

# National Identity Construction in Independence Day Speeches of Anglophone West Africa

by

Dora F. Edu-Buandoh, Ph.D.  
dora.edubuandoh@ucc.edu.gh  
Department of English  
University of Cape Coast, Ghana

&

Nancy Boahemaa Nkansah  
nbnkansah@ug.edu.gh  
Language Centre  
University of Ghana, Legon

## Abstract

Nations are constantly and actively enacting their own identities to distinguish them from other nations and project them for international recognition. Independence Day speeches construct various forms of identities for the nations, their environment and what they hope to be. This paper looks at the collective construction of national identities represented in the discourse of Independence Day speeches of five postcolonial Anglophone countries in West Africa and the discursive features used in enacting these identities. Using the social and national identity theories, the paper discusses various aspects of national life embedded in the speeches, focusing on the five thematic contents of common political past, present and future, common culture and national character as espoused in Wodak et al (2009). The findings point to some differences and similarities in conceptualisation, self-categorisation and effects emanating from individual nations in relation to the discourse of their past, present and the future and with implications for collective efforts for national development.

## Introduction

### The Discursive Construction of National Identity

The concept of identity is considered as the positioning of the self in relation to others. Individuals and groups define themselves and are defined by others on the basis of certain characteristics such as race, ethnicity, religion, language and culture (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005; Deng, 1995) and in relation to their roles and social groups, hence the construction of personal and social identities. Social identity can be looked at from two angles: that which relates to the individual in the construction of individual identity and that which relates to the identity of the group, otherwise known as collective identity (Wodak, de Cillia, Reisigl & Liebhart, 2009).

The nation has been identified as the primary social group which individuals identify with in terms of their identity (Whannel, 1992). A nation, according to Anderson (1983), is an “imagined community” because it is purely a mental construct since no member of a nation gets to meet every other member, even in the smallest nation. Guibernau (1996) adds a relatively new dimension when he describes the nation as “a human group conscious of forming a community, sharing a common culture, attached to a clearly demarcated territory, having a common past and a common project for the future and claiming the right to rule itself” (p.47). Thus, a nation is a population that considers itself as sovereign which has a culture, a territory, a past and a future. Asante (2015) in his description of Kemet, the first nation state in human history, indicates that a nation has a racial dimension made up of people of different ethnic and social communities. The discursive nature of “nation” puts an identity on the people who occupy that sovereign state. National identities are special forms of social identities that are constructed, reproduced, transformed and destructed through language and other semiotic means (de Cillia, Reisigl & Wodak, 1999).

National identity, like other forms of identity, is not static, but constructed according to context: the social field, situational setting and topic. A nation, therefore, can produce multiple identities revolving around its past, the present and the future (Wodak et al, 2009). Studies on the discursive construction of national identity have largely focused on political speeches (Coe & Neumann, 2011; Berntson, 2014), media discourse (Alameda-Hernández, 2008; Georgalou, 2009) and commemorative speeches (de Cillia et al, 1999). These studies have revealed that different people emphasize different aspects of a nation’s identity as it relates to the *self* or the *other*: the construction of the *self* (nation), the *other* (other nations) and the *other* within the *self*.

In relation to the construction of the *self*, de Cilia et al (1999) looked at the topics, strategies and linguistic devices that are employed to construct national sameness and difference of Austria. Using focus group discussions as an example of a semi-public discourse, they identified that the idea of a homo Austriacus, the narrative of a collective political history, the discursive construction of a common culture, collective present and a national body constitute the contents of Austria’s national identity.

They distinguished four macro-strategies: constructive, perpetuation and justification, dismantling or destructive strategies and sub-strategies such as the presupposing of intra-national sameness where there was the use of the national *we* and the eponymic adverbial *Austrian*. The strategy of emphasizing national singularity was achieved through the use of the *Austrian* as a referent for *we* and the use of *own* to indicate that they were different from other people. The presupposition or emphasis of difference between nations was also realized through the use of terms such as *foreigners*, *southerners* and other labels. There was the use of positive self-representation as a constructive and perpetuating strategy. There was a repeated comparison between Austria and others although no specific reference was made. Their linguistic analysis focused on the lexical units, argumentation schemes and other syntactical means. There was the frequent use of the personal pronoun *we* with its variants and its corresponding possessive pronouns. The pronoun *we* was used to show national collective and had as its referent Austrians alive, those dead and even sub-national groups. The three tropes of metonymy, synecdoche and personification were employed as a constructive strategy to create sameness.

In a similar study, Berntson (2014) investigated the linguistic construction of national identities in two royal speeches by King Abdullah II of Jordan and King Mohammed VI of Morocco. He established that the Jordanian King focused on the construction of a common past and present through the use of the assimilation, inclusion and continuation strategy, and unification and cohesion strategies. This was achieved mainly through the use of the 1<sup>st</sup> person plural, spatial reference and time adverbials, and nationalistic vocabulary in general. On the other hand, the Moroccan King focused on the construction of a common political present through the use of unification and cohesion strategies which was realized linguistically through his choice of vocabulary, specifically his use of adjectives. While the Jordanian king had elements of the past in the construction of identity, the Moroccan king emphasised present events.

In the construction of the identity of the *other*, Coe and Neumann (2011) examined the role of foreigners in the construction of American national identity in the annual State of the Union Address of over eight decades. When foreigners are mentioned, places are usually mentioned first and people as second. When people are mentioned, the focus is more on leaders and citizens than on military troops. This is attributed to the ambivalence of the identity of military troops since they cannot be broadly classified as citizens or specifically as national symbols. In terms of their role, military troops and citizens are usually positioned as participants of the world order and leaders as dissenters because of their (leaders) role in determining the actions of nations. Citizens are also viewed as victims in need of US support with the exception of Obama who described citizens in neutral terms. In terms of the tone used in describing them, citizens are presented positively, leaders the most negatively, and troops in the most neutral terms. People or foreigners are not mentioned as exemplars worthy of emulation except for Obama who held up other nations as exemplars.

Alameda-Hernández (2008) also studied how the Gibraltarian identity was constructed by three different newspapers after the 2002 referendum. That is, the Gibraltarian press, Spanish press and the British press. Employing Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL's) transitivity system, it was found that Gibraltar was presented using the material, verbal, mental and relational processes throughout the Gibraltar, Spanish and British press though with varying degrees of occurrence in each of the data set. The participant roles assigned in the Gibraltarian press are the actor, senser and carrier roles. In the Spanish press, the participant roles are the senser, goal, beneficiary and actor roles. Gibraltar is mostly represented as a senser, goal, sayers, receiver, target and verbiage in the British press. In relating this to identity, the author points out that Gibraltar is presented as passive because of the absence of a goal. The senser is given prominence which is realized through the use of the pronoun *we* to represent the people of the Gibraltar. Gibraltarian authorities are usually assigned the participant role of sayers which endows them with greater power. In the Spanish Press, when Gibraltar is presented as an actor, it is responsible for negative connotations and as beneficiaries of actions by Spain or Britain. The relational process serves as a strategy to call for a change of the status quo, and the future status of Gibraltar is also not given prominence. There is also the use of structures such as noun phrases and prepositional phrases which imply a background representation of Gibraltar. The British Press also represents Gibraltar as a passive entity. Through the use of the verbal process, Gibraltar's ordinary citizens are given a voice but they are affected by the actions of others.

The above studies show that presidents and journalists are continually actors or responsible for the construction of various forms of identities. There are different identities that are likely to be constructed based on the speaker or writer although there are bound to be confirmation of the identities as in the case of Gibraltar.

Commemorative and political speeches provide a site for the construction of various national identities. One of such commemorative speech is the Independence Day speech, which is the focus of this paper. From this background, this paper sets out to find how national identities are constructed in Independence Day commemorative speeches in Anglophone West African countries, what identities are constructed by these nations and how the national identities constructed in the speeches point to national development.

## **Data, Theoretical and Analytical Frameworks**

The data consists of five Independence Day speeches of Anglophone West Africa: Ghana (GH), Nigeria (N), Sierra Leone (SL), The Gambia (TG) and Liberia (L). The most recent speech delivered in either 2016 or 2017 for each country was retrieved from the official government websites of the respective nations and coded for analysis. The Anglophone West African countries were selected purposively for this study because of their colonial past and for the common English language background.

The speeches were delivered by the presidents, except for Liberia where it is the practice to have a prominent person in the society deliver the speech. The Liberian speech used was delivered by an orator, Dr. Dougbah Chris Nyan. Although the presidents of the nations may not necessarily be the writers of the speeches, they cannot totally absolve themselves of the responsibility the speeches put on them as animators. Presidents are embodiments of the identities of their nations and are considered to be national political symbols (Coe & Neumann, 2011). The Liberian orator represents the voice of the citizenry.

## **Social Identity Theory**

This work employs the Social Identity Theory (SIT) and the Self Categorization Theory (SCT) by Tajfel and Turner (1979); Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher and Wetherell (1987) and Turner (1991). The Social Identity Theory dwells on three interrelated cognitive processes of group behaviour: social categorisation, social identification and social comparison. Social categorisation deals with the fact that individuals assign themselves and others into groups, creating an in-group and out-group distinction. They tend to act toward in-group members favourably and discriminate against out-group members. With social identification, individuals identify with the group they have categorised themselves into. People no longer perceive themselves as unique individuals, but as group members, and group membership overrides personal identity. Hence, group norms influence individual behaviour as a result of their membership to that group (Sindic & Condor, 2014). With social comparison, there is a comparison between in-group and out-group behaviour (Sindic & Condor, 2014). In order to achieve a positive sense of self, people perceive the groups to which they belong positively (Rubin & Hewstone, 1998; Weller, 1997). They, therefore, think and act in ways that achieve or maintain a positive distinctiveness between one's group and the other (Hornsey, 2008). When people are dissatisfied with the social group to which they belong because of their inferior or negative social identity, they engage in various forms of collective activities or strategies aimed at changing the comparative value associated with their group. These social change activities include dis-identifying with the group (physically or psychologically), making intergroup comparisons with another group of low status, focusing on dimensions that favour the in-group or focusing on a new dimension of comparison (Sindic & Condor 2014; Hornsey, 2008). The social change will depend on whether the inferior status of a social group is legitimate or not. However, when the inferior status is considered as illegitimate, members will engage in social competition in order to contest their inferior status (Sindic & Condor, 2014; Hogg, Terry & White, 1995)

Social Identity Theory was further developed as the Self Categorization Theory (SCT) by Turner (1987). The Self Categorization Theory states that when individuals categorise themselves as group members, they see themselves as similar to in-group members as a result of depersonalisation. That is, in-group members are seen as, reacted to and act as an embodiment of the relevant in-group prototype rather than as unique individuals (Hogg et al., 1995; Hogg & Terry, 2000). A prototype is a subjective representation of the defining attributes of a social category which includes beliefs, attitudes and behaviours (Hogg et al., 1995; Hogg & Terry, 2000), and is constructed according to context (Fiske & Taylor, 1991; Hornsey, 2008). The group prototypes maximise similarities within and differences between groups (Hogg & Terry, 2000). The two related theories are relevant for the present study since a nation is a social category which is defined by certain parameters and serve as the basis of comparison. Individuals in nations are also perceived as exemplars of national identity. Since individuals have categorised themselves as belonging to a nation, our focus is to investigate how a social category projects its identity within which individuals also situate their personal identities.

## **Discourse Historical Approach**

The analysis of the speeches is based on the Discourse Historical Approach for the discursive construction of national identity (Wodak, de Cillia, Reisigl & Liebhart, 2009). The authors distinguish between three types of analysis based on the idea of sameness and difference in contents, strategies and means and forms of realisation. In terms of content, national identity deals with five thematic areas which are the linguistic construction of the national spirit, the narration and confabulation of a common political past, the linguistic construction of a common culture, the linguistic construction of a common political present and future and the linguistic construction of a national body. These are used as markers to analyse the speeches collected. They also distinguish between strategies in relation to the construction, perpetuation and justification, transformation, and dismantling of national identities. The overall goal of the defining strategies is to emphasise sameness or difference. The search for identity includes differentiating *self* from the *other* and the politics of identity is always pointing to difference. Both the thematic areas and the strategies are viewed in relation to the lexical units and syntactic devices that are used in realizing them, as identified by Wodak et al, (2009) from the discursive constructions of a common political past, present and future, national character, common culture and national body.

## Discussion

### The Common Political Past

Individuals in nations claim their political past as a collective identity. The political past is seen as a history shared by the people of the country whether they were born at the time of events or not. Ghana's political past is presented starting from its status as a former British colony which gained independence some sixty years ago. Mention is made of specific dates and events such as the Bond of 1844, which led the country to become a British colony, the formation of the Aborigines Rights Protection Agency on 4<sup>th</sup> August, 1897, which marks the beginning of the struggle for independence, the launch of the First Political Party on 4<sup>th</sup> August, 1947 and the formation of the second political party, the Convention People's Party, on 12<sup>th</sup> June, 1949. The excerpt below illustrates this political past:

#### Excerpt 1

*We are met here today to celebrate the 60th anniversary of our nation's independence, to celebrate our freedom from the clutches of British imperialism, to celebrate the final achievement of the struggle of successive generations of Ghanaian patriots to establish a free, sovereign Ghana . . . Our founders chose this day, March 6, as the date of our independence, in order to repudiate the Bond of 6<sup>th</sup> March, 1844, which led to our land becoming a British colony. (GH: p.1)*

Specific names of individuals who contributed to the political past of Ghana, and their roles are also mentioned in the speech.

#### Excerpt 2

*It is worth mentioning some of the names of the members of the Society because, unfortunately, we have not often acknowledged their role –John Mensah Sarbah, Joseph Casely Hayford, J.W. Sey, J.P Brown, and their colleagues, who mobilized the chiefs and people against the Crown Lands Bill and forced the colonial authorities to retreat . . . I pay homage to Ephraim Amu, Tata Amu as he was fondly called. He was the composer of what easily passes as our unofficial National Anthem, Yen Ara Asase Ne . . . I pay homage to Philip Gbeho, the composer of our National Anthem, and to Theodosia Okoh, the designer of our national flag . . . I pay homage to Dede Ashikisham and Akua Shorshorshor, famous market queens, who financed Kwame Nkrumah and the nationalist movement from their successful businesses. (GH: p.3)*

Nigeria's political past is presented in two sentences in the opening paragraph of the speech:

Excerpt 3

*Today — first October is a day of celebration for us Nigerians. On this day, fifty-six years ago, our people achieved the most important of all human desires – freedom and independence. (N: p.1)*

The Gambia indicates that the country was declared independent some time in the past and this is stated in the opening paragraph in one simple sentence:

Excerpt 4

*It was on this day that The Gambia was declared Independent. (TG: p.1)*

Although there is no direct reference to colonialism, there is an implication of a country that was in a form of bondage. The Liberia speech presents the independence of Liberia although it acknowledges that Liberia was never colonised:

Excerpt 5

*Exactly One Hundred and Sixty-Nine (169 years) ago, our founding fathers bravely declared Liberia's independence to the whole world. As of this date, Liberia became a sovereign nation, making Liberia the first independent democratic country on the African Continent. History documents that Liberia was never colonized, nor occupied by any European colonial power. (L: p.2)*

However, the speech mentions the freedom from enslavement in America, the struggle between the settlers and the indigenous African population, the struggle for multiparty democracy and the civil conflicts from 1980s to early 1990s. These major events in the political past of Liberia are illustrated in the following excerpts:

Excerpt 6

*Encountering series of conflicts in their resolutions for peaceful coexistence, Liberia was founded and our founding parents finally realised their dream of returning to their continent of origin, free from slavery, free from servitude, and free from dehumanisation in the Americas. From then on we established a democracy and embarked on building a nation that was envisioned to be a replica of the socioeconomic and political system of the United States of America. (L: p. 3)*

Excerpt 7

*We witnessed series of conflicts between the “settlers” and the aborigines – we partially resolved that. We went through a period of the struggle for multiparty democracy – we made enormous progress at attempting to achieve it. We experienced the military coup d’état of 1980 which trampled on the little democratic footprints our fore-parents had established and this threw us backwards. Then came the 14-year civil war which rained death on the people and destroyed everything that this nation struggled to build: the civil war destroyed our infrastructure, destroyed the fabric of our society, destroyed precious lives, internally displaced our population, sent the Liberian people into refugee camps and dispersed Liberians all over the world. (L: p. 3)*

For Sierra Leone, the presentation of its political past does not make reference to colonisation but it mentions the efforts by the people to achieve self-government:

Excerpt 8

*Fellow Citizens, today once again, we celebrate the great event marking the decision of those before us to take charge of our destiny; to make our own laws, formulate our own policies and to implement our own programmes. Today, we celebrate fifty-six years of the freedom to manage our own affairs. (SL: p.1)*

It could be seen from the excerpts that each country had a different political past as stated in the Independence Day speeches. In the data, it is only Ghana that explicitly recognises its past political identity as a former colony of the British. Details of the history of its colonisation to independence are given in vivid terms thereby projecting a victim identity and reducing the significance of its political present and future. The excessive listing of individuals, comprising political actors, composers, artists, writers, musicians, educationists, market women, traditional leaders and ex-service men who contributed to Ghana’s independence, shows a country that recognises its heroes and heroines. They are described as *nationalists, brave and selfless individuals*.

Although Nigeria and The Gambia and part of Sierra Leone were also colonised by the British (www.thecommonwealth.org), the three countries do not explicitly state that colonial political past in the speeches. By not mentioning their past colonial identity, Nigeria, Gambia and Sierra Leone construct themselves as nations more focused on their present and future political identities, thus making their colonial identities insignificant. Nigeria and The Gambia do not say much about their past, but Liberia constructs a past political identity of people who have gone through various struggles, although they were not colonised, the most recent being the 14-year civil war. The speech describes Liberians as self-destructive, having destroyed what their forbearers did for the country – infrastructure, the fabric of the society, precious lives and peaceful coexistence of Liberians. The excerpt below sums up what is detailed in Excerpt 7:

#### Excerpt 9

*You see, it took about a combined 142 years to build Liberia by ourselves without any colonial master. Then, it took us as little as 10 years to destroy 142 years of hard work. We inflicted maxim damage on ourselves in so short a time. (L: p. 4)*

Linguistically, the political past is realized mainly through vocabulary and phrases. As victims of colonisation and conflicts, Anglophone West Africa describes its past through the use of expressions such as *British colony* and *clutches of British imperialism* to depict a nation that was colonised. Words such as *freedom, justice, a free, sovereign Ghana, independence, and independent democratic country* used in Excerpts 1-5 point to the independent status of nations after colonialism. The data also make use of temporal adverbs such as *sixty years, fifty six years ago, 169 years ago, and 52 years* to indicate a period in the past when these nations gained independence.

The Liberian speech uses words such as *series of conflicts, slavery, struggle, military coup d'état, and 14 year civil war* to show that they have been victims of conflicts. The effects of the civil war are realized through the use of the verb *destroyed* and its corresponding objects such as *our infrastructure, the fabric of our society and precious lives*.

The identity of appreciating heroes is realized mainly through noun phrases as appositives and the use of non-defining relative clauses as post-modifiers. The use of the appositives gives more information about these individuals while the relative clauses have been used to specify the roles of these individuals in Ghana's history.

There is the use of personal pronouns such as *we* and *our* in the excerpts to refer to a past that was shared by all.

## The Political Present

The political present in the speeches are determined by events and issues that are catalogued after independence of the nations up to present time. The discussions construct identities that are acknowledged by the speakers as pertaining to the nations. In the speeches from Ghana and Nigeria, the Armed Forces and the security services are appreciated for committing themselves to the peace of the nations and the world. The speeches construct the identity of a nation that is interested in the security of its people and grateful to those who ensure peace and security. The excerpts below illustrate that:

### Excerpt 10

*Our Armed Forces and security services are rightly celebrated across the region, the continent and the world for their professionalism and contribution to global peace and security. (GH: p. 1)*

### Excerpt 11

*Nigerians should thank our gallant men of the Armed Forces and Police for rescuing large areas of the country captured by insurgents. Now, residents in Borno, Yobe and Adamawa States, as well as several neighbouring states go about their daily business in relative safety . . . Credit for this remarkable turn-round should go to our Armed Forces, the Police, various sponsored and private vigilante groups, the local traditional leaders. Security is a top to bottom concern and responsibility. (N: p. 1)*

The president of Ghana is appreciative that the Armed Forces and security services are acknowledged globally for their commitment to duty just as the Nigerian president acknowledges that the Armed Forces and the Police have been able to ensure the security and safety of the people and, thus, deserve to be commended. The two speeches construct the identity of a peaceful and secured nation in both instances. All the speeches, except the Gambian speech, construct a stable and peaceful identity for the nations. Ghana makes reference to *domestic peace and tranquillity and the sanctity of our property*. Nigeria describes in detail how people are able to go about their daily lives because it has peace: *People can go to mosques, churches, market places in reasonable safety. Commuters can travel between cities, towns and villages without fear*. For Sierra Leone, the nation is presented as stable and peaceful through the collective efforts of government and the citizens, an achievement that the President attributes to the collective efforts of Sierra Leoneans:

Excerpt 12

*In my almost 10 years of service as your Head of State, I am proud of what we have achieved together. We have experienced a decade of uninterrupted stability in governance. Rated the most peaceful country in West Africa and the sixth most peaceful in Africa, we have demonstrated to the world that we are a peaceful and stable nation . . .*  
(SL: p. 1)

The speech from Liberia indicates that Liberians have lived and continue to live in peace in the last ten years. This is an achievement that is attributed to the President, the People of Liberia and the international community.

Excerpt 13

*As one of the notable achievements, every Liberian can undeniably point to the fact Liberians have lived in peace in the last 10+ years. Madam President, we whole heartedly thank you, the people of Liberia and the international community for keeping the peace.* (L: p. 5)

The Gambia presents an identity of a country that is just emerging from instability and conflict. The relative peace it enjoys, as stated in the speech, is very recent and only after the change of Government in February 2017:

Excerpt 14

*Gambia has changed forever. The people are fully conscious that they can put government in office as well as remove it. No government will ever be able to entrench itself against the will of the Gambian people. This is the lesson we must draw from the change that has been brought by the people. We are now confronted with many challenges. We have inherited an economy that has declined because of political uncertainty. During the political impasse, businesses were shot down, offices and schools were closed. Foreign missions scaled down their staff, 50, 000 left the country and over 126, 000 became internally displaced. People restricted their movements and the country became ungovernable. The country would have remained in such a situation if the new government did not succeed in finding a solution to the impasse.* (TG: p.1)

Apart from the identity of gratitude and peacefulness, three of the nations—Ghana, Nigeria and The Gambia—present themselves as presently nations under some economic crises emanating either from the post-independence era or from contemporary mismanagement by previous governments. The speech by the Ghanaian president bemoans the abysmal state of the economy which has contributed to a lot of Ghanaians being poor as is illustrated below:

Excerpt 15

*Sadly, the economic dividend that was meant to accompany our freedom has still not materialised. Sixty years after those heady days, too many of our people continue to wallow in unacceptable poverty. (GH: p.5)*

In Nigeria, the economic crisis is seen in relation to people not being able to pay school fees, afford the cost of food, the cost of local and international travel, and graduate unemployment.

Excerpt 16

*I know that uppermost in your minds today is the economic crisis. The recession for many individuals and families is real. For some It means not being able to pay school fees, for others it's not being able to afford the high cost of food (rice and millet) or the high cost of local or international travel, and for many of our young people the recession means joblessness, sometimes after graduating from university or polytechnic. (N: p. 1)*

For The Gambia, the nation is presented as one in economic crisis as a result of its recent past, an indication of the extension of the past into the present:

Excerpt 17

*We are now confronted with many challenges. We have inherited an economy that has declined because of political uncertainty. (TG: p. 2)*

The Liberia speech does not mention any economic crisis in the present and the Sierra Leone speech presents a nation that is experiencing economic growth as a result of its policies.

Excerpt 18

*Our policies have attracted an unmatched record of foreign direct investments into our country, resulting in the employment of many of our young people particularly in the extractive sector. And owing to those actions, we have witnessed a corresponding double digit economic growth. (SL: p. 1)*

One common identity in the political present is the claim to democracy. All the nations claim the identity of democratic governments.

Excerpt 19

*The records show that our democratic credentials remain ever more commendable. We are reviewing our constitution, strengthened our transparency and accountability mechanisms, opened up the media space and the voices of civil society actors are becoming louder. Every now and again, majority of Sierra Leoneans conduct their affairs in keeping with the tenets of democracy and good governance. We vote in a peaceful manner. (SL: p. 2)*

Excerpt 20

*I would like to thank the Gambian electorates for their astuteness. They exercised their civic rights in a peaceful and non-violent manner during the campaign, on election day as well as after the elections . . . It is the decision of Gambians to change a Government which has entrenched itself through the ballot box . . . Gambia has changed forever. The people are fully conscious that they can put government in office as well as remove it. No government will ever be able to entrench itself against the will of the Gambian people. (TG: p 1)*

Excerpt 21

*After the brutal civil war, we have had two successive democratic elections, elections in which several political parties participated. With over 20 political parties in a population of about 4.5 million people, Liberia can literally boast of practicing multi-party democracy during the last 10+ years. (L: p. 8)*

#### Excerpt 22

*On 7th December, 2016, the Ghanaian people exercised their sovereign franchise, in a dignified and serene manner, to remove an incumbent and elect a new government, and, thus, demonstrated again their deep attachment to democratic values and governance . . . Finally, in Ghana, a consensus emerged with the coming into being of the Fourth Republic. We have agreed on a multi-party constitutional democracy and a guarantee of individual freedoms under the rule of law. (GH: pp. 4-5)*

Although Nigeria does not explicitly state its democratic identity, the reference to individuals having run for office implies that there is a system of governance that allows for the selection of officers by the people.

#### Excerpt 23

*But let me say to all Nigerians today, I ran for office four times to make the point that we can rule this nation with honesty and transparency . . . 'I ran for office because I know that good government is the only way to ensure prosperity and abundance for all. I remain resolutely committed to this objective. (N: p. 1)*

*The present identity of being appreciative is realized through the use of words such as thanks and credit. The use of attributive adjectives in the following phrases such as peaceful and stable nation, uninterrupted stability, and most peaceful country is indicative of the nature of peace that is being enjoyed in these nations as can be seen in Excerpts 12, 13 and 14.*

In describing their economic status, words such as *economy, economic dividend and economic crisis* are found in the data set. The use of the present participial forms, *has declined* and *has still not materialised*, in Excerpts 16 and 17 shows how bad the nations have fared in terms of economic growth. The present participle *has materialised* and the negative marker *not* shows the negative stance of the otherwise positive statement which has a present relevance. The effect of the economic failure in Ghana is described using the adjective *unacceptable* to qualify *poverty* to show the extent of poverty. *In Excerpt 16, the Nigerian president mentions what the economic crisis means for Nigerians. Pronouns such as many, some and others reflect the idea of a nation as an imagined community with no specific reference to groups of persons.*

In relation to democracy, nouns such as *democratic credentials, campaign, elections, vote* and *civic rights* were used to indicate the particular subject matter as these suggest democratic practices. This political achievement is seen as a collective effort which is realized through the use of personal pronouns such as *we* and *our* as subjects in active sentences:

*We are reviewing our constitution . . . we have had two successive democratic elections.*

## **Political Future**

The political future of the nations is wound around hard work, honesty, respect for the rule of law, tolerance, unity, economic growth and respect for the rights of citizens. In the area of economic growth, all except Sierra Leone construct this identity. Ghanaians are admonished to build the identity of hard work, enterprise, creativity and honesty. This future identity projected in the speech is expected to build the economy of Ghana:

Excerpt 24

*The challenge before us is to build our economy and generate a prosperous, progressive and dignified life for the mass of our people. Hard work, enterprise, creativity and a consistent fight against corruption in public life would bring the transformation we seek.* (GH: p. 5)

The nation is also expected to be united. Ghanaians are entreated to collectively work towards the unity of the nation despite its ethnic diversity:

Excerpt 25

*We will achieve these goals when we move and act as a united people. We must take pride in our diversity by all means, but the Ghanaian must always rise above the ethnic or sectional interest.* (GH: p. 5)

In the Nigerian speech, the speaker projects that the nation will fight the identity of corruption, ensure growth of the economy and build the identity of self-sufficiency for the nation:

Excerpt 26

*Fighting corruption is Key, not only to restoring the moral health of the nation, but also to freeing our enormous resources for urgent socio-economic development . . . The country should be self-sufficient in basic staples by 2019. (N: p. 2-3)*

The Sierra Leoneans look forward to a nation where the rule of law is respected and regulations of political parties and rights of individuals are respected. This identity is illustrated below:

Excerpt 27

*We must continue to allow the rule of law to prevail, adhere to the regulations of our political parties and respect the right of others to participate in the electoral process. (SL: p. 2)*

Although Sierra Leoneans are democratic, they intend to strengthen their democracy through the collective efforts of the people. The speech points to *the new Sierra Leone* where diversity is tolerated and respected.

The Gambia sees its future as closely linked to partnership with foreign agencies and external partners, unlike the other nations which expect their citizens to be the key actors of the political future.

Excerpt 28

*The Government will seek to partner with ECOWAS, AU, the UN, other traditional development partners like the US, the EU, UK and new development partners to improve on infant and maternal health. The aim is to improve their wellbeing and reduce mortality. (TG: p. 2)*

In addition, the nation looks forward to developing respect for human rights and protecting the rights of citizens and again the onus is on the government, not the citizens. The speech, like that of the other nations, presents a future of a united nation despite its diversity.

Liberia's political future is focused on peace and unity, respect for rule of law, improved education and an end to corruption. Here, it is the responsibility of the nationals, especially the experts in education and those in the Diaspora to improve the lives of Liberians.

Excerpt 29

*We must ensure that the teachers who teach our children are themselves well-trained to be in the class room . . . But allow me to suggest this if there is none that we can really point to, then we need to mobilize around the spirit of "UNITY." For, we need unity more than ever before, as we have recently emerged from a period of self-destruction during the civil conflict. I believe that there is much more that unites us as Liberians or people of Liberian origin than that which divides us . . . Marching into the future, we must ensure that public institutions are able to effectively and honestly manage public resources and conduct public affairs in a manner that is free of corruption and abuses, and upholds the rule of law. (L: p. 10)*

Liberia also sees the future as a platform to address issues related to gender disparity and equal opportunities for both genders, as well as technological advancement. The use of verbs such as *build, generate, move* and *act* and the use of nouns such as *hard work* and *creativity* in the Ghanaian speech are suggestive of what needs to be done to ensure economic growth and unity in the future.

*In Excerpt 24 and 26, corruption is personified. As an abstract entity, corruption is assigned human qualities as that which fights, corrodes and destroys. These qualities foreground the concept to show the enormity of the issue and the need to deal with it. With regard to the future identity of adhering to the rule of law, phrases such as *rule of law, our political parties* and *electoral process* are drawn on. The frequent use of the verb *to improve* in Excerpt 28 denotes the desire for a change of the current status of The Gambia. There is also a frequent use of the modal *must* in constructing the political future identity in the Liberian and Ghanaian speeches as can be seen in Excerpt 25 and 27. The modal is used in constructing the identities of unity and adherence to the rule of law in order to place an obligation on the citizens of these nations. Apart from the use of the modal *must*, there is also the use of personal pronouns *we* and *our* to suggest that the building of the economy, being united, adherence to the rule of law and an improvement in education is a collective responsibility. The political future leads obviously to speak to the thematic content of national identities, culture and integration.*

## **National Identities, Common Cultures and Promotion of National Integration**

According to Wodak et al (2009), common culture and national character as thematic content of national identity construction is important in sameness and difference of nations. Wodak et al identify language, religion, art, science and technology, and everyday culture as key pillars of common culture. Although the five speeches did not talk about the ordinary everyday culture of clothing, eating and drinking habits, etc. as mentioned by the authors, all the speeches mention religion as key to the common culture of the people. This gives the nations a cultural identity that seeks to revere deities. Reference to religion was either for Christianity or Islam. Interestingly, none mentioned African Traditional Religion (ATR). It is not clear whether the omission is from the size of the population of the two religions mentioned as against ATR, or due to the political past of colonialism with its concomitant missionary characteristics. Intra-nationally, the five Anglophone West African countries rely on God/Allah for achieving success. The sameness of this common culture of Abrahamic religiosity is touted in all the speeches. In addition, specific nations have common cultures that present the people and the national character of the nations in unique ways. While Ghana presents a national character of patriotism and boasts of its natural resources, Nigeria presents a national character of patience, steadfastness and resilience and also boasts about its richness in water bodies. Sierra Leone describes a national character of resilience and pride. For The Gambia and Liberia, recent wars have perhaps tainted their national characters to the extent that the celebratory speeches could not absolve them of the characters of pain and suffering that comes from the wars and conflicts that have ravaged the nations. There is however an optimistic future character to be developed, as stated in the speeches, if Gambians and Liberians will redeem the past for the future of positive national characters. The concept of national integration is projected in the general appeal to citizens to eschew vices such as corruption and see the common good.

## **Conclusion**

The study investigated the construction of national identities by specifically looking at what and how national identities are constructed in Independence Day commemorative speeches of Anglophone West Africa, and also how the identities point to national integration. In the speeches, there are different foci for each of the countries as some focus on the past, or present or the future. Ghana's speech is mainly about the past with very little about the present and the future, whereas the Nigerian's speech is all about the future with very little about the past. The national identities that are thematically constructed point to commonalities as well as uniqueness. Generally, there is the identity of a common colonial past, except for Liberia, with related challenges that none forgets. There is the identity of nations that are politically independent, security conscious, grateful, democratic and are relatively stable but with economic challenges.

Despite the fact that there are present challenges, Anglophone West Africa is optimistic about the future. In future, Anglophone West Africa hopes to ensure socio-economic growth, be united despite their differences, be democratic and respect the rule of law. In terms of culture, the nations are constructed as religious and the national character is defined in terms of their collective strength in their characters and resources. Challenges of corruption and economic issues thematically run through the speeches but the optimism that ends the speeches indicate that the nations are ready to mobilize their citizens for a better future. The call for national integration is an important core for all the speeches.

The study reinforces the idea that the construction of national identity is about sameness as there is no explicit construction of national difference in the nations. In employing the Social Identity Theory and the Self-Categorization Theory, this study has also revealed that not only are social categories presented positively all the time, but there can also be a negative presentation of social categories depending on the choice of data. Socially, these identities will lead to international and intra-national cohesion due to the commonalities in the identities of the nations studied. The study emphasizes the relationship that links the political past, present and future identities of nations as necessary to promote development and national integration. This sociolinguistic study offers an impetus for studies to explore the construction of national identities in other national documents.

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