

National identity construction through grammatical cohesive devices in independence day speeches in Ghana: A corpus-based study

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Abstract

The construction of national identities in post-colonial nations is significantly influenced by political discourse, as political leaders use language to shape and reinforce a sense of collective identity. In this context, Ghana provides a compelling case for examining how grammatical cohesive devices in Independence Day Speeches contribute to national identity formation. This study employs a corpus-based approach, focusing on Ghana's Independence Day speeches delivered by various presidents from 2010 to 2024, to capture trends across successive administrations. Drawing on Social Identity theory and Theory of Cohesion, this study examines how references to Ghana's political past, present, and future contribute to the formation of a unified national identity. The findings indicate that demonstratives are the most dominant grammatical cohesive devices employed by Ghanaian presidents. These demonstratives mostly describe events, people and actions pertinent to the national narrative. One noteworthy finding is the use of the additive conjunction 'and', which serves a dual function: it links ideas linguistically while also creating contrast within discourse. This dual role enhances the effectiveness of the speeches. These findings highlight the crucial role of cohesive devices in reinforcing a shared national identity and fostering solidarity among the populace.

Keywords

corpus-based study, independence day speeches, national identity

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Introduction

The legacy of colonialism has had enduring and profound effects on the cultural, political, and social landscapes of African nations. Notably, foreign systems of governance, education, and language were imposed, significantly shaping the self-perception and global positioning of colonised populations (Dorvlo, 2011; Saah & Baku, 2011). Like many other African countries, Ghana experienced colonial influences that obscured and weakened indigenous identities, necessitating deliberate efforts to reconstruct a national identity after independence (Saah & Baku, 2011; Wiredu, 2011).

National identity, a special form of social identity, arises from a collective sense of belonging, shared characteristics, values and traditions that bind a nation together. This sense of belonging is rooted in the understanding that nations are distinct entities with shared histories, cultures, and political structures. Anderson (1983) conceptualises a nation as an "imagined community," in which national identity is built on a sense of profound connection among members, despite not personally knowing each individual in the group. This imagined sense of community is constructed, reproduced, transformed and even destructed through language and other semiotic means (de Cillia, Reisigl & Wodak, 1999; Wodak et al. 2009).

Language, the primary medium of communication, plays a crucial role in shaping and expressing national identity. It conveys cultural values, historical narratives, and collective memories. In post-colonial Ghana, language has been instrumental in reclaiming indigenous identities while fostering a unified national identity amidst the nation's diverse ethnic and linguistic landscape (Bloom, 1990; Saah & Baku, 2011). The coexistence of English, the de facto official language, alongside indigenous languages, reflects the intricate interplay between modernity and tradition in constructing Ghanaian national identity (Asilevi, 2011). Language, therefore, serves as a tool for articulating and reinforcing a shared national identity, particularly in political speeches such as Independence Day Speeches.

Independence Day Speeches (IDSs) in Ghana hold significant political and cultural weight. Delivered annually by the incumbent president, these speeches commemorate the nation's historical struggles and achievements and serve as a potent platform for envisioning its future. They are moments of national unity in which the nation's essence is communicated through carefully crafted language. Presidents use these speeches to resonate with the populace by drawing on historical references, cultural symbols, and linguistic and rhetorical strategies to strengthen collective national identity. Among linguistic strategies, grammatical cohesive devices play a crucial role. These devices create connections within the text, lending unity and coherence to the message being communicated (Israel & Okoh, 2018).

While existing studies have concentrated on the construction of national identity (Chang & Holt, 2009; Române-Kalniņa, 2022), and others have analysed the discourse of Independence Day speeches (Edu-Buandoh & Nkansah, 2018; Odogwu & Akpojishi, 2018; Sherzer, 2020; Moronfoye, 2021), the specific role of cohesive devices in fostering national identity remains underexplored. Furthermore, most previous studies have not utilised corpus-based methodologies, thereby providing a systematic approach to examining large volumes of text for linguistic patterns and structures.

Given the crucial role Independence Day Speeches play in fostering national unity, a closer examination of grammatical cohesive devices from a corpus-based perspective could provide deeper insights into how these speeches contribute to the construction of national identity. Therefore, this study seeks to address the following research questions:

- a. Which grammatical cohesive devices are most frequently used by Presidents in their Independence Day Speeches in Ghana?
- b. What communicative functions do these frequently used grammatical cohesive devices serve in the Independence Day Speeches of Presidents in Ghana?

This paper proceeds by reviewing existing studies on the discursive construction of national identity, cohesive devices in political discourse and social identity and cohesion theories, establishing the empirical and theoretical contexts of the study. This is followed by a detailed description of the data and methods used, analysis and discussion of the findings, and finally, a conclusion synthesising the study's contributions to understanding national identity construction through cohesive devices in political discourse.

Discursive Construction of National Identity

Identity is a cornerstone of human experience, influencing how we perceive ourselves and interact with the world around us (Hogg & Abrams, 1988; Deng, 1995; Kowert & Legro, 1996). Scholars have approached this concept from personal and social perspectives, highlighting its fluid nature within social constructs (Edu-Buandoh & Nkansah, 2018; Fearon, 1999; Române-Kalniņa, 2022). Wodak et al. (2009, p. 11) define identity as a "relationship between two or more related entities in a manner that asserts a sameness or equality." This definition does not capture the full complexity of individuals or groups which naturally evolve. Personal identity, which encompasses an individual's distinct sense of self and social identity stemming from group affiliations, can change across contexts, whether for individuals or groups. Identity centres on how one differs from others rather than on similarity or equality (Române-Kalniņa, 2022). According to Jenkins (1996, p. 4), identity is how "individuals and collectivities are distinguished in their social relations with other individuals and collectivities". Similar to individual or group identity, national identity is shaped by emphasising the unique characteristics of the nation in relation to itself and others, involving the construction of the other (other nations), the self (nation), and the other within the self (Conway, 2006).

Building on the understanding that the representation of the *other* shapes national identity, Kenix (2015) explored how Samoan national identity was constructed in *The Samoa Observer*, Samoa's primary newspaper. Using a micronarrative framework, the study quantitatively assessed how national identity was portrayed in three Samoan news sources. Notably, the study found that *The Samoa Observer* emphasised indigenous Samoan traditions in its coverage without marginalising other groups, prioritising these traditions over a more exclusionary approach to identity construction. Kenix argued that Samoan news content does not distinctly construct a national identity separate from others. Instead, the dominant narratives across news outlets portrayed Samoa as embracing various traditions, cultures, and values, reflecting a cohesive national identity that did not necessitate the exclusion of other groups.

In their examination of national identity construction in Austria, the construction of the *self*, De Cilia et al. (1999) investigated themes, strategies, and linguistic mechanisms used to establish a sense of national similarity and distinctiveness. The study utilised focus group discussions as a form of semi-public discourse to elucidate key components of Austria's national identity, including the concept of 'homo Austriacus' (the typical Austrian), shared political history, common culture, collective present and the notion of a national body. De Cilia et al. outlined four main strategies: constructive, perpetuation and justification, dismantling or destructive, and several sub-strategies. Notably, they found that the presupposition of intra-national sameness was marked by the frequent use of 'we' and the adverbial form 'Austrian,' while the emphasis on national uniqueness was achieved by using 'Austrian' as a reference for 'we' and the word 'own' to underscore the sense of difference from others. Distinctions between nations were

highlighted, using terms such as 'foreigners' and 'southerners.' The study's linguistic analysis revealed that positive self-representation was a constructive and perpetuating strategy that often involved implicit comparisons of Austria to other nations. The authors also noted the frequent use of the personal pronoun 'we' and its possessive forms, which collectively referred to Austrians, including past generations and sub-national groups. Additionally, the study found that metonymy, synecdoche and personification were employed to cultivate a sense of national unity and common identity.

Alameda-Hernández (2008) conducted a study on the portrayal of Gibraltar during the 2002 referendum. The research focused on the representation of the Gibraltar community in editorial articles from three distinct media outlets: the Gibraltar, Spanish, and British press. The study employed the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) framework, developed by Fairclough (1995), Van Dijk (1993) and Wodak et al. (1999), in conjunction with Halliday's (1994) transitivity model. The analysis revealed that Gibraltar was represented through material, verbal, mental, and relational processes, with variations in emphasis across the three media sources. Gibraltar was predominantly identified as an actor, sener and carrier in the Gibraltar press. Conversely, the Spanish press attributed roles to Gibraltar such as sener, goal, beneficiary, and actor, while the British press predominantly portrayed Gibraltar as a sener, goal, say, receiver, target and verbiage. The study highlighted that Gibraltar was often depicted as passive, especially in the absence of a goal, with the sener role being emphasised through the use of the pronoun 'we,' representing the Gibraltar people. Furthermore, Gibraltar authorities were frequently assigned the role of say, thereby granting them more agency and authority in the discourse. The portrayal of Gibraltar in the Spanish press often carries negative connotations, describing it as a beneficiary of actions taken by Spain or Britain. This portrayal is used as a rhetorical strategy to advocate for changes to the political status quo, with less attention given to the future status of Gibraltar. Additionally, the use of noun and prepositional phrases suggests a passive representation of Gibraltar, reinforcing its backgrounded portrayal. Similarly, the British press also depicts Gibraltar as a passive entity, but it includes the voices of ordinary Gibraltar citizens through verbal processes, although these voices are largely influenced by external forces. This analysis highlights how Gibraltar's identity is constructed in different national media platforms, reflecting broader political and social dynamics.

The above-mentioned studies demonstrate that political actors and journalists play a significant role in shaping different identities of nations. The speaker or writer often influences these identities but generally confirms them, as seen in the case of Gibraltar. Commemorative and political speeches serve as platforms for constructing diverse national identities. One such speech is the Independence Day Speech, which is the focus of this paper.

Cohesive Devices in Political Discourse

Halliday and Hasan (1976) outline that cohesive devices are linguistic tools that enhance structure and coherence in spoken and written discourse. Studies have investigated the use of cohesive devices in political discourses, highlighting their role in shaping national identity.

Emilinda, Anggraeni, Hum and Sigalingging (2022) conducted a study analysing the cohesive devices employed in Donald Trump's concession speech. Their focus was on the frequency, functions, and patterns of both grammatical and lexical cohesion. Applying Halliday and Hasan's (1976) framework, the analysis revealed that personal reference was the most frequently employed cohesive device, while ellipsis and substitution were the least often used. The study identified the predominance of personal reference, particularly the pronoun "we," and the additive conjunction "and" as the primary grammatical cohesive devices. Within Trump's speech, repetition emerged as the dominant form of lexical cohesion. The study highlighted the use of

"we" as a rhetorical strategy to establish collective identity and belonging, while "and" served as a connector for additional information. Repetition was employed to emphasise key points within the speech. However, the study's failure to comprehensively outline the methodological process used to identify dominant cohesive devices limits the transparency and reproducibility of the findings.

In a related study, Tafuli, Bustan, and Haan (2023) analysed the grammatical cohesive devices used in Joko Widodo's speech at the G-20 summit. They employed a descriptive method to analyse the data through identification and classification. Their analysis revealed the prevalence of four key grammatical cohesive devices: reference, substitution, ellipsis, and conjunction. They found that reference was the most frequently used grammatical cohesive device, followed by conjunction, while substitution and ellipsis were less frequently used. This finding is consistent with Emilinda et al.'s (2022) study, which similarly observed that personal reference dominated as a cohesive device in Donald Trump's concession speech, with ellipsis and substitution being less prominent.

In the Ghanaian context, Ahwireng (2017) examined the use of cohesive devices in the 2016 State of the Nation Address (SONA) delivered by President John Dramani Mahama. The study analyses the communicative implications of cohesive devices within political discourse, using Halliday and Hasan's (1976) Theory of Cohesion. The study examined both grammatical and lexical cohesive devices, revealing the strategic use of references, substitutions, ellipsis, and conjunctions as grammatical cohesive devices, alongside lexical devices such as reiteration (including repetition and synonymy) and collocation. The study found that grammatical cohesive devices, particularly reference and substitution, were predominantly used to avoid redundancy, thereby maintaining audience engagement and sustaining their attention throughout the address. This strategic use of cohesive devices prevents monotony and ensures clarity. On the other hand, lexical cohesive devices such as repetition and synonymy were primarily used to emphasise the achievements of the government and to outline plans. Ahwireng concluded that the use of cohesive devices is crucial for political figures because these tools enable them to craft persuasive, coherent, and impactful speeches. By utilising well-structured cohesion, politicians can convince and sway their audience, thus influencing public opinion on various issues and policies.

In a study by Adukpo (2017), the analysis of register and lexical cohesive devices in the 2012 manifesto of the New Patriotic Party (NPP) was conducted. The study applied Halliday and Hasan's (1976) Theory of Cohesion as well as Halliday's (1994) Register Theory. The work employed a qualitative approach, using Leech and Short's (2007) lexical category framework to analyse registers in the manifesto. The findings indicated that in terms of cohesion, repetition was the most dominant lexical cohesive device employed to emphasise the scope of the party's proposed projects and its commitment to their execution. The use of synonyms helped clarify the party's ideology for the electorate, while antonyms were employed to contrast the incumbent government's achievements with the NPP's proposed improvements to the economy. Superordinate terms were strategically used to group and categorise the party's plans, making the manifesto's content more comprehensible for the electorate. Adukpo (2017) concluded that the NPP's strategic use of lexical cohesive devices helped establish clear connections between various lexical items, enhancing the overall coherence and persuasiveness of the manifesto.

Based on the review of previous studies, it is apparent that political leaders consistently utilise cohesive devices to organise their speeches and effectively convey their messages. Whether concession speeches, inauguration addresses, summit speeches, manifestos, or State of the Nation Addresses (SONAs), cohesive devices play a crucial role in shaping political discourse. However, cohesive devices such as those in Ghana's Independence Day Speeches for

constructing national identity remain underexplored. This gap is particularly noteworthy, given the unique role of Independence Day Speeches in fostering unity and constructing national identity.

Theoretical framework

Social Identity Theory

This study is grounded in Social Identity Theory (SIT) and Self-Categorisation Theory (SCT), developed by Tajfel and Turner (1979) and further elaborated by Turner (1991). Social Identity Theory outlines three cognitive processes that influence group behaviour: social categorisation, social identification, and social comparison. Social categorisation involves the cognitive process by which individuals classify themselves and others into distinct groups, leading to differentiation between in-groups and out-groups. This often results in favourable treatment of in-group members and discrimination against out-group members. Through social identification, individuals begin to see themselves as part of the group they have categorised themselves into, viewing themselves less as unique individuals and more as group members. Consequently, group norms influence their behaviour (Tajfel, Billig, Bundy & Flament, 1971). Social comparison entails the evaluation of behaviours and characteristics of in-group members relative to those of out-group members. People often exhibit favouritism towards their groups to maintain a positive self-image (Tajfel et al., 1971; Hogg, 1993) and engage in behaviours that protect or enhance their group's distinctiveness. When individuals are dissatisfied with their group's social identity, they may take collective action to improve the group's standing, such as distancing themselves from the group or emphasising aspects that favour the in-group (Crisp & Hewstone, 2007; Hogg, 2015). Whether or not individuals seek social change depends on whether the group's lower status is viewed as legitimate. If seen as unjust, group members are more likely to engage in social competition to challenge it (Hornsey & Hogg, 2000; Crisp & Hewstone, 2007).

Turner (1987) extended Social Identity Theory by introducing Self-Categorisation Theory, which delves into how individuals, upon aligning with a group, come to perceive themselves as more akin to other group members through a phenomenon known as depersonalisation (Abrams & Hogg, 2010). Depersonalisation entails individuals behaving and being treated according to the shared characteristics or prototypes of the group rather than as unique individuals. Prototypes represent the distinctive characteristics of a social group, encompassing shared beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours influenced by the context. They highlight the commonalities within and the distinctions between groups (Hogg, 2015).

Theory of Cohesion

Theory of Cohesion asserts that texts achieve effective communication by utilising cohesive devices to establish connections within and between sentences, thereby unifying a series of sentences into a coherent text. According to Halliday and Hasan (1976), cohesive relationships are important in determining the coherence of a set of sentences. Thus, cohesion is not merely a linguistic feature but a central property of any text that is integral to its structure and communicative intent. Halliday and Hasan's framework identifies key grammatical cohesive devices—reference, substitution, ellipsis and conjunction—that create continuity in discourse and contribute to the text's overall meaning. However, Halliday and Hasan (1976) posit that conjunctions contain both grammatical and lexical elements that straddle the boundary between grammatical and lexical cohesion. Therefore, this study considers conjunctions within the category of grammatical cohesion.

Social Identity Theory provides a framework for comprehending nations as social categories and how they express their identity through discourse. It also emphasises how linguistic strategies

in Independence Day Speeches (IDSs) reflect and reinforce a shared sense of belonging and unity among citizens. Meanwhile, Theory of Cohesion is employed to investigate how cohesive devices in IDSs shape national identity, emphasising the interplay between linguistic features and text coherence. The combination of these two theories provides a comprehensive understanding of the construction of national identity through language.

Discourse Historical Approach

The paper analyses Independence Day Speeches using the Discourse Historical Approach (DHA) to understand the discursive construction of national identity, as outlined by Wodak et al. (2009). Using the DHA, the analysis operates within three textual dimensions: content or thematic level, discursive strategies employed, and linguistic means and forms utilised. The construction of national identity is explored across five key thematic areas: the construction of a national spirit, the narration and confabulation of a shared political history, the linguistic construction of common culture, the linguistic construction of a common political present and future, and the linguistic construction of a national body. Various discursive strategies related to constructing, perpetuating and justification, transforming and dismantling national identities are employed. These strategies aim to either emphasise sameness or highlight differences, which are crucial in identity formation. The thematic areas and strategies are examined in relation to specific lexical units and syntactic devices used to express them, contributing to the discursive construction of shared political history, present and future, national character, common culture, and national body (Wodak, de Cillia, Reisigl, & Liebhart, 2009).

Method

Data and Method of Analysis

The study is corpus-based, and a specialised corpus was built from the Independence Day Speeches (IDSs) of key political figures, namely former Presidents John Evans Fiifi Atta Mills and John Dramani Mahama, as well as incumbent President, Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo. As noted in Baker (2006) and Ngula (2017), in corpus methodology, the researcher exercises discretion in sample selection due to the extensive data, ensuring representativeness and generalisation of the findings. Therefore, the data for this study comprise IDSs delivered between 2010 and 2024, covering the speeches of John Evan Fiifi Atta Mills and John Dramani Mahama during their presidential tenures from 2010 to 2016, as well as all of Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo's IDSs from 2017 to 2024.

Corpus Building Processes and Compilation

The corpus compilation consisted of fifteen (15) Independence Day Speeches delivered by presidents from March 6, 2010, to March 6, 2024. The speeches were sourced from the official websites of the Presidency, *Graphic Online*, and *MyJoyOnline*. The original texts were in Word documents and PDF formats, which are not compatible with corpus software. Therefore, all texts were converted into plain text to ensure machine readability and to maintain the accuracy of the original texts (Kennedy, 1998; McEnery & Hardie, 2012; Sarfo-Kantankah, 2021). A raw specialised corpus containing thirty-four thousand and forty-eight (34,048) running words was built. The corpus consisted of four thousand seven hundred and fifteen (4,715) word types or entries and thirty-four thousand and forty-eight (34,048) total frequency or tokens. It is important to note that the number of tokens is the same as the total frequency for building the corpus in corpus compilation. A summary of the specialised corpus has been created and presented in a tabular form below:

Table 1. Summary of Specialised Corpus

Tokens	Word types/Entries	Total number of words
34,048	4,715	34,048

Procedure for Corpus Analysis

The corpus was analysed to identify the most frequently occurring cohesive devices using AntConc version 4.3.1, released July 29, 2024. Specific thresholds were established to determine which cohesive devices were deemed statistically significant based on their frequency within the corpus to facilitate quantitative count and address our research questions. According to these criteria, cohesive devices with a frequency of one hundred and fifty-five (155) or less were deemed numerically insignificant for the analysis. The identified cohesive devices were tabulated as they appeared in AntConc and corroborated with evidence from the software. These criteria enabled us to determine the most frequent cohesive devices in the corpus, thus addressing Research Question One. Subsequently, a qualitative inquiry into the communicative functions of the grammatical cohesive devices within their contextual usage was conducted. This was facilitated through the keyword-in-context (KWIC) and file view tabs of the AntConc corpus software.

Results and Discussion

The Most Frequently Occurring Grammatical Cohesive Devices

Zufferey (2020) and McEnery and Hardie (2012) note that the frequency count of the target linguistic features under study is a fundamental aspect of corpus-based studies. In our analysis using the AntConc corpus software, we identified ten (10) grammatical cohesive devices that dominated the corpus and held significant numeric value for our study. These cohesive devices were categorised according to Halliday and Hasan's (1976) Theory of Cohesion. Therefore, the cohesive devices were categorised as personal references (i.e. *we, us, it, I, our*) and demonstrative references (i.e. *this, that, the*). Conjunctions were further subcategorised into additive (i.e. *and*) and causal (i.e. *for*) types. Table 2 presents the rank and frequency of grammatical cohesive devices with numerical strength for the study.

Table 2. Ranks and frequencies of grammatical cohesive devices

Rank	Frequency	Word
1	2193	the
3	1346	and
5	712	our
6	667	we
9	527	that
11	370	for
12	278	it
14	272	I
18	238	us
19	226	this

Source: AntConc software

Based on the table extracted from AntConc software, it is evident that the definite article ‘*the*’ is the most frequently occurring grammatical cohesive device, with a frequency of 2193, making it the 1st most common grammatical item in the corpus. Following closely is the word *and*, with a frequency of 1346, ranking as the 3rd most frequently occurring item in the corpus. Among the ten (10) grammatical cohesive devices, ‘*this*’ was found to have the lowest frequency, occurring only 226 times and ranking as the 19th most frequent grammatical item in the corpus. Figure 1 displays a concordance that shows the dominance of the cohesive device ‘*the*’ in the corpus.

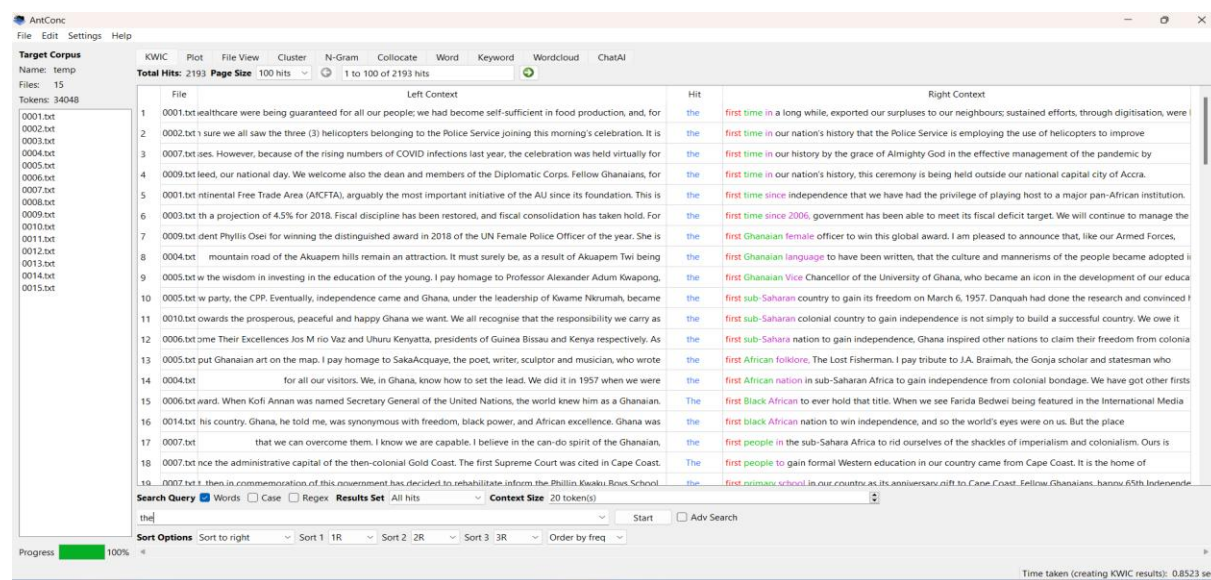


Figure 1. Concordance lines showing the occurrence of the determiner ‘*the*’ in the corpus

Communicative Functions of Cohesive Devices in Independence Day Speeches

In corpus studies, it is imperative to consider the communicative function of a specific linguistic feature(s) under examination within its specific context (McEnery & Hardie, 2012; Sarfo-Kantankah, 2021). The analysis of Research Question Two delves into the communicative functions of the grammatical cohesive devices identified as dominant in Research Question One by closely examining the sentences in which they are employed, treating these sentences as units of analysis under three thematic areas (Wodak et al., 2009) that were identified as prominent in the data.

Common Political Past

The construction of a shared national past is a prominent theme in Ghana’s Independence Day Speeches. Presidents employ cohesive devices to evoke the shared memory of the nation’s historical journey and to construct a narrative highlighting the continuity of Ghana’s identity, linking the nation to ancient Ghana.

Excerpt 1

870 years ago, we struck against the attempt of the Arabs to impose religious slavery upon us in Ghana. We left our homes in Ghana and came down here to build a new home. But there is one thing we brought with us from ancient Ghana. We brought with us our ancient freedom.

(60th Independence Day Speech: 6th March 2017)

Akufo-Addo establishes a connection between ancient Ghana and present-day Ghana. Notably, he uses the first-person plural pronouns (*we, us, our*) to foster a sense of collective identity and

position himself and the Ghanaian people as integral parts of a unified group (nation) with a shared history. Additionally, the deliberate use of the determiner "*the*" in the phrase "***the attempt of the Arabs***" adds specificity to the narrative. Furthermore, the additive conjunction "*and*" links ideas and ensures logical progression. The compound sentence, "*We left our homes in Ghana and came down here to build a new home*", uses "*and*" to emphasise the continuity of Ghana's journey. The ellipsis, marked by the omission of the subject "*we*" in the second clause, contributes to cohesion by avoiding repetition while maintaining clarity.

Excerpt 2

*As **the** first sub-Saharan nation to gain independence, Ghana inspired other nations to claim their freedom from colonial domination.*

(59th Independence Day Speech: 6th March 2016)

Ghana's shared political past is deeply rooted in its historical role as a leader in Africa's struggle against colonialism. Mahama emphasises Ghana's pioneering status as the first sub-Saharan nation to gain independence. The use of the determiner "*the*" in the phrase "***the first sub-Saharan nation***" accentuates Ghana's exceptional status as a trailblazer in the decolonisation process. This specific use of "*the*" highlights Ghana's distinctiveness, distinguishing it from other nations in Africa; hence, the *self* and *other* in identity construction. By explicitly stating "***the first***," Mahama constructs a narrative that fosters a sense of national pride and showcases Ghana's pioneering position in the broader African liberation movement.

Excerpt 3

*If **the** signing of **the** Bond of 1844 marks **the** formal start of **the** Gold Coast colony, then **the** formation of **the** Aborigines Rights Protection Society on 4th August 1897, in Cape Coast, marks **the** start of **the** struggle for political independence.*

(60th Independence Day Speech: 6th March 2017)

The consistent use of the determiner "*the*" before key historical events, such as "***the signing of the Bond of 1844***" and "***the formation of the Aborigines Rights Protection Society***", plays a crucial role in highlighting these events within Ghana's political narrative. The determiner "*the*" conveys specificity and prompts the audience to perceive these moments as established and non-negotiable milestones in the nation's history. Through the use of "*the*" in these contexts, the speaker accentuates the events' authoritative status, compelling the audience to recognise them as foundational elements in the collective memory of Ghana's struggle for political independence. Furthermore, the repetition of "*the*" reinforces the significance of these events, linking them to a broader historical timeline and affirming their importance in the shared political past of the nation.

Excerpt 4

*53 years ago, **our** founding father, Osagyefo Dr Kwame Nkrumah, declared Ghana a free nation, **and it** is a well-catalogued fact that **the** struggle for independence was not an easy one.*

(53rd Independence Day Speech: 6th March 2010)

The speaker references important historical figures to highlight a shared political past. The mention of "***our founding father, Osagyefo Dr Kwame Nkrumah***" evokes a common historical figure pivotal to the nation's identity. Using the personal reference "*our*" establishes collective ownership of Nkrumah's legacy. Additionally, the use of the additive conjunction "*and*" links Nkrumah's declaration of Ghana's freedom to the well-known struggle for independence, strengthening the flow of the discourse by demonstrating the direct relationship between these historical moments. The personal reference "*it*" serves as a forward-pointing reference to the phrase "*a well-catalogued fact*," ensuring the smooth progression of the argument. Furthermore,

the determiner "the" in "**the** struggle for independence" also presupposes familiarity with the event, reinforcing the notion that this historical struggle is a well-established part of the nation's collective memory.

The Political Present

Independence Day Speeches in Ghana reflect the nation's continuously evolving political present, which is shaped by historical events since independence, as well as contemporary issues. Presidents often emphasise Ghana's dedication to democracy, its efforts to combat corruption, and its collective responsibility to address environmental challenges such as illegal mining (known as *galamsey*).

Excerpt 5

*We are a democratic nation, **and** not every country can make such a claim. ... there is nothing democratic about colonial rule **and** whatever **we** have today, **we** have worked out for ourselves.*

(67th Independence Day Speech: 6th March 2024)

Akufo-Addo uses grammatical cohesive devices in constructing Ghana's political present by contrasting Ghana's colonial past with its current democratic status. The compound sentence "**We are a democratic nation and not every country can make such a claim**" introduces the pronoun "we" which establishes a sense of collective identity. This allows the speaker to position himself and the audience as part of a unified group collectively responsible for the nation's democratic achievements. The additive conjunction "and" is employed to contrast the two clauses: "**We are a democratic nation**" and "**(it is) not every country (that) can make such a claim.**" This contrasts Ghana (*the self*) and other nations. Notably, there is an ellipsis in the second clause, where "it is" and "that" are omitted. In the compound-complex sentence, "**there is nothing democratic about colonial rule **and** whatever we have today, we have worked out for ourselves,**" the additive "and" is again used, this time to link two ideas: the lack of democracy under colonial rule and the self-determined progress achieved by Ghana post-independence.

Excerpt 6

*Corruption is not a partisan matter, **and we** must all act to protect **the** public purse. In **the** words of **the** 1st President of **the** 4th Republic, His Excellency Jerry John Rawlings, **and** I quote: "Combating corruption is not beyond **us**. Imagine **the** effect on **our** nation **and** **our** future if, for just a few months, all decent Ghanaians would put aside their own convenience, apathy **and** faint-heartedness **and** challenge every corruption, no matter how petty, which comes their way.*

(61st Independence Day Speech: 6th March 2018)

The data shows the use of grammatical cohesive devices to reinforce the collective responsibility in combating corruption, a crucial aspect of the nation's political present. The compound sentence, "**Corruption is not a partisan matter, **and** we must all act to protect the public purse,**" introduces several cohesive elements. The conjunction "and" acts as an additive conjunction, connecting two clauses that emphasise both the non-partisan nature of corruption and the need for collective action. This use of "and" recurs in the phrase "****and** challenge every corruption,**" where it once again links individual responsibility to the broader national struggle against corruption. The personal reference "we" establishes a sense of collective identity. Thus, Akufo-Addo aligns himself with the audience, invoking a shared duty to "**act to protect the public purse**", emphasising that corruption is a national issue requiring the active participation of all citizens. Furthermore, the speaker invokes the authority of the first President of the 4th Republic, Jerry John Rawlings, to enhance the message's credibility. The pronoun "us" in the phrase "**not beyond us**" emphasises inclusivity, suggesting that overcoming corruption is a collective effort within the nation's capacity. The use of "our" in "****our** nation and our future**" strengthens the sense of collective

ownership and responsibility, implying that the nation's well-being is linked to the actions of its citizens.

Excerpt 7

*We must, thus, be determined to protect **our** environment **and** water bodies by joining hands in **the** fight against illegal mining, also known as **galamsey**, in order to bring an end to **the** devastation of some of **our** landscapes **and** **the** pollution of **our** water bodies, occasioned by **the** activities of illegal miners.*

(61st Independence Day Speech: 6th March 2018)

Excerpt 7 demonstrates how the use of "we," "our," "and," and "the" contribute to the construction of the political present in addressing environmental challenges. The use of the first-person plural "we" positions Akufo-Addo and Ghanaians as a unified group (nation) responsible for environmental protection, fostering a sense of collective action and belonging. Similarly, the personal reference "our" reinforces this narrative of collective ownership and responsibility by personalising references to "**our** environment" and "**our** water bodies." This further confirms that these natural resources belong to the nation and that protecting them is a common obligation. In addition, the additive conjunction "and" connects the need to protect the environment with the fight against illegal mining (galamsey). Akufo-Addo highlights the interconnected nature of these actions, framing them as part of a larger, unified struggle. Lastly, the definite article "the" signifies specificity, drawing attention to particular elements like "**the** devastation of some of **our** landscape" and "**the** pollution of **our** water bodies." This emphasises the immediacy and urgency of the issue, while also framing it as a shared national concern.

Political Future

The political future of Ghana is centred on hard work and the empowerment of the youth as catalysts for progress. Ghanaians are being urged to promote a collective identity rooted in enterprise and ingenuity.

Excerpt 8

***The** challenge before **us** is to build **our** economy **and** generate a prosperous, progressive **and** dignified life for **the** mass of **our** people. Hard work, enterprise, creativity **and** a consistent fight against corruption in public life would bring **the** transformation **we** seek.*

(60th Independence Day Speech: 6th March 2017)

In **Excerpt 8**, "the," "us," "our," "and" and "we" are employed to depict a vision of the political future centred on hard work. The definite article "the" specifies the particular "challenge" facing Ghanaians, drawing attention to the crucial task of building the economy as a fundamental step towards a prosperous political future. The pronoun "us" reinforces inclusivity, signifying that the challenge is one that all citizens collectively confront. This shared responsibility extends to shaping "**our** economy" and fostering a dignified life for "**our** people," using "our" to personalise the country's economic and social transformation. The conjunction "and" connects the core values of "*hard work, enterprise, creativity*," presenting them as essential elements in constructing this future. It also links the efforts to combat corruption with the overarching goal of transformation, presenting them as interconnected components of the nation's development. Finally, the use of "we" unites the speaker and the audience, emphasising that the transformation "**we** seek" is a shared goal.

Excerpt 9

***We** are laying a strong foundation for an educated **and** skilled workforce of **the** future through **the** Free Senior High School (SHS) programme, which **this** academic year enabled 90,000 additional young Ghanaians to enrol in SHS.*

(61st Independence Day Speech: 6th March 2018)

Excerpt 10

*These children are **the** future of Ghana. They are **the** future that **the** men **and** women in **our** forces will march today with them **our** task to protect.*

(59th Independence Day Speech: 6th March 2016)

In **Excerpts 9** and **10**, the data illustrate the use of grammatical cohesive devices to emphasise the significance of educating children in shaping Ghana's political future. The personal reference "we" in **Excerpt 9** establishes a collective responsibility, implying a shared duty to invest in the education of the youth. The conjunction "and" connects ideas, linking the educational foundations with the successful outcomes of the Free Senior High School programme in **Excerpt 9**, while in **Excerpt 10**, it connects two noun phrases "the men" and "the women." Furthermore, using the determiner "the" specifies significant concepts, such as "**the future of Ghana**," thus emphasising the critical role of children in national development and underscoring the urgency of their education. The demonstrative reference "this" in **Excerpt 9** draws attention to the current academic year, grounding the educational initiatives in the present and showcasing their immediate impact. Finally, the personal reference "our" in **Excerpt 10** fosters a sense of shared obligation, indicating that protecting the future is a collective task that involves all citizens.

The analysis has found that presidents used references, ellipsis and conjunctions a total of 153 occurrences. Among these, reference was the most commonly used grammatical cohesive device, with 120 occurrences. Two types of reference were identified: personal reference (I, we, us, our, it) and demonstrative reference (this, that, the). Demonstrative reference was the most dominant, appearing in 64 occurrences, with the determiner 'the' being the most frequently used (58 occurrences), followed by 'this' (5 occurrences) and 'that' (once). Personal reference appeared 56 times, with 'we' being the most common (24 occurrences), followed closely by 'our' (23 occurrences). The reference 'us' appeared 6 times, while 'I' and 'it' were used twice and once, respectively. Additionally, the additive conjunction 'and' appeared 31 times and two instances of ellipsis were identified. It is worth noting that no instances of substitution were found.

The study's findings contrast with previous research (Emilinda et al., 2022; Yurikayani et al., 2024) by identifying reference, ellipsis and conjunction but not substitution. The results show that reference was the most commonly used cohesive device, which is consistent with Tafuli et al.'s (2023) conclusion that reference is the most frequently employed cohesive device. However, this study emphasises that demonstrative reference was the dominant grammatical cohesive device, in contrast to Emilinda et al.'s (2022) study, which identified personal reference as the most frequently used cohesive device in Donald Trump's concession speech. The study also found that the determiner 'the' was the most frequently used, supporting the corpus software's findings that the definite article 'the' is the most common grammatical item in the corpus. The additive conjunction 'and' and personal reference 'we' followed closely, confirming Emilinda et al.'s (2022) findings that "we" and "and" are key cohesive devices. Additionally, the findings reaffirm Tafuli et al.'s (2023) conclusion that ellipsis and substitution are less frequently used cohesive devices. The dominance of reference in the data can be attributed to the frequent need to describe events, people, and actions. At the same time, the minimal use of substitution and ellipsis is not surprising. This finding supports Halliday and Hasan's (1976) assertion that these linguistic features are more common in spoken than in written language.

The data further demonstrates the communicative functions of personal reference (I, we, us, our, it), demonstrative reference (this, that, the), conjunction (and) and ellipsis. The pronoun 'I' indicates the speaker's direct involvement and commitment, while 'it' acts as a forward-pointing reference. Speakers use 'we' to promote collectivity, inclusivity and shared identity, as evidenced by Emilinda et al.'s (2022) research on Donald Trump's use of 'we' to align himself with

the American people. Similarly, 'our' and 'us' foster a sense of unity and inclusiveness. Demonstrative references 'this' and 'that' act as pointers to specific goals, with 'this' also serving as a temporal and referential marker, conveying immediacy. The determiner 'the' emphasises specificity, concreteness, distinctiveness, and familiarity with an event or time. Additionally, the additive conjunction 'and' connects ideas, highlighting the continuity of actions. This aligns with the findings of Yurikayani et al. (2024) and Tafuli et al. (2023), who observed that conjunctions contribute to logical coherence within texts. An interesting finding from the data is the use of 'and' not only to connect ideas but also to create contrast, representing a unique communicative function.

Conclusion

This study has investigated how Ghanaian presidents use grammatical cohesive devices in their Independence Day speeches to construct national identity. The analysis revealed three significant thematic areas, in line with Wodak et al.'s (2009) framework for national identity construction: the shared political past, political present, and political future. The shared political past was evoked through cohesive devices emphasising Ghana's historical journey, connecting it to ancient Ghana and its significant role in Africa's anti-colonial struggle. In addressing the political present, the speeches reflected ongoing challenges and achievements, including Ghana's commitment to democracy, the fight against corruption, and the collective responsibility to address pressing issues such as illegal mining and environmental degradation. Looking toward the political future, presidents projected a vision of progress centred on hard work and youth empowerment. The study found that grammatical cohesive devices were consistently employed to promote national unity regardless of the president in office. Among these, demonstrative references were the most frequently used, while ellipsis was the least employed. The frequent use of inclusive pronouns such as 'we,' 'our,' and 'us' underscored the presidents' deliberate effort to construct a collective identity. Through these cohesive devices, Ghanaian presidents reaffirm their commitment to fostering a sense of national identity that unites all citizens under a shared vision for the country's past, present, and future.

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