

# ASPIRING VICE-CHANCELLORS' RHETORIC AND THE CHALLENGES OF BUILDING A 21ST CENTURY NIGERIAN UNIVERSITY

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## Abstract

*This study analyses the manifestos prepared by some candidates aspiring for the post of Vice-Chancellor of the Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria, between 1999 and 2000. It examines the appropriation of rhetorical tactics by the aspirants to impress upon the target audience that they possess the ability to clearly decipher the problems of the university and determine the required antidote. The study focuses on two major issues that are recurrent in the discourse: the challenges facing the university at the turn of the twenty-first century and the kind of leadership that the university would desire to stem the tide. It adopts Aristotle's model of rhetoric to analyse the discursive practices of the respective candidates relative to these key issues. It reveals that although the candidates address the same range of subjects, they still, at some point, employ varied rhetorical appeals to manipulate the target audience. Such appeals generally, however, still fall within the range of the rhetoric of political campaign, but they are strategically chosen to reflect the context of the discourse.*

**Key Words:** Manifesto, Nigeria, Political campaign, Rhetoric, University, Vice-Chancellor

## Introduction

Universities are generally acclaimed to be the spinning centre of knowledge crucial for the training of human minds and accordingly for the development of society. Ebuara et al. (2009) argue that universities exist to generate, disseminate and apply knowledge through teaching, research and extension services. For this reason, Osundare (2005: 11) observes that universities are 'the bedrock of progress, the indispensable instruments for the emergence of the nation-state, the fertile ground for learning and knowledge without which a nation's quest for advancement

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can only be a futile joke'. The history of universities in Nigeria dates back to the founding of the University College of Ibadan in 1948 as an affiliate of the University of London. Ever since this landmark in the history of tertiary education in Nigeria, universities in the country have grown in leaps and bounds. Going by the National Universities Commission (NUC) Bulletin of 12th October 2009 quoted by Adeogun et al. (2009), the number of universities in Nigeria has increased to ninety-six, twenty-seven of them owned by the Federal Government, thirty-five owned by state governments, and thirty-four owned by individuals or religious organisations. Some more are still awaiting approval from the licensing and regulatory body.

Existing studies on Nigeria's university system have addressed issues basically on its challenges. Such attention is to be expected in view of the fact that Nigerian universities have over the years fallen short of the standards of international ideal practices. Ekundayo and Adedokun (2009) examine the contentious issue of university autonomy and academic freedom in Nigerian public universities. Considering the major areas of erosion of university autonomy and academic freedom, they argue that autonomy should be granted to the university in such areas as recruitment, training, admission and appointment of Vice-Chancellors. They posit, however, that autonomy cannot connote total independence from the government or state and even from a regulatory agency such as the National Universities Commission (NUC).

In another study, Ekundayo and Ajayi (2009) examine the myriads of problems militating against the effective management of the university system in Nigeria which include poor funding, poor conditions of service, the 'brain drain' syndrome and poor infrastructure. Generally, these problems have been the bane of higher education systems in developing countries. Saint et al. (2003: 1) observe:

Education in general, and higher education in particular, is fundamental to the construction of a knowledge economy and society in all nations ... Yet the potential of higher education systems in developing countries to fulfil this responsibility is frequently thwarted by long-standing problems of finance, efficiency, equity, quality and governance.

So, there have been agitations by trade unions in Nigerian universities for an improved learning environment for students and improved facilities for

researchers as well as enhanced conditions of service for the generality of the staff. On this issue, Arikewuyo (2006) examines the relationships between staff unions and the authorities of Nigerian universities vis-à-vis the demands of the former on how to address the catalogue of challenges facing the university system in Nigeria.

In a bid to restore the ethics, values and high educational standards that would make Nigerian universities live up to their billing, Ebuara et al. (2009) identify the challenge of good leadership as a fundamental issue. They argue that leadership in the university system, as in other organisations, cannot be ignored. Since the buck stops at the table of the principal academic and executive officer of the university, that is, the Vice-Chancellor, the question of the appointment of the Vice-Chancellor of a university is a challenging one. The frequently asked questions have been: Who should be the Vice-Chancellor? How is the right person to be selected? What should be the process that will enable the selection of the right person? What should be the role of the university Governing Council and the government in the processes for appointing the Vice-Chancellor?

Rao and Singh (n.d) carried out a study in which they attempted to analyse different methods adopted for the appointment of Vice-Chancellors in Indian universities along with those of some foreign universities which include Nigeria and Ghana. While such a study sheds light on the fairly elaborate procedure for the selection of Vice-Chancellors across countries, it does not in any way address candidates' preparedness for the contest vis-à-vis the rhetorical strategies that they employ to underline their perceived preferability to their opponents. Hence, this study examines which types of rhetoric aspiring Vice-Chancellors employ in crafting messages that portray them as being worthy of appointment, going by the way they assess the status quo and the kind of leadership that can rise to the occasion.

Some research has been devoted to the rhetorical strategies deployed by aspirants in their campaign discourse in presidential or parliamentary elections in democratic settings in countries such as America, Canada, Taiwan, Belgium and Nigeria (Jerit, 2004; Druckman et al. 2004; Damore, 2005; Wei, 2005; Barker 2005; Roberts, 2005; Medvedeva, 2008; Boyd, 2009; Bouckaert, 2009; and Omozuwa & Ezejideaku, 2010). Given the fact that candidates in this context seek votes in elections, there is the compelling need for some other studies to be carried out on other forms

of campaign discourse produced in political situations where aspirants are not elected by popular votes but selected on the basis of merit by a constituted panel. The present study takes us further away from the familiar political culture and processes at the national level by focusing on a typical public establishment such as the university community where there exists another strand of political culture culminating in the appointment of the chief executive of the institution.

### **The Data**

Considering that every university has its own tradition and peculiar challenges within a national and even an international frame, we consider it useful to delimit the study to the Obafemi Awolowo University, which was founded in 1962 and, therefore, is one of the first generation universities in Nigeria. Going by tradition, upon the declaration of a vacancy for the position of the Vice-Chancellor of the university, eligible academics of professorial cadre who are interested in serving are enjoined to submit their letters of application, curriculum vitae and statements of their visions for the university. Thus, the campaign discourse produced by the aspirants in the form of proposals or mission/vision statements constitutes the data for this study, as the aspirants seek to persuade the target audience by managing the messages communicated to them.

As regards the choice of the contest that this study focuses on, one may raise some pertinent questions: Were there no contests before and have there not been any other contests after it? Simply put, what is significant about the contest which this study focuses on? Of course, since the university is not a newly established one, there had actually been contests before the one focused on in this study. Even after it, there have been two others. The table below substantiates our claim.

**Table Showing Past Vice-Chancellors of the Obafemi Awolowo University**

S/No	Names	Tenure
1.	Prof. Oladele Ajose	1962-1966
2.	Prof. H. A. Oluwasanmi	1966-1975
3.	Prof. O. Aboyade	1975-1978
4.	Prof. C. A. Onwumechili	1979-1982
5.	Prof. Wande Abimbola	1982-1989
6.	Prof. C. A. Osuntogun	1990-1991

7.	Prof. Wale Omole	1991-1999
8.	Prof. Roger Makanjuola	1999-2006
9.	Prof. M. O. Faborode	2006- 2011
10.	Prof. Tale Omole	2011 to date

However, the fact remains that in the history of the university, the contest between 1999 and 2000 attracted an unprecedented surge of political awareness in view of the historical turn at the end of one millennium and the ushering in of a new one – 1999/2000 –, a period in which there were so many clamours around the world about ‘change’ and ‘vision’. Given the challenges that had faced the university system in Nigeria towards the end of the second half of the 20th century, it would be quite engaging to probe into how the aspirants exploit the temporal frame of their contest to address the problems inherent in a typical Nigerian university.

For the purposes of this study, we keep the identities of the aspirants anonymous in order not to cause any animosity among them or cause them any embarrassment as individuals. This is because of the fact that, ordinarily, they would not have thought that their proposals could be of scholarly interest to the rhetorician. For easy referencing, therefore, we tag the proposals of the three aspirants selected, Sample A, Sample B and Sample C, as we cite them in the course of analysing the data. It is also useful to clarify that the choice of the masculine pronominal referencing in the analysis and discussion is not an attempt to sound sexist. Actually, there were no female aspirants for the contest and so there is no need to balance the pronominal referencing by using either the singular ‘they’ or alternating both the masculine and feminine pronominal elements, s/he.

Out of the nine proposals submitted by the nine candidates eventually screened for the final selection process, we purposively sampled three to reflect the aspirants’ respective perceptions of the realities on the ground and their vision of the university. We delimited the samples to three aspirants in order to have a focused analysis of the proposals with significant rhetorical tactics that address the major challenges of the university and the kind of leadership that can address them. This bias does not in any way foreclose the display of rhetorical appeals in the other six proposals not sampled. For instance, rhetorical appeals also derive from other issues such as commitment to staff and student welfare, image

laundering in terms of personal qualities, experience in office and values or principles, funding and industrial harmony, among others.

### **Theoretical Perspective**

Aristotle's treatise, *The Art of Rhetoric*, has remained the most influential systematisation of rhetoric ever written. Hence, we adopt the tenets of the Aristotelian model of rhetoric in analysing the campaign discourse of the candidates in this study. The rhetoric developed by Aristotle presents an answer to Plato's criticisms of the sophists when he opined that 'rhetoric is the counterpart of dialectic', meaning that while dialectical methods are necessary to find the truth, rhetorical methods are required to communicate it. Aristotle defined rhetoric as 'the faculty of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion'. With this definition, Aristotle placed invention or the discovery of the lines of argument at the very centre of the rhetorical enterprise. In so doing, he set his system apart from that of the sophists which focused on outcomes of public speaking. Aristotle's treatise on rhetoric was an attempt to systematically describe rhetoric as a human art or skill.

According to Aristotle, a writer's ability to persuade is based on how well he/she appeals to his/her audience in three different areas, hence the question of rhetorical appeals. Aristotle identified three different types of rhetorical proof: *ethos*, *logos* and *pathos*. By *ethos*, he meant how the credibility of a speaker or writer influences an audience to consider him/her to be believable; by *pathos* he meant the use of emotional appeals; and by *logos*, the use of language in constructing an argument, referring to the internal consistency of the message itself, independent of its proponents. Therefore, in analysing the manifestos of the aspirants, we will examine how they exploit the appeals contained in this rhetorical triangle to influence the target audience.

Aristotle emphasised that for rhetoric to be effective, the rhetor must be sensitive to the element of *kairos*, the context in which the proof will be delivered. In *kairos*, winning an argument requires a deft combination of creating and recognising the right time and the right place for making the argument in the first place. Sensitive to *kairos*, a speaker or writer takes into account the contingencies of a given place and time and considers the opportunities within this specific context for words to be effective and appropriate to that moment. This concept is tightly linked to considerations

of audience (the most significant variable in a communicative context) and to decorum (the principle of apt speech). As a result, we will examine how the aspirants exploit the exigencies and constraints of time, place and audience to influence the opinions of the target audience.

We must not gloss over the question of the moral nature of the art of rhetoric which has remained one of great debate among scholars of rhetoric. The study of rhetoric was for several years regarded by scholars as a meaningless enterprise, for it was perceived as a study of linguistic ornamentation. If it was frequently under attack from those who saw it as producing dishonest, unoriginal or flashy language, in more recent academic writing, rhetoric has re-emerged as a key term for emphasising the way in which we can understand a given subject as if it constituted a specific language or form of discourse. Thus, we employ the poststructuralist mode of analysis which emphasises discourse rather than language because ‘the concept of discourse implies a concern with the meaning and value-producing practices in language, rather than simply the relationship between utterances and their referents’ (Mihas 2005: 125). Instead of treating language as a transparent tool (a conduit between thoughts or concepts and things), we take a discourse approach which treats language as opaque by engaging in an analysis of both the linguistic practices and the language of enquiry itself. Against this backdrop, we try to deconstruct the meaning of the rhetorical garbs of the campaign discourse of the aspirants which the ordinary reader may take at face value.

### **‘Here I am, Send Me’: Rhetoric of Aspiring Vice-Chancellors**

Almost all the aspirants begin their write-ups with an assessment of the situation in the university system. This attention-getting strategy would give the audience an insight into aspirants’ understanding or reading of the problems of the system before they could claim to have the needed solutions. Consider the excerpt below:

#### **Excerpt 1**

Our university is one of the foremost in the country. It has the tradition for academic excellence and leadership both nationally and internationally. However, like other institutions of learning in Nigeria, it has been greatly affected by the economic, social and moral

decline that has beset us in recent years. Successive administrators have tried hard to overcome these problems ... and have achieved much under the circumstances. However, a lot remains to be done. (Sample A)

The aspirant speaking in the above extract deploys a number of rhetorical strategies to give persuasive force to his argument. We find out, first of all, that the speaker puts to good use the rhetorical element of *kairos* by laying emphasis on place in assessing the condition of the university system. He refers to the immediate setting which is his university by using the expression 'our university' and compares the prevailing situation therein to that of sister institutions by using the expression 'other universities in Nigeria'. In fact, in the second expression, the prepositional phrase 'in Nigeria' which serves as an adjunct element helps to identify the geographical space within which the universities operate. Mentioning 'Nigeria', therefore, goes beyond defining the geographical space of the country in which the universities are located. It summarizes the genesis of their predicaments, as the socio-political and economic forces that operate in the country would impact greatly on the functioning of the universities.

The aspirant's use of the expression 'our university' instead of deploying other possible expressions such as 'this university' or mentioning the name of the university outright is stylistic. The use of the plural possessive pronoun 'our' which is characteristic of a group cause discourse is a rhetorical attempt by the speaker to merge his voice with that of the audience in a bid to underscore collective ownership/responsibility, thereby projecting himself as a stakeholder whose commitment and passion should not be doubted. The speaker goes ahead to emphasise the status of the university by using the spatial deictic elements 'nationally' and 'internationally' in an attempt to instill in the audience a sense of pride in his institution as one with positive attributes and great potentialities, not only within the shores of the country but also beyond. Regrettably, we get to know that the status has dwindled. The contrast between the status that the university has been noted for and the forces affecting it is underlined with the adversative conjunct 'however'. This conjunct is significant in the sense that it opens up the discourse for the audience to appreciate that something is wrong with the system, as a result of which the right leadership must be put in place to address the situation.

Paying tribute to past leadership in the university, the speaker acknowledges their efforts, saying that their administrations have 'achieved much'. The speaker's attempt to give honour to those that had served in the capacity he aspires to assume is a rhetorical strategy of trying to save the 'face' of the personae. This strategy brings to bear the notion of 'face' by Brown and Levinson (1978). Brown and Levinson define 'face' as the public self-image that all members of the society want for themselves. All interactants have an interest in maintaining two types of face during interaction: 'positive face' and 'negative face'. Positive face concerns the desire to be appreciated and approved of, while negative face concerns a person's want to be unimpeded and free from imposition. When an act of verbal or non-verbal communication runs contrary to the addressee's and/or the speaker's face wants, this is called a face-threatening act (FTA). Using the notion of face, Brown and Levinson developed the politeness theory which is regarded as having a dual nature: positive politeness and negative politeness. Lakoff (1990), quoted in Zhao (2008: 630), states that in a pragmatic perspective, politeness 'facilitate(s) interaction by minimising the potential for conflict and confrontation inherent in all human interchange'. Therefore, a speaker would strategically manage his/her face-threatening acts to account for either positive or negative politeness. In this regard, the speaker in the extract being analysed mitigates face-threatening acts to the positive face of the past Vice-Chancellors.

As the speaker aspires to occupy the exalted office of the Vice-Chancellor, he could have opted for this strategy for some reasons. First, some of the past Vice-Chancellors, even when their names are not mentioned at all, could still be influential and consequently instrumental to the choice of who becomes the next Vice-Chancellor in the university. It would be foolhardy for the speaker to expose the weaknesses of their administrations, for he would lose their support. Besides, even if the past Vice-Chancellors are no longer influential, their loyalists/apologists who are still in the system could feel slighted that the efforts of their role models were being rubbished and this would count against the speaker. Since humans would naturally want their abilities to be respected, the speaker could be saying what this select audience would want to hear, just to get their support.

Such likelihood makes one curious when one considers the sentence that immediately follows the tribute to the efforts of past administrations: ‘However, a lot still remains to be done’. When viewed in line with the previous sentence, the use of the adversative conjunct ‘however’ is somewhat incongruous and therefore sounds dubious. In the previous sentence, the quantifier ‘much’ is used to underscore the appreciable level of success recorded by past administrations, as a result of which one would expect ‘(a) little’ to be done by the subsequent administration. Unexpectedly, the speaker still uses ‘a lot’ to quantify what has not been done. Let us consider the argumentative patterns in the paradigm below for a better understanding:

**Option 1**

Successive administrations ... have achieved much under the circumstances.

**Therefore,**  
a little remains to be done.

**Option 2**

Successive administrations ... have achieved much under the circumstances.

**However,**  
a lot remains to be done. (emphasis ours)

If the rhetor had chosen Option 1 above, he would have shot himself in the foot, in that he would have no rationale for parading himself as being capable of rising to any serious challenges in the administration of the university. But by selecting Option 2 where there is an imbalance in the quantifiers, going by the structure of the paradoxical sentence, the speaker leaves the reader of the text to wonder about the sincerity of his intentions. There appears to be some illogicality in the expression, giving us the impression that the speaker is just trying to avoid conflict with past administrations. This hunch is confirmed when the speaker goes ahead to reel off a catalogue of challenges facing the university after all. One is then left wondering why, if the past administrations have achieved much, there are these myriad problems still confronting the university.

Still on the challenges of the university, another aspirant uses some other rhetorical tactics not evident in the extract we have just analysed.

Let us consider the following:

## Excerpt 2

Many problems today besiege the university system generally in the country and [at] Obafemi Awolowo University in particular. If care is not taken to rectify the situation, it may come to a stage that the university will be living on past glory and eventually become stagnant in the academic world ... It is high time we stopped shouting GREAT...IFE when, in actual fact, the greatness is gradually collapsing. The Founding Fathers left us a good image, a good heritage. It is for us to maintain the image to enhance the heritage, to revitalise, to transform, to rebuild, to recast, and to rescue in order to have a fine heritage, a fine legacy to pass on to posterity. (Sample B)

It is obvious that the present speaker, like the previous one, clearly contextualises his discourse by placing the challenges of the university he seeks to administer within a larger entity. Apart from touching on the spatial reference, the speaker also makes use of the temporal deictic element 'today' to identify the point in history around which his discourse revolves. While the element of *kairos* is deployed here in order to make the discourse appropriate, the speaker invokes another rhetorical tactic to underline the emergency situation the university is in. The rhetor raises an alarm in the structure: 'If care is not taken to rectify the situation, it may come to a stage that the university will be living on past glory...'. Such a word of caution couched in a conditional sentence is rhetorically significant. It brings to the fore the use of the fear appeal in political discourse. In order to sway the audience, the rhetor may resort to injecting some fear into the discourse by alerting the audience of possible disastrous consequences if they do not support the rhetor to take the necessary steps towards averting them.

According to Pfau (2007: 216), 'Fear is an influential emotion whose history reveals its impact not only on individuals but [also] on entire communities ... Fear has been particularly important politically, and the history of Republics reveals a political discourse rife with appeals to fear'. Pfau (2007) argues that although philosophers since Plato have often condemned emotion in general and fear in particular, in that they run counter to the reason and logic that ought to guide the rational human

being, there are other political thinkers that posit a constructive political role for fear. Walton (2000 quoted in Pfau 2007: 219) gives a succinct definition of the fear appeal argument thus:

The term ‘fear appeal argument’ ... refers to a specific type of argument that has three central characteristics: (i) it cites some possible outcome that is fearful to the target audience, (ii) in order to get that audience to take a recommended course of action, (iii) by arguing that in order to avoid the fearful outcome, the audience should take the recommended course of action.

Therefore, for the target audience of the rhetor not to witness the unimaginable drifting of the values and ideals of the university that they so much cherish, they would do well to reason along with him and share his views on how best to avert the ugly scenario. The rhetorical force of the fear appeal is further given impetus by some stylistic choices made by the rhetor. First of all, he uses the expression ‘living on the past glory’. The use of the temporal deictic element ‘past’ portends that the university will lose relevance in the new scheme of events. It also suggests wallowing in a world of illusion when actually there is nothing remarkable to be proud of. Second, the rhetor uses the adjective ‘stagnant’ and the place adjunct ‘in the academic world’ to intensify the force of the fear appeal. The word ‘stagnant’ is a metaphor for lethargy and consequent motionlessness which in every sense contradict the dynamism and seminal culture for which universities across the world are noted.

Cutting the figure of a realist for himself, of a dispassionate leader, of a leader with a sound sense of judgement, the speaker touches on an emotional issue that the staff, students and alumni of the university so much cherish, and that is the slogan ‘Great Ife’: ‘It is high time we stopped shouting Great..Ife when, in actual fact, the greatness is actually collapsing’. As is characteristic of most leading universities in Nigeria, every one of them has a slogan which encapsulates its perceived superiority evidenced in its tradition, ideals and uniqueness among other universities in the country. Where, for example, the University of Ibadan, the premier university in Nigeria, has as its slogan, ‘Greatest UI ... the first and the best’, Obafemi Awolowo University adopts ‘Great Ife’. In fact, more often than not, when the name of the university is not mentioned in full, within the Nigerian environment, the catchphrase ‘Great Ife’ has

come to be a useful substitution. It is the brand name of the university on car stickers and all souvenirs produced by the university. It may even be of interest to note that the university has a mantra which fires the spirit of the students and its alumni whenever it is being rendered. Interestingly, in the mantra the name of the university is not mentioned in full; instead, it is the slogan ‘Great Ife’ that occurs in it. As a matter of fact, any ceremony on the university campus or any gathering of students and alumni of the university in any part of the world where the anthem has not been rendered would be regarded as deficient. Here is the mantra:

Great Ife, Great Ife  
Africa’s most beautiful campus  
We are conscious, vigilant, progressive  
*Aluta* against all oppression  
Forward ever, backward never  
For learning and culture  
Sports and struggle  
Great Ife, great!  
I love you  
There is only one Great Ife in the universe  
Another Great Ife is a counterfeit  
Great, great, great...!

Going by the ecstasy that accompanies the rendering of this anthem, one who watches/listens to Obafemi Awolowo University students and alumni cannot but share in their euphoria, as they celebrate the ‘greatness’ of their university. However, the rhetor’s caution deserves a second thought. For the enthusiastic Obafemi Awolowo University student or alumnus/alumna, the rhetor’s use of the verb ‘shouting’ could sound somewhat contemptuous. While such a disposition may sound offensive to some members of the university community who may not want to support the aspirant for such a ‘careless’ utterance, if you will, the great thinkers in the university community who have followed its history since its inception may see some wisdom in the rhetor’s assessment. That the rhetor could do away with sentiment and face the realities could eventually give him an edge over other contestants who are still given to frivolities.

One is able to appreciate the speaker’s assessment of the situation better when he elaborates on his viewpoint in the proclamation below:

### Extract 3

... **IFE** of yesterday, **IFE** of 1962, is not **IFE** of today, not to talk of **IFE** of tomorrow, **IFE** of next century, **IFE** of next millennium. There are problems that call for urgent solutions in order to maintain the greatness, the uniqueness and the international fame and index of the university. (emphasis in original) (Sample B)

In the extract above, the speaker deploys some rhetorical tactics to underscore his message. First of all, he uses folk appeal by substituting ‘IFE’ for the full name of the university. This is because ordinarily when members of the university community speak, they use the name ‘Ife’ to refer to the university. Second, the repetition of the name ‘IFE’ six times within the space of two lines calls the reader’s attention to the most important subject matter.

Furthermore, the plethora of temporal deictic elements in the discourse is engaging. Once again, the speaker uses the rhetorical element of *kairos* by situating the discourse in a temporal context. While the first two temporal deictic elements – ‘yesterday’ and ‘1962’ – show something desirable and, therefore, worth celebrating, the others give a contrary picture as used by the rhetor. The argument has a stylistic force with the use of the negator ‘not’ after the first two references, as in: ‘Ife of ... is not Ife of ...’. If the speaker is able to assess the present and past situations that he can confidently comment on, he will only be just if he limits himself to these temporal frames alone without extending the unpleasant picture he creates of the present moment to the future, even the distant future. Could it be that the rhetor is a pessimist, or does he try to sound rather exaggerative by attempting to play the fear card? The ominous reference to ‘tomorrow’, ‘next century’ and ‘next millennium’ could be counterproductive if the audience erroneously takes the rhetor to be an incurable pessimist. From another perspective, it could be that the rhetor paints such a gloomy picture of the future to caution that for such an unpleasant scenario to be averted, a competent Vice-Chancellor should be appointed.

The contrast between two temporal frames – past and present – in assessing the challenges of the university is further exploited by another aspirant thus:

## Extract 4

Historically, the acclamation “Great Ife!” not too long ago captured an impressive realisation of the dream of the founding fathers of the Obafemi Awolowo University. Today, that vision has been short-circuited and there are legions of problems associated with the towering crisis induced by the inability to match the facilities with aspirations and expectations... (Sample C)

The rhetorical element of *kairos* used in the above extract is given impetus with the use of the adjuncts ‘historically’ and ‘today,’ which are temporal deictic elements, to gauge the two points in history when the fortunes of the university blossomed and degenerated, respectively. By painting the past as glorious and the present as challenging, the rhetor prepares the ground for the exigency surrounding his aspiration. It is not surprising then when he goes ahead to say: ‘Our present task, therefore, is to recapture the best of the past in search of the way forward by embracing the collective vision of OAU in the 21st century’. In appraising the three temporal frames as shown in the discussion thus far, a particular picture is created of each moment in the history of the university and this can be represented thus:

Glorious past	(feeling of delight)
Squalid present	(feeling of disenchantment)
Redeemable future	(rekindling of confidence)

It is clear that the aspirants’ argumentative pattern revolves around the three temporal frames in a bid to provide a diagnosis and prognosis of the challenges of the university. If the picture of the present is dismal and the members of the university community are getting despondent, it behoves the aspiring Vice-Chancellor to raise the hope of this set of people by painting a picture of a brighter future that his leadership would herald. In so doing, the rhetor cuts the figure of a shrewd administrator imbued with the practical intelligence to analyse and proffer solutions to the problems of the university. In that capacity, he can clearly see beyond the present moment and think beyond the level of reasoning of other people. The rhetor, therefore, becomes a rallying point, a source of inspiration and a visionary who sees light at the end of the tunnel. In such a posture, an aspirant declares:

## Extract 5

It is abundantly clear that the Obafemi Awolowo University is at the crossroads. A situation such as that in which we are calls for new ways of thinking, new approaches, and a new discipline of mind and character, new commitment and resolve to confront the changed and changing circumstances. (Sample B)

In the above extract, the rhetor plays the fear card again with the use of the spatial as well as temporal idiomatic expression ‘at the crossroads’ which provokes the audience to be awake to the defining moment in the history of the university when important decisions have to be reached, among which is the appointment of the Vice-Chancellor, to save the university from further degeneracy. Following from this, the rhetor proceeds to inspire the audience to imbibe the attitude that can bring the desired results, as he attempts to sell an offer to them. He employs the rhetorical device of repetition by using the word ‘new’ four times in the syntactically parallel structures: ‘new ways of thinking’, ‘new approaches’, ‘new discipline of mind and character’, and ‘new commitment and resolve’. All of these structures are nominal groups with different noun heads which relate to the cardinal issues that can revamp the situation in the university.

The repetition of the word ‘new’ in these structures is suggestive of the use of the word in advertising discourse. More often than not when the word is used in advertising, though not necessarily repetitively, it is abused, hence it is classified as one of the ‘weasel words’ in advertising. In the present discourse, the rhetor may be emphasising the demands of the new era in human history during which the contest fell – the third millennium/21st century. In fact, all the aspirants sampled for the study make reference to the 21st century or the third millennium in one way or the other in their campaign discourse, with emphasis on it as a time when the university has to be repositioned to take its pride of place in the academic world. They always emphasise ‘my vision of the Obafemi Awolowo University in the 21st century or the next millennium’. For the purposes of the political goals of the aspirants in the present discourse, it would be quite interesting to probe into the use of this temporal deictic element in the campaign discourse.

Reference to the 21st century in the present discourse and generally in popular discourses is significant for some reasons. Generally, it is believed

that at the turn of a new century, the world should brace itself up for greater challenges in every sphere of human life. As such, it is believed that there must be improved standards of running the affairs of humankind from what they used to be in the previous century or the century that is ending, since lofty targets are usually set for the new century. As a result, every nation seeks to break the record earlier set by others. For the African continent in particular, the turn of the 21st century was a time when the governments of different nations came up with action plans and policies designed to tackle the economic downturn, poverty, illiteracy, (killer) diseases such as cholera, polio, and HIV&AIDS, among others, and the drive to make unprecedented breakthroughs in science and technology.

By also invoking the temporal deictic in the present campaign discourse, the aspirants seek to draw the audience's attention to that moment in the history of university education in Nigeria when Nigerian universities would have to tackle the setbacks that had hitherto held them back from competing favourably with world class universities. But in reality, the aspirants may just be echoing this reference to the 21st century to appeal to the people's emotions without actually weighing the challenges therein. Normally, one would have expected the aspirants in their campaign to let the audience know the opportunities offered for Nigerian universities in the 21st century that would make them actualise their goals, to demonstrate that they are not just jumping onto a bandwagon to get the people's support.

A number of pertinent questions may be asked in this respect: Has funding for education increased from what it was in the past? Have governments and the body regulating universities in Nigeria (the National Universities Commission) drawn up clear policy statements and implementation strategies geared towards radically changing the status of university education in the country? Are there donor agencies such as corporate organisations and multinationals that have shown interest in sponsoring research activities in the university? Simply put, what is spectacular about the 21st century for the university system in Nigeria? These questions could be some of the issues that the audience would expect the aspirant to address in concrete terms instead of just touting the miracle century.

On the question of the kind of leadership that can deal with the problems facing the university system, the aspirants also set certain standards which are quite lofty. Consider this:

## Extract 6

Thus, a leader needed to revitalise the age-long glory of IFE, to transform the present status of the university, is a leader that is accommodating; it is a leader that regards himself as first among equals; it is a leader that is not pompous; it is a leader that does not parade himself as ‘Mr Know All’; it is a leader that appreciates the feelings, the problems, the failures, the successes, the hopes and aspirations of others...It is a leader that does not allow communication gap. It is a leader that can serve all the time and in any or all circumstances, as ‘a man of the people’. He has to remember that he deals not only with files but with people. (Sample B)

The leadership image portrayed by the rhetor is made effective with the use of some rhetorical appeals. The first is the heavy deployment of syntactic parallel structures evidenced in the syntactic pattern: ‘it is a leader that is (not) ...’ where there is a subject complement used after the verb ‘be’ and ‘it is a leader that does (not) ...’ where there is an object after a verb that expresses an action. Apart from the repetition of the word ‘leader’ which is emphatic, thereby thematising the issue of leadership in the discourse, the use of the topicalising device (it + be + Noun Phrase [NP]) which is a stylistic strategy makes the repetition more prominent. When we focus on the constant element ‘a leader’ in all the structures, we must as well focus on the varied lexical items that function as either subject complements or the direct objects of certain verbs, while also taking cognizance of the stylistic use of the negative particle ‘not’ which nullifies what the aspiring Vice-Chancellor must not be. Such expressions as ‘accommodating’, ‘first among equals’, ‘not pompous’, ‘not Mr Know All’ used as subject complements sound appealing, and so the audience could easily identify with the cause of the aspirant who appreciates such values in a leader. The collocation of the words ‘feelings’, ‘the problems’, ‘the failures’, ‘the successes’, and ‘the hopes and aspirations of others’, with the verb ‘to appreciate’, underscores the virtues that any group of people would want to see in their leader.

Furthermore, the rhetor makes use of a phrase used in the Nigerian environment when referring to a public figure that is popular with the people. The reference to a leader being ‘a man of the people’ in the extract

resonates with the title of one of Chinua Achebe's novels, *A Man of the People*. According to Dwivedi (2008: 3), Achebe's *A Man of the People* 'reflects his distaste for post-independence Nigeria as a place where leaders who had fought for independence became traitors after attaining power, and sacrificed their country in exchange for middle-class comfort'. The novel delineates the conflict between morality and corruption by contrasting the protagonist, Odili Samalu, with his opposite, the Minister of Culture, Chief Nanga. These characters are worlds apart: while Odili is an idealist, Nanga, who is a politician, is a realist, who has a genuine rapport with the people whom he represents. It is in the sense of the affinity between the leader and the subjects that the novel is titled *A man of the People*, though with some literary undercurrents which could be satiric. In this sense, one could see in the novel Nanga's dubious tendencies of exploiting his people. Summing up the picture of Nanga as Achebe's '*A man of the people*', Dwivedi (2008: 5) says:

Achebe presents ... Nanga as a political opportunist. Nanga has no concept of political morality. He has become rich through bribery, corruption, and intimidation, and knows how to work these things to his advantage ... Nanga and many others pursue self-interest with false promises of sharing with everyone.

This image of Achebe's '*A man of the people*' is what most Nigerian public speakers do not take into consideration when they campaign and promise to be 'men/women of the people'. They just emphasise the rapport between the leaders and their subjects without taking note of the negative light in which the expression is used in the narrative. Or it could be that such an expression has been stripped of its literary import and then recontextualised to refer to the leader who genuinely feels for the people and who has no ulterior motives. If that is so, it could be that the aspiring Vice-Chancellor who uses the phrase in his campaign discourse is quite aware of the import of his choice, for indeed he goes ahead in the extract to explain: "He has to remember that he deals not only with files but also with human beings". This leadership style that the speaker emphasises here in relation to giving his administration a human face is where the question of 'a man of the people' as opposed to 'a man of files' comes to the fore.

Besides those who conceptualise leadership in respect of the person at the helm of affairs, there is an aspirant that tries to redefine successful leadership as everyone's business. This view resonates with contemporary thinking about leadership as not being a position but a process. According to Hughes et al. (2006: 6), '...leadership is a complex phenomenon involving the leader, the followers and the situation'. No wonder that the aspirant says:

### **Extract 7**

...the collaboration of everyone, staff and students, is essential to the continued proper functioning and development of the institution. Whether this institution succeeds or fails is dependent largely on the members of the community; no Vice-Chancellor can succeed without the collaboration and efforts of the university community. (Sample A)

From the excerpt above, the speaker is trying to sell himself to the audience by suggesting that he is not an island, not a tree that makes a forest, not a single hand that can lift a heavy load to the head, but one who does appreciate group efforts in a bid to achieve the desired goals. With this rhetorical appeal, he cuts the figure of a team player whom the other members can look up to for a purposeful and result-oriented captainship. By identifying the key players with whom the aspirant will attend to the problems of the institution, he gives the impression that he is a shrewd manager not only of material resources but also of human resources. Hogan et al. (1994, quoted in Hughes et al. 2006: 7) define leadership in such a light thus: 'The ends of leadership involve getting results through others, and the means of leadership involve the ability to build cohesive, goal-oriented teams. Good leaders are those who build teams to get results across a variety of situations'.

From the above discussion that we have had so far on how the aspirants handle the question of leadership, we can deduce that they all use a self-effacing strategy, not ascribing those qualities directly to themselves although those are the ingredients they would need to function effectively in office. If the aspirants could appreciate the qualities, it must be that they possess some of them or would strive towards acquiring such

attributes. But they neither make reference to, or state categorically that they possess these leadership qualities and would draw on them in running the administration. Could this be a rare display of modesty that one would expect from academics whose exposure has taught them not to be conceited? Or could it be that as craftsmen who manipulate the discourse in order to control the minds of their audiences, the rhetors have tactically kept their identity in the background? Of course, it could be a non-committal strategy so that should they fail to live up to expectation, no one would hold them responsible.

The same self-effacing strategy is used by some of the aspirants towards the end of their manifestos when they challenge the authorities concerned with the appointment of Vice-Chancellor not to fail in their assignment. Here are some charges:

### **Extract 8**

In selecting the new Vice-Chancellor, the managers of this university have a historic opportunity to decide for the future. (Sample C)

### **Extract 9**

This is a critical period for the university... The decision taken now is a pointer to the future of this GREAT CITADEL OF LEARNING AND CULTURE. May God in His infinite wisdom guide and direct the assessors in taking the important, delicate and far-reaching decision. (Sample B)

In trying to imbue their discourses once more with the desired rhetorical force, the rhetors invoke the rhetorical element of *kairos* by cautioning the assessors that whatever decision they make will determine the ‘future’ of the university. The aspirants, as shown in the extracts above, appear to employ subtle intimidation, cautioning the assessors that if after seeing the credentials each of them presents they fail to choose the right candidate – the respective speaker – it would cost the future of the university a lot.

It is as if the rhetors are advertising certain products in these excerpts and they give the impression that the products may not be available for

purchase the next time and therefore they should be procured here and now to cure the ailments of the audience. Since the audience would not want to make such a costly mistake, they may buy the product for contingency reasons. In a similar vein, the rhetor in excerpt 8 appears to be saying that the ‘historic opportunity’ that the assessors have is to choose him and not any other person, while the other in excerpt 9 seems to be saying that the ‘far-reaching decision’ to be made by the assessors is to see him as the right choice for the post.

## **Conclusion**

The analysis we have carried out so far shows the extent to which a powerfully controlled discourse in the hand of the political rhetor could yield multiplicities of meaning when subjected to critical reading, as the study tries to lay bare the rhetorical style of the aspirants seeking the post of Vice-Chancellor of the Obafemi Awolowo University at a critical point, not only in the history of the institution, but also the world at large. Just like the practice outside the university community where political aspirants seek to influence the attitudes of the electorate, we see the aspiring Vice-Chancellors packaging their messages, combining emotions and image-building to position themselves and their ideas to influence the selection panel.

Generally, while the aspirants use a credibility strategy in a restrained manner and inject some good dose of appeal to fear into the discourse, it is noteworthy that they all put to judicious use the element of *kairos*, as they strategically harp on the exigencies and constraints of place, time and audience to give rhetorical force to their utterances. It appears they all capitalise on the degeneration in the system, as well as the apprehensions and aspirations of members of the university community, for their rhetorical strokes. Had the university not found itself in the doldrums and therefore in dire need of focused leadership to bail it, one wonders what the rhetorical appeals in the discourse would be. In this sense, this study opens up further areas of investigation into the rhetorical style of aspiring Vice-Chancellors, not only in other Nigerian universities but also in universities in Africa, in a bid to reveal the contextual considerations that could constrain discursive practices in their respective universities.

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