A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF 2019 POLITICAL POSTERS OF THREE GUBERNATORIAL CANDIDATES IN IMOSTATE OF NIGERIA

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Abstract

This paper uses critical discourse analysis to unpackthe posters used in the 2019 gubernatorial electioneering campaigns in Imo State with a view to discovering the ideologies used to control the minds of the electorate towards giving the candidates a favourable support. Using purposive sampling technique, data were collected from the political posters of three gubernatorial candidates' posters in the election. Van Dijk's Ideological Square is the theoretical framework that drives the study. Theanalysis reveals that some words, expressions and images which have ideological colouration are used by politicians in these posters to demonstrate political will and commitment so as to garner support for their political ambition. Significantly, this paper provides critical insights to the peculiar choices of words in political campaigns and affirms that lexical items and images are not just linguistic elements, but most importantly, ideological tools.

Key words: ideological Square, ideologies, electorate, posters, Imo State

Introduction

Languages exist only to be used, and our use of language distinguishes us from all other animals. It is language use that makes us uniquely human. This means that by putting language to use, we do things, we accomplish things and we can achieve social and intellectual satisfaction. (Finegan, 267)

The forms of language one uses to communicate what one intends to communicate reflect ones' social identity and mirrors the situation in which one is communicating. It is an intrinsic part of life. Language and human activities are, therefore, regulated by social factors. These social factors vary from country to country, state to state, and community to community. It follows, then, that the way in which language is used in different societies to portray similar events also varies. In the political settings, especially during election periods, political parties compete to secure political control. As a result, the electorate is often bombarded with several barrages of campaign posters. In Nigeria, electionsat all levels areoften perceived as warfare, and violence has become their common attribute. Consequently, election periods often present a typical tug-of-war situation between candidates of different political parties as they battlefor the political control of state resources. To this end, posters are often ingenuously designed and intelligently crafted to sway the people and gain their support.

Language, therefore,is absolutely an indispensable tool in the hands of politicians. Language use in electioneering campaigns in Nigeria has attracted the attention of scholars from different disciplines. Omozuwa and Ezejideaku (2008) analyzed the language of political campaigns in Nigeria from a stylistic point of view, highlighting and analyzing the special features of the language. Omilusi (2020) investigated into the unfulfilled campaign promises made by the candidates and their parties especially in the 2019 General Elections and how to make them live up to their promises and stop them from merely deceiving the electorates with such promises. Ikeke (2021) carried out a research on language use in political campaigns using critical analytical and hermeneutic and noted that there is need for politicians to behave morally in their use of language duringcampaigns in order to build a better society.

This study, examines the use of language as an instrument of mind control in the posters of three gubernatorial candidates in Imo state in the 2019 electioneering campaigns from the perspective of Critical Discourse Analysis. As far as this researcher knows the posters used during the election has not yet caught the attention of scholars and need to be unpacked for the people to understand them better for what they are. To this end, it will provide answers to these two research questions:

- 1. What strategy was deployed in the posters to grab the attention of the electorates?
- 2. In what ways were ideologies used as a tool for mind control in the posters?

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is an offshoot of critical linguistics and has its roots in rhetoric, text linguistics, anthropology, philosophy, socio-psychology, cognitive science, literary studies, sociolinguistics, applied linguistics and pragmatics (Wodak and Meyer 1). According to Van Dijk, CDA is a type of discourse analytical research that primarily studies the way social power, abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context (135). Broadly put, it is concerned with how social and political inequalities are manifested in and reproduced through discourse (Robin, 137). Nnamdi-Eruchalu observes that "CDA draws attention to power imbalance, non-democratic practices, social inequality, and other injustices with a view to promoting social justice, fairness and social equality", (114). CDA is associated with and originated from the works of researchers like Norman Fairclough, Teun A. van Dijk and Ruth Wodak,Gunther Kress, Theo van Leeuwen (Wodak and Meyer 3). Today, a host of other researchers have followed and expanded and amplified this research perspective.

It is a qualitative research approach or research perspective or agenda to the study of texts and talks in socio-political settings with the aim of unpacking them for evidence of power imbalance, ideological manipulation, dominance, in the construction of the texts and talks and the ways they can be resisted. Such strategies of social inequality, discursive manipulations, dominance enacted discursively in "social relationships of class, gender, ethnicity, race, sexual orientation, language, religion, age, nationality, or world region" are often reproduced and perpetuated by those in position of power, and accepted as naturalized commonsense by the dominated group (van Dijk, 18). CDA analyses the linguistic and semiotic aspects of the text in social and political contexts. It looks at why speakers or writers make use of certain words among other words available to them.

The term "Critical" in CDA refers to a search for deeper understanding in texts and talks with a view to unpacking, and not criticizing them. It means laying bare the true meaning of discourse, such that the cloak of ideologies are stripped off it. CDA, therefore, raises consciousness towards ideological workings of language which according to Faircloughis the first step towards emancipation (1989, pg1). Critical Discourse analysts are of theopinion that public communication should not be accepted at its face value, but should be subjected to critical analysis for evidence of ideology (Nnamdi-Eruchalu, 112). Simply put, CDA deals with the saying, doing and the identity a language represents.

2.2 Language Use in Politics

Politics is one term that carries a lot of connotations. It means different things to different people: the good, the bad, the ugly. The Greek philosopher, Plato described it as "nothing but corruption", and George Orwell in his Politics and the English Language notes that politics "is a mass of lies, evasions, folly, hatred and schizophrenia" ((Beard, 5). Politics is a beehive of activities ranging from political meetings of all kinds, policy making, speeches, to electioneering campaigns, and to elections proper, to declaration of results, and governance. Language is uniquely deployed in the profession to address all these. Politicians use highly symbolic language, public gestures, unfounded assumptions, and lots of vague or ambiguous words to communicate their content to the electorate. Edelman observes that language shapes what the administrators and the public take for granted, whose expectations they accept as legitimate and whose they ignore, how they define their functions, and what meanings they read into the outcomes of their policies (Pg.2).

The use of language in political texts and talks is uniquely different from other discourses. It is by the use of language that ideologies and power are negotiated. Bloor and Bloor define ideology:

"As a set of beliefs or attitudes shared by members of a particular social group. The beliefs or attitudes that stem from ideology may not always be held consciously by individuals. They can be so deeply ingrained in our thought patterns and language that we take them for granted as self-evident," (10).

Like other ideologies, language ideologies are influenced by political and moral interests and are shaped in a cultural setting. The immense power of language to control the mind is not a fictional phenomenon, language helps in shaping our thoughts. We think in words, and when we try to conceive an idea for which there are no words, we find ourselves stumbling. Therefore, language helps us to think and express our thoughts appropriately. CDA believes that social power, not only controls the communicative action of the dominated group, it believes that it indirectly controls the minds of the dominated groups or recipients. Mind control is, therefore, a function of texts and talks, and does not always mean manipulation. Language, therefore, is discourse or action used by members of society bound together in relationship practices and shaped by struggles for power. Linguisticchoices we make are ideologically shaped to reflect such relationships of power. Gross, (2013) states that the language people speak has a great influence in their mind, behaviour, even their economic achievements as well as decisions

2.3 The Socio-Political Background of Imo State

The area now known as Imo state was part of the East- Central State before 1976. Imo state was created on February 3, 1976 of the Old East Central State by the then regime of General Murtala Muhammed. Imo state is located in the south eastern Nigeria, it covers an area of five thousand, five hundred and thirty (5,530) square kilometres. It has twenty-seven (27) local government areas and takes its name from Imo River. The inhabitants of Imo state are Igbos and their official language is Igbo alongside English. Since her creation in 1976, Imo state which is known as the Eastern heartland has been ruled by both military and civilian governors. Commander Godwin Ndubuisi Kanu, NN, was appointed the first Military Governor of the state.

In the just concluded March 23, 2019 election, Imo state was always in the news. The reasons being that the state gradually has become one of the country's electoral malevolent state in the recent years. The second reason being that Imo state paraded seventy gubernatorial candidates which was the highest since the inception of Nigeria as a country. Prior to the 2019 general election, there was a deep craving from the majority of the "Imolites" for a change of government. The majority of Imo citizens were yearning for a new government since it was understood they were fed up with the supposed irregularities and corrupt practices of the then present government. Imo needed a governor who has the interest of the masses at heart, therefore, the citizen could not afford to be distracted in selecting their governor. The 2019 gubernatorial election in Imo state politics became very tough and competitive.

This research work therefore, was prompted as a result of recent happenings in the political life of the state. The political situation in Imo state in the recent time has been very tense, and interesting too, the once peaceful state suddenly became a violent one as a result of political ambitions of the political gladiators in the state. There has been a lot of political intrigues and power tussle over which political party dominates the most powerful seat in the state. The number of candidates vying for governorship position was alarming. The competition became so high and interesting as each of the political parties desperately wanted its candidate to win. Therefore, they sought for the best ways to convince the electorate and to win their votes; however, language became one of the veritable tools to use. They used language through the choice of words they made and images in the posters to promote their candidates as well as their parties, and at the same time condemn their opponents. A lot of promises were made through the individual posters in order to gain the support of the electorate. Political rhetoric was used by these politicians as persuasion techniques to win the voters to their sides and to have their votes. Among the seventy gubernatorial candidates that contested for the 2019 election, there were the most prominent ones. These candidates were five in number, and I call them the "Top

Five". These top five gubernatorial candidates made the election in Imo more captivating and interesting. These frontline contestants were: Emeka Ihedioha of People Democratic Party (PDP), Hope Uzodinma of All Progressives Congress (APC), IkediOhakim of Accord Party (AC), Ifeanyi Ararume of All Progressive Grand Alliance (APGA), and Uche Nwosu of Action Alliance (AA). Emeka Ihediohaof PDP was the deputy and Acting Speaker of House of Representatives. Hope Uzodinma of APC was a senator representing Imo West Senatorial Zone. Ifeanyi Ararume of APGA was a senator representing Okigwe zone. IkediOhakim of the Accord Party was once a governor of Imo state. Uche Nwosu of Action Alliance was Imo state Chief of Staff and the son-in-law to Governor Owelle Rochas Okorocha. All these five gubernatorial candidates have their antecedents and are well known to the Imo electorate. While we had other sixty- five candidates contesting for the governorship post, the battle was for these top five contestants. This implies that, while the battle might be tough and chaotic, the selection of the right candidate could be easy for the electorates given that they have only five gubernatorial candidates contesting and they knew their backgrounds and pedigree. However, as a matter of time and space, only three gubernatorial candidates' posters; AA, APC and PDP are analysed in order to explicate the ideological underpinnings in them and to aid in the emancipation of the poor electorate.

2.4 Theoretical Frameworks

This research study uses Van Dijk's ideological square, and Kress and Van Leeuwen Visuals and Multimodality as the theoretical frameworks. In Van Dijk's ideological square, he encapsulates the twin strategies of positive "in group" description and negative "out group" description. The double strategy of this binary opposition is often manifested in discourse by lexical choices and other linguistic features, (Hakam, 37). Van Dijk maintains that many group ideologies involve the representation of "Self" and "Others", "Us" and "Them". Many therefore seem to be polarized – "We" are "Good" and "They" are "Bad", and the "ideological square" functions to polarize in- and out-groups in order to present the "We" group in a favourable light and the "They" group unfavourably.

Visual structures in the form of images also convey ideological meanings. Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (MCDA), therefore, shows how images, photographs, diagrams and graphics also create meaning communicated by a text, which are often more implicit or indirect than language. With inspiration from Halliday, Kress and van Leeuwen, (2006) explain how the visual mode can create meaning through the ideational, interpersonal and textual meta functions.

3. Methodology

The data for this study were collected from three gubernatorial candidates' posters of People Democratic Party (PDP), All Progressives Congress (APC) and Action Alliance (AA), in the just concluded 2019 election in Imo state by snapping the posters of the candidates on the walls of the streets in the area. The sample for this study is three gubernatorial candidates' posters, (Emeka Ihedioha of PDP, Uche Nwosu of AA, and Hope Uzodimma of APC) out of the seventy gubernatorial candidates that contested the 2019 election in Imo state. This sampling was done through purposive sampling technique, and the posters were chosen out of the seventy because of the time and space available to the researchers.

4. Data Analysis

Three Gubernatorial Candidates' Posters in Imo and the Analysis of each Poster:

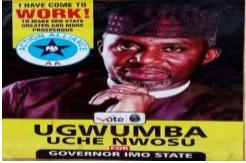


Figure 1. Political Poster of the 2019 AA Gubernatorial Candidate, Uche Nwosu.

This poster is one to be read from top to the bottom since Uche Nwosu appears in the centre top to the part of the left hand side of the poster, which contributes to highlighting that he is the main social actor represented and therefore the most prominent element of the composition. The point of light in the poster is on his face. He appears serious and looks deeply with rapt attention somewhere outside the poster, which can be interpreted as a symbolic way of looking forward to being the governor of Imo state, and looking forward to making it a better state in the near future. The fact that he touches his jaw with his left hand makes it clear that he is currently reflecting on something important that needs complete concentration. What could be more important to him than the interest of the people he wants to be their governor. There are different colours in the poster and they all have their different symbolisms.

The dark background suggests that Imo state is in semi-darkness and it could be understood as a big challenge for Uche, whose main aim is to win the elections and improve the state's situation. The dark colours of the background contrast with the white, blue, red and black letters of the written text. The yellow colour in the poster is the easiest to see and the most visible colour from a distance which symbolises cheerfulness, friendliness, joy and energy. He used the yellow in his poster to get the attention of the voters as a sign of friendship and to show that he is youthful and energetic, therefore will give them life (who doesn't need more yellow in his life). Another colour that is prominent in the poster is red. Red represents physical energy, passion and desire. No wonder in the text, "work" is written in red. It symbolises action, confidence and courage.

On the top right hand, the text "I HAVE COME TO WORK! TO MAKE IMO STATE GREATER AND PROSPEROUS" appears in capital letters graphology and the word "work" is written in red and in a bigger font than the rest of the written text to help highlight the importance of his mission. It shows that while the previous government or his opponents might have played or come to play or come to embezzle, his sole aim is to work to make his people greater and more prosperous. This a positive self-presentation of himself and at the same time, indirectly projecting his predecessors and opponents in negative way.



2. Political poster of the 2019 PDP gubernatorial candidate, Emeka Ihedioha.

The information value of this poster is read from top to bottom, this is because, the election year (2019), and four hands with colours red, white, green and black, holding one another as a symbol of togetherness appear at the top of the poster, which makes the reader to start reading this multimodal text from the top. The hands are important in the composition because their joining together shows team spirit. This means that the candidate is not going to work alone. He needs his party members and his supporters to rebuild Imo state as we can see in the text beside it "Together we can REBUILD Imo". The name of the party and logo is written very close to the left ear of the candidate, showing the candidate's dedication to his party, close to it are some texts which read; "He Thinks", "He Listens" and "He Delivers". The texts portray the candidate in a positive way. He is described as a good leader who would be able to think, listen to his people before he does anything and he must have something to deliver. His name appears at the end of the poster and his chieftaincy title, "Ome nkeahuruanya" for governor" directly under his name which is written in Igbo significantly means a person who has done remarkable things. Next to it is the text; "My Word" My Bond" which is a clear indication that he is a

man of his word unlike his opponents who might promise and fail. The word "Imo" is written in red which symbolises danger. This means that all is not well with Imo. Thus, it becomes necessary that there should be a change for better, and to save the future of Imo citizens and this can only be achieved with their vote for him.

In addition, the photograph is the most striking element of the composition due to its size and to the message it conveys: the politician appears foregrounded, the background is white and clearer than the one in the previous poster. Emeka looks cheerfully and directly to the electorate, which is a clear way of interacting with them and requesting an answer or rather an action from them: their vote for PDP. This can be considered a demand image (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006), which contrasts with the one presented in the previous poster. Emeka looks less serious as he smiles, and he is more relaxed and sure, than in the last poster. Moreover, his smile shows that he is confident as a leader and is willing to bring the change that his people are yearning for. In other words, he is assuring his people to rest assured that everything would be fine as long as they give him their vote. His attire and facial expression thus portray his image as a grass root politician that is more approachable.

Green is the most prominent colour in the poster and not chosen at random because it is one of the three colours that appear on the umbrella which is the PDP's logo. The colours of the logo are green, white and red. In this way we observe a cohesive use of colours. As stated in the previous poster, all the colours in the poster have their symbolisms. The analyses above project the candidate and his party positively, and his opponent negatively.



Figure 3. Political poster of the APC candidate for 2019 gubernatorial election, HopeUzodimma.

This poster is different from the previous two because the candidate, Hope Uzodimma appears in full photograph in the poster, dressed in a white shirt and trousers with a red hat which is in coherence with the party colours. He appears boldly on the right, where the most important information is placed. The background colour of the poster is green with blue attached at the top left hand side of the poster. The texts on the poster were written with white and red which also blend with the colour of the party. The colour green represents nature, fertility, vitality, prestige and wealth. This means that the candidate is presented as being full of life and has come to give hope to the people by making the land fruitful again. The white colour represents purity and the red colour represents energy, passion and desire to return "hope" to Imolites. The predominant use of colours green and white which are Nigerian colours in his poster also shows a cohesive use of colours and goes a long way to explain who the candidate is, a true "Nigerian man".

Hope also is connected through a vector with the slogan "HOPE RETURNS TO OWERRI" placed at the beginning of the text. The colours of the slogan, which are white and red matches with Hope's clothe and hat, which adds cohesion to the composition and significantly matches the colours of his attire. He appears serious and he looks deeply somewhere outside the poster just like the photograph in the first poster. This can be interpreted as a symbolic way of looking forward to something more serious and deep, and what can be more serious and deep than being the governor of Imo state in the near future and returning hope to them. The use of colour blue which is a universally accepted colour as one of the background colours, is used to portray his message of trustworthiness and calmness to

his audience. The text, "HOPE RETURNS TO IMO" shows that Imo state before now may have been in a state of despondency, and therefore, needs a "saviour" andredeemer. He also uses the text under the slogan which reads, "Building the Imo state our people hoped for" to portray himself positively and as the more acceptable one.

5. Conclusion

This paper has carried out a critical discourse analysis of three gubernatorial candidates' posters. It has discovered that linguistic items and visuals are generally used by the politicians in the electioneering campaign in their different political parties to indicate political commitment and promises, pledges and persuasion, political obligation and manipulation, mind control, negotiation, personal conviction, possibility and appeal. Politicians tactfully choose these words and visuals to reinforce their individual political ideologies, communicate their political ideology and elicit public support. Thus, one similar thing is common, that all the parties hide meanings behind the words.

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