A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF METAPHORS AND INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE IN PRESIDENT GEORGE WEAH'S SPEECHES

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Abstract: Language is a powerful tool wielded by its user, which can either promote unity or incite conflict. It has the dual ability to create common ground or instigate war. In the context of a post-conflict society, the role of language becomes particularly crucial as political leaders use its power to manage the sensitive process of peace and reconciliation. Through a qualitative method of data collection, this article examines metaphors and inclusive language employed by President George Weah in promoting peace and reconciliation in the context of a post-conflict Liberia. George Weah's linguistic behaviour is analysed in the light of Norman Fairclough's approach to Critical Discourse Analysis. The investigation shows that language plays a vital role in promoting peace and reconciliation in a post-conflict environment. George Weah employs specific linguistic devices including metaphors and inclusive language in the process of promoting unity and reconciliation.

Keywords: Context, discourse, language, linguistic, metaphors, qualitative

Résumé : Le langage est un outil puissant, manié par son utilisateur, capable de favoriser l'unité ou d'inciter au conflit. Il possède la double capacité d'établir un terrain d'entente ou de déclencher une guerre. Dans le contexte d'une société post-conflit, le rôle du langage devient particulièrement crucial, car les dirigeants politiques utilisent son pouvoir pour gérer le processus délicat de la paix et de la réconciliation. A travers une analyse qualitative, cet article examine les outils linguistiques utilisés par le président George Weah pour promouvoir la paix et la réconciliation dans le contexte d'un Liberia post-conflit. Le comportement linguistique de George Weah est analysé à la lumière de l'analyse critique du discours de Norman Fairclough. L'analyse montre que la langue joue un rôle essentiel dans la promotion de la paix et de la réconciliation dans un environnement post-conflit. George Weah utilise des outils linguistiques spécifiques tels que les métaphores et le langage inclusif dans le processus de promotion de l'unité et de la réconciliation.

Mots-clés: Contexte, discours, langage, linguistique, métaphores, qualitative

Introduction

Language serves as a powerful tool wielded by its user, able of either fostering unity or inciting conflict. It possesses the dual ability to establish common ground or instigate warfare. In the context of a post-conflict society, the role of language becomes particularly crucial as political leaders use its power to manage the sensitive process of peace and reconciliation. In other words, for a post-conflict society to regain its peace heritage, its leaders including politicians must carefully select a language that brings people together as one in the reconciliation process. To explore the role of language in post-conflict societies like Liberia, it is relevant to understand the country's background of turmoil. On the authority of K. Kufuor (1994, p. 374), "the Liberian conflict began in December 1989, when the NPFL rebelled against President Samuel Doe with the purpose of overthrowing his government". The rebels, finally, "succeeded in reaching the capital, Monrovia, and besieged the presidential residence where the President, the rump of his administration, and the remnants of the Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL) had sought refuge" according to K. Kufuor (1994, p. 374). Since then, successive Liberian Presidents, including Ellen Johnson Sirleaf and George Weah, have endeavoured to promote peace and reconciliation through their actions and speeches.

The desire to understand how language can contribute to reconciliation and peacekeeping is the focus of this topic: a critical analysis of metaphors and inclusive language in President George Weah's speeches. The topic triggers the following questions. What linguistic devices does President George Weah uses to convey messages of peace and reconciliation in his speeches? What insights can be drawn from President Weah's speeches regarding the role of language in conflict resolution and social cohesion? Through a qualitative method of data collection, the study examines the linguistic devices employed by President George Weah in promoting peace and reconciliation in his speeches. Besides, the investigation provides insights into how language can be used as a tool for conflict resolution and social cohesion in diverse communities.

The investigation is motivated by two main facts. First of all, by analysing President Weah's speeches, one can gain insights into how language can be effectively used by political leaders to promote peace and reconciliation in post-conflict societies. Secondly, Studying George Weah's speeches can provide valuable information for civil society organisations involved in peacebuilding initiatives. George Weah's strategies for reconciliation and

peacekeeping are analysed in the light of Norman Fairclough's approach to Critical Discourse Analysis. Critical Discourse Analysis studies language with a critical perspective. It is an approach to discourse analysis that examines how language is used in social and political contexts.

Norman Fairclough's approach to critical discourse analysis considers language as a form of social practice which is "used in representing a given social practice from a particular point of view" according to N. Fairclough (1995, p.56). Moreover, he suggests that language is a social process and a socially conditioned process since language and society are not different entities; linguistic phenomena are undoubtedly social phenomena (N. Fairclough, 1989). N. Fairclough and I. Fairclough (2012, p. 81) define Critical Discourse Analysis as "a type of discourse analytical research that primarily deals with the way social power, abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context". N. Fairclough outlines three principal analytical stages in the study of discourse: description, interpretation and explanation. In two parts, this article discusses George Weah's peace and reconciliation strategies in light with N. Fairclough's approach to critical discourse analysis. The first part is entitled: fostering unity and reconciliation through metaphors. The second part deals with building consensus through inclusive language.

1. Fostering Unity and Reconciliation through Metaphors

President George Weah uses metaphors in his speeches as powerful linguistic tools to cultivate unity and solidarity among the diverse communities of post-conflict Liberia. These metaphorical framings play an essential role in shaping narratives of reconciliation and fostering a shared sense of national identity. By employing metaphors, President Weah is able to inspire hope and reinforce collective aspirations for a unified and prosperous future for Liberia. This section explores how metaphors are employed in President Weah's speeches to promote unity and solidarity among Liberians in their journey towards reconciliation and peace. Metaphorical expressions are described, interpreted and explained to show the will of George Weah to lead a unified and reconciled Liberia.

1.1. Metaphors for a Unified Liberia

A metaphor refers to the use of a word or phrase to refer to something other than its literal meaning. According to F. Zhang and J. Hu (2009, p. 79), in linguistic system, "is to endow with a word and extension of meaning, and a bridge of the known and the unknown.

Metaphor makes one semantic domain map onto another". In simpler terms, a metaphor provides a broader meaning to a word or phrase by linking it to something else. It acts as a bridge, connecting what we already know to something new or unfamiliar. Additionally, as A. Goatly (1997, p. 1) states, "metaphor is not something that can be easily confined, but is an indispensable basic of language and thought". Metaphors are deeply embedded in the way we communicate and understand the world around us. In the illustrations that follow, one can easily notice the language of unity through metaphorical expressions.

(1) "today, we all wear the jersey of Liberia," (G. Weah, January 22nd, 2018).

(2) "today, we Liberians have reached an important milestone in the never-ending journey for freedom, justice, and democracy; a search that has remained central to our history as a nation" (G. Weah, January 22nd, 2018).

(3) "Notwithstanding the harshness and immeasurable cost of the lesson, we have learned that equality and freedom are never just a final destination that a people or a nation reaches" (G. Weah, January 22nd, 2018).

In the excerpt (1), one can notice the metaphorical expression which symbolizes unity and collective identity. This statement implies that all the Liberian citizens are united under the common goal of advancing Liberia's interests. Similar to a sport team, President George Weah wants the Liberians to come together as one for a common purpose. According to M. Zellmer-Bruhn and C. Gibson (2001, p. 276), "metaphors for teamwork serve as cognitive reference points for team members. They are similar to internalized behavioural routines, or scripts, and the mental models that team members hold about team structure and process". In other words, teamwork metaphors are like mental guides that show team members how to act and understand team dynamics.

The illustration (2) highlights the progress made by Liberia as a significant marker on an ongoing journey toward freedom, justice and democracy. Though progress has been made, George Weah urges his fellow citizens to continue the journey through this metaphorical expression. Thus, this statement highlights the continuous nature of the struggle for these ideals. Subsequently, in the illustration (3), President Weah compares the achievement of equality and freedom to reaching a destination. It implies that these ideals are not static, but are fulfilled through an ongoing process. Through metaphorical language, President Weah shows how he intends to lead the country for the next six years; together with his fellow citizens. On the authority of U. Anessova and M. Bagdan (2015, p. 221), "any political

metaphor promotes formation of model of action, a role and place of the subject which is expressed in political activity". This quote suggests that political metaphors do more than merely embellish language, in the sense that they actively shape models of political action and the role of the political actor within the political sphere.

The use of metaphorical expressions to cultivate peace and reconciliation is as well palpable in President Weah's concession speech held on November 18th, 2023. According to R.Putri and Y. Yanti (2021, p. 37), a concession speech is "a term used in politics to describe speeches given by losing candidates after an election and after the overall vote". The act of conceding defeat is an act of profound respect for the democratic process. George Weah's concession speech shows great maturity in putting national interests before selfish ones. In his speech, Weah used several metaphorical constructions to emphasize the importance of unity and collaboration.

    (4) "The true winners of these elections are the people of Liberia" (G. Weah, November 18th, 2023).

    (5) "Tonight, the CDC has lost the election, but Liberia has won" (G. Weah, November 18th, 2023).

The statement (4) contrasts the defeat of the CDC with the broader victory of Liberia, portraying the country's success as transcending the political outcome. Thus, the statement highlights the importance of individuals in the democratic electoral system, emphasising Liberia's collective success despite the political setback experienced by the CDC. The excerpt (5) emphasizes President Weah's intention to promote peace and reconciliation. Indeed, it contrasts the defeat of the CDC with the broader victory of Liberia, portraying the country's success as transcending the political outcome. The metaphorical expressions help President Weah to communicate his message in a more vivid and emotionally engaging way, enabling him to establish a deeper connection with his audience. On the authority of U. Anessova and M. Bagdan (2015, p. 221), "function of a metaphor in a political discourse is very huge; it makes the speech figurative, bright and visible". Besides, metaphors "have pivotal rhetorical purpose in communication with audiences, mainly in situations in which the audiences are emotionally involved" according to M. Hampl (2012, p. 40). Furthermore, P. Chilton and G. Lakoff (1995, p. 56) emphasise the ideological dimension of metaphors, as they "define in significant part what one takes as reality". Thus, political metaphors can have a significant ideological impact, framing how people understand and engage with the political world.

1.1. Metaphors for a Reconciled Liberia

In a broader sense, reconciliation is the process by which former enemies come together and live peacefully as in the past. According to K. Brounéus (2007, p. 6), reconciliation involves "finding a way to balance issues such as truth and justice so that the slow changing of behaviours, attitudes and emotions between former enemies can take place". Therefore, K. Brounéus (2007) suggests that reconciliation involves balancing truth and justice. This balance helps change the behaviours, attitudes and emotions of former enemies over time. The following metaphorical expression provides evidence that President George Weah is committed to leading a unified and reconciled country.

(6) "the foundation of the New Liberia must be reinforced by the steel of integrity" (G. Weah, January 22nd, 2018).

The use of the 'steel of integrity' metaphor by President Weah powerfully conveys the idea that strong moral foundations are essential for constructing the political and social architecture of the 'New Liberia'. As G. Lakoff and M. Johnson (1980, p. 151) argue, metaphors have the power "to create a reality rather than simply to give us a way of conceptualizing a preexisting reality". Weah's metaphor compares the strength and durability of steel to the integrity and ethical principles needed for reconciliation. He suggests that building a strong and ethical society is as important as constructing durable physical infrastructure. Thus, Weah's metaphorical framing emphasises the importance of fostering moral values for the establishment of a stable and reconciled Liberia. George Weah promotes the idea that an effective reconciliation requires the establishment of a new Liberia.

(7) "this victory belongs to the almighty God who has blessed us with this new day; **a new day that is filled with new hopes and new dreams** for a united and progressive Liberia" (G. Weah, January 22nd, 2018).

(8) "this is a historic day for our country. It is a day that signifies **the renewal of our faith** in the future of Liberia" (G. Weah, January 22nd, 2018).

(9) "Let us celebrate together **the rebirth of our nation**, and **the dawning of a new era** in which we put away our differences, and place the higher interests of our people above our own" (G. Weah, January 22nd, 2018).

In these excerpts, one can clearly perceive metaphorical expressions promoting key ideas related to reconciliation. In the statement (7) 'a new day' represents a metaphor for a fresh start or a new beginning that symbolises the hope and possibilities that come with reconciliation. Thus, George Weah uses metaphor to convey an optimistic vision for the future of Liberia. As L. Cameron (2007, p. 200) argues, "linguistic metaphors often carry the perspective dynamics of the speaker: they are evaluative, emphatic or act to position speakers relative to other people or to the content of which they talk". Subsequently, 'renewal of our faith', in the illustration (8), is a metaphor for restoring beliefs and confidence. Besides, it suggests that reconciliation brings a renewed sense of optimism for the 'new Liberia'.

In the statement (9), two metaphorical expressions are worth mentioning: 'rebirth of our nation' and 'dawning of a new era'. These metaphors depict the beginning of a new phase in the history of Liberia. They characterise unity, reconciliation and the promotion of collective interests above individual differences. On top of that, the metaphors of 'rebirth' and a 'new dawn' evoke a vision of unity and harmony, where past divisions are transcended, and the collective interests of the nation take precedence over individual differences. This highlights how the metaphors can symbolize the reconciliation process and the pursuit of national unity. The use of these metaphorical expressions conveys a sense of hope and optimism for the future. As R. Lazarus (1999, p. 654) notices, "a fundamental condition of hope is that our current life circumstance is unsatisfactory—that is, it involves deprivation or is damaging or threatening". Thus, President Weah wants to connect with his audience and convince them that under his governance, things will positively change for the welfare of Liberians. With the metaphorical framing of unity and reconciliation, Weah's speeches also use inclusive language as a key rhetorical strategy to bring Liberians together and build broad consensus for his vision.

2. Building Consensus through Inclusive Language

In the quest of fostering unity and consensus in post-conflict societies like Liberia, inclusive language is emerging as a powerful tool for political leaders. President George Weah's speeches illustrate the strategic use of inclusive language, using both parallelism and

repetition. These linguistic devices cultivate a sense of shared identity and collective responsibility among Liberians. Through parallelism, he highlights common goals and aspirations. Meanwhile, the repeated use of pronouns such as 'we' and 'us' serves to reinforce a collective identity that transcends individual differences and fosters a sense of belonging to the nation as a whole. This section explores how President Weah uses parallelism for unity and repetition to emphasize inclusiveness in his vision for peace and reconciliation in Liberia.

2.1.   Parallelism for Unity

On the authority of S. Nwankwo (2023), parallelism is a form of text cohesion and interdependence of parts, and it is deemed an effective element in polishing discourse linking the discourse at a high level of organization and balance. In other words, he suggests that parallelism in writing helps to efficiently connect different parts of the text, creating balance and cohesion. Thus, George Weah uses parallelism to reinforce key themes of peace and reconciliation throughout his speeches. The use of parallelism reflects Weah's intention to lead a balanced and cohesive Liberia, where political differences are set aside in favour of national unity and progress. The excerpt below is an example of this idea.

(10)   "The victory belongs **to the people**, **to peace**, and **to democracy**" (G. Weah, January 22nd, 2018).

By repeating the same grammatical structure, President Weah emphasizes shared values and common goals. Besides, the excerpt (11) illustrates the democratic culture of the George Weah. Indeed, in democracy, the power belongs to the people. As E. Brou et *al*., (2021, p. 51) suggest, "democracy is the people-centred form of governance. It emerges through competitive elections in which people choose their representative for a mandate". The President's use of parallelism serves to reinforce shared values and aspirations for peace and reconciliation. This aligns with the democratic principle that empowers the people to hold representatives accountable for achieving these goals. Parallelism is, as well, strategically employed to promote national unity.

(11)   "it will be **my task**, **my duty**, and **my honor**, to lead this nation from division to National Unity, and toward a future of hope and prosperity" (G. Weah, January 22nd, 2018).

It comes out through the illustration (12) that George Weah employs parallelism in order to emphasise his commitment to leading Liberia from division to national unity. The

repetition of "**my task**", "**my duty**" and "**my honor**" serves to underscore the personal responsibility of the President in achieving this goal. This is in line with his main objective of promoting unity and reconciliation in a post-conflict Liberia. It also underlines the idea that, despite individual differences, all citizens must work together towards a common goal. Parallelism can create a sense of trust and hope by presenting clear and consistent ideas.

(12)   "my greatest contribution to this country as President **may not lie in the eloquence of my speeches, but will definitely lie in the quality of the decisions** that I will make over the next six years to advance the lives of poor Liberians" (G. Weah, January 22nd, 2018).

The parallelism in this statement implies that George Weah values actions over words. It suggests that his effectiveness as president will not be measured by his ability to deliver persuasive speeches, but by the quality of the decisions he makes to improve the lives of disadvantaged Liberians. The parallel structure in this sentence is highly effective in conveying Weah's priorities and leadership approach. The use of the parallel clauses '**may not lie in the eloquence of my speeches**' and '**will definitely lie in the quality of the decisions**' creates a clear contrast between rhetoric and tangible action. Furthermore, parallelism is employed to promote inclusivity within Liberian society.

(13)   "mine is a further expectation that you will discover **a new sense of fairness and integrity**; **a new love for country and for each other**. **A love that will turn public servants and government officials into national champions for change**. **A love that will bring back home Liberians scattered far and wide across the globe**—many of them highly **skilled**, **talented**, and **experienced**—to join us in building a New Liberia" (G. Weah, January 22nd, 2018).

In this statement, President Weah promotes inclusivity through his emphasis on unity and collective action. Besides, the statement expresses a desire for individuals to develop a "**new love for country and for each other**", which encourages a sense of belonging and solidarity among all Liberians, regardless of their backgrounds or political affiliations. Furthermore, the reference to the repatriation of skilled Liberians from abroad serves to illustrate a commitment to inclusivity, whereby the contributions of all members of the Liberian diaspora are recognised and valued. In this context, President Weah's repeated use of personal pronouns 'we' and 'us' not only reinforces inclusivity and collective action, but also fosters a sense of unity and shared purpose among Liberians.

2.2.   Repetition of Personal Pronouns 'we' and 'us'

In a post-war society like Liberia, the choice of language holds significant power in shaping the trajectory of peace and reconciliation. The use of inclusive language becomes paramount in fostering unity, healing wounds, and rebuilding trust among communities torn apart by conflict. Specifically, the repetition of pronouns such as 'we' and 'us' serves as a linguistic device employed by President Weah to emphasize collective identity, shared responsibility. According to N. Bramley (2001, p. v), "pronouns are pivotal in the construction of reality—a reality that is created and understood in the discourse of the moment". The reality that George Weah wants to create is the reality of a country where all citizens are united. A country where all the people are working towards a common goal. The following lines clearly illustrate this claim.

(14)   "**We** can do better, **together**" (G. Weah, January 22nd, 2018).

(15)   "**We** must not allow political loyalties prevent **us** from collaborating in the national interest" (G. Weah, January 22nd, 2018).

(16)   "**We** must respect each other and act as neighbors, regardless of religious, social and economic differences" (G. Weah, January 22nd, 2018).

(17)   "**We** must learn how to celebrate **our** diversity without drawing lines of divisions in our new Liberia" (G. Weah, January 22nd, 2018).

(18)   "**We** count these fallen West African soldiers among the martyrs of **our** history" (G. Weah, January 22nd, 2018).

The first-person plural 'we' and its various forms - us and our - are used by President Weah to connect with the audience. On a larger scale, with the citizens of Liberia. These statements emphasize collective action and imply that progress can only be achieved through unity and collaboration. On top of that, these inclusive utterances promote a sense of unity by emphasizing collective identity, shared responsibility and mutual respect. Thus, President Weah encourages Liberians to come together, transcending differences and working towards a common vision of a united and prosperous nation. The following utterances continue the theme of inclusivity by emphasizing the importance of economic participation.

(19)   "**We** want to be known as a business-friendly government" (G. Weah, January 22nd, 2018).

(20)   "**We** will do all that is within our power to provide an environment that will be conducive for the conduct of honest and transparent business" (G. Weah, January 22nd, 2018).

(21)   "**We** cannot remain spectators in **our own** economy" (G. Weah, January 22nd, 2018).

These statements convey a message of openness and opportunity. They suggest that the government aims to create an environment where all citizens, regardless of background, can prosper economically. By promoting a business-friendly atmosphere and promising to facilitate transparent and honest business practices, President George Weah, with the help of all Liberians, is committed to fostering economic growth and development for the benefit of all. In addition, the statement "**We** cannot remain spectators in **our own economy**" underscores the idea of active participation and engagement, encouraging citizens to take ownership of their economic future and collectively contribute to the prosperity of the nation.

Through the repetition of the pronoun 'we', George Weah intends to create a collective identity. On the authority of J. Hakansson (2012, p. 14), "'We' in an important pronoun in political speeches in the sense that it expresses 'institutional identity' i.e. when one person speaks as a representative of or on behalf of an institution". Furthermore, J. Hakansson (2012, p. 14) claims that "by using the pronoun 'we', the speaker includes others in the utterance, creating a group with a clear identity, making others responsible for potential issues as well". As a result, using the inclusive 'we' in discourse creates a shared identity and collective responsibility among the group.

President Weah's strategic use of inclusive language, particularly the repetition of pronouns like 'we' and 'us', serves to emphasize collective identity, shared responsibility and mutual respect among citizens. By consistently using these inclusive pronouns, Weah encourages Liberians to come together, transcending differences and working towards a common vision of a united and prosperous nation. This is, indeed, a way of claiming 'sameness'. As Z. Toh (2021, p. 122) suggests, "sameness can be seen in the fact of grouping the speaker and the listener. It is transparent in the use of the first plural person 'we'". In other words, the use of the inclusive 'we' by the speaker works to create a sense a shared identity and collective purpose with the audience.

Conclusion

This study delves into President Weah's speeches in Liberia, scrutinizing the rhetorical strategies employed to promote unity and reconciliation in a post-conflict Liberia. The investigation addresses several research questions to unravel the role of language in fostering peace and reconciliation. N. Fairclough's approach to critical discourse analysis was relevant in the analysis of President Weah's speeches, as it enabled the description, interpretation and explanation of the language of unity and reconciliation in the analysed speeches. The analysis reveals that President Weah employs metaphors of unity and reconciliation to inspire hope, gratitude and remembrance. Thus, he intends to foster a sense of collective identity and solidarity among Liberians. Additionally, the use of inclusive language, characterized by the repetition of pronouns like 'we' and 'us', highlights shared responsibility and mutual respect. As a result, citizens are encouraged to transcend their differences for the welfare of their country. In a nutshell, President Weah's speeches exemplify the critical role of language in promoting peace and reconciliation in post-conflict societies. By resorting to the power of language to cultivate unity, political leaders like George Weah can pave the way for a more inclusive future for all Liberians. As Liberia continues its journey towards reconciliation, it is highly important for its leaders to use language as a catalyst for positive change and true reconciliation.

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