

Lexico-syntactic analysis of antonyms in some speeches of John Dramani Mahama

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Abstract

Language and politics are intertwined. This is because in order to champion political interest, politicians rely on some powerful linguistic resources to communicate with their audience. Available literature suggests that one of such linguistic resources is antonyms. However, researchers have not paid attention to the use of antonyms in political discourse, especially, in Ghana. On account of this, the present study investigated the lexico-syntactic features of antonyms in some speeches of John Dramani Mahama, a former President of the Republic of Ghana. The study is an interface between cognitive semantics and political discourse which sought to discover the lexico-syntactic features and the functional implications of the antonym pairs used in the speeches of John Dramani Mahama. The study was conducted within the framework of the Lexical Field Theory and the speeches were analysed, using the qualitative research method. Through the use of purposive sampling method, sixteen (16) political speeches of John Dramani Mahama were selected for the analysis. The study relied on Cruse's (1986) outlined features of antonymy and Murphy's (2003) theoretical view on context-derived antonymy to identify the antonym pairs in the speeches. The study discovered one hundred and seventy-three (173) antonym pairs in the sixteen (16) selected speeches. The outcome of the study further revealed the noun phrase pair as the largest grammatical category in the selected speeches. The study again showed that John Dramani Mahama usually uses noun antonymic pairs and the coordinated frame *X and Y* in his political speeches. The study concluded that John Dramani Mahama uses antonyms in his speeches to persuade his audience, establish association, inspire hope and confidence, call for patriotism and hardworking towards national development, and finally, to present his political vision to Ghanaians.

Keywords: Antonyms; John Dramani Mahama; Political discourse; Linguistic resources

1. Introduction

According to Jones (2002: 9), the term *antonymy* was formulated in 1867 by the British Clergyman, Charles John Smith, as an opposite of *synonymy* (a relation that holds between words with similar meaning). Smith (1867) thus describes *antonyms* as words which contrast in meaning. Generally, the term *antonym* is used to refer to lexical items that are semantically opposed (Lyons, 1977; Cruse, 2000; Jones, 2002; Murphy, 2003; Saeed, 2016). In lexical semantics, *antonymy* has been considered as one of the most crucial semantic relation because it holds an important place in our everyday life communication situations unlike the other sense relations. Hence, antonymic pairs are often employed in political discourse where ideologies are at play to achieve some desired results. However, researchers have not paid attention to the use of antonyms in political speeches.

The earlier studies on political discourse have focused on the description and analysis of style, ideologies and rhetorical strategies of politicians, metaphorical structures and manipulation of linguistic constructions to champion individual interests in political speeches. For instance, Djabetey (2013) conducted a study on the critical discourse analysis of

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selected campaign speeches of two presidential candidates, Nana Addo Dankwa Akuffo-Addo and John Dramani during the 2012 general elections in Ghana. The study reported that the selected candidates project power relations and strategies that are ideologically motivated in presenting their ideas to their audience. Anderson (2014) explored the stylistic analysis of selected political speeches of John Evans Atta Mills. The study revealed that John Evans Atta Mills uses stylistic features such as positive self-projection, code switching, biblical and historical allusions and the imagery of a preacher to present his political ideas.

Lawan (2016) also did a critical discourse analysis of metaphor in selected acceptance and inaugural speeches of president Goodluck Jonathan and Barack Obama. The author disclosed that Obama and Goodluck employ metaphors as an effective element in their tirades of lies and deception to misguide the people. Awawdeh (2021) conducted a critical discourse analysis of president Donald Trump's speeches during the coronavirus crisis. The study showed that Trump uses some lexical items in his selected speeches to highlight concepts such as American's superiority and supremacy, national unity, citizens' involvement and self-glorification. Bani-Khaled and Azzam (2021) explored the theme of unity in president Joe Biden's inaugural speech delivered on the 20th of January, 2021. The researchers reported that the speaker use religion and history as sources of rhetorical persuasive devices. Mwinwelle (2021) also investigated the lexico-stylistic features of selected political speeches of John Dramani Mahama. The study revealed that Mahama uses simple vocabulary in order to reach his audience from different levels and backgrounds. The study further showed that John Dramani Mahama believes in the political ideologies of Dr. Kwame Nkrumah.

Mention must be made that these studies (Djabetey, 2013; Anderson, 2014; Lawan, 2016; Awawdeh, 2021; Bani-Khaled & Azzam, 2021 and Mwinwelle, 2021) have revealed how politicians use language in their political speeches to present their political ideologies and aspirations, show power relations and persuade their audience. However, none of these previous studies focused on the lexico-syntactic features of antonyms and their functional implications in political speeches. As a result, the public have not been well-informed about the use of antonyms in political discourse, especially, in presidential speeches. According to Jones (2002), antonyms surrounds us and form an integral part of the human communication system, hence, worthy of study. On account of this, there is the need to investigate the use of antonyms in political speeches, particularly, in Ghana to unravel how and why antonym pairs are used in political speeches.

Towards this end, the present study analyses the lexico-syntactic features of antonyms and their rhetorical effects in sixteen (16) selected speeches of John Dramani Mahama, a Ghanaian politician who served as a President of the Republic of Ghana from 2012 to 2016. The aim of the study is to identify the antonymic pairs and their word classes. The study further looks at the lexico-syntactic frames (structures) of the antonyms and their functional implications in the speeches. The researchers concentrate on the political speeches of John Dramani Mahama because of his political experience in Ghana. In the political history of Ghana, John Dramani Mahama is the first president of the Republic of Ghana to have served at almost all levels of political office. He served as an Assemblyman, Member of Parliament, Minister of State, Vice president, President and Chairman of Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) among others. The researchers, therefore, believe that studying the speeches of John Dramani Mahama would unearth how antonym pairs are grammatically structured in text and further educate readers on their functional implications in political speeches.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Definition of Antonymy

It is believed that the British priest, C. J. Smith, in his book *Synonyms and Antonyms* (1867: 11) introduced the term *antonymy*. He describes the term *antonymy* as a relation between words that are opposed in meaning and *antonyms* as words that contrast in meaning. Smith (1867: 11) considers *antonymy* as the opposite of *synonymy* and suggests the word *counterterm* as an alternative for *antonym*. Over the years, many scholars have made an attempt to define the concept of antonymy. For instance, Egan (1968: 41) defines *antonym* as "a word so opposed in meaning to another word; it's equal in breath or range of application, that is negates or nullifies every single word of its application". From Egan's (1968) definition of antonym, two lexical items can only be classified antonymous if they agree and differ on some semantic features. Egan (1968: 41) presents *parent/child*, *white/black*, *question/answer*, *perfect/imperfect* as examples of antonyms. Lyons (1977: 271) also defines *antonymy* as an "oppositeness of meaning between lexemes" and *antonyms* as "words which are opposite in meaning". He limits the term *antonym* to *gradable opposites* on the account of its polarity. Lyons (1977: 271) presents words like *buy/sell*, *male/female*, *high/low* and *rich/poor* as antonym pairs.

Lyons (1977) agrees with Smith (1867) and Egan (1968) that antonymy expresses *oppositeness* of meaning between lexical items. Leech (1981: 92) defines *antonyms* as "words of opposite meaning". He argues that defining *antonyms* exclusively as "words of opposite meaning" is inadequate in the sense that the word *antonym* creates an erroneous

impression that words contrast only on a single dimension. Thus, Leech (1981) disagrees with Egan (1968) and Lyons's (1977) exclusive definition of *antonym* as "word of opposite meaning". This, according to him, mistakenly denotes that words contrast only on a single dimension. He points out *woman/man*, *boy/girl*, *male/female* and *adult/child* as examples of antonyms. Cruse (1986: 204) defines *antonym* on the basis of the following characteristics. According to him, antonyms are fully gradable and usually move in opposite directions along a particular scale such as *length*, *weight*, *speed*, *accuracy* etc. He adds that members of an antonym pair have a midpoint value which cannot be properly referred to by either of the pair.

Cruse's (1986) outlined features of antonymy points to *gradable antonyms*, hence, he restricts the term *antonymy* to only *gradable antonyms* rather than being used as a cover term for all kinds of lexical opposites. Thus, Cruse (1986: 204) states *hot/cold* as an antonym pair with an intermediate quality like *warm*, *tepid* or *lukewarm*. He further presents *big/small*, *old/young* and *long/short* among others as typical examples of antonyms. Like Lyons (1977), Cruse (1986) restricts the term *antonymy* to *gradable opposites* as opposed to Egan (1968) who use the term *antonymy* to refer to the other kinds of lexical opposites. Murphy (2003: 169) also defines *antonymy* as "arguably the archetypical lexical semantic relation". This definition of *antonymy* reveals that antonymic relationship is both lexical and semantic. Murphy (2003: 169-170) introduces the principle of *Relation by Contrast –Lexical Contrast* (RC-LC) to argue that antonyms share some common features and differ on a single contrasting feature.

Murphy (2003) disagrees with the theoretical position of Leech (1981) that words contrast with other words on a number of dimensions. While Lyons (1977) and Cruse (1986) consider *antonymy* as one of the lexical opposites, Murphy (2003) proposes that *antonymy* and *opposite* should be used interchangeably. Murphy (2003: 170-173) indicates word pairs like *fresh/stale*, *female/male*, *alive/dead*, *happy/sad*, *hot/cold* and *alive/dead* as antonyms. Saeed (2016: 63) defines *antonyms* as "words which are opposite in meaning". He reveals that antonymic words share some similarities and differ as well. Saeed (2016: 66-67) points out the *pair pass/fail*, *above/below*, *employer/employee* and *hit/miss* as antonymous. Saeed's (2016) admission of the synchronic occurrence of sameness and contrast of antonymous pairs correlates with Murphy's (2003) theoretical view of *maximal similarity* and *minimal difference* in defining the concept of *antonymy*.

The various definitions of *antonymy* analysed so far indicate that scholars have made several attempts over the years to define the concept of *antonymy*. Regardless of the discrepancies in their efforts to define *antonymy*, some relevant facts pertaining to *antonymy* have been established. First of all, it is revealed that *antonymy* expresses oppositeness in meaning between two lexical items. Again, it has been indicated that *antonymy* can be defined from two different approaches – the lexical and semantic. The review further shows that *antonymy* can be used in a broad and narrow sense. However, the current study takes the broad sense approach which covers all word relations that are opposite in meaning. Finally, the review establishes that *antonymy* operates on the principle of *maximal similarity* and *minimum difference*. In sum, the term *antonymy*, generally, refers to words which contrast in meaning.

2.2. Previous Studies on Political Speeches

Several studies have been conducted on political discourse both locally and internationally to reveal some hidden meanings in political speeches. For instance, Djabetey (2013) conducted a study on the critical discourse analysis of selected campaign speeches of two presidential candidates, Nana Addo Dankwa Akuffo-Addo and John Dramani during the 2012 general elections in Ghana. The study was carried out to analyse the power relations, ideologies and persuasive techniques employed in the speeches. The study employed the analytical frameworks in the critical discourse analysis (CDA) domain with other related frameworks servings as additions. The study reported that the selected candidates project power relations and strategies that are ideologically motivated to persuade the audience to endorse their bid for the position of president. Djabetey's (2013) study exposed how politicians hide behind language to persuade their audience. While Djabetey (2013) focussed on power relations, ideologies and persuasive strategies in political speeches, the current study concentrates why and how politicians use antonym pairs in their political speeches.

Anderson (2014) also explored the stylistic analysis of selected political speeches of John Evans Atta Mills. The study was set out to discover whether the stylistic features in the speeches relate to his background and further ascertain if the inherent stylistic features project him as a Man of Peace. The study relied on Halliday's (1994) Systemic Functional Linguistics and Onah's concept of Peace. The study showed that the speaker uses stylistic features such as positive self-projection, repetition, code switching, biblical and historical allusions to show his mental disposition and traces of his background. Again, the study revealed that the stylistic features used by the speaker with respect to the underlining socio-political, socio-cultural and religious situation project him as a Man of Peace.

While Djabetey (2013) investigated campaign speeches of two presidential candidates, John Dramani Mahama and Nana Addo, Anderson (2014) did a stylistic analysis of selected political speeches of John Evans Atta Mills. Contrary to Djabetey (2013) who employed the analytical framework in the domain of critical discourse analysis (CDA) to analyse the data, Anderson (2014) used Halliday's (1994) Systemic Functional Linguistics and Onah's Concept of Peace. While Anderson (2014) revealed the relevance of stylistic features in the political speeches of John Evans Atta Mills, the current study investigates the lexico-syntactic features of antonyms in selected political speeches of John Dramani Mahama. Lawan (2016) did a critical discourse analysis of metaphor in selected acceptance and inaugural speeches of president Goodluck Jonathan and Barack Obama. The purpose of the study was to critically analyse the use of metaphors in the speeches.

The researcher relied on the critical metaphor analysis which is an aspect of critical discourse analysis to examine the different forms of metaphors used in the speeches and their functional implications. The study reported that metaphors perform different functions apart from being an element of literary aesthetic or verbose display of language proficiency. The study revealed that metaphors in the speeches perform three major functions: the pragmatical (emphasise the true-value of a statement), power relations (exercise power and show power struggle) and political (as a persuasive tool). Anderson (2014) looked at the stylistic features in political speeches of John Evans Atta Mills while Lawan (2016) examined the functional implications of the use of metaphor in the political speeches of Goodluck Jonathan and Barack Obama. Unlike Lawan (2016) who focuses on metaphor in the selected speeches of two political personalities, the present study explores the use of antonyms in some political speeches of John Dramani Mahama.

Awawdeh (2021) conducted a critical discourse analysis of president Donald Trump's speeches during the coronavirus pandemic crisis. The study aimed at investigating the implications of Trump's choice of certain lexical items and further looked at the ideologies reflected in his use of certain grammatical patterns. The selected speeches were analysed in the light of Fairclough's (2001) three-dimensional model of the critical discourse analysis. The study showed that Trump uses the lexical items in the selected speeches to highlight concepts such as American's superiority and supremacy, national unity, citizens' involvement and self-glorification. The researcher concluded that Trump uses bombastic language in the speeches to attract Americans to his ideology. While Awawdeh (2021) looked at implications of linguistic choices in political speeches, the present study investigates how antonym pairs are grammatically structured in political speeches.

Bani-Khaled and Azzam (2021) investigated the theme of unity in president Joe Biden's inaugural speech delivered on the 20th of January, 2021. The study was set out to discover how the theme of unity was conveyed in the speech through linguistic choices. The study adopted a qualitative analytical analysis of the concept of unity as referred to in the speech. The results showed that the Joe Biden uses appropriate language in addressing the theme of unity. Again, the researchers reported that the speaker use religion and history as sources of rhetorical persuasive devices. Like Awawdeh (2021), Bani-Khaled and Azzam's (2021) study brought to fore how lexical items in political speeches reflect the ideological stance of politicians. Unlike Bani-Khaled and Azzam (2021) who focused on the theme of unity in president Joe Biden's inaugural speech, the current study looks at the concept of antonymy in some political speeches of John Dramani Mahama.

Mwinwelle (2021) explored the lexico-stylistic analysis of selected political speeches of John Dramani Mahama. The focus of the study was to analyse the use of lexical items and the functions they play in the speeches from the stylistic perspective. The study was conducted within the framework of Halliday (1994) and Matthiessen's (2014) Systemic Functional Grammar theory. The researcher analysed the lexical items from a descriptive and interpretative approach. The study revealed that Mahama predominantly uses nouns in the speeches to refer to the plans and policies that his government wishes to carry out. The study also reported that Mahama uses simple vocabulary in order to reach his audience from different levels and backgrounds. Both Awawdeh (2021) and Mwinwelle (2021) focus on the linguistic choices of politicians. While Mwinwelle (2021) focused on the lexico-stylistic analysis of political speeches, the current study looks at the lexico-syntactic analysis of antonyms in political speeches.

2.3. Theoretical Framework

Theoretically, the present study is based on the lexical field theory. The theory establishes that words should not be considered in isolation but in their relationship to semantically related words (Saussure, 1916; Trier, 1931). According to Cruse (1986), the meaning of a word is constituted by its contextual relations similar to Firth's (1957: 11) claim that "You shall know a word by the company it keeps". The above theoretical claims show that the meaning of a word is dependent on the meaning of the other words of the same lexical field. Thus, the study of word relation is central to the study of meaning. Linguists have proposed two relations which are fundamental in establishing meaning of words in the lexical field analysis: the syntagmatic and paradigmatic relation.

Whereas the syntagmatic analysis studies the syntax (surface structure) of a text, the paradigmatic analysis seeks to identify the various paradigms embodied in text where the values of specific linguistic items are defined (Murphy, 2003; Geeraerts, 2010). Thus, the lexical field theory is adopted because the identification of the antonym pairs in the selected speeches and their classification into various word classes fall under paradigmatic analysis. Again, the analysis of the surface syntactic structures that host the antonym pairs in the addresses is within the domain of the syntagmatic analysis of the lexical field theory.

2 Research Methodology

Epistemologically, this current study is rooted in the socially constructed philosophical assumption. The socially constructed knowledge rests on the fact that individuals develop subjective meanings of the world (objects or things in the world) in their quest to understand the world (Mertons, 2010; Lincoln & Colleagues, 2011). Here, the individual's views about the situation being studied are considered where the researcher makes sense of the views based on his personal, cultural and historical background. According to Mertons (2010), these subjective meanings are usually negotiated socially and historically. Thus, the subjective meanings are not imprinted on individuals but are formed through interaction with others and through historical and cultural norms that operate in individuals' lives. With this philosophical position, the researchers' intent is to interpret the meanings others have about the world. The socially constructed philosophy is an approach to qualitative research which collects, analyses and interprets text to understand a phenomenon; hence, this philosophy was adopted. Again, the socially constructed philosophy was employed because the researchers made subjective interpretation of the speeches to unravel why and how antonym pairs are used in the speeches of John Dramani Mahama.

In terms of ontology, the interpretive paradigm followed in this study is the philosophical view of idealism (Creswell, 2013), which assumes that the world exists according to people's understanding of it and therefore nothing has meaning without human interpretation and awareness (Creswell, 2013). Researchers [in the field of discourse analysis] see the interpretive paradigm as having two characteristics, and which is what influence our choice of this philosophical stance. First, the researchers following this paradigm go through a thorough investigation of its data in detail, in order to interpret embedded meanings and interpretations, which can be in the form of written words, oral conversations, or even visual pictures (Creswell, 2003). Second, the interpretive paradigm allows the researcher to ask open-ended questions, in order to come out with thick analysis. As this study is aimed at investigating the choice of language through which president Mahama achieves his political intentions, it was necessary to employ the constructivist view of knowledge which allows us to offer deeper and subjective interpretations to the data (in this case, the speeches of John Dramani Mahama).

In line with the research paradigm, the researchers employed the qualitative research method to carry out the study. According to Creswell (2002), qualitative method involves collecting, analysing and interpreting written or spoken text to understand a phenomenon. This method is used because the study deals with the description, analysis and interpretation of written speeches to discover how and why antonyms co-occur in political speeches. This kind of analytical approach helped the researchers to present a detailed account on the use of antonyms in the political speeches. The researchers downloaded thirty (30) of John Dramani Mahama's political speeches. Using the purposive sampling method, sixteen (16) out of the thirty (30) speeches were selected for the study. Leedy and Ormrod (2005) define the purposive sampling technique as where a unit of the population is chosen based on the characteristics of the population and the objective of the study. Hence, the researchers considered the sixteen (16) speeches sufficient to achieve the stated objectives. This sampling technique was chosen because it aided in the gathering of very relevant data that helped the researchers to answer the research questions of the study. In selecting the speeches, the researchers considered the ones with the most antonym pairs and those delivered on special occasions such as the Swearing-in Ceremony, State of the Nation Address, Independence Day Celebration, and United Nations General Assembly among others.

The sixteen (16) selected speeches of John Dramani Mahama were numbered to allow for easy references:

- Inaugural Address, January 07, 2013 –JDM01
- 2013's State of the Nation's Address, February 21, 2013 –JDM02
- 56th Independence Day Address, March 06, 2013 –JDM03
- Acceptance Speech as Chairman of ECOWAS, March 30, 2014 –JDM04
- National Economic Forum Address, Senchi-Akosombo, May 13, 2014 –JDM05
- 69th Session of the United Nations General Assembly Address, September 25, 2014 –JDM06
- Address at the Pan-African Conference on Inequalities, April 28, 2014 –JDM07

- Concession Speech, December 10, 2016 –JDM08
- Address at the 9th National Delegates Congress of the National Democratic Congress (NDC), November 17, 2018 –JDM09
- Address on the Presentation of Medical Items to Health Workers during the COVID19 crisis, April 04, 2020 – JDM10
- Digital Conversation with Ghanaians, April 23, 2020 –JDM11
- Address at the 28th Anniversary Ceremony of NDC, June 10, 2020 –JDM12
- Speech on the Supreme Court Ruling on the Compilation of New Voters' Register, June 05, 2020 –JDM13
- Speech at the Outdooring of Nana Opoku Agyemang as Running Mate, July 27, 2020 –JDM14
- Address on Irregularities in New Voters' Register, September 24, 2020 –JDM15
- Speech at the National Democratic Congress's 2020 Manifesto Launch, September 08, 2020- JDM16

The researchers then adopted textual analysis to examine the selected speeches. This textual analytical approach was used because the study analysed written political speeches to discover some underlying meanings in a text (Fairclough, 2012). The researchers read through the sixteen (16) selected speeches thoroughly to identify the antonym pairs. For the antonym identification, the researchers relied on Cruse (1986: 204) and Murphy's (2003) theoretical views on what constitute an antonym. On the basis of their theoretical views, the researchers generally defined antonyms as words or expressions that are opposed in meaning. Hence, in the speeches, all the lexical items that were opposed in meaning were selected as antonyms.

To ensure objectivity in the identification of the antonym pairs, the researchers constructed test items which comprised all the sentences that contained the antonym pairs in the sixteen (16) selected speeches. In constructing the test, all the antonymous sentences in JDM01 to JDM16 were copied and printed on separate A4 sheets. The test items were given to English teachers of a Senior High School and they were instructed to underline the antonym pairs with red pen. All the antonym pairs that the researchers identified were confirmed by the teachers. Also, in order to account for the grammatical classes of the antonym pairs, the researchers relied on Quirk and Greenbaum's (1973) analysis on grammatical categories. Again, in order to discover the functional implications of the antonym pairs used in the speeches, the researchers focused on how the antonym pairs function in contexts of use. Finally, the researchers examined the lexico-syntactic structures (frames) that host the antonymic pairs.

2.4. Data Analysis

In all, the researchers identified one hundred and seventy-three (173) antonym pairs in the selected speeches. Some examples of the antonym pairs identified are *men/women*, *forefathers/foremothers*, *domestic/international*, *public/private* and *live/die* among others.

In terms of the word class category, one hundred and sixty-three (163) of the antonym pairs occurred in the same word class while ten (10) antonyms occurred in different word classes. Table 1.1 below shows the word classes of the antonym pairs and their frequencies in the sixteen (16) selected speeches.

Table 1 Word Classes of the Antonyms and their Frequencies in the Sixteen Speeches

Word Classes	Frequency	Percentage %
NP-NP	95	54.9%
ADJP-ADJP	49	28.3%
VP-VP	15	8.6%
ADVP-ADVP	3	1.7%
PP-PP	1	0.6%
VP-ADJP	4	2.3%
NP-ADJP	2	1.2%
VP-NP	2	1.2%
ADVP-ADJP	2	1.2%
TOTAL	173	100%

Source: Field data, 2024

2.4.1. The Noun Phrase (NP) Pairs

The noun phrase antonym pairs recorded the highest number of the antonyms at a rate of 54.9%. Out of the ninety-five (95) noun phrase pairs identified, only five (5) occurred in two sentences. The noun pairs were grouped into two. The first group are head words in noun phrases that occurred with or without modifiers. Examples of those that occurred without a modifier include the pair in example (1a) while those that were pre-modified by adjectives and determiners include those in example (1b), (1c) and (1d): (1)

- *Ladies and gentlemen*, as a Social Democratic Party, we seek to harness the best qualities in all our people to transform the destiny of our nation (JDM14, S 63).
- Ghana's past is defined by heroic *men* and *women* ... (JDM01, S 4).
- But the people that made up those millions, those *men* and *women* were our *grandfathers* and *grandmothers*, our *uncles* and *aunts*, our *mothers* and *fathers*, our *sisters* and *brothers* (JDM03, S 10).
- My vision for this country is to create a conducive national environment in which our *children* grow happily into responsible *adults*... (JDM02, S 17).

In (1a), the antonym *Ladies/gentlemen* has no modifier, *men/women* in (1b) is pre-modified by an adjective *heroic* while the pair *men/women*, *grandfathers/grandmothers*, *uncles/aunts*, *mothers/fathers* and *sisters/brothers* in (1c) are pre-modified by *our* which is a determiner. In example (1c), five antonymous pairs occur in one sentence. According to Jones (2002), *gender* determines antonym sequence where *male* conventionally precedes *female*. However, he indicates that this normal sequence can be reversed for the sake of priority. In this regard, the first three antonym pairs *men/women*, *grandfathers/grandmothers*, *uncles/aunts* in example (1c) follow a normal sequence while the last two antonym pairs (*mothers/fathers* and *sisters/brothers*) in (1c) are reversed by placing the *female* before *male*. In example (1d), *children* is pre-modified by a determiner *our* while its opposite pair *adults* is pre-modified by an adjective *responsible*. All the pairs in example (1a), (1b), (1c) and (1d) are common nouns. The second group of noun phrase pairs are those that occurred in prepositional phrases and function as complements to the preposition and those that are post-modified by prepositional phrases. Some examples of those that occurred in prepositional phrases and function as complements to the preposition include the pair in (2a) and those that were post-modified by prepositional phrases include the pair in example (2b):

- (2) a. If we speak of *success*, we envision success, and we work towards realizing that vision, we will achieve it. If we speak and focus on *failure*, any inspiration to believe, to see, and to create has already been killed (JDM03, S 60 & 61).
- To the service commanders and *men* and *women* in uniform, I wish to extend my profound gratitude to you for your selfless service to Ghana (JDM08, S 19).

In (2a), the noun pair *success/failure* occurs in two sentences (inter-sentential antonym) where *success* complements the preposition *of* and *failure* complements the preposition *on*.

In (2b), the pair *men/women* occurs in one sentence (intra-sentential antonym). The antonym pair is post-modified by the prepositional phrase *in uniform*. Whereas the antonym in example (2a) is an abstract noun, the antonym in example (2b) is a common noun.

2.4.2. Adjective Phrase (ADJP) pairs

Forty-nine (49) adjective phrase pairs representing 28.3% were identified. Only two (2) of the forty-nine (49) adjective pairs occurred in two sentences. They were put into two categories – those that occurred within noun phrases functioning as pre-modifiers and those that occurred within predicates complementing either an object or a verb. The antonymous pairs in example (3a), (3b) and (3c) illustrate the first category where the antonym pairs occur in noun phrases.

- (3) a. We need to look beyond *temporary* fixes to find *lasting* solutions for the complications we've experienced with power, water and sanitation (JDM01, S 35).
- Mr. Speaker, our recent presidential and parliamentary elections have been adjudged by both *domestic* and *international* observers ... (JDM02, S 10).
- I congratulate each and every one of you gathered here, and the millions across the world, for your *individual* and *collective* efforts so far (JDM09, S 4).

In example (3a), *temporary* pre-modifies the head noun *fixes* while its opposite pair *lasting* pre-modifies the head noun *solutions*. In example (3b), the head noun *observers* has been pre-modified with the antonymous adjective pair *domestic* and *international*. Similarly, the pair *individual/collective* in example (3c) has been used to pre-modify the head noun *efforts*.

The second category of adjective phrase pairs are those that occurred within the predicate and function as the complement of either an object or a verb. Some examples of this category from the data have been provided in example (4a), (4b), (4c) and (4d):

- (4) Nelson Mandela once said, "It always seem *impossible* until it is done". I believe that with God, and in Ghana, all things are *possible* (JDM01, S 58 & 59).
- No offer of service is too *small* or too *big* to make a necessary impact (JDM03, S 79).
- Many are having to stay home, shut down their businesses-both *big* and *small*-despite the economic implications on the family and workforce (JDM10, S 13).
- This will make the provision of primary health care to all Ghanaians, *young* and *elderly* (JDM14, S 65).

In example (4a), the adjective pair *impossible/possible* occurs in two sentences. Whereas *impossible* complements the linking verb *seem*, its opposite pair *possible* complements the verb *are* which is also a linking verb. In sentence (4b), the gradable adjective pair *small/big* complements the linking verb *is* while in (4c), the gradable pair *big/small* complements the object *businesses*. In example (4d), the pair *young/elderly* complements the object *Ghanaians*.

2.4.3. Verb Phrase (VP) Pairs

The verb phrase pairs identified were fifteen (15) representing 8.6% of the total antonym pairs. Three (3) of the verb phrase pairs occurred in two sentences while the others occurred in one sentence. Examples of the verb phrase pairs that occurred in one sentence are shown in example (5a), (5b) and (5c) below:

- (5) A While we celebrate our diversity, let us explore what *unites* us instead of focusing on the things that *divide* us (JDM02, S 406).
- And even if we *agree* on ideas, we may *differ* in our opinions and how to implement them (JDM05, S 21).
- The young are also advised to exercise precaution, because in the reality of the COVID-19 Russian Roulette, nobody knows who will *die*, and who will *live* (JDM11, S 91).

The verb pairs *unites/divide* in example (5a) and *agree/differ* in example (5b) occur in a complex sentence. However, the verb pair *die/live* in example (5c) occurs in a compound-complex sentence. The verb pairs in example (5a), (5b) and (5c) are regular verbs. Some examples of the verb antonymous pairs that occurred in two sentences are provided in (6a), (6b) and (6c) below:

- (6) a. But we *cannot give up*. We need to *continue fighting* the virus (JDM 12, S 47 & 48)

- Africa is *rising*. Since 2005, poverty on the African continent has *declined* faster than it did between 1990 and 2005 (JDM07, S 63 & 64).
- It has been suggested that through changes in behaviour and practices, the public could potentially *reduce* if not eliminate their exposure to the virus. Yet in reality, the Ebola virus was able to *spread* so quickly throughout the West African sub-region because of its exposure to fluidity of our borders (JDM06, S 47&48).

In sentence (6a), the verb pair cannot *give up/continue fighting* occurs in two simple sentences. The verb pair *rising/declined* in example (6b) also occurs in two sentences. While the verb *rising* (progressive aspect) occurs in a simple sentence, *declined* (perfective aspect) occurs in a complex sentence. In example (6c), the verb pair *reduce/spread* occurs in two sentences. Whereas *reduce* occurs in a compound-complex sentence, *spread* occurs in a complex sentence. The remaining word classes in table 1.1 – adverb phrase, prepositional phrase, verb-adjective phrase, noun-adjective, verb-noun and adverb-adjective phrase pair feature insignificantly in speeches at an accumulated percentage of 8.2%.

2.5. Lexico-Syntactic Frames (Structures) of the Antonym Pairs

Table 2 The Major Lexico-Syntactic Frames of the Antonyms in the Speeches

Lexico -Syntactic Structures (Frames)	Frequency
X and Y	83
X- Y	6
X or Y	6
X to Y	6
both X and Y	4
X, Y	4

Source: Field data, 2024

The researchers identified fifty-seven (57) lexico-syntactic frames (structures) in the speeches hosting one hundred and sixty-nine (169) antonym pairs out of the total of one hundred and seventy-three (173) pairs. The deficit four (4) antonyms did not occur in any syntactic frame. Table 7.2 below presents the six (6) major lexico-syntactic frames (structures) which host the antonyms in the sixteen (16) selected speeches of John Dramani Mahama:

2.5.1. X and Y Frame

The X and Y lexico-syntactic structure appears eighty-three (83) times in the selected speeches making it the dominant frame in the addresses. It is a structure where the antonyms are unified in context through the use of the coordinating conjunction “and”. Some examples of the antonym pairs which occurred in this structure have been shown in example (7) below:

- (7) a. My fellow *countrymen* and *women*... is now in our possession (JDM01, S 67).
- My *brothers* and *sisters*, this moment demands of us, to act with patriotic zeal to preserve the peace and stability of our beloved Ghana (JDM15, S 90).
- Our *forefathers* and *mothers* fought for our independence in order to use the wealth...especially our children and grandchildren and those yet unborn (JDM03, S 17).
- *Ladies* and *gentlemen*, the EC and our opponents suggest that these concerns are an exaggeration (JDM15, S 25).

The antonymous pairs *countrymen/women*, *brothers/sisters*, *forefathers/mothers* and *ladies/gentlemen* in (7a), (7b), (7c) and (7d) respectively are joined by *and* which is a coordinating conjunction. In example (7a), John Dramani Mahama uses the antonym pair *countrymen/women* to establish an association with his audience where he presents his government as one that belongs to all, hence, must be united and contribute towards national development.

In (7b), he uses the pair *brothers/sisters* to create a social bonding in order to influence the people to support him maintain the peace and stability of the country. As a politician, he uses the pair *forefathers/mothers* in (7c) as a historical allusion to persuade the Ghanaian citizenry to continue the good work of ensuring the economic progress of Ghana for the benefit of the unborn generation. This makes John Dramani Mahama a political historian. Finally, the antonymic pair *ladies/gentlemen* in example (7d) is used to show courtesy in order to win the attention of his audience.

2.5.2. X – Y frame

The X-Y syntactic frame hosted six (6) antonym pairs in the speeches. This frame occurs when an antonymic pair is joined by *dash* (-). Some examples of the antonym pairs that occurred in this structure have been provided in example (8) below:

- (8) For those who choose to be contenders and go into electoral contests, we go about it as a *win-lose* proposition (JDM08, S 3).
- In embarking on this journey of expanding access, we will also begin to explore new modalities of *public-private* partnerships in Health investment... (JDM02, S 84).
- In the spirit of *public-private* partnership, SADA has facilitated partnerships to establish three agro processing factories... (JDM02, S 138).
- These include the introduction of *public-private* partnership models on commercially viable routes... (JDM02, S 231).
- In the course of this year, and under the policy on *public-private* partnerships, feasibility studies will commence... (JDM02, S 238).

The antonym pairs *win/lose* in example (8a) and *public/private* in example (8b), (8c), (8d) and (8e) and are respectively joined by dash (-) which is a punctuation mark. The antonym *win-lose* in example (8a) is used to present the idea that election produces two results and any of them must be accepted at the end of the contest. It is meant to console himself and his supporters to accept the defeat wholeheartedly. The speaker uses the pair *public/private* in the remaining examples to present his political vision of working collaboratively with the private sector. As a politician, he uses this as a persuasive tool to win the support of the business community.

2.5.3. X or Y frame

Like the X-Y frame, six (6) antonym pairs were recorded in the X or Y frame. In this structure, the antonymous pair is joined by the coordinating conjunction *or*. Examples of the antonym pairs housed in this structure include those in example (9):

- (9) In our hands –rests the *success or failure* of Ghana's future (JDM01, S 27).
- Whether *night or day*, in the midst of storm... (JDM03, S 83).
- The choice is ours to *believe or not believe* (JDM01, S 47).
- pursuit of peace and progress cannot end ... in either *victory or defeat* (JDM06, S 20)
- The African continent is, without doubt, the one place in the world that has consistently been linked- whether *right or wrong*, whether *accurately or inaccurately* with inequality (JDM07, 56).

The antonym pairs *success/failure*, *night/day*, *believe/not believe*, *victory/defeat*, *right/wrong* and *accurately/inaccurately* in example (9a), (9b), (9c), (9d) and (9e) respectively are joined in context by *or* which is a coordinating conjunction. In example (9a) and (9b), the antonym pairs are used by John Dramani Mahama to challenge Ghanaians to be patriotic and hardworking towards national development. The antonym pair in example (9c) is used to inspire hope and confidence in Ghanaians while the pair in (9d) is employed to call for national unity and active involvement in nation building. Finally, in example (9e), the antonym pairs are used by the speaker to show his scepticism on the issue of inequality in Africa.

2.5.4. X to Y frame

The X to Y frame also hosted six (6) antonym pairs in the speeches. This lexico-syntactic frame occurs when there is a movement from one antonymous state to the other through the use of the preposition *to*. The antonym pairs in example (10) below illustrate this frame:

- (10) a. We need to look beyond *temporary* fixes to find *lasting* solutions for the complications we've experienced with power, water and sanitation (JDM01, S 35).
- As a policy, I am requesting *public* officials to give priority to the Ghanaian *private* sector in goods and services... (JDM02, S 197).
- we shall exert ourselves and work hard to recapture power for the development of Ghana and change the current narrative of majority of Ghanaians living in *hardship* to that of a shared *prosperity* for all (JDM09, S 56).
- We must do our part to ensure that the progress of our *past* governments, from the very first one led by our nation's founder, Dr. Kwame Nkrumah to this most *recent* one that I have led... (JDM08, S 35).

The highlighted antonym pairs *temporary/lasting*, *public/private*, *hardship/prosperity* and *past/recent* in example (10) above are linked with *to* which is a preposition. The use of the preposition *to* marks a transition from one antonym pair to the other.

In example (10a), John Dramani Mahama uses the antonym pair *temporary/lasting* to present his political vision to the Ghanaian people in handling issues of power, water and sanitation. Again, he employs the pair *public/private* in example (10b) to show his commitment to ensuring a good business relationship between the two sectors. In example (10c), he uses *hardship/prosperity* to roll out his vision of improving the living conditions of the poor in the country. Finally, the speaker employs the pair *past/recent* to appeal to the emotions of Ghanaians to be patriotic and diligent towards national development.

2.5.5. Both X and Y frame

This lexico-syntactic frame appeared four (4) times in the speeches. It occurs where the antonym pair is joined by *both ...and...* which is a coordinating conjunction. The four (4) antonyms identified with this frame are exemplified in (11):

- (11) We will continue to provide security for both *onshore* and *offshore* oil and gas infrastructure against disruptive threats and theft... (JDM02, S 324).
- As noted earlier, we have just come out of a historic election... which has been acclaimed by both *domestic* and *international* observers as free, fair and transparent (JDM02, S 328).
- It is our expectation that both our *domestic* and our *international* partners will join us in the implementation of this strategy (JDM05, S 69).
- Many are having to stay home, shut down their businesses-both *big* and *small*-despite the economic implications on the family and workforce (JDM10, S 13).

The above antonym pairs in example (11) are unified by the coordinating conjunction *both...and* to emphasise that the first member of the pair is valid as well as the other. The speaker uses the antonym *onshore/offshore* to show the efficient security measures his government has put in place to check external aggressions. Again, the speaker employs the antonym pair *domestic/international* in example (11b) to establish the credibility of the 2012 presidential elections, thus, sending a message to his critics that he is democratically and legitimately elected as president of Ghana.

However, he uses the same antonym pair in example (11c) to show his belief in partnership as a political strategy in securing national economic progress. John Dramani Mahama finally uses the antonymic pair *big/small* to show his pains and frustration of the negative impact of COVID-19 on Ghanaian businesses. This is to sympathise with the Ghanaian citizens, especially, the business community.

2.5.6. X, Y frame

Like the *both X and Y frame*, the *X, Y frame* occurred four (4) times in the speeches. This lexico-syntactic frame is realised where the antonym is united through the use of comma (,). The four (4) antonyms which occurred in this frame are shown in example (12) below:

- (12) a. As a developing middle-income country, there is still a lot more to be done to further *reduce* poverty, *expand* infrastructure ... (JDM02, S 25).
- We cannot advance as a nation, *half poor*, *half rich* (JDM02, S 113).
- In the words of Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, "*Forward ever, backward never*" (JDM08, S 36).
- To those who get the opportunity to register, I implore you to assist your *brother*, *sister* and compatriot by guaranteeing for them even if it takes a bit more of your time (JDM13, S 39).

All the highlighted antonym pairs *reduce/expand*, *half poor/half rich*, *forward ever/backward never* and *brother/sister* in example (12) are unified in context by comma (,) which is a punctuation mark in English. The speaker uses the antonym pair *reduce/expand*, *half poor/half rich* and *forward ever/backward never* in example (12a), (12b) and (12c) respectively to present himself as a visionary leader who is interested in building a better future for Ghanaians. In example (12d), the pair *brother/sister* is employed by John Dramani Mahama to show political alliance. Here, he passionately appeals to the Ghanaian electorates, most especially, members of his party to help one another secure a voter identification card for the 2020 presidential and parliamentary elections.

2.5.7. Antonyms without Frames

Four (4) antonym pairs in the speeches were identified without lexico-syntactic frames. Jones (2002) describes such antonym pairs as *ancillary* where a non-contextual antonym pair generates another opposition between words that may not be really considered as opposite. Jones (2002) refers to the non-contextual pair as *A-pair* and the supposed antonym as *B-pair*.

According to him, ancillary antonymous sentences provide two antonym pairs where the *B-pair* is highlighted by its co-occurrence with the *A-pair*. Jones (2002) stresses that such antonym pairs do not occur in any specific lexico-syntactic frame. The two (2) ancillary sentences that provided the four (4) antonyms have been provided in example (13) below:

- (13) We are of *different ethnicity* but *united* by our *nationality* (JDM12, S 39).
- Our *momentary difficulties* must only serve in strengthening this collective resolve towards a future of *limitless possibilities* (JDM02, S 421).

In (13a), the non-contextual antonym *different/united* is the *A-pair* while the supposed antonym pair *ethnicity/nationality* is the *B-pair*. Again, in example (13b), the non-contextual antonym *momentary/limitless* is the *A-pair* while the supposed antonym pair *difficulties/possibilities* is the *B-pair*. These antonym pairs do not occur in any specific frame. In example (13a), the antonym pairs are used to create a picture of unity among the Ghanaian citizens while the antonyms in (13b) are used to inspire hope and confidence in Ghanaians.

3. Discussion

The analysis reveals a total of one hundred and seventy-three (173) antonym pairs in the sixteen (16) selected political speeches of John Dramani Mahama. In terms of the word class category, the analysis shows that one hundred and sixty-three (163) antonyms occur in the same word class while ten (10) of them occur in different word classes.

The noun, adjective, verb, adverb and the prepositional antonym pairs are those that occur in the same word class at an aggregate percentage of 94.1% while the verb-adjective, noun-adjective, verb-noun and adverb-adjective constitute those that occur in different word classes at an accumulated percentage of 5.9%. This finding reveals that the majority of the antonymous pairs identified co-occur within the same word class while few of them occur in different word classes. This debunks Fellbaum's (1995: 289) claim that antonyms largely co-occur in different word classes.

In the analysis, the noun antonym pair is identified as the largest word class at a percentage of 54.9%. The adjective phrase pair takes the second position at 28.3% while the verb phrase pair takes the third position at 8.6%. The rest of the word classes feature insignificantly in the speeches. The identification of the noun phrase pair as the largest word class debunks Kreidler's (1998: 100) claim that adjective pairs are commonly used in text than the other word classes. It further shows that John Dramani Mahama frequently uses the noun antonym pairs in his political speeches. This confirms Mwinwelle (2021) study that John Dramani Mahama predominantly uses nouns in his political uses. In the case of Mwinwelle (2021), the nouns are used to refer to abstract plans and policies of his government while in the current study, the noun antonym pairs are largely used by John Dramani Mahama for historical allusion, to show courtesy and association and finally present his political vision to Ghanaians.

Fifty-seven (57) frames are identified in the speeches hosting one hundred and sixty-nine (169) antonym pairs out of the total of one hundred and seventy-three (173) pairs. The deficit four (4) antonyms are ancillary pairs identified without syntactic frames. This finding shows that majority of antonym pairs used by John Dramani Mahama in his political speeches co-occur in lexico syntactic frames.

In the data analysis, the *X and Y*, *X-Y*, *X or Y*, *X to Y*, *both X and Y* and *X, Y* are identified as the major frames in the speeches. Other frames such as *X and not Y*, *X towards Y*, *X turn into Y*, *X as well as Y*, *X return to Y*, *not X but Y*, *X than Y*, *X as well as Y*, *X outstripped Y*, and *X instead of Y* among other frames appear insignificantly in the selected speeches. In all, the *X and Y* frame is identified as the dominant lexico-syntactic frame appearing eighty-three (83) times in the speeches. This finding shows that John Dramani Mahama frequently uses the antonymic frame *X and Y* in his political speeches. The four (4) ancillary antonym pairs identified in the speeches without frames confirm Jones's (2002) claim that ancillary antonymous pairs have no syntactic frames. The study further reveals that John Dramani Mahama uses antonyms as a powerful linguistic tool to persuade his audience. This finding confirms Djabetey (2013), Lawan (2016) and Bani-Khaled and Azzam (2021) whose study reveal that politicians hide behind language to persuade their audience to achieve their political agenda.

4. Conclusions

According to Lyons (1977), Lehrer and Lehrer (1982) and Jones (2002), antonymy forms an integral part of the human communication system which play a crucial role in the interpretation of utterances. However, previous studies on political discourse, both locally and internationally, have not paid attention to use of antonyms in political speeches (Djabetey, 2013; Awawdeh, 2021; Bani-Khaled & Azzam, 2021; Feji & Sepaty, 2021). On account of this, the present study investigated the use of antonyms in some speeches of John Dramani Mahama, a Ghanaian politician. The study has revealed that antonyms in political speeches exhibit some lexico-syntactic features. In this regard, the study has shown that one hundred and sixty-three (163) antonymic pairs occur in the same word class while ten (10) antonym pairs occur in different word classes.

This finding shows that members of an antonym pair can co-occur in the same word class, as well as, across different word classes. The analysis has further revealed the noun antonym pair as the largest word class which shows that John Dramani Mahama largely uses noun antonym pairs in his political speeches. Again, the study has exposed that many antonym pairs co-occur in certain lexico-syntactic frames. To this end, the study has shown that John Dramani Mahama largely uses the coordinated frame *X and Y* to communicate his intentions to the Ghanaian community. The study has revealed that John Dramani Mahama cautiously uses antonyms in his political speeches as a powerful linguistic tool to achieve some desired results. The study has shown that John Dramani Mahama uses antonym pairs mainly for persuasion, establishment of association and presentation of his political vision to Ghanaians. It is important to note that the findings of the study have exposed some lexico-grammatical features and the functional implications of antonyms in text, especially, in political speeches in Ghana. Antonyms are therefore a linguistic resource that help politicians to champion their political interest.

Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of conflict of interest

No conflict of interest to be disclosed.

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Appendix

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