

Power and Ideology: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Campaign Speeches of 2023 Nigeria Presidential Aspirants

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Abstract

Humans deploy the commonest social behavior, that is language, in perpetrating their social practices daily. As such, language underlies the constructed worldview of a people representing a majority, if not all part of the sociocultural and politico-economic aspects. Language could be said to represent relations of power and Ideology, exemplified in the relations of politicians to the general masses. This is manifested in the political sphere. Political discourse underscores the power relations, and ideology system obtainable in that geographical setting as well as underlines the exclusion and inclusion strategies of political actors. Thus, this study investigates the power relations and ideologies in the campaign speeches of the top three 2023 Nigerian Presidential candidates using the theoretical framework of Critical Discourse Analysis, CDA, by Norman Fairclough. Adopting a qualitative analysis method of analysis, two (2) tweets per candidate, making a total of six (6) tweets, collected from Twitter are sampled for analysis. This study showed that there exist asymmetrical power relations between the less powerful and the powerful, which underscores the political ideology in Nigeria and presidential aspirants employ more of inclusive than exclusion lexemes.

Keywords: Critical Discourse Analysis, Power, Ideology, Campaign Speeches, Social Practice

1.0. Introduction

The presidential election in all over the globe, generally, and in Nigeria, specifically, is an avenue where the electorates elect their leader through votes casting. Usually, it is one adult per vote, at the end of vote-casting, the candidate with the majority votes is elected as the winner because, under the virtue of the larger number of votes the candidate got for him/herself, that speaks volumes that he/she is the winner. The Independent National Electoral Commission, INEC, declares the winner after collating and summing the voting results from different parts of the state. Before the election aspirants rally for the citizens' votes, and in doing such they try to carry citizens and netizens along, thus rendering oral speeches and making posts as a convincing tool to win People to their respective parties. The president oversees the affairs of the nation, thus almost everyone aspires to be at the helm of affairs; to be in charge and others follow. The general masses give their choice through voting, an aspect of democracy, which is the government of the people, by the people, and for the people.

In doing the rallies, political positions aspirants try to use language instrumentally to achieve their purpose. According to Mey (2001, 293) qtd by Nnamdi-Eruchalu (110), "the use of language is a common human privilege, a human right", but the privilege is unevenly distributed amongst members of society". This results in asymmetrical power relations; the existence of the powerful and the less powerful in Nigeria. Political candidates aspiring to government posts employ language, in their campaigns to canvas for support and because this study focuses on the language of the campaign as used in Nigeria, Norman Fairclough's theoretical framework is best fit for the analysis as language or discourse is seen as "a form of social practice" (1989, p.22).

Because of the unequal power stratifications in Nigerian society, it is mostly seen that the powerful groups/individuals tend to have control over the less powerful. This is achieved through their strategic use of certain linguistic elements which underlies their power expressions as well as ideologies, beliefs, or worldviews shared by that set.

This study contends that the political campaign speeches of the top three 2023 Nigeria Presidential candidates' campaign posts veil their ideology and what they want others to believe. This study investigates such indices of language to control others.

2.0. Political Discourse

Politics involves power tussle and struggle to gain the power to dominate, control and exercise authority over others. Political discourse refers to discourse that centers on politics and government. Political discourse is seen as a discourse or speech that is “associated with either struggle for power or maintenance/control of it” (Sharndama, 2015, p.9). In every political discourse, there are speakers who are known as “political actors”, who produce the discourses of politics, and “political recipients”, the general masses. According to Igwedibia (2016, p. 253) qtd by Udoh and Ejiaso (2022), political actors possess political powers that “has to do with the position of being in charge over people’s behavior, making decisions and controlling of general resources of society”.

3.0. Socio-Political Situation of the Nigerian Government

Nigeria is a multicultural, multi-ethnic, and multilingual society. Since its creation, it has practiced some forms of government and now is practicing democracy, which in layman’s language is the government of the people, by the people, and for the people. A system of government that prioritizes the opinion of the general masses, which is important in leadership.

During an election, the general masses vote for the candidate of their choice into power. This is done according to the provision of the democratic system of government. To gain more votes, political position aspirants canvas for the support of the masses to their passes. This is achieved through press publications, social media posts, interviews, and all. Social media space is an important tool used by politicians to canvas for support and do their political rallies. Thus, this research focuses on the Twitter campaign posts of the top three political aspirants of the 2023 Nigerian presidential election to unveil the power relations as well as the ideology of the Nigerian political system.

4.0. Empirical Studies

A lot of researchers have conducted investigations on political discourse as well as employing the Critical Discourse Analysis, CDA, according to Norman Fairclough over the years. Sharndama (2015) investigated the political discourse of President Muhammadu Buhari’s inaugural speech using Fairclough’s CDA theory to uncover the ideologies of his government and the contents of the speech. His research showed that the president’s speech consists of appreciation, expositions of ideological plans of good governance, the fight against corruption, etc. And subtle criticism of past governments. Ashipu and Odey (2016) investigated the former president of Nigeria’s speech, President Goodluck Jonathan’s CONFAB to unveil the language of politics. The study discovered that the national ideology which is implicit is embedded in the speech, which is that the president has good intentions for the country.

This study, therefore, focuses on investigating the social media posts of the top three presidential aspirants to uncover the power relations that exists between the political actors and the political recipients and the language of inclusion and exclusion that the presidential aspirants employ in their speeches.

5.0. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study is Norman Fairclough’s Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). It is deemed fit as it provides a tool to study language as used in society. For him, " language is a part of the society", thus discourse is a form of social practice, as such shelters a lot of other behavior or practices obtainable in a society. According to Van Dijk (2003) qtd by Dia, CDA is a proposition aimed at how the corruption of power, dominance, and inequality is practiced in the discursiveness of social and political contexts. CDA focuses on unveiling the power, ideology, and hegemony as represented in discourse/language. Thus, it is an important social research tool.

According to Bloor and Bloor (2013), “central to critical discourse analysis is the understanding that discourse is an integral aspect of power and control” (4). Power and exercise of power and control have manifestations in discourse, spoken or written. For Fairclough, there are three parts to a

discourse, which are: text, interaction, and social context. These are elements of a language that enables the analysis of a discourse, not critical discourse analysis. To do a critical discourse analysis, Fairclough (1988, p.23) suggests three important stages of achieving it, which will be used in this study:

1. Description of text
2. Interpretation of the relationship between text and interaction and
3. Explanation of the relationship between interaction and social context

To further explain these three stages of critically analyzing discourse or language as used in society, Fairclough explains that, the description stage is concerned with uncovering and analyzing the formal properties of texts, ranging from tone, mood, grammar, vocabulary, etc.; interpretation stage deals on studying the connection between text and interaction, by so doing 'text' would be seen as a product of a process of production and 'interaction' seen as an important tool for the interpretation process and the explanation stage is concerned with investigating the social effects of the process of production (text) through the process of interpretation. For Nnamdi-Eruchalu (p. 111), "description involves text analysis; interpretation involves process analysis, while interpretation involves social analysis."

6.0. Methodology

Two tweets were collected from the Twitter handles of the top three 2023 Nigerian Presidential Campaign candidates: Peter Obi, Bola Ahmed Tinubu, and Atiku Abubakar between November 2022 and February 2023. Therefore, six (6) tweets are purposively sampled to investigate the objectives of this study, which are to investigate the relational value of textual features and indices of asymmetrical power relations between the political aspirants and the masses in the texts.

7.0. The Data

Excerpt A: I have the courage and the heart with which to deliver the dividends of democracy freely and fairly to our people. Where we fail, hold me responsible; where we succeed, kudos to you. We can change this country. If it takes us making the supreme sacrifice, let us make it for a greater tomorrow. I am grateful that you found me worthy to take the torch and lead. I would not have come thus far if you didn't follow me. You are my strength, the wings that power the historic Obedient movement... (Peter Obi, 4:48pm, 22 Feb. 2023)

Excerpt B: I ask you, my people, to empower me as your president and commander-in-chief. I will be in charge. I have the requirements for correct leadership: character, competence, Commitment, humanity, and humility. (Peter Obi, 4:48pm, 22 Feb. 2023).

Excerpt C: Today, I met with more youthful and energetic Nigerians to discuss my progressive agenda for renewed hope in Nigeria. I assured them that young people will play an important role in my administration and encouraged them to join me as we create a Nigeria that works for them all. (Bola Ahmed Tinubu, 10:04pm, 06 Jan. 2023).

Excerpt D: I expressed that if elected we will create a committee from amongst diverse business leaders across our nation, who will expand, execute and continuously inform our action plan. I and my running mate Kashim Shettima, promise you comfort, prosperity, and a "can do" society where you can fulfill your dream, we'll Renew Hope! God bless you all. (Bola Ahmed Tinubu, 8:02 pm, 22 Dec. 2022)

Excerpt E: On behalf of my campaign team, I want to express my utmost satisfaction and gratitude for the large turn at the rally. When we Recover Nigeria together, Equity demands that we reciprocate your love in kind. (Atiku Abubakar, 28 Jan 2023)

Excerpt F: I believe that when we all play our parts as stakeholders in the election this weekend and vote massively for our great party, the PDP, Nigeria's fortune as a country of peace and prosperity shall be restored. On behalf of my team, I wholeheartedly thank every Nigerian who took the time to attend our rallies and for the promise of victory for our party and the country in the polls. (Atiku Abubakar, 12: 36pm, 19 Feb 2023).

8.0. Analysis and Discussion of Findings

The relational value of textual features provides clues to the social relations between discourse producers and discourse consumers. The political position aspirants strategically chose the linguistic

elements with which to embellish their posts to be a convincing tool. In the first stage, we shall answer these questions:

- i. What are the values of relation in the textual features?
- ii. What relational values are possessed by vocabulary items?
- iii. What values do textual features have in terms of the subject position of the producer?
- iv. What relational values are possessed by vocabulary items?
- v. What values do textual features have with respect to the position of the netizens/general masses?

Pronouns: pronouns are parts of speech that show identity in such a way that it created room for social distance of inclusion or exclusion, and even as authority. One could visualize this in the use of "we", "us", "our" etc. as inclusive pronouns and "them" for instance, as exclusion pronouns. "I" is seen in the position of power or authority. "You", depending on its use could stand for exclusion of inclusion.

We: "We" as an inclusion pronoun is employed by speakers as a solidarity or unity marker in discourses. The presidential candidates employed the use of "we" a lot in their tweets as a solidarity tool to bring the populace to their party wings. In Excerpts A and C, the discourse producers employed the use of "we" to include only themselves and their teams, excluding the people, as those to perform actions. This is seen in: Excerpt A, "Where **we** fail, hold me responsible; where **we** succeed, kudos to you." And in excerpt D, "I expressed that if elected we will create a committee from amongst diverse business leaders across our nation..." and in excerpt E, "...Equity demands that **we** reciprocate your love in kind...". Again, "we" is also used by discourse producers to include every Tom, Dick, and Harry in their discourses. This is seen in Excerpt C, "... encouraged them to join me as **we** create a Nigeria that works for them all"; Excerpt E, "when **we** Recover Nigeria together...", and in Excerpt F as in "I believe that when **we** all play our parts as stakeholders in the election..."

Our: the pronoun, our, is employed by text producers to show solidarity or unity with the general public. This is strategically used to show the oneness of the political aspirants and the people. This is seen in: Excerpt A: "...to deliver the dividends of democracy freely and fairly to **our** people..."

Excerpt D: "...we will create a committee from amongst diverse business leaders across our nation..." and

Excerpt F: "I believe that when we all play our parts as stakeholders in the election this weekend and vote massively for **our** great party..."

The discourse producers deployed this to show their powers to control by bringing in people to form a team.

I: the first-person pronoun is a signifier of power and authority, which is a form of exclusion that is not good in government. The use of "I" in texts produced by political post aspirants is seen in these excerpts: A, B, C, D, E, and F. In A, we see it in "**I** have the courage and the heart with which to deliver the dividends of democracy freely and fairly to our people..."; B, "**I** ask you, my people, to empower me as your president and commander-in-chief. **I** will be in charge. **I** have the requirements for correct leadership: character, competence, Commitment, humanity, and humility.", C, **I** assured them that young people will play an important role in my administration..."; D, "... **I** and my running mate Kashim Shettima, promise you comfort, prosperity, and a "can do" society where you can fulfill your dream..."; and F, "**I** believe that when we all play our parts as stakeholders in the election this weekend and vote massively for our great party..."

You: this is used by political aspirants as a way to show support and solidarity. This is seen in Excerpts A as in: "...kudos to **you**... I am grateful that **you** found me worthy to take the torch and lead. I would not have come thus far if **you** didn't follow me. **You** are my strength..."; Excerpt B, I ask **you**, my people, to empower me as your president..."; and "you " used to exclude a set from others and to show support, as seen in excerpt D, "... I and my running mate Kashim Shettima, promise **you** comfort, prosperity, and a "can do" society where **you** can fulfill your dream..."

The discourse producers deployed the use of the second person pronoun to show their belief system of inclusion of the general masses, and solidarity for them, and also a way to showcase their power relationship by the display of disparities in the status of discourse participants.

B. What relational values are possessed by vocabulary items?

The top three presidential candidates for the 2023 Nigerian Presidential election strategically chose the lexical items used in their campaign tweets to bring the public to join their parties. To achieve this, they employed the use of lexical items of solidarity such as:

Excerpt A: "our people", "us"

Excerpt B: "my people"

Excerpt C: "more youthful and energetic Nigerians"

Excerpt D: "our nation", "our action plan"

What values do textual features have in terms of the subject position of the producer?

Here, the focus shall be investigating the structures of discourse that place the subjects in a position of authority, as leaders and those in control. To achieve this, the modes of structures would be studied.

Declarative Modes: here, the position of the subject/addresser is to give information whereas the addressees receive information given. Instances of declarative sentences are used plentifully in the select data, some of which include: excerpt A, "*I have the courage and the heart with which to deliver the dividends of democracy freely and fairly to our people...*"; Excerpt B, "*...I have the requirements for correct leadership: character, competent, Commitment, humanity, and humility.*"; Excerpt C, "*...I assured them that young people will play an important role in my administration and encouraged them to join me as we create a Nigeria that works for them all.*" etc.

In all of these, the presidential candidates, give information to the general masses through their tweets thereby showcasing themselves and also trying to convince people that they are capable to lead if given the opportunity.

There exists asymmetrical relation of power in the discourse. The presidential aspirants are placed in the position of authority (give information) while the text consumers (the netizens or general masses) are placed in a less powerful or subordinate position (receive information). This underlies the ideology that exists in the Nigerian political realm in that those in government are powerful and enjoy authority that gives them privileges to control the general masses.

What values do textual features have with respect to the position of the netizens/general masses?

Here, the concern is on the linguistic items that are used to describe the subject positions of the audience/readers, i.e., the general Nigerian public. The political positions aspirants used certain lexical items to give clues to what the ordinary Nigerian is to them. This is seen in the words used in the excerpts which include:

Excerpt A: "*... the wings that power the historic Obidient movement...*"

Excerpt C: "*youthful and energetic Nigerians*", "*young people*"

The presidential position aspirants deploy these words as a strategy to maintain and lubricate the people's positive faces to have them on their sides and ensure they win. This strategy leaves the readers to infer the ideology hidden that the masses are seen as an important tool for their championships, but once achieved is no more considered so relevant.

Interpretation Stage (Process Analysis)

To do an interpretation of discourse, the intertextual context and situational context are to be studied. The situation context says a lot about the appropriateness of discourse as used in that context. We shall answer these questions which will help in discovering what is available in the situation of the discourse.

What's going on? This has to do with the type of activity. The top three political aspirants for president make posts on their Twitter handles to canvas for support, and political rallies, from the general masses to win the post of president of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

Who's involved? This has to do with the participants in the discourse. Here, there are addressers and addressees. Their roles differ as the addressers make posts showcasing what they can offer to the people to convince the general masses to vote them into power and the addressees read and makes their judgments from what they understood.

In what relations? Here, the consideration is based on the subject positions in the discourse. This is done in terms of the relations of power and social distance as evident in the discourse.

What's the role of language? For Fairclough, language is “a tool for getting things done” (1898, p.115) Language is used instrumentally to convince the populace on social media into voting for them. Through their tweets, the Nigerian netizens are given points to consider in making their choices of party to belong based on what each political position aspirants tweeted.

Explanation Stage (Social Analysis)

Here, focusing at the societal and institutional contexts that structure discourses because discourses are shaped by both institutional and societal power relations which are produced, implemented, and maintained through the belief systems of the society/institution. The institution of Nigerian politics at the level of the presidential position of the country has unequal power relationships with others, and the president controls more powers, because of the privilege of being at the helm of affairs of the country. To win the minds of *ordinary* Nigerians, the citizens of the nation without political power, the presidential position aspirants specifically stated what they would do with their powers in the capacity of a president if given the opportunity. In excerpt A, the text producer asserts that “... *We can change this country. If it takes us making the supreme sacrifice, let us make it for a greater tomorrow...*”. We also see excerpt C, where the addresser enjoins Nigerians to believe in him more by asserting creating a new Nigerian, “... *encouraged them to join me as we create a Nigeria that works for them all*” and in excerpt D, the discourse producer uses a performative verb of promise to rally for votes as in “... *I and my running mate Kashim Shettima, promise you comfort, prosperity, and a "can do" society where you can fulfill your dream...*”.

The audience, the Nigerians, see and read because they are interested in seeing that a new Nigeria exists to shadow the developmental issues and challenges they face daily.

The presidential aspirants, in producing their texts, chose lexical items that showcased their effort to suppress the power relations that their position could give them. Such use of words shows their solidarity and inclusion, but what underlies what they created lies the power relationship inequality because their strategic use of lexical items of inclusion are purposively used to rally and to win the majority votes. Ideology is implicated in these discourses to change the mindsets of people from their beliefs that politicians make campaign promises that are unfulfilled when they are put into power. It could be inferred that, though the presidential aspirants for the Nigerian Presidential election in 2023 employed more of inclusion textual features and less of exclusion linguistic elements, it is important to state that the unequal distribution of power relations between the politicians and the *ordinary* Nigerians cannot be changed. This also underlies the ideology that the general masses are tools to achieving a desired end in political conquests, thus every means of showing solidarity is employed during political rallies, but at the end of the election, the suppressed power relations in rallies come to life again.

8.0. Conclusion

From the analyses above, the campaign tweets of the three top presidential candidates showed the asymmetrical power relations that are unevenly distributed among political actors and the political recipients, the masses. As well, their Twitter posts show to a large extent their inclusion of the masses, that is prioritizing them, this is to win them over to their parties because the greater supporters a party has, the greater the number of votes. This could be seen as the underlining ideological system in the Nigerian political sphere where citizens are given chairmanship seats during political rallies, but hereafter dethroned after the election. It is recommended that the citizens should be prioritized within and after political campaigns and in governance as it should be in a democratic society. Again, the presidential aspirants should not only use inclusive language during their campaigns but also implement them by involving all the citizens in all they do in governance.

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