

Original Research Article

Analysis of Presidential Updates on Covid-19: The Case of Ghana

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Abstract: The present study aimed to offer a critical genre analysis of the presidential COVID-19 updates in Ghana. Sixteen out of the twenty-eight updates were purposively sampled for the study. Whereas a combined Swales' (1990) move-step and Huttner's (2010) classificatory model in studying the schematic structure revealed a total of eight obligatory moves and six sub-moves, Bhatia's (2015) Critical Genre Analysis (CDA) and van Dijk's (2010) CDA employed in the study showed that the pre-election COVID-19 updates were predominantly a blend of public health announcements and a subtle political campaign messaging giving credence to CGA's intertextuality and interdiscursivity, while the post-election updates mainly highlighted the government's successes in the fight against the pandemic and a renewed commitment to governance. The study revealed that the sixteen sampled updates shared some similarities in both the obligatory and ambiguous moves, with some varying degrees of textual space, depending on the prevailing circumstance and the trajectory of the pandemic.

Keywords: COVID-19, Critical Genre Analysis, Schematic structure, Intertextuality, Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo, Nana Addo's Update (NAU).

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INTRODUCTION

The Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) originated in Wuhan, China, and was reported to the World Health Organisation (WHO) by the Chinese government on December 31, 2019. COVID-19 claimed millions of lives, making it one of the deadliest diseases to have emerged in recent history (Morens *et al.*, 2020). It had a devastating effect on the economies of the world (Sarfo-Kantankah *et al.*, 2021). According to the Ghana Health Service (GHS) (2020), by March 11, 2020, WHO had declared the COVID-19 pandemic following its spread into 114 countries across the globe just after three months of its emergence, and infecting over 118,000 people (WHO, 2020). The disease still raged on and claimed close to 6 million lives globally (WHO, February 2022).

Ghana had its fair share of the damage caused by the pandemic as the country recorded a little over 1,442 deaths from the pandemic, with a total case count of about 160,000 and over 158,000 recoveries (Ghana Health Service, February 2022). Across the globe, governments had to adopt desperate measures aimed at reducing the spread and devastation of the pandemic (Dong & Gardner, 2020). To Thelwall and Thelwall (2021), a key strategy to fighting the pandemic during

the period was effective communication to the population and the engagement of their consent. Such communications, they posit, mostly came as updates from political leaders who sought to inform, educate, and awaken people's consciousness about the disturbing nature of the pandemic so that its spread would be minimized, if not eliminated.

Like many world leaders, President Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo Addo of the Republic of Ghana updated Ghanaians on the pandemic from March 12, 2020, purposely to keep them informed about the reality of the disease, the actions taken by his administration to combat the disease, and the responsibilities of Ghanaians themselves towards the fight against the pandemic. As a politician, a political head and an incumbent president, when the pandemic emerged about the same time when the country was preparing to hold a general election, there was the need for him to effectively and strategically use language to communicate to Ghanaians specifically, as well as the global community about the destructive nature of the pandemic, the havoc it caused and continued to cause to lives and economies of the world, as well as the threat and the potential threat it posed to humanity. These were contained in the pre- and post-election 2020 COVID-19 updates presented by President Akufo-Addo.

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Again, the occurrence of the pandemic at the time when Ghana was preparing to hold general elections in the country was significant on the part of the sitting president of the country since he and his government were going to be assessed by the citizenry on their performance primarily from how they were able to handle the pandemic and all its related issues. Therefore, the President's presentation of the COVID-19 updates needed to remain tactful, discreet, and strategic to win the approval and admiration of the Ghanaian electorate. In pursuance of this goal, therefore, the President of the ruling New Patriotic Party government, Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo, according to Sullivan (2020), left no room for fragmentation of decision-making, which was likely to be exacerbated by the partisan nature of decision-making.

Unsurprisingly, as 2020 progressed, COVID-19 issues became increasingly politicised. This politicisation was mainly from the two largest political parties in Ghana, the National Democratic Congress (NDC), and the ruling New Patriotic Party (NPP), on whose ticket the incumbent President, Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo, was going to run for a second term.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the schematic structure of the pre- and post-election 2020 Covid-19 updates by President Akufo-Addo.

Statement of the Problem

Even though studies on presidential speeches on COVID-19 abound, and include those from Indonesia (Sultan & Rapi, 2020), the U.S. (Mandl & Reis, 2022), Nigeria (Anyanwu, 2020), and Ghana (Adu Gyamfi & Amankwah, 2021), their focus has predominantly been on rhetorical strategies, crisis management, and communicative efficacy. Notably absent is a genre-based investigation that interrogates these updates' schematic structure and lexico-grammatical choices, particularly through Bhatia's (2015) Critical Genre Theory. It is as a result of the above gap that this study is conducted to analyze the structure of the Presidential speeches during the COVID 19 period in Ghana.

Review of Related Literature

Theoretical Framework

This section highlights both Genre and Genre Analysis, a prelude to the consideration of a combined theoretical framework adopted for the study; Bhatia's (2015) Critical Genre Analysis (CGA), Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) by Van Dijk (2001) and the Genre Analysis method by Swales (1990) and how they contribute to the totality of this research.

The study's adoption of Bhatia's (2015) CGA, the overarching theoretical framework, is to examine the 'interdiscursive performance' in the crisis communication by Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo, President of Ghana. Thus, CGA allows the analysis to

connect the moves in the COVID-19 updates to the wider socio-political practices and private intentions underlying the President's communication before and after the 2020 elections. Van Dijk's (2001) CDA aids in examining the President's enactment of power, ideology and persuasion in the COVID-19 updates by the President. Similarly, Swales' (1990) Move-step model identifies the schematic structure, whereas Huttner's Classificatory system enables comments to be made on the statuses of the moves.

Genre and Genre Analysis

The term 'genre' has been used for a long time in the history of classical rhetoric and literary studies. It has been understood and applied in different ways by different people. Swales (1990: 33) asserts that its definition is still "a vague idea, a rather ambiguous term of art." His definition of "genre" is as follows:

A genre comprises a class of communicative events, the members of which share a set of communicative purposes. These purposes are recognised by the expert members of the parent discourse community, and thereby constitute the rationale for the genre (Swales, 1990, p. 33).

Bhatia (1993: 13) also defines 'genre' along the lines of Swales' definition and states:

[It is] a recognisable communicative event characterised by a set of communicative purpose (s) identified and mutually understood by the members of the professional or academic community in which it regularly occurs. Most often, it is highly structured and conventionalized with constraints on allowable contributions in terms of their intent, positioning, form and functional value. These constraints, however, are often exploited by the expert members of the discourse community to achieve private intentions within the framework of socially recognized purpose(s). (Bhatia, 1993: p.13).

To advance the discussion on the positionality of Bhatia (1993) as regards the definition of genre, it could be said that apart from other aspects such as content, form or audience/readership, genres are recognised by their communicative purpose. For instance, a COVID-19 update by President Akufo-Addo is not only recognised as such given its typical form and content but also largely because of its communicative purpose of informing Ghanaians about the steps the government is taking to prevent the further spread of the pandemic and what Ghanaians must do to complement the efforts of government in the fight against the pandemic.

Bhatia (2015) asserts that a genre might change based on the academic or professional community in which it is frequently employed. In this case, minor changes to the genre's communicative purpose (s) bring

about differences in the various sub-genres, while major changes lead to a different genre.

Furthermore, genres are "most often [...] highly structured and conventionalized" communicative occurrences, which gives rise to these two characteristics of genre, according to Bhatia (1993: 13): The first benefit of genre knowledge is that it enables experts in any academic or professional group to use and alter the genres they encounter on a daily basis. Newcomers to a specialized community can also employ genres "appropriately" if they are familiar with their conventions and systems. Second, because of their "long experience and/or training," the academic or professional community shapes and conventionalizes a genre (Bhatia, 1993, p. 14).

Violating these limitations or "boundaries" will be viewed as strange not just by the professional or academic community but also by the "good users of the language in general" (Bhatia, 1993, p. 14). Genre analysis did not become a distinct discipline within discourse studies until the early 1980s, when the social or pragmatic age in linguistics emerged (Berge & Ledin, 2001) (Björkvall, 2020).

Genre theory in linguistics has mainly been influenced by the work of Bakhtin, who defines genre as "comparatively stable thematic, compositional, and stylistic categories of utterances" (Bakhtin, 1986; p. 64). Björkvall (2020) intimates that a significant portion of genre research in linguistics has focused on language and communication within professional, organizational, and educational settings, which are typically defined by typifications and consistent modes of interaction through text and discourse. However, according to Bhatia (2015), genres have conventionalized communicative purposes but have proven to undergo constant modifications and creativity, not changes per se, to get them to do other things. The line of thought, according to Björkvall (2020), that genres are consistently aimed at an individual (addressivity) and inherently establish dialogical relationships with other utterances (dialogicity) formed the basis for the description of genre hybridity and interdiscursivity (Bhatia, 2015; Fairclough, 2003).

Drawing on Bakhtin, Berkenkotter and Huckin (1995: 4) assert that genres are "dynamic rhetorical forms that are developed from actors' responses to recurrent situations." Their positionality is that to categorize a genre, both the specific discourse community that owns the genre in question and the recurring social condition to which the genre reacts must be taken into account.

Thus, it must be recognized that, since genre remains a conventionalized way of using language, new genres will emerge or change to address new or emerging rhetorical needs within a discourse community in a given

recurring social context with these needs dictating their form and function in this ever-changing world.

Criticality in Critical Genre Analysis

Bhatia (2015) posits that, for some time now, it has been commonly assumed that creating and understanding genres is an end in and of itself rather than a means to an end. Genre theory has focused on the analysis of generic constructions, with little attention to the settings in which such genres are formed, interpreted, and employed. He observes that very little attention is paid to professional practice, the goal of all that constitutes genre theory. So, to analyze interdiscursive performance in professional practice, a more thorough, multiperspective genre analysis paradigm was needed. This, therefore, marked the shift from genre analysis to critical genre analysis with "its agenda in the demystification of multiperspective and multidimensional nature of professional practices as objectively, realistically, rationally and rigorously as resources permit."

Thus, the term "Critical" in "Critical Genre Analysis" refers to the use of a variety of methodological frameworks and procedures, such as ethnographic (including expert interviews and/or "convergent accounts" of seasoned members of the professional community in question), rigorous in analytical procedures, and integrating genre analysis and other pertinent multiple perspectives and dimensions of professional genres (Bhatia, 2004).

A further consideration of the term 'criticality' by Bhatia (ibid.) puts it as representing "two concepts that overlap but are distinct: first being 'critical social theory', which is mainly concerned with the identification, evaluation and the other signifying a rigorous intellectual analysis to demystify social and institutional actions as separate from ideological interpretation, while the former refers to the remediation of societal actions through the analysis of language intended to introduce social inequalities, disempowerment, and injustices in and through social practices.

The ability to demystify, comprehend, explain, and account for the types of professional procedures we carry out in our day-to-day work lives is another benefit of the second robust idea. According to Bhatia (ibid.), this second idea specifically promotes a framework that is thorough and rigorous in conducting multiple-perspective, multi-dimensional research, giving equal weight to semiotics and practice. This second meaning is where the term "criticality" comes into play in this study.

Though a new field of political discourse, if matched with the practices and values of discursive communities, can be described through concrete move analysis of the genre structures of the texts (i.e., the presidential updates on COVID-19). The analysis of the

research findings, based on the Critical Genre Analysis (CGA) framework (Bhatia, 2015), is similar to genre analysis in the ESP tradition, according to Bjorkvall (2020).

Bjorkvall Further States:

This kind of analysis identifies the textual movements that are either required or optional, each of which corresponds to the communicative goal. (Bjorkvall 2020, cf. Swales 1990: 141). A move, in turn, frequently comprises different steps with more specific purposes that together realize the move in question. Such an analysis identifies more or less obligatory moves in texts—each move corresponding to the communicative purpose. A move, in turn, often consists of different steps with more specific purposes that together realize the move in question (Bjorkvall 2020, cf. Swales 1990: 141).

From this angle, RQ1(What schematic structure characterized the pre- and post-election 2020 COVID-19 updates by President Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo?) is responded to. Also, beyond the deployment of the textual or lexico-grammatical resources lies the consideration of the president's 'private intentions' in enacting power, ideology and persuasion in the updates preceding Ghana's election 2020 and those that followed it; as this responds to RQ2: How did President Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo use language in the pre- and post-election 2020 COVID-19 updates to enact power, ideology and persuasion?

Van Dijk's (2001) Critical Discourse Analysis

Van Dijk's (2001) approach to Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a framework for examining how power, ideology, and society are related. His work focuses on how discourse, whether spoken or written, represents and perpetuates social power and injustice, as evidenced in politics, the media, and race, and how these are related. Key ideas expressed include discourse and society, ideology and power, cognitive interface, discourse structures, multidisciplinary approach and the importance of context as well as social responsibility.

With respect to discourse, van Dijk (2001) argues that it is not neutral but reflective of social structures and aids in maintaining or challenging power relations. He further argues that language is strategically used to promote ideologies and can at the same time marginalize others (ibid), bringing to the fore the interplay between discourse and society. In considering ideology, van Dijk (2001), posits that it is a set of values that people in a social group hold in common. He emphasizes ideology and makes a strong claim that powerful groups legitimize their dominance, and control public opinion through discourse. A case in point is where politicians resort to persuasive discourse to justify policies that serve elite interest but would appear to serve the interest of the populace by seeming to be democratic or inclusive. The concept of ideology is inextricably linked to power, van Dijk (2008), where he defines

power in terms of control over discourse, and through discourse over the minds—how people perceive and understand the world—as well as how powerful groups often engage in discourse to bring home ideologies that legitimize and entrench their dominance.

Finally, van Dijk (2001) does not just view power to be individual but also institutional. Thus, he posits that power is embedded in politics, education, media, and social structures. In sum, power is not just the use of coercive force or a show of physical dominance, but also about discursively and cognition in reproducing and maintaining dominance in society.

Swales' (1990) Move-Step Analysis

According to Bhatia (1997), genre analysis is the discovery of situated linguistic behavior in institutionalized academic or professional settings (p. 181). It is the most recent addition to genre analysis that focuses on discursive performances in professions with the goal of demystifying cross-border discourses by bridging the gap between professionals and academics. Bhatia attaches criticality to the analysis of genre in English for Special Purposes (ESP), rendering it similar to what is postulated by the Sydney School in terms of emancipation, and by this aimed at giving non-native speakers of a language and in our context, English language, access to its professional and expert genres (Bjorkvall, 2020). The critical aspect espoused by Bhatia (2004, 2015, 2017) also makes it transcend the applications of pedagogy in the ESP and advance what is referred to as CGA, which brings to the fore a critical understanding of genres in professional discursive and interdiscursive practices, with its key concept being professional practice and culture (Bhatia, 2015) as already discussed in Chapter 2 of this work. Again, according to Bhatia (2015), CGA is centered "on analytic rigour in an attempt to investigate the motivations, on the part of professionals in specific contexts, for their everyday professional actions within the context of individual professional cultures."

However, Swalesean move-step approach to genre analysis postulates that parts of texts have sub-communicative intentions that come together, which result in the main communicative purpose of the text referred to as 'moves.' The term "Move analysis" refers to a technique for analyzing how language functions in a specific genre to fulfill a communicative purpose (Heron & Corradini, 2020). This communicative function is the distinctive feature of a genre—it distinguishes one genre from another and shapes its structure, linguistic features, and overall form (Dudley-Evans, 1993). In his later works, Swales (2004) (p.-228) described a move as a "discourse or rhetorical unit that performs a coherent communicative function in a written or spoken discourse". (p.-228). In addition to the "moves," which can be a single sentence or a sequence of sentences, other rhetorical devices, like "steps" or "sub-moves," can also be employed to determine the communicative purpose of

a given genre (*ibid.*). According to Samraj (2009), steps and movements serve as communicative functions and might be obligatory or optional within a genre.

Formal (structural) and substantial (content) text analysis are also included in the move analysis model. According to cognitive-semantics, formal analysis comprises a macro-level approach to genre analysis in which the texts' structure, the number of moves, and the moves' intended purpose (based on cognitive-semantics), and how the main communicative purpose is realized by these sub-rhetorical sections (that is, 'moves') of the text are identified. Nwogu (1993) corroborates Swales' claim by asserting that the boundary of moves is determined by the cognitive-semantic structuring of the textual elements that seek to pinpoint the genre's primary communication goal. Swales (1990) asserts that classifying various text units based on their distinct communicative purposes allows one to determine the communicative aim of a text. To Parodi (2014), each of the moves can be in a text rhetorical section, revealing a specific communicative function and the unique organization of the moves of a specific genre and that is what gives the genre its unique identity and sets it apart from other genres.

In order to determine the schematic structure of the selected updates (macro level approach), as well as the distribution of particular linguistic features and how these features work together to achieve the communicative goal of the COVID-19 updates, Swales' (1990) model of genre analysis was adopted to examine the move structure that characterizes the COVID-19 updates by the President of Ghana.

This model is particularly useful for identifying the communicative purpose of discourse by segmenting texts into functional units known as 'moves', each of which contributes to the overall intention of the text. A move, according to Swales (2004), is a rhetorical unit that serves a particular communicative purpose in a spoken or written discourse and these moves are often supported by more fine-grained elements known as 'steps', which serve as sub-functions of the main rhetorical move.

Applying this model to the presidential updates, the analysis seeks to reveal the underlying schematic structure of the addresses and understand how language is used strategically to inform, persuade, and reassure the public during a national health crisis. To achieve this, the study goes beyond a descriptive analysis of content and incorporates four core components: identification and labelling of the moves, textual space, their frequency across the data, and the sequencing of their occurrence.

The first step involves identifying and labelling the moves based on their communicative purpose. Drawing on Swales' (1990) move-step approach, the study moves beyond the broad functional labelling of

rhetorical segments to a more detailed mapping of specific moves and sub-moves identified from the data. This helped to capture the rhetorical strategies employed by the President in addressing the nation throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. The following are the labelling of the moves identified from the data.

Move 1: Signing-In (Opening Formalities):

This move functions as an entry to address, and it is to establish rapport and orient the audience. It included the following sub-moves:

Sub-Move 1.1: Salutation ("Fellow Ghanaians")

Sub-Move 1.2: Greetings ("Good evening")

Sub-Move 1.3: Expressing Gratitude (thanking front-line workers or citizens)

Move 2: Recapitulation of Previous Measures: This was when the president briefly summarized past actions or previous updates to maintain narrative continuity and accountability.

Move 3: Updating on the Current Situation: This move was used to deliver up-to-date statistics, infection rates, recovery numbers, and regional breakdowns. It corresponds to Swales' notion of a problem presentation, foregrounding the exigency of the communication.

Move 4: Assuring the Public: This included phrases meant to instill confidence, express optimism, and manage public anxiety. It reflects the intention of the government to maintain public trust amid a medical emergency.

Move 5: Cautioning Against Complacency: This was placed directly after assurance. This move highlights ongoing risks and reinforces the seriousness of the pandemic despite progress.

Move 6: Acknowledging Support and Cooperation: Here, the President recognizes the efforts of various stakeholders which serves both a diplomatic and unifying function.

Move 7: Referencing the 2020 General Election: In some updates, especially those delivered close to the electoral season, the President references the election in relation to pandemic management, safety protocols, or the continuation of leadership.

Move 8: Appealing for Continued Adherence to Protocols: This move calls on citizens to comply with preventive measures including mask-wearing, handwashing, and social distancing. It functions as a directive speech act rooted in public health education.

Move 9: Announcing the Easing of Restrictions: This move serves to communicate changes in policy regarding lockdowns, school reopening, or public gatherings. It typically follows a justification based on improving case statistics.

Move 10: Announcing New Government Interventions: Here, the President introduces economic relief packages, health interventions, vaccination rollouts, or logistical updates.

Move 11: Referencing International or Regional Practices: This move situates Ghana's actions within a global or African context, often to legitimize government policies by comparison or alignment with WHO, ECOWAS, or other nations.

Move 12: Sign-Out (Closure)

As with Move 1, this final move features formulaic elements of closure that reaffirm national values and offer solidarity. It includes:

Sub-Move 12.1: Code-switching or Strategic Language Shift (occasional use of Twi/Ga for emphasis)

Sub-Move 12.2: Invoking Divine Blessing (May God bless us all)

Sub-Move 12.3: Expressing Thanks Again (Thank you for your attention)

Following the identification and labelling of moves and sub-moves, the study examines the textual space each move occupies within the presidential COVID-19 updates. This was done by calculating the number of sentences assigned to each move and expressing this as a percentage of the total number of sentences in a given update. This analytical measure is essential to reveal which communicative functions receive the most rhetorical emphasis within the discourse.

In addition to examining the textual space occupied by each move, the study also analyzed the frequency with which each move appears across the corpus of presidential updates. This aspect of the analysis is essential in distinguishing between obligatory, optional, and ambiguous moves within the genre. Moves that appeared consistently across all sixteen sampled updates were classified as obligatory, as their presence appears integral to the communicative structure of the genre. These include Move 1: Signing in, which was further broken down into three consistent sub-moves. Similarly, Move 2: Recapitulation, Move 3: Updating, Move 5: Cautioning, Move 8: Appealing for Adherence, and all three sub-moves under Move 12: Sign-out appeared in 100% of the updates. This reinforces their status as core components of the genre. These moves serve both rhetorical and strategic functions: updating the audience on pandemic realities, cautioning against complacency, reinforcing adherence to protocol, and concluding with culturally resonant closure strategies, such as religious appeals and inclusive language.

On the other hand, some moves occurred with less consistency and are therefore classified as ambiguous. These include Move 6: Acknowledging Support (75%), Move 7: Referencing the 2020 Elections (50%), Move 10: Announcing Interventions (50%), and

Move 11: Referencing International Practice (75%). The variation in frequency suggests that these moves are context-sensitive and largely influenced by external factors such as timing, political developments, or international events. Move 9: Easing Restrictions was marked as optional, since it occurred in only three out of the eight updates (38%). This move appears only when the government has positive developments to report and therefore does not constitute a stable feature of the genre. Its inclusion is clearly dependent on epidemiological data and policy shifts.

Finally, the study explores the sequencing of moves within the speeches. This analysis reveals that while there is a generally stable pattern, some flexibility exists in the order of presentation. In some instances, the President chooses to foreground civic appeals earlier in the speech, particularly when emphasizing national unity in moments of heightened crisis. In other cases, reassurance is provided at multiple points within a single address, suggesting a cyclical deployment of certain moves to sustain public morale. Such patterns show rhetorical variation and the dynamic nature of crisis communication, where the order of information is often shaped by evolving circumstances.

Context of Situation and Context of Culture

Bronislaw Malinowski, a towering early-20th-century anthropologist, first introduced the two concepts: The Context of Situation and the Context of Culture. Malinowski (1923) posited in his work that language must be studied relative to the practical and social circumstances of its usage. He again theorized that meaning arises from both linguistic elements and the total situation in which a communication occurs.

The coinage of the concept *Context of Situation* by Malinowski (1923) referred to what surrounded an utterance: the physical setting, the participants, and the ongoing activity (i.e., collectively referred to as the immediate environment). Halliday (1985) incorporated the concept into Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), representing it through three register components: field, tenor, and mode. Field is interpreted as "what is happening?" -- it refers to the social action or activity taking place. Tenor, on the other hand, relates to "who is involved?" -- that is, the participants in the interaction, their social roles, and the relationships among them. Mode refers to the role language plays in the communication process, indicating whether it is written or spoken and whether it is formal or informal. These three elements provide a structured means of analyzing how language varies across contexts.

Contrary to what was the case with Context of Situation (the immediate environment of an utterance), *Context of Culture* refers to the socio-cultural and ideological background in which texts and genres are embedded. Within a society or community, emphasis is placed on shared values, traditions, social structures, and

communicative functions, as all of these affect what is communicated. Halliday and Hasan (1985) claim that the Context of Culture governs a genre's availability to a society, achieving specific social purposes through conventionalized ways. They further posit that within a given cultural setting, the context of culture justifies the appropriateness or the authoritativeness of certain textual structures, rhetorical strategies and modes of address. Therefore, genres, according to Martin and Ross (2008), act as semiotic responses to recurring social situations, shaped by institutional norms and historical practices.

Both levels of context (situational and cultural) are key to contemporary genre theory, especially within the Critical Genre Analysis (CGA) and Systemic Functional Analysis traditions. Context of situation enables researchers to examine the communicative function of texts in specific events, whereas context of culture focuses attention on the broader institutional and ideological forces that shape the form and meaning of discourse.

In the present study, these two concepts present an analytical lens for the interpretation of the structural and rhetorical features of President Akufo-Addo's COVID-19 updates. Within the framework, we identify the nature of the communicative event as a national broadcast necessitated by a public health crisis, followed by the roles of the speaker (President) and the audience (Ghanaians). By Context of Culture, we refer to the sociopolitical history of Ghana, the role religion plays in public discourse as well as the President's orientation about the cultural norms of the Ghanaian society in general and being able to align with these norms in the public space to get his message across to the public.

All of these contextual profiles are essential for appreciating genre conventions and how they are mobilized to realize sociopolitical legitimacy in crisis situations.

Political Discourse

A more thorough understanding of the idea of political discourse is achieved by first considering what the term 'discourse' means. Afful and Gyasi (2021) define discourse as language used to reflect and shape social institutions, structures, and processes at a level beyond the sentence. As a branch of Applied Linguistics, Discourse Analysis (i.e., the study of discourse) concerns itself with the study of how language is used in real life to perform tasks such as persuading, flirting, and arguing (Jones, 2012, p. 321). To the linguist, the concept of *political discourse* concerns itself with inequalities that exist in the social and political spheres resulting from political domination (Fairclough, 1995), as well as with issues peculiar to the rhetoric of political communication (Schaffner, 1995). According to Van Dijk (1997, p. 12), political discourse is the discourse of politicians. Sheigal (2000) also posits that *political discourse* is a complex linguistic phenomenon, directly or indirectly aimed at

distributing and exercising political power, and at winning the majority of votes during an election. What characterizes political discourse is perspicuousness with the purpose of resolving misunderstandings in political communication (Zaleski, 2012).

Moreover, political discourse raises two issues: "analysis of political discourse as simply an example of discourse type, without explicit reference to political content or political context" and "discourse which is itself political" (Wilson, 2005, p.398). By this, Wilson posits that the two terms are distinct but interconnected. He advances the argument that 'a discourse which itself is political' refers to the use of language in political contexts by political actors, and they include manifestos, press briefings, state-of-the-nation addresses, inaugural speeches and interviews, and in all of these languages serve as a tool for persuasion, exercise of power, legitimization, as well as agenda setting. From this perspective, political discourse becomes the communicative act itself, shaping and reflecting political processes and ideologies.

The second issue concerns the study or analysis of such language use. Political discourse in this context then becomes the object of scholarly investigation, where language use is examined by scholars to determine how it constructs political identity, conveys ideologies and negotiates power relations. This includes approaches such as Critical Genre Analysis (CGA), Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), rhetorical analysis, and other linguistic or sociopolitical frameworks.

Wilson (2003) had previously argued that definitions of political discourse in terms of general themes such as power, conflict, control, or domination are the primary cause of a potentially confusing situation (see Fairclough, 1992a, 1995; Giddens, 1991; Van Dijk, 1993). He intimates that whenever power and control concerns are being resolved at any level, there is politics. Additionally, he argues that we risk greatly oversimplifying the concept of political discourse if we treat all discourses as political in the broadest sense. Therefore, Wilson's difference draws attention to the dual nature of political discourse as a mode of political action and a discipline of political research.

Political discourse, according to Afful and Gyasi (2021), encompasses all discourses created by politicians, whether they work full-time or not, in various contexts for various objectives. They advance the argument, corroborating Michira's (2013) stance that all decisions and efforts of politicians are conveyed through political discourse to gain or maintain power and authority. Thus, the presidential updates on COVID-19 as a genre situated in the context of political discourse, when critically analyzed in terms of the moves as well as the linguistic or lexico-grammatical resources deployed by the president, will reveal how the president achieved

his private intentions of ‘gaining’ and ‘maintaining’ political power in the 2020 general election.

Political discourse, according to Berrocal *et al.*, (2021), is a process of communal decision-making in which a path of political action must be justified by shared ideals and an understanding of the context and subject at hand. They contend that "the question of who can act on behalf of whom and how socio-cognitive representations of political collective entities such as states, nations, governments, and institutions are discursively constructed and contested are just as much socially and discursively legitimized as the course of action."

In this research, I take a keen interest in the language use of Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo, a politician who, at the same time, was an incumbent president, a head of state, and a head of government, as evidenced in his regular updates on the COVID-19 pandemic to the people of Ghana. The pandemic coincided with a year when Ghana, a third-wave democracy on the African continent, was preparing to go to the polls to elect a new president and members of parliament. Agbele and Saibu (2021) posit that elections in Africa, in general, and Ghana, in particular, are crucial, as they can either strengthen or weaken a nation's democracy or even cause it to collapse completely. Indubitably, the elections could not be suspended despite the apparent threat posed by the pandemic and the potential danger it could have posed to the conduct and management of the elections in Ghana's fledgling democracy.

The foregoing, to a large extent, demonstrates the inextricability of politics from the discourses surrounding pandemics by politicians and political actors, as through that, private intentions are ultimately achieved. It is, therefore, not far-fetched to categorize COVID-19 updates by governments as political discourse since politicians and political actors hold themselves accountable to the people and, as such, would claim to act on behalf of the people as per their unbending positionalities.

Presidential Speech Genres in Ghanaian Political Discourse

Presidential speeches have characterized the rule and reign of political leadership in general since the Aristotelian classical period. Such speeches span across nations and dispensations. The nature of such speeches is to target their audiences in a particular context, to accept, embrace, and adapt to the changing trends and exigencies of the time, and to modify their way of life. According to Stuckey (1992), presidential addresses often generate and mobilize public support from citizens (Denton & Hahn, 1986; Kernell, 1986). He suggests that understanding the dynamics of presidential discourses on gaining and retaining popular support is essential to comprehending and appreciating the presidency.

Therefore, presidential speech genres serve different communicative purposes. They include concession and victory speeches, inaugural speeches, crisis speeches, and remembrance speeches, New Year's Eve Speeches, State-of-the-Nation Address and May 1st (Workers' Day) Address.

A Victory Speech (VS) is a significant moment in any presidential election, serving the special purposes of consolidating democratic principles and facilitating a smooth and peaceful transition of power. A victory speech, an instance of the presidential speech genre, is an address by the winning candidate celebrating the outcome, outlining a vision for governance and extending inclusivity. It serves to inspire national cohesion, acknowledge supporters, and set the tone for leadership. A typical feature of victory speeches is the celebration of the electoral mandate, thanking the electorate and calling for unity as the new administration assumes office.

A losing candidate acknowledges defeat with a Concession Speech (CS). It is a genre of political discourse in which the losing candidate publicly concedes once the results are clear (Afadzi & Yedu, 2024). They intimate that concession speeches typically acknowledge defeat, congratulate the winner, urge supporters to accept the outcome, and signal confidence in the democratic process. They further assert that CSs precede victory speeches, but together they serve a democratic end: they both project harmony after a contest and uphold the principle of the peaceful transfer of power. Similarly, Corcoran (1994) describes CSs as a readily identifiable genre that is highly formulaic and focused on failure and transition. Critically, CSs perform the crucial function of ending the campaign peacefully, 'the loser's privilege to cease hostilities, declare peace and make the first gesture in restoring the nation' (Terrinoni, 2021). In Ghana, when John Mahama and Mammudu Bawumia lost the presidential elections in 2020 and 2024 respectively, their concessions exemplified these roles.

An Inaugural Speech (IS), however, is delivered by a newly sworn-in President to the entire nation. This is "the first and most significant speech the President will give after he is sworn in" (Mensah *et al.*, 2023). Inaugural speeches are quite symbolic in the sense that they publicly lay out broad policy directions and national values (Campbell & Jamieson, 2008), mark the commencement of a new tenure, establish the president's persona, and articulate broad goals. Rhetorically, inaugurals often blend ethos (the President's commitment to serve) with pathos (appeals to national pride and unity) and logos (outlining policy visions). They typically reference Ghana's history and values to legitimise in incoming administration. For instance, President Akufo-Addo's 2021 inaugural speech was marked with the framing of "hope" and a "can-do spirit" to inspire confidence in Ghanaians.

Additionally, there is the State of the Nation Address (SONA), which is an annual genre that presents a factual account of national progress and sets policy priorities (Bhatia, 1993). It is highly informational, providing statistical updates and detailed plans. President Akufo-Addo's COVID-19 address shares a common feature with the State of the Nation Address as it also presents data on public health, measures taken and policy implications.

Also, as a presidential speech genre, a New Year's Eve Speech (NYES) is a ceremonial reflection on the past year and an expression of hope for the year ahead (Kjeldsen, 2016). Features include retrospection, gratitude for resilience, optimism and religious or moral blessings. As a presidential speech genre, it inspires hope and confidence in the people, reassuring all citizens and urging collective perseverance, as was the case with the COVID-19 updates by President Akufo-Addo.

As a uniquely Ghanaian presidential speech genre, the June 4 Address commemorates the 1979 uprising. It is a recount of historical struggles against corruption in Ghana. This was when a group of junior officers in the Ghana Armed Forces, led by Flight Lieutenant Jerry John Rawlings, overthrew the then-ruling military government in response to widespread corruption and economic hardship. The event marked a turning point in Ghana's political history, emphasising ideals of accountability, justice and moral renewal (Gyampo, 2010). The COVID-19 updates sometimes reflect this genre's tone by condemning irresponsible behaviour that jeopardises public health, thus positioning collective discipline as a civic duty.

Furthermore, the May 1st (Workers' Day) address by the president, according to Campbell and Jamieson (2008), celebrates contributions and affirms the government's commitment to labour welfare. As a genre of presidential speech, it often extols resilience and national productivity, particularly through praise for frontline workers and essential staff. Likewise, the International Women's Day Address (IWDA) offers an avenue for presidents to highlight women's roles, gender equality, and social progress (Kendall & Tannen, 2003). Although the COVID-19 updates are not explicitly gendered, references to vulnerable groups — such as market women or female healthcare workers — reflect this inclusive ethos. Closely related is the Remembrance Speech (RS), which honours the deceased and reinforces collective memory and hope (Bhatia, 1993). In the Ghanaian Presidential COVID-19 updates, these elements converge as the president pays tribute to victims, often concluding with religious benedictions that evoke solidarity and national renewal.

Metadiscourse Perspective

From a metadiscourse perspective, Aljazrawi *et al.*, (2021) investigated the use of interactional metadiscourse markers for persuasive and

communicative purposes, as well as their frequency in the WHO director general's statements about the COVID-19 pandemic. According to the study, the WHO Director also relied heavily on self-mention markers and boosters to convey the organisation's confident and cooperative attitude, in addition to using interactional metadiscourse markers to make his statements more persuasive and coherent.

In the US, Awawdeh and Al-Abbas (2023) intimated that Trump's COVID-19 updates were replete with frequent pronoun shifts, self-referential boasts and repetitive nationalist framing. They accentuate how metadiscourse — phrases that show how audiences interpret the message — shapes the addresses as self-legitimising performances rather than purely informative crisis communication. This aligns with and evidences Bhatia's (2015) insight that genres 'colonise' one another to meet evolving communicative purposes.

Also, Qin and Uccelli (2021) examined speeches by U.S. and European leaders and discovered that metadiscourse markers were crucial in conveying epistemic certainty (for example, "we know", "clearly"), expressing solidarity (for example, inclusive pronouns like "we", "together"), and guiding audience interpretation through logical transitions.

Similarly, Anjomshoa and Sadighi (2022) applied Hyland's model to analyse COVID-19 updates from global leaders. In their study, they highlighted how interactional metadiscourse (for example, attitude markers such as "unfortunately" and "thankfully") helped humanise political figures and maintain empathy. They argue that metadiscourse served a dual function: managing information and interpersonal relationships, especially during national crises.

From an African perspective, few studies that have focused directly on metadiscourse include that of Adebayo (2022) from Nigeria, who explored President Buhari's pandemic addresses and identified frequent use of self-mentions ("I assure you...") and boosters ("We will defeat this virus") as markers of presidential presence and confidence. Adebayo argues that these metadiscursive elements helped to construct a strong leadership image and framed the pandemic as a winnable battle.

Similarly, in Ghana, Rockson (2024) examined President Akufo-Addo's COVID-19 updates, noting his frequent use of inclusive pronouns and engagement devices such as rhetorical questions (Who would have thought...?) and appeals ("My fellow Ghanaians, we must...") to sustain public attention and build community. Rockson further argues that these features reflect a culturally grounded need for relational leadership and collective identity-building.

These pandemic speeches, from a metadiscourse perspective, construct the speaker's stance and engage the audience. The commonalities in their features include explicit self-references (the leader referring to themselves, for example, "I assure you..."), inclusive pronouns ("we", "our"), audience references ("you, my fellow citizens"), and discourse markers indicating transitions or emphasis. For example, Ghana's president habitually begins addresses with the unity appeals ("Fellow Ghanaians") and ends with collective pledges ("together we will beat this virus").

Likewise, international analysts observe that early COVID-19 addresses by WHO or EU officials were heavily replete with collaborative pronouns and factual markers, whereas later or more urgent addresses shifted to booster lexicon ("must," "certainly") and concessives. Al-Khayyat *et al.*, (2020), in their linguistic study of Trump vs. Macron during COVID-19, quantified these differences: Trump used exclusive "we" 59.6% (emphasising unity), and Macron's higher incidence of "you" (30.6% vs Trump's 17.8%) suggested a more direct address and critique of the public. Such pronoun usage reflects metadiscursive stance-taking.

In Ghana, analysts note that Akufo-Addo's repeated use of "Fellow Ghanaians" and collective "we"/"us" clearly forges an inclusive identity, while simultaneous reliance on first-person "i" embeds personal accountability (Rockson, 2024). Other markers, hedges like "perhaps", boosters like "definitely", and engagement markers like rhetorical questions appear repeatedly to manage the tone. In sum, metadiscursive elements in these speeches function to align the speaker with the audience, signal expert authority, and guide interpretation of the message.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

A research design, according to Khanday and Khanam (2019), is the methodical strategy researchers use to provide legitimate answers to enquiries. Labaree (2009) also posits that a research design refers to the strategy for collecting, measuring, and analysing data that enables a researcher to integrate the various components of a study to address an identified research problem.

A qualitative content analysis approach was adopted for this research to critically analyse the content of President Akufo-Addo's COVID-19 update speeches in Ghana. The qualitative content analysis approach is appropriate, as it helps us understand how the President used language in the updates preceding the 2020 general elections, culminating in his victory, and in those that followed the elections. Again, the analysis of the updates was descriptive, as I sought to identify themes and patterns in the selected updates. As a method of qualitative research, content analysis enables the

quantitative summarization of qualitative data in an organized manner.

By breaking down a vast number of texts into manageable categories on a number of levels—word, phrase, sentence, or theme—it allowed me to turn them into a highly structured and succinct summary of the main findings, which is typical of the content analysis's goal. Additionally, content analysis can be used to analyze data in a variety of formats, such as audio recordings, movies, texts, and interview transcripts. The primary goal of content analysis is to quantify, analyze, or investigate the relationships and meanings of words and concepts to draw conclusions about the messages in the data.

Qualitative research design was opted for because, according to Dey (2003), it enables the analysis of naturally occurring data and the identification of themes, patterns, and connections to comprehend human behaviour. Additionally, the choice of this approach helped me in accounting for the comparative study of the textual and linguistic resources characterizing the presidential COVID-19 updates preceding the 2020 election and those that followed it.

It should be mentioned that although the study is mainly qualitative, a bit of quantitative method was used to examine the data, including frequency counts and percentages. After analysing the numerical values of the occurrence of the rhetorical manoeuvres found in the study's updates and the textual space allotted to each of these moves, and generalizations made.

Broadly, the study adopts Bhatia's (2015) Critical Genre Analysis (CGA) as its central analytical framework. CGA is particularly suited to this research because it goes beyond merely describing the schematic structure of texts to critically interpreting how institutional and socio-cultural contexts shape discourse. In practice, the analysis combines Swales' (1990) Move-Step model to identify the communicative moves within the presidential Covid-19 updates, with Bhatia's notion of interdiscursivity and private intentions to examine how these moves draw on multiple speech genres, such as crisis speech, state-of-the-nation address and victory speech, to achieve broader political and social objectives. The CGA framework, thus, enables the study to show how these updates function as a hybrid genre, simultaneously addressing public health concerns and reinforcing presidential ethos and legitimacy within Ghana's unique socio-political context.

Methodological Orientation

To examine the interplay between crisis communication and political agenda-setting, the study adopts a Critical Genre Analysis (CGA) framework (Bhatia, 2004, 2015), which enables an exploration of how genre conventions are adapted or exploited for private, often persuasive, intentions. CGA provides a

lens for interrogating how the president's addresses navigated the boundary between crisis management (public health discourse) and political messaging, bringing to the fore the tenets that underpin the CGA framework: hybridisation, interdiscursivity, genre embedding and discursive performances.

Data Source and Sampling Procedures

The dataset for this study comprises 16 out of the 28 COVID-19 updates delivered by President Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo between March 2020 and March 2023. After downloading the video recordings of all twenty-eight (28) updates by the President from YouTube, the researcher transcribed them with the assistance of two Research Assistants from the Department of English at the University of Cape Coast, Ghana, where this research was carried out.

Following from above, sixteen (16) updates out of a total of twenty-eight (28) were purposively segmented into two broad phases: the pre-election period (March 2020-December 6, 2020), comprising nineteen (19) updates, and the post-election period (December 7, 2020-March 2022), comprising nine (9) updates. To ensure representativeness while maintaining a manageable corpus for qualitative analysis, a total of eight (8) updates were sampled from each phase, culminating in a balanced dataset of sixteen (16) speeches.

Data Analysis Procedure

After downloading the video recordings of all twenty-eight (28) updates from YouTube from 11 March 2020 to 28 May 2023, the updates were transcribed with the assistance of two research assistants from the University of Cape Coast's English Department, Ghana, where this research is being undertaken.

The primary analytical framework adopted was Swales' (1990) Move-Step model of Genre Analysis, which allowed rhetorical moves and sub-moves to be identified and labelled in each update. This approach facilitated the segmentation of the speeches into functional units based on their communicative purposes. To provide a socio-political interpretation of the discourse, Bhatia's (2015) Critical Genre Analysis (CGA) was employed as the overarching framework, enabling the researcher to interrogate how professional and institutional practices shaped the genre. The CGA framework was complemented by van Dijk's (2010) Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which offered tools for examining the ideological and power-related dimensions of the President's linguistic choices. The analysis was preceded by the identification of recurring rhetorical moves. Each move was further broken down into sub-moves where applicable.

To assess emphasis and rhetorical strategy, the textual space of each move was measured by calculating the number of sentences allocated to it, expressed as a

percentage of the entire update. Furthermore, a frequency analysis was conducted across all sampled updates to determine which moves were obligatory, optional, or context-dependent. The final layer of analysis focused on move sequencing, that is, the order in which rhetorical moves appeared across the corpus, with attention paid to any consistent patterns or strategic rearrangements. This comprehensive analytical procedure revealed how the President's COVID-19 updates functioned as a genre of political discourse, with subtle expressions of power, persuasion, and ideology.

Analysis of Data

An Aggregated Schematic Structure of Pre- and Post-Election COVID-19 Updates by President Nana Addo-Dankwa Akufo-Addo

Move 1: *Signing In*

All sixteen updates require *signing in*, making it obligatory. Each comprises three (3) sub-moves, as indicated earlier. These are: *Fellow Ghanaians*, *Greetings*, and *Thanking*. Each is explained below.

Sub-Move1: *Fellow Ghanaians*:

Fellow Ghanaians, as part of the opening, was an intentional political and rhetorical strategy meant to appeal to the Ghanaian citizens with respect to psychological, cultural, and historical significance. It established unity and projected a common identity, as Ghanaians are one people charting a common course to fight the pandemic together, reinforcing the oft-used phrase, "we are in this together." Remotely, it could be viewed as a historical tool to remind Ghanaians of Kwame Nkrumah's independence era declarations, "Fellow Ghanaians, at long last, the battle has ended! And thus, Ghana, your beloved country, is free forever."—Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, *Accra Polo Grounds, March 6, 1957*. This evoked a sense of shared destiny in difficult times, such as the COVID period.

As a way of reducing the anxiety that had gripped Ghanaians, there was an urgent need to employ a familiar language, and the president aptly used it across all the sampled speeches to reassure Ghanaians of good days ahead. It plays a key role through hybridity as a tenet in Critical Genre Theory, introducing a political address and public health advice, with the President applying it as a sign of his institutional authority and personal endearment.

In his foundational literature on Genre Hybridity in CGA, Bhatia (2004, 2010, 2017) discusses hybridity in professional and public discourse where he defines hybridity as the mixing of conventions from different genres and the embedding of multiple discourses, such as the analysis of the COVID-19 updates which mixes scientific (epidemiology and statistics), political justification (policy and restrictions), religious assurance (faith in God) and nationalist rhetoric (unity and pride). For instance, Mwinlaaru and Bhatia

(2020) argue that in African contexts, hybridity is not an exception but a strategic and necessary feature, shaped by historical, socio-political and cultural complexities, bringing into focus the interdiscursive blending in the updates, —combining scientific discourse (case numbers, protocols), political action (lockdowns, economic plans) and religious/ nationalist appeals (faith, unity-- mirroring the hybrid patterns described by Mwinlaaru and Bhatia.

Sub-Move 2: *Greetings*

The *greetings move* is characterised by the President politely and fondly following it with *Fellow Ghanaians* as seen in Extracts 1, 2 and 3 below:

Extract 1: Fellow Ghanaians, good evening. (NAU 1)

Extract 2: Fellow Ghanaians, good evening. (NAU 19)

Extract 3: Fellow Ghanaians, good evening. (NAU 28)

The President's greetings here function not merely as a polite opening, but as a discursive mechanism of identity construction and ideological positioning. It again evokes national unity, constructs a collective subject and situates the President within an inclusive moral high ground.

Fairclough (1995) and Chilton (2004) intimate that such routine formulations are ideologically saturated, subtly reinforcing institutional authority while performing acts of solidarity. Similarly, Wei (2010) posits that greetings are a significant aspect of politeness, crucial for the establishment and maintenance of interpersonal relationships. Culturally and socially, both in Ghana and across the globe, it is such an important tool that one cannot overlook in all contexts when addressing the audience. In the context of the President's updates, it had a purpose of *courtesy* and *recognition*, branding the President as a calm, fatherly figure and positioning him politically as a likeable candidate for the upcoming election.

Sub-Move 3: *Thanking*

This sub-move also served a similar purpose, showing courtesy and respect and aligning with Ghanaian communal values. Beyond courtesy and respect, it served as a powerful psychological, political, and cultural appeal. The President always showed appreciation to all Ghanaians for welcoming him into their homes and making Ghanaians realize their contribution towards stanching the pandemic.

Extracts 4, 5 and 6 buttress the claims above.

Extract 4: I am happy that I have the opportunity this evening to engage with you again in your homes. (NAU 14)

Extract 5: I am coming into your homes tonight with some rather unpleasant news. (NAU 22)

Extract 6: I came into your homes on 17th January to give an account of our COVID-19 situation. (NAU 23)

Here, the president sought to solidarize and identify with Ghanaian citizens, who were in despair and had been gripped with the fear of contracting the disease. Again, the president sought to create a personal connection by reducing social distancing through television and radio broadcasts—thereby constructing an image of a caring leader. This aligns with Bhatia's (2015) tenet of genre embedding, in which a political figure uses persuasive discourse to foster trust, compliance, and solidarity in crisis communication.

Move 2: *Recapitulation*

What followed the *Signing-in* move was the *Recapitulation* move. As an obligatory move, it summarised the previous speech, the purpose of which was to refresh listeners'/viewers' memories of the salient points made. For instance:

Extract 7

Five days ago, on 6th March, at the Baba Yara Sport Stadium in Kumasi, on the occasion of our Nation's 63rd Independence Anniversary Celebration, I gave an update on the measures put in by the government in response to the novel corona virus disease which has so far affected some 11,800 people across the world resulting in the death of some 4000 persons and is wreaking havoc on the global economy. WHO has now characterised it as pandemic. (NAU 1)

Extract 8

Exactly two weeks ago, I came again into your homes to outline a roadmap for easing the restrictions put in place to help contain the spread of the corona virus pandemic in our country. I indicated that it would be a phased approach involving a selected list of public gatherings based on their risk profile, socio-economic impact and most importantly our capacity to enforce and to respond in the event of a flap in our number of infections. (NAU 11)

Extract 9

It has been a month since I came to provide you with an update on the measures being taken by my government to combat the Coronavirus pandemic. And it has been almost five (5) months since our lives were turned upside down, and, indeed, the whole world was forced into a crisis of unimaginable proportions. (NAU 14)

Knowing that humans are prone to forgetfulness, there was a need to keep reminding them of the previous update so they could keep track of measures instituted by the government in combating the disease. The specific lines below also affirm this claim:

Extract 10

Three weeks ago, I delivered Update No.18 on the measures being taken by the Government to stem the tide of COVID-19 on our shores. I indicated that the number of recorded active cases, that is, persons with the

virus, was in decline, with the statistics pointing to the fact that we were on the path towards defeating the virus. Our nation, in the weeks prior to that address, had become accustomed to this downward slide of active cases, ... (NAU 19)

In the *Recapitulation* move, the President would offer Ghanaians a brief report on the disease, its spread or containment, as well as what measures or steps the government has taken in the fight against the pandemic. For instance:

Extract 11

Fellow Ghanaians, since I last spoke to you, a month ago, a significant development in our fight against COVID-19 has taken place in our country. In the course of this week, Wednesday, 24th February, to be precise, we took another concrete step in our quest to rid our nation of COVID-19, with the arrival in the country of six hundred thousand (600,000) doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine, the first consignment of many more to come. (NAU 24)

Extract 12

In recent weeks, however, we have observed a gradual change in the trajectory of the virus, with an increase in active cases from the three hundred and ninety-eight (398) cases recorded three weeks ago, to one thousand, one hundred and thirty-nine (1,139) active cases, as at Friday, 6th November 2020. The total number of deaths now stands at three hundred and twenty (320), a great majority of them, still, with underlying illnesses, such as hypertension, diabetes, chronic liver disease and asthma. (NAU 19).

Move 3: Updating

The President, in his updates to the nation, consistently appealed to the consciences of the public to adhere to the safety protocols instead of invoking a legislative act to ensure compliance with the safety protocols. Extracts 13 to 16 affirm the claim.

Extract 13

This fight, Fellow Ghanaians, cannot be that of the government alone. It is for all of us. I urge the media to join this cause fully and help disseminate information effectively on the dos and don'ts of the disease. (NAU 8)

Extract 14

I appeal to civil society organisations, schools, universities, faith-based organisations and places which harbour large gatherings such as classrooms, lecture halls, meetings, parties and funerals to put in place mechanisms to caution any excess patrons on basic preventive measures. (NAU 1)

Extract 15

So, my fellow Ghanaians, I make this plea to all of you to ensure compliance with the enhanced hygiene and mask-wearing protocols that have become part of our

daily routines. This will help us in the fight against the virus. (NAU 20)

Extract 16

Fellow Ghanaians, I am appealing to all of you to be even more disciplined in your adherence to the personal hygiene, mask-wearing and social distancing measures. (NAU 19)

President Akufo-Addo's modest posture and measured tone in handling COVID-19 related issues are a testimony to his quest not to hurt the feelings and emotions of the masses especially giving the exigencies of the two dispensations, pre-election period, when as a party in power they needed to maintain power at all costs and so had had to be tactful in dealing with the electorate, and post-election period, especially the first update following his re-election when he needed to show appreciation to the very people who had to maintain him in power. Understandably, the President could not have been so stern on the people who should be electing him president once more, nor could he have been ungrateful to them after they had elected him the president. This may have accounted for the very posture in question.

Move 4: Assuring

This move was aimed at instilling confidence in the general public and, at the same time, raising their hopes while presenting the realities on the ground. Also, as an obligatory move, it struck a balance between realism and optimism, aiming to build and maintain public trust and compliance in the fight against the pandemic. Provision of economic support, vaccination safety, public health measures, transparency in the management of the COVID-19 situation, and long-term policies were among the key focus areas. This is evident in extract 17 below:

In the area of economic and social support, in the president's quest to mitigate the COVID-induced suffering of citizens, he introduced relief programmes tangible enough to assure the masses that the government was standing in solidarity with the people. These included, but were not limited to, free utilities (i.e., a 3-month free water supply and subsidised electricity for households and businesses) as indicated in the Extract 17 below:

Extract 17

The Ministries of Gender, Children and Social Protection, Local Government and Rural Development, and the National Disaster Management Organisation (NADMO), working with MMDCs and the faith-based organisations, have begun to provide food for up to four hundred thousand (400,000) individuals and homes.... Again, the Ghana Water Company Ltd and the Electricity Company of Ghana have been directed to ensure the stable supply of water and electricity.... In addition, there will be no disconnection of supply. Furthermore, the Government will absorb the water bills

for all Ghanaians... Government, in collaboration with the National Board for Small Scale Industries (NBSSI), Business & Trade Associations and selected Commercial and Rural Banks, will roll out a soft loan scheme up to a total of six hundred million cedis (GH¢600 million), which will have one-year moratorium and two-year repayment period for micro, small and medium scale businesses. (NAU 5)

Then, on *vaccine safety*, the president addresses skepticism, reassuring Ghanaians of the safety of the vaccine doses as evidenced in Extract 18 below:

Extract 18

Fellow Ghanaians, I know there are still some who continue to express doubts about the vaccine, others have expressed reservations about its efficacy, with some taking sides with conspiracy theorists who believe the vaccine has been created to wipe out the African race. This is far from the truth. Our domestic regulatory agency, the FDA, one of the most reputable in Africa and in the world, has certified the safe use of the vaccine. It will not do so if it had any reservations about the safety of the vaccine, and I have gone on record as saying that no vaccine will be deployed in the country for use without the express certification of the FDA. Taking the vaccine will not alter your DNA, it will not embed a tracking device in your body, neither will it cause infertility in women or in men. As your President, I want to assure you that the vaccine is safe. That is why tomorrow, on Monday, 1st March, ahead of the commencement of the vaccination programme on Tuesday, 2nd March, my wife, the First Lady, the Vice President, his wife the Second Lady, and I will take the vaccine publicly at two (2) health facilities in Accra.... (NAU 24)

The President's long-term assurance to the citizenry centered primarily on health investment. Key mentions included Agenda 111 (i.e., an initiative to build 111 hospitals across the country to improve health care accessibility), a revised and robust national health policy (i.e., ensuring citizens receive equitable care), and the government's collaboration with the private sector to produce PPE and renewable energy in health facilities.

The President, in his addresses, built trust and confidence by demonstrating transparency and accountability, providing regular statistics on infections, deaths, and recoveries.

Again, policy decisions on COVID-19 were expressed to the citizenry as being backed by science and aligned with economic realities.

Also, it can firmly be stated that the president could assure the citizenry by leveraging on the strong religious and cultural inclinations of the broader population, as he usually merged faith with collectivism and unity as expressed in the extract 19 below:

Extract 19

I am privileged to be speaking to you on a sacred day of the Christian calendar, Palm Sunday, which ushers in the Holy Week to commemorate the passion and sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Let His example unite all of us, Christians, Muslims, all Ghanaians, in our care for each other, and in our resolve to overcome this challenge.

This, Too, Shall Pass! (NAU 5)

Here, the President's religious references serve as tools of persuasion, reinforcing his caring and moral leadership persona, appealing to faith-driven values among the Ghanaian populace, and divinely legitimising government actions. The President achieves this through interdiscursive hybridity, weaving religious discourse into crisis management.

Move 5: Cautioning

This move also runs through almost all the sampled data, the purpose of which was for the President to warn the citizens against negligence, blatant disregard for safety protocols, leading to endangering the lives of the entire populace, and anything they would do that would jeopardise the efforts made at curbing the scourge and spread of the pandemic. The researcher identified that even though the President, in most cases, was moderate in his approach in dealing with citizens on matters of COVID-19, where need be, he did not mince words in cautioning members to stay clear of the danger and was ready to get the law enforcement agencies to get people to comply, as evidenced in extracts 20 to 22:

Extract 20

We must not abandon them. And remember that the law enforcement agencies are going to increase their enforcement of the stay-at-home directive. Do not leave your homes other than for the essential, stipulated reasons. (NAU 5)

Extract 21

Residents of these four regions and indeed all Ghanaians must remember that the wearing of masks is now mandatory. Leaving our homes without a face mask or face covering is an offence. The police have been instructed to enforce this directive which is the subject of an executive instrument. Let me repeat. Our survival is in our own hands. If we are lax and inattentive, we will continue to have serious challenges with the virus. If we are mindful and self-disciplined, we have it in us to defeat this pandemic and help return our lives to normalcy. (NAU 12)

Extract 22

Let me reiterate my admonition from a few weeks ago. Severe sanctions exist in our laws for persons who want to continue to disregard these protocols, and for those who want to endanger the rest of the population through their actions and negligence. The law

enforcement agencies will, where necessary, apply these measures without fear or favour. (NAU 19)

Even though Update 19 was the last one before the general election, it conveyed the strongest warning to the masses to avoid disregarding safety protocols, as severe sanctions awaited them if they did. Ordinarily, one would have expected that the President, at this point, would sound moderate and persuasive, as identified in most of the previous speeches, but the opposite is the case here. One can, therefore, witness the enactment of power at this crucial moment, which could probably speak to the President's level-headedness and his genuineness in handling matters that bordered on the interest of the masses and not necessarily his presidency.

Extract 23

Until then, and with barely a week to the Christmas festivities, which bring in its wake family reunions, parties and many social and religious gatherings, I urge all of us to err on the side of caution, and observe the COVID-19 safety protocols no matter where we find ourselves... (NAU 20).

Extract 23 above is another instance in which the President urges caution ahead of an important occasion such as Christmas, demonstrating his commitment to fighting the pandemic. Within the framework of Bhatia's (2004) CGA, it reflects a discursive hybridity between governance and advisory genres, contributing to the ideological framing of responsible citizenship and moral leadership. This update immediately followed the President's re-election and, to a large extent, could not have sounded any other way, which would have revealed his inconsistency in handling COVID-19 issues.

Move 6: Appealing for Adherence

On many occasions, the President issued directives to citizens to strictly adhere to safety protocols, as this was a sure way to effectively fight the pandemic, as evidenced in Extract 24.

Extract 24

Nevertheless, I appeal to each and every one of you to continue to tread on the path constructed by the government and follow religiously all the social distancing, mask wearing and enhanced hygiene protocols. (NAU 17)

Here, it is evident that the citizens complied with the president's directives to follow safety protocols, but there was a relentless appeal to continue doing so to avert a spike in the case count. This was a deliberate attempt to combine religious appeals, warnings, proven data and pragmatic steps to encourage adherence.

From a religious perspective, the President was spot on when, in most cases, he based his appeal on religious content. A case in point was when he made a

direct appeal to Muslims as part of 'the whole Ghana approach' when he sought counsel with the Chief Imam and had to communicate to all Ghanaians, especially Muslims, on the occasion of Ramadan. Excerpt 25 below illustrates that:

Extract 25

Fellow Ghanaians, just as the Christians' celebration of Easter was severely affected by the virus, resulting in the cancellation of the usual activities associated with Easter, the Holy Month of Ramadan has not been spared either. It is my understanding that in the time of Prophet Mohammed any time there was heavy rain, he admonished the faithful through the Azan to stay in their houses and pray rather than going to the Mosques. In the Bucharis collection of the Hadith, Book 13, Hadith number 24, Ibn Sidin reports that Ibu Abass said to his Muezzin, "After saying I testify that Mohammed is Allah's Messenger, do not say come for the prayer, but say pray in your houses. It was done by one much better than I, that is, the Prophet. Through analogical deduction, Muslim scholars agree that the rain represented danger and therefore the prescriptions for Muslims to stay home and pray in time of heavy rain apply to all life-threatening situations.

I thus call on Muslims to heed this Prophetic admonishment to pray at home so we can protect ourselves from the danger of COVID-19. This is in line with the counsel of the wild devout scholar, the Chief Imam, Sheikh Dr. Omar Shaributu. I wish all Muslims Ramadan Mubarak. (NAU 19)

On some occasions, the president issued warnings as a majority of Ghanaians blatantly disregarded the protocols, leading to a spike in cases ahead of the general election. He stated:

Extract 26

Fellow Ghanaians, it appears that we are letting our guard down. Now more than ever, we have to adhere to mask wearing, handwashing, the use of sanitizers, and social distancing protocols that have become a part of our daily routines, and which have ensured that we do not impose, all over again, the restrictions we are seeing in other parts of the world.

In getting citizens to comply, sometimes he threatened legal sanctions for such violations and urged political parties to enforce protocols when campaigning. The extract below illustrates that. (NAU 19)

Extract 27

Let me reiterate my admonition from a few weeks ago. Severe sanctions exist in our laws for persons who want to continue to disregard these protocols, and for those who want to endanger the rest of the population through their actions and negligence. The law enforcement agencies will, where necessary, apply these measures without fear or favour. (NAU 19)

The president has also had to buttress his stance by seeking compliance from the citizenry, speaking to available data from research. He states:

Extract 28

Indeed, the high compliance rate with mask wearing of persons surveyed by the Ghana Health Service in some selected areas of Accra, for example, to which I referred optimistically in Update No.15, has, according to a new survey by the same Service, fallen alarmingly, from 44.3% to 5%. This is not acceptable... (NAU 19)

The appeals for protocol adherence were heightened, usually during school reopening, spikes, and election periods. The president consistently reinforced these appeals in almost all the updates, balancing empathy with authority.

Move 7: Announcing Intervention

Here, the communicative purpose is to announce a raft of government measures to combat the pandemic. This came in various forms. In his first major address on Wednesday, 11 March 2020, Nana Addo, the President of Ghana, announced that Ghana's entry points would screen all entrants and that they were ready to quarantine and isolate persons with suspected cases. This is shown in Extract 29:

Extract 29 (Update 1)

Our points of entry such as our airports and land borders, continue to show satisfactory preparedness to screen all entrants into Ghana. The Ministry of Health has designated a Quarantine facility that can hold infected persons, while all regional hospitals are preparing Isolation Centres for holding suspected cases. (NAU 1)

To fight and defeat the virus head-on, the president announced the adoption of a Ghana-wide approach to prepare adequately for a possible surge in cases within Ghana's borders. To execute this, the President instructs the Finance Minister to provide \$100 million in cedis to strengthen Ghana's COVID-19 response and readiness strategy.

Extract 30 below affirms this claim:

Extract 30

In order to do so, at my prompting, the Minister for Finance has made available the cedi equivalent of \$100 million United States Dollars to enhance our Coronavirus preparedness and response plan. (NAU 1)

Similar interventions were announced subsequently by the President, as captured in Extract 31 below:

Extract 31

Since the announcement on Wednesday, 11th March 2020, of the first set of restrictions to help win the fight against the virus, several others have been imposed

by the Government to this end. Measures including the temporary partial lockdown of the Greater Accra Metropolitan Area, Tema, Kasoa, and the Greater Kumasi Metropolitan Area and contiguous districts, the closure of our schools, the adherence to enhanced hygiene, social distancing and mask wearing protocols, the ban on public gatherings, and the closure of our schools and our borders, imposed considerable difficulties on all of us. (NAU 21)

These interventions affirmed the government's adaptive and rigorous approach to the pandemic, while keeping its eyes on socio-economic considerations and public health.

Move 8: Signing Out

The signing-out move signaled the end of the speech and consisted of three sub-moves: code-switching, invoking the Divine, and thanking.

Step 1: Code-Switching

Typical of the updates, the president switched from English, the official language, to arguably the two dominant languages in Ghana (Twi and Ga). As a powerful genre hybridization strategy aimed at enhancing the persuasive and ideological force, it also reflects a deliberate blending of institutional authority with local cultural discourse, thereby fostering public compliance, shared responsibility and national unity. Here, key issues raised in the updates are summarised. The purpose of it, obviously, is to reach a wider audience and to bring listeners' minds, especially a section of Ghanaians who do not speak English, to the urgency of the situation at hand. Extracts 32 and 33 below present examples.

Extract 32

Fellow Ghanaians, we are determined to beat this virus. Yebedi nkonim!" (Translation: "We shall succeed!") (NAU 1)

Extract 33

Me manfo, yemfa yen ani nsi so. Yenni Agoro." (Translation: "My people, let's not take our eyes off the ball. Let's not joke with this."). (NAU 20)

Extract 33 indicates the president's warning to Ghanaians not to lose focus but to stay alert in spite of the Christmas festivities so that spikes in case counts would be prevented. Here, the president taps into the emotional and moral registers familiar to the populace in order to reinforce trust and compliance, aligning with Bhatia's (2010) CGA's focus on "discursive performance"—language choices made strategically to accomplish specific goals.

Step 2: Invoking the Divine

This step is embedded in the concluding move, in that it signalled the end of each update. It is, therefore, not the least of the moves, but for the simple fact that it

is one of the four moves signalling the end of the speech. Extracts 34, 35 and 36 exemplify that;

Extract 34: May God bless us all and our homeland, Ghana, and make us great and strong. (NAU)

Extract 35: For the Battle is Still the Lord's!! May God bless us all, and our homeland Ghana, and make her great and strong. (NAU 19)

Extract 36: For the Battle is still the Lord's. (NAU 20)

Here, the President proclaims his belief that God can deliver the nation and the world at large from the pandemic. This is in consonance with the psyche of the citizens who are religiously inclined. The reference to the Supreme Being in presidential speeches like this is a constant reminder of what is typical, according to Liu (2012), as cited in Afful *et al.*, (2020), of American Presidents who would resort to religious power in their inaugurations.

Step 3: *Thanking*

Quite apart from the acknowledgements and tons of appreciation shown by the President in sections of the various updates under study, thanking became a regular step in the concluding part of the update, which constituted the final move. Such extracts include:

Extract 37: I thank you for your attention... (NAU 20)

Extract 38 (Update 1): I thank you for your attention. (NAU 1)

This move was typical of all 16 sampled updates, and there was consistency across them in terms of form, reinforcing its status as obligatory. Its recurrence, according to Afful and Gyasi (2020), stresses the importance of acknowledgements not only in academic discourse but more so in political discourse, where persuasion is the main communicative purpose, since a better way to persuade is to show appreciation for the least support. Given the prevailing circumstances, it is not surprising that the President could thank Ghanaians for showing solidarity and cooperation. To continue to enjoy the support and goodwill both internally and externally, there was a need to show appreciation to all.

Key Research Findings

Research Question 1: *What schematic structure characterized President Nana Akufo-Addo's COVID-19 updates?*

The study found that there were eight obligatory moves and six sub-moves, embedded in both the introductory and the closing moves. The eight obligatory moves which contribute to the generic integrity of COVID-19 updates in Ghana include signing in (which consisted of 3 sub-moves: fellow Ghanaians, greetings and thanking), recapitulation, updating, assuring,

cautioning, appealing for adherence, announcing intervention and signing out (which consisted of code-switching, invoking the Divine and thanking). These were categorized as obligatory moves. However, four (4) updates differed in their move structure. These included acknowledging support, promising incentives, economic recovery, and easing restrictions. These were classified as ambiguous and optional moves since they were not typical of all the updates and had to be realized in light of the prevailing circumstances and conditions, with varying degrees of textual space depending on those circumstances and the trajectory of the pandemic.

CONCLUSIONS

The study deepens the understanding of the schematic structure of the presidential updates on COVID-19 in Ghana and how the president's language use in the updates demonstrates power, ideology, and persuasion, confirming most of the general assumptions underpinning Bhatia's (2010) Critical Genre Analysis framework.

The study concludes that the COVID-19 updates by President Akufo-Addo have a move structure with six sub-moves, three each for the introduction (Signing-in) and the conclusion (Signing-out). Also, his speeches before the 2020 election were predominantly a blend of public health announcements and a nuanced political campaign messaging, giving credence to CGA's genre embedding and genre hybridity (interdiscursivity) as he mixed religion, nationalism, and health, eliciting spiritual, rational, and national responses from the citizens. The post-election updates, however, focused not only on narratives highlighting the government's success in overcoming the pandemic but also on continuity.

Suggestions for Further Research

The present study opens several avenues for future enquiry into presidential crisis communication and the broader COVID-19 update genre. First, future studies may conduct comparative genre analysis across different countries or political systems to determine whether the move structures identified in Ghana's updates align with, differ from, or expand global patterns of crisis communication. Such comparative work would strengthen cross-cultural appreciations of how political leaders manage public health emergencies through discourse.

Besides, further research could adopt longitudinal or corpus-driven designs to trace how the schematic structure, ideological framing and persuasive strategies in presidential updates evolve beyond the pandemic period. This would help reveal whether certain rhetorical practices persist, transform or diminish as national priorities shift.

In addition, future research may integrate multimodal analysis to complement the textual focus of

the present study. Since presidential updates combine spoken language with gesture, framing, camera angle, and visual graphics, multimodal approaches could provide a fuller picture of how power, ideology and persuasion are enacted across semiotic resources.

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