

## Language and Ideology: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Nigerian National Anthem

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### Abstract

This paper is a critical discourse analysis of Nigerian national anthem with the view to finding out the ideologies in the text and how they are enacted through the use of words. The data for analyses were obtained from the current Nigerian national anthem as composed and adopted in 1978. The study investigates the lines of the anthem to uncover the ideological imports of the Nigerian National Anthem using critical discourse analysis. The concern of the analysis is to ascertain how language can be used as a tool for social restructuring in the society. The study adopts qualitative approach to show the interconnectedness between language and ideology. The analysis reveals that language of the text does the social work of mind-reconstruction, cultivating patriotism, faith and unity; and that the phrasing of the text is appropriate and aptly embodies the ideologies of Nigeria as a country. The use of CDA shows how equality, fairness, unity and patriotism can be mediated through language. It concludes that language is not simply a neutral medium for generating subject knowledge, but a form of social practice that acts to constitute as much as reflect social realities. The study recommends critical discourse analysis as a means of textual analysis that unravels the unsaid said of a speaker.

**Key words:** critical discourse analysis, ideology, national anthem, Nigeria and language.

### Introduction

One of the paradoxes of life is that some of the things that are closest to us in time, space, significance and importance remain among those things that cannot be exhaustively described or properly understood; and human language is one of those things. The study of language is generally to unravel its workings and foster understanding of the complex phenomenon which human language has remained. In discourse analysis, some of the most interesting observations are made in the study of language, but in terms of the way language is used. In the view of Brown and Yule (2010), the analysis of discourse is necessarily the analysis of language in use. As such, it cannot be restricted to the description of linguistic forms independent of the purpose or functions which those forms are designed to serve in human affairs (p. 1). The major difference between linguists and discourse analysts is in their approach to analysis of language. While the linguist's preoccupation is on determining the formal properties or elements of a language, a discourse analyst is committed to an investigation of what that language is used for. To the discourse analysts, language is loaded with direct and indirect meanings (factual and contextual). These are two perspectives behind a single utterance.

The argument of Brown and Yule (2010) is that it would be very unlikely that, on any occasion, a natural language utterance would be used to fulfill only one function out of the two functions (factual and contextual) of language to the total exclusion of the other. The function which language serves in the expression of linguistic content, according to Brown and Yule (2010) is transactional; while the function involved in expressing social relations and personal attitude or ideology is described as interactional. These functions are given different names by different scholars. They are transactional and interactional (Brown & Yule, 2010), representative and expressive (Buhler, 1934), referential and emotive (Jakobson, 1960), ideational and interpersonal (Halliday, 1970), and descriptive and social-expression (Lyons, 1977).

Language as a way of social expression is also ideological. Ideology is fundamentally a set of ideas that dictates or guides the decision and action of a people in a context. It is the belief, creed, dogma, philosophy, or principle on which a political or economic system is based. In the discourse, language is not simply a neutral medium for generating subject knowledge, but a form of social practices that acts to constitute as much as reflect social realities. Language per se is not powerful and ideological but gains power and ideology through people who by using it infuse messages to the society. According to Lemke (2002), language and ideology are inseparable because language is the carrier of ideology (p.40).

The thrust of this work is to investigate the language of the Nigerian national anthem with the view to extracting their ideological implications as opposed to the factual or propositional information. The inquiry into the relationship between language and ideology definitely will confront us with a lot of implications both on the nature of the text and the nature of the reading. This is because, in discourse analysis, a text is not only studied ideationally but also interpersonally. The interpersonal aspect of a text analysis is what reveals the ideologies of the text as encapsulated by language. Lemke (2002) expresses that “language functions ideologically not only by enabling us to make meanings that maintain the dominance of one group over another, but also by providing ways of challenging the dominance” (p. 40). To use language, therefore, is to use it ideologically as no utterance is ideologically neutral. The relationship between ideology and meaning is rooted in the question of language. When the message and ideology of a nation’s creed is not well understood, the effect is always enormous – it leads to lack of patriotism. This is one of the numerous challenges facing Nigeria – the fact that the intents and ideas of her national anthem are not well comprehended. Meanings are achieved not just through linguistic variables but also through socio-cultural setting of a work. This socio-cultural knowledge of the Nigerian anthem is lacking as attention is only given to the wording of the anthem.

In what follows, we shall study some excerpts to unravel how the ideological imports of the speaker are enacted into language and communicated to all Nigerians.

### **About Nigerian National Anthem**

National anthems are the official songs of nations that are sung on special occasions. Nigerian anthem “Arise, O Compatriots” became the nation’s anthem in 1978, after the old anthem “Nigeria We Hail Thee” was replaced. Due to the criticisms against the first national anthem and the agitation to have it changed, a national competition was held with the purpose of choosing one. A committee was created to that effect to choose the best anthem from all entries and they did a good job acceptable by the people. The anthem was drawn from five best entries and the music was by Nigerian Police Band under the directorship of Benedict Odiase. It is an anthem of two stanzas of nine lines each. The first stanza is a call on the citizens of Nigeria; while the second stanza is a prayer unto God – the “creator of Nigeria and all therein”. In some formal occasions, the second stanza is said as Nigerian official prayer at the commencement or at the end of an official programme.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical orientation of this work is Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). It is a proven knowledge through discourse analysis and pragmatics that we sometimes mean more than what we say, less than it, or even something completely different from it. CDA is a critical theory concerned with the processes by which systems of social discrimination are shaped and retained. Power asymmetry is so common in society that inequality is no longer visible but principally obscure. This is due to ideological progressions that make inequality appears to be accepted situation of human social systems. Fairclough (1995, 2006) and Van Dijk (1993) are two major players in this orientation who advocate the approach called “critical discourse analysis” (Wardhaugh, 2010; Chilwa, 2013).

CDA is a theory which took off from a functional perspective and explains language as a meaning carrier. It is a common place knowledge through discourse analysis and pragmatics that we sometimes mean more than what we say, less than it, or even something completely different from it. From time immemorial, humans have appreciated the directness in speech communication. The effectiveness of CDA in language analysis is based on the fact that it is context sensitive. According to Nogaard et al. quoted in Kamalu (2018), CDA is “a term used to refer to stylistic work investigating the ways in which social meanings are manifested through language” (p.27). This definition, by extension means that CDA is an approach that uncovers how social meanings, such as power and ideology are enacted through language, which in this respect, can impact on the way we perceive the world. Remilinger (1999), in line with the above-mentioned point, explains that one way of enacting power is to control the context of speech situation (p.1). CDA, in the view of Wodak and Meyer (2008), takes particular interest in the relationship between language and power (p.1).

Bloomaert (2005) asserts that CDA is ideological and judgemental; it is a source for people who are battling against domination and oppression as shown in linguistic forms (p.25). CDA does not only reveal the social magnitude of language use, it is also an object of moral and political evaluation since questioning them would have effects in society, such as authorizing the powerless, giving voice to the voiceless, uncovering power abuse and rallying people to remedy social wrongs. According to Kamalu (2018), “every text can be read as carrying on an implicit dialogue with other social voices that may stand in alliance with or opposition to it” (p. 574). Eco (1979) contends that it is the duty of a reader to find out what in the text is ideologically presupposed. In the words of Van Dijk (2002), CDA is a type of discourse analytical research that primarily studies the way social power, dominance and inequality are enacted, reproduced and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context (p.353).

Kamalu (2011) explains that CDA researchers do not merely appeal to context to explain what is written or said or how it is interpreted; rather, they have come to see language as a form of social practice (p. 352). CDA not only

deals with shrouded ideologies, but also tells how selection of words is utilized in grooming those ideologies. Critical research on discourse needs to satisfy a number of requirements in order to effectively realize its aims. A very insightful explanation of CDA is the one given by Fairclough and Wodak (1997) with the following words: CDA sees discourse - language use in speech and writing - as a form of social practices. Describing discourse as social practice implies a dialectical relationship between a particular discursive event and the situation(s), institutions(s) and social structure(s), which frame it. The discursive event is shaped by them, but it also shapes them. That is, discourse is socially constitutive as well as socially conditioned - it constitutes situations, objects of knowledge, and the social identities of and relationships between people and groups of people. It is constitutive both in the sense that it helps to sustain and reproduce the social status quo, and in the sense that it contributes to transforming it. Since discourse is so socially consequential, it gives rise to important issues of power. Discursive practices may have major ideological effects, that is, they can help produce and reproduce unequal power relations between (for instance) social classes, women and men, and ethnic/cultural majorities and minorities through the ways in which they represent things and position people. (p.258)

Fairclough and Wodak (1997) summarize these terms of CDA as follows:

1. CDA addresses social problems
2. Power relations are discursive
3. Discourse reflects society and culture
4. Discourse does ideological work
5. Discourse is historical
6. The link between text and society is mediated
7. Discourse analysis is interpretive and explanatory
8. Discourse is a form of social motion.

The adoption of CDA in this work is based on the fact that CDA is context sensitive and ideological; and our analysis is on the ideological import of Nigerian national anthem.

### **Methodology**

The data for analyses were obtained from the current Nigeria national anthem as composed and adopted in 1978. The study adopts the qualitative approach to analyse the ideological imports of the lines of the Nigerian national anthem using critical discourse analysis framework. All the lines of the text were purposefully identified and analyzed to explore how ideologies can be enacted through language.

### **Discussion and Findings**

The argument of Brown and Yule (2010) is that a natural language utterance fulfills two functions – factual function and contextual function; and that it will be very unlikely that there will be any occasion where one function will be fulfilled at the exclusion of the other. The contextual function also known as interactional or interpersonal function expresses social relation and personal attitude. This function reveals how social structure and order are enacted through language. The concern in this work is to carry out an interpersonal analysis of Nigerian national anthem to see how the phrasing encodes Nigerian ideology, encourages patriotism, promotes “Nigerianess” of the Nigerian country, and reveals Nigeria’s only trust in God. The first stanza of the anthem opens with:

**Excerpt 1:** Arise, O Compatriots

First, the line above is a sentence – an imperative sentence. It can roughly be paraphrased as “Arise, Nigerians.” or even just “Arise.” which is a verb sentence. Syntactically speaking, a verb sentence is an imperative or a call to an action. The sentence is a call for togetherness towards fighting for the country’s common interest. It will be of interest to know that this call came when the unity and the peace of the country was greatly threatened. There was a civil war – Nigerian-Biafra war which started in 1967 and ended 1970. The eastern Nigeria-predominantly Igbos had wanted to secede to become a sovereign state called “Republic of Biafra”. The Republic that lasted just about three years was forced back to Nigeria after being over-powered by the Nigerian force. Spirits were weak and interest in Nigeria very low. The first line of Nigerian national anthem was motivated by this observation, thereby, the call for all to arise and build a strong and egalitarian society where everyone will be actively involved in the process.

According to Kamalu (2018), the concern of CDA is to study how texts and talks are used to enact social relations in a community (p. 190). The idea in the line above is that of clarion call for all to arise towards the rebuilding of the country. It is a call for patriotism to all especially to those who had lost interest in Nigeria particularly during the secession tragedy of 1967 – 1970. This shows that a text does a rehabilitation work in a community. It is used to soothen the heart of those who are offended. Wodak (2001) sees a text, from CDA perspective, as “analysing people as well as transparent structural relations of dominance, discrimination, power

and control as manifested in language” (p. 2). Through the sentence “Arise, O Compatriots”, the idea of equality has also been enacted. The belief that all citizens of Nigeria, the different positions notwithstanding, are compatriots shows that language can be used to promote equality and symmetrical power. The fact that everyone recites the anthem, including the president, using the word “compatriots” shows the need that equality must be entrenched in the country’s system before there can be any significant growth. The word compatriot is often used to suggest an automatic sense of friendship. It is a word devoid of class and sentiments

The linguistic structure of the sentence also shows that the call is a very urgent one. The placement of the verb “arise” before “compatriots” shows that the verb is thematised or emphasised. The linguistic formation of excerpt 1 places the process (material process) before the actor. Insights from Halliday’s Systemic Functional Linguistics remind us that though a sentence naturally starts with a nominal group followed by the verbal group and the goal, it can, however, still be reordered based on the function of such a sentence. This choice of linguistic structure which places the verb before its subject is not just a style but also ideological. The focalization of the verb carries the ideology of action and urgency to “serve” Nigeria. We can extract from the above excerpt the need for urgency in standing to serve Nigeria. The ideology which is not categorically stated but can be extracted is the belief that everyone – all compatriots must arise and stand together before Nigeria can move forward. The ideological aspect of language does not lie in the linguistic system, which is autonomous, but in the use of language which is not. The persona, through the above excerpt, seeks to influence and propel all to action through ideology of equality hidden in language use. From this first line of Nigerian national anthem, we can therefore deduce that language is ideological and carries the belief system of a society. As Allison and Chanen (2011) note, it is usually language which is the chief signal of both permanent and transient aspects of our social identity beliefs, values, ideologies and identities (P.87).

#### **Excerpt: 2**

Nigeria’s call obey  
To serve our fatherland  
With love and strength and faith  
The labour of our heroes past  
Shall never be in vain

The excerpt two reveals what the clarion call is all about Nigeria – to obey Nigeria’s call. The call for patriotism is a call to serve one’s fatherland with all love, strength and faith. The voice in the anthem is not necessarily the voice of the composer. The persona can be seen as representing the country, thus the use of the adjective “our”. The phrase “with love and strength and faith” as seen in line four is very apt. The unity and peace of the nation had been threatened and people, thereafter, showed no love, strength, and faith in serving the country. The call is, therefore, timely for all citizens to show love towards serving the country and achieving greater heights. The service cannot be productive if it is not done with all strength and faith. This, by extension, means that all citizens of Nigeria should have faith in Nigeria as no person can serve Nigeria with faith if the person does not have faith in Nigeria. Faith in Nigeria is the belief that Nigeria will work. It is selfless service rendered with love and strength towards making Nigeria work. It is the patriotism needed in discharging social responsibilities.

Lines five and six further reveal the threatened unity of the country which is the main reason for the clarion call. The reason, according to the persona is to ensure that the labour (efforts) of the fallen heroes who founded Nigeria shall not be in vain. If Nigeria was to be disintegrated, it means that the efforts of Nigerian nationalists towards Nigerian independence would be in vain. The ideology here is that of togetherness through which the unity of the country can be sustained and made stronger. It can be deduced from these lines that the anthem does the social work of addressing the country’s social problem. A critical analysis of the excerpt above will reveal how ideology can be enacted through language. First, the persona’s use of the inclusive adjective ‘our’ is an ideological marker. It underscores the speaker’s ideology of inclusiveness, equality, and unity in achieving any political and economic success. The use of this all-inclusive adjective ‘our’ which appears in many lines of the anthem is ideological. It means that a country that is divided into economic and political classes cannot make any headway. This is the ideology enacted through the use of the adjective ‘our’. The persona overtly stated that fundamental issues such as illiteracy, poverty, unemployment, lack of health facilities, and lack of standard educational institutions must be addressed before any meaningful development in Nigeria. The use of the adjective ‘our’, however, means that the challenging issues cannot be solved if Nigerians, despite their class differences, are not united as compatriots. Again, the reference to Nigerian Independence heroes is also a pointer to the ideology of synergy, respect and continuity. Nigerian independence heroes fought tirelessly as patriots to secure our political freedom. The persona, by making reference to them, believes also that we need the same amount of zeal as our Independence heroes, their passion, patriotism and dedication to make progress. This is because the memory of Nigeria’s Independence heroes is synonymous or always identified with commitment, patriotism, and sacrifice. This means that there is,

in this excerpt, an intertextuality of ideology between Nigerian Independence heroes and the persona on areas of political commitment, sacrifices and patriotism. The persona still shares the ideology and dreams of Nigerian Independence heroes, but also adds what must be done in order to have visible actualization of the dreams.

**Excerpt: 3**

To serve with heart and might  
One nation bound in freedom  
Peace and unity

The lines above reveal the fact that the ideology behind the Nigerian national anthem is that of unity. It is based on the desire to enthrone a unified country (one nation). The fact that the secession movement of 1967 through 1970 contributed to the ideology of this work cannot be denied. What the anthem is meant to achieve is to reconcile all and to make all see Nigeria as “one country” that is bound in freedom, peace, and unity. It can be argued that the intent of anthem is to soothen the upset and amend the cracks in Nigerian foundation. This is what only patriotism can restore. It is the only way unity can be restored. When this is done, the citizens can thereafter make bold to serve Nigeria with love, strength, faith and might towards achieving a prosperous Nigeria.

Though the Nigerian national anthem has two verses, only the first verse is usually sung. On some occasions, the second verse is recited as “The National Prayer”. The second stanza of the anthem is built on the belief and ideology that God factor cannot be divorced from the desired unity needed in building an egalitarian Nigeria. This belief is rooted in many African countries and Nigeria in particular that God has a role in Nigerian affairs. The second stanza, therefore, is a prayer to God.

**Excerpt: 4**

O God of creation  
Direct our noble cause  
Guide our leaders right  
Help our youth the truth to know

These lines reveal the ideology that nothing will work if not committed to the God who “created” or founded Nigeria as a nation. Lines two through four of the above lines are a prayer that God directs the noble cause – the cause that Nigeria should be a united nation. The line three of the stanza reflects the fact that the activities and decisions of Nigerian leaders have immense contribution in the unity of the country and the faith of the citizen. This prayer is necessary because the action of the leaders can jeopardize the unity of the country, which in turn affects the faith of the people. The prayer for the Youth to know the truth stems from the belief that knowledge is powerful and a prerequisite for any meaningful contribution by the youth to the society. A youth who has not gained or acquired knowledge is not fit to be drafted into leadership in any form. This can be explained as one of the problems of Nigeria today where people with no knowledge of truth are at the helm of Nigerian affairs.

The importance of Nigerian unity justifies this strong recognition and prayers to God. The Nigerian motto is “unity and faith, peace and progress”. The motto gives insights to the ideology of the anthem and the emphasis on unity. It means that for progress to be felt and achieved there must be peace. There cannot be peace if the citizens have lost faith in the entity called Nigeria; and there will be no faith if there is no unity. It, therefore, has a trickle-down effect where the level of unity in the country determines the amount or quality of the citizens’ faith; and the faith determine the peace while the peace determines the progress of the country.

**Excerpt: 5**

In love and honesty to grow  
And living just and true  
Great lofty heights attain  
To build a nation  
Where peace and justice shall reign

These lines above show that the unity and growth prayed for must be in a rancour free nation where love and honesty are worthwhile virtues. Through these lines, the persona aligns with political agenda of Nigeria that is committed to challenging the disunity and growing faithlessness amongst the citizens. The idea is to promote social tolerance, ethnic and religious equality, love, progress, peace, faith, and lasting unity in the country. To make this possible, the persona recognizes the roles of citizens in achieving the desired unity and also the God factor. When the above listed virtues are in place, then the country will attain “great lofty heights”.

This study has revealed that language is not simply a neutral medium for generating subject knowledge, but a form of social practice that acts to constitute as much as reflect social realities. The phrasing of the anthem helps it to gain ideology and power in the social restructuring of the country. The ideology is that all citizens (compatriots) must arise, despite the differences in tribe and religion, to build a nation where peace and justice shall reign. It is also found out that the use of “compatriots” and the adjective “our” show the spirit of equality where everyone, positions notwithstanding, is seen as being equal. The anthem buttresses the fact that every text does the social work of reconstructing the social attitude of a country, in this case, in orders to restore patriotism and unity.

### Conclusion

This study reveals that language is an embodiment of ideologies which can be recovered through a critical study of a text. The ideology here is that of patriotism towards building a united nation. The language of the text reveals the belief that some citizens are dissatisfied with the country, thus the call to arise and build a nation of progress, peace, faith and unity. The anthem generally puts across the roles to be played in restoring the spirit of patriotism and unity; and also recognizes the need to have God in the process. The use of CDA has given the platform for this ideological analysis to show how equality, fairness, unity and patriotism are mediated through language. CDA therefore seeks to empower subjects by raising awareness on how language is used in public sphere.

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### Appendix

#### Nigerian National Anthem

Arise, O Compatriots  
Nigeria’s call obey  
To serve our fatherland  
With love and strength and faith  
The labour of our heroes past  
Shall never be in vain  
To serve with heart and might  
One nation bound in freedom  
Peace and unity

O God of creation  
Direct our noble cause  
Guide our leaders right  
Help our youth the truth to know  
In love and honesty to grow  
And living just and true  
Great lofty heights attain  
To build a nation  
Where peace and justice shall reign