

A Critical Discourse Analysis of Atiku's Speech at the Inaugural Campaign Council September 2022

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Abstract

This study critically examines the inaugural campaign speech delivered by Atiku Abubakar in Akwa Ibom, Nigeria, intending to analyze his use of language to convey ideological positions and the strategic deployment of pronouns. Grounded in the theoretical framework of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), the study adopts Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional model (1987), which encompasses textual analysis, discursive practice, and discourse as a form of social practice. The findings reveal that the candidate employs negative representations and derogatory language to discredit his political opponent, thereby reinforcing his ideological stance. Additionally, the frequent use of the pronoun "our" serves to construct a sense of unity, empathy, and solidarity with the electorate. The speech further contains rhetorical appeals centered on national restoration, as the candidate pledges to rebuild and restore the country's lost glory if elected into office.

Keywords: Language, discourse, ideology, and political discourse

Introduction

Political discourse plays a crucial role in shaping public perception, constructing ideological narratives, and influencing voter behavior. Within this context, political speeches serve as powerful tools through which politicians communicate their visions, mobilize support, and establish legitimacy. One such significant political discourse is the inaugural campaign speech delivered by Atiku Abubakar, the presidential candidate of the People's Democratic Party (PDP), at the official launch of his Campaign Council in September 2022. As Nigeria approached its 2023 general elections, this speech functioned not only as a strategic campaign tool but also as a discursive construction of political ideologies, power relations, and national identity.

This study conducts a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) of Atiku's speech to uncover the underlying ideologies, power dynamics, and persuasive strategies embedded in the text. CDA, as conceptualized by scholars such as Norman Fairclough (1995) and Teun A. van Dijk (2001), views discourse as a form of social practice that both reflects and shapes societal structures. By examining how language is used to produce and reproduce dominance, solidarity, and resistance, CDA enables a deeper understanding of the socio-political context in which the speech was delivered.

The speech, delivered at a politically sensitive moment marked by insecurity, economic uncertainty, and ethnic tensions, offers a rich text for analysis. It provides insights into how Atiku positions himself concerning key national issues, his political opponents, and the electorate. Through rhetorical strategies such as positive self-presentation, othering, and nationalistic appeals, Atiku constructs a narrative of hope, unity, and competence aimed at distinguishing his candidacy.

Therefore, this study explores the speech's linguistic features, ideological structures, and discursive strategies, highlighting how they function to construct meaning, project authority, and appeal to specific socio-political interests. Ultimately, this analysis contributes to the broader understanding of political communication in Nigeria, the role of language in electoral politics, and the dynamics of discourse in democratic processes.

Literature Review

The study reviews pieces of literature and some concepts related to it.

Discourse

Discourse is derived from the Latin word "discursus," which refers to general speech or conversation. This indicates that discourse can take the form of spoken or written communication in social settings. Vna Dijk (1997) described discourse as "the form people make of language to convey ideas, thoughts, or beliefs within a social context". A form of language use is discourse. It involves not only representing the world but also signifying it, forming and creating the world's meaning. In addition, Fairclough (1995) opines that discourse analysis is a type of analysis that entails describing the language text, interpreting how the productive and interactive discursive processes relate to the text, and explaining how the discursive processes relate to social processes.

Political Discourse

Politics is a social activity that can be characterized as a struggle for power between those in authority and those who do not currently hold any positions of power but would like to. Politics can be thought of as a collection of cooperative tactics used by some institutions of society to resolve social conflicts. Political discourse is some speeches delivered by a candidate of the government or opposition party to persuade, influence, and woo support from the electorate to vote for their party (Hywood, 2013).

Political discourse analysis, according to Van Dijk (1998), deals with the abuse, supremacy, or dominance of political authority. As a result, he sees political discourse as a group of genres that are defined by the field of politics rather than as a genre in and of itself. Thus, some genres associated with politics include political speeches, electoral debates, parliamentary discussions, political programs, and government discussions

Ideology

Ideologies refer to a system of ideas or belief structures characteristic of a particular social group, class, or society. These belief systems often legitimize and reinforce dominant political powers (Eagleton, 1991). On a social level, they are shared collectively by groups of social actors and become embedded in everyday practices and discourses. Fairclough (1997) defines ideology as the implicit assumptions that underpin discourse and are closely linked to existing power relations.

Ideology is most effective when its mechanisms are concealed; once individuals recognize that certain "common sense" ideas serve to perpetuate power imbalances to their disadvantage, such ideas may lose their ideological power. Notably, ideologies often surface not through explicit textual markers but through the underlying assumptions and structures that shape discourse.

Critical Discourse Analysis

It is an interdisciplinary approach to studying language that views discourse as a form of social practice. Originating from critical linguistics in the 1970s and formalized in the 1990s by scholars such as Norman Fairclough, Teun A. van Dijk, and Ruth Wodak, CDA focuses on how language both reflects and reinforces social power relations, ideologies, and inequalities.

According to Fairclough (1995), discourse is not merely a tool for communication but a medium through which social identities, relationships, and systems of knowledge are constructed and negotiated.

Van Dijk (1996), opines that critical discourse analysis is a field that focuses on researching and examining spoken and written texts to identify the discursive sources of bias, inequality, and power. It looks at the preservation and replication of these discursive sources within particular social, political, and historical contexts. Similarly, Wodak (1995), considers critical discourse analysis as a type of analysis that examines other ambiguous and clear-cut structural relationships of power, bias, control, and dominance that exist in language.

In essence, it is vital to understand the intricate relationship between language, ideology, and identity, particularly when analyzing texts that function within the political sphere. **Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)** offers a powerful framework for uncovering how these elements interact within discourse. Through the critical examination of language use, CDA reveals how ideologies are subtly embedded in texts, shaping how individuals and groups perceive reality and position themselves concerning others. As Fairclough (1995) notes, language does not merely reflect social reality; it actively constructs it. This means that the way political actors speak—through lexical choices, rhetorical devices, and discursive strategies—is deeply tied to their ideological positioning and identity construction.

CDA allows researchers to move beyond the surface meaning of texts and uncover the power dynamics and strategic intentions that inform political communication. In political discourse, language is rarely neutral; it is carefully constructed to serve specific purposes, such as legitimizing authority, influencing public opinion, constructing social identities, and marginalizing opposition. Politicians often use discourse to present themselves as credible, trustworthy, and aligned with national interests, while simultaneously delegitimizing opposing views. Van Dijk (2006) explains that such discursive practices are designed to sustain dominance and control by producing "positive self-representation" and "negative other-representation", often along ideological lines.

Therefore, CDA serves not only as an analytical method but also as a critical lens for interrogating how language is used to achieve political goals. It is particularly effective for analyzing speeches,

campaign messages, media statements, and policy discourse, all of which are central to political communication. In this regard, CDA is the most appropriate and comprehensive model for studying political discourse, especially in contexts where political actors seek to influence the masses through carefully crafted language.

Joshua and Ofori (2020) studied Critical Discourse Analysis of the Campaign speech of a Ghanaian opposition leader. The study examined how politician use language to express their ideology. The study was analyzed based on Fairclough's three-dimensional models of critical discourse analysis, but most importantly on discourse as text. The study revealed that the candidate used "you, our" pronouns to sympathize with the electorate, to convince and influence them to vote him as a prepared candidate.

Aladean and Awawdeh studied the critical discourse Analysis of President Donald Trump's Speeches during the coronavirus pandemic. The study investigated Trump's choice of lexical items in his speeches and his ideological stands through the use of grammar and vocabulary. The Findings revealed that the President's choice of words revealed the country's superiority and supremacy, national unity, and self-glorification. Another finding showed that the president's use of pronouns "I, and we" in his speech is to identify with the Americans.

Emmanuel (2015) studied the inaugural speech of the present Muhammad Buhari delivered on swearing day. The study identified and discussed the micro and macro structure of the president's speech. The study was analyzed based on the Faiclogh Model as the description (text analysis), interpretation (processing analysis), and explanation (social practice and analysis. The findings of the study revealed the president's efforts in enhancing good governance, strengthening international relations and foreign policy, and fighting insecurity, among others. However, the aforementioned studies differ in context, setting, methodology, and data from the present study, but are similar in terms of theoretical framework; all the works used Fairclough's (1995) model to analyze the data. Though even the study by Emmanuel (2015) is in the same context as the current study, but differs greatly in methodology as it studied the speech delivered by President Muhammadu Buhari at his swearing day into office, while the current study examines the inaugural speech of Atiku's campaign council. Based on this, this study contributes a little to the literature of this field, Critical Discourse Analysis.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study is provided by critical discourse analysis (CDA). According to this theory, discourse analysis goes beyond simple transparency and involves a perspective and methodical approach that includes looking at the network of social processes that the discourse is affected by. Furthermore, Bastone (1995) asserts that CDA is a method of linguistic analysis that aims to expose hidden ideological constructions in texts. The discourse aspects of power abuse and the resulting injustice are addressed by CDA. Additionally, Gee (2011) opines that CDA goes beyond description to address "social practices, not just in terms of social relationships, but also in terms of their implications for things like status, solidarity, and the distribution of social good and power." Therefore, the Fairclough method, whose theory has been at the heart of CDA for more than ten years, is one major critical discourse analysis strategy pertinent to the study of the language of campaign speeches. In his earlier writing, Fairclough

referred to his method of approaching language and discourse. Hence, the study adopts Fairclough's (1987) model as a theory guiding the operation of this study since it is best in the analysis of campaign speeches, and this research aims to analyze the inaugural campaign speech of Atiku Abubakar, a presidential candidate of the People's Democratic Party of Nigeria.

Methodology

The research design for this study is qualitative research. It is a design that is not based on numerical numbers or tables but rather describes, explains, and illustrates the findings of results in detail. The data for this study is a text of speech delivered by the presidential candidate of the People Democratic Party during the inauguration of the presidential campaign council on Wednesday, 28 September 2022 (attached in appendix). The method of data analysis is Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional models for the smooth analysis of the data. It is categorized as follows: the text, the discursive practice, and the socio-cultural practice. The text entails the spoken and written discourse. CDA also entails a detailed examination of texts, focusing on elements such as **vocabulary choices, grammatical patterns, and semantic meanings**. These linguistic features help reveal how ideology and power are encoded in language. At the level of **discursive practice**, the analysis is concerned with the processes involved in the **production, interpretation, and dissemination** of discourse—how texts are created, received, and understood within specific contexts. Finally, the **sociocultural practice** dimension addresses the broader **social, cultural, and institutional factors** that shape and are shaped by discourse, including **power relations, social structures, and ideological systems**. Through this multi-layered approach, CDA enables a comprehensive understanding of how language functions within and contributes to social reality.

Data Analysis and Discussion

This study's data is analyzed based on Fairclough's three three-dimensional models, which are the study's analytical framework. The question raised for the study is how the candidate used language to express his ideologies in the text during the inauguration of his party campaign council slated for Uyo, Akwa Ibom, Nigeria.

In the opening paragraph, the candidate begins his speech by expressing heartfelt gratitude to the audience, using the personal pronoun “*my*” to convey the deep joy and appreciation he feels. He extends this sentiment to members of his party and the general public for granting him the opportunity to witness the inauguration of the campaign council. Importantly, the candidate emphasizes that the significance lies not merely in the inauguration itself, but in the anticipated victory of the party in the forthcoming general election. Through this, he subtly assures all aspirants of a collective triumph, rather than presenting the campaign as a personal endeavor.

Campaign speeches are avenues that the candidate uses to express his or her Ideology. Ideology is a product of language; it can only be expressed with language. As language is a social form of representation, politicians use language to sometimes present themselves positively and, in some instances, negatively present others with the use of some derogatory lexical items or vocabulary to express their ideologies. In paragraph two of this text, the presidential candidate of (PDP uses some lexical items that mock the APC politician as leaners or beginners in terms of real politics.

Here are the words, “Season politicians with nothing but pure politics flowing through our veins”. In essence, he is projecting himself as a renowned professional who achieved the highest esteem in politics compared to his opponent, President Muhammadu Buhari (APC), whom he refers to here as the person who does not understand politics and its game to move the country to greater light. This in disguise is de campaign the opponent to gain support from the electorate.

Furthermore, another derogatory word used to look down upon the (APC) government is “**our great party,**” which shows that the (PDP) is far better than the (APC), considering its opportunity to rule the country from 2009 to 2015. It situated the country in a better position in all aspects of life as security, economy, education, health, communication, etc. But lost the bid in 2015 and handed over the mantel of power to the opposition party (APC) because they respected the rule of law.

More so, the PDP candidate, in his attempt to gain more support from the electorate, describes the current government as a failed government that fails to deliver what it has promised. The first and the most paramount importance to any reasonable government is the security of the life of the citizen. But in Nigeria now, there is banditry, cattle rustling, rampant killing, kidnapping, etc. The life and property of people is not secured as a result of the activities of the aforementioned, which is left unchecked. Based on this, citizens cannot afford three daily square meals and become poorer than before.

The Use of Pronouns

Pronouns play a crucial role in both speech and writing, primarily by serving as substitutes for nouns. This function helps to avoid unnecessary repetition and contributes to the fluidity and coherence of discourse. Beyond this basic grammatical role, pronouns carry important communicative and rhetorical functions, particularly in political speeches.

In political discourse, pronouns are often strategically employed by speakers to achieve specific effects. For instance, the pronoun “**I**” is used to express personal commitment, authority, or responsibility. “**You**” establishes direct engagement with the audience, creating a sense of involvement or accountability. “**We**” and “**our**” are commonly used to foster a sense of unity, collective identity, and solidarity between the speaker and the audience.

Thus, pronouns such as *I*, *you*, *we*, and *our* are frequently found in political speeches, more so than other types of pronouns. Their deliberate use allows politicians to align themselves with their audience, promote inclusivity, and subtly shape the perception of agency and responsibility.

Therefore, the pronominal selection of the possessive pronoun ‘our’ plays an important role in this context to bring together both the candidate and the audience in that sense of common destiny. For instance, **our economy is “shambles, growth has stagnated, and hunger** is are derogated word that the candidate used negatively to present his opponent. Besides that, the candidate is showing his sympathy to the audience and in turn influencing them to support his party in the upcoming election as the current government failed to uplift the living standard of the citizens. This finding is in line with that of Joshua and Ofori (2020), who studied Critical Discourse Analysis of the Campaign speech of a Ghanaian opposition leader Their findings revealed that the candidate used

“you, our” pronouns to sympathize with the electorate and convinced, influence them to vote him as a prepared candidate.

By and large, the personal pronoun ‘our’ that the presidential candidate of the People Democratic Party, P.D.P, frequently used in the text is to identify with the people and show his love and concern for them. As in **our nation is in “disarray”**. This signifies that the unity of the country is shaking as what binds the citizens together is almost tier apart as a result of ethnicity, mistrust, and favoritism. These lead to some parts of the country always agitating for separation, which is a threat to the unity of the country as a whole. All these are happening under the watch of the current government, APC, which is why the PDP candidate is projecting it out to convince the audience to elect his party at the expense of the APC.

In the same vein, in paragraphs 10-11, other derogatory words are used to discredit the government in power and secure support from the audience. As in **“our system of education is embracing and our system of government is broken”**. All these expressions are used to ridicule the image of the current government and the PDP candidate to sell his ideologies. Even with regards to education, the university students stayed at home for eight months as a result of the ASUU strike simply because of some minor demands that the government could meet up, considering lots of the money was spent unnecessarily on foreign trips and radical health check-ups of some of the government officials. While the Nigerian universities lack learning facilities and enough funds to be maintained effectively.

More so, the system of government is broken as the last tier of government is malfunctioning at the expense of the state and federating unit. This ugly situation deters the meaningful development of the local people. With this projection of the (PDP) candidate, the local people can prepare to vote for his party rather than the APC.

In essence, political discourse is the formal exchange of reasoned views as to which of several alternate courses of action should be taken to solve a societal problem. It is intended to involve all citizens in the making of the decision, persuade others (through valid information and logic), and clarify what course of action would be most effective in solving the societal problem. So, the candidate promised to restore the lost glory of the country and put all things in place, ranging from insecurity, inequality, poverty, ASSU strike, etc. In addition, in paragraph 15, the candidate explains to the audience that their presence at the venue of this inauguration of the campaign council is not only for that alone, but to secure and rebuild our great country, Nigeria. This can be achieved by all those present and other Nigerians voting for this government that puts us into these problems. It is not an easy task but it needs to be for the future of the country, children, and generations yet to come.

Lastly, the candidate ends his speech by congratulating men and women nominated to serve in the presidential campaign council and extending his wishes for success to all those present in their lives.

Findings of the Study

Based on the analysis and discussion so far, the following are the findings of the study:

- 1- The candidate uses personal pronouns like: my, I, you, and us to sell his ideologies to the audience. As it is depicted in the first sentence in the candidate speech in the first paragraph, “it is my distinct honor and pleasure to welcome you all to today’s inauguration”.
- 2—The candidate uses derogatory words like “Our nation is in disarray,” “hunger,” and “our system of education is embarrassing,” all stated in paragraphs 10- 11 to ridicule the A, P, and C., and gain the support of the electorate.
- 3-The candidate exposes how the A.P.C government misgoverns the Nigerians in all spare of life and promises to restore its lost glory. As the security of lives and property of the citizen is not guaranteed, the fabric of unity is torn apart where tribalism, ethnicity, and distrust prevail.
- 4-The candidate shows sympathy and solidarity with the electorate in some instances to identify with them to support his party by exposing the terrible and deprived conditions that the citizenry found themselves in under the leadership of his opponent party All Progressive Party (APC). This is as a result of hunger that the citizenry is experiencing due to poor economic policies plant by the APC government.

Conclusion

It is established that language is an important tool that politicians use to sell their ideologies. Ideology flourished only with language. Politicians used linguistic structures such as lexical items and vocabulary grammar to positively represent themselves or negatively represent their opponents. It is revealed in this that the PDP candidate, in some instances, negatively presents his opponent at the expense of his party to draw the attention of the electorate to vote for his party and get power, which is the sole aim of campaign speeches. Furthermore, the PDP candidate used the personal pronoun our in delivering his speeches simply to sympathize and identify with the electorate to feel at home with his party and vote for it. Lastly, the candidate promised to restore the lost glory and rebuild his beloved country, Nigeria, if the electorates give him the mantle of power.

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