
Discursive Representation of Nigerian Economic Situation in President Bola A. Tinubu Public Conversations

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Abstract

The economic state of Nigeria is causing a lot hardship to the citizens. Several studies have attributed the economic crisis to poor leadership, corruption, and poor management of resources, indicating that the ruling class are taking decisions that affect the economy and, in turn, the masses. Nevertheless, attention has not been given to how the leaders perceive the economy and its impact, which could influence their decisions. The aim of this study, therefore, is to identify how Nigerian leaders view the country's economy and its impacts on citizens. Its objective is to identify how the present Nigerian president perceives the country's economic state, the causes of the country's economic crisis, and the impact of the economy on citizens. The data for this study were collected from three purposively selected live broadcasts of President Bola Ahmed Tinubu, the president of Nigeria, on the country's 63rd Independence Day Anniversary, 2024 New Year Day, and 2024 Workers Day. The data were analysed qualitatively, using the Topic vs Comment tenet of Halliday's Information Structure as the theoretical anchor. The results revealed that the president made utterances that captured his perceptions of the country's economic state, whereby he expressed that the crisis is inevitable as a result of

the economic reforms taking place. It is also discovered that he believes Nigerians are responsible for developing the country's economy and should, therefore, endure the hardship until the positive effects of the reforms are felt. The study, therefore, concluded that the president perceives the country's economy as undergoing a positive reformation that introduces a short-lived hardship.

Keywords: Discursive representation, language, Information Structure, Nigerian economic state

1.0 Introduction

The economic situation in Nigeria is becoming worrisome. The price of commodities is going up on a daily basis, thereby making the citizens encounter harsh economic challenges. Ucha (2010) reveals that the rate of poverty in the country is on the increase because cases of unemployment, underemployment, and economic inequality are rising. Alloh and Regmi (2017) also disclose that the poor state of the Nigerian economy can be perceived when one considers the astronomical inflation plaguing the country. For example, in 2016, the rate of inflation in Nigeria was 17.9% and this rate was considered the highest within the period (Ikpoto, 2024). But the state of things has become worse because the country's inflation rate rose to 27% in October 2023 (Ikpoto, 2024) and further to 30% in February 2024 (Ogbonna, 2024). But then, the price of things, especially food items, continues to rise in the market, indicating that the inflation rate is still going up and further plunging more Nigerians into hardship.

Several factors have been blamed as the cause of the present economic hardship Nigerians are facing. Scholars, such as Adams

(2019), Makar et al. (2023), Onwe and Eze (2019), Dike (2010), and Ucha (2010), identify corruption, unemployment, poor leadership skills, non-diversification of the economy, and many other social factors as the chief causes of the country's economic challenges. The problem with the bad economic state of the country is that it affects citizens in several ways. For example, it breeds insecurity, leads to poor education, and increases the number of the vulnerable in the country (Onwe & Eze, 2019; Alloh & Regmi, 2017; Ucha, 2010). This means that more Nigerians are going to experience the impact of this condition if it is not abated as soon as possible.

As mentioned earlier, poor leadership is one of the identified causes of the economic woes faced by Nigerians. This issue has been attributed to the poor state of the country's political institution (Dike, 2010) and mismanagement of its resources (Adams, 2019). Based on these arguments, it is obvious that Nigerian political leaders have roles to play in order to alleviate this problem. But then, their ability to solve the problem depends on how they perceive it. Put differently, Nigerian leaders have to understand that Nigerians are experiencing hardships as a result of the country's economy before they can find ways to alleviate the problem. Unfortunately, previous studies have not examined or identified how Nigerian economy and its impact are perceived by these leaders.

The aim of this study, therefore, is to identify how Nigerian leaders view the country's economic situation and its impacts on citizens. Specifically, the study's objective is to identify how the incumbent Nigerian president perceives the country's economic state, the causes of its economic crisis, and the impact of the economy on citizens. Identifying these perceptions provides an insight into discovering the possibility of the government creating an imminent solution to the problem.

2.1 Language and Discursive Representation of Concepts

Discursive representation refers to the process of representing ideas, situations, and concepts (Matus, 2018; Lorenzo & Rubeira, 2019). This representation can be achieved in communication with the use of language (Senit, 2020), visuals (Junqueira & da Silva, 2018), and any other semiotic or communication device (Lorenzo & Rubeira, 2019). Kochetova and Plavina (2018) disclose that discursive representation is the identification of realities because it captures how an individual understands and interprets a concept or an idea.

The interpretation that takes place here is believed to be influenced by the person's mental activities and social experiences. Junqueira and da Silva (2018) further disclose that discursive representation captures the perspective or standpoint from which an individual views a subject as a result of what it means to him. Based on this argument, Matus (2018) claims that discursive representation refers to how people use ideas, images, and objects to replace or frame the issue under discussion. This is to say that discursive representation refers to the standpoint from which an individual views a concept, a situation, a piece of information, or an idea. In the context of this study, it refers to how the country's economic situation is perceived by the ruling class, especially the president.

As mentioned earlier, discursive representation can be achieved through communication, whereby language and other semiotic elements, such as images, are used to frame or build a perspective around the concept under discussion. Junqueira and da Silva (2018) disclose that the information delivered through communication provides the materials for building this frame. This is because, as Kochetova and Plavina (2018) posit, such information can show how the sender conceptualises the reality and categorises the issue. One of the crucial questions that arise from the position of these scholars remains identifying how language plays a role in

communication to represent items and build perspectives around them.

Language is a system of communication that humans use to interact with one another. During this interaction, people use this device to describe situations and events as well as express their feelings, beliefs, ideas, and thoughts over the concept being discussed (Baji, 2019; Ansa, 2004). Language also allows people to identify and understand other people's knowledge, point of view, and perception about a subject when they express themselves with the device during communication (Mishina & Iskandar, 2019). Scholars, such as Reiger and Xu (2017) and Cibelli et al. (2016) also disclose that the language an individual uses influences how he perceives things and thinks. Reiger and Xu (2017), for instance, argue that people that use different languages tend to see things differently. To explain this further, Latkowaska (2015) and Mortega (2022) posit that since language is used to describe, represent, and categorise, it can encapsulate a person's reality. This is to say, therefore, that the use of language in communication can give an insight into the user's reality, knowledge, and perception of the issue under discussion. In other words, the Nigerian president's reality, knowledge and perception of the country's economic state and its impact on the citizens can be identified through the information he conveyed in his public communication.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

This study adopts M.A.K. Halliday's Information Structure as its theoretical anchor. The theory was propounded in 1967 to disclose how language users organise and arrange information in utterances to aid comprehension (Aghaei et al., 2022; Matic, 2015). It is a component of Textual Function tenet of the Metafunction model of Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar, also known as Systemic

Functional Linguistics (Matic, 2015). While the Metafunctions model focuses on the different social functions performed by language in conveying meanings, the Textual Function tenet is concerned with how the physical form of language enables the conveyance of information and meanings. Hence, the Information Structure, a component of Textual Function, is concerned with identifying how information is physically arranged in utterance to enable comprehension.

Based on the principles of Information Structure, when a speaker makes an utterance, he signals what he assumes the listener knows about the concept under discussion (Aghaei et al., 2022; Matic, 2015; Cheng, 2012). This assumption is reflected on how he arranges information in his utterance because he first mentions what the listener already knows before stating other information related to the concept. In addition, he embeds instructions on how the delivered information should be processed. The instructions could be that the listener should add the communicated information to his knowledge bank, expunge the information or idea from his knowledge bank, or update or modify the information he has about the concept under discussion. Arranging information by placing what is known or the topic under discussion at the beginning of an utterance signals and instructs listeners on how to process the information in order to decode the embedded meanings.

Information Structure has three major components, which capture the different ways of identifying meanings in utterances. The first component is the Given vs New Information structure, which focuses on how known information (given) is placed at the beginning of the utterance with the new information following suit. Then, the Topic vs Focus structure identifies how speakers instruct listeners of what is important about the subject (topic) under discussion. Here, information is also arranged so that Topic is placed

at the beginning while Focus (the information that should be paid attention to) follows thereafter. Finally, the Topic vs Comment structure is concerned with identifying what is said about the subject (topic). Here also, Topic is placed at the beginning of a sentence while what is said about it (Comment) comes later.

This study adopts the Topic vs Comment component of Information Structure as the principle to use in analysing data. This tenet enables it to identify the president's perception of the Nigerian economic state and impact through what he said. By examining the arrangement of information in his utterances to identify the related topics and comments in them, the study is able to identify how he discursively represents these factors.

3.0 Methodology

The data for this study were collected from three public speeches the incumbent president of Nigeria, President Bola Ahmed Tinubu, on three different national events. These selected speeches were broadcasted on live television in the mornings of the country's 63rd Independence Day Anniversary (October 1, 2023), the 2024 New Year Day (January 1, 2024), and the 2024 Workers Day (May 1, 2024). The speeches were purposefully selected because they addressed issues related to the country's economy, its causes, and impacts. In addition, they were broadcasted during on live television national events, meaning that they address all Nigerians across the country, irrespective of their differences, must have viewed or received them.

The speeches were downloaded from the websites of two Nigerian national dailies – Punch and Daily Trust, and the Nigerian embassy in Hague. They were examined to identify the key information the president delivered with them. The identified information and the utterances used to deliver them were extracted

and analysed qualitatively. The Topic vs Comment tenet of Halliday's Information Structure was adopted as the theoretical perspective for the analysis.

4.0 Data Analysis and Discussion

The data collected for this study were analysed in three sections to capture the discursive representations of Nigerian economic situation, the causes of the present economic state, and the impacts of the economy on the masses. For the sake of this study, the speeches are identified with the event of their broadcast. Hence, the speeches are labelled thus: 63rd Independence Day Anniversary (IDA), 2024 New Year Day (NYD), and 2024 Workers Day (WD).

4.1 Discursive Representation of Nigerian Economy

Some of the information delivered by the president in the selected speeches captures how he perceives the state of Nigerian economy. These perceptions and examples of utterances used to express them are presented and analysed below.

Perception 1: Other nations are facing economic challenges

In an utterance, the president revealed that the economic crisis faced in Nigeria is not peculiar to the country. The utterance he used to create this perception is identified as Text 1.

Text 1: *We took office at the time many nations, including ours, were experiencing daunting socio-political and developmental challenges (WD)*

Table 1: Information Structure of Text 1

Clause	Topic	Comment
many nations ...were experiencing daunting socio-political and developmental challenges	Many nations	were experiencing daunting socio-political and developmental challenges

Text 1 and Table 1 give an example of the president’s belief that Nigeria is not the only nation experiencing crisis. The topic of his statement, “many nations”, is an indication that what he said in the comment is not only about Nigeria. However, he did not explicitly specify that challenges experienced by other nations are economic. Nevertheless, since scholars, such as Dike (2010) and Adams (2019), reveal that poor political architecture leads to economic problems in Nigeria, it is assumed that the “socio-political and developmental challenges” mentioned by the president also refers to the state of the country’s economy.

Perception 2: There is hope of an improved economy

The president delivered information that reveals he has hope the economy will improve. Some of the utterances used to create this impression are captured in Texts 2 – 5.

Text 2: *The seeds of greatness planted in our nation are beginning to bear fruit, and they promise a future filled with hope and bound by prosperity (WD)*

Table 2: Information Structure of Text 2

Clause	Topic	Comment
The seeds of greatness ... are beginning to bear fruit	The seeds of greatness	are beginning to bear fruit
they promise a future filled with hope and bound by prosperity	They(the seeds of greatness)	promise a future filled with hope and bound by prosperity

Text 3: *tough times never last (NYD)*

Table 3: Information Structure of Text 3

Clause	Topic	Comment
Tough times never last	Tough times	never last

Text 4: *Having laid the groundwork of our economic recovery plans within the last seven months of 2023, we are now poised to accelerate the pace of our service delivery across sectors (NYD)*

Table 4: Information Structure of Text 4

Clause	Topic	Comment
we are now poised to accelerate the pace of our service delivery across sectors	we	are now poised to accelerate the pace of our service delivery across sectors

Text 5: *We have embarked on several public sector reforms to stabilize the economy (IDA)*

Table 5: Information Structure of Text 5

Clause	Topic	Comment
We have embarked on several public sector reforms to stabilize the economy	we	have embarked on several public sector reforms to stabilize the economy

Texts 2 to 5 reflect the president’s belief that the country’s economy is improving or about to improve. Table 2 shows where he refers to the economic investments made by the country as “seed of greatness”, which will improve the country’s economy (bear fruits) soon. He also listed the investments that will improve the economy, some of which are captured by Tables 4 and 5. Furthermore, it is observed that the president used the pronoun, “we”, as the topics of Texts 4 and 5. This enables him to clarify the performers of the actions mentioned in the comment section.

Perception 3: The economic crisis is inevitable

The president made some statements that show he believes the economic crisis the country is currently facing is inevitable. Some of the utterances used to create this perception are presented and analysed below.

Text 6: *I have taken some difficult and yet necessary decisions to save our country from fiscal catastrophe (NYD)*

Table 6: Information Structure of Text 6

Clause	Topic	Comment
I have taken some difficult and yet necessary decisions to save our country from fiscal catastrophe	I	have taken some difficult and yet necessary decisions to save our country from fiscal catastrophe

Text 7: *I must add that because God didn't create us with equal talents and strengths, I cannot guarantee that we will have equal outcomes when we work hard (NYD)*

Table 7: Information Structure of Text 7

Clause	Topic	Comment
God didn't create us with equal talents and strengths	God	didn't create us with equal talents and strengths
I cannot guarantee	I	cannot guarantee

Text 8: *I said that bold reforms were necessary to place our nation on the path of prosperity and growth (IDA)*

Table 8: Information Structure of Text 8

Clause	Topic	Comment
bold reforms were necessary to place our nation on the path of prosperity and growth	Bold reforms	were necessary to place our nation on the path of prosperity and growth

Text 9: *Reform may be painful, but it is what greatness and the future require (IDA)*

Table 9: Information Structure of Text 9

Clause	Topic	Comment
Reform may be painful	Reform	may be painful
it is what greatness and the future require	It (reform)	is what greatness and the future require

Text 10: *There is no joy in seeing the people of this nation shoulder burdens that should have been shed years ago. (IDA)*

Table 10: Information Structure of Text 10

Clause	Topic	Comment
the people of this nation shoulder burdens	the people of this nation	shoulder burdens
that should have been shed years ago	That (the burden)	should have been shed years ago

The utterances presented and analysed in this section expressed the president’s belief that the hardship people are experiencing is inevitable. Texts 6 and 8 were used to show that the economic reforms causing the problems are necessary while Text 10 expresses that the hardship would have been experienced during the past administrations if the necessary reforms were implemented. This claim align with the observation of Dike (2010) and Ucha (2010), who argue that non-diversification of the economy and poor leadership skills contribute to the poor economic state of the country.

Perception 4: The current economic state should evoke patriotism

The president made utterances that reveal his belief that the harsh economy of the country should evoke patriotism among the citizens. An example of such utterance is presented in Text 11.

Text 11: *The socio-economic challenges of today should energize and rekindle our love and faith in the promise of Nigeria* (NYD)

Table 11: Information Structure of Text 11

Clause	Topic	Comment
The socio-economic challenges of today should energize and rekindle our love and faith in the promise of Nigeria	The socio-economic challenges of today	should energize and rekindle our love and faith in the promise of Nigeria

The Nigerian president made this utterance during his 2024 New Year broadcast. The utterance shows his positive perception of the country's economic state. This is why the topic of utterance is "the socio-economic challenges of today", which signals that the positive and motivating message contained in the second segment of the utterance is about the country's economy.

4.2 Discursive Representation of Causes of Economic Challenges

Some statements the president made revealed his view about the causes of economic challenges witnessed in the country. This section presents these perceptions and analyses the utterances used to express them.

Perception 5: Nigerian citizens play key roles in developing and improving the economy

The president disclosed that the country's economy develops when the citizens work together to achieve that. As a result, he implied that citizens share blames in the poor economic condition of the country. The utterances captured in Texts 12 to 16 were used to create this perspective.

Text 12: *I want to assure you that we appreciate and celebrate your hard work, sacrifices, and contributions to the prosperity and stability of our great nation every day*
(WD)

Table 12: Information Structure of Text 12

Clause	Topic	Comment
we appreciate ... your hard work, sacrifices, and contributions to the prosperity and stability of our great nation every day	we	appreciate ... your hard work, sacrifices, and contributions to the prosperity and stability of our great nation every day

Text 13: *the working class holds a central position in the affairs of this nation* (WD)

Table 13: Information Structure of Text 13

Clause	Topic	Comment
the working class holds a central position in the affairs of this nation	The working class	holds a central position in the affairs of this nation

Text 14: *So, I call upon each and every one of you, as I have consistently done, to join hands in shaping the destiny of our nation towards greatness (WD)*

Table 14: Information Structure of Text 14

Clause	Topic	Comment
I call upon each and every one of you... to join hands in shaping the destiny of our nation towards greatness	I	call upon each and every one of you... to join hands in shaping the destiny of our nation towards greatness

Text 15: *The job of building a prosperous nation is not the job of the President, Governors, Ministers, Lawmakers and government officials alone (NYD)*

Table 15: Information Structure of Text 15

Clause	Topic	Comment
The job of building a prosperous nation is not the job of the President, Governors, Ministers, Lawmakers and government officials alone	The job of building a prosperous nation	is not the job of the President, Governors, Ministers, Lawmakers and government officials alone

Text 16: *In this new year, let us resolve that as joint-heirs to the Nigerian Commonwealth, we will work for the peace, progress and stability of our country (NYD)*

Table 16: Information Structure of Text 16

Clause	Topic	Comment
we will work for the peace, progress and stability of our country	We	will work for the peace, progress and stability of our country

The excerpts presented and analysed in this section were used to express the president’s belief about the agents responsible for developing and improving the country’s economy. Texts 12 to 14 were extracted from his broadcast on the 2024 Workers Day, meaning that he was addressing workers and informing them of their roles in nation building. The utterances in Texts 15 and 16 addressed every Nigerian, thereby, indicating that the president believes that every Nigerian should participate in building the country’s economy. Though Dike (2010) and Adams (2019) uphold that leaders have the duty of building the economy, the utterances of the president has shown that he believes otherwise.

4.3 Discursive Representation of Impacts of Economic Challenges

President Tinubu made utterances that captured his perspectives about the impact of the country’s economy on the citizens. These perceptions and the utterances used to express them are presented and analysed in this section.

Perception 6: Nigerians face difficulties as a result of the country's economic state

Some of the statements from the president disclosed that he is aware of the hardship caused by the country's economic situation. However, some of these utterances show that he believed the hardships were caused by important economic reforms. Examples of utterances used to express this perspective are presented in Texts 17 to 19 and further analysed on Tables 17 to 19.

Text 17: *Without a doubt, these two decisions brought some discomfort to individuals, families and businesses (NYD)*

Table 17: Information Structure of Text 17

Clause	Topic	Comment
these two decisions brought some discomfort to individuals, families and businesses	these two decisions	brought some discomfort to individuals, families and businesses

Text 18: *I hear the groans of Nigerians who work hard every day to provide for themselves and their families (NYD)*

Table 18: Information Structure of Text 18

Clause	Topic	Comment
I hear the groans of Nigerians	I	hear the groans of Nigerians
who work hard every day to provide for themselves and their families	Who (Nigerians)	work hard every day to provide for themselves and their families

Text 19: *I am attuned to the hardships that have come (IDA)*

Table 19: Information Structure of Text 19

Clause	Topic	Comment
I am attuned to the hardships	I	am attuned to the hardships
that have come	That (hardships)	have come

Texts 17 to 19 present the president’s perception of the hardships experienced by Nigerians as a result of the state of the economy. In Text 17, he expresses his belief that the hardship is caused by the economic decisions taken by the government while in Text 18, he simply reveals that he is aware of the hardships. However, Table 19 reveals that the president has always expected the hardship to take place.

Perception 7: Nigerians have to endure the hardship

The president, though acknowledging that Nigerians face difficulties as a result of the economic challenges they face, goes ahead to disclose his belief in Nigerians’ resilience and why they have to endure the hardship. Some of the utterances used to express this belief are presented as Texts 20 to 22 and also analysed on Tables 20 to 22.

Text 20: *We are made for this period; never to flinch; never to falter (NYD)*

Table 20: Information Structure of Text 20

Clause	Topic	Comment
We are made for this period	We	are made for this period
Never to flinch	(we)	(are) never to flinch
Never to falter	(we)	(are) never to falter

Text 21: *I wish to explain to you why we must endure this trying moment. (IDA)*

Table 21: Information Structure of Text 21

Clause	Topic	Comment
we must endure this trying moment	We	must endure this trying moment

Text 22: *But we must endure if we are to reach the good side of our future. (IDA)*

Table 22: Information Structure of Text 22

Clause	Topic	Comment
we must endure	We	must endure
if we are to reach the good side of our future	(if) we	are to reach the good side of our future

The utterances presented and analysed in this section capture the president's ideology towards the hardship the citizens are experiencing. Here, his expressions reveal that he expected Nigerians to endure the hardship.

Conclusion

The state of Nigerian economy has plunged many citizens into hardships. The high rate of inflation in the country is becoming worrisome because it has led to instabilities in different quarters. Researchers have attributed these hardships to poor leadership skills, corruptions, and non-diversification of the country's economy. This means that the leaders have important roles to play in alleviating the problem.

The analysis of data collected from the speeches of the Nigerian president, President Bola Ahmed Tinubu, shows that his statements can reveal how he perceives the country's economy and its impacts on citizens. His expressions reveal that he is aware of the hardships the citizens encounter but believes they have to endure them because they (the hardships) are caused by important economic reforms that will improve the country's economy. The president's utterances also show that the citizens are responsible for developing and improving the country's economy, thereby indicating that they contribute to the country's economic crisis when they fail to act accordingly. However, based on the utterances of the president and the information he delivered through them, it can be deduced that he believes the country's economy is undergoing a positive reformation that introduces a short-lived hardship.

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Appendix

Links to Speeches

1. President Tinubu's 2024 May Day speech. *Daily Trust*. <https://dailytrust.com/full-text-president-tinubus-2024-may-day-speech/>.
2. President Tinubu's 2024 New Year address to Nigerians. *Punch*. <https://punchng.com/full-text-president-tinubus-2024-new-year-address-to-nigerians/>.
3. President Bola Tinubu's 63rd Independence Day Anniversary Speech. <https://nigerianembassythehague.nl/2023/11/29/full-text-of-president-bola-tinubus-63rd-independence-day-anniversary-speech/>.