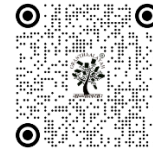


Original Article

“THE HONEYMOON PERIOD IS OVER”: A DISCOURSE ANALYTICAL STUDY OF THE GFA PRESIDENT’S MEETING WITH THE GHANA BLACK STARS

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ABSTRACT

The speech of a leader is of great importance during challenging times. Therefore, beyond mere words, the effectiveness of a leader’s address creates good grounds to inspire. This study conducts a discourse analysis of the speech delivered by the President of the Ghana Football Association (GFA) during a meeting with the Ghana Black Stars team. By employing a content analysis approach, the study identifies six essential communicative functions: constructing a shared identity as Ghanaians, invoking the spirit of patriotism, expressing disappointment, making reference to history, issuing a call to serve, and instilling confidence and hope. The findings have implications for understanding discourse and leadership rhetoric, concluding with a recommendation for future research.

Keywords: Communicative Functions, Analytical Study, Leadership

INTRODUCTION

The Ghana Football Association (GFA) is a private entity established under Ghanaian law that acts as the governing body for football in the country. It is tasked with the development and promotion of the sport and represents Ghana as a member of the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) and the Confederation of African Football (CAF) [Darby \(2016\)](#). While Ghana boasts a variety of sporting disciplines, the GFA and its senior national football team, the Black Stars, have long been at the heart of Ghanaians.

Occupying a sensitive place among Ghanaians, the Black Stars have encountered significant challenges in recent years. The GFA and the team have faced considerable criticism, primarily due to disappointing performances on the international stage. Many sports enthusiasts believe that management issues have been a considerable setback, often overshadowing the team’s performance. There is a prevailing sentiment that frequent changes in leadership, particularly among coaches and technical staff, have disrupted the strategic continuity necessary for cultivating a successful football program [Soebbing and Washington \(2011\)](#). These management difficulties have undoubtedly contributed to the inconsistent performances of the Black Stars, who have struggled to regain their footing in recent international competitions despite having a pool of talented players.

Moreover, after a series of unsatisfactory results in key tournaments, there is growing concern among fans and analysts regarding the team’s direction and strategies. The pressure to perform well in international fixtures is immense, and the expectations from a passionate fan base further complicate the situation [Zimbalist \(2010\)](#). As the national team strives to regain its past glory, it becomes crucial for the management and players to address these issues.

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Several scholarships on Ghanaian sports have focused on unrelated issues such as the history and development of football in Ghana [Dankwa \(2022\)](#), football and identity politics in Ghana [Darby \(2016\)](#), the fundamental problem of the Ghanaian football league [Ayenor \(2020\)](#), wooing fans back into Ghana stadia—in the wake of the globalization of football [Frimpong \(2014\)](#), football leadership and public value in Ghana [Charway \(2021\)](#), women’s football and gendered nationalism [Adjepong \(2022\)](#), African athletes give-back behaviors’ as cultural identity or popularity [Acheampong \(2024\)](#) and others. Surprisingly, none of the studies investigate the Ghana Black Stars and leadership communication concerning underperformance. The present study examines the discourse of the GFA President’s meeting with the Black Stars team from a (critical) discourse analytical perspective.

Mr. Kurt Edwin Simeon-Okraaku, the President of the Ghana Football Association (GFA), was first elected on October 25, 2019. Following his impactful leadership in Ghana’s sports sector, he was re-elected for a second term on October 5, 2023. Previously, he served as the Communication and Marketing Director for Accra Hearts of Oak and later became the Administrative Manager of the League Clubs Association of Ghana (GHALCA). Among his various roles, he is also the owner of Dreams FC. His term in office is set to conclude in 2027.

FOOTBALL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

Discourse Analysis (DA) offers a framework for understanding how language both reflects and constructs social realities. As defined by [Potter and Wetherell \(1987\)](#), DA encompasses all forms of spoken or written interaction and explores how texts generate meaning within particular social contexts. In the realm of sports, discourse serves as a platform where ideologies of nationalism, masculinity, and competition are enacted [McLean and Wainwright \(2009\)](#). Football commentary, media narratives, and fan interactions transcend mere description; they actively shape identities and mediate power dynamics [Numerato and Giulianotti \(2018\)](#).

Although the study is concerned about communicative functions, it fashions Critical Discourse Analysis [Fairclough \(2003\)](#), [Wodak \(2005\)](#) to examine football leadership discourse as a social practice that both reflects and influences national sentiment. By examining how the GFA President’s speech uses linguistic strategies such as inclusive pronouns, metaphors, and rhetorical questioning, the research uncovers how authority and solidarity are discursively negotiated in the wake of sporting failure.

METHODOLOGY

DATA COLLECTION AND TREATMENT

The data for the study was obtained from the internet, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?> on October 13, 2024. A 17-minute speech delivered by the GFA President, Mr. Kurt Edwin Simeon-Okraaku, on October 9, 2024, at Kumasi, Ghana, constitutes the data for the study. The speech was transcribed at the initial stage, and later, the service of another researcher was employed to confirm its accuracy. Some repetitions that were not necessary were slashed off, and grammatical errors were corrected.

A day before the crucial match against Sudan in the 2025 African Cup of Nations (AFCON) qualifiers, the President of the GFA convened an important meeting with the players. He urged the team to give their utmost best in what is perceived as a must-win game for the Black Stars to secure their place in the AFCON tournament.

DATA ANALYTICAL PROCEDURE

As indicated earlier, the speech delivered by the GFA President to the Ghana Black Stars team constitutes the dataset for the study. A content analysis method was conducted in three stages: identification, interpretation, and explanation. First, organizing and preparing the data for analysis. Second, a close reading through the data to discover the discourse function of the speech. Third, the communicative functions identified were interpreted based on the circumstances surrounding the speech and available background information [Nartey \(2024\)](#), and were discussed within the framework of narrative and pragmatics at the discourse level.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The discourse analytical study revealed six communicative functions of the GFA President’s speech: (1) constructing a shared identity as Ghanaians, (2) invoking the spirit of patriotism, (3) expressing disappointment, (4) making reference to history, (5) calling to serve, and (6) instilling confidence and hope. The discursive functions establish the GFA President as an effective leader who aims for positive outcomes to enhance his reputation and elevate Ghana’s football on the global stage. The discourse functions are discussed as follows:

CONSTRUCTING A SHARED IDENTITY AS GHANAIS

The term ‘identity’, according to [Gleason \(1983\)](#), falls into two opposing conceptions: “In one sense, identity can be called ‘intrapyschic’ in that it comes from within, is fixed and stable, and is what people speak of when they talk about ‘who we are’. A second conception holds that identity can be ‘acquired’ in that it is a conscious or internalized adoption of socially imposed or socially

constructed roles". The preceding excerpts highlight the notion that a collective group of individuals can possess a shared identity, which is shaped by social constructions. As noted by [Woodward \(1997\)](#), identity fundamentally informs us about who we are and how we connect with those around us. In the speaker's address, it becomes evident that there is a concerted effort to legitimize identity status. Specifically, in clauses (1-4), the use of inclusive pronouns "we" and "us" predominates the discourse. These linguistic choices serve to unite the audience and the speaker, framing them as one cohesive group, who are bound together by shared beliefs and aspirations. The following excerpts serve as evidence of the strategic construction of collective identity, emphasizing the strength of communal ties between the speaker and the audience.

- 1) It is imperative for me to join you, to remind all of us about who we are and the need for all of us to remember that we are Ghanaians.
- 2) And we are here because Ghana has called upon us to be here.
- 3) If we remember that we are Ghanaians, you have your family members, your friends, and your loved ones, Ghana will always be a name to be ringing in your ears all the time.
- 4) For this reason, if you are given the opportunity to represent Ghana, you should be eager and desirous of returning home to represent your country.

The pronouns "we", "I", "you", "them", "they", and "us" are frequently used in discourse. [Fairclough \(2003\)](#) argues that English pronouns hold relational values that help shape social relationships. He ascribes that these relationships can include or exclude individuals based on ideological perspectives. [Wodak \(2005\)](#) supports the view that pronouns influence how people conceptualize group identity, creating distinctions between insiders and outsiders, as well as coalitions and parties. The speaker, therefore, deployed the said pronouns to highlight a collective identity.

Another means of constructing collective identity in the speaker's speech is the use of anthropomorphic generic terms [Wodak \(2009\)](#), such as "Ghanaians" and "Ghana". I argue that the discourse goal that influenced the lexicalization of those terms was to inform the addressees about the realization of their self-identity, and to create the impression that there was a need for the addressees to play their collective role to merit their identity and the status they occupied. This discourse strategy is possibly prejudiced by the defeats conceded by the team, thereby making Ghanaians and some supporters tout the GFA President as a major cause of the Black Stars' poor performance.

Previous studies have highlighted that leadership plays a crucial role in driving organizational success [Barrick et al. \(1991\)](#), [Judge et al. \(2004\)](#), [Weiner and Mahoney \(1981\)](#). Great leaders inspire and motivate their teams, setting the stage for achieving remarkable results; hence, this may arguably inform the speaker to accept such a responsibility in a monolithic endeavor to make the statement "It is imperative for me to join you, to remind all of us about who we are and the need for us to remember that we are Ghanaians". The principal clause in extract (4) contextually implied that the speaker's meeting with the addressees was important following certain circumstances, perhaps a revulsion, that the speaker could not bear. As to-infinitive clauses could be used to express purpose or opinion about something, the clause "to remind all of us about who we are" offered a wake-up call for the realization of self-identification and the onus of responsibility on both the addressees and the speaker.

Accepting the fact that many factors are accountable for the meeting between the GFA President and the team, the evidence of the speaker's speech portrays that the inability of the team to recognize they belong to one group is the reason they are reluctant to represent the nation on international duties. This behavior is not good for a leader who is focused on results, so he offered a word of advice, "For this reason, if you are given the opportunity to represent Ghana, you should be eager and desirous of returning home to represent your country", extract (4).

Also, the place of the phoric adverb "here" in extract (2) pragmatically imposed synthetic personalization, indicating an action including both actors taking place at a time where such a meeting could be reckoned as crucial.

INVOKING THE SPIRIT OF PATRIOTISM

Patriotism is a passionate and unwavering commitment to one's country, fueled by deep love, devotion, and a sense of loyalty [Smith \(2019\)](#). Similarly, patriotism is also seen as an emotional attachment to one's country, intertwined with linguistic expressions that shape and are shaped by collective identities [Bodnar \(1996\)](#), [Yusupova \(2024\)](#). It can be expressed through symbols, sports, traditions, and other means in honor of a nation. After watching the games lost by the Ghana Black Stars, it became apparent that the team's performances might have influenced the discourse between the two parties. This prompted the conscience of the speaker and Ghanaians that the team lacked enough dedication. The emphasis on the word "love" in the speech serves as a noun, representing an intense feeling of deep affection. Generally, love is accompanied by commitment. Consequently, the speaker felt the team did not exhibit this quality, resulting in consecutive match losses and instigating arguments among the Ghanaian people. The extracts below are evidence:

- (10) Under no circumstance must you lose your love for your country.
- (15) Millions of people need our help.

(16) What they need from us is good performance, passion, a victory that heals souls, a victory that heals wounds, and a victory that heals families.

(17) This is what the people outside need from us.

(19) Why do we not appreciate that we occupy a special space and are given the chance to impact society?

As the team’s performance has been the focal point of the discourse, the speaker’s posture and linguistic resources conveyed the impression that the place of the supporters was relevant and referred to them in various linguistic forms throughout the speech. Firstly, the mention of the nominal phrase “millions of people” in clause (10) did not only refer to Ghanaians, but also sports lovers who pledged their support for the Black Stars team. As it has always been in football, supporters share common ground, forge relationships, and create alignments of solidarity with one another to cheer their team to win. In the event that the team does not perform, supporters get upset and criticize players and the technical team. For others who are unable to hold their emotions cause chaos. As ardent fans can cause violence and hooliganism Poulton (2008), Young (2002), it is unsurprising to see ‘die-hard’ supporters target the homes of players they believe are responsible for the team’s defeats and vent their anger on their families. Amidst the huge expectation of supporters, the speaker was informed without no choice but to make the proclamation, “Millions of people need our help”, extract (15). This discourse practice is essential as players’ commitment and victory are consequential in bringing joy to supporters.

Secondly, the speaker frequently used the third-person plural agent “they” in the speech as a referentiality to navigate the discourse. The choice of personal pronouns reflects the speaker’s strategic approach to communication Gocheco (2012), hence, the pronoun “they” was used anaphorically in the mood structure in the excerpt (16), set off by parallel structures to make orientation to the important space supporters occupied.

Parallel structures have an ideological effect in discourse. Heffner and Slevc (2015) assert that parallel structures are made up of syntactic recursion with musical effects. They create rhythm and balance in writing and speech to make ideas clearer and more convincing Bezbaruah (2025), Nolan and Jeon (2014). In this way, it makes the message easier to grasp by the addressees. It is, therefore, not disconcerting that the speaker used such structures to echo the need for the team to up their game to yield victory.

It is contestable that the Black Stars’ poor performance and consistent defeat caused dissension among sports pundits, wounds among families, and broken hearts among supporters. Given this perspective, it is prudent for a concerned leader to bring to attention the real issues supporters go through, so players can play their roles at the very best to bring victory, and this was made noticeable in the excerpt, “What they need from us is good performance, passion, a victory that heals souls, a victory that heals wounds, a victory that heals families”, extract (16). Framing himself and the team as having a core responsibility to perform in a rhetorical question in the excerpt (19), the speaker functionally underscored that they occupied an important space to contribute their quota to make Ghanaians and supporters happy.

EXPRESSING DISAPPOINTMENT

It was a shared knowledge that the Black Stars team played a series of matches during the 2024 Africa Cup of Nations (AFCON) and conceded defeats. Throughout the speaker’s speech, questions appeared to be ubiquitous. While questions are used to elicit responses and for clarification, they similarly perform important discourse functions. On such occasion, it was thoughtful for a leader to ask questions amidst turbulent situations. Following the discourse, it can be said that the speaker strategically employed questions to elucidate his dissatisfaction and disappointment about the team’s performance. The excerpts below are evidence:

(33) Few weeks ago, we played against Niger.

(34) How did you guys?

(35) Having drawn against Niger, how did you feel?

(36) Were we happy?

(37) Were you happy?

(38) Niger! Come on guys!

(39) You drew 1-1 against Niger!

(40) That was the score line.

(41) No joke! 1 - 1 against Niger!

(44) We saw the Black Stars team play without energy, passion, or desire to play.

Interestingly, most of the speaker’s questions are framed in simple structures, such as (VSC), (S)(VS), and concise phrases that conclude with exclamations. A retrospection of Sarfo and Krampa (2013) study on Language at War indicates that complex phenomena can be expressed in complex language. In contrast, the current study takes a different stance, suggesting that complex issues can be communicated in simple language.

As Ghana is recognized as a prominent football nation, the historic successes of former players raise questions about the current team's performance. The speaker maintained that it was inconceivable for the Black Stars to settle for a draw against Niger. The speaker's remarks highlighted that Niger was not a suitable opponent for the Black Stars, and therefore, drawing the match and conceding defeat should be a source of concern for any dedicated supporter. The speaker's dissatisfaction can be inferred from excerpts (34-37). The reiteration of his frustration in excerpts (38) and (39) conveys a strong evaluative tone and evokes a sense of emotion. The phrase in extract (49), "No joke! 1 - 1 against Niger!" illustrates the speaker's use of exclamatory language as inherently emotional and volatile—reflecting a moment that the speaker believed was not appropriate for celebration.

MAKING REFERENCE TO HISTORY

History serves as a vivacious reference in discourse to illuminate the roots of current issues and shape understanding of societal dynamics. Yet again, its illustrious place in the speech reflects patterns learned from past mistakes and the appreciation of diverse perspectives. Ultimately, history permits conscious minds to make informed decisions for a better future. Given its importance, it is no surprising that the speaker tactfully interlaces history into the discourse to underscore his communication goal. Intertwining the discourse with history, the speaker brings the conscience of the team to bear, suggesting that history-making goes with resilient determination and the urge to fight.

(67) You lost a game in Baba Yara after 34 years; it is not acceptable.

(68) It is no joke.

(69) In 1957, Ghana gained independence, led by men with chests and hearts.

(70) Not men who will run away from the battlefield.

(71) That was the only reason why we gained independence.

(72) When Kudus, you were not born, this team existed.

(73) Alex, when you were not born, this team called Black Stars existed.

The term 'battlefield' indicated by the speaker in excerpt (70) could typically be associated with 'war' or 'military' engagements. However, its meaning can extend metaphorically to situations of intense struggle, competition, or conflict. In this view, the speaker established the relationship that the tournament was a sort of 'battlefield' that required 'men'. In an African society, 'men' symbolizes 'masculinity', 'strength', and 'bravery'. In this context, it was incumbent on the players to reposition and align themselves as men to fight their course. The speaker succeeded in coercing the individual players with such rhetoric and remained in anticipation that they would replicate it into action.

By invoking 'Baba Yara', a historically undefeated ground, the speaker taps into collective memory as a rhetorical appeal. This intertextual reference functions to evoke nostalgia and moral accountability, reminding players of a lost legacy and urging them to restore national pride. Referring to this account, the speaker conveyed a discourse of disenchantment, as the entire Ghanaians were unhappy about the long-standing record that had been broken.

In extracts (72) and (73), the speaker referenced some key players like Kudus and Alex, whom he thought could change the fortune of the team, but in the end, it appeared the speaker was living in a delusion.

ISSUING A CALL TO SERVE

The phrase "to serve" refers to the act of offering support or assistance to others. This encompasses acting in the interest of individuals or groups by performing tasks. In essence, "to serve" embodies a sense of duty. Following the team's performance in meeting expectations, the speaker expressed that it was a remarkable opportunity for individual players to shine, especially when there are equally talented players in search of an opportunity into the team. It can be deduced from the speech that to be part of the team is to serve the interests of the nation, as can be found below:

(14) It is important that we are here to serve.

(78) It is important for us to remember that we belong to a privileged group.

(79) Please the time for jokes, the time for not fully connected is gone.

(80) In our parlance we say the honeymoon period is gone.

(81) For me and the 30 million people, the message is clear.

(82) It is either you are with this family or you are out of this family.

(83) Believe, I swear on my life.

(85) Don't forget somebody played before you.

(86) It is time for you to play, and somebody will also play after you.

The speaker’s speech in excerpts (79) and (80) expressed a negative index both structurally and pragmatically. They illustrate a wider solidarity gap between the two actors, as the speaker intended to confront the players’ unwillingness and lack of commitment, which were detrimental to the team’s progress. Additionally, in extract (82), the term ‘family’ contextually refers to a group of individuals united by a common goal. The speaker aimed to encourage players who are not ready to commit to this collective goal to consider stepping away. The word “please” in the extract can be used to show politeness; however, it can also suggest that the speaker was creating a divide between himself and the listeners, while portraying that he is being straightforward. In excerpt (81), where the speaker states, “For me and the 30 million people, the message is clear,” he places a cognitive burden on the team, requiring them to think both within and beyond the context to fully understand his perspective.

In a follow-up, the speaker employed extracts (85) and (86) to assume that great players served the Black Stars team in the past. As a leader at the helm of affairs, he cautioned the team that the opportunity to play for the team was an opportunity to serve.

INSTILLING CONFIDENCE AND HOPE

In the entire speech, the speaker’s manner of communication and the functional use of linguistic resources bequeathed the impression that the meeting was not a friendly one, as circumstances could influence his demeanor and linguistic choices. In the latter part of the address, it is apparent that the speaker uses positive representation to instill trust and confidence in the team, so in effect the team will not be left in a negative face, since this may have a psychological effect on the individual players. This mien demonstrates a good leader who is strategic and mindful of rhetoric. The extracts are shreds of evidence:

(93) We have shown we can do it.

(94) If you ask me, I will tell the entire nation that we have the men to do it.

(95) I have absolute confidence in this squared.

(96) I have absolute confidence in the technical team and the staff.

(98) You transforming my confidence into performance is what we need.

(102) The indomitable fighting spirit of the Blackstars must be resurrected.

(103) I wish you well.

(104) God bless our homeland, Ghana, and make us strong.

The discourse enacted and the posture of the team possibly gave a sober reflection to the speaker to believe that the situation would change. The speaker could be informed that the team had a lot of talent, along with a mixture of expertise involving the technical men. He alluded to himself by using the first person pronoun “I” to offer a discourse of hope embedded in clauses like “If you ask me, I will tell the entire nation that we have the men to do it”, “I have absolute confidence in this squared”, “I have absolute confidence in the technical team and the staff”. The singular honor of a leader to perform such a duty corroborates the studies of [Agbanyo \(2024\)](#) and [Woods \(2006\)](#) that the pronoun “I” is used to show commitment to taking responsibility for certain actions.

Lastly, the mention of ‘God’ by the speaker in extract (104) may be timely. God is supremely seen as a “provider”, “problem solver”, and more. As situations may be beyond the speaker, he thought that the solutions to man’s problems must come from God. As helpless as he might be, the speaker resorted to spiritual warfare and left the team with goodwill messages in extracts (103) and (104).

CONCLUSION

This study draws on insights from discourse and critical discourse analysis to explore the speech delivered by the GFA President during a meeting with the Ghana Black Stars team. It identifies six discourse functions: (1) constructing a shared identity as Ghanaians, (2) invoking the spirit of patriotism, (3) expressing disappointment, (4) making reference to history, (5) issuing a call to serve, and (6) instilling confidence and hope. The speaker’s linguistic choices portray him as a leader dedicated to achieving collective goals rather than pursuing personal gain. These identified discourse functions were conveyed through a series of linguistic resources, including anecdotes, topoi, carefully selected vocabulary, and positive self-presentation. Such elements enabled the speaker to communicate his intentions effectively to the audience. The study adds to the shelf of discourse and a nuanced approach to communication. Future research in this area could investigate similar dynamics in other national football contexts to uncover deeper insights into universal linguistic patterns.

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