Futuristic Rhetoric in Goodluck Jonathan’s 2015 Presidential Campaign Speeches

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Abstract
This paper examines the use of futuristic rhetoric (deliberative) by the former President of Nigeria Goodluck Jonathan to communicate his re-election agenda during the run off to the 2015 presidential election. Two campaign speeches are analyzed: the declaration-of intent speech presented on November 11, 2014 and a speech to mark the formal commencement of his campaign made on January 8, 2015. The speeches are analyzed using two theories: Aristotelian rhetorical analysis and Chilton’s (2004) version of critical discourse analysis called legitimization model. The analysis found out that Jonathan conceived the future as a binary structure. This binary structure as presented in his speeches frames a false dilemma where only two choices are provided, namely, “old ways” and “moving forward.” Jonathan portrays his opponent as a symbol of the “old ways”, buttressing on the images of fear and brutality. He depicts the election of his opponent as threatening the country’s future. Contrarily, Jonathan positions himself as safeguarding the future for the next generation and touts himself as the person who has moved and will be “moving” Nigeria “forward” to “progress” when elected. The paper concludes that the futuristic rhetoric used by Jonathan in these campaign speeches reflect a tradition that evolved out of vestiges of colonial legacy, hence the need to always interrogate these legacies in order to reveal how Nigerian elites use these colonial discourses to legitimize their power and perpetuate inequality.

Introduction
Elections are a crucial part of democratic processes, which affirm the core values of representative democracies. In modern democracies, the government’s legitimacy to govern and rule over the people is solely derived from the consent of the governed in a free and fair election process, at least in theory particularly in Africa. The principal means by which the consent of the people is solicited is through electoral campaigns. According to Maisel and West (2004), election campaigns deal with the different ways through which political actors communicate with the voting public during elections. Moreover, many studies have suggested that skillful choices of different rhetorical strategies during campaigns go a long way in “framing an issue in such a way as to make some choice considerations more salient than others” (Barker 2005, p. 376). Benoit (2000) indicates that voters’ perceptions can be strongly swayed more by the rhetorical devices the candidate uses to talk about “the economy than the economic figures themselves – or what the news media says about those figures” (p. 1). This is why it is important to analyze campaign speeches especially in a Nigerian context. Goodluck Jonathan campaign speeches exemplifies it.

Stuckey & Antczak (1995) categorize the verbal act of election campaigns in three ways: First, is the establishment of interpretative dominance “by presenting the image of the candidate “as representative of the electorate” (p. 118). Second, the “ideological unity with the audience” (p. 118). Third, “all language use is tropic, that is, any use of language involves a choice about how
to figure language – how to shape, and thus in one way or another, selectively define reality” (p. 118). Since it is not possible at all times for politicians to have the physical resources to back up their claims of credibility, verbal communication becomes crucial in political interaction and in establishing credibility (Chilton, 2004). This implies that during a campaign, candidates must make strategic and tactical communication choices to get the attention of their voters.

Moreover, there is a need to draw attention to the recognition that the power to influence people during campaign is different from the power to persuade them during governance. Windt (1986) stresses that campaign rhetoric presents a set of either/or choices, seeking the defeat of the enemy in a war-like strategy. However, a governing rhetoric is one that stresses accommodation, theoretically. Although, the two forms of rhetoric (campaign and governance) might overlap, the recognition of the importance of campaign rhetoric in political analysis is very important. In fact, an election campaign is primarily a rhetorical affair. Hence, the imperativeness of understanding the process of decision-making in society that relies not purely on concrete reality but on the power of persuasion. It is based on this need that this paper focuses on analyzing the different rhetorical and discursive strategies Nigerian former Goodluck Jonathan employed in his 2015 re-election campaign speeches to galvanize support.

**Futuristic or Deliberative Rhetoric**

Rhetoric is one of the essential components of human existence from antiquity to the contemporary world, as virtually everything in life is practically about making a point, making your voice heard, making a choice and getting people to believe in an idea. It is nearly impossible to imagine a world without rhetoric, especially, in this information revolution age. We daily use different media (written, spoken, visual) to express our points of view, to convince, to persuade, to make decisions and to inform. At best these are different ways we use rhetoric and encounter rhetoric. However, in this paper the word rhetoric is used from the Aristotle’s sense as the “ability, in each [particular] case, to see the available means of persuasion” [1356a]. Borrowing from Aristotle’s sense of rhetoric, this paper focuses on those patterns that reveal a speaker’s strategies of persuasion. Specifically, the paper investigates how the former President of Nigeria Goodluck Jonathan, who as an incumbent seeking reelection, used different rhetorical and linguistic strategies to pursue his political goals.

Furthermore, in his *Rhetoric*, Aristotle presents a tripartite division of rhetorical genres: forensic or judicial, deliberative or political, and epideictic or ceremonial. According to Aristotle:

Each of these [species] has its own “time”; for the deliberative speaker, the future (for whether exhorting or dissuading he advises about future events); for the speaker in court, the past (for he always prosecutes or defends concerning what has been done); in epideictic the present is the most important; for all speakers praise and blame in regard to existing qualities, but they often also make use of other things, both reminding [the audience] of the past and projecting the course of the future [1358b].

From the above quotation, Futuristic also called deliberative rhetoric is aimed at establishing the expediency or harmfulness of a proposed action, and functionally to exhort or dissuade. Forensic
rhetoric deals with the type of argument common in the courtroom where passing judgment relies on the issues in the past and thematically on justice and injustice. Its function is to accuse or defend. Epideictic, on the other hand, is linked to the present. Thematically, it is a common language used in funeral orations, commencement addresses, or when heroes are celebrated, or villains are condemned. Functionally, it focuses on praise and blame.

The two speeches this paper analyze focus on electoral campaign and may therefore, be attributed to deliberative oratory in the sense that both speeches center on future actions during election. The main persuasion in the speeches was directed at one possible outcome and that is, the choice of the speaker over his opponents. Jonathan focuses his attention on advocating for the right course of action in the future. This course of action is a choice between Jonathan and his major opponent Muhammadu Buhari (who became the elected President). Jonathan is out to persuade his audience that he is the best possible candidate for the election.

**Theoretical Framework**

This paper draws on Aristotelian rhetorical approach and critical linguistics approach informed by Chilton’s (2004) legitimization model. The Aristotelian rhetorical approach “provides a method for looking at rhetoric as a human phenomenon, for learning how to use it, and also for a system of criticism” ((Kennedy 2007, p. 20). The rhetorical approach offers us a key to understanding the nature of how the soft power of the pen (and words) at certain times works more effectively than the blunt power of the sword (and weapon). This phenomenon, therefore, demands that we examine the ways in which people are discursively manipulated especially in political discourse because politics can best be understood through the eyes of rhetoric. Especially, in an election campaign, we can say that politics is primarily a rhetorical affair. According to Burke (1982: 51) election campaign “is a rhetorical contest, in which each side (it takes at least two sides to make a contest) tries to out-persuade the other”. The main aim of persuasion in an election campaign is to accrue electoral votes. To achieve that ultimate goal, candidates must attempt to persuade as many voters as possible to reach a coalition with their audience, that they are the right candidates for the job. Achieving a coalition with the audience requires strong persuasive skills. Persuasion is therefore central to politics not only that it is “merely the means of selling a policy but becoming rather the process through which policy in itself is created” (O’Shaughnessy, 2014, p. 20). Thus, understanding the strategic activities of political actors is something that could be enriched by greater attention to their rhetorical activities. Such insights are valuable to understanding Goodluck Jonathan’s campaign speeches not only in terms of their propositional content, but also based on how prominence is given to a particular way of arguing. In this way rhetoric will remain as an important tool in doing political analysis of campaign election speeches in Nigeria.

**Legitimization Model**

Another theoretical framework employed in this paper is legitimization model by Chilton (2004). According to Chilton (2004) politicians linguistically manage their interests in what he calls the “strategies of delegitimization (of the other) and legitimization (of the self)” (p. 47). This approach
is adopted by politicians in their bid to win election. The delegitimization and legitimization shows various types of polarization strategy, what van Dijk (1997) calls the “ideological square”:

- Emphasize **our good** things
- Emphasize **their bad** things
- De-emphasize **our bad** things
- De-emphasize **their good** things

According to van Dijk (1997), the polarization is semantically constructed, for example: Whereas WE are “democratic,” THEY are not, and whereas our soldiers, or those who share our cause, are “freedom fighters,” those of the “others” are obviously “terrorists.” Thus, lexical items may not only be selected because of official criteria of decorum, but also because they effectively emphasize or de-emphasize political attitudes and opinions, garner support, manipulate public opinion, manufacture political consent, or legitimise political power (van Dijk 1997, p. 28). For example, words might be chosen as “acts of negative other-presentation, acts of blaming, scapegoating, marginalizing, excluding, attacking the moral character of some individual or group, attacking the communicative cooperation of the other, attacking the rationality of the other” (Chilton, 2004, p. 47). Chilton’s legitimization forms the core of political campaigns and largely focuses on self which “includes positive self-presentation, manifesting itself in acts of praise, self-apology, self-explanation, self-justification, self-identification as a source of authority, reason, vision and sanity, where the self is either an individual or the group with which an individual identifies or wishes to identify” (p. 47). The strategies used for listing such reasons, whether overtly or by implication, include the awareness and/or assertion of the addressee’s wants and needs. The main strategy Goodluck Jonathan employs in asserting his wants is futuristic rhetoric where the future is discursively construed as the “here now.” Moreover, the futuristic rhetoric is anchored on false dilemma where only two choices are provided: “old ways” and “moving forward.” Jonathan’s opponent is portrayed as a threat to the future and representative of “the old ways” while Jonathan positions himself as safeguarding the future for the next generation and touts himself as the person who is “moving” Nigeria “forward” to “progress”.

The use of both rhetorical and linguistic approaches is informed by the heterogeneous nature of political speech where it attempts both to persuade and yet to reshape its discursive practices. According to Fairclough (1997), the discursive event of political speech is to do a persuasive work, but at the same time, the speech is expected to intervene in the existing political order of society by trying to reshape it. Hence, for a detailed analysis of a political speech we need the two approaches: rhetorical and discourse approaches. Fairclough (1997) further states that “orientation to the specificity of the discursive event includes orientation to how it reworks the social resource of the existing order of discourse; but it also includes the concerns of stylistics, pragmatics and rhetorical analysis” (p. 47). As such, from this perspectives this then reshapes the social and political sphere and this is achieved through rhetoric.

**Methodology**
The data for this study come from two select campaign speeches delivered by the former President of Nigeria, Goodluck Jonathan in 2015. The first was made on Tuesday November 11, 2014 on his declaration of intent to run for the 2015 presidential elections on the platform of the Peoples’ Democratic Party (PDP) at Eagle Square, Abuja. The second speech is Jonathan’s Thursday, January 8, 2015 remarks at the start of the PDP 2015 campaign in Lagos. The first speech was made to gain the nomination of his party where the choice was between him and other PDP bidders and the other was after his nomination where the contest was between him and other parties’ candidates. The analysis does not focus on summarizing individual speeches point by point, or in sequence but the analysis considers Jonathan’s speeches as a rhetorical tool which is used to persuade and influence the audience. Thus, this paper focuses on the discursive means by which these rhetorical appeals are constructed. The transcription conventions for the extracts used in this paper are as follows: Jonathan’s original speech extract are italicized and the researcher’s comments are in plain texts inserted in square brackets, emphasizes are bold-faced. The extracts are numbered in ascending order for easier identification. While at the bottom of each text is the paragraph number which corresponds with the numbering in the original text. The speech of declaration-of-intent is labelled as A while the remarks Jonathan made at the commencement of his campaign is labelled as B. The full transcripts of the declaration-of-intent speech was retrieved from the Nigerian private television Channels TV websites.

Data Analysis

Jonathan employs a deliberative argument to show the difference between what he calls “the old” system that was run in Nigeria and comparing it to the innovations of the present Nigeria under his own leadership, and his plans for the future. He projects the future as pregnant with hope, riddled with progress and development. Jonathan uses the image of the moon implying that he is the source of light which will take Nigeria to the promise land thus:

1. You must vote for your liberation, you must vote for your development, you must vote to take Nigeria to the moon. You cannot vote to take Nigeria backward. (B 81)

The unstated alternatives alluded to here are suppression (as opposed to liberation), and retrogression (as opposed to development).

This attempt to get people to vote, especially for Jonathan, is driven by the presumed binary structure typical in politics as discussed in Chilton (2004) where the arguments are structured as “either/or.” As Jonathan puts it:

2. Either you vote and continue to be relevant in Nigeria’s political history or you vote to be irrelevant. (B 5)

3. [He also says,] Vote for your liberation or imprisonment. (B 61)

This binary structure frames false dilemma where only two choices are provided: “old ways” and “moving forward.” Jonathan’s opponent is portrayed as representing “the old ways.” This is threatening to the future since change is the only constant phenomenon. Jonathan presents the images of fear encapsulated in Buhari’s past military administration which can be detrimental to the progress of the people. Jonathan positions himself as safeguarding the future for the next
generation and presents himself as the person who is “moving” Nigeria “forward” to “progress” (the rhetoric of progress).

Although, Jonathan acknowledges different problems and difficulties that his administration faced, such as what he called “uncommon challenges” and “the wave of insurgency” that swept through some parts of Nigeria, and the problem of corruption, which according to Jonathan, “[r]emains a big challenge in our national life,” those challenges and problems with all the consequential sufferings were legitimated by a futurist (deliberative) rhetoric in which he claims to know the future with certainty and objectivity. The argument was that if Jonathan is voted into office again, he would turn around the tide of things in the country. The following excerpts indicate the way the future is depicted:

4. We have eradicated [corruption] in the agricultural sector and we will surely eradicate it in other sectors of our economy. (A 38)

5. We are equipping the armed forces and deploying special forces to engage the terrorist and end this senseless war. (A 5)

Even with the array of problems facing Nigeria such as corruption and insurgency, Jonathan uses futuristic rhetoric to give hope and to buy the support of the electorate which can be seen in the reality at that time.

6. March of progress as a united and democratic country. (A 2)

In this context, Jonathan is presented as the candidate who will waive the magic wane and solve the problems of corruption and insurgency. deliberative rhetoric is an attempt at image restoration, which relies on promises of a better future. These promises do not necessarily stem from an objective description of the world, but rather as means of inducing cooperation from Jonathan’s audience.

Deliberative rhetoric is anchored on a future that is human-made, which requires a human agency to shape it, as opposed to “natural” future events that are outside human agency such as earthquakes and floods. In Jonathan’s case, the possible human-made future is a choice between what he referred to as “going backward” and “moving forward”. To vote for Jonathan’s opponents means a future where the misgovernance continue. As stated in this extract:

7. Railways were allowed to rot in neglect… (A 80)

8. Where there were long queues at our filling stations due to irregular supply of products and our people were exploited…. (A 85)

9. [Where] women and youths were denied opportunities in government and in responsible positions. (A 86)

10. [where women will] go back to the kitchen and die there. (B 66 & 67)

To vote for Jonathan means a future where Nigeria:

11. Thirsts for progress with children across the nation, eager for knowledge and safely in schools! Where all who have taken up arms, would again embrace peace! Where our women can aspire to any heights, without hindrance! Where one day the next generation will take us to outer space. (A 98, 99, 100, & 105)
The choice between “going backward” (doom) versus “moving forward” (optimism and progress) is expected to lead listeners or electorate to make mental models that are binary in character. We have seen the binary tendency at work in representations of Nigeria’s conditions into two: “old ways” (going backward) and new ways (“moving forward”). Also, the choice in the verbs between “going” and “moving” could be deliberate where “going” does not specify the nature of motion but “moving” specifies “progress” or entails “positive action.” The deliberative rhetoric offers Jonathan the opportunity to legitimize the present with its problems and challenges in the name of a good future. However, some of the future projects could affect Jonathan’s credibility. For example, the project of going to the “outer space” does not seem to be one of the pressing priorities for Nigerians hence; this might suggest that Jonathan has lost touch with the pressing problems facing the Nigerian people.

Contrastive Tenses as Linguistic Frames in Jonathan’s Deliberative Rhetoric

The linguistic concept of tense and aspect is significant in the evocation of deliberative rhetoric. The contrast between the temporal moments of past, present, and future in Jonathan’s speeches represent the temporality of situations and actions in different ways. Jonathan juxtaposes the simple past tense and the present tense and aspect to describe the “old ways” and “moving forward” respectively. The following excerpt illustrates that:

12. *My brothers and sisters, we cannot go back to the old ways! Our railways were allowed to rot in neglect, we have revived and are modernising them. We cannot go back to the old ways! Our road infrastructure collapsed. We are reconstructing and expanding federal roads across the country. We cannot go back to the old ways! Our airport terminal buildings were dilapidated and our airspace [rendered] unsafe. We are fixing this. (A 80, 81, & 82)*

Jonathan uses the simple past tense to recount the events of the past related to Buhari’s military regime – what he called the “old ways” – to portray “the old ways” (military regime) as issues that are entirely of the past and, thus, not desirable in the progressive present moment, hence should not be allowed to return. The past tense “were allowed to,” “collapsed,” and “dilapidated” in the above excerpt are used to achieve the purpose of persuading the audience to see the past as riddled with underdevelopment, misgovenance, and evil. He uses the present perfect and present continuous to represent the events of the present: what he called “moving forward” which helps to draw a picture of an ongoing progress (his continuing tenure) that should not be interrupted. The present participles “reconstructing,” “fixing,” and the present tense copula “are” render the sentences as statements of a timeless principle that are not unique to any particular temporal moment, hence should not be limited to his expiring tenure but rather allowed to go on into the future. Similarly, the perfective aspect “have revived” renders Jonathan’s past projects as natural extensions of a recent, desirable past into the present and future. Jonathan also uses repetition as a powerful rhetorical device to complement the use of tense in constructing the binary frame between the past and the future. The phrase “we cannot go back to the old ways” was utilized as a repetitive
rhetorical device to help the audience remember and recognize the importance of voting for Jonathan who represents the “new way.”

Jonathan projects the future through deontic and epistemic lenses – projections of both what ought to be done (voting for him) and what will be at some future moment (journey to progress). The contrastive use of simple past tense verbs and present perfect aspect function rhetorically to indicate a break from the past, which is not a desirable moment, and the present moment that will necessarily develop into a fruitful future. Jonathan construes the “present” as he indicates with the use of temporal deixis “today” and “now” as durative, as continuing into the future which can be obstructed by electing another person other than him. Example:

13. *We came and cleaned up the sector and today there is no corruption in the fertilizer industry again...* [W]e developed the e-wallet system and through that the farmers now get their fertilizers directly. (B 25 &26)

14. *Now our trains are moving. Egbin power sector got burnt in 2005 and remained so until now when we are fixing it.* (B 43)

Through manipulating the present tense to project an image continuing into the future, Jonathan “de-futurizes” the future by rendering it as already existing in the present moment. The future is thus linguistically and discursively construed as the “here now” and a vision of one possible future. Jonathan through the use of futuristic rhetoric persuades the electorates to vote for new ways as against “old ways.”

**Postcolonial Frames in Jonathan’s Deliberative Rhetoric**

The futuristic rhetoric can be equated to optimistic projections of modernity during the colonial era. According to Mignolo (2011), the project of modernity interprets colonialism as the vehicle that brings modern values and institutions to the colonized world but behind the so-called progress of modernity lies a logic and history of coloniality. While recent political rhetoric in the colonized world such as Nigeria is not a justification of colonial rhetoric, it has expression in narratives of progress and expansion, which was necessitated different types of movement, including “flows of knowledge, materials, commodities, practices” (Mignolo 2011, p. 9) and social and physical movements. Every rhetoric exists in the contexts of the people's overall experience or a segment thereof. In this light, Jonathan’s campaign speeches reflect a tradition that evolved out of vestiges of colonial legacy. According to Addei, Osei, and Annin (2013):

For the masses in many African countries, the postcolonial era did not offer them anything too different from the colonial era itself. The only difference, however, is that their white colonial masters have simply metamorphosed into their own natives, the elite few, who have assumed control. In other words, it is a period of change of batons where white colonial masters have given way, after independence, to black masters lording it over their fellow black men. To these black masses therefore, the dream of freedom after independence is simply a mirage. (p. 164)

Apparently, postcolonial Africa has maintained some of the colonial rhetoric molded in the name of development and progress. According to Törnquist (1999), the argument often touted is
that the developing countries found themselves on an inherited and undeveloped traditional level and that is due to their own backwardness, not to colonial rule. Hence, political and other forms of development in these countries required modernization of a kind similar to that which today's developed countries had undergone. As such, developing countries did not need to reinvent the wheel but could take in most cases a shortcut by copying the advances pioneered by the developed countries. Such rhetoric of development relies heavily on a deliberative rhetoric, where the elites promise economic growth and financial prosperity with little evidence to support the actualization of those promises, while ignoring existing poverty and social inequality in the society. The following excerpts features these promises of progress and economic growth:

15. In moving forward, I see a Nigeria that thirsts for progress with children across the nation, eager for knowledge and safely in schools! (A 98)

16. I remain grateful for the trust you reposed in me to lead our Nation through uncommon challenges in our march of progress as a united and democratic country. (A 2)

17. In our journey to progress, knowledge is indispensable. You must vote for the progress of this country. (A 47)

Colonial occupation and European modernity were defined by a discourse of progress and development. Post-colonial political elites in Africa eventually inherited this discourse, most importantly, with the globalization of democracy; this discourse has become even more entrenched and perhaps defines African political discourse. This Western influence can be deciphered in Jonathan’s constant repetition of “progress,” “march of progress,” “journey to progress,” and “vote for progress.” All these promises of progress conjure the image of economic growth which have remained a myth to the local people and demonstrates one of the ways the enduring legacy of colonialism still controls the colonized world. Ironically, as Mignolo (2011) asks if discussions of progress and economic growth function to “save capitalism and not to save human beings?” (p. 144). This rhetoric of progress serves only the colonialists who are primarily concern with profit making.

**Conclusion**

In summation, the sub-genres of deliberative rhetoric are “ideologically and materially consequential because of their capacity to define and delimit the future possibilities of a given present moment” (Dunmire 2011, p. 67). Through rhetorical acts, Jonathan created an expectation, which had material effects of legitimizing his political goals and interests. Edelman (1988) sees this creation of expectations “as a rhetorical act through which political actors make “rhetorical evocations of a remote time unlikely to arrive which, in turn, have material effects on the present by legitimating more immediate proposals and policies that serve the partisan’s political goals and interests” (p. 18). Through binary conceptualizations of events and issues, Jonathan legitimated his political policies and actions by projecting images constructed as “moving forward” and declaring that certain good things will happen soon if he is re-elected as president. What Jonathan does with deliberative rhetoric is an attempt to place two choices before his audience: images of hopes and “progress,” if Jonathan is re-elected as the president, versus images of fear and threats
if his main opponent is elected as the president. Through the means of deliberative discourse, Jonathan casts his political goal with language that intend to speak in the interest of the audience, including prioritizing promises of the provision of good roads, security of lives and property, health care, good educational system and a host of others while ignoring the real impact of those projects in effectively dealing with poverty and inequality. However, Jonathan’s futuristic rhetoric which is embedded in progress is influenced by Nigeria’s postcolonial lived experience. Colonial preoccupation of Africa was rationalized by the colonialists as a project that would bring “modern” values and institutions to the colonized world but behind the so-called modernity lies in the exploitation and perpetuation of inequality.

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