



Leveraging Political Messaging with Religious Resonance: A Transitivity Analysis of the Easter Address of a Ghanaian President

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ABSTRACT

Religion and politics are inextricably connected through shared values, institutional influence, and historical relationships, culminating in what can be described as *politics in religion* and *religion in politics*. During key religious festivities, political actors deliver messages to the members of the religious community. Thus, the present study employed a Systemic Functional Linguistic (SFL) approach to examine the transitivity choices in the 2021 Easter speech by former President Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo (PNADAA) to reveal the interplay between political messaging and religious resonance. By employing the transitivity pattern of process and participants, the study showed how PNADAA revealed his political and religious ideologies. Material clauses were used to address pressing concerns while at the same time resonating with shared religious beliefs around the themes of hope and the principle of compassion, commitment, and communal welfare. Verbal and relational clauses were used to engender rapport and credibility with the Christian community while echoing religiously inspired motifs of renewal and redemption. With echoes from the religious concepts of faith, perseverance, and endurance, the mental clauses were employed to acknowledge the challenging times while the existential clauses simultaneously blended the religious themes of health and life preservation with the government's commitment to safeguarding public safety during the peak of the Covid-19 pandemic. The study has implications for theorizing the interconnection among discourse, politics, and religion.

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INTRODUCTION

Presidential Easter messages are semi-political and religious genres expected annually by Ghanaians in Christian religious circles. They serve as a resource for political figures to communicate their religious solidarity and to identify with the majority of Christians who celebrate the Easter festivity. Politicians show some level of commitment to principal religious practices and indulge in the celebration of cardinal religious rituals.¹ As a widely known Christian religious festivity, Easter is celebrated to commemorate the resurrection of Jesus Christ. In the celebration of Easter, Christians memorialize Christ, specifically his death, and his resurrection from the dead. The significance of Presidential Easter messages in Ghana is notable, as they serve as a way for political figures to connect with the Christian community during

¹ David Domke and Kevin Coe, *The God Strategy: How Religion Became a Political Weapon in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

this important religious holiday. By acknowledging and participating in Easter celebrations, politicians demonstrate their support for religious practices and show solidarity with the majority Christian population in Ghana. Easter, as a central event in the Christian faith, holds deep meaning for believers as they commemorate the resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is a time for reflection on Christ's sacrifice and the hope that his resurrection brings.

Since the utterances of presidents are conveyed and echoed with greater emphasis than those of other political figures or public officials, it would be fascinating to examine how Presidential Easter messages in Ghana play a dual role in both political and religious contexts.² These messages provide an avenue for political leaders to connect with the Christian community and demonstrate their support for religious practices during this significant holiday.

Given its position as a prominent global religion, Christianity has had a significant impact on the beliefs and behaviours of many politicians throughout history.³ The Easter season is frequently used by politicians as an avenue to establish a connection with the underlying principles of reflection, empathy, compassion, and other values that are linked to this festive period. Against this backdrop, the presidential Easter message has evolved into an annual ritual of political leadership, aiming to inspire faith and galvanize the passion of Christians across Ghana.

Despite the religious and political significance of these messages, they remain underexplored in terms of linguistic analysis, particularly within the framework of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). SFL, a theory that explores how language functions within social contexts, provides a valuable tool for examining the linguistic resources employed in politico-religious communication. The use of transitivity as a theoretical framework in the examination of ideational meaning has the potential to expose covert ideological structures that exist within speeches and intricate language use.⁴ In effect, by applying SFL to analyse presidential Easter messages, underlying linguistic mechanisms used by political actors to convey their messages of religious solidarity and political agenda simultaneously could be uncovered. Thus, there exists a significant research gap in the linguistic analysis of presidential Easter messages in Ghana. By addressing this gap, deeper insights into the interplay between language, politics, and religion in the Ghanaian context could be gained.

A review of the literature on presidential Easter messages in Ghana has shown that linguistic studies on these messages are limited. In the SFL research, transitivity has proven to be an effective tool for linguistic analysis, revealing findings that have helped shape how linguistic choices are used to achieve diverse agendas. In political discourse, Logogye and Ewusi-Mensah show how the dominant use of material processes in former President Nana Addo's inaugural address suggests his intention to actively work on concrete projects for development and policy direction, while the minimal use of existential processes indicates that some socio-economic challenges persist in Ghana.⁵ In the same domain, by employing Halliday's systemic functional linguistics framework, Saragih et al. study the ideologies of potential presidential contenders in Indonesia's 2024 pre-election phase. By analyzing the participants and actions selected by the political actors, the study uncovers distinct leadership ideologies, linguistic styles, and their underlying justifications.⁶

While these studies shed light on how transitivity analysis reveals political ideologies in conventional political speeches, presidential Easter messages require examination through both political and religious discourse frameworks, as they uniquely blend political agenda with religious symbolism. In religious discourse, EL Hadifi focuses on the construction of experiential meanings in Pope Francis'

² Kevin Coe, "The Language of Freedom in the American Presidency, 1933-2006," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 37, no.3(2007):375-98.

³ Africa Christian Professionals Forum, "Church and Politics," LinkedIn Pulse, August 15, 2023, https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/church-politics-acpf-christian-professionals-africa?trk=article-ssr-frontend-pulse_more-articles_related-content-card.

⁴ Geoff Thompson, "From Process to Pattern: Methodological Considerations in Analysing Transitivity in Text," *New Developments in the Study of Ideational Meaning: From Language to Multimodality*, 2008, 17-33.

⁵ Logogye Cynthia and Ewusi-Mensah Lawrence. "Experiential Meaning Construction in Political Discourse: A Transitivity Analysis of the Inaugural Address of Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo, the President of the Republic of Ghana." *European Journal of English Language and Literature Studies* 9, no. 7 (2021): 24-33. <https://ssrn.com/abstract=3953574>.

⁶ Amrin Saragih, Feriyanti Gultom, and Zulfidar Zulfidar, "Ideology and Linguistic Realization of Political Contestation by The Prospective Presidential Candidates of the Republic of Indonesia Pre-2024 Election," in *Proceedings of the 5th International Conference on Innovation in Education, Science, and Culture, ICIESC 2023, 24 October 2023, Medan, Indonesia* (EAI, 2024), <https://doi.org/10.4108/eai.24-10-2023.2342255>.

historical speech during his apostolic journey to Morocco in March, 2019, showing that Pope Francis primarily employs material and mental processes in his speech, emphasizing their significance in conveying lively information and fostering collaboration between Catholics and Muslims.⁷

In literary studies, one observes how transitivity choices play a significant role in the intention of poets and other authors. Owusu et al., studying transitivity in Atukwei Okai's "The Oath of Fontomfrom", show that the extensive choice of material processes indicates that the poet portrayed warfare as involving concrete and physical actions.⁸ Similarly, Ezz-Eddin elucidates the role of transitivity choices in Woolf's "Woolf's Story" and how she articulates her ideologies, experiences, internal emotions, perspectives, and attitudes toward English society.⁹ In other works, Mwinlaaru and Nartey show how transitivity choices in national anthems of former British colonies in Africa reveal the enactment of resistance to promote freedom and decolonization through language and ideologies, providing hope and encouragement to oppressed groups.¹⁰

In the media space, "The Hindu" and the "Washington Post's" August 2022 Reports on the Israeli onslaught on Gaza are studied by Abunahel who reveals that both news media used verbal and material processes to portray Israel as an actor associated with extreme violence, while Palestinians were associated with less violence but described as using extreme violence.¹¹

Based on the insightful findings that transitivity unravels in most disciplines, it would be interesting to see how transitivity leverages the dual role Presidential Easter messages play in both political and religious contexts, serving as a way for political figures to connect with the Christian community. This article conducts a transitivity analysis of PNADAA's 2021 Easter celebration message, elucidating the transitivity choices employed in leveraging political messages and religious imagery, themes, and principles in connecting with diverse audiences.

Christianity and Politics in Ghana

Christianity has played significant roles in Ghana's politics, both during and after colonization, with a strong connection between religion and power. Mission churches during colonization tried to convert locals to Western-style Christianity, leading to the founding of African independent churches, and religion continues to play a pervasive role in contemporary Ghanaian politics.¹² The schools that provided education to the emerging nationalists in Ghana, particularly in the more developed areas such as Accra and Cape Coast, were established by British missionaries before the country's independence. The early nationalist leaders in Ghana, who were predominantly Christians, had received education from these mission schools and maintained strong ties with the Christian churches.¹³

During times of political crises and tensions, the mission denomination churches rely on their intellectual resources to respond to the situation through media statements addressed to the parties involved. Similarly, the Pentecostal/charismatic churches usually organize periods of prayer and fasting to address threats of violence before and after elections. Almost all the leaders who governed Ghana after achieving independence have identified themselves as Christians, occasionally citing their religious beliefs during their time in office.¹⁴ Ghana's constitution prohibits the establishment of political parties based on religion, and none of the nation's political parties overtly emphasize religion in their electoral

⁷ Mohammed EL Hadifi, "Transitivity in Pope Francis' Speech in Morocco: A Systemic Functional Linguistic Analysis," *Integrated Journal for Research in Arts and Humanities* 3, no. 6 (December 5, 2023): 59–67, <https://doi.org/10.55544/ijrah.3.6.7>.

⁸ Edward Owusu et al., "Transitivity in Atukwei Okai's 'The Oath of Fontomfrom,'" *International Journal of Language and Literary Studies* 4, no. 4 (December 29, 2022): 175–201, <https://doi.org/10.36892/ijlls.v4i4.1102>.

⁹ Nermeen Ezz-Eddin, "A Systemic-Functional Grammatical Analysis of Woolf's Story," *Egyptian Journal of Linguistics and Translation* 12, no. 1 (January 1, 2024): 154–73, <https://doi.org/10.21608/ejlt.2023.245385.1045>.

¹⁰ Isaac N. Mwinlaaru and Mark Nartey, "'Free Men We Stand under the Flag of Our Land': A Transitivity Analysis of African Anthems as Discourses of Resistance against Colonialism," *Critical Discourse Studies* 19, no. 5 (September 3, 2022): 556–72, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17405904.2021.1999286>.

¹¹ Mohammed M. A. Abunahel, "Ideology in Portraying the Israeli Onslaught on Gaza in August 2022: A Transitivity Analysis of The Hindu and the Washington Post Reports," *South Asian Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities* 4, no. 2 (April 2, 2023): 63–90, <https://doi.org/10.48165/sajssh.2023.4204>.

¹² Jeffrey Haynes, "Christian Nationalism and Politics in Ghana," *Religions* 14, no. 9 (September 20, 2023): 1202, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14091202>.

¹³ Haynes, "Christian Nationalism and Politics in Ghana."

¹⁴ Johnson Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, "'God Bless Our Homeland Ghana': Religion and Politics in a Post-Colonial African State," in *Trajectories of Religion in Africa* (BRILL, 2014), 165–83, https://doi.org/10.1163/9789401210577_012.

appeals. Nonetheless, this does not deter the two major parties (New Patriotic Party and National Democratic Congress) from seeking the support of religious leaders, both Christian and Muslim, in projecting their political ideologies.¹⁵ This is believed to have strengthened the ties between politics and religion, especially Christianity, in Ghana.

Transitivity

Halliday and Matthiessen argue that language concurrently performs three functions (i.e., metafunctions). The metafunctions comprise ideational, textual, and interpersonal.¹⁶ The theoretical concept of the ideational function, also referred to as the experiential metafunction, within the framework of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), pertains to the encoding of experience and meaning.¹⁷ Bloor and Bloor state “that language serves the purpose of organizing, comprehending, and expressing our perceptions of the world and our own consciousness.”¹⁸ The ideational metafunction can be further categorized into two modes: experiential and logical. The former emphasizes the linguistic expression of ideas and contents, specifically how individuals articulate their experience of their internal consciousness. On the other hand, the latter focuses on the relationship between coordinating, subordinating, and modifying these ideas.¹⁹

Experiential meaning is conveyed through the system of transitivity, or the type of process chosen, which implies the associated participant role and configuration.²⁰ Transitivity, as a prominent aspect of the ideational metafunction, delineates the various types of processes recognized in language and the corresponding structures used to convey them.²¹ The term transitivity is used in a broader sense than in traditional grammar. It essentially represents how meaning is expressed in a clause. Transitivity reflects how speakers encode their mental representation of reality and how they manifest their experience through language usage.²² In terms of ideational meaning, clauses can be categorized into three constituents: Process types, Participant functions, and Circumstances. The concepts of Process, Participant, and Circumstance are semantic categories that explain how phenomena of the real world are represented in linguistic structure in the most general way.²³

Three components constitute what Halliday refers to as the transitivity process:

- a. The specific event or state being described, which is the Process itself.
- b. The entities involved in the process, known as the Participants, such as the actor, behavior, sayers, goal, and senser.
- c. The Circumstances associated with the process, specify the time, manner, place, and reason of the process.

Clauses represent various events and processes, and the transitivity model aims to reveal how the action is performed, who performs the action, and what/who the action is performed upon.²⁴ This makes transitivity a crucial tool in the analysis of experiential representation. Different social structures and values necessitate different patterns of transitivity. Halliday proposes six process categories in his transitivity system. These are Material, Relational, Mental, Behavioral, Verbal, and Existential.²⁵

Material Process

Material processes denote doings and happenings. They encode the notion that an entity A does something that may affect another entity, B (active construction), or what entity A does affects itself (passive construction). The material process involves six categories and subcategories of participants,

¹⁵ Haynes, “Christian Nationalism and Politics in Ghana.”

¹⁶ Michael Alexander Kirkwood. Halliday, *An Introduction to Functional Grammar* (Edward Arnold, 1985).

¹⁷ Halliday, *An Introduction to Functional Grammar*.

¹⁸ Thomas Bloor and Meriel Bloor, *The Functional Analysis of English: A Hallidayan Approach* (Routledge, 2013).

¹⁹ Michael A. K. Halliday, “Linguistic Function and Literary Style: An Inquiry into the Language of William Golding’s ‘The Inheritors’,” in *Essays in Modern Stylistics* (Routledge, 2019), 325–60.

²⁰ Suzanne Eggins, *An Introduction to Systemic Functional Linguistics*, 2nd ed. (London: Continuum, 2004).

²¹ Halliday, *An Introduction to Functional Grammar*.

²² Paul Simpson, “Language, Media, and Communication: Part II,” *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 5, no. 2 (June 1988): 166–72, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15295038809366696>.

²³ Halliday, *An Introduction to Functional Grammar*.

²⁴ Halliday, *An Introduction to Functional Grammar*.

²⁵ Halliday, *An Introduction to Functional Grammar*.

namely, the ACTOR, GOAL, SCOPE, RECIPIENT, CLIENT, and in some cases, ATTRIBUTE.²⁶ The entity that does something in the material process is the Actor. The GOAL is the entity that directly undergoes the Actor's action. The RECIPIENT is the beneficiary of the ACTOR's action. The CLIENT is also another type of beneficiary. The RECIPIENT is introduced by the preposition "to" and the CLIENT is introduced by the preposition "for". The ATTRIBUTE in the Material process is the quality assigned to an entity through the action of the process. These categories are exemplified with an adaptation from Halliday and Matthiessen.²⁷

The cat caught the mouse
Actor **Process: Material/active** **Goal**

The cat was caught by the dog
Goal **Process: Material/Passive** **Actor**

The lion caught the dog for its cubs.
Actor **Process: Material** **Goal** **Client**

The lion gave the meat to its cubs.
Actor **Process: Material** **Goal** **Receiver**

Nana played my guitar
Actor **Process: Material** **Scope**

John painted the cup black
Actor **Process: Material** **Goal** **Attribute**

Relational Process

Relational clauses serve the purpose of characterizing and identifying, constituting the process of being and having.²⁸ According to Halliday and Matthiessen's proposition, the relational process operates with three distinct types: (1) Intensive, denoted by "x is a"; (2) Circumstantial, represented by "x is at a"; and (3) Possessive, indicated by "x has a".²⁹ The specific role of the participants involved in relational processes is contingent upon the particular type of relational process being expressed. Relational processes within the intensive category typically fall into one of two types. These types are known as Attributive and Identifying.³⁰ The first type, the attributive relational process within the intensive category, involves two participants: the Carrier, which is the entity that carries the attribute, and the Attribute, which is the quality assigned to the carrier. To facilitate comprehension of the attributive relational process, Eggin provides a list of verbs that classify this process.³¹

Become	She	became	suspicious
Appear	The luggage	appeared	harmless
Taste	The soup	tasted	wonderful
Is	He	is	intelligent
Verbs	Carrier	Process, Rel. Intensive	Attribute

A relational process that is identifying is the second type. This process is employed to classify one entity based on another.³² In conventional grammar, this attribute is known as the subject complement.

²⁶ Michael Alexander Kirkwood Halliday and Christian M.I. Matthiessen, *Halliday's Introduction to Functional Grammar*, 4th ed. (Routledge, 2014).

²⁷ Halliday and Matthiessen, *Halliday's Introduction to Functional Grammar*.

²⁸ Halliday and Matthiessen, *Halliday's Introduction to Functional Grammar*.

²⁹ Halliday and Matthiessen, *Halliday's Introduction to Functional Grammar*.

³⁰ Lise Fontaine, *Analysing English Grammar: A Systemic Functional Introduction* (Cambridge University Press, 2013).

³¹ Eggin, *An Introduction to Systemic Functional Linguistics*.

³² Geoff Thompson, *Introducing Functional Grammar*, 2nd ed. (London: Arnold, 2004).

Attributives are semantically and grammatically distinct from the intensive Identifying processes. The purpose of an Identifying clause is to define rather than assign or categorize as exemplified below:

Tom is the doctor
Identified/Token Relational/intensive Identifier/ Value

Behavioural Process

The outward manifestation of a mental state is the behavioral process. According to Halliday and Matthiessen, the behavioural process refers to the process of physiological and psychological behaviour in humans.³³ The material and the mental are resonant in different ways. This process can be: breathe, cough up, frown, gaze, smile, laugh, look, etc.³⁴ Thompson suggests that the Behaver is the only participant in the behavioural processes, and unlike Actor, she can only exist as a human. The Behaviour, which is not a real participant but serves as a supplementary specification for the process, may be present in some clauses where another apparent participant is involved.³⁵ This is exemplified below.

The boy laughed
Behaver Process: Behavioural

The boy laughed an embarrassing laugh
Behaver Process: Behavioural Behaviour

Mental Process

The mental process, according to Simpson, is a process that goes on in the internal world of the mind.³⁶ To Bloor and Bloor, mental processes tend to be realized through the use of verbs like think, know, feel, smell, hear, see, want, like, hate, please, disgust, admire, enjoy, fear, frighten.³⁷ The mental process, according to Halliday and Matthiessen, has two participants. The participant who experiences the process is labeled *Senser* (this must be human), and that which is experienced is assigned the label *Phenomenon*.³⁸

You didn't want it.
 I dislike your manner.
Senser Process: mental Phenomenon.³⁹

The Verbal Process

The verbal process is a process of saying.⁴⁰ This process is made up of three participants: sayer, receiver and verbiage. The Sayer is the individual who speaks or communicates with a signal. The recipient of a verbal message is the Receiver and the entity which is merely stating what the sentence signifies is the Verbiage. In some cases, the spoken communication may be directed toward another person. This provides the fourth participant known as the Target.⁴¹

I explained to her what it meant.
Sayer Process: verbal Receiver Verbiage
 The report sharply criticizes Lilly's quality control procedures.
Sayer Circumstance Process: verbal Target

Existential Process

Egins defines existential processes as the representation of experience through the assertion that 'there was/is something'. Typically, existential processes employ the verb *be* or its synonyms such as *exist*,

³³ Halliday and Matthiessen, *Halliday's Introduction to Functional Grammar*.

³⁴ Egins, *An Introduction to Systemic Functional Linguistics*.

³⁵ Thompson, *Introducing Functional Grammar*.

³⁶ Simpson, "Language, Media, and Communication: Part II."

³⁷ Bloor and Bloor, *The Functional Analysis of English: A Hallidayan Approach*.

³⁸ Halliday and Matthiessen, *Halliday's Introduction to Functional Grammar*.

³⁹ Bloor and Bloor, *The Functional Analysis of English: A Hallidayan Approach*.

⁴⁰ Halliday and Matthiessen, *Halliday's Introduction to Functional Grammar*.

⁴¹ Thompson, *Introducing Functional Grammar*.

arise, and occur. The structure of an existential clause consists of *there* followed by the existing entity and, if applicable, a Circumstance. The Existent, the only obligatory participant in an existential process, is assigned a functional label. Existential processes often include Circumstantial elements, particularly those related to location.⁴²

There were	trees	in the forest.
Pr. Existential	Existent	Circumstance
<hr/>		
There was	a very beautiful and attractive lady	
Pr. Existential	Existent	

Circumstance

Circumstance is one of the three constituents in the transitivity process according to Hallidayan Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), representing contextual details surrounding an event or action. Circumstantial elements, which are realized through the use of adverbial and prepositional phrases, fulfill the purpose of determining aspects like “time” and other related factors in the clause. This in turn provides valuable supplementary information to the given clause. The different types of circumstances in transitivity include time, place, manner, accommodation, cause, location, extent, and contingency.⁴³

METHODOLOGY

The Easter message delivered by PNADAA on April 4, 2021 constituted the data for this study. After the data was sourced from the internet, manual content analysis was applied based on the transitivity model.⁴⁴ The data was read and re-read to identify the relevant linguistic structures for this study. The structures were chunked into clauses, classified and labelled based on the Participant, Process type, and Circumstantial categories of transitivity as offered by Halliday.⁴⁵ The signs [Ø: Ellipsis], [<>> Truncated clause], [() not part of the clause] were used to aid the analysis. Some elliptic structures were re-introduced to shape and give a clear picture of the type of clause under contention. Some clauses were also embedded and needed to be truncated to clearly demarcate the clausal boundaries. Finally, some structures such as conjunctions, which are not analyzed as part of the clause were cut out and enclosed into parenthesis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Material Process

Material clauses as espoused by Halliday and Matthiessen indicate actions in the form of happenings and doings. They indicate who is doing what and to whom.⁴⁶ During a COVID-19 Easter celebration in 2021, PNADAA employed material clauses to communicate his government’s action by leveraging political action with religion. To bolster a formidable bond with the Christian community, PNADAA rhetorically blends his political communication with religious symbolism that leverages the religious merits of Easter. By acknowledging Easter as a period of sober reflection and renewal, he uses inclusive language that induces religious imagery which in turn resonates with the Ghanaian values and beliefs. PNADAA balances the link between the resilience of Ghanaians amid difficulties and the resurrection of Christ. By referring to the triumph of Christ over death, the religious themes of perseverance and hope are rekindled, with the motive of inspiring Ghanaians to hold on to their faith in togetherness as challenges loom. Referencing this mutual faith and resilience is believed to instill in the Ghanaian, a sense of solidarity, identity, and unity rooted in religious heritage.

Aligning political actions and communication with religious principles

⁴² Eggins, *An Introduction to Systemic Functional Linguistics*.

⁴³ Halliday and Matthiessen. *Halliday’s Introduction to Functional Grammar*. 4th ed. Routledge, 2014

⁴⁴ <https://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/FULL-TEXT-President-Nana-Addo-Dankwa-Akufo-Addo-s-2021-Easter-message-1222339>

⁴⁵ Halliday, Michael Alexander Kirkwood. *An Introduction to Functional Grammar*. Edward Arnold, 1985

⁴⁶ Halliday and Matthiessen. *An Introduction to Functional Grammar*. 4th ed. London: Hodder Arnold, 2004.

Strategically, PNADAA marshals religious principles of compassion and communal welfare with the actions of his government in a bid to have the nexus between religious values and political leadership bolstered.

41. Government, together with the security services INITIATOR, will make sure PROCESS SCOPE (that,) << this time, CIRCUMSTANCE these gains GOAL are protected. MATERIAL>>

42. Let PROCESS us CARRIER be RELATIONAL each other's keeper ATTRIBUTE

In clause 41, “make sure” and “are protected” are the material processes opted for to represent the government's commitment and compassion action. Through these options, the duty of the government to protect the gains made in the fight against COVID-19 is emphasized. In clause 42, the choice of process “let's be” and the attributive relational “each other's keeper” are used to ignite people's commitment to have the well-being and security of Ghanaians in safe hands. It resonates with the religious principles of communal welfare, compassion, and commitment. The framing of the government's actions in this manner reinforces its legitimacy, commitment, and selflessness to have the people served in line with religious values.

Inclusive language and religious imagery

To have a sense of unity and a shared purpose advanced, PNADAA strategically employs inclusive language and religious imagery to convey a message that resonates with the Christian community:

68. Ghana, and, indeed, the whole world, ACTOR will rise MATERIAL again. CIRCUMSTANCE

73. Just as CIRCUMSTANCE Christ ACTOR is risen MATERIAL,

74. Ghana ACTOR will (also) rise. MATERIAL

Clauses 68, 73, and 74 employ a material process “rise” to communicate the action of hope. By referring to the concept of “rising”, a principal doctrine in Christianity linked to Christ's resurrection is invoked. By using inclusive language with Ghana as the actor in clause 68 to link Ghana to the international community, PNADAA emphasizes that his message of hope and renewal is universal. Through this imagery, there is a strong resonance of the shared belief of renewed life that unites the people in a communal sense of optimism in challenging times. By aligning his political message with religious values, PNADAA strengthens the connection between the government and the Christian community.

13. We SCOPE were faced MATERIAL with an unknown foe, CIRCUMSTANCE ACCOMPANIMENT (and)

14. we, ACTOR (therefore), had to take MATERIAL the difficult but necessary decisions SCOPE to protect MATERIAL our lives and livelihoods. GOAL

Clause 13 utilizes the scope “we” which, in transitivity analysis, does not represent an entity directly impacted by any action. This choice is seen as complementing religious imagery. The material processes in clauses 13 and 14 are “were faced”, “had to take”, and “to protect”. The inclusive “we” is selected as an actor in clause 14 to advocate a sense of solidarity and mutual responsibility. By communicating the nation's challenges as a shared responsibility through the choice of goal “our lives and livelihoods” in clause 14, PNADAA promotes a sense of perseverance and unity. The president, in a similar sense, frames the pandemic as an “unknown enemy” in clause 13. This religious imagery reflects the themes of spiritual warfare. The choice of scope “we” reaffirms the theme, as scopes do not suffer direct actions. The so-called spiritual warfare in some Christian beliefs is not a physical battle with actions that directly impact people, hence the choice of scope “we”. This resonates with Christian teachings on overcoming challenges through faith and unity. By aligning religious principles and appealing to shared values and beliefs with political actions, PNADAA builds a narrative of hope, unity, and collective action that resonates with Ghanaians during the Easter season.

Political and Critical lenses

In political and critical lenses, the study observes that PNADAA uses material clauses as a communication tool to shield his government from negative public sentiments as a result of the strict measures taken to control the pandemic. Since the actions taken by the government are unfavourable and have the tendency to make his government unpopular, he employs what Thompson terms “nominalization and passivization” which tend to delete actors and hide agency.⁴⁷ These are indicated in the clauses below.

28. Church services GOAL must be held MATERIAL for a maximum of two hours, CIRCUMSTANCE (and)
29. the requisite social distancing rules GOAL must be strictly obeyed. MATERIAL
30. Night clubs, cinemas and pubs GOAL continue to be closed. MATERIAL
31. Funerals, concerts, theatrical performances, and Parties GOAL are banned. MATERIAL
32. Private burials, GOAL with no more than twenty-five (25) people CIRCUMSTANCE can take place MATERIAL, with the enforcement of the social distancing, hygiene and mask wearing protocols. CIRCUMSTANCE
33. Spectators GOAL are (still CIRCUMSTANCE) banned MATERIAL from going to the stadia to watch football matches. CIRCUMSTANCE

In clause 28: process = “must be held”

Participant Roles: Actor: Not explicitly mentioned (implied to be the government)

Goal: Church services

In clause 29 process = “must be strictly obeyed”

Participant Roles: Actor: Not explicitly mentioned (implied to be the government)

Goal: The requisite social distancing rules

In clause 30: Process = “continue to be closed”

Participant Roles: Actor: Not explicitly mentioned (implied to be the government)

Goal: Nightclubs, cinemas, and pubs

In clause 31: process = “are banned”

Participant Roles: Actor: Not explicitly mentioned (implied to be the government)

Goal: Funerals, concerts, theatrical performances, and parties

In clause 32: process = “can take place”

Participant Roles: Actor: Not explicitly mentioned (implied to be the government)

Goal: Private burials

In clause 33: process = “are banned”

Participant Roles: Actor: Not explicitly mentioned (implied to be the government)

Goal: Spectators

The use of these agentless clauses could be seen as a hedge against making the government unpopular; hence, an example like clause 33 is used instead of “the government has banned spectators from going to the stadia...”

Conversely, PNADAA positions the government in a good light when the information contained in the clause portrays the government as caring. In this instance, the government is positioned as the initiator of actions that are perceived as managing and protecting the interest of the public. Positioning the government as the initiator of actions that are deemed protective of public interest, PNADAA represents the government as responsive to the concerns of Ghanaians.

41. Government, together with the security services INITIATOR, will make sure MATERIAL SCOPE (that,) << this time, CIRCUMSTANCE these gains GOAL are protected. MATERIAL>>

⁴⁷ John B. Thompson, “Language and Ideology: A Framework for Analysis,” *The Sociological Review* 35, no. 3 (August 1, 1987): 516–36, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-954X.1987.tb00554.x>.

In clause 41, there are “gains” as a goal to protect; hence, “government” is opted for as initiator in an explicit position to portray the government as responsive. This functions as a framing that advances his political motives and upholds the government’s legitimacy and support in the political space.

Relational Process

To resonate with the Christian community, the “identifying” and “attributive” relational clauses are used to identify and describe the Easter season. This is done with echoes from religious concepts and imagery.

42. Let PROCESS us CARRIER be RELATIONAL each other’s keeper

ATTRIBUTE

4. Easter TOKEN symbolizes RELATIONAL God’s plan of salvation for our redemption from sin and the grave, VALUE

In analyzing clause 42, a sense of communal responsibility is emphasized in the attributive relational clause, with the process “let be” and carrier “us”. At the same time, it reflects the Christian principles of compassion, brotherliness, and love for one another. These religious motifs are used to promote shared responsibility and support for one another. PNADAA’s message reflects his insight and the respect he accords to the Christian faith. This in turn maximizes his affinity and trustworthiness among the Christian community. In clause 4, PNADAA employs an identifying relational process, “symbolizes,” and the participant, “Easter,” as a token, and “God’s plan of salvation for our redemption from sin and the grave” as value, to identify the relevance of Easter. This clause associates the efforts of the government with the religious themes of renewal and atonement. This is suggestive of redeeming the nation from the throes of the pandemic. PNADAA thus leverages the Easter message to communicate a broader message of communal responsibility.

Verbal Process

These are processes of sayings.⁴⁸ In the verbal clauses, several themes emerge, reflecting PNADAA’s communication strategies and the context of his Easter address.

9. I SAYER quote: VERBAL “...he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his stripes we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each one has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.” VERBIAGE

72. On behalf of my beautiful wife, Rebecca, my children and family, and on behalf of Government, CIRCUMSTANCE I SAYER wish VERBAL all Ghanaians

TARGET a Happy Easter, with the hope that the blood spilled on the cross will heal our land, and cleanse us of our iniquities. VERBIAGE

77. I SAYER thank VERBAL you TARGET for your attention.

CIRCUMSTANCE -REASON

The verbal clause 9 reflects the theme of religious reflection and scripture. PNADAA quotes from Isaiah 53:5-6 to emphasize the spiritual significance of Easter and convey messages rooted in Christian faith and scripture in the verbiage. His use of religious language and imagery: “pierced”, “crushed”, and “punishment” such as in the verbiage of clause 9 evokes a strong emotional response from the audience. By quoting scripture and referencing the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, he taps into deep-seated religious sentiments and creates a sense of reverence and solemnity surrounding the Easter message. Clause 72 embodies the theme of community engagement and well wishes. With “Ghanaians” as the target, PNADAA extends Easter greetings and expresses hope for healing and renewal within the community, fostering a sense of unity and shared purpose during the Easter season in the verbiage. This evokes the spiritual blessings associated with the holiday and expresses hope for spiritual and societal renewal. The themes of gratitude and leadership are reflected in clause 77 with PNADAA himself as the sayer (I), and Ghanaians as the target (you). He acknowledges the audience’s attention and professes his gratitude for

⁴⁸ Thompson, “From Process to Pattern: Methodological Considerations in Analysing Transitivity in Text.”

it. He shows gratitude and appreciation for entrusting him with the keys to the nation. To convey a message of hope, renewal, and redemption, PNADAA employs symbolic language in the verbiage of clause 72. By stressing the need for “healing” and “cleansing” in the verbiage of Clause 72, he encourages teamwork among Ghanaians, guided by the Christian values of unity and togetherness.

Mental Process

The mental process reveals the affection, perception and cognition of the speaker. Mental processes are internalized processes that encode the meanings of feeling or thinking in one’s consciousness.⁴⁹ PNADAA utilizes mental processes to convey his thoughts, perceptions, and attitudes, providing insight into his perspective on Easter celebrations and the challenges faced by the nation in the throes of the pandemic.

45. I SENSER know MENTAL

25. We SENSER will have to endure MENTAL, this year, another quiet Easter,
PHENOMENON

Clause 45 reveals PNADAA’s acknowledgment or understanding of the situation with himself “I” as a SENSER and the cognitive mental process “know”. By stating “I know”, he communicates his awareness or recognition of the pandemic and the challenges it presents. PNADAA’s use of the first-person pronoun “I” in Clause 45 as a SENSER and the inclusive pronoun “we” in Clause 25 (also as a SENSER) reflects his leadership communication style. By acknowledging personal awareness and collective solidarity, he adopts a tone of empathy and shared responsibility, reinforcing his role as a leader who is attuned to the concerns and experiences of the citizenry.

PNADAA also demonstrates his awareness of the cultural significance of Easter in the Ghanaian Christian community. The acknowledgment of a “quiet Easter” as the choice of phenomenon in Clause 25 reinforces the cultural significance of Easter in Ghana, where it is traditionally a time for gatherings, celebrations, and religious observances. By recognizing the disruption to these customary activities as a result of the pandemic, PNADAA acknowledges the cultural context and sensitivities surrounding the Easter holiday, demonstrating his cultural competence and awareness in his communication.

An implied religious theme of hope and resilience is reflected in both clauses. In clause 25, the choice of SENSER “we” is suggestive of a shared admission of the mutual endurance in trying times. This endurance is tied to the phenomenon “*another quiet Easter*” in Clause 2. There is again an inference of a religious theme of endurance in clause 25 in the choice of “will have to endure” as a mental process. Endurance as a concept resonates with the Easter narrative of perseverance, as PNADAA tries to navigate the complex blend of political messaging and religious concepts.

Existential

Existential processes are processes that point to the fact that something exists or happens.⁵⁰ PNADAA utilizes existential processes to assert the existence of the pandemic, providing clarity on the status of Easter-related activities in this instance.

27. There will, (therefore), be EXISTENTIAL no Easter Conventions, Easter picnics, parties, or gatherings at the beaches. EXISTENT

In clause 27, PNADAA asserts the non-existence of Easter-related gatherings and events due to the prevailing circumstances. The use of the existential process “there will be no” followed by a list of activities: “picnics, “parties...” as existent, emphasizes the absence of these events during the Easter period. Through a political lens, such directives are deemed as commands that sound more autocratic and authoritative. As an observation, PNADAA strategically makes the communication on the ban on Easter events more welcoming through the use of this existential clause. In this sense, he avoids the word “ban” as a transitivity choice despite the existence of an actual ban. Again, the choice of the existential process

⁴⁹ Eggins, *An Introduction to Systemic Functional Linguistics*.

⁵⁰ Halliday and Matthiessen, *An Introduction to Functional Grammar*.

“there will be no” conceals the initiator and avoids directly associating PNADAA and his government with the enforcement of this restriction. By this strategy, PNADAA avoids direct attribution of unpopular decisions, thereby reducing the likelihood of negative public sentiment towards the government, especially being deemed autocratic.

By implication, PNADAA’s statement communicates a clear directive regarding the cancellation of traditional Easter gatherings and festivities, aligning with public health measures aimed at reducing the spread of COVID-19. While the clause primarily addresses restrictive decisions regarding Easter-related events and gatherings, religious themes could indirectly be inferred. This implicitly conveys the theme of life preservation and health. PNADAA’s decision to cancel Easter gatherings aligns with the religious principle of valuing and preserving life. In many religious teachings, including Christianity, the sanctity of life is paramount, and protecting the health and well-being of individuals is considered a moral obligation. Therefore, the decision to prioritize public health and safety during Easter reflects a commitment to upholding religious values related to the preservation of life. Further, religious themes of adaptation and sacrifice are also suggested. In some religious contexts, Easter is a time of reflection, sacrifice, and adaptation. In addition, the cancellation of traditional Easter events and gatherings may prompt individuals to soberly reflect on the deeper meaning of Easter beyond just its customary celebrations. This situation evokes reflections on the Christian narrative of Jesus Christ’s sacrifice and resurrection. Therefore, while not explicitly stated, the clause may resonate with religious themes of sacrifice and adaptation inherent in the Easter season.

CONCLUSION

Through the transitivity choice of process and participants, the study has demonstrated, through transitivity choices of processes and participants, how political messages resonate with religious themes and motifs. The findings have implications for understanding the relevance of linguistic choices in influencing public perception and interaction, following this dual role of language in presidential communications during religious holidays. Through transitivity analysis, the study observed how PNADAA makes deliberate choices as he negotiates the balance between political and religious messaging. Material clauses, in the analysis, are employed as a hedging tool to avert public sentiment and at the same time address public health concerns resonating with religious principles of commitment, compassion, and communal welfare. Strategically, the relational and verbal clauses are used as enhancement tools to maximize PNADAA’s rapport and credibility with the Christian community.

While this reflects a sense of humility and appreciation, it evokes the religious motifs of renewal and redemption. While the mental clause is employed to acknowledge the challenging situation facing the nation, with echoes from the religious notion of perseverance, endurance, and faith, existential clauses serve to clarify, through hedging, decisions in relation to the ban on Easter gatherings, stressing the commitment of the government to put public safety first amid the COVID-19 pandemic. The analysis has for political communication in general with emphasis on the role of language in advocating patriotism, unity, and inclusiveness. PNADAA’s selection of participants and processes, coupled with his use of language to soften bitter experiences, is an example of a carefully thought-out communication strategy to effectively engage both religious and political enthusiasts. Linguistic studies in the future could explore language choices, dialectal differences, stylistic preferences, as well as linguistic variation among religious communities. This can broaden our understanding of how religious identity and political ideologies intersect with linguistic practices. Exploring the variations in linguistics across and within religious camps can shed light on the complexities of identity formation and interaction within varied societies.

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