

Power Dynamics in Nigeria's Political Rhetoric: A Critical Analysis of Presidential Election Campaign Discourse

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Abstract

This article critically examines discursive expressions of power by Nigerian political actors during campaigns. Specifically, selected speeches delivered by three major presidential candidates in different parts of the country were critically analysed. The data comprises eighteen (18) speeches circulated from September 2022 to February 2023. The study draws insights from Fairclough's approach to critical discourse analysis (CDA) for its investigation of politicians' use of linguistic resources of metaphor, pronominal, pidginisation, code switching, naming, among others to project self/in-group as powerful actors and others as uninfluential. These constructions of power were achieved through deployment of discursive strategies of appeal to emotion, negative framing of the opponent, criminalisation of others, self-promotion and polarisation. The study concludes that politicians' campaign speeches were influenced by underlying ideologies of welfarism, collectivism, and supremacism deployed to present self or opponents as powerful or powerless actors in Nigerian political landscape. Considering these findings, the paper recommends that the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), creates awareness among voters on politicians' ideological framing of power in campaign discourse. This is expected to help citizens make informed choices in future elections.

Keywords: Critical Discourse Analysis; Power; Campaign Speeches; Presidential Election

Introduction

Campaign discourse is important to electoral outcomes in Nigeria's democratic environment particularly as the country's electoral field has been described as a complex and competitive terrain (Nwalie, 2025). Factors ranging from the multi-ethnic nature of Nigeria to political elites' predilection for regional and ethnic alignment during elections, and the struggle for resource control among the various ethnic groups have been identified

as some of the reasons why electioneering campaigns discursively reflect political gladiators' intense struggle for power during presidential election campaigns (Oamen, 2015). The 2023 general election campaigns were conducted amidst growing insecurity, dwindling economy, and many young Nigerians' discontentment with what they perceived as bad governance of the country (Orjinmo, 2023). The choice of Peter Obi as the flag bearer of the Labour Party (LP), further heightened dominant parties' efforts to wrest/retain control of the nation's presidential seat during the period. Obi and the LP were perceived to represent the emergence of a viable third force in Nigeria's politics which posed a challenge to decades of the supremacy of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) and All Progressives Congress (APC) in the nation's political landscape. More importantly, the emergence of Tinubu, Atiku and Obi as presidential candidates meant that the three major parties had candidates from the major ethnic groups contesting for the office of president in the election. Against this background, politicians discursively constructed power by deploying linguistic resources and ideological discourses to influence citizens' perception on issues/candidates, legitimise self as the ideal candidates all in a bid to gain voters' support at the polls. Therefore, this article critically investigates discursive expressions of power in selected presidential candidates' campaign speeches. The critical approach adopted for the analysis is considered useful because of its appropriateness in unveiling opaque ideologies in campaign discourse produced in Nigeria's multiethnic democratic space. The major interest of the article is to classify the linguistic resources employed in the speeches to express power; critically discuss discursive strategies reflecting the structuring of ideologies in the speeches, and examine the speeches as tools of dominance/resistance of power in Nigeria's socio-political context. This is expected to make clearer Nigerian politicians' strategic use of language to shape public perception during electioneering processes in the country. In addition, the critical approach adopted is expected to aid in unveiling political elites' ideological construction of access to power in the nation's multi-ethnic environment.

Power, ideology and campaign discourse

Politics and ideology are closely related concepts that could shape the way individuals and groups relate with one another in society. Politics refers to activities, institutions, and processes through which decisions are made about how a society is to be governed, and how resources are to be distributed. It is the collective creation, maintenance, and alteration of institutions for gaining and using power (Aryodiguno, 2023). Ideology, on the other hand, is a term used to describe beliefs and values that shape an individual's or group's perception of the world. Ideologies could be seen as frameworks through which individuals

interpret and make sense of political events and issues. They provide a basis for citizens to form opinions about political matters and to choose which political actions to support. Ideologies could be political, feminist, ecological, racist or ethnic. Politics and ideology are connected because political parties/candidates are influenced by some form of beliefs, goals, ideas among others which shape their politics, discourse and actions (Johnson & Roberto, 2019).

Political discourse has been described as referring to the language used by politicians when they are engaged in political activities (van Dijk, 2009). Thus, political discourse mainly manifests when political actors are engaged in political actions such as voting, campaigning, protesting, among others. Political campaigns as a form of political action are sites where the struggle for power could be enacted and multiple identities ideologically (re)produced. The concept of power in the critical discourse analysis purview revolves around the question of who has control or access to discourse, how language is used to manipulate public opinion, obscure the truth, appeal to people's emotions and prejudices, among others. To influence the electorate and present self as the ideal leader, a political candidate could speak as a politician, racist, welfarist, capitalist, feminist, or anti-feminist agitator at the same time during campaigns depending on his/her ideological leaning. In the pre-independence era, Nigerian political leaders exploited nationalism as an ideology for fighting against colonialism and arousing in the masses the desire for sovereignty (Olasupo, et al. 2017). Over the years, however, other ideologies have been exploited by Nigerian politicians, particularly during campaigns to polarise the electorate, manipulate their perception on issues and attack their opponents. Against this background, this paper employed the critical analytical approach to the examination of campaign speeches in order to unveil politicians' deployment of different ideologies to present self/party as powerful/capable, and others as unfit for the office of president during the 2023 presidential campaigns in Nigeria. This is expected to make clearer the ways in which Nigerian politicians deploy identity politics for voter mobilization during campaigns.

Campaign speech and critical discourse analysis

The notion of democracy implicates the idea that citizens have the right to decide on who governs them for a specified period. It also means that politicians are required to deploy persuasive means (language, inclusive), to convince voters to support them at the polls. One major area where language is employed by politicians to obtain voters' support in electioneering process is in campaign speech. Campaign speech has been classified as a type of discourse which is one of the acts typical of the political domain (van Dijk, 1998). The context of political campaign speech is important because it distinguishes one from

another based on the purpose for which it is produced and deployed. While acceptance speech is usually delivered by a politician to members of his or her party to express appreciation for being nominated and to reiterate commitment to the party, election campaign speech is competitive in nature, although informal in its delivery. Politicians and their parties use election campaigns to strive to win the acceptance and backing of the electorate, and conversely to delegitimise opposition parties/candidates. Thus, it could be argued that election campaigns are designed to maximize the political benefits of political parties, their candidates and supporters at the polls (Osunbiyi, 2001; Cummings & Wise, 2005).

Within the nation's multiethnic domain, Nigerian political candidates sometimes structure election campaign speeches in form of propaganda, deploying different forms of ideologies to inclusively identify with the electorate and positively represent self as fit for the position. Nigeria's 2023 presidential election has been described as the most contested since the country reembraced democratic system of government more than two decades ago (Fasakin, 2023). The emergence of Obi as a viable third force candidate amidst growing insecurity and economic hardship in the country made the outcome of the elections uncertain. Thus, the campaign speeches delivered by the presidential candidates during the general election campaigns were deemed to be rich sites for the critical investigation of ideological discourses employed by Nigerian politicians to express their suitability and persuade the electorate to vote in their favour.

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) uses a multidisciplinary approach to the study of language use in society. Proponents of CDA examine how power relations are represented and constituted through discourse, and how discourse contributes to the construction and maintenance of social hierarchies. CDA primarily focuses on unveiling hidden ideologies in discourse. Ideology could be ethnic, racist, political or gender related. CDA has been applied to the study of institutional discourses of the media, politics, and workplace. In the context of political speech, CDA is sometimes applied to the analysis of political elites' use of discourse to maintain and reinforce power. In light of this, CDA is considered as a useful approach for studying political rhetoric produced within Nigeria's tough electoral field because it could help to make clear opaque expression of power relations and the veiled ideologies underpinning discourses that are produced to construct self and others positively or negatively during campaigns. This study therefore draws insights from the three-dimensional approach to CDA developed by Fairclough (2001). The three-dimensional approach is valuable for the critical study of political campaign discourse at the textual, intertextual and social context levels of language use in politics. This is because

the approach helps the analyst to provide explanation and interpretation of discourses against the socio-political context in which they are produced.

Review of related studies

Studies have been carried out on the connection between language and politics. Johan (2021) is a content analysis of the use of personal and social deixis by Donald Trump to win voters' support during the 2020 US presidential campaigns. The findings showed that Trump used personal deixis more than social deixis. In addition, the study revealed that he used the deixis to construct himself positively. Arnold-Murray (2021) is a multimodal study of campaign discourse produced for Kentucky's Sixth Congressional District in the 2018 election. Findings showed that political campaigns multi-modally (re)frame the words of the opponents in order to vilify them and present self positively. Talde (2021) adopted a critical discourse analytical approach to the investigation of five campaign speeches delivered by Rodrigo Roa Duterte, the President of the Philippines. The study was carried out to ascertain the discursive patterns of the speeches. The findings showed that modals will, would, shall and should had the highest level of frequency while language was used to perform informative, regulatory and instrumental functions which were intended to project the president positively on the one hand and on the other hand, attack the opponents. Furthermore, the findings showed that Roa Duterte used language to counteract the unequal power relationship between him and the citizens while at the same time asserting control. These studies underpin the non-neutrality of discourse deployed for political actions. In addition, they demonstrate that discourse is integral to the construction of positive or negative identities for political actors particularly during campaigns.

Research has also been conducted on campaign discourses produced during electioneering processes in Nigeria. Ifechelobi and Okpokiri (2020) is a study of impoliteness in campaign speeches delivered by politicians from the APC and PDP during campaigns for the 2015 presidential election. The analysis was carried out using Culpeper's framework of impoliteness strategy and Austin's speech act theory. The findings showed that Nigerian politicians deliberately deploy provocative discourse that could trigger electoral violence during campaigns. Oamen (2020) has also carried out research to critically analyse Nigerian political actors' expression of resilience through the speeches they deliver during campaigns. The study analysed speeches delivered by Muhammadu Buhari, Atiku Abubakar, and Obiageli Ezekwesili to convince the Nigerian electorate to support them at the polls in 2019. The critical approach adopted in the study was intended to make clear politicians' discursive expression of their abilities to wrest power and lessen vulnerability during the campaigns. The results of the study showed that politicians employed strategies

such as categorization, argumentation, and self-glorification in to prove their political influence. Abdulkadir (2021) also critically analysed Nigerian politicians' interviews on Channels Television's *Politics Today*. The study aimed at unveiling Nigerian politicians' expressions of dominance and victimisation through their media talks. Drawing insights from the notions of member resources advanced by Fairclough (1995) and the socio-cognitive approach to CDA by van Dijk (2010), the study analysed two (2) interviews in order to ascertain politicians' ideological positioning of self and others. The results indicated that politicians deploy discursive strategies of domination and control when engaged in campaign related discussion in the media. Udoh and Ejiasco (2023) is a critical study of campaign tweets produced and circulated by three presidential contenders in the 2023 election. Fairclough's three-dimensional model was applied to critically analyse the tweets of Peter Obi, Bola Ahmed Tinubu, and Atiku Abubakar. The results reflected asymmetrical power relations between Nigerian politicians and the masses. It was also revealed that inclusive discourse was strategically deployed by the candidates to win the support of the electorate during the campaigns. These studies are in consonance with the idea that Nigerian political campaign speeches are not neutral but tactically targeted to project the candidates or parties positively. The current study also falls within the domain of critical discourse analysis. However, it employed Fairclough (2001)'s three-dimensional approach to analyse power dynamics in campaign speeches delivered in different regions of the country. This was intended to unveil influences of regional context on Nigerian politicians' structuring of campaign speech.

Research methodology

The study employed the qualitative approach to the critical investigation of campaign speeches made by major candidates during the 2023 presidential election campaigns. Data was selected from the following media websites: Channels TV, TVC News and Vanguard Online News. The data comprised twelve (12) campaign speeches which were drawn from speeches delivered by Tinubu of the APC, Atiku of the PDP, and Obi of the LP. The speeches were delivered between September 28, 2022 and February 24, 2023. The period covers the beginning of the general election campaigns to twenty-four (24) hours before the presidential election. A purposive sampling method was adopted to ensure that only candidates whose parties enjoyed national spread and significant followership were selected. In addition, the speeches were purposively selected from those delivered from four zones of the country: North-Central/North-East, South-West, South-South and South-East. This was done to investigate different ideological perspectives adopted by the presidential candidates in different zones to project self/party as the ideal choice. The data

analysis was guided by Fairclough's (2001) three-dimensional model approach to CDA. The analysis focused on the interpretation of linguistic resources, discursive strategies and the nuanced ideological underpinnings of campaign speeches delivered to persuade voters from different parts of Nigeria to support the candidates. Furthermore, for ease of analysis, data were listed and itemized as excerpts.

Results and discussion

The analysis focused on identification and explanation of the linguistic resources used by the presidential candidates to demonstrate control and influence as politicians in Nigeria. Also, the analysis critically examined the discursive strategies deployed by the candidates to present self as capable leaders in Nigeria's democratic environment. Finally, the analysis investigated the underlying ideologies that influenced the candidates' strategic structuring of discourse in different regions of the country.

Linguistic resources in the campaign speeches

Campaign speeches revealed deliberate selection of linguistic resources by the candidates to project self and party as powerful and opponents as undesirable or powerless. The excerpts analysed below demonstrate this observation.

Excerpt 1:

01. However, the APC government have consistently propagated falsehoods, claiming they developed Lagos.
02. I am here to tell you (that) it's all lies.
03. They are deceiving you. Hence, it's time for the people of Lagos to free themselves from a family-dominated government and transit to a government by the people, for the people.
04. This people's government will be led by Jandor under my leadership. (Channels TV, December 5, 2022)

Excerpt 1 is Atiku's speech delivered at the PDP rally in Lagos. In order to assert his personal involvement to his promised reforms, Atiku deployed pronoun 'I' (line 2): 'I am here to tell you (that) it's all lies'). This was done to assert his political self in a campaign that was done in a state that is often perceived as Tinubu's political stronghold. In addition, he used the typical 'we' and 'they' polarising discourse to tacitly project self as the ideal candidate on the one hand and to criminalise the APC and Tinubu on the other hand: '**They**

are deceiving you.’ (line 3) Atiku also metaphorised the process of voting as one requiring that the electorate in Lagos state ‘free itself from a family-dominated government and transit to a government by the people.’ This metaphor of war was used to project Lagos residents as political captives, and the action of voting for Atiku, a liberating activity that Lagos residents needed to engage in. Excerpt 1 therefore demonstrates how politicians inclusively identify with the electorate during campaigns in Nigeria’s multi-ethnic domain. In addition, the excerpt reflects politicians’ tacit responsabilisation of the electorate as the determinants of the outcome of an election while at the same time deresponsibilising or weakening the role of the discoursal self in the outcome of the election.

Excerpt 2:

01. This election that we want to engage in, is your election.
02. Am I wrong?
03. This is an election of prosperity This is the election that you’ll use to liberate yourselves. Do you know, when it comes to my food; when it comes to my drink; when it comes to what I’ll move around with; they’ve all been provided by God, but the youth without jobs are much, and they graduated from school. (*TVC News*, February 15, 2023)

Similarly, in Excerpt 2, which is an extract from a speech delivered by Tinubu in Ekiti, he used the first person singular pronoun ‘I’ (line 2) and the determiner ‘my’ (line 3) to project self as financially empowered: ‘When it comes to my drink, when it comes to what I’ll move around with, they’ve all been provided by God.’ This is sharply contrasted with the use of third person plural pronoun ‘they’ (line 3) to refer to an impoverished Nigerian youth: ‘the youth without jobs are much, and they graduated from school.’ By positioning the discoursal self in this way, Tinubu projects the image of a powerful politician who was on a rescue mission to liberate the suffering Nigerian youth. This discursive move is strategic and becomes clearer when examined against the background of significant rise in youth political participation in Nigeria’s 2023 elections. Tinubu therefore strategically employed this emotive discourse to seek inclusive identity with youths in Ekiti state to gain their approval and support.

Excerpt 3:

01. We thank you a lot. Ekiti people!
02. Yoruba people! Yoruba people! Whose turn is it?
03. When it comes to education, Ekiti people will read extensively; Ekiti people read remarkably.
04. You want to turn us into house helps, you’re liars; we’re not house helps.

05. We don't need to look behind us, what I'm looking at in front of me is enough; it's enough for battle; it's enough. (*TVC News*, February 15, 2023)

Tinubu also employed a metaphor of war in Excerpt 3 when he declared, "We don't even need to look behind us, what I'm looking at in front of me is enough, is enough for battle, it's enough." (line 5) In this way, he framed Nigeria's democratic domain as a battlefield, emphasising the high stakes and intense competition involved in the voting process. The metaphor was deliberately employed to evoke a sense of collective effort between self and the addressees/electorate in the outcome of the election. In addition, pronoun 'we' inclusively portrays voters as soldiers in a shared struggle, thus reinforcing a combative, the 'us-versus-them' mentality of Nigerian politicians. This observation agrees with Ikpe's (2023) position that Nigerian politicians' comments during campaigns are sometimes antagonistic and capable of heightening tension in the country.

Excerpt 4:

01. I'd like to begin by saluting our late and esteemed father and leader, Chief Obafemi Awolowo, and also by paying my respects to Akintola and all the past and present leaders and heroes of Yorubaland.
02. I assure you that this government marks the start of constructing a new Nigeria, one where Nigerians will proudly declare their nationality.
03. We will ensure the security and unity of Nigeria and prevent unruly behavior in any part of the country. (*TVC News*, November 23, 2022)

In Excerpt 4 (Obi's speech delivered in Oyo state), the first person singular pronoun 'I' (line 2) was used to project the discursial self as a detribalised Nigerian politician who was committed to the realization of a vision of a new Nigeria. Obi also used the pronoun 'Our' (line 1) to evoke the feeling of inclusion and create a personal connection with the Southwestern people of Nigeria. In addition, the typical semantic extension of English kinship terms was also deployed to establish a sense of affinity with his Yoruba addressees: 'I'd like to begin by saluting our late and esteemed **father** and leader, Chief Obafemi Awolowo.' The word 'father' is a typical family discourse used by Nigerian English speakers generally. However, it is exploited by Nigerian politicians to create a sense of inclusion with the electorate during campaigns. In this instance, family discourse has contextual significance because it is produced by an Igbo politician who was addressing Yoruba electorate. Obi's use of this discourse is best appreciated against the background of animosity between the Yoruba and the Igbo ethnic groups which some scholars (e.g. Undiyaundeye, 2021) have traced to rivalry between Obafemi Awolowo and Nnamdi Azikiwe as far back as the 1930s. In addition, against the background that one of the

challenges the country has faced since its return to democratic rule is that of separatist agitations from the Southeast, the discourse could be interpreted as Obi's calculated way of framing self as a nationalist, rather than an ethnic politician.

Typology of ideologies

The campaign speeches revealed deliberate deployment of ideologies by the candidates to project self and party as influential on the one hand, and on the other hand, the opponents as unfit for the office of president.

Supremacist ideology

Some of the extracts reflected Nigerian politicians' tacit use of underlying ideology of supremacy to project self and their in-group members as powerful. Conversely, the candidates employed supremacist ideology to frame their opponents as inferior to them.

Excerpt 5:

01. Now, let me inform you, this is a verifiable fact.
02. You can go and check.
03. The federal government was responsible for constructing the second Mainland Bridge, rehabilitating the old Carter Bridge, and building the third Mainland Bridge.
04. If you elect me as your president, I pledge, with the presence of God, to set aside \$10 billion to empower our young men and women in small and medium enterprises. (Channels TV, December 5, 2022)

In Excerpt 5, Atiku leveraged on precedence to demonstrate his political supremacy as a former vice president of Nigeria. He employed naming and listing using the following nominals: 'The federal government', 'second Mainland Bridge, Carter Bridge', 'the third Mainland Bridge' (line 3) to project his involvement in the development of Lagos state. Conversely, his word choice helped to delegitimise Tinubu, the former governor of Lagos state. The use of figure '\$10 billion (line 4) was also intended to demonstrate his economic power and capability to implement his campaign promise of a better life for Lagos residents. This discursive move is best appreciated against the backdrop of APC's claim over the years that Tinubu developed Lagos. By emphasising the federal government's contributions to the development of the state during his tenure, Atiku indirectly took credit

for the major projects, positioning himself as a key political figure in Nigeria. This tactic not only bolstered his own credibility but also painted Tinubu and his party as deceptive.

Excerpt 6

01. We have a proven track record. Datti Baba Ahmed has a Ph.D. from the University of Westminster, and he's an entrepreneur with two universities.
02. I, Peter Obi, hold degrees from the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Oxford, Lagos Business School, and Cambridge University.
03. Our chairman shares our values and qualifications.' (Channels TV, February 4, 2023)

In Excerpt 6, which is Obi's speech delivered in Ogun state, he expressed supremacist ideology through self-glorification. The listing of academic qualifications and universities: 'PhD', 'two degrees', 'University of Westminster', 'University of Nigeria' helped Obi to project himself and his running mate as new breed politicians who are roundly educated. Conversely, the extract tacitly represented the other major contenders as academically inferior. Obi deployed this discourse to showcase his intellectual capability and superiority over the other two major contenders. This move could best be appreciated against that fact that his supporters were mainly youths who would see this as credentials that qualified him and Datti as ideal leaders who would govern well.

Collectivist ideology

Collectivist ideology was deployed in some of the speeches to emphasize group interest over individual interest. This ideology was exploited by politicians to show that they prioritised equality and cooperation over personal gain.

Excerpt 7

01. Today marks the culmination of our campaign.
02. I wish to express my gratitude to all Nigerians for their incredible solidarity.
03. I want to reassure the entire nation that we will not let you down.
04. We are committed to establishing a peaceful country, a thriving economy, improving education, and decentralizing power to the states.
05. I wish to underscore these five key points.
06. In Adamawa, you have a golden opportunity to choose me. (Vanguard Online News, February 18, 2023)

In Excerpt 7, which is Atiku's speech delivered at the PDP rally in Adamawa, he emphasised his commitment to realizing group interest when he promised to establish a peaceful country by 'decentralizing power to the states.' (line 4) For a northern politician to use the verb 'decentralising' in a campaign for office of president is significant. The North and its politicians have been accused for many years of holding power at the centre to the disadvantage of other regions (Nwanne, 2022). Others, particularly the Igbo believe they have been marginalised. So, by using the verb 'decentralising' Atiku projected himself as a northern politician who had a national outlook to power sharing in Nigeria. In addition, the word 'decentralising' strategically backgrounded his personal interest as a politician. Nonetheless, he still used the phrase: 'golden opportunity' to suggest ethnic hegemonic implication for his Adamawa state, his place of descent, if he was voted into power.

Welfarist ideology

The welfarist ideology was exploited in some of the campaign speeches to project political candidates as ideal leaders. In some of the speeches, this the welfarist ideology which reflects politicians' prioritisation of provision of social services and economic support for citizens was exploited to emphasise the candidates' desire to create a more equitable Nigerian society if they win the election. The excerpts below demonstrate how discourse was deployed to project politicians as altruistic rather than self-centred using this ideological positioning of self.

Excerpt 8:

01. You've heard the commitments made by the PDP to Ogun State.
02. We've pledged to devolve more authority and resources to Ogun State and its local governments.
03. We're committed to fostering industrialization in Ogun State, considering its abundant mineral resources.
04. To generate jobs and prosperity, both the federal government and the PDP administration will prioritize the utilization of these mineral resources and the industrialization of Ogun State.
05. The APC government has let us down, and it's our collective responsibility not to grant them another term in power. (Channels TV, February 4, 2023)

Excerpt 9

01. What we are talking about? About prosperity in Nigeria without our own factory?
02. Without better utilization of our ports? Without peace and stability?

03. We cannot achieve those aims and those dreams.
04. We want to take your life seriously, beyond politics.
05. You want the president, here I come. (TVC News, February 15, 2023)

In Excerpt 8, which is Atiku's speech, delivered in Ogun state, he projected a welfarist image using material processes: 'devolve', 'fostering', 'generate' and 'prioritize' (line 4). Against the background of continuous struggle for the control of resources at the three tiers of government in Nigeria (Ude, 2019), this discourse strategically projected Atiku as a liberal leader. In Excerpt 9, Tinubu used rhetorical questions to highlight socio-economic issues and thus project himself as a caring leader to the Rivers state electorate. In the excerpt, the rhetorical questions were deployed in form of a thought provoking strategy to get the electorate to question the status quo. In this way, he framed past presidential leaders as having failed the citizens and presented self as an empathetic leader.

Excerpt 10

01. Igbo kwenu! Igbo kwenu! Igbo kwezuenuo! We're not here to speak Igbo, we'll speak English.
02. I'll start with the students, we will take education seriously, no more strike, no more strike, Labour party says no more strike, we will sit down and negotiate, we will talk to the lecturers, education is serious to us. (TVC News, February 14, 2023).

In Excerpt 9, the speech Obi delivered at the Labour party rally in Imo state, he used language to project self as a humble and caring leader. This was done by code switching from Igbo to English, to create a sense of inclusiveness with his Igbo addressees and other Nigerians. By code-switching between English and the Igbo language, Obi demonstrated an understanding and connection with the Igbo community thereby creating a sense of shared identity and belonging that could help him gain the trust and support of his ethnic group members. By switching to English, he also maintained a national identity of self. Obi's declarative sentences: 'We're not here to speak Igbo, we'll speak English' (line 1) strategically backgrounds his ethnic affiliation, and projects him as a nationalist. This observation is in consonance with Ricks (2018) study which revealed that code switching could strategically influence voter's decision by significantly impacting a candidate's political appeal.

Discursive strategies in campaign speeches

The campaign speeches revealed deliberate selection of discursive strategies by the candidates to project self/party as ideal and others/opponents as undesirable. Some of the discursive strategies identified in the extracts include appeal to emotion, polarisation, criminalisation, self promotion, inclusivity/exclusivity, among others.

Appeal to emotion

This strategy reflects Nigerian politicians' predilection for moralising issues during campaigns in order to garner voters' support. Some of the extracts showed how politicians tapped into feelings of anger, fear, or pride to shape different identities of self and others on the one hand, and on the other hand, to make their argument more persuasive. In extract 1, Atiku attempted to stir up emotions of discontent in the electorate in Lagos by deploying the metaphor of enslavement: 'It's time for the people of Lagos to free themselves from a family-dominated government.' (line 3) Conversely, in Excerpt 7, Atiku appealed to ethnic sentiments of the people of Adamawa where he is autochthonous: 'In Adamawa, you have a golden opportunity to choose me.' (line 6) This discourse is best appreciated against the background that Atiku is a prominent political figure from Adamawa State and he was thus shaping an insider identity for himself based on his ethnic link to the people of the state. Appeal to ethnic affiliation is a common tactic in Nigerian politics, where political candidates often rely on ethnic loyalties to build their support base. This observation is corroborated by Adamu & Ocheni (2016) who noted that Nigerian politicians deploy ethnic discourse to mobilise their group members when access to power and resources are the subjects of national discourse.

Polarisation in form of "us" versus "them"

Polarising discourse was employed by some of the candidates to create a clear division between self/in-group and others/outgroup, thereby portraying self as superior or virtuous and the opponents as inferior or criminal.

Excerpt 11

01. That wayoo has ended. Let nobody tell you it's his turn.

02. It's nobody's turn; it is your turn to take back your country. (Channels TV, January 18, 2023)

Excerpt 12

01. Your royal highness, distinguished ladies and gentlemen, my brothers and sisters of the Arewa origin, first of all, I want to apologise very deeply for coming late, we were held up in Zaria on a courtesy call to the Emir.
02. We share the dream of our leader and foremost nationalist, Sir Ahmadu Bello, the Sultan of Sokoto, Premier of Northern region in announcing his vision for Northern Nigeria.
03. I would like to caution that Northern Nigeria's social and economic challenges call for sober reflection. It should be our collective desire to see Northern Nigeria fulfil our potentials in the not too distant future.

In Excerpt 11, Obi engaged the 'us' versus 'them' polarising strategy to criminalise the APC and its presidential candidate on the one hand, and project self and the electorate as victims in Nigeria's democratic domain on the other hand. The word 'wayo' (line 1) is a Hausa word that is borrowed and used in Nigerian Pidgin English (NPE) to refer to deception. Obi used the word 'wayo' in a discourse in which he alluded to Tinubu's hegemonic claim to the presidential office through his declaration "emi lo kan" (meaning 'it is my turn') to indirectly criminalise him. In addition, he deliberately used the indefinite pronoun 'nobody', the determiner 'his' and second person plural pronoun 'you' (line 2) to categorise the electorate as the powerful political actors who actually determine the outcome of an election. Similarly, in Excerpt 3, Obi used inclusive discourse by referring to past Yoruba leaders as: 'our late and esteemed father and leader, Chief Obafemi Awolowo.' (line 1) In this way, Obi aimed at evoking a sense of history and pride in his Yoruba audience to position himself as an insider in the Southwestern region's political environment. In Excerpt 12 which is a speech delivered by Atiku at PDP rally in Kaduna, he also employed inclusive discourse when he deployed broadened meaning of kinship term in his reference to Northern electorate as 'my brothers and sisters of the Arewa origin' (line 1). In addition, he constructed his vision for the North as 'our collective desire to see Northern Nigeria fulfill our potentials.' (line 3). In this way, he positioned himself as an insider in northern Nigeria's politics. In addition, his promise of the realization of 'our potentials in the not too distant future' emphasizes his idea of Northern Nigeria's prosperity as a shared objective and suggest that he prioritized group interest over his individual partisan interests.

Self-promotion

The strategy of self-promotion was used in some of the excerpts to build credibility and a favourable image in the audience's mind. In Excerpt 5, Atiku attempted to promote self by listing the federal government's accomplishments in Lagos state that he indirectly claimed credit for. Conversely, this strategy helped him to undermine Tinubu, a former governor of Lagos state, thus delegitimizing his opponent's right to a higher political office in the country based on precedence. Similarly, Obi in Excerpt 6 promoted himself and his running mate, Datti by highlighting their achievements and academic qualifications Obi deployed this strategy to demonstrate that they were technocrats and thus, different from other Nigerian politicians. The excerpt demonstrates how Obi attempted to assure majority of the Nigerian electorate who had become disenchanted with political leaders due to unfulfilled campaign promises that he and his running mate were credible Nigerian politicians.

In all, the findings indicate tactical use of linguistic resources and discursive strategies by Nigerian politicians to project self and party as the ideal choice during campaigns. Conversely, the speeches show politicians' representation of their opponents as unfit and uninfluential. The findings show that politicians used pronominal, nominal, metaphor, code switching to position the discursual self as powerful. Analysis particularly shows that politicians employed pronouns to establish the 'us' versus 'we' polarization of citizens. The study reveals that the interrogative 'Whose turn is it?' and the declarative 'It's nobody's turn' have gained new meanings of regional hegemonic control/resistance of dominance in Nigeria's democratic space. The findings also show that the third force politician tends to use academic titles 'PhD', 'Prof' and place name 'Harvard' to categorise self and running mate as elitist and technocratic. In addition, the study revealed the role of ideologies in polarizing politicians/electorate into insiders and outsiders in Nigeria. Politicians tend to express supremacist and welfarist ideologies when describing their capabilities while conversely, deploying marginalizing discourse when describing their opponents. The analysis shows that these ideological structuring of discourse was contextually motivated based on the regions of the country they were produced. Analysis further uncovers politicians' tactical exploitation of family discourse in form of pronoun 'our' and kinship terms 'father', 'sister', brothers' to establish affinity with the electorate in different regions of the country. The application of Fairclough's (2001) three dimensional model approach to CDA in the study has proven useful in identifying Nigerian politicians' tactical lexical choices and discursive strategies deployed to express candidates'/parties' influence and ability during the campaigns. Fairclough's approach has also proven effective in

interpreting the discourse against the socio-political background in which they were delivered. Overall, the paper confirms that language is used to portray and challenge unequal political power situation in Nigeria's political space.

Conclusion

The paper critically examined expressions of power in the discourse of three contenders for the presidential seat in Nigeria's 2023 general election. The sampling method adopted for data collection was purposive. This method helped to reflect regional influence in the production of campaign speeches in Nigeria's political landscape during the campaigns. Insights from Fairclough's (2001) three-dimensional model aided the study of the intricate relationships between language, ideology and power relations in these speeches. The results of the study demonstrated candidates' deployment of language in form of pronominal, metaphors, pidginisation, code switching, naming among others to project self/in-group as powerful political actors. In addition, the speakers used discursive strategies in form of criminalisation, polarization and self-promotion, appeal to emotions to represent self and others positively/negatively. The speeches also reflected candidates' use of ideologies of welfarism, collectivism, supremacism to project self as influential actors in Nigeria's democratic space. In light of the findings, the study recommended that voter education programmes be promoted by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to enhance citizens' awareness of strategic coding of campaign discourse. This should reduce voters' vulnerability to manipulative political discourse and help them to make informed choices in future elections.

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