



A Textual Analysis of Ellen Johnson Sirleaf Oslo's, December 10th, 2011, Nobel Lecture

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Abstract - This paper deals with the textual analysis of Ellen Johnson Sirleaf Oslo's, December 10th, 2011, Nobel Lecture, focusing notably on the three types of Themes: topical, interpersonal and textual. The methodology adopted for the analysis of the discourse is the mixed method approach, which is actually the combination of both quantitative and qualitative linguistic data. The discourse is therefore divided up into analyzable units called clause or a linguistic unit in which the experiential, the interpersonal and the textual meanings can be actualized simultaneously. The quantitative description of Theme types uncovers that the discourse contains 165 clauses, that is, the same number of topical themes. The thematized tokens are *people, women, call for action, democracy, I*, which are at the center of message of the former President of Liberia. As regards interpersonal Themes, they have served to convey meanings related to respect and affection whereas theme markedness has emphasized some pertinent circumstances which have clarified the exact context of the text. The logico-semantic explication of the discourse is achieved through textual Themes. Such a thematization has clarified the author's crucial meanings in terms of feminist thoughts.

Keywords: Themes, mixed methods, tokens, discourse, feminist thoughts.

Résumé - Ce travail de recherche porte sur l'analyse textuelle du discours de Prix Nobel d'Ellen Johnson Sirleaf du 10 décembre 2011 à Oslo, mettant notamment l'accent sur les trois types de Thèmes: topicaux, interpersonnels and textuels. Le travail utilise l'approche de la méthode mixte qui est en fait l'intégration des données linguistiques qualitatives et quantitatives. Le discours est par conséquent divisé en unité d'analyse linguistique appelée proposition ou une unité linguistique dans laquelle les significations expérientielles, interpersonnelles et textuelles peuvent être réalisées de façon simultanée. La description quantitative des types de Thèmes révèle que le discours contient 165 propositions, c'est-à-dire, le même nombre de Thèmes actuels. Les éléments les plus thématisés sont *les gens, les femmes, l'appel à l'action, la démocratie, moi*, qui sont au centre du message de l'ancienne Présidente du Liberia. En ce qui concerne les Thèmes interpersonnels, ils ont servi à communiquer des significations relatives au respect et l'affection tandis que les Thèmes marqués ont situé le texte dans son contexte précis. Le développement logico-sémantique du discours est réalisé à travers les Thèmes textuels. Une telle Thématisation a mis en exergue les significations essentielles que l'auteure du texte a voulu communiquer en matière de pensées féministes.

Mots clés : Thèmes, méthode mixte, éléments linguistiques, discours, pensées féministes.



INTRODUCTION

The election of Ellen Johnson Sirleaf as the President of Liberia and the first woman to be elected as President of an African country, on 23 November 2005, was an event of international caliber. Even age-old democracies like those of France and the United States of America have not yet achieved such an exploit as regards gender equality or women's promotion. Entrusting a woman with the destiny of a whole country is the most eloquent way to implement women's rights. This is not maybe commented as appropriate. It is, however, worth noting that Africa has given a lesson of democracy to the rest of the world through Sirleaf's election as President. Researchers have concentrated a lot of attention on her discourse, surely in order to decode what her position means for her and for women in general, and how she has constructed some realities.

Adegoju (2012) analyses Johnson's discourse from a rhetorical perspective and contends that she uses rhetoric strategies to manipulate the Liberian people. Put another way, she is only motivated by vote-catching or selfish ambitions, which is somehow a biased argument. For, a President is a leader whose responsibility is, among other things, to give political orientations, to fix clear objectives, to clarify threats and opportunities. The best way to do this is through words or discourse. Katamba (2022) does a different analysis though based on the same theory, that is, rhetoric. He concludes that the former President of Liberia uses language to consolidate power and democracy. Being the first woman to lead a country which has gone through hard moments of tribal civil wars, she must construct positive feelings and ideologies via oratorical devices. Actually, she has to achieve reconciliation following the nation's decade-long civil war. Adebimpe's (2019) study is a qualitative and quantitative survey text analytical research, utilizing inaugural speeches as primary data and literature in the field of political discourse as secondary data. Basing his analysis on the systemic functional and the critical discourse analysis theories, the researcher comes up with the view that the speeches communicated the messages of the leaders with regard to their sociocultural and sociopolitical reality.

This study suggests an analysis of Sirleaf's Nobel Lecture using the systemic functional approach, notably the textual metafunction level of language use. The postulate behind the analysis is that the thematic choices made by the ex-President can reveal her main feminist thoughts, the Nobel Price being used as a platform to address gender issues. At this level of analysis, language is viewed as message conveyed through the three kinds of Themes: topical, interpersonal and textual.



1. Theoretical Background

1.1. *The Grammar of Textual Meaning: Theme*

The grammar of textual meaning is about clause as message (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2004). Here, clause means a unit in which the interpersonal, the experiential and the textual meanings can be combined and realized simultaneously. When language is studied as message, the accent is put on “the level of organization of the clause which enables the clause to be packaged in ways which make it effective given its purpose and its context” (Eggins, 1999: 274). This form of organization exists in all languages, but thematic organization varies from one language to another. In English the clause is divided into two parts: Theme and Rheme. The Theme is the component which functions as the point of departure of the message whereas the Rheme is the remainder of the message or the part in which the Theme is developed.

There are three kinds of Themes (Eggins, 1994): a topical Theme is the component of the clause which has a Transitivity function such as actor, behavior, sensor, carrier, circumstantial elements (place, time, etc.). As far as the Interpersonal Theme is concerned, it is the component of the message to which a Mood value can be ascribed: finite (in interrogative mood) and adjuncts (vocative, mood, comment, polarity). Finally, a Textual Theme is the part of the clause which has a cohesive role such as continuity adjuncts and conjunctive adjuncts.

Systemicists argue that there is another level of thematic organization called Theme Markedness and Unmarkedness which are essential in the description of language as message. An unmarked Theme is characterized as a “typical” or “usual” Theme whereas a marked Theme signifies simply “atypical” or “unusual”. In other words, an unmarked Theme is a Theme which corresponds to the Mood elements such as Subject, Finite, Predicator, WH elements. As regards a marked Theme, it is an element of the clause which is equivalent to any other constituents from the Mood system. It is usually a circumstantial element.

2. Methods

The methodology adopted for this work is the mixed or the integrative research (Gunasekare, 2015; Creswell, 2015) the main principle of which is the integration or combination of both qualitative and quantitative data. This method is more and more used in discourse analysis (Djimet, 2022). It consists in selecting a discourse or a text usually on the qualitative basis and identifying linguistic features using

quantitative principles. Here, the principle is applied to Sirleaf's Nobel lecture, focusing the analysis on textual constituents of the clause as message. The different types of Themes are pinpointed in the text divided up into clauses, and meticulous statistics are ascribed to theme, so as to have an exact number of their occurrence. This facilitates the interpretation of the findings.

3. Results

Table 1. recapitulates Theme distribution in the discourse.

Theme types	Numbers	Total	Percentage
Textual	24, 25, 28, 37, 48, 50, 52, 53, 55 56, 58, 60, 61, 63, 65, 67, 68, 70, 71, 72, 75, 77, 78, 80, 84, 88, 89, 93, 95, 96, 100, 103, 107, 112, 113, 115, 118, 121, 124, 125, 126, 128, 134, 141, 147, 148, 150, 163, 165	49	29.69%
Interpersonal	1, 5, 8, 21, 35, 48 39, 64, 67, 79, 86, 87,109, 116, 128, 129, 137, 153, 165	19	11.51%
Topical	1 ... 165	165	100%
Total		165	100%

The above table highlights the occurrence of Theme types in the discourse. It contains 165 topical Themes in 165/165 clauses (100%), the principle being that each clause must have a topical Theme. The table displays an important number of textual Themes, meaning that the text is profoundly written, that is, ideas are well developed through enhancement, elaboration and extension conjunctions. Furthermore, the table reveals that interpersonal Themes are used 19/165 times, representing 11.51%. This highlights some probabilities and some formal address terms aimed at clarifying interpersonal meanings related to respect and affection.

Table 2 summarizes the occurrence of topical Themes, and particularly it identifies the thematized tokens.

Table 2. Distribution of thematized tokens

Theme	Number	Total	Percentage
I	2, 3, 5, 10, 11, 17, 22, 58, 103, 107, 108, 125, 134, 135, 147, 162, 163	17	10.30
Women	1, 16, 25, 29, 35, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 74, 76, 80, 81, 82, 102, 110, 117, 119, 140	20	12.12
People worldwide	4, 9, 15, 20, 21, 32, 33, 46, 47, 50, 52, 55, 60, 61, 62, 65, 66, 67, 68, 115, 124, 126, 131, 139, 142, 143, 144, 145, 146, 148, 149, 161	32	19.39
Women's life	54, 56, 57	3	1.81



Call for being and action	104, 105, 106, 109, 120, 121, 122	7	4.24
place	6, 36, 37, 83, 91, 129	6	3.63
Time	85, 101, 130	3	1.81
Struggle and sacrifices/ Progress	18, 23, 53, 63, 112, 113, 114, 116, 132, 133, 136, 137, 138, 150, 151, 152	16	9.69
Circumstance other than place and time	8, 12, 19, 24, 30, 48, 75, 141	8	4.84
Right / laws/ Document/light/ /Democracy	28, 77, 79, 84, 93, 94, 96, 118, 154, 155, 156, 157, 158, 159	14	8.48
Rape/violence etc	72, 73, 78, 95	4	2.42
Prize, award	26, 160	2	1.21
Any other thing	7, 13, 14, 27, 31, 34, 43, 44, 45, 49, 51, 59, 64, 69, 70, 71, 86, 87, 88, 89, 90, 92, 97, 98, 99, 100, 111, 123, 127, 128, 153, 164, 165	33	20
TOTAL	1, ... 165	165	100

A glance at table 2 above allows to notice that *people* is used 32/165 as Theme (19.39%); that *any other thing* (*my journey, it, mine, history, there, the windows of closed chambers, etc.*) is thematized 33/165 times (20%); that *women* occurs 20/165 times as Theme (12.12%); that *I* appears 17/165 in thematic position (10.30%); and that *rights, laws* and *documents* are used 14/165 times (8.48%). Some circumstances of place and time are also accentuated through 8/165 Themes (4.84%). These statistics give an exact idea about the message of the discourse.

Table 3 below synthesizes Theme markedness in the text.

Table 3. Theme markedness

Topical themes	Number	Total	Percentage
Marked	1, 8, 12, 13, 15, 19, 27, 28, 30, 43, 48, 75, 83, 85, 91, 92, 101, 130, 141, 148	20	12.1
Unmarked	2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 and any remaining numbers which are not listed in the marked column	164	87.9

Twenty Themes over one hundred and sixty-five (20/165) are marked, which means that the discourse has been consciously prepared and that specific circumstances needed to be emphasized to convey a particular message regarding the meaning of the Nobel Prize for the prizewinner and for women in general. The highlighted circumstances have contributed to make the message relevant and precisely situated in a particular context.

4. Discussion and Interpretation of the Findings

The quantitative description of Theme patterns has uncovered 165 clauses and the same number of topical Themes, each clause containing necessarily a topical Theme. Textual Themes rank second with a number of 49/165, representing 29.69% whereas interpersonal Themes occur 19/165 times, corresponding to 11.51%. This, quantitatively, means that the author of the discourse is very keen about the coherent construction of the message in terms of elaboration, extension and enhancement, ensuring the logico-semantic development of the text. Put another way, the message would not mean what it means without re-saying, addition or variation of meanings, comparison or causal relationship, etc. In the discourse under analysis, coherence is particularly achieved through items such as *and, but, as, that, for, to which, if, so, and as, however, although, to whom, when, that only*, in clauses (24, 25, 28, 37, 48, 50, 52, 53, 55, 56, 58, 60, 61, 63, 65, 67, 68, 70, 71, 72, 75, 77, 78, 80, 84, 88, 89, 93, 95, 96, 100, 103, 107, 112, 113, 115, 118, 121, 124, 125, 126, 128, 134, 141, 147, 148, 150, 163, 165).

There is a diversity of thematized tokens in the discourse, the most thematized ones being *my journey, it, mine, history, there, the windows of closed chambers*. These are used 33/165 times as topical Themes, that is 20%, in clauses (7, 13, 14, 27, 31, 34, 43, 44, 45, etc). It is through such items that the prizewinner describes the main experiences related to hope and challenges. Actually, there are encouraging changes as regards women's rights. This is exemplified in clauses such as *my journey was supported by my many teachers and mentors who guided me to a world opened up by the enlightenment of higher education, and which led to my conviction that access to quality education is the social justice issue of our time* (49, 50, 51, 52, 53). But there are also important obstacles which forestall women to benefit from economic, social and political opportunities, which justifies call for action and collaborative efforts expressed via the thematization of *people* in clauses (67, 68, 115, 124, 126, 131, 139, 142), and *I* in clauses (2, 3, 5, 10, 11, 17, 22, 58, 103, 107, 108, 125, 134). Indeed, people must join energy in denouncing, combating all forms of injustice towards women. Actually, the thematized items are the carriers, actors and sensors as regards the implementation of positive actions and ideas or ideologies concerning women.

Moreover, the author of the discourse puts the accent on the rule of law through democratic principles in clauses such as *around the world, slowly, international law and an awareness of human rights are illuminating dark corners, in schools, in courts, in the marketplace. The windows of closed chambers where men and women have been unspeakably abused are being opened, and the light is coming in. Democracies, even if tentatively, are*



taking root in lands unaccustomed to freedom (91, 92, 93, 94). Thus, women's emancipation is a social construction, and documents play a significant role in this process. In fact, actions must first take the form of laws and texts before being fulfilled or accomplished. However, the prizewinner highlights some messages which convey meanings about *sacrifice, struggle* and *progress* in clauses (18, 23, 53, 63, 112, 113, 114, 116, 132, 133, 136, 137, 138, 150, 151, 152), which are interrelated and necessary codes. In other words, women's plight will not change if these notions are not well understood, for femininity is engraved in culture.

The use of interpersonal Themes has clarified the relationship between the prizewinner and the audience whom she has treated with due respect and affection through formal address terms, carefully expressing her judgements related to the probability of certain things happening or not. They occur 19/165 times, equivalent to 11.51%. *May we all resolve to fulfill that duty your majesties, my sisters and my brothers, surely there is no place for girls and women to be beaten and abused* (21, 64, 86) are among other clauses which illustrate the thematized interpersonal meanings.

The preparedness of the discourse is achieved via Theme markedness. The analysis exudes that 20/165 (12.1%) are marked, that is, some essential circumstances are emphasized in clauses such as *today, across the globe, women, and also men, from all walks of life are finding the courage to say, loudly and firmly, in a thousand languages; from this global platform, I want to speak for a moment of Liberia and to Liberians; on November 8th, we concluded our second successive free and fair presidential and legislative elections, consolidating Liberia's transformation into a stable, democratic nation* (101, 129, 130). These thematic items have contextualized the discourse and contributed in clarifying relevant circumstances.

CONCLUSION

Ellen Johnson Sirleaf Oslo's, December 10th, 2011, Nobel Lecture has been carefully analyzed on the basis of the systemic functional linguistics theory, taking precisely into account the textual level of language. The three types of Themes have been meticulously and quantitatively described and analyzed. The analysis reveals that the use of topical Themes has emphasized relevant tokens such as *people, I, democracy, rights, law, women, call for action, struggle and sacrifices*, etc. which are actually the main actors, sensors and carriers in the struggle for women's emancipation. Some of these tokens are part of the solution whereas others are part of obstacles. It is therefore paramount for the author of the discourse to have this mind in order to construct new attitudes. A few interpersonal meanings regarding

respect and affection are also actualized in the discourse via interpersonal Themes. Moreover, the prizewinner has prioritized meanings related to probability expressed through the use of modal items in thematic position. Finally, textual items have ensured the logico-semantic development of the message, and theme markedness has contributed to contextualize it, demonstrating a conscious preparedness of the discourse. The prizewinner has clearly taken advantage of the Nobel platform to address important issue related to injustice towards the female gender. Thus, Sirleaf's main feminist thoughts are basically about equality, justice and freedom or democracy which require efforts, actions and patience.

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