

A Critical Discourse Analysis of Selected Nigerian Gubernatorial Inaugural Speeches, 2023

By

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Abstract

This study was an attempt to critically analyze selected Nigerian gubernatorial inaugural speeches with the aim of identifying the linguistic choices, why they were made as well as the ideological implications of these choices and the way forward. Two gubernatorial inaugural speeches were selected and ten excerpts were taken purposively from each making a total of twenty. Using the qualitative research design, these were analyzed following the three dimensional model of Norman Fairclough. It was found that there is a preponderance use of inclusive pronouns and linguistic elements that implicate the electorate in the task of running the states thereby making governance a collective responsibility between the elected political leaders and the masses. The implication is the evasion of individual responsibility to the states. The study therefore suggested that political leaders including governors-elect should take their duties to the state as individual responsibility as this will enable them to see themselves as solely responsible for the outcome of whatever decisions and achievements they make in office for the betterment of the state. This will better policy decisions that will aid nation building.

Keywords: Inaugural Speeches, Language, Speech Acts, Political Speech, Gubernatorial

Introduction

Language is a resource for interpersonal communication. Society and language are closely interwoven such that without the use of language, it will be impossible to make any meaningful contribution to nation building. Language can be manipulated to achieve different communicative purposes in the lives of human beings. Thus, M. A. K Halliday (2014) avers that, language has evolved to serve specific communicative functions for human beings in different social contexts. It is a social semiotic system that offers its users a variety of choices of ways of making meaning

through its various systems and subsystems, hence, the choice of one way of making meaning over another is determined by the context of the interaction and the relationship between the participants in the interaction. However, inequality pervades human relationships hence, the powerful control discourse and manipulates language to serve their interests against the interests of the less powerful group. Discourse refers to language in use either in speech or writing in different social contexts. Critical discourse analysis (CDA, henceforth) sees discourse as a site of struggle for dominance where text producers - the powerful group, by virtue of the preferential discursive access they enjoy, use language to sustain and legitimate their different ideologies thus creating social injustice. CDA, therefore, attempts to unveil this abusive and manipulative use of language by creating awareness of it so that the less powerful who are usually the text consumers learn to approach texts with skepticism and by so doing, minimize the oppressive tendencies of the dominant group in society.

Critical Discourse Analysis

Fairclough (1995) defines discourse as language use in spoken or written form seen as social practice. Drid (2010) defines it as a unit of expression in verbal or written mode while Cameron (Cited in Aragbuwa, 2021) sees it as language in use, in doing and meaning something and as well interpreted in a real-world context. In sum, any contextualized use of language to make meaning either in speech or in writing no matter the length constitutes discourse. It also extends to extra linguistic meaning making expressions such as body postures, facial expressions, dress codes, and so on. Successful interpersonal relationship depends on the ability of participants in discourse interactions to interpret one another's messages meaningfully. Discourse analysis involves meaningfully interpreting what we see, what we hear and what we read. Ezeifeke (2018) holds that

discourse analysis involves the description, interpretation and explanation of textual representations both spoken and written. This entails that both the micro and macro level analysis has to be involved. The micro level analysis is done at the linguistic level and involves the identification of textual markers that make for cohesion and coherence while the macro level involves the interpretation at the semantic level of the various nuances of meaning represented in the linguistic choices and the explanation at the pragmatic level of what ideological implications the various meanings encode. Cameron (Cited in Aragbuwa, 2021) avers that discourse analysis covers all modes of analysis of language in use, situationally contextualized language production and interpretation. Van Dijk (1985) holds that it involves the methods of linguistic analysis, cognition, interaction, society and culture. The critical paradigm in critical discourse analysis sees language as pervaded by naturalized ideologies which people are unaware of and take for granted and which contribute to the positioning of people as social subjects (Fairclough and Wodak, 1997). Fairclough (1989) posits that language can be used as a tool for the exercise of power and hegemony by the dominant group in society aimed at oppressing the masses. This exercise of power and hegemony is what CDA aims to uncover and subvert also through the use of language. Van Dijk (1995) opines that since CDA focuses on abuse of power, critical studies focus on the illegitimate forms of control of or access to text and talk which may censor, intimidate or otherwise limit the freedom of dominated participants in a communicative event. He opines that patterns of discourse control and access have a close association with social power. Van Dijk (1995) defines social power as control of one group by another and claims that if such control can extend to the actions and minds of the dominated group members and dominance or power abuse implies that such control is in the interest of the dominant group, then, the dominant group members can also

exercise such control over text and talk. He asserts that preferential access to or control over discourse and its properties are forms of the direct enactment of social or institutional power which allow specific social actors to engage in and have access to verbal actions that is prohibited to others, hence, Politicians control governmental and parliamentary discourse of which inaugural speech is one. They also have preferential access to the mass media. Ordinary people on the other hand have access to and control only discourse genres such as everyday conversation with family members, friends or colleagues and passive access to institutional or public and media discourse. This preferential access to public discourse or control over its properties has the potential to affect the minds of others since discourse is not limited to verbal actions but also involves meaning, interpretation and understanding. What this means is that powerful social actors can control the minds of the recipients through text and talk. Despite the freedom to interpret and use discourse as they please in their best interest in specific circumstances, people may succumb to lies, manipulation and persuasion against their best interest to serve the interest of the powerful through mind control by the powerful social actors who happen to control institutional discourse in society. CDA thus, analyzes linguistic elements in order to reveal covert connections between language, power and ideology in order to challenge and subvert them in solidarity with the less powerful in society.

This paper is thus, a critical discourse analysis of selected Nigerian gubernatorial inaugural speeches of 2023. Its focus was to critically analyze the linguistic choices made by newly elected

governors in their inaugural speeches, the ideological implications of these choices and offer suggestions on the way forward with a view to contributing to nation building.

Inaugural Speeches

Inaugural Speech is an aspect of political discourse – a speech delivered by an elected political leader as part of his/her induction into office. It offers him/her the opportunity to appreciate those who were loyal to them throughout the campaign activities and whose votes made their emergence possible. More importantly, the inaugural speech is an opportunity for the elected leader to unveil the plans he/she has for the masses, intended policies and achievements aimed at making their lives better. In most cases however, the linguistic choices made by the producers of these inaugural speeches tend to place the responsibility of achieving meaningful progress in governing the state on the shoulders of the electorates in such a way that the elected leader cannot function without the electorate. What this means is that the leader takes the credit for successes but tends to share his failures with the masses that elected him. This does not augur well for nation building.

Statement of the Problem

It has been observed that elected political leaders, in their inaugural speeches, tend to represent the electorate as partners who should be involved in running the country or state if any meaningful progress is to be made during their tenure of office. This, they do through the choices they make in language as they present their inaugural speeches. They make many promises of delivering good governance to the people with the people's cooperation. Thus, they present the act of good governance as collective responsibility between the elected and the electorate. The problem here

is that the opinions and feelings of the electorate are not considered in making critical decisions that affect them. Yet, if they fail to deliver as promised, they cannot be held responsible because ‘we’ are responsible. But if they succeed, they claim responsibility because ‘I’ did it. This attitude does not augur well for national development as political leaders take advantage of it to shirk responsibility for their failure in office. Most critical discourse analyses of inaugural speeches had focused on presidential speeches. Gubernatorial inaugural speeches have attracted less scholarly attention hence, this present study focuses on a critical discourse analysis of selected gubernatorial inaugural speeches.

Objectives of the Study

Critical discourse analysis is interested in the interpretation of any type of discourse that exhibits inequality, unfairness, injustice and other forms of abuse of social power and dominance and to elicit opaque meanings from texts that a casual reader may be unaware of. This study specifically aimed to

1. Identify linguistic choices made in the selected inaugural speeches that implicates the people
2. Interpret and explain the ideology portrayed by these linguistic choices.
3. Suggest the way forward.

Significance of the Study

The study is significant in that exposing the fact that the choices made in language by text producers are not always as neutral as casual text consumers may assume is a step in the right direction. It will awaken critical awareness in the electorate as they listen to and read political texts so that they bring their knowledge to bear on their interpretation of political texts both written and

spoken. It is also significant in that it will contribute to the bulk of knowledge in the field of critical discourse analysis.

Research Questions

The study made attempts to provide answers to these specific questions:

1. What linguistic choices made in the selected inaugural speeches implicates the people?
2. What ideology is portrayed by these linguistic choices?
3. What is the way forward?

Theoretical Framework: The Three Dimensional Model

The study adopted the three dimensional model of CDA postulated by Norman Fairclough. (1995). He posits that discourse is composed of three elements of which the text is just a part and the other two being discourse practice and social practice. Discourse analysis, for him, should be based on all these three dimensions. In correspondence to these three dimensions, Fairclough developed three levels of analysis, namely, description (linguistic level analysis), interpretation (semantic level analysis) and explanation (pragmatic level analysis). He avers that significant connections exist between features of texts, ways in which texts are put together and the nature of the social practice. At the linguistic level, a descriptive analysis of the formal properties of texts such as vocabulary, grammar including transitivity, mood and modality, generic form, cohesive relations between sentences and textual features is done. The semantic level analysis involves an interpretation of the discourse practice which involves the sociocognitive aspect of text production and interpretation. It involves a detailed explication of how both participants (text producers and text consumers) produce and interpret texts. The pragmatic level analysis involves the explanation

of the relationship between text and social practice. Fairclough noted that questions of power and ideology may arise at each of the three levels of analysis.

Methodology

This study adopted the descriptive qualitative research design which is appropriate for textual analysis. The inaugural speeches of Governors Alex.C. Otti OFR of Abia State and Peter Mbah of Enugu State yielded data for the study. These inaugural speeches were critically read and excerpts were purposively taken from the speeches for the purpose of illustration. Excerpts taken from Governor Alex Otti's inaugural speech are tagged **AO 1-10** while those taken from Governor Peter Mbah's inaugural speech are tagged **PM 1-10** making a total of 10 excerpts. The data were presented and analyzed following the three dimensional model of critical discourse analysis put forward by Fairclough (1995).

Data Presentation and Analysis

The Abia state governor, Alex otti in his inaugural speech addressed the citizens of Abia state using the utterances below which illustrates that he sees the act of governorship not as his individual responsibility but as a collective one between him and the citizens.

AO

1. It is up to **all of us** to awaken the giants in **us**.
2. For **all citizens and residents of God's Own State**, this is the time to rebuild.
3. It is my duty to let them know that **we** have in **us** the qualities that are necessary to recreate the glorious past that they dream about.
4. I have abiding faith in **our** ability to conquer the challenges of decades of poor quality governance, the decades of stunted growth and development, the decades of

5. deprivation, injustice and loss of self-dignity, the decades of hopelessness, injustice and pain.
6. **We** must therefore **all** get ready to have a clean break from **our** past.
7. **We** are fortunate that destiny has placed before **our generation** the onerous but historic task of replacing what the flying and creeping locusts, masquerading as leaders may have consumed these past years.
8. As **we** get ready to cross over our River Jordan into the Canaan land that God has graciously given **us**, let **us** not be under any illusion that the worst is over.
9. There is no turning back until **we** achieve **our collective** dreams and aspirations.
10. Abia state's potential to be a more significant player in this emerging world order should be of interest to **all of us**.
11. Let **us all** bear in mind that this adventure will only meet with success when **we all** resolve to come and contribute to it.

By using the utterances below, the Enugu state governor, Peter Mbah also implicated the citizens of Enugu as fellow actors who must be involved in his administration for him to deliver good governance to them.

1. **Enugu** will rubbish 'japa' not by legislation but by creatively addressing the challenges to the future of **our** youths.
2. My prayer today is that **every citizen of Enugu** will remember today and be glad that **we** took a bold step forward for the benefit of **our** children unborn.
3. There is no doubting **Enugu's** capacity to recreate the wonderment of economic prosperity and phenomenal growth witnessed in Singapore and the United Arab Emirates.

4. Today, **we** too are announcing the conception of same humongous dream, right here, on the soil of Enugu.
5. All the ingredients needed to actualize this dream are present in **us**.
6. Let me invite the **people of Enugu State** to accompany our administration on this journey into prosperity.
7. **Each Enugu son and daughter** should ask themselves the question: what sort of future do **we** desire for **our** children?
8. In answering the question, **we** must begin to work together to forge that future of **our** dream.
9. Here on the soil of **Enugu** are hidden innumerable potentials for future greatness
10. My charge to **all of us** today is that **Enugu** must take back what it has always represented.

Inaugural speeches are supposed to be speeches of appreciation from the elected political leaders to the electorate for the trust reposed in them through their votes which gave the elected political leader an opportunity to serve the people. It is also an opportunity to present the roadmap or plan of action of the political leader aimed at bettering the lives of the masses. In contrast, the excerpts above seem to place the responsibility of governance on the masses by making them co-governors with the governors-elect such that the governor cannot function without them. Thus, the task of running the state is presented as collective responsibility. The question, however, is ‘to what extent do these political leaders involve the masses, listen to their opinions or even consider the interests of the masses in their policies and decision making? The answer is that their opinions are not even sought let alone taken into consideration.

Research Question 1: What linguistic choices in the selected inaugural speeches implicate the people?

A close look at the selected clauses reveals that there is a preponderance of linguistic items that implicate the electorate in the act of governance by political leaders. Governor Otti made use of inclusive pronouns to implicate the electorate as part of whatever happens in his administration.

These are illustrated as follows:

For ‘**all citizens and residents of God’s Own State** (Abia State)...’

‘us’ as in

‘it is up to all of **us**...’

‘we have in **us**...’

‘...be of interest to **all of us**.

‘Let **us**...’

‘our’ as in

‘I have abiding faith in **our** ability...’

‘...destiny has placed before **our** generation...’

‘...achieve **our collective** dreams and aspirations.

‘we’ as in

‘**we** have in us...’

‘**we** must therefore **all**...’

‘**we** are fortunate...’,

‘as **we** get ready to...’

‘There is no turning back until **we**... ...’

‘...this adventure will only meet with success when **we all** resolve...’

Similarly, Governor Mbah of Enugu state implicated the citizens of Enugu by making choices such as,

‘Enugu’ (which vaguely refers to the citizens of Enugu as ‘Enugu’ does not refer to the speaker neither does it refer to any individual in particular) as in

‘**Enugu** will rubbish ‘japa’...’

‘...**every citizen of Enugu** will remember today...’

‘There is no doubting **Enugu’s** capacity...’

‘Let me invite the **people of Enugu State** to accompany...’

‘**Each Enugu son and daughter** should...’

‘...on the soil of **Enugu** are hidden...’

‘...**Enugu** must take back...’

He equally made significant use of inclusive pronouns such as

‘our’ in

‘...by creatively addressing the challenges to the future of **our** youths.

‘...**our** administration...’

‘...we desire for **our** children’

‘to forge that future of **our** dream.’

‘we’ in

‘**we** too are announcing...’

‘...**we** desire for our children?’

‘**we** must begin to work **together**...’

‘All the ingredients ...are in **us**’

‘My charge to **all of us**...’

Such choices of words illustrated above are vague and enabled the speakers to evade commitment since they have indicated by their words that the masses have to be involved in the task of governance. The ‘how?’ of this involvement is a question that is left unanswered in the two inaugural speeches under study.

Research Question 2: What ideology is portrayed by these linguistic choices?

It is the position of CDA that inequality, dominance and social power abuse are enacted, reproduced and resisted using text and talk in social and political contexts (Van Dijk, 2003). This is the situation between political leaders and the electorate in the Nigerian context hence, linguistic choices made in the selected gubernatorial inaugural speeches are considered opaque and loaded with ideological implications. Surprisingly, political manifestoes of the political parties on which platforms they were elected do not reflect this imposition of responsibility on the electorate rather; they reflect the paths their candidates will toe to bring good governance to the people. The reason for this is not far-fetched as political manifestoes are presented before the elections while inaugural speeches come after successful elections. The two inaugural addresses sought to achieve the same ideological purpose – that of influencing their different audiences to see the act of governance as not only the governor’s individual responsibility but rather, a collective responsibility between the governors and the governed so that they do not expect too much from their leaders if they themselves do not contribute. The preponderant use of inclusive pronouns in

both inaugural speeches illustrates the imposition of this collective responsibility. But this ideology begs the question ‘how do the masses contribute to governance when the government is so far away from them? How do they come in when neither their opinions nor their interests matter to the political leaders who seem to be only concerned with their personal interest? One can only deduce that the inaugural speeches are ideologically manipulated to absolve the political leaders of commitment and the responsibility they ordinarily should have of providing good governance to the people. What is baffling is that if they manage to perform ordinary duties such as building few kilometers of road, constantly paying the salaries of civil servants and suchlike, they are praised to high heavens as if they did anything out of the ordinary by the same people who are being oppressed. This is because through the ideologies they sold to the people which they unconsciously consented to, the political leaders already have undue control over the minds of the people who should be their masters and to whom they are supposed to be accountable. So, their failures as political leaders are even excused by the same people who should be demanding accountability from them. This is a cog in the wheel of progress as far as nation building is concerned especially in developing nations like Nigeria.

Research Question 3: What is the way forward?

It is the position of this researcher that governance should be seen as the individual responsibility of the elected political leader. Provision of good road networks, electricity, education, security of lives and property and every other infrastructure needed to better the lives of the people should be his sole responsibility. He should work out ways to achieve these without pretending that the

masses are part of the process because they are not. Government is usually only brought to the grass root during electioneering campaigns when the politicians canvas for the votes of the masses.

Afterwards, it is so far away that they hardly feel its presence. So, pretending that the people need to contribute to successful governance is only an avenue through which the political leaders shirk responsibility for their failures. They should therefore take individual responsibility for both their successes and their failures of running the states. This, in the opinion of this researcher, will make for better governance and put the state on the fast lane to development.

Discussion of Findings

CDA is focuses on power asymmetry which breeds dominance and abuse of power by the dominant group. This inequality of access to institutional discourse is exploited by political actors in society. Inaugural speeches are monologic as opposed to dialogic in nature. The audience only listens and do not get a chance to query whatever they are told nor to express their views on the issues raised in the inaugural speeches. This places them in a disadvantaged position and gives the political leaders the advantage to say and claim anything and even implicate the masses in their speeches knowing that they cannot be challenged. The political leaders, therefore, represent governance as collective responsibility in order to evade the individual responsibility of nation building which their election had imposed on them and the people cannot query them. The failures of the political leader are thus represented as everyone's responsibility and not just that of the leader yet he takes individual credit if any positive achievement made during his tenure.

Moreover, in the Nigerian context, hunger, poverty, ignorance, and insecurity has so dealt with the citizens that they can even support their oppressors during elections at the offer of crumbs. Politicians take advantage of this to get close to them during elections by sharing food items and

money, hence, it has become a norm that government presence is only felt by the masses during electioneering campaigns. Noteworthy is the fact that representing governance as involving the people is only principle-deep but never realized in practice. What happens in practice is the complete exclusion of public interest in favour of private interests which has been the bane of nation building in Nigeria and accounts for the backwardness that is the sorry tale of most states in particular and the Nigerian nation at large.

Conclusion

From the discussion of the findings of this study, the conclusion was drawn that political leaders at all levels exemplified by governors-elect in this study tend to impose the task of successful running of the state's affairs as shared responsibility between them and the electorate. This is reflected in their inaugural speeches which are fraught with statements that implicate the electorate as co-actors with the political leaders and enable them evade the individual responsibility for poor policy decisions that translates to retrogression. This paper posits that governors-elect and indeed all political leaders should see the task of governance as their sole responsibility. After all, they felt that they had all it takes to move the state forward and that was why they contested and got elected. They owe it to the people to deliver good governance. This way, they will make better policy decisions knowing that the success and failure of the states would be credited to them. This will ultimately make for better potentials for progress in nation building.

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