Leadership Through Discursive Strategies in Abiy Ahmed's Welcoming Speech at the 35th Ordinary Session of the African Union Assembly

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ABSTRACT: Diplomatic language and political discourse have always been inseparable and have wielded effects in terms of power, control, and domination. These effects depended on how language was used and for what purpose. The article stems from the premise that the use of specific strategies, particularly discursive strategies, enables users to convey power and leadership. Consequently, this article analyzes the political discourse, specifically the diplomatic language, used in the welcoming speech delivered by Ethiopia's Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed at the African Union (AU) Assembly. The analysis is conducted based on Reisigl and Wodak's Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA) theory, focusing on their five discursive strategies. The goal is to uncover the discursive strategies employed by Abiy Ahmed to achieve unity and, through unity, convey Africa's power in general, in the face of foreign intrusion, as well as Ethiopia's power specifically. The analysis reveals that the discursive strategy of predication predominated throughout the speech, both individually and in combination. Predication was employed to showcase notions of power, positivity, independence, and sovereignty of Ethiopia. By utilizing these discursive strategies, Abiy emphasizes the importance of collaborative efforts to overcome any obstacles that arise in Africa.

KEYWORDS: PM Abiy Ahmed; discursive strategies; leadership; Africa; Ethiopia

1. Introduction

Power has been defined in various ways [1–3]. Consequently, there are two types of power: hard power and soft power. In both types, powerful individuals exert dominance and control. The elites also play a crucial role in wielding power, primarily through their control over various resources, particularly financial ones. Thus, having a firm grasp on finances allows one to achieve almost any objective. One such goal is the control of media. Through media, the elites can influence how events are reported, shaping the audience's perception of a particular event or situation. This control of media also helps the elites in influencing the general population's views and beliefs [4]. Furthermore, the elites can utilize written or audiovisual media to make decisions, issue statements, and promote specific ideologies within society. The concept of elitism is not solely confined to wealthy individuals or politicians, but it also applies to diplomats. Diplomatic personnel possess power of the soft type, which is different from

physical force [5]. Their power lies in the language they use, known as diplomatic language or the language of diplomacy [6]. Diplomatic language alone cannot foster diplomatic relations between countries unless the countries are already on good terms with each other, and vice versa. Therefore, the crafters of international diplomacy, the diplomats, play a crucial role in establishing good diplomatic relations. A diplomat's command and knowledge of language, including speech delivery, speaking, reading, writing, and listening in foreign languages like English, are essential skills [7]. Additionally, diplomats must possess strong interpretation abilities to discern the nuances of language during diplomatic meetings and encounters [5]. In essence, a diplomat cannot effectively achieve the desired diplomatic effect without comprehensive knowledge of the intricacies of the designated language.

In this introduction, it is crucial to provide a brief overview of previous studies related to the topic and field of study. Firstly, [8] conducted a critical discourse analysis of Abiy Ahmed's second inaugural speech to explore how his language usage facilitates communication. The study aimed to analyze the language used, identifying the socio-cognitive components supporting communication and the critical discourse analysis elements present in the text. The research methodology and theoretical framework employed in this study were CDA, along with the socio-cognitive model [9] and Van Dijk's multidimensional critical discourse analysis as analytical frameworks. The findings revealed that lexical words, pronouns, figures of speech, and expressions were used to establish unity, the dominant ideology, at the micro-level of analysis. The macrostructure analysis also demonstrated the creation of subjects and macro structures to showcase unified ideology. Cognitive tools such as authority, evidentiality, polarization, and victimhood were utilized to generate discourse on unity, with the in-groups being portrayed positively and the outsiders negatively. Hence, according to [8], the language used aimed to construct a discourse of consistency, with Abiy utilizing history as a primary unifying rhetorical tool to convince the audience and attain, exert, and maintain power. Similarly, [10] conducted a critical discourse analysis of Abiy Ahmed's language usage, employing Fairclough's notion of CDA. The article examined Abiy's political rhetoric advocating for the unity of the Oromo and Amhara ethnic groups, redefined as "Oromara". The goals of the study were to identify the rhetorical tools and discourse techniques employed in the integration of Oromara, analyze the discursive construction of the groups' integration, explain the intended features of the interview texts, and clarify how rhetoric about politics, power, and ideology combined to reinforce the groups' integration. The interview conducted by Abiy with an Amhara television reporter on November 13, 2017, was purposefully selected, converted into textual form, and thematically examined. The findings of [10] indicated that the text utilized rhetorical elements such as simile, repetition, parallelism and comparison, metaphor, and metonymy. The interview employed macro-discursive methods of accommodating, normalizing, constructing, and genericizing. The interview text conveyed both negative (hostility, revenge, detestation, skepticism, conflict, and vengeance) and positive (integration, trust, forgiveness, peace, and admiration) signals. The negative adjectives depicted group solidarity as a threat to the political system, while the positive descriptors emphasized the importance of Oromara speech in bringing about systemic change in the country.

Moreover, [11], in a similar vein to [8], analyzed the first inaugural speech of Abiy Ahmed using CDA, specifically employing [1] Three Dimensional Framework of CDA to examine the political discourse of Ethiopia's Prime Minister. The study by [11] primarily

focused on discussing the alterations in political discourse brought about by Abiy Ahmed's speech. The examination was mainly qualitative, but a quantitative keyword analysis was also conducted to support the qualitative analysis. The findings of [11] revealed that Abiy Ahmed made significant modifications in political rhetoric compared to his predecessors and the Tigray People Liberation Front-led Ethiopian People Revolutionary Democratic Front (TPLF/EPRDF). The discourse shifts were evident in the representation of Ethiopian heritage, identity, and pluralism. While the TPLF/EPRDF advocated for a country of identities, Abiy aspired to a country of ideas. Similarly, [12] utilized Fairclough's CDA, but with a different approach. Previous study focused on lexical choices and conducted a comparative analysis of the speeches of two Ethiopian leaders: Meles Zenawi's inaugural address and P.M. Abiy Ahmed's address. The analysis aimed to identify the linguistic elements that constituted the conventional discursive elements of the two speeches [12]. The study concluded that the discursive technique employed was sensationalization. In contrast to the previous studies, another study conducted a Media Discourse Analysis using the tool of framing [13]. The objective was to evaluate the framing of P.M. Abiy Ahmed's remarks in the publicly owned Ethiopian Herald and the privately owned The Reporter. The prime minister's speeches served as the primary data for this study. The findings indicated that the Ethiopian Herald covered the prime minister's address in alignment with government strategy and policy, whereas The Reporter's coverage was negative.

2. Method and Material

The present article adopts a qualitative research design, which is a non-experimental type. It is a descriptive study that aims to describe the actions, feelings, achievements, and other traits of a group of subjects [14]. Descriptive research focuses on describing the characteristics of existing phenomena [15]. Therefore, the design of this article is qualitative, and the researcher examines specific language meanings and insights within a particular situational context [16]. Qualitative analysis is utilized in this article to reveal the profound meaning of Abiy Ahmed's Welcoming Speech at the 35th Ordinary Session of the African Union Assembly, specifically in relation to how power and leadership are maintained through language use. The instrument of analysis is derived from the theory of Discourse Historical Approach (DHA) [18, 19], particularly their five discursive strategies. According to [18], when conducting a DHA analysis, the material or text being examined and the analyst's perspective must be transparent. The method should also provide an explanation for why specific readings and assessments of certain discursive events are preferred over others.

The approach of [18] is based on linguistic and hermeneutic social practices, focusing on how these behaviors transmit and perpetuate ideology in different social organizations. Their goal is to "demystify" the dominance of specific discourses by deciphering the ideologies that establish, perpetuate, or challenge dominance [18]. To better understand these concepts, [19] defines a strategy as an intentional plan of practices adopted to achieve a specific social, political, psychological, or linguistic goal [19]. The five specified strategies, which are exemplified in the Table 1, are nomination, predication, argumentation, perspectivation, and mitigation & intensification.

<p style="text-align:center">**Table 1.** Discursive strategies [18].</p>

Discursive Strategies	Objectives	Devices
Nomination	Discursive construction of social actors, objects, phenomena, events, processes and actions.	1. Membership categorization devices, deictics. 2. Tropes such as metaphors, metonymies, personification. 3. Verbs and nouns used to denote processes and actions, etc.
Predication	Discursive characterization of social actors, objects, phenomena, events, processes and actions (e.g., positively or negatively)	Stereotypical, negative or positive traits (adjectives, prepositional phrases, infinitive participial) nouns/pronouns, collocations, comparisons, presuppositions, implicatures, conditionals, triplets.
Argumentation	Persuading/ justifying and questioning of addressees in terms of the validity of specific claims of truth normative rightness.	Topoi (personal opinion/idea, formal or more content-related) Fallacies (faulty reasoning)
Perspectivization, framing, or discourse representation	Positioning the speaker' or writer's point of view and expressing involvement/distance.	Deictics, direct, indirect or free indirect speech, quotation marks, discourse markers/ particles.
Mitigation and Intensification	Modifying the illocutionary force of utterances in respect to their epistemic or deontic status of the utterances	Diminutives or augmentatives (Modality), tag questions, subjunctive, hesitations, vague expressions, etc. Indirect speech acts (e.g., question instead of assertion). Verbs of saying, feeling, thinking.

3. Results and Discussion

The analysis of the speech is conducted meticulously, starting with the topics addressed and then proceeding to identify and interpret the discursive strategies with ample examples. The speech of Abiy Ahmed encompasses four main issues. Before each topic, Abiy Ahmed would begin with a salutation to the attendees. The four topics covered in his speech are food security and agriculture, the UN's inequitable treatment of Africa, the international representation of Africa and the media, and peace and security. These topics are highlighted through various themes, with unity being the most prominent.

In his speech, Abiy Ahmed emphasizes the importance of unity in combating foreign interference in the country, whether related to health or other matters. Unity is exemplified in statements such as "Land of Origins, our reunion, our Union, our natural assets, our people, our farms, our theme, our aim, our collective… extraordinary efforts, collectively" [20]. The discursive strategy of nomination is employed to stress identity, as seen in the phrase "us Africans" [20]. Identity is also expressed through the use of pronouns in the strategy of predication, as seen in the phrase "our collective survival" [20]. Abiy Ahmed draws upon collective life experience to support his statements, as demonstrated in the example "we have also learned" [20]. The discursive construction of Ethiopia as the land of ancient civilization is conveyed through the example "Land of Origins," employing the strategy of nomination. Nomination is further used in the example "...his Excellency president Cyril Ramaphosa" [20]. Argumentation is employed through cause-and-effect reasoning and listing, as evidenced in the statement "Covid-19 caused the disruption of the Union" [20]. Abiy Ahmed also lists the reasons for their struggle against the human cost, stating, "an inequitable system of vaccine distribution, arbitrary travel bans, border closure, lockdowns, and misinformation about the value of vaccines" [20].

Perspectivation is achieved through discourse markers such as "let me, let me take the opportunity" [20], "welcome" [20], and "I wish" [20], which express the speaker's perspective or feelings. Nomination is employed at the beginning of the speech sequence, particularly through the discursive construction of social actors.

"Your Excellency, President of the Republic of…and incoming Chairperson of.
Your Excellency,
Chairperson of the African Union Commission,
Excellencies Heads of State and Government,
Distinguished Ministers,
Commissioners,
Excellencies Ambassadors,
Invited Guests" [20].

Predication is employed, using negative adjectives to describe actions related to Covid-19, such as "inequitable, struggle, arbitrary flows, acute food insecurity" [20]. However, positive nouns are also used, such as "leadership, exemplary leadership, and ambitious plans" [20]. Additionally, triplets are used, emphasizing cooperation, collaboration, and survival, highlighting the unity among Africans. Nomination is used positively in slogans like "The Africa We Want" [20]. This implies that Africans have created the continent of their dreams, emphasizing their independence, voice, and power.

Argumentation is utilized through the use of supportive listing and positive vocabulary such as "undertake, transform, sustain, fulfill, to birth, and implement," action verbs that support Abiy Ahmed's viewpoint. Mitigation and intensification are also employed through modal language, as in "will require us to make extraordinary efforts collectively", emphasizing the necessity of unity for Africa to prosper. Argumentation is observed in content-related slogans, such as "our theme for 2022 is nutrition and food security". Statistics are used to support the idea, as in "increase by over 60% as effects of Covid-19", illustrating the reasons behind Africa's financial crisis. Triplets are used to describe floods, droughts, and desert locusts, factors contributing to the decrease in food and nutrition in Africa. Predication is employed using prepositions to convey independence and power, as in "without reliance on external assistance... without reliance on charity". Argumentation and predication are combined through content-related vocabulary, framing events such as "two years disruption, over the past two years, over the past year, in the past two years" [20], indicating the duration of Africa's struggles in finance, health, and nutrition.

Nomination is used with process verbs to illustrate Ethiopia's efforts to improve its situation, such as "made substantial investments, control and manage production factors, production of 20 million quintals of irrigated wheat for our farmers on over 500,000 acres... 60 billion birr income". The mention of "our farmers" is crucial as it signifies Ethiopia's reliance on its national citizens and workforce for progress, implying the absence of foreign labor. This highlights Ethiopia's dependence on its own people for growth and development. Furthermore, the phrase "will in the imaginable future" employs personal topoi, indicating Abiy Ahmed's vision and belief in the collective power of Ethiopian citizens to secure and self-sustain the country. Opposing processes are contrasted in "deforestation, afforestation, and forestation", used as triplets in the discursive strategies of nomination and predication, highlighting the measures taken to reduce drought and increase green lands in Africa, particularly in Ethiopia.

Slogans are employed, as in "under the slogan Green Legacy", demonstrating that agriculture is part of the government's agenda to expand green areas in the country. Modality is utilized to express Abiy Ahmed's vision as a personal topoi, as in "we will not only meet our national target, but plan to surpass the target by reaching 25 billion" [20]. Such modality is conveyed through predication, mitigation, and intensification, providing evidence of the government's sustainability plan.

Moreover, conditionals and modality are employed to express vision and the realization of sustainability, as seen in "if we can collaborate, we will be able to guarantee our citizens the basic necessities of life". This usage is significant as it reveals Abiy's plans not only for Ethiopia but also for Africa, aiming for prosperity and financial prominence. Modality, specifically the modality of obligation, is used in phrases like "must and needs to" to express a personal opinion. This use leaves no room for choice for the audience, which includes the members of the African Union and the spectators watching the speech. The use of modality is crucial as it outlines Abiy Ahmed's perspective on Africa's global strength, stating that "Africa's voice on the world stage needs to be heard loud and clear. Full stop, Africa must also be represented on important international bodies" [20]. These lines are significant not only due to the use of modality but also the collocation of "loud and clear" and the metaphor of the "world stage". Through nomination and predication, these discursive strategies highlight that Africa's voice must be heard in order to gain prominence worldwide. The metaphor implies that Africa is a significant actor and a key player in the world, with an essential role to fulfill.

Moreover, there is the use of predication through a sequence of negative adjectives in the example:

> "Africa is often portrayed in the international media negatively. The endless representation as a continent troubled by civil wars, hunger, corruption, greed, disease and poverty is demeaning and dehumanizing and likely driven by a calculated strategy and agenda" [20].

This sequence is significant as it reveals that the negative portrayal of Africa in the media is not coincidental but rather a systematic and calculated strategy. This stereotypical act serves a dual purpose: providing misinformation about Africa to the world and influencing how Africans perceive themselves in a negative light. Pragmatically, it implies that whoever is behind this agenda aims to undermine Africa from within, as the destruction of a country often starts internally. However, Abiy Ahmed presents a decisive strategy against this by emphasizing the importance of Africans telling their own stories and shaping their own narratives. This ensures that Africans can restore the positive image of their continent, which has been tarnished by the international media. Abiy highlights the need for this to be the utmost priority at the African Union (AU), emphasizing the idea of African unity. He proposes the establishment of an African Union Continental Media House [20] to support this objective.

Furthermore, Abiy indirectly calls upon the United Nations (UN) to fulfill its international responsibility towards Africa. He implies that the current UN system is outdated and fails to reflect the contemporary global reality. He criticizes the lack of equity in terms of international representation, stating that Africa is underrepresented and discriminated against within the UN system. Abiy suggests reforming and revitalizing the United Nations to address this issue. Strong verbs are used to denote action, such as "provide authoritative news, promote

our collective agenda, and offer opportunities for Pan African voices to be heard" [20]. This triplet, utilized through predication, serves as a direct call to combat negative news about Africa and present accurate information about this prosperous continent.

After addressing three crucial topics, Abiy Ahmed moves on to the final topic of his speech: peace and security in Africa. He calls for addressing the "new and complex problems" that challenge the unity and sovereignty of the continent. Abiy supports his arguments with personal and real-life experiences from Ethiopia, particularly emphasizing law and order. He lists positive actions as evidence of his commitment to implementing law and order, such as "implement unilateral withdrawal, use necessary force, release high-profile suspects, create a conducive peaceful environment, and launch an inclusive national dialogue". Lastly, Abiy stresses the necessity of cooperation and support from "our African brothers and sisters" for the existence and continuity of Ethiopia as part of the continent. He quotes the saying, "United we stand, divided we fall" [20], employing the discursive device of perspectivation.

In conclusion, Abiy ends his speech by providing real-life examples of Africans standing proud and tall, highlighting elements such as steadfast unity, a substantial percentage of youth, dynamic drive for African prosperity, the free trade agreement, and increased intra-African trade. He emphasizes that these elements must be accompanied by the free movement of people and investments and self-reliance to secure and boost Africa's Renaissance. African identity is also highlighted through the nomination strategy, emphasizing the creation of a strong cultural identity, common heritage, values, and ethics. This can only be achieved through the cooperation of the African Union, which in turn enables resistance against external forces seeking to divide and undermine the African continent.

As a final example of how Ethiopia successfully resisted destructive external forces, Abiy highlights that "many fellow Africans joined the great Ethiopia Diaspora Homecoming" [20]. This act effectively challenged and demonstrated to the world that Ethiopia is a safe and culturally rich tourist destination. This statement implies that if Ethiopia could overcome external divisions, then other African countries could also achieve unity by joining forces against foreign powers. Abiy concludes his speech by employing the discursive strategy of mitigation and intensification through verbs of saying. He thanks the people of Ethiopia, warmly welcomes them, expresses gratitude to the African Union, and concludes with words of blessings for Ethiopia and Africa. The occurrences of discursive strategies in the speech are summarized in the Table 2.

Table 2. Number of occurences of the discursive strategies.

Discursive Strategy	Times
Predication	7
Nomination	6
Argumentation	5
Mitigation and Intensification	3
Perspectivation	2

4. Conclusions

The analysis reveals that, in terms of individual strategies, predication is primarily used, followed by nomination, argumentation, mitigation and intensification, and lastly, the perspectivation strategy. Predication not only dominates in the individual use of these strategies but also has significance in relation to the combined use of strategies, especially in pairs such as argumentation and predication, nomination and predication, and mitigation and

intensification with predication. This indicates that predication is the most prominent discursive strategy in Abiy Ahmed's speech. Predication is employed to convey notions of power, positivity, independence, and sovereignty of Ethiopia. Therefore, the main message of the speech, conveyed through the use of these five discursive strategies, is that African unity stems from the collective cooperation of its countries and their collaboration with one another, leading to their continuous survival and the flourishing of the continent. Abiy emphasizes the importance of working together to overcome any obstacles that arise in Africa.

Competing Interest

No competing interest has been identified.

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