

PRAGMATIC AND CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF ALHAJI ATIKU ABUBAKAR'S DECLARATION OF INTEREST IN THE PDP'S 2022 PRIMARIES

Samuel Adebayo Omotunde

Abstract

Encoders of different genres of political speeches make use of various strategies to persuade their audience to share their point of view, agree with their philosophy and align with their beliefs and views on issues they wish to pass across. It is based on the above assertion that this work sets out to investigate the strategies deployed by Alhaji Atiku Abubakar in his declaration of interest in the PDP 2022 primaries, using insight from critical discourse analysis and two pragmatic concepts. The data for the analysis were downloaded from the internet. Findings reveal that in passing across his intention, the encoder adopted the strategies of allusions, insinuations, membership categorization, number game and messianic assurance.

Keywords: Speeches, insinuation, allusion, messianic assurance, number game.

In a democratic setting, different political activities take place before the general elections that will usher in a new president. At the centre of all these political activities is the use of language in the form of speech making by politicians for the purpose of persuading people that they have the necessary qualities and abilities to govern effectively the geographical space that is constitutionally allotted to them depending on the post being contested for. It is probably because of this that De Wet (2013: p.103) wrote that “politicians rise to power mainly because they can talk persuasively to voters and political elites.... politicians are endlessly geared to persuading voters to their own or party’s point of view.” It is seen in the literature that politicians deliver various political speeches which are given different names depending on the occasion and the functions that such speeches are meant to

perform. For example, there are campaign speeches, inaugural speeches, acceptance speeches, Independence Day speeches and declaration speech or an expression of interest which is the subject of this paper.

A declaration speech or an expression of interest speech is a sub-genre of political speech that is normally delivered by candidates to party members chiefly and to members of the public indicating that they are interested in contesting for certain positions under the umbrella of their political parties. These formal declarations make it possible for both political parties and members of the public to know officially those who have shown interest in contesting for elective positions under each political party in a country or in a particular geographical space within a country. Since this genre of political speech is meant to seek the support of party members in getting the ticket that will make the candidate emerge as the standard bearer of the party, different strategies must be deployed by the speech encoder in his attempt to influence and persuade party delegates to elect him as the standard bearer of the party.

This genre of political speech has not received much scholarly attention in the literature. However, since the text for study is under the umbrella of political speech, the author reviewed few that are related to this work. Agangan and Kamalu (2015) explored the rhetorical strategies adopted by President Goodluck Jonathan in the speech he delivered during declaration of interest in the PDP presidential primaries. The authors deployed critical discourse analysis as the theoretical tool. They grouped their analysis under two headings of positive-face strategies and negative-face strategies. The overall finding of the work is that President Goodluck Jonathan “uses the positive- face strategies to project his identity and self-image and the negative - face strategies to coerce and threaten the opposition, and to make them jettison any sentiment or bias they may hold against his political ambition.” Although the work under review and the current study got their data from the same political genre, the theoretical framework used in the two studies are not the same.

Aschale's (2013) work is a critical discourse analysis of President Obama's speeches vis-à-vis Middle-East and North Africa. Through critical discourse analysis, the author brought out the issues of morality and religion as encoded in the text, the issue of power contestation and so on. Sharndama (2016) looked at the discursive strategies used in selected gubernatorial inaugurals in Nigeria using critical discourse analysis. The author analysed the micro structures of the selected speeches, the pronominals used and reasons for the choices as well as the use of propaganda in the speeches for achieving some political ends. The major finding of the work is that the speech is persuasive in nature, hence, it used "different commissive acts to assure the people that the new administration will work to meet the needs of the people"(p.25). The work is different from the current study in terms of data and the theoretical framework used.

The works reviewed above have revealed the widespread usage of CDA in bringing out coded meanings in different texts. The current work hopes to contribute to the existing works by investigating how CDA and some pragmatic concepts can work together in bringing out some hidden meanings in a political speech of a specific genre-declaration speech or an expression of interest speech.

Theoretical Framework

Linguistic inquiries into the various shades of meaning residing in a text (spoken or written) have been through various approaches, theories, disciplines and concepts depending on the nature of the texts for analysis and the focus of the researcher. The current work makes use of insight from Critical Discourse Analysis and some concepts from pragmatics.

Critical Discourse Analysis (henceforth CDA) is a multi-disciplinary approach used in interpreting discourse. In an attempt to simplify the definition and explanation of what CDA involves, Ayoola (2015:180) writes that CDA:

is concerned with interpreting and explaining any type of discourse that exhibits traits of inequality, unfairness, injustice and other

manifestations of social imbalance in verbal (spoken and written) and non-verbal discourse (e.g. photos, videos, gestures etc.).

This type of approach to interpreting discourse is said to be critical because it objectively interprets and analyses discourse for the purpose of bringing out different shades of meaning that may not be immediately open or visible to casual readers or listeners who rely on other traditional or previous approaches. According to Fairclough (1996: p.287), CDA is “a perspective which is concerned with showing up often opaque connections between language and other aspects of society and culture.” Explaining more on the relevance and methods of CDA in interpreting discourse, Ikenna and Agangan (2015:p.36) reveal that “CDA focuses on the hidden relationship between the discourse practice, events and text on the one hand and the wider socio-cultural context on the other hand,” and “the hidden agenda” of any text must be seen from the socio-cultural background that informed the construction of the text.” This means that the socio-cultural context surrounding the production of a particular text cannot be ignored if all the meanings that are not openly expressed (but which nevertheless are present in the text) are to be revealed. Van Dijk (1998a) writes that CDA as a research tool deals with the study and analysis of both written and spoken texts in order to bring to light the discursive sources of power, dominance, inequality as well as bias.

Sharndama (2016: p.16) reveals that CDA “examines how these discursive sources are maintained and reproduced within specific social, political and historical contexts. CDA provides the reason for the choice and assumptions of the lexical items and expressions deployed by a writer or speaker. It interprets a particular text by laying bare the probable meanings which are inherent in a text by critically studying the society, groups and institutions from which the study being studied emanated. This simply means that CDA does not study language in isolation of the practices in the society. Scholars in this area of research have argued that the concepts of history, power and ideology cannot be divorced from a critical study of a text, either spoken or written.

In the words of French:

Power is a process, a dynamic interaction. To have power really means to have entry to a network of relationships in which one can influence, persuade, threaten or cajole others to do what one wants or needs them to do... One does not possess power. It is granted to the dominators by hosts of other people, and that grant is not unretractable.... (French, 1985: p.509).

The concept of power as explained above is applicable to the current paper in that Alhaji Atiku Abubakar whose speech is analysed has both political and economic power in that he was a two-term Vice-President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria and has chains of businesses. Based on these two sources from where he derived his power, he is able to produce a text that is meant to persuade and influence members of the People's Democratic Party to elect him so that he will be the standard bearer of the party in the 2023 general elections. Furthermore, the concept of history is also applicable to the interpretation of the text under analysis because there are some hidden meanings in some of the linguistic expressions used by the speech encoder that can only be effectively decoded by going back to some events that had happened in the country, Nigeria.

The above indicates that CDA is an appropriate tool for analysing the text. Apart from the above, two relevant concepts in pragmatics, which are insinuations and allusion are equally useful in analysing instances of "coded language" (Wodak, 2007) in the speech under analysis. In analysing the data, the author adopts Fairclough's (1989) approach to CDA which "has moved from focusing on the "what?" of the text description toward the "How?" and "Why?" of the text description and interpretation, i.e. why a speaker/writer selects certain forms or models". It is widely believed by scholars in the area of CDA that linguistic selections in texts are to achieve certain ends.

Fairclough's (1989) model of CDA is adopted for this work. The model recognises three stages of analysing texts which are:

- i. Descriptive Stage: This stage concerns itself with describing the formal properties of the text;

- ii. Interpretation Stage: This stage concerns the relationship between text interaction where the text is perceived to be the end product of a process of interpretation, and
- iii. Explanation Stage: This establishes the connection between the text or discourse and the social or cultural context of production and interpretation of the text.

Data for the Study

The data for the study were gotten from the internet. The speech was delivered by Alhaji Atiku Abubakar to PDP Executive members in particular and to Nigerians in general to inform them that he was interested in contesting for the post of the president of the Federal Republic of Nigeria in 2023. This type of speech is normally called expression of interest speech or declaration of interest speech.

Method of Data Analysis

The analysis centres on the strategies adopted by the speech encoder in order to lend weight to his message in the speech. The strategies identified are briefly explained where necessary which is then followed by relevant excerpt(s) from the speech. Where applicable, historical references in form of historical background are made to situations in the contemporary Nigeria to clarify or validate some assertions.

Data Analysis

The analysis is based on the strategies adopted by Alhaji Atiku Abubakar to open the eyes of his listeners or decoders to various things about the upcoming 2023 general elections in Nigeria which should make Nigerians decide to prefer his party (PDP) to the current ruling party (APC) and his candidature to others.

Allusions

This is one of the pragmatic devices used by the speech encoder to pass across some indirect meanings; that is, coded meanings to his

audience. The first instance of such allusion is making reference to 1993 presidential elections in Nigeria. Consider the excerpts below.

I. We should focus on the issues, not our differences.

Let us unite and fight our common enemies: the lack of unity, insecurity, poverty, inflation and unemployment. That is what this election is about. I have no doubt in my mind that we as Nigerians can do it. We have done it in 1993. We can do it in 2023.

It is significant to note that the 1993 election referred to by the speaker was conducted close to 30 years ago which is popularly known as June 12, 1993 election in Nigeria. However, there were elections in Nigeria in 2000, 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015 and 2019. Curiously, the encoder of the speech was a direct beneficiary of the elections conducted in 2000 and 2003 in which he was the Vice-President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria with Chief Olusegun Obasanjo as the President. Why then did he single out 1993 election as the ideal one to be referred to? The June 12, 1993 presidential election in Nigeria has been adjudged as the freest and the most peaceful election in Nigeria which was presumably won by late M.K.O. Abiola; it was an election in which nobody thought and talked about the tribe or the religion of the contestants. The presumed winner – M.K.O. Abiola not only won convincingly in the South-western part of the country where he came from but also overwhelmingly in the northern part of the country where his opponent – Alhaji Bashir Tafa came from. Unfortunately, the election was annulled by the then Head of State, General Ibrahim Babangida on frivolous excuses.

In essence, by alluding to the 1993 election which was conducted close to 30 years ago rather than those of 2000 and 2003 in which he was a direct beneficiary as a two-term Vice President, he was saying that Nigerians should forget about tribal and religious differences and vote for him massively just as they did in 1993 so that he can help the citizens to fight their common enemies – “lack of unity, insecurity, poverty, inflation and unemployment.” This strategy is an

appeal to the masses for general and absolute support for his candidature.

The second major instance of allusion in the text is that of alluding to respected political figures cutting across the country. The following excerpts illustrate the point above

- i. I offer myself to rescue the sinking ship. Under my captainship, this ship will sail to a brighter course by the grace of God. However, this journey is not mine alone. It is a journey I am taking for all Nigerians. It is a journey to a destination I planned with my late great mentor, Major General Shehu Musa Yar'adua and with my beloved compatriot, the late and great, Chief Moshood Kashimawo Olawale Abiola. May their souls rest in peace.
- ii. As Chief Abiola once said, "we in Nigeria must not allow ourselves to be left behind." If you look at our present state, you will agree with me that the world, and sadly, even the rest of Africa have left us behind.
- iii. Why is unity a priority? Well, we must work to strengthen our unity as my dear father and brother, Chief Alex Ifeanyi Chukwu Ekwueme, once said. National integration, he continued, will not come as a gift. It is the role of government to work very hard and promote it.
- iv. The late sage, Chief Obafemi Awolowo did say that "after rain comes sunshine. After darkness comes the glorious dawn." We have experienced rain and darkness has enveloped us for too long. Now is the time for sunshine. The hour of our glorious dawn is finally here.

It is important to note that mentioning the above names is not coincidental, but intentional for the purpose of scoring political goals. The speech encoder made references to notable names that cut across the three major tribes in Nigeria. The first person he mentioned – Major General Shehu Musa Yar'adua was a respected person from the northern part of Nigeria (Hausa/Fulani); he was also well liked and admired in other parts of the country. The second person he mentioned is late Chief Moshood Kashimawo Abiola, the presumed winner of the historic June 12, 1993 election who hailed from the South-western part of the country (Yoruba). The third person he also mentioned is Chief Alex Ifeanyichukwu Ekwueme. He was the Vice President of the Federal

Republic of Nigeria in the First Republic (1979-1983) who hailed from the Eastern part of the country (Igbo). Another notable name he mentioned is late Chief Obafemi Awolowo who also hailed from South-west (Yoruba). The aim of alluding to these respected figures that cut across the three main tribes in Nigeria is to pass a message that he is an experienced and detribalised Nigerian who is much familiar with the philosophies and ideas of the great men from each of the tribes and that he is ready to adopt the philosophies, ideas, beliefs and world views of the above-mentioned persons in running the affairs of the country.

The encoder's reference as well as the comments credited to late Chief Alex Ekwueme are very significant. He wanted to score political goals with the people of South-east, Nigeria, who are agitating to break away from Nigeria. It is a way of saying that the current Administration has not done enough "to work very hard and promote" national unity and integration and that it is because of this that the Igbo people are agitating to leave the federation. It is a diplomatic way of not only justifying the agitations of the people of Southeast, but also a way of telling them that he will address their grievances.

Insinuation

Insinuation is one of the pragmatic concepts which Wodak (2007) identified as one of the means of passing across coded meanings in texts. Insinuation is a bad or an unpleasant meaning passed across in an indirect way. There are many examples of insinuations in the text under study of which the following excerpts are examples. The insinuated meaning in each case is put in brackets and italicised after each phrase or sentence where applicable.

- (i) In the face of the worst division (*which this country has never witnessed since independence and which was caused by this administration because of the way it handles national issues*) you believe that this country can still unite. In the face of economic hardship (*which leaves Nigerians to battle with astronomical hike in the prices of cooking gas, kerosene, charcoal and food items thereby resulting in excruciating poverty for the masses because of a lack of robust economic*

- policies*) you believe prosperity is coming. In the face of the worst insecurity (*which makes bandits, kidnappers, armed herdsmen terrorise farmers relentlessly throughout the length and breadth of Nigeria as if the nation's security architecture has finally collapsed*) you believe peace is possible.
- (ii) We need a kind of leadership that will steer us to the positive path (*compared to the current leadership with negative records in almost all areas of the nation's life*). In 2023, we want a president who has ideas on how to fix Nigeria (*unlike this clueless one currently heading the nation*).
- (iii) Throughout my life, I have never looked at Nigerians as divided people. In my eyes, all Nigerians are the same. (*However, in the current administration, it appears as if the people from a section of the country are more favoured in some areas than people from other tribes*).

It is important to know that these insinuations are arrived at when the analyst or the author relates the text to the society in which it is produced. This type of insinuated meaning is used in text so that the speech encoder will not be accused of directly or openly attacking the current administration which can lead to violence or blame game. The major aim of using insinuation is to indirectly make it clear to his audience that there is the need to sack the current ruling party in the next general election and vote for him as their preferred candidate. This identified strategy of insinuation probably agrees with the position of Kamalu and Agangan (2016:36) that “CDA focuses on the hidden relationship between the discourse practice, events and text on the one hand and the wider socio-cultural context on the other hand. Meaning exists in that hidden relationship because it is all about the “unsaid said” concealed in a text.” In essence, the insinuations put in italics above and in brackets represent the “unsaid said.”

Membership Categorisation

The encoder of the speech cleverly labelled the ruling party negatively and portrayed it as the source of the problem that Nigerians

are facing while he identified himself with other Nigerians as belonging to the group of the oppressed thereby leading to “they” and “us” situation. He spoke as if he was never a two-term Vice President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. He spoke as if he was really one of the poor masses that were living below the poverty line. This is a form of manipulation aimed to sway the unsuspecting listeners to his side that he had never been in the group of the capitalists who control the means of production, hence the life of Nigerians. Consider the following excerpts.

- i. As the election is fast approaching, **we** should not be distracted from the devastating conditions **we** are in now. The ruling party wants to divide **us**; they want to divide **us** along the political, ethnic and religious lines so that **we** forget to blame **them** for the rising inflation.
- ii. **They** want to distract **us** from holding **them** responsible for the insecurity and poverty. **They** want **us** to be facing each other and hating one another. **We** should focus on the issues, not our differences. Let **us** unite and fight **our** common enemies.

In the above, the speaker used “we” and “us” (meaning that he is included) to represent the group of people that have been devastated by the ruling party (represented by “they” and “them”). With the use of “we”, the encoder equally says that he is among those that are affected by the rising inflation in the country (while in the real sense of it, he is not affected in any way). With the use of “we” and “us”, he wished to cleverly manipulate his audience into believing that he is equally a victim of insecurity and poverty in the country just like the common persons on the street. The use of “we” and “us” in this context is to pass across the message “I belong to the same social and economic strata with you and that we are all victims of the misrule of the ruling party.” In summary, the aim of this strategy is to persuade the people that APC which is the ruling party at the federal level needs to be changed to the People’s Democratic Party which Alhaji Abubakar hopes to represent.

Messianic Assurance

In order for politicians who seek political office to pass across the message of hope, the message of a glorious dawn when they assume

office, some parts of the speech should be in the form of “messianic assurance,” especially for people who have been battered and shattered economically and socially. This is because in politics, language is a fundamental instrument used in giving assurance and hope and equally dimming assurance and hope as the case may be. As at the time of the production of this text, Nigeria was passing through a lot of problems to the extent that several Nigerians had become frustrated and disillusioned. Thus, anybody wishing to be the president of the country had to devise ways of passing across messages of hope and assurance to the people that things would be different from the current realities once he emerged as the president. Hence, the speech encoder, being a politician to the core, knew that he had to convince the people that he was really fit for the post and he had to assure the people that he was up to the task. This led to his use of messianic assurance in his declaration of interest. Consider the excerpts below.

- i. Since the civil war, the unity of Nigeria has never been as threatened as it is today, Nigerians are losing hope in the oneness of this country. My fellow Nigerians, I am the unifier that is coming to bond the broken union.
- ii. Our military forces are fighting on the front lines without equipment and morale. That is not fair. If we get into power, we will increase the welfare of all security forces. We will use modern technology and intelligence to combat insecurity. We will also increase the number of personnel for our security agencies.
- iii. Under my leadership, we will ensure absolute security because that is the number one condition for economic prosperity. We will provide access to mechanized farming systems and develop the agricultural value chain.

In the first excerpt above, the expression “I am the unifier” is very soothing and very assuring to the listeners because everybody in Nigeria was fully aware that the country was moving close to disintegration. In the other two excerpts, the use of “we will...” is meant to convey strong willingness and determination for the purpose of giving absolute assurance to Nigerians concerning the proposition. The “we” as used in the above may either refer to the party or to the president and his cabinet (if the party eventually wins).

Using Figures or Number Game

Many encoders of political speeches often use figures, numbers or statistics for the purpose of persuading their listeners that they have accurate knowledge of the situations of things in the areas they are talking about. It is one of the strategies through which politicians show their close familiarity with the object of discussion. In the text under analysis, the speech encoder, in his attempt to convince the listeners that he knows much about some vital areas in the country, used figures and percentages to support his claims and assertions. Consider the excerpts below.

- (i) All the macro-economic indicators are not favourable under the APC administration. APC inherited single-digit inflation; they now increased it to about 16%. When APC came into power, unemployment was around 9%, unemployment is now more than 33%.
- (ii) The exchange rate was ₦197 to a dollar in 2015, but in the hands of APC, naira suffered the worst devaluation ever. As we speak, the exchange rate is more than ₦400 to a dollar, the official rate.
- (iii) When APC came into power, Nigeria's debt was ₦12 trillion and now they increase it to ₦32 trillion. They still want to borrow more.

Using figures, numbers or statistics makes the assertion above to be easily quantifiable, therefore, it is likely to persuade the listeners that the speaker really knows what he is talking about.

Discussion of Findings and Conclusion

Decoding meaning by researchers in everyday discourse, especially political discourse, has taken a centre stage in contemporary linguistic study because of the need to see how text producers encode different meanings in order to serve varied reasons which may not be immediately clear to casual decoders (readers or listeners). CDA has emerged as one of the new directions of research to probe different shades of meaning embedded in texts. CDA works on the assumption that linguistic choices, that is, words, phrases and sentences made by politicians or other powerful individuals are advertently made in texts in order to achieve certain goals which more often than not, are for

manipulating the views of their listeners or readers. Probably, this is why Wodak (2007:209) writes that “critical theory seeks to create awareness in agents of how they are deceived about their own needs and interest.” Even though CDA is a powerful research tool to investigate different texts, the fact remains that there are some meanings in texts that can be reasonably accounted for when the researcher looks outside CDA of which the current work is a typical example. That is, the author went into pragmatics in order to properly account for other meanings in the text under analysis which may not be satisfactorily accounted for by CDA alone.

In our analysis, for example, while allusions and insinuations are pragmatic concepts according to Wodak (2007), membership categorisation, messianic assertion and number games are notable strategies used in CDA for shedding light on hidden meanings. While the general or overall aim of the allusions deployed in the text was to indirectly inform the presenters that he was a friend to all the regions in the country thereby portraying himself as a detribalised politician, the idea behind the use of insinuation was to expose the incompetence, lack of vision and lack of compassion of the ruling party. Probably, this is why Kamalu and Agangan (2016:33) wrote that “in ideal political situations, language is the bullet employed by political opponents to bring down the other, diminish their relevance and construct a positive face for themselves.” Membership categorisation into “they and them” versus “we and us” is achieved through pronouns in the speech. Beard (2000:46) reveals that “the pronoun politicians use in their speeches are worth looking at because they make a significant contribution to the overall effect.”

Alhaji Atiku Abubakar used pronouns to portray the ideology of exclusion and inclusion. He used “we and us” to make the masses or the common person on the street feel that they share common ground, meaning that he is really one of the suffering masses. Lastly, the number game strategy used by the encoder was to persuade his audience that he had all the necessary indices, facts and figures which would help him to rescue and restore the nation to the road of progress and prosperity if

given the chance to be the party's standard bearer. In conclusion, all the strategies used by the speech encoder were meant to persuade his listeners that the ruling party, and by extension, the current administration has failed the country and that there was the need to vote for an alternative party which is People's Democratic Party and that he (as the standard bearer) had all that it takes to lead the country to the promised land.

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