

A Critical Discourse Analysis of Selected Peter Obi's Campaign Speeches

Sohwo Arojitobo Lydia & Macaulay Mowarin

ABSTRACT

This paper critically discusses four of Peter Obi's presidential campaign speeches at Ebonyi, Jos campaign rallies, and the Chatham House and Arewa House between 2022 and 2023. The study adopts Fairclough's (1992) three-dimensional model and uses a Quantitative Data Analysis approach. The data analysis reveals that Obi employs more pronouns, 'I' and 'we' in his campaign speeches to project a sense of commitment, strong leadership, and collective inclusion of the audience in decision-making. The plural pronoun 'we' blurs the demarcation between Peter Obi and the audience, which projects a sense of "collective destiny" to persuade them to vote for him. The discourse structure of his speeches amplifies Obi's positive image and delegitimises his opponents by projecting a negative image of his opponents.

Keywords: critical discourse, legitimisation, political campaign, image projection

Introduction

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is an interdisciplinary approach to analysing how language, as a form of social practice, interacts with and influences power dynamics, ideologies, and social structures in society. It aims to uncover the hidden connections between language use and the broader social and political contexts that shape and are shaped by it. CDA operates under the premise that language is never neutral or objective but is permanently embedded in a web of social relations and power structures (Fairclough, 1993). CDA is applied across various texts and discourses, including media content, political speeches, educational materials, legal documents, and everyday conversations. Researchers in this field are often interested in how discourse maintains the status quo, legitimises certain power relations, or, conversely, how it may be used for resistance and social change.

At its core, CDA seeks to reveal how the use of language (in texts, speeches, conversations, and other forms of communication) reflects, perpetuates, or challenges social inequalities and power imbalances. This involves examining the linguistic choices made in texts—such as word choice, grammar, narrative structure, and discourse strategies—to understand how these choices contribute to constructing particular worldviews, identities, and social relations. Discourse is the primary social manifestation of communication (Emama, 2022). It refers to all language communicators' use in society (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997; Van Dijk, 1997). Discourse is the linguistic sentence exchange between the speaker, listener, writer, and reader. Van Dijk (1997, p.2) defines discourse as "the form that people make of language to convey ideas, thoughts, or beliefs within a social context". Discourse Analysis (DA) is a linguistic field of inquiry that analyses language at the context level from a grammatical standpoint (Jorgensen & Philips, 2011). In all of these instances of discourse, there are specific underlying rules, and each of these is, in turn, dependent on the social context in which the discourse takes place. Thus, discourse is primarily shaped by the function it performs. For instance, a conversation between a parent and a child differs in structure from that underpinned by politics.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a methodology used to examine the relationship between language, power, and ideology in political contexts. It involves analyzing texts, speeches, or conversations to uncover how language is used to shape public opinion, manipulate meanings, and

exercise control. Election campaigns and other political discourses are all ideologically driven speech events that naturally fall under the purview of critical discourse analysis. Richards and Schmidt (2010) define CDA as a form of discourse analysis that takes a critical stance towards language use. CDA aims to critically analyse texts and other types of discourses in order to uncover hidden ideologies, domination, manipulation, and power underlying them. It takes the position that every language use is ideologically motivated, that all linguistic usages encode different ideologies resulting from their different situations and purposes, and that by these means, every language works as a form of social practice (Fairclough, 2000; Emama, 2024; Maledo & Emama, 2020; Mowarin & Emama, 2020). Van Dijk (11) says it is evident here that different and opposing groups, powers, struggles, and interests are at stake. In order to be able to compete, political groups need to be ideologically conscious and organised. In this process, language plays a crucial role, for every political action is prepared, accompanied, influenced and played by language. It is one of the vital tools that politicians use to shape the electorates' political thoughts to sell their ideologies to them. Language and politics are interwoven because language expresses a speaker's opinions, views and philosophies. The plausibility of a political speech is measured by its ability to proficiently tilt the issue at hand and sway the listeners to its side (Emama & Mowarin, 2024). In political contexts, CDA can help reveal:

1. How politicians use language to construct their public image and shape their message.
2. The ways in which language is used to marginalize or exclude certain groups.
3. The role of language in shaping public policy and political decisions.
4. How political discourse reflects and reinforces existing power structures.

Since we often deal with people to acquire power, politicians are clever and manipulative in using language to persuade the people. Therefore, campaign speeches are strategically crafted to convince the electorate of various policies, programs and ideas. To achieve this, politicians carefully package their messages in a manner that an audience can easily accept through the employment of strategies that place the speaker of the message in an in-group position with the audience. Therefore, there is a need to thoroughly analyse Peter Obi's selected campaign speeches—his speech at the Jos Campaign rally and the Arewa house. The study explores the hidden meanings of power and ideology in his speeches by analysing the word choice and grammatical aspects, focusing on referencing and reiteration within the framework of Critical Discourse Analysis in Peter Obi's selected speeches. To arrive at the findings, the answers to the questions below will give a clear result of the investigation.

- What potential ideological stands are cohesively reflected in Obi's usage of specific grammatical constructions, including pronouns, modal structures, framing and repetition?
- What are the possible implications of Obi's choice of certain lexical items in his speeches during the Jos campaign and Arewa House interactive session?
- How does the language structure used in Obi's campaign speeches construct the identity of the aspirants and the electorates?

Statement of the Problem

Several studies have been carried out on campaign speeches. However, very little has been done about Peter Obi's campaign speech during the just-concluded 2023 presidential election. The primary orientation of CDA is an understanding of the hidden ideological contents shrouded in the deliberate and sometimes not-so-deliberate choices of language that politicians make in their speeches. There is no doubt that studies abound on the discourse structure of political

communication, as evident in the works of Abaya (2008), Akodu (2009), Abdullahi-Idiagbon (2010), Kamalu and Agangan (2010), Aremu (2010), Ahmed (2012), Balogun (2015). However, these studies were more preoccupied with the discourse structures of political language rather than with the ideological contents of such speeches. One essential property of political discourse is its interest in the ideological layers of the text, which many previous studies within the context of Nigeria from theoretical and applied linguistics (critical discourse analysis) have glossed over or completely ignored. Thus, it is appropriate to analyse the speech of Peter Obi using critical discourse analysis since he has unique characteristics as a politician and is also a phenomenon in current Nigerian political events. His charismatic and powerful message at every rally has fueled his political advancement. The speeches of Peter Obi are expected to show his political ideologies and views from an oppositional perspective. By examining the speaker's discourse structures and rhetorical strategies, persuasion's effect on the audience will also be shown.

Literature Review

Many studies on discourse analysis investigate political speeches and how people perceive them. Ike-Nwafor's critical discourse analysis of selected political campaign speeches of gubernatorial candidates in South Western Nigeria" (2015) examined the interface between structures of discourse and structures of power in the eight gubernatorial campaign speeches in the South Western zone of the country. The study unravels the hidden meanings of the social structures, intentions, identities and power relations of (serving and intending) political officeholders. Sharndama's (2015) critical discourse analysis of President Muhammadu Buhari's Inaugural Speech uncovered the ideologies underlying Buhari's speech and how he unveiled his plans and strategies for sustaining power. Rachman & Yunianti's (2017) research work, titled "Critical Discourse Analysis in Donald Trump's Presidential Campaign to Win American's Heart" showed that Trump's way of delivering his ideology in gaining power was dependent on his ability to control people, which was in line with his purpose to win American's heart. They employed a descriptive qualitative Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to analyse Trump's speech in his November 16, 2015 presidential campaign. The results showed that Trump attempts to focus his political discourse on the nation's unity, using informal language to make the audience feel close and intimate with him. He utilises various strategies to gain power and become the President of the U.S.

The central topic of his speech is the idea of making America great again. Trump's ideology is gaining power, which is associated with money, politics, and authority. Power also includes one's ability to influence the actions or decisions of others. Trump's political strategies succeeded and gained much support, making him elected as the presidential candidate of the Republic party. Also, Chen (2018) found that Trump used the first personal pronoun, simple words, and brief and declarative statements in his inaugural speech to achieve political goals. This indicates that Trump attempts to establish a rapport with the audience and reach many voters. "A Critical Discourse Analysis of Donald Trump's Announcement Speech" by Obiero (2017) demonstrated that discourse can contain features that may perpetuate and reinforce control of power by those who have it. He espouses how Trump uses an ideological weapon to construct and reinforce the concept of homogenous people and a homeland threatened by dangerous "other", in which he employs positive self-representation and negative "other" representation.

Methodology

Critical discourse analysis is vital in the text to explain the relationship between language, ideology, and identity. Norman Fairclough's assumptions in critical discourse analysis claim that "ideologies reside in texts", that "it is not possible to 'read off' ideologies from texts", and that "texts

are open to diverse interpretations". Due to the nature of this discipline, the methodology with the utmost appropriateness is Quantitative Analysis. Quantitative analysis carries with it an aura of scientific respectability. This is because it uses numbers and can present findings in graphs and tables, conveying a sense of solid, objective research. The data was selected using one of the social research strategies: case study. This is because a case study depends on a conscious and explicit choice of case to select from among many possibilities.

Theoretical Framework

Discourse and Discourse Analysis

Discourse, as a linguistic term, literally refers to a formal talk, a piece of writing or a discussion. In other words, a discourse could be spoken or written. It is also sometimes considered as language put to use, which is synonymous with text. Cook (1992) describes discourse as language use in communication, and the search for what gives discourse coherence is discourse analysis. Cook explains that discourse analysis examines how stretches of language, considered in their full textual, social, and psychological contexts, become meaningful and unified for their users. Rymes (2008) also believes that discourse is generally defined as "language-in-use." discourse analysis studies how its use influences language-in-use. In the classroom, context can range from the talk within a lesson to students' and teachers' talk. Based on this, discourse analysis in the classroom becomes critical classroom discourse analysis when classroom researchers take the effects of such variable contexts into account in their analysis. As such, it cannot be restricted to describing the linguistic forms independent of the purpose or functions they are designed to serve in human affairs. While some linguists may concentrate on determining the formal properties of language, the discourse analyst is committed to investigating what that language is used for.

Critical Discourse Analysis

CDA can be viewed as an analytical approach whose primary concern is how dominance, social power and inequality are enacted, reproduced and resisted in text, social and political contexts (Van Dijk 2001: 352, 2003: Fairclough: 2010). According to Young and Harrison (2004: 3), CDA focuses on espousing ideologies hidden in language. Such ideologies naturalise the unequal power relations, but they can be contested once brought to the fore. The primary concern of CDA, therefore, is to show the relationship between language, power and ideology on the one hand and that of social change and social identity on the other. CDA does this by looking at the role discourse plays in the production and maintenance of unequal power relations and dominance (Weiss & Wodak, 2003; McGregor 2011: 4). Although significant variations exist in CDA's approaches, Haig (2011) argues that two critical facets of CDA remain consistent; the relationship between language and power on the one hand and the way language creates and maintains an unequal power relation on the other. Fairclough and Wodak (1997:271- 80) summarise the tenets of CDA, which encompasses the fact that CDA addresses social problems, power relations are discursive, discourse constitutes society and culture, discourse does ideological work, discourse is historical, the link between text and the society is mediated, discourse analysis is interpretive and explanatory, discourse is a form of social action. One of the most essential linguistic theories correlated with a critical discourse approach is that of Halliday's systemic functional grammar. It is supported by some linguists such as Chouliaraki and Fairclough (1999) and Fairclough (1992), who used it for analysing the text because systemic functional grammar has a significant role in the critical interpretation of linguistic expression in various discourses.

Fairclough's Model of Analysis

In 1989, Fairclough presented his model of CDA, which was considered the centre of Critical Discourse Analysis. The 1995 model for CDA consists of three inter-related tactics of analysis tied to three inter-related dimensions of discourse. According to Fairclough, each of these dimensions requires:

1. **Textual content analysis (description):** This step concentrates on text analysis. Sound system, vocabulary semantics, cohesion organisation above the sentence level and grammar analysis are part of linguistic analysis. Therefore, the text gives the necessary data for linguistic analysis. It is the primary source of grammar description.
2. **Processing evaluation (interpretation):** Interpretation is concerned with the relationship between text and interaction, with the text being seen as the product of a process of production and as recourse in the process of interpretation. At this stage, interpretation should be focused on the relationship between the discourse, its production and its consumption. Attention should be drawn to other factors, such as intertextuality and speech acts, because these factors link the text to its context.
3. **Social Practice (Explanation):** This stage is the relationship between discourse and social and cultural reality. It focuses on the language and individual words that shape a text. The analysis in this part is related to the social, cultural and historical contexts. The hidden information of power relations, language, and ideology can be explored and explained in this stage in two contexts: social context and institutional context.

Data Analysis

A quantitative approach based on Fairclough's three-tier model of description, interpretation and explanation was adopted. The researcher provided linguistic tools for analysing the structures, which include word choice, pronouns, modal verbs and the comparative and superlative forms. The interpretation and explanation dimensions will later be discussed and analysed to show the result of the first dimension.

Identity Construction

A political aspirant tends to present himself/ herself and his or her group in a positive light and other groups in a negative light. He employs socially shared mental models with negative connotations to capture different ideological positions. The excerpts below justify this notion:

Use of Pronoun

Excerpt 1: *The future of Nigeria depends on the North. I will unlock it because I want to be able to say I want to turn the entire... I can tell you countries that are that tiny. We can't go on this way. That is what I want to solve. That is what I want to change. I assure you.*

Personal pronouns are extensively repeated regarding rhetorical devices used in Obi's campaign speech. For instance, this excerpt uses the first-person singular pronoun 'I' seven (7) times. Peter Obi projects his personality to the electorate through the pronominal 'I'. He alludes to the fact that the vast land in the North is being underused because of Nigeria's poor investment strategies. His projection of himself as the one who can easily handle the situation is heightened by the clause "I assure you". Notice the agentive position he occupied in the clause. Also, Obi uses "that" in his statement, "That is what I want to solve" and "That is what I want to change." It indicates spatial features and is used to express gestures or other means of pointing to specify an ambiguous utterance. Therefore, it can help to make speeches concise and clear, void of ambiguity.

Excerpt 2: *The money they give you is why you are hungry. That is why no jobs, food, security, or schools exist. We want to stop hunger in Nigeria; we want to create jobs for the youth, and we want to stop the stealing of public money.*

This is a typical example of a positive representation of "we" and a negative representation of "them". Politicians are always keen on achieving their primary goal of winning votes. Peter Obi projects himself in a positive light, "We want to stop hunger in Nigeria", and their opponents in a negative light, "The money they are giving to you is why you are hungry." The use of some lexical items shows the different ideological positions, hence the negative representations – 'no security', 'no job' and 'no food'. The expression, "We want to stop stealing public money, " is meant to derogate the opponents and paint them negatively. The pronominal selection 'they' further points to the ideological differences between the speaker and the members of the other party being referred to. This is best revealed in 'we' and 'they'.

Use of Repetition

Excerpt 3: *When I left Anambra state, I left Access Bank, a bank in Nigeria with \$50 million and over #10 billion. I left Diamond Bank with \$50 million and over #10 billion. I left Fidelity Bank with \$50 million and over #10 billion, and till today, Anambra has never paid me #1 as gratuity or pension. I left 8 years ago. You can go and verify it. If anybody says he will fight corruption, let him tell us how he managed public money before.*

The excerpt above espouses self-glorification. The speaker elevates his image by subtly attacking the opponents. The repetition of the expression "50 million and over #10 billion" is for emphasis and is meant to project a positive image of the speaker. Peter Obi perhaps uses this statement to demonstrate how prudent he is regarding financial management. The imperative clause "let him tell us how he managed public money" is ideologically configured to project power and an implicit way of challenging his opponents. The interpersonal cue is a superior figure issuing a command to the inferior other.

Use of Framing

Excerpt 4: *Our country is currently one of the most miserable in terms of poverty rate, number of out-of-school children, infant and under-5 mortality rate, life expectancy, and a host of others. All these problems, though complex, are not unsolvable.*

In this utterance, the speaker intentionally uses negative identity construction for the ruling government through his cohesion and the framing mechanism. Thus, words such as 'poverty rate' and 'out-of-school children' paint the opponent and past administration as 'miserable' and him as the solution. He intends to construct his own identity to persuade the audience to win their votes.

Use of Theme and Rheme

Excerpt 5: *We will demonstrate that good governance is all about providing the needed services to the people.*

In the above utterance, the inclusive pronoun, 'we', is the Theme, and the rest of the sentence is the rheme. Constructing the speaker's identity, the use of 'we' as the Theme identifies the speaker as a member of the in-group and perhaps other political detractors as the out

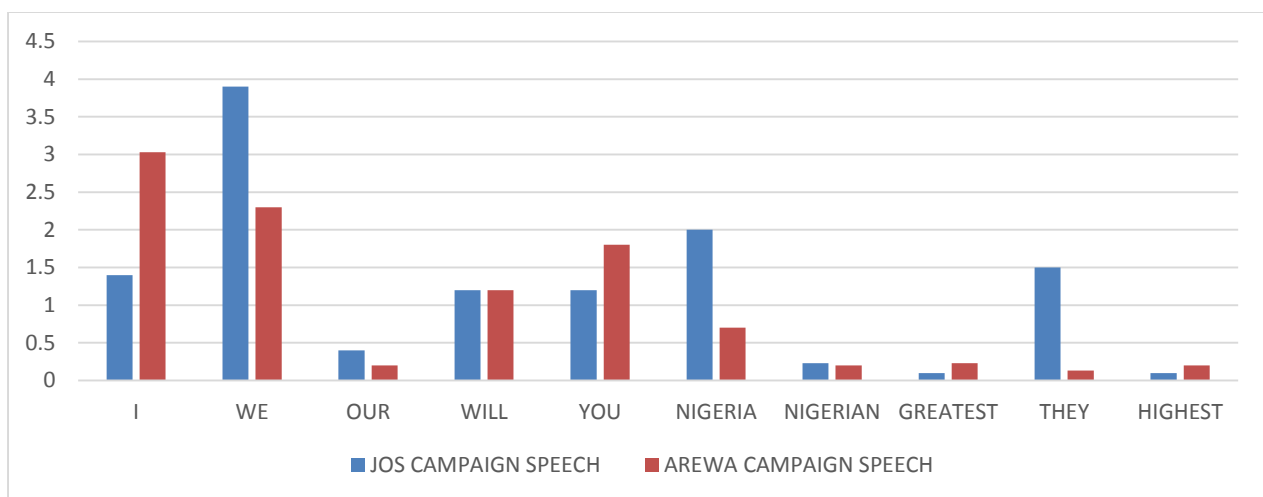
-group members. In other words, Obi constructs the image of a powerful and well-meaning group for himself and his party as a positive identity of a social actor who has the qualities to turn things around.

Findings

Peter Obi's selected speeches may involve hidden views delivered by choice of words and elements of cohesion, which are grammatically realised through pronouns, comparatives, and models. In order to arrive at a more quantitative-based result of this analysis, a keyword analysis of both frequently used words and connotations in Obi's speech was undertaken, yielding the following result.

Frequency/ Percentage Table

LEXICAL ITEMS	PERCENTAGE IN JOS CAMPAIGN SPEECH	PERCENTAGE IN AREWA CAMPAIGN SPEECH
I	1.4%	3.03%
We	3.9%	2.3%
Our	0.4%	0.2%
Will	1.2%	1.2%
You	1.2%	1.8%
Nigeria	2.0%	0.7%
Nigerian	0.23%	0.2%
Greatest	0.1%	0.23%
They	1.5%	0.13%
Highest	0.1%	0.2%



Bar Chart Showcasing the Frequency of Lexical/ Grammatical Items

The use of pronouns, modals and comparatives mainly represents the grammatical cohesion in this study. The predominant use of the first-person plural pronoun, 'we', prominently marks a sense of common interest with members of his party and makes the speaker sound humble by including the audience. Thus, politicians use pronouns to refer to categories and groups in which they can choose to place themselves. The choice is based on personal interest, that is, for their political agenda, constructing their identity and presenting themselves in a positive light. Politicians shift their identities through pronoun choice to enable them to appeal to their different hearers, which helps broaden their ability to persuade the electorate to win their votes. The study further shows that pronominal items like 'I', 'We', 'our', 'us', 'their' and 'them' are deictic references for projecting different ideological positions in political campaign speeches such as positive self-representation and negative other representation and of course, a potent weapon of personality profiling. The use of the linguistic modal 'will' implies determination. "Nigeria" and "Nigerian" were primarily used to express identity and a sense of belonging. He succinctly used these words to re-emphasise nationalism.

Conclusion

It is essential to re-emphasise that language has excellent power and potential to influence and shape public opinion. From the analysis using Fairclough's model for Critical Discourse Analysis, the study reveals amazingly discourse structures that have implications for power and ideology to uncover hidden meanings and messages embedded in the linguistic expressions used. Peter Obi employed language to create identity and show solidarity with the electorates to persuade them to accept and support his ideas and ultimately vote for him. To achieve this, he frequently used the pronouns 'I', 'you', 'our', 'we' and repetition in his campaign speech, which were discoursed in the context of Fairclough's model. This can conclude that Obi's political strategy is to use his campaign to show commitment, determination, responsibility, and group cohesion to gain support through his ideology and win Nigerians' hearts.

References

- Brown, G and Yule, G (1988). *Discourse Analysis*. Cambridge, Cambridge University, Press.
- Cook, G. (1992). *Discourse*. Cambridge' Cambridge University, Pres.
- Chouliaraki, L., Fairclough (1999). *Discourse in Late Modernity*. Edinburgh, U.K.: Edinburgh University Press.
- Emama, E. O. & Mowarin, M. (2024). The language of Nigerian Stand-up comedy. *European Journal of Humour Research*. 12 (2) 36-52
- Emama, E. O. English and the Socio-Cultural Semiotics of Identity in Selected Poems of Tanure Ojaide *Humanus Discourse* 4 (3), 90-104
- Emama, E.O. (2022). Music domains as index of the vitality of the Urhobo language *Aridon* 2 (1), 131-146
- Fairclough, N., & Wodak, R. (1997). *Critical Discourse Analysis. Discourse Studies: A Multidisciplinary introduction*, pp. 2, 258–284.
- Fairclough, N. (1992). *Discourse and Social Change*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.
- Fairclough, N. (1989). *Discourse and power. Language and power*. London: Longman.
- Haig, E. (2011). *A Critical Discourse Analysis and Systemic Linguistic Approach to Measuring Participant Power in Radio Bulletin About Youth Crime*. In *Studies in Media and Society*, 3pp, pp. 45–70.
- Ike-Nwafor, G.N. (2015). *Critical discourse analysis of selected political campaign speeches of gubernatorial candidates in southwestern Nigeria*. University of Nigeria, Nsukka.

- Maledo, R.O. & Emama, E.O. (2020). Wole Soyinka's *The Road* as an intertext. *Tydskrif vir Letterkunde* 57 (2), 26-36
- Mowarin, M. & Emama, E.O. (2020). Linguistic Devices and Rhetorical Strategies in Nigerian Stand-up Comedy. *Abraka Humanities Review* 10 (1), 1-19
- Obiero, O.B. (2017). *A critical discourse analysis of Donald Trump's Announcement speech*. University of Nairobi.
- Rachman & Yunianti. (2017). *Critical Discourse Analysis in Donald Trump's Presidential Campaign*. TELL Journal.
- Richards, J.C., & Schmidt, R (2010). *Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics*. Pearson Education Limited.
- Rymes, B. (2008). *Classroom discourse analysis: A tool for critical reflection*. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.
- Sharndama, E.C. (2015). *Political Discourse: A critical discourse analysis of President Muhammadu Buhari's Inaugural Speech*. Vol.3, No.3, pp.12-24.
- Van Dijk, T. (2001). *Encyclopedia of language and linguistics*. Universitat Pompeu; Fabra, Barcelona.
- Young, L. & Claire H. (2004). (eds). *Systemic Functional Linguistics and Critical Discourse Analysis: Studies in Social Change*. London and New York: Continuum.