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**A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF PRESIDENT BOLA AHMED TINUBU'S
INAUGURAL SPEECH**

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Inaugural addresses serve as a new president's first formal platform to outline their vision and legitimize their authority, making them rich sites for ideological and persuasive discourse. This study employs Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), drawing on Van Dijk's (2006) ideological square and micro-strategies, to examine the discursive features of President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's 2023 inaugural speech. The analysis focuses on how linguistic choices construct political ideologies and power relations. Findings reveal a strategic use of pronominals to foster in-group solidarity and out-group distancing, alongside key micro-strategies such as evidentiality, national self-glorification, and lexicalisation. The study concludes that Tinubu's speech is a calculated political performance designed to unify a national "self" while subtly marginalising a political "other," thereby attesting to the intricate relationship between language, power, and ideology in the Nigerian political context.

Keywords: Critical Discourse Analysis, Political Discourse, Inaugural Speech, Ideology, Van, Tinubu

Language functions not merely as a medium of communication but as a form of social practice that shapes and is shaped by the social world. It is a potent instrument for control and influence, a fact evident not only in literature but also in the strategic realm of political oration. The primary objective of a political speaker is to marshal linguistic resources to validate their propositions and secure the audience's unconditional support. In this light, linguistic elements are not neutral referential tools but systems through which speakers formulate and disseminate their perceptions, beliefs, and ideologies (Capone, 2010; Fairclough, 1989).

As Van Dijk (2006, p. 732) asserts, "if there is one social field that is ideological, it is that of politics." Inaugural speeches, in particular, are highly persuasive and performative, serving to unify the populace, legitimize new authority, and set a governing agenda. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is uniquely positioned to deconstruct such discourse, revealing the underlying ideologies and power relations that often remain opaque (Gee, 2004). This study adopts CDA to analyze the 2023 inaugural address of President Bola Ahmed Tinubu of Nigeria. Utilizing Van Dijk's (2004; 2006) framework, the analysis specifically investigates the discursive strategies of positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation to uncover the ideological underpinnings of his political vision.

Critical Discourse Analysis and Political Discourse

Critical Dourse Analysis (CDA) is an interdisciplinary approach to studying language as a social practice, with a central concern for how discourse reproduces and challenges power dominance (Johnson & McLean, 2020). While much CDA research has focused on media and racism (e.g., Teo, 2000; Van Dijk, 2001), the analysis of political speeches remains a fertile ground for inquiry.

Political discourse is inherently ideological, and speakers often employ a range of identities and strategies to articulate beliefs and gain public support (Van Dijk, 2002).

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a relatively recent field of linguistic study in Nigeria. Its formal introduction is widely traced to 1995, marked by Professor Adebayo Olumuyiwa of the University of Lagos and his seminal article, "A Survey of Critical Linguistics." This work served as the foundational introduction to CDA for Nigerian academia. Olumuyiwa systematically outlined the theory's philosophical and linguistic underpinnings, defined its core concepts—such as language, discourse, and context—and detailed its primary analytical tools, including transitivity and transformation systems, while also surveying the field's development. This comprehensive review successfully directed the attention of Nigerian linguists and scholars toward this emerging discipline.

Another pivotal contributor to Nigerian CDA studies is Professor Chinedu Okeke of Ahmadu Bello University. In 1996, his article "Language, Power and Ideology: Critical Linguistics" further elaborated on CDA's theoretical aims, methodologies, and practical application through examples. Okeke's most significant publication is the 2005 book *Critical Linguistics: Theory and Application*. Here, he probed the interconnectedness of language, ideology, and power, outlined CDA methodologies, and applied them to English media discourse and intertextuality. A key contribution was his rationale for using Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) as CDA's core framework: firstly, SFL's focus on the ideational meaning of language; secondly, its nature as a social semiotic theory; and thirdly, its concepts of register and context, which provide a structure for analyzing discourse in its social setting.

Okeke has continued to shape the field. In his 2003 work, "Language, Text and Power," he explored how power, defined as the capacity to control others, is enacted through discourse. His

focus later expanded to socio-cognitive approaches, advocating for the integration of cognitive linguistic theories—such as figure-ground alignment and prototype theory—into CDA (2007). More recently, Okeke and Amina Bello (2013) have reviewed the goals, methods, and evolving trends within CDA, further enriching its theoretical landscape in Nigeria.

Beyond these key figures, other esteemed scholars have significantly advanced CDA in Nigeria. Ezeoha Nnamdi and Fatima Abdullahi (2001), in their review, examined CDA's linguistic foundations, the language-power dynamic, and its pedagogical implications, highlighting CDA's inherently social orientation compared to mainstream linguistics. Similarly, Ibrahim Suleiman (2001) outlined CDA's main methodologies through Systemic Functional Grammar, intertextuality, and the discourse-historical method. Later, Suleiman (2009) provided a multi-perspective analysis of the term "discourse," examining it from structural, functional, sociolinguistic, and ideological viewpoints. Also in 2009, Suleiman and Okeke co-authored a critical evaluation of Fairclough's CDA theory, detailing its core principles and discussing its limitations.

The "Us" vs. "Them" Dichotomy in Political Speech

A recurring theme in political discourse is the construction of an in-group ("us") and an out-group ("them"). Engel's (2004) analysis of George W. Bush's radio addresses demonstrates how the "self" extends beyond the individual speaker to encompass associated groups, serving to legitimise policy and action. Similarly, Leudar and Marsland (2004), in their study of speeches after 9/11, show how leaders like Bush, Blair, and Osama bin Laden leveraged this dichotomy to justify violence and mobilise their constituencies. Van Dijk's (2005) analysis of Spanish Prime Minister José María Aznar further illustrates how positive self-presentation is often a strategic response to potential criticism, enacted through personal, organisational, and national claims to moral authority.

This study is anchored in Van Dijk's (2006) socio-cognitive model of CDA, which posits that ideologies are socially shared mental representations that govern discourse and other social practices. The "ideological square" is a central tenet, comprising four macro-strategies: Emphasise our good properties/actions, Emphasise their bad properties/actions, De-emphasise our bad properties/actions and De-emphasise their good properties/actions.

These macro-strategies are realised through specific micro-strategies of discourse. This analysis will focus on the following, as defined by Van Dijk (2006):

1. Evidentiality: Providing evidence (e.g., authority, statistics) to bolster credibility.
2. Hyperbole: Using exaggeration for rhetorical effect.
3. Metaphor: Employing figurative language to frame concepts persuasively.
4. National Self-Glorification: Making positive references to the nation's history, values, and people.
5. Lexicalization: Selecting words with strong positive or negative connotations.
6. Number Game: Using numbers and statistics to create an aura of objectivity and precision.

Methodology

The data for this study is the full transcript of President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's inaugural speech delivered on May 29, 2023. This text was selected for three primary reasons. First, its recency ensures it reflects the current socio-political landscape of Nigeria following a highly contested election. Second, as a key political actor, Tinubu's speech is a strategic performance aimed at achieving specific political and economic goals. Finally, the inherently persuasive nature of an

inaugural address makes it an ideal site for analyzing how a leader constructs legitimacy and seeks to unify a diverse populace.

The analysis is qualitative, employing Van Dijk's (2004; 2006) CDA framework. The primary units of analysis are the discursive strategies of positive self-presentation (in-group favoritism) and negative other-presentation (out-group derogation). The analysis pays particular attention to the use of personal pronouns and keyword frequency, as these are key indicators of ideological positioning

Analysis and Discussion

Pronominal Politics: Constructing "Us" and "Them"

A salient finding is the strategic deployment of personal pronouns, which serves to construct a unified in-group and a distinct out-group. As Wales (1996, p. 50) notes, pronouns are "rarely neutral in reference." The high frequency of first-person plural pronouns—"our" (69 times), "we" (44 times), and "us"—functions as an inclusive strategy, creating a sense of shared identity and collective national purpose between Tinubu and the Nigerian people (Muhlhausler & Harre, 1990).

Example of Inclusive "We/Our": Tinubu consistently uses "we" and "our" to amalgamate his agenda with the national destiny. He states, "*We have endured hardships that would have made other societies crumble. Yet, we have been gifted with the innate resilience to persevere.*" This constructs a collective national self that is resilient and enduring. Furthermore, his vision for the economy is framed collectively: "*Our administration must create meaningful opportunities for our youth.*" This rhetoric absorbs his administration's goals into the nation's, making dissent seem like a betrayal of a shared project.

Conversely, the use of the third-person plural and specific lexical choices creates an exclusive function, drawing a demarcation between this national "us" and a political "other."

Example of Exclusive "They/Them": While often implicit, the "other" is clearly framed as those who have failed the nation or spread despair. He creates this dichotomy by stating, "They circulated rumours of an interim government and said we would not see the light of day. They were sure they had seen the back of us. But we are here (line 208)." Here, "they" are the doomsayers and anti-democratic forces, while "we" are the resilient Nigerian people who have triumphed. This is a classic application of Van Dijk's ideological square, emphasising their bad properties (defeatism, undemocratic tendencies) and our good ones (resilience, democratic victory).

Keyword Analysis and Ideological Weight

A frequency analysis of lexical items reveals the speech's ideological priorities. The high-frequency tokens, as shown in Table 1 below, are ideologically significant.

Table 1: Frequency of Key Lexical Items in Tinubu's Inaugural Speech

First Group Tokens	Frequency	Second Group Tokens	Frequency
Our	69	Security	6
Me	65	Peace	5
We	44	President	5
Nigeria	21	Hope	1

First Group Tokens	Frequency	Second Group Tokens	Frequency
Nation	20	Citizen	2
Shall	28	Future	3
My	25	Land	3
Economy	7	Human	3
Govern	8	Job	6
<i>Total Words</i>	1,905	Democracy	4

The dominance of collective pronouns ("Our," "We"), the nation ("Nigeria," "Nation"), and the assertive modal "Shall" points to a strategy of National Self-Glorification and a commitment to a collective future. The personal "Me" and "My" balance this collectivism by establishing Tinubu's individual agency and leadership.

Example of National Self-Glorification: Tinubu elevates the nation and its people, saying, "To Nigeria, we pledge our devotion and we pledge our loyalty. This is our country. This is our moment. This is our time (line 92). The repetition of "our" and the focus on "Nigeria" glorifies the national collective and the historic nature of the moment, fostering pride and unity.

Example of Assertive "Shall": The high frequency of "shall" (28 times) is used to project authority and an unshakeable commitment. He declares, "We shall remake our nation into a beacon of hope." and "On the economy, we shall target a higher GDP growth. (line 76)" This modal verb

does not invite debate; it asserts a predetermined future, constructing an image of a decisive and powerful leader.

Manifestation of Van Dijk's Micro-Strategies

Evidentiality and Number Game: Tinubu uses specific, concrete policy announcements as evidence of his decisiveness and command.

1. **Example of Evidentiality:** The most striking example is the fuel subsidy declaration: "*We shall instead re-channel the funds into better investment in public infrastructure, education, health care and jobs that will materially improve the lives of millions.* (line 185)" This blunt, evidence-based statement serves to project a no-nonsense, action-oriented leadership style. He provides a rationale, framing it as an economic necessity: "We commend the decision of the outgoing administration in phasing out the petrol subsidy regime which has increasingly favoured the rich more than the poor.(line 180)" Here, he uses the previous government's own finding to evidence his controversial decision.

Lexicalisation: The choice of words carries significant ideological weight, often framing policies and groups in a morally charged light.

Example of Negative Lexicalisation: The previous economic system is described in negative terms: "The currency swap was a profoundly problematic policy." The word "problematic" is a euphemism, but "profoundly" intensifies it, clearly marking the policy (and by extension, its architects) as flawed.

Example of Positive Lexicalisation: His own policy intentions are framed positively: "Instead, we shall redirect the funds into better investment in public infrastructure, education, health care

and jobs that will materially improve the lives of millions." Words like "better," "improve," and "jobs" are positively loaded, justifying the painful removal of the subsidy by contrasting it with a future of tangible benefits.

Metaphor: Tinubu uses metaphors to frame complex political issues in simple, relatable, and persuasive terms.

Example of Metaphor: He uses the metaphor of service and stewardship to define his presidency: "I have a message for our youths... I will be a fair referee." The "fair referee" metaphor positions him as an impartial, just leader above the political fray. He also uses the metaphor of foundation: "The foundation of our prosperity today is the elbow grease of our ancestors." This connects his vision to a glorified, hard-working past, giving it historical legitimacy.

Hyperbole: Exaggeration is used to amplify the significance of the moment and the threats faced.

Example of Hyperbole: The description of the nation's challenges is hyperbolic: "We have endured hardships that would have made other societies crumble." This elevates the resilience of the Nigerian people (the "self") to an almost superhuman level, thereby glorifying the in-group.

Victimization: This strategy is used to present the in-group as victims of circumstances or the actions of the out-group, which justifies radical action.

Example of Victimization: The Nigerian people are portrayed as victims of a flawed economic system: "The subsidy can no longer justify its ever-increasing costs in the wake of drying resources. To put it bluntly, the ever-increasing cost of the subsidy has been stifling the economy." (paragraph. 60: line 184) Here, the nation ("the economy") is the victim being "stifled," and the removal of the subsidy is framed as a necessary liberation.

This study has demonstrated that President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's inaugural speech is a strategically crafted piece of political discourse. Through a Critical Discourse Analysis informed by Van Dijk's framework, we have delineated how linguistic features—most notably pronominal choice and strategic lexicalisation—serve to construct a unified national identity (positive self-presentation) while subtly creating a distance from a political "other" (negative other-presentation). The speech effectively employs micro-strategies such as national self-glorification and evidentiality to legitimise the new administration's authority and policy direction. Ultimately, this analysis affirms the power of language as a tool for ideological construction in the political arena, revealing how discourse is instrumental in shaping public perception and consolidating power in the Nigerian context. Future research could conduct a comparative CDA of Tinubu's speeches and those of his predecessors to trace the evolution of political discourse in Nigeria.

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