

# Syntax, Technology and Politics: Analyzing Political Facebook Posts



Esther Serwaah Afreh<sup>1</sup> , Obed Atta-Asamoah<sup>1</sup>  & Ebenezer Asare<sup>1</sup> 

<sup>1</sup> Department of English, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Ghana.

## ABSTRACT

This study used Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) theory to analyze syntactic complexity in digital communication. Thirty Facebook posts made between August and December 2023 by John Dramani Mahama, a Ghanaian former president, were analyzed in this study. A textual analysis was conducted on the data. The findings affirmed that grammatical categories are functional. There was a deliberate linguistic strategy marked by a prevalence of declarative sentences and a notable dominance of complex structures in this genre of digital writing. The strategic use of non-finite clauses contributes to the complexity of the discourse. The genre of writing is also characterized by information ranking and integration. The linguistic choices align with the formal expectations of political and digital communication - precision, depth, and engagement. These observations challenge and enrich existing theories of political discourse and communication strategies in the digital era.

### Correspondence

Obed Atta-Asamoah

Email: [atta.obed91@gmail.com](mailto:atta.obed91@gmail.com)

### Publication History

Received: 21<sup>st</sup> April, 2024

Accepted: 18<sup>th</sup> June, 2024

Published online:

2<sup>nd</sup> July, 2024

**Keywords:** *Syntactic Complexity, Digital Communication, Facebook, Sentence Types, SFL*

## INTRODUCTION

Social media makes an important contribution to political discourse offering real-time engagement and political participation.<sup>1</sup> The unprecedented popularity of the use of social media platforms is unchallenged. Esteron reckons that these platforms have shaped contemporary linguistic expectations and use in digital media.<sup>2</sup> The brevity and immediacy inherent in this media influence how individuals express themselves within the constraints of concise yet impactful messages.<sup>3</sup> The brevity and immediacy inherent in the media pose a unique challenge to traditional syntactic structures, prompting a closer examination of how individuals adapt their linguistic choices to communicate effectively within the constraints of the platform.

Broersma and Graham aver that social media has engulfed formal politics.<sup>4</sup> Kahne, Middaugh, and Allen identify Facebook as the most popular social media site for political activities.<sup>5</sup> Hence, political

<sup>1</sup> Anne Kaun and Julie Uldam, "Digital Activism: After the Hype," *New Media & Society* 20, no. 6 (2018): 2099–2106; Xerxes Minocher, "Online Consumer Activism: Challenging Companies with Change. Org," *New Media & Society* 21, no. 3 (2019): 620–38; Todd Graham and Julia Schwanholz, "Politicians and Political Parties' Use of Social Media in-between Elections," *Journal of Applied Journalism & Media Studies* (2020):91-103.

<sup>2</sup> Maria Angela S Esteron, "Different Language Usage on Social Media," *International Journal of Advanced Engineering, Management and Science* 7, no. 3 (2021): 93–104.

<sup>3</sup> Michael Alozie Nwala and Isaac Tamunobelem, "The Social Media and Language Use: The Case of Facebook," *Advances in Language and Literary Studies* 10, no. 4 (2019): 9–13.

<sup>4</sup> Marcel Broersma and Todd Graham, "Tipping the Balance of Power: Social Media and the Transformation of Political Journalism," in *The Routledge Companion to Social Media and Politics*, ed. Alex Bruns et al. (New York: Routledge, 2016), 89–103.

<sup>5</sup> Joseph Kahne, Ellen Middaugh, and Danielle Allen, "2 Youth, New Media, and the Rise of Participatory Politics," in *From Voice to Influence*, ed. Danielle Allen and Jennifer Light (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2021), 35–56, <https://www.degruyter.com/document/doi/10.7208/9780226262437-004/html>.

discourse on Facebook provides a rich context for exploring the dynamic relationship between syntactic complexity and the conveyance of political ideas. Nwala and Tamunobelega share that content creators are required to ensure a delicate balance between concise expression and the conveyance of substantive content in a medium characterized by brevity and informality.<sup>6</sup> As society increasingly relies on digital platforms for information consumption and opinion formation, the impact of syntactic choices on the reception and interpretation of political messages becomes particularly noteworthy. Such empirical exercise contributes to our understanding of how individuals [political figures] strategically make syntactic choices in the digital space to influence perceptions, resonate with diverse audiences, and shape political narratives. The impact of social media on political activities is replete in the literature.<sup>7</sup>

In this study, the researchers acknowledge the potential implications of syntactic choices in fostering or hindering meaningful political engagement within the inherently dynamic and interactive space of Facebook. Facebook is a text-based platform. Halliday and Matthiessen describe the text as follows:<sup>8</sup>

When people speak or write, they produce text; and text is what listeners and readers engage with and interpret. The term 'text' refers to any instance of language, in any medium, that makes sense to someone who knows the language; we can characterize text as language functioning in context.

Eggs corroborates with Halliday and Matthiessen by saying that language is used functionally and that, linguistic choices are made from alternatives for meaning-making.<sup>9</sup> Language, according to Halliday's SFL theory, is semantic and contextual. Situated in this theoretical framework, this empirical investigation, therefore, seeks to transcend the conventional perception of grammatical preferences as mere stylistic elements, contending that they serve as deliberate instruments carrying communicative intents. The researchers choose to concentrate on how language operates in digital political discourse. The questions we sought to answer were:

- i. What linguistic structures are found at the sentence level in Facebook political posts?
- ii. What communicative intents underlie the linguistic structures?

The Facebook posts made by the Ghanaian former president, John Dramani Mahama were the corpus of study.

### Context Description

John Dramani Mahama (JDM) served as a Ghanaian President from July 24, 2012, to January 7, 2017. He is a member of the National Democratic Congress (NDC), a major political party in Ghana. He sought re-election in the 2016 presidential election but was defeated by Nana Akufo-Addo of the New Patriotic Party (NPP). Mahama continues to be an active figure in Ghanaian politics, and his political career has played a significant role in the country's recent political landscape. He intends to run for re-election in the 2024 presidential election. He has been active on several social media sites, where he interacts with his large followership. JDM's Facebook posts usually consist of videos, photos, albums and text posts. Given his intention for re-election, his Facebook posts deliberately promote his previous term's accomplishments and continuing initiatives, with an emphasis on economic growth, education, healthcare, and infrastructure programmes. These posts seek to construct a favourable narrative about his leadership by emphasising the practical impact of his initiatives on the country. The campaign trail updates on his Facebook page also

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<sup>6</sup> Nwala and Tamunobelega, "The Social Media and Language Use: The Case of Facebook."

<sup>7</sup> Men Kimseng, "Shaping Political Change: The Role of Social Media in Cambodia's 2013 Elections," *Asia Pacific Media Educator* 24, no. 1 (2014): 107–16; Alia Azmi, Ike Sylvia, and Desy Mardhiah, "Discourse Analysis of Politicians Social Media Posts," *Jurnal The Messenger* 10, no. 2 (2018): 174–86; James Asante, "African Politics in the Digital Age: A Study of Political Parties- Social Media Campaign Strategies in Ghana" (University of Westminster, 2020); Graham and Schwanholz, "Politicians and Political Parties' Use of Social Media in-between Elections"; Ayesha Karamat and Dr Ayesha Farooq, "Emerging Role of Social Media in Political Activism: Perceptions and Practices," *South Asian Studies* 31, no. 1 (2020); Beatrice E. Amenyewu, "Social Media and Political Campaign Communication in Ghana" (Clark University, 2021); Mohammed Saaida, "The Role of Social Media in Shaping Political Discourse and Propaganda," *Science for All Publication* 3, no. 2 (2023): 1–8.

<sup>8</sup> Michael A. K. Halliday and Christian M. I. M. Matthiessen, *An Introduction to Functional Grammar*, 3rd ed. (London: Hodder Arnold, 2004).

<sup>9</sup> Suzanne Eggs, *An Introduction to Systemic Functional Linguistics* (London: Continuum, 2004); Halliday and Matthiessen, *An Introduction to Functional Grammar*..

provide a behind-the-scenes look at his encounters with the public, rally attendance, and community participation.



Figure 1: Mahama's December 4 Post on his Meeting with Dr. Duffuor

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL)

Halliday and Matthiessen's SFL theory is the framework for this study. The theory is premised on the assumption that language in itself is a system of choices where each linguistic choice is made based on functional considerations.<sup>10</sup> Halliday considers language as systemic and functional.<sup>11</sup> According to him, systemic language is a matrix of interconnected systems or a collection of possibilities for producing meanings. By functional, he refers to what language is used for in society, i.e., the constructive intent of the language in everyday life. Rather than viewing language as a set of rules, SFL views it as an asset for producing meaning and meaning lies in systemic patterns of choice. SFL examines language usability along with the way it is organized to be used. Additionally, SFL believes meaning to be social and that social meaning influences linguistic choices.<sup>12</sup> In SFL, language's primary function is to perform a social function. The majority of grammars regard language as an abstracted network of relationships. On the other hand, in SFL, language is viewed by Halliday and Matthiessen as pragmatic and a way of communicating meaning.<sup>13</sup> To Martin and Rose, this method looks beyond the formal systems of language and considers the context in which language is utilized.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Halliday and Matthiessen, *An Introduction to Functional Grammar*.

<sup>11</sup> Halliday and Matthiessen, *An Introduction to Functional Grammar*.

<sup>12</sup> Halliday and Matthiessen, *An Introduction to Functional Grammar*.

<sup>13</sup> Halliday and Matthiessen, *An Introduction to Functional Grammar*; Christian M. I. M. Matthiessen, *Lexicogrammatical Cartography: English Systems* (Tokyo: International Language Sciences, 1995).

<sup>14</sup> James R Martin and David. Rose, *Working with Discourse: Meaning beyond the Clause* (London and New York: Continuum, 2003).

Halliday and Matthiessen's principal objective is to "show why and how the text means what it does".<sup>15</sup> In their attempt to demonstrate how the text represents what it does, Halliday and Matthiessen argue that meaning in a text is governed by three factors: the context of culture, the context of the situation and metafunction.<sup>16</sup> Halliday employs three register variables to explain the context of a situation: field, tenor and mode.<sup>17</sup> According to Halliday and Hasan, a text cannot be adequately dealt with unless the setting in which texts emerge and are to be comprehended is considered.<sup>18</sup> Field, as explained by Halliday, refers to the complete occurrence within which the text is working, coupled with the speaker's or writer's purposeful action.<sup>19</sup> It, therefore, encompasses the subject matter as one component in it. It depicts the social engagement in which the individuals are involved. This is highly important in the context of the study's usage of the text, i.e. Facebook posts. Halliday and Matthiessen are of the view that based on whom you are speaking to or sharing meaning with, the language will change and adapt to the circumstances.<sup>20</sup> Halliday refers to mode as the role that a language plays.<sup>21</sup> It could be printed or verbalized, as well as impulsive or not. He further explains that this demonstrates that when language contact occurs in a certain location, individuals may acquire a large amount of knowledge about the meanings that are being transferred and the meanings that are probable to be shared. Halliday and Hasan opine that under the context of the situation, the register parameter domain is linked to the ideational metafunction, the tenor variable domain is mapped onto the interpersonal metafunction, and the mode variable field is projected onto the textual metafunction.<sup>22</sup>

## METHODOLOGY

This study used a qualitative method in a textual analysis. Though sections of the findings are presented using statistical figures, the researchers adopt non-quantitative analyses through interpretation. The corpus for the study was the thirty Facebook posts made by the former Ghanaian president, JDM. The researchers conveniently selected posts made between August and December 2023. These posts were specifically chosen within the stated period firstly based on the currency of data. Additionally, the period was characterised by the former president's active social media engagement. He had just been elected on May 14, 2023 as the flagbearer of the party. The Facebook posts were made at a time when the former president was seeking re-election. It is expected of him to use the channel to comment on national issues, criticize the activities of the incumbent government, which is his rival, and share his vision for re-election. The posts were taken from the official Facebook website of the former president.<sup>23</sup> This study purposively included posts in which the former president had commented on national issues, criticized the incumbent government, touted achievements of his previous administration, or updated his followers about his community engagements. The researchers manually parsed the clauses in each post. The sentence structures were catalogued based on Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech, and Svartvik's sentence categorization.<sup>24</sup> According to them, sentences are functional units defined by their communicative intent rather than solely their grammatical structure. They categorize sentences into declaratives (stating information), interrogatives (asking questions), imperatives (giving commands) and exclamatives (expressing emotions). Their framework of sentence categorization provides an understanding of how sentences serve different communicative goals.

<sup>15</sup> Halliday and Matthiessen, *An Introduction to Functional Grammar*.

<sup>16</sup> Halliday and Matthiessen, *An Introduction to Functional Grammar*.

<sup>17</sup> Michael A. K. Halliday, *An Introduction to Functional Grammar* (London: Edward Arnold, 1994).

<sup>18</sup> Michael A. K. Halliday and Ruqaiya Hasan, *Language, Context and Text: Aspects of Language in a Social-Semiotic Perspective* (Geelong: Deakin University Press, 1985).

<sup>19</sup> Halliday, *An Introduction to Functional Grammar*.

<sup>20</sup> Halliday and Matthiessen, *An Introduction to Functional Grammar*.

<sup>21</sup> Halliday, Michael Alexander Kirkwood. *An introduction to functional grammar*. (London: Edward Arnold, 1994).

<sup>22</sup> Halliday and Hasan, *Language, Context and Text: Aspects of Language in a Social-Semiotic Perspective*.

<sup>23</sup> <https://web.facebook.com/JDMahama>

<sup>24</sup> Randolph Quirk et al., *A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language* (London: Pearson Longman, 1985).

## PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### Functional Sentence Types

From the data, the following sentence types were found to be prevalent in this variety of digital writing.

**Table 1: Distribution of Functional Sentence Types**

Functional Types	Frequency	Percentage
Declarative	153	87.4
Interrogative	0	0
Imperative	13	7.4
Exclamative	9	5.1
Total	175	100.0

Source: Field data, 2024.

The analysis, as shown in Table 1, reveals that the declarative sentence dominates this genre of communication. The former president used the channel to disseminate information. Greenbaum and Quirk aver that the discursual function of the declarative sentence is “primarily used to convey information.”<sup>25</sup> Wiredu also notes that the declarative sentence type “apparently facilitates the provision of information to the reader.”<sup>26</sup> The following declarative sentences were seen in the data:

1. The sword of my fight against corruption will cut across – against past government officials, officials of the incumbent administration, civil and public servants, businesses, government suppliers, etc. if they fall foul of the law. [11-Dec-23]
2. I can tell you here and now that the government of Nana Akufo-Addo and Bawumia has reached "DZE-NU-NYE-KPO-DZI". [27-Nov-23]

There were few instances the former president used imperative sentences. Greenbaum and Quirk share that imperative sentences “are primarily used to instruct somebody to do something.”<sup>27</sup> The former president used this sentence type to extend an invitation to his followers and inspire in them the spirit of patriotism. The underlying reason for his use of imperative sentences was to persuade Ghanaians for him to be re-elected. Some texts from his posts are:

3. Let’s Build the Ghana we want, together! [23-Nov-23]
4. Visit an EC office and register to vote on December 7, 2024. [12-Sept-23]

As shown in Table 1 above, exclamative sentences were used the least across the posts made by the former president. The exclamative sentence conveys the speaker’s strong emotions or reactions. Some texts from the former president’s posts are:

5. A Happy 114<sup>th</sup> Birthday to Osagyefo Dr Kwame Nkrumah, the Founder of Ghana! [21-Sept-23]
6. Cocoa farmers certainly deserve better! [11-Sept-23]

### Structural Sentence Types

A variety of structural sentence types were used across the various Facebook posts of the former president. The trends observed are presented in Table 2.

**Table 2: Distribution of Structural Sentence Types**

Structural Types	Frequency	Percentage
Simple Sentence	40	22.86
Non-Simple Sentence		
Compound	7	4.00
Complex	101	57.71

<sup>25</sup> Sidney Greenbaum and Randolph Quirk, *A Student’s Grammar of the English Language* (Longman, 1990).

<sup>26</sup> John Franklin Wiredu, “A Grammar of Newspaper Editorial Language: The Complex Sentence,” *Legon Journal of the Humanities* 23 (2012): 75–124.

<sup>27</sup> Greenbaum and Quirk, *A Student’s Grammar of the English Language*.

Compound-Complex	27	15.43
Total	175	100.00

Source: Field data, 2024.

The non-simple sentence dominated the Facebook posts of the former president. This trend is attributed to the ability of non-simple sentences to allow language users to express ideas in a detailed manner. The former president’s use of non-simple sentences allowed him to create a sense of sophistication. The trend highlights his preference to provide depth to his messages and share complex thoughts. Simple sentences were used across the data in a relatively small proportion.

***The Simple Sentence***

A simple sentence, according to Greenbaum and Quirk, “consists of a single independent clause.”<sup>28</sup> The simple sentence is effective in achieving straightforward ideas and providing quick information. A text-based platform such as Facebook requires content creators to maintain a friendly tone. Nonetheless, as observed from the trend, the former president used relatively small proportions of simple sentences compared to non-simple sentences. The researchers infer that the former president opts for a relatively low simple sentence to maintain a balanced and friendly tone in his Facebook engagement with his followers and sympathizers. The preference for non-simple sentences affirms his desire to communicate more detailed information. The following simple sentences were seen in the Facebook posts of the former president.

7. I began a two-day #BuildingGhanaTour of the Western North Region on Wednesday morning. [13-Dec-23]
8. I believe in transparency, accountability, and good governance. [11-Dec-23]
9. The actions and incompetent governance of Nana Akufo-Addo and Bawumia have completely eroded Ghana's democratic goodwill. [01-Sept-23]

The simple sentences illustrated in extracts (7) – (9) contain single independent clauses each. These simple sentences provide quick information to the audience and help the former president to easily connect with his followers. Without much knowledge of the literacy level of your audience, social media content creators are expected to maintain brevity. His choice of simple sentences helped him engage individuals with varied language proficiency and educational backgrounds.

As has been pointed out, non-simple sentence types dominated the linguistic structures used in the former president’s communication on Facebook. The non-simple sentence contributes significantly to syntactic complexity.<sup>29</sup> Much of the discussion, thereof, was centered on the non-simple sentences.

***The Compound Sentence***

The compound sentence “...consists of two or more coordinated clauses...are normally linked by one of the coordinating conjunctions.”<sup>30</sup> Related ideas of the same grammatical rank are coordinated to ensure information symmetry. This non-simple sentence type was the least used type of sentence across the posts of the former president. The compound sentence was rarely preferred, showing that it is not unique in the linguistic style of this variety of digital writing. Table 3 shows the number of clauses found in a compound sentence from the data.

**Table 3: Number of Coordinated Independent Clauses per Compound Sentence**

Clauses	Frequency	Percentage
2 Independent Clauses	6	85.71
3 Independent Clauses	1	14.29
Total	7	100.00

<sup>28</sup> Greenbaum and Quirk, *A Student’s Grammar of the English Language*.

<sup>29</sup> Wiredu, “A Grammar of Newspaper Editorial Language: The Complex Sentence.”

<sup>30</sup> Sidney Greenbaum and Gerald. Nelson, *An Introduction to English Grammar*, 2nd ed. (Great Britain: Pearson Education Limited, 2002).

Source: Field data, 2024.

Only one sentence was found to have three grammatical structures of the same rank coordinated. This is illustrated using the extract below:

10. [Cost of living has become very unbearable;]<sub>1Ind. Cl.</sub> [businesses are collapsing,]<sub>2Ind. Cl.</sub> and [the unemployment rate has gone up.]<sub>3Ind. Cl.</sub>

In extract (10), each of the three clauses holds a unique idea communicated independently of each other. The president piled up the three clauses contributing to the information density of the sentence. The first independent clause is identified as:

*The cost of living has become very unbearable*

This clause contains an independent idea. The former president described the awful state of living and expressed his displeasure about the situation. Additionally, he provided another description of the awful state of affairs by providing evidence of the situation described in the first independent clause. This information is carried out in the second clause which is:

*Businesses are collapsing*

The second independent clause is an additional information provided to give substance to the first clause. The second clause describes how dire the living conditions of the Ghanaians are. The same is seen in the third independent clause:

*The unemployment rate has gone up*

### ***The Compound-Complex Sentence***

Compound-complex sentences were seen across the data. Its significant proportion suggests its uniqueness in this variety of genres. This sentence type accounts for 15.43% of the structural sentence types in the data. The sentence type allows language users to join clauses of equal and unequal ranks. This technique contributes to information density in digital communication. For instance, the following sentence was seen in the former president’s Facebook post:

11. Our farmers are the backbone of our economy, and we will continue to invest in their success. [01-Dec-23]

In extract (11), two independent clauses are coordinated. Another clause is also subordinated to an independent clause. Two clauses are of the same grammatical rank while one is of a lower grammatical rank. The ranking of the clauses in the above extract is illustrated in Figure 2.

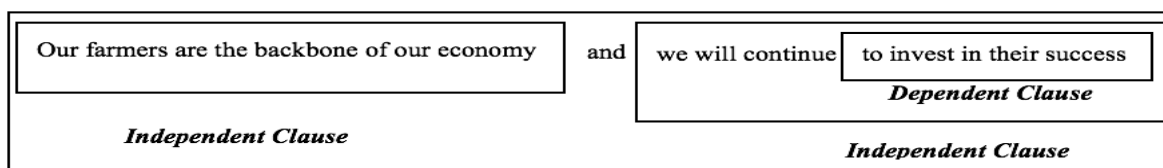


Figure 2: Ranking of Clauses in Extract (11)

Each independent clause presents a main idea that the former president shared with his digital audience. In the first clause, the former president affirmed the critical role farmers play in building the Ghanaian economy. In the second independent clause, he further communicated his intentions for the farmers as he anticipates being re-elected into office as president.

Compound-complex sentences illustrate the hierarchical organization of a language user’s information.<sup>31</sup> It was observed from the analysis that clauses of unequal grammatical ranks were piled in a single sentence, forming a compound-complex sentence. This sentence type is a grammatical feature of digital communication. As illustrated in Table 4, as many as four clauses of the same grammatical rank

<sup>31</sup> Wiredu, “A Grammar of Newspaper Editorial Language: The Complex Sentence.”

were found in a compound-complex sentence in this variety of digital writing. Five clauses were found which were subordinated to a higher clause in a single sentence.

**Table 4: Number and Type of Clause in Compound-Complex Sentences**

Clauses	Frequency	Percentage
2 Independent & 1 Dependent Clause	15	55.56
2 Independent & 2 Dependent Clauses	4	14.82
2 Independent & 3 Dependent Clauses	2	7.41
2 Independent & 5 Dependent Clauses	1	3.70
3 Independent & 2 Dependent Clauses	3	11.11
3 Independent & 4 Dependent Clauses	1	3.70
4 Independent & 3 Dependent Clauses	1	3.70
Total	27	100.00

Source: Field data, 2024.

The greatest number of independent clauses piled in a single compound-complex sentence is four. This is illustrated in the extract below.

12. [My child, help your father in his old age]<sub>1Ind Cl.</sub> and [do not grieve him]<sub>2Ind Cl.</sub> [as long as he lives]<sub>Dep Cl.</sub> [even if his mind fails,]<sub>Dep Cl.</sub> [be patient with him;]<sub>3Ind Cl.</sub> [because you have all your faculties]<sub>Dep Cl.</sub> [do not despise him]<sub>4Ind Cl.</sub>

The four independent clauses represent the independent ideas of the former president. Each clause carries a main idea. The former president, as illustrated in extract (12), organized his information by piling up a number of main ideas in his sentences. The extract also contains three subordinated clauses. These subordinated clauses convey minor ideas. They are ranked below the main clauses. Each subordinate clause serves to specify relationships and provide context to the main information carried in the main clauses.

As Wiredu avers, non-simple sentences show the relative importance of a speaker’s information.<sup>32</sup> Using extract (12), the letters of the alphabet are used to show the ranking of the ideas communicated in the compound-complex sentence:

- CLAUSE A1: *My child, help your father in his old age*
- CLAUSE A2: *[and] do not grieve him*
- CLAUSE A3: *be patient with him*
- CLAUSE A4: *do not despise him*
- CLAUSE B1: *as long as he lives*
- CLAUSE B2: *even if his mind fails*
- CLAUSE B3: *because you have all your faculties*

The multiple dependency relationships help language users arrange their ideas and give prominence to the most relevant information. Though the compound-complex sentence was relatively low in the former president’s communication with his audience, it is a unique syntactic feature of this variety of digital writing. It gave linguistic variety to the former president’s communication and enhanced the richness and complexity of the language used.

**The Complex Sentence**

Independent and dependent clauses are piled into a single sentence to form complex sentences. This sentence type differs from the compound-complex sentence in terms of the number of independent clauses. Greenbaum and Quirk captures it as:

<sup>32</sup> John Franklin Wiredu, “The Complex Sentence in Legal English: A Study of Law Reports,” *Unilag Journal of Humanities* 2, no. 1 (2014): 1–22.



...like a simple sentence in that it consists of only one MAIN clause, but unlike a simple sentence it has one or more SUBORDINATE clauses functioning as an element of the sentence.<sup>33</sup>

While compound-complex sentences have two independent clauses, as has been illustrated in section 5.3., complex sentences have one independent clause. Multiple subordinate clauses can be embedded in both sentence types. Through subordination, language users package complex information.<sup>34</sup> The former president embedded a number of subordinate clauses in his complex sentences to enrich his language use. The complex sentence was the predominant sentence type in this variety of digital communication. It accounted for 57.71% of the total sentence types. The former president relied extensively on this sentence type to communicate with his audience. Idea expansion was, thus, mostly achieved by the former president through the use of complex sentences. An example is given in extract (13).

13. The appointments show the NDC's intent to secure victory in the 2024 elections [27-Aug-23]

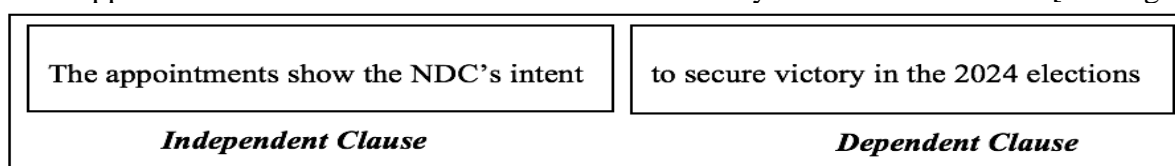


Figure 3: Clauses in Extract (13)

Extract (13) contains one independent clause and a dependent clause. The independent clause as identified in the above diagram is *the appointments that show the NDC's intent*. This clause carries the main information in the former president's sentence. He shares his views with his digital audience about the party's activity of appointing new officers into office. To provide further explanation of the intent of the party, the former president subordinates another clause to the main clause. The subordinated clause, *to secure victory in the 2024 elections*, is an infinitive clause specifying the purpose and goal behind the party's intent. The clause provides additional information about what the appointments have achieved. This kind of information expansion was predominant in this variety of digital writing. It helped the former president to pack complex information for persuasion and rhetorical effect.

A large amount of information is contained in the sentences used in this variety of digital writing. The subordinating clause is a linguistic feature of information complexity. Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech, and Svartvik write that:

...the device of subordination enables us to organize multiple clause structures. Each subordinate clause may itself be superordinate to one or more other clauses, so that a hierarchy of clauses, one within another, may be built up, sometimes resulting in sentences of great complexity.<sup>35</sup>

A trend was observed where a variety of clauses are subordinated in a single complex sentence. Accordingly, Table 5 shows the number of subordinate clauses found per complex sentence.

**Table 5: Number of Subordinate Clauses per Complex Sentence**

Sub Clause	Frequency	Percentage
1 Sub Clause in a Complex Sentence	34	33.66
2 Sub Clauses in a Complex Sentence	39	38.61
3 Sub Clauses in a Complex Sentence	17	16.83
4 Sub Clauses in a Complex Sentence	3	2.97
5 Sub Clauses in a Complex Sentence	4	3.96
6 Sub Clauses in a Complex Sentence	2	1.98
7 Sub Clauses in a Complex Sentence	1	0.99

<sup>33</sup> Greenbaum and Quirk, *A Student's Grammar of the English Language*.

<sup>34</sup> George Kodie Frimpong, "Subordination Across Ghanaian And British Newspaper Editorials: A Register Perspective," *Ghana Journal of Linguistics* 6, no. 1 (June 30, 2017): 75, <https://doi.org/10.4314/gjl.v6i1.59>.

<sup>35</sup> Randolph Quirk et al., *A University Grammar of English* (London: Longman Group Ltd, 1973).

8 Sub Clauses in a Complex Sentence	1	0.99
Total	101	100.00

Source: Field data, 2024.

The observed feature of the former president’s digital writing was the limitless nature of dependent clauses embedded in a complex sentence. The highest number of dependent clauses in a single complex sentence was eight. Subordinating more than three clauses in a complex sentence was seldomly done in the digital communication of the former president. The embedding of three subordinate clauses mostly characterized the syntactic choices of the former president. This is attributable to the need to prevent reader fatigue in digital communication. Examples of complex sentences with two and three subordinated clauses are illustrated below:

14. We will introduce a 24-hour economy with incentives and tax breaks for manufacturers who will run extra shifts to create more room for employment. [12-Aug-23]

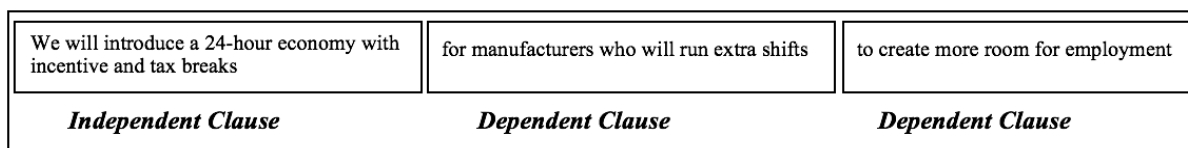


Figure 4: Information Dependency in Extract (14)

15. Let me take a moment to assure you that the 24-hour economy promise that has garnered a lot of attention is an attainable goal for Ghana. [23-Nov-23]

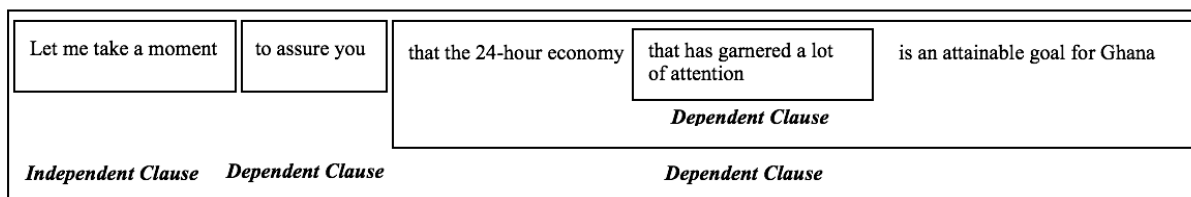


Figure 5: Information Dependency in Extract (15)

Extracts (14) and (15) are representations of information dependency in digital writing. They also illustrate the hierarchical arrangement of information by language users. The essence of information structure is to engage the audience to appreciate the weight of each set of information. It helps to identify each set of information and its relative prominence. The letters of the alphabet are used to illustrate how ideas are ranked in extract (15).

- CLAUSE A: *Let me take a moment*
- CLAUSE B: *to assure you*
- CLAUSE C: *that the 24-hour economy...is an attainable goal for Ghana*
- CLAUSE D: *that has garnered a lot of attention*

In terms of relative importance, the independent clause (Clause A) holds the primary message and conveys the main idea. This clause is the core and central focus of the sentence. The dependent clauses contribute by adding specific details and context to the main idea. The dependent clauses are of lower prominence than the information carried in the independent clause. This information structure through clause ranking is seen across this genre of digital communication. Audiences are able to “establish the dependency relations among the ideas expressed in the sentence.”<sup>36</sup>

**Dependent Clauses**

The trend showed the predominant use of non-simple sentences across this genre of digital writing. This discussion, therefore, focused on the embedded dependent clauses characterizing this genre of writing. After identifying and counting the dependent clauses across the data, an observation was made of a whole

<sup>36</sup> Wiredu, “The Complex Sentence in Legal English: A Study of Law Reports.”

range of dependent clauses in the Facebook posts of the former president. Accordingly, Table 6 shows the different types of dependent clauses found in this variety of digital communication.

**Table 6: Types of Dependent Clauses**

Clause Types	Frequency	Percentage
Nominal Clauses	26	10.1
Relative Clauses	48	18.6
Adjectival Clauses	4	1.6
Adverbial Clauses	34	13.2
Non-finite Clauses	146	56.6
Total	258	100.0

Source: Field data, 2024.

The non-finite clause accounted for 56.6% of all dependent clauses used by the former president in making his Facebook posts. This observation affirms the assertion that the non-finite clause is the most preferred clause used to achieve information density. Other types of dependent clauses were found in the data though they were in relatively small proportions. The following sections will accordingly show how each dependent clause was used in the data to achieve linguistic complexity and communicate to the targeted audience. The argument hereof is in support of this study's position that grammatical preferences are not just mere stylistic elements, but serve as deliberate instruments carrying communicative intents.

### **Nominal Clauses**

The study found that the nominal clause accounted for 10.1% of all dependent clauses across the data. Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech, and Svartvik aver that "just as noun phrases may occur as subject, object, complement, appositive, and prepositional complement, so every nominal clause may occur in some or all of these roles."<sup>37</sup> In the data, these clauses served complement roles. Two types of nominal clauses were found across the data: THAT-clause and the Zero-That clause.

**Table 7: Nominal Clause Type**

Nominal Clause Types	Frequency	Percentage
That-Clause	19	73.1
Zero-That Clause	7	26.9
Total	26	100.0

Source: Field data, 2024.

There was a high preference for the THAT-clause by the former president. This dependent clause was used for verbal and adjectival complements. They provided information expansion. Examples of the THAT-clause found across the data are given below:

16. I am confident *that working together, the NDC will continue to be a strong and unified force and bring Ghana the deserved change in 2024.* [04-Dec-23]
17. It would appear *that violence has become the new normal for the NPP in any electoral contest they are involved in.* [26-Aug-23]

The THAT-nominal clauses in extracts (16) and (17) are used in complement roles. In extract (16), the clause *that working together, the NDC will continue to be a strong and unified force and bring Ghana the deserved change in 2024* complements the adjective *confident*. The THAT-clause serves to provide further explanation about what the former president is confident about. The clause is embedded within the adjectival group as a complement to the adjective head. Such clause embedding contributes to information density and language complexity. A similar instance of clause embedding was observed across the

<sup>37</sup> Quirk et al., *A University Grammar of English*.

Facebook posts of the former president. This clause embedding is illustrated with a tree diagram in Figure 6.

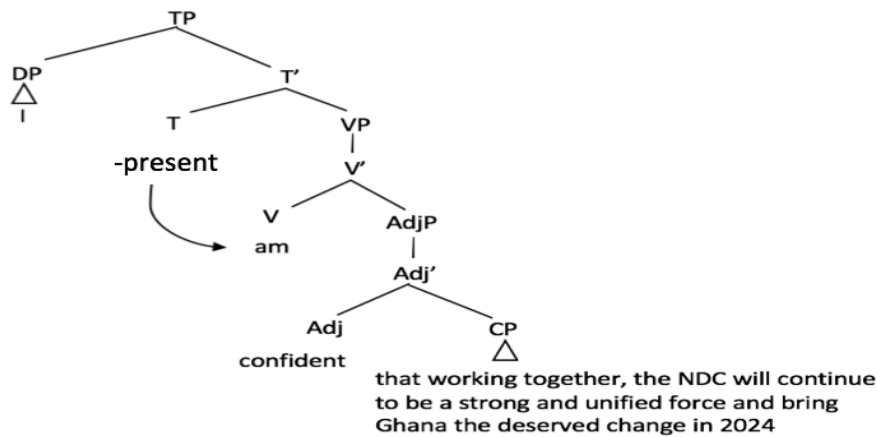


Figure 6: Embedding of That-Clause in an Adjectival Group

Similarly, in extract (17), the THAT-clause, *that violence has become the new normal for the NPP in any electoral contest they are involved in* is a verbal complement. It offers expansive information about the verb *would appear*. The dependent clause is also embedded within the verbal group as a complement. It takes the traditional syntactic position of a word element. The tree diagram in Figure 7 also illustrates the embedding of THAT-clause in a verbal group.

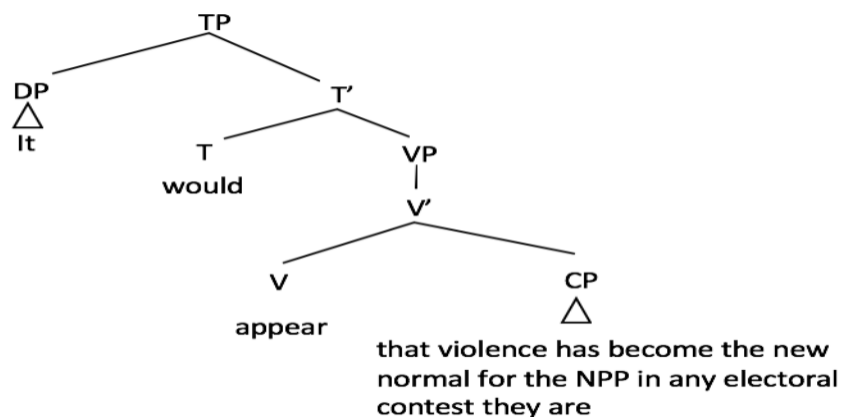


Figure 7: Embedding of That-Clause in a Verbal Group

The preference for Zero-That nominal clause was in relatively low proportion. This clause type performed both verbal and adjectival complement roles. An example of this clause is provided in extract (18).

- 18. On this occasion, I want to assure our farmers that the next NDC government will prioritise their welfare and work tirelessly to ensure *they have the necessary resources and support to thrive*. [01-Dec-23]

In the above extract, the Zero-That clause *they have the necessary resources and support to thrive* is embedded in the verbal group. It is the object of the verb *ensure* and provides expansive information about the verb. Like other clauses in the data, it was used to communicate the specific intentions of the former president and engage his targeted audience.

**The Relative Clause**

The incidence of the relative clause across the data was 18.6%. Relative clauses are used for identifying and expanding information about nominals. For a former president who seeks re-election, his Facebook channel is an avenue to rally the support of the electorates and clarify his vision for the future of the

country. Thus, he elaborated and clarified most information he gave to his audience. His clarification of information was tailored to resonate with the electorate’s current sentiments, emphasize his accomplishments, and inspire confidence in his leadership. He used three different types of relative clauses to achieve this: WH-relative, THAT-relative and WHIZ-relative. The distribution of these clauses is shown in Table 8.

**Table 8: Relative Clause Type**

Relative Clause Types	Frequency	Percentage
Wh-Relative Clause	22	45.8
That-Relative Clause	17	35.4
Whiz-Relative Clause	9	18.8
Total	48	100.0

Source: Field data, 2024.

Among the relative clause types, the WH-relative was the most used. This was followed closely by the THAT-relative clause. These clause types provided information about the noun complement. Examples of WH-relative and THAT-relative clauses are given in extracts (19) and (20) respectively.

19. This is unfair to our cocoa farmers, *who have been worse off since the NPP took over the reins of government in 2017*. [11-Sept-23]
20. Today, we all can attest to the fact *that nothing is working for anybody*. [27-Nov-23]

The slightly higher choice for WH-relative clause over THAT-relative clause is attributed to the former’s formal status. Thus, the president’s choice of the WH-relative clause was not only to elaborate his information but also to maintain a formal tone. This projected a sense of gravitas and statesmanship to instill confidence in his online audience, ensured the seriousness of his message, provided a more inclusive message and showed how the message was carefully drafted. The THAT-relative clause was, however, in close proportion to the WH-relative clause. This clearly shows that though the former president leaned towards a formal tone, he did not overlook issues of audience connection, engagement, strategic messaging and social media norms. For social media platforms such as Facebook, a more casual atmosphere is often created. Users expect content that feels native and less formal than traditional communication channels. A blend of both formal (WH-relative clause) and less formal structures (THAT-relative clause) was evident in the former president’s flexible and adaptable communicative style, effective communication of different topics to diverse audiences and adherence to the dynamics of digital platforms.

**The Adjectival Clause**

For the purposes of our study, we distinguished between relative and adjectival clauses. We considered adjectival clauses as those clauses introduced by the relative adverbs *where*, *when* and *why*. The adjectival clause, like the relative clause, details information about a specific noun. Adjectival clauses accounted for only 1.2% of the total dependent clause type in the data. Only one type of adjectival clause was seen across our data.

**Table 9: Adjectival Clause Type**

Adjectival Clause Type	Frequency	Percentage
Clause with Subordinator <i>Where</i>	4	100.0
Total	4	100.0

Source: Field data, 2024.

As shown in Table 9, all the adjectival clauses seen in the data were clauses with subordinator *where*. These clauses specify the location associated with a noun. It serves the purpose of adding descriptive details, offering context and answering the question ‘where’. Extract (21) exemplifies the use of adjectival clauses across the data.

21. Together, we can build a Ghana *where every child dreams of a brighter tomorrow, where well-paying job opportunities flourish, where infrastructure development connects communities, and where our beloved nation stands tall on the global stage.* [23-Nov-23]

In the above extract, the adjectival clause *where every child dreams of a brighter tomorrow* describes the type of Ghana being discussed. It specifies the condition or quality of Ghana by providing information about the dreams of every child. The second adjectival clause *where well-paying job opportunities flourish* also adds details to the type of Ghana being envisioned by the former president. It describes the economic aspect of a future Ghana proposed by the former president. In the third clause, *where infrastructure development connects communities*, a descriptive detail is offered about the infrastructure of Ghana while the fourth clause *where our beloved nation stands tall on the global stage* provides insight into the global status of Ghana. These adjectival clauses provide additional information about the characteristics, aspirations and qualities associated with a Ghana envisioned by the former president. The clauses allowed the former president to create a vivid picture of his deepest visions for re-election. Though in little proportion, adjectival clauses added variety to the sentence structures in this digital variety and made the former president’s communication more engaging to read.

**The Adverbial Clause**

Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech, and Svartvik share that “adverbial clauses operate as adjuncts or disjuncts...they are like adverbs, and are often commutable with prepositional phrases.”<sup>38</sup> In the data, the researchers found these clause types giving circumstantial information about the message communicated by the former president. Table 10 shows the distribution of adverbial clauses found in the data.

**Table 10: Adverbial Clause Type**

Adverbial Clause Types	Frequency	Percentage
Clause of Reason	5	14.7
Clause of Time	18	52.9
Clause of Purpose	2	5.9
Clause of Condition	4	11.8
Clause of Manner	1	2.9
Clause of Place	1	2.9
Clause of Comparison	2	5.9
Clause of Concession	1	2.9
Total	34	100.0

Source: Field data, 2024.

The distribution of adverbial clauses within the dataset exhibits an uneven pattern, indicative of nuanced pacing in the former president’s digital communication.

Adverbial clauses expressing temporal sense used the subordinators *as*, *when*, and *during*. This clause type provided a temporal framing to the former president’s discourse. He placed high emphasis on communicating information related to specific events and activities within a temporal context. More so, the adverbial clause of time kept the audience informed about ongoing and future activities and linked the former president’s posts with timely and relevant events in the political landscape. The following extracts are taken from the posts of the former president:

22. In 2012, *when a Ghanaian citizen decided to challenge the creation of the 45 new constituencies*, the Supreme Court had a sole judge to decide the interlocutory injunction application in a timely manner. [11-Sept-23]
23. *As we move forward with our #BuildingGhanaTour*, visiting more regions and connecting with more Ghanaians, I invite you, my fellow Ghanaian, to continue to share your ideas, concerns, and hopes for our nation's future. [23-Nov-23]

<sup>38</sup> Quirk et al., *A University Grammar of English*.

In extract (22), the adverbial clause *when a Ghanaian citizen decided to challenge the creation of the 45 new constituencies* provides information about the specific time during which the action of challenging the creation of new constituencies took place. The adverbial clause to time, as indicated, was used by the former president to recount key milestones in the political landscape of Ghana. He linked these past events to present occurrences and made a strong case for the justification of his re-election. In extract (23), the adverbial clause of time *as we move forward with our #BuildingGhanaTour* introduces a temporal context to the message. It provides information about the time for which the action of moving forward, visiting regions and connecting with Ghanaians is taking place. These clauses helped the former president to organize information chronologically, highlight temporal aspects of his message, and set expectations for future engagement. The adverbial clause of time reflected the pulse of the present moment and the urgency of ongoing developments. They were not merely linguistic devices but tools for real-time connection and orchestration of a symphony of engagement in a responsive digital space.

### Non-finite Clauses

The preceding sections have shown that the non-finite clause was preponderant in the dataset. This justifies it as the preferred dependent clause type in this genre of digital writing. More so, the researchers consider it as the linguistic tool used to achieve information complexity in digital communication. Table 11 shows the distribution of the two sub-types of non-finite clauses found in the dataset.

**Table 11: Non-Finite Clause Type**

Non-Finite Clause Types	Frequency	Percentage
Infinitive with <i>to</i>	87	59.6
Participle Clause	59	40.4
Total	146	100.00

Source: Field data, 2024.

The distribution of the two sub-types of non-finite clauses was in close proportion, with the infinitive *to* being in the majority. It was used as a clausal element (object), complement to the adjective head, object complement and adverbial.

Infinitive clauses as objects articulated the former president's objectives. He used these clauses to clarify his vision and commitments in seeking to be re-elected. A statement, as shown in extract (24), is, for instance, made by the former president.

24. Persons assigned to the public trust must be prepared *to be accountable to the people*. [11-Dec-23]

In extract (24), the infinitive clause *to be accountable to the people* is an object to the verb *prepared*. As an object, the infinitive clause specifies what individuals must be prepared to do, in this case, being accountable to the people. When functioning as an adjective complement, infinitive clause enriched descriptions in the former president's posts. The clause elucidated the specific nature of actions and also offered details to the message. Extract (25) exemplifies this:

25. It is important *for us to come together* and work towards unity and the growth of our party. [04-Dec-23]

In extract (25), the infinitive clause complements the adjective head *important*. The clause post modifies the adjective head explaining what is considered important, in this case, coming together.

The infinitive clause also provided additional information about what the former president was committed to. As object complements, infinitive clauses enhance the completeness of the statements. They are distinctly used to provide more details or specifications. Thus, they contributed to information density in this genre of digital communication.

26. I reiterated my commitment *to prioritise the completion of abandoned and uncompleted government projects in our communities*. [13-Dec-23]

The infinitive clause in extract (26) is *to prioritize the completion of abandoned and uncompleted government projects in our communities*. This clause is a complement to the noun phrase *my commitment*, which is the direct object of the sentence.

The research also found that, across the dataset, infinitive clauses were craftily used as adverbials. They provided information about the purpose, intention, or circumstances surrounding the action of the main verb. They also offered valuable insights into the motivations and conditions associated with the main action expressed in the message of the former president. As illustrated in extract (27), the infinitive clause offers circumstantial information. It provides information about the purpose or intention behind waging a war against corruption. The clause specifies why the former president intends to take the particular action of waging war against corruption.

27. ...my administration would wage a strong fight against corruption *to save money for reinvestment in the economy*. [11-Dec-23]

The participle clause was also deftly used to complement a prepositional head, adjectival complement and adverbial. This is illustrated in extracts (28) – (30) respectively.

28. Together, we will work towards *building the Ghana we want and for a brighter future for the NDC*. [04-Dec-23]

29. It was great *meeting with Dr Kwabena Duffuor* as we discussed the future of our party and the upcoming 2024 elections. [04-Dec-23]

30. *By extending the operational hours of businesses and essential services, investing in technology, providing, and strengthening security and boosting infrastructure development*, we will unlock unprecedented job opportunities and revitalise our economy in a way that benefits every Ghanaian. [23-Nov-23]

## CONCLUSION

In the examination of the former Ghanaian president's Facebook posts, a discerning pattern emerged, showcasing a careful and strategic use of sentence structures. The prevalence of declarative sentences underscores a direct and authoritative tone, a characteristic often sought in political discourse. However, the notable dominance of non-simple sentences, particularly complex sentences, indicated a nuanced approach to conveying intricate ideas and expressing a sense of depth. The strategic deployment of non-finite clauses served as a key driver of language complexity. It allowed for a subtle expression and contributed to the overall sophistication of the discourse. It was evident that these linguistic choices were not mere stylistic preferences but were carefully selected to align with the genre of political communication in a digital space, where precision, depth and strategic messaging play pivotal roles. The former president leveraged these syntactic structures to craft messages that resonated with the formal and authoritative expectations of the political genre while ensuring a refined and sophisticated but concise articulation of ideas in the dynamic realm of social media.

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## ABOUT AUTHORS

Esther Serwaah Afreh is a Senior Lecturer at the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology. She holds a PhD in Linguistics. Her research has concentrated on syntax and conceptual organisation in language.

Obed Atta-Asamoah holds an M.Phil. in English. He is also a Language Tutor at the College of Distance Education, University of Cape Coast (Hwidiem Learning Center). His research has focused on the [systemic] functional use of language in political discourse.

Ebenezer Asare has an M.Phil. in English from the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology. He is interested in genre studies and political discourse.