

Other Representations in Politics: ‘O To Ge’ Rhetoric in Nigeria’s Election Campaigns

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Abstract:

Politics is a battleground for ideological exhibition by different social and political actors, and these actors ensure victory at all cost, even if it sometimes leads to the denigration of opponents through labeling. This paper investigated how the All Progressive Congress (APC) was able to successfully oust the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) from the government by deploying strategies to present PDP with negative identities during campaigns exercises which preceded the election. Using the inquiry word ‘*O to ge Kwara*’, 15 videos were recovered from YouTube and they formed the data for the paper. YouTube was selected on the grounds that it serves as an archive for political campaign videos in Nigeria. The selected videos were subjected to analysis through the application of van Dijk’s (2006) approach to Critical Discourse Analysis. The negative identity representation of the Peoples Democratic Party in the 2019 general elections in Kwara State, thrived on the ‘O to ge’ rhetoric and the representations from the vistas of ‘others’. The paper concluded that these negative identity representations are projected through different discourse strategies.

Keywords: identity, CDA, political campaigns, ‘O to ge’, rhetoric, discursive moves

Introduction

In politics, language plays a crucial role in the struggle for political power, strengthening dominance and weakening or extinguishing the inferno of hegemony. Contradicting the common notion that language is purely meant for a communicative purpose, and yet not denying it, Gee (2005) argued that the function of language is not radically monolithic in terms of being meant for communication only. Rather, he placed language relevance in terms of its social and cultural usefulness. He summed up the functions of language in two ways: ‘to support the performance of social activities and social identities and to support human affiliation within cultures, social groups and institution’. This view by Gee corroborates Duranti (1994) and Morgan (2010) who also

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viewed language as social performance and social action. Apart from the indispensable import of language in human society for a communicative purpose (Sirbu, 2015), the political arena is one of the endless sources of various human interactions manifested through the instrumentality of language (Utych, 2018). A larger number of studies within humanities and social sciences have looked into the place of language in politics or political power (see Fairclough, 1989; Fowler, Hodge, Kress & Trew, 1979; Olorunsogo & Akinade, 2020).

Language is a very important tool politicians use during the electioneering campaigns to sell their views and feelings to the electorate with the sole aim of re-shaping and redirecting views of the electorate. Their campaign speeches are predicated upon the programmes of the successive administration, presented in a rather negative manner, and then present themselves in a positive manner (Wirth-Koliba, 2016). As it was earlier established by van Dijk (2006: 732) “it is eminently here that different and opposed groups, power, struggle and interests are at stake. In order to be able to compete, political groups need to be ideologically conscious and organized”.

Since language has power potentials to influence individuals and shape public opinions, in the context of this present work, we shall see how feelings and ideological beliefs of individuals or groups are conveyed through linguistic expressions to project personal and group ideology as well as to encode power. Language use during election campaigns can be described as a social process and a socially conditioned process that can be used to accomplish tremendous social work. Thus, politics as the exploitation of language and social practice is necessarily a linguistic and social event.

This paper is motivated by the consideration that because people’s lives are becoming increasingly shaped by textual representations (which are politically, socially or economically motivated coupled with the present explosion in information technology), there is need for people to create awareness of how these representations should be internalized. It is against this backdrop that this paper sets out to investigate political campaigns that preceded the Kwara state’s gubernatorial elections, and how APC was able to defeat PDP in the gubernatorial polls, through the deployment of the rhetoric of *O to ge* in Kwara state’s 2015 gubernatorial election.

‘O to ge’ Movement

‘O to ge’ is a three-word statement, which is loosely translated ‘*enough is enough*’. It is a campaign rhetoric which doubles as a slogan that was used to end the political dominance and hegemony as well as

continuous political rule of Saraki's (former Nigeria's Senate president) family in Kwara State. According to the originator of this slogan, Lazeez Ayinla Kolawole, 'Every revolution starts as a seed, it grows to become an oak'.

Nigeria as a country practices multi (political) party system, with over a hundred political parties. However, there are two main prominent political parties out of all these parties; the opposition Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) and the ruling All Progressive Congress (APC), being the political party ruling at the central government level. There is the replication of party architecture of the central government in virtually all the rest tiers of government, namely state and local governments, where the predominant political parties are PDP and APC serving as ruling and opposition parties, respectively.

The 'Nigerian general elections' holds every four years. It is called "general" because originally, during the same period, the governorship elections in all thirty-five states in Nigeria are expected to be held. Over the years, the situation has changed. Marred by outcomes of various election tribunals, some states now run their gubernatorial elections separately (Olorunsogo and Chukwu, 2021). Nevertheless, the term 'general elections' has not changed because gubernatorial elections in more than twenty-five states still take place during the general elections. Kwara state, which is the contextual focus of this paper, has its governorship election during the general election.

Electoral campaigns always precede the elections, where different political parties try to garner supports, present their candidates, present their manifestos, and focus on negatively presenting their major opponents. In the 2019 general elections, campaigns started in November 2018 and elections were expected to be held in February 2020. The interesting thing about Kwara state is that during the campaigns, APC projected the rhetoric 'O to ge' and it became the driving force of campaigns all through the campaign period. The movement was successful as they formally ended the long term rule the Sarakis in the state.

Literature review

This paper is situated within empirical studies that have been carried out in the area of political discourse. Omozuwa and Ezejideaku (2010) considered election campaigns from the vistas of stylistics, looking at the stylistic analysis of the language of political campaigns in the 2007 general election. They opined that language of political campaigns is laden with persuasion, propaganda, rhetorical question, abusive utterances, attacks on logo and slogans of opponents among others, with the view to cajole the electorate and thus garner votes, on the one hand; to discredit their opponent(s) before the electorate, on the other hand.

They concluded the study by revealing that Nigerian politicians just like any other politicians in other parts of the world use language as a formidable tool during the campaign to galvanize votes, using different possible linguistic strategies to win such election.

Darweesh and Muzhir (2016) explored the representation of the Syrian crisis in the American political speeches, a work that is closely related to this paper, especially in the ideological motivation of van Dijk's 'US' versus 'THEM' as well as positive self-representation and negative other-representation. The researchers argued that American politicians' political speeches, with specific attention paid to that of Barack Obama, J. Kerry and Hillary Clinton, are laden with bias and void of neutrality, and thus holding a negative stance and ideology in the representation of political crisis. In achieving this, the American politicians, in their political speeches employ negative lexicalization, polarization, argumentative move, compassion as well as implication, which are the findings in the paper.

Oyeleye and Osisanwo (2013) worked on ideologies of expressions from the media accounts of the 2003 and 2007 general elections in Nigeria with special attention paid to critical linguistic perspective on the language used in reporting electoral matters. They discovered that the discourse of the story assumes an ideological stance to shape the perspective of the readers in elections. Furthermore, they argue that ideologies are expressed, acquired, confirmed, change and perpetuated through discourse. The study found that newspapers employ ideological polarization between the ideological structures of in-groups and out-groups such that in-groups typically foreground self-deeds while they emphasise other's bad deeds. This is in line with van Dijk's (2006) ideological square.

Sharndama (2015) critically analyzed the inaugural speech of President Muhammadu Buhari which was delivered in May 2015. He adopted Fairclough's three-dimensional Analytical Models as a theoretical framework for the work. The result of the analysis shows that analyzed speech reveals the ideologies and plans of the new government. In its relevance to this paper, the research concludes that the inaugural speech of President Buhari consists of an exposition of ideological plans as to the direction of the new government and subtle negative ideological representation of the past government. The research work is relevant to this present paper, especially in term of ideological representation of self, on the one hand; as well as the ideological representation of others, on the other hand. However, the research differs from the present paper. This work will look at ideological positioning in the electioneering

campaign. Similarly, this present paper will deal with underlying persuasion in the ideological representation.

Hamrita (2016) focused on the metaphorical and ideological representation of the political opponent in the hard-line Islamist discourse in Tunisia. The researcher adopted Critical Discourse Analysis and Conceptual Metaphor Theory as a theoretical orientation to analyze the socio-political discourse of the hard-line Islamist politician in Tunisia. The researcher revealed that metaphors are all-encompassing, as they are used by political and religious actors to influence and persuade their audience positively or negatively, with attention paid to, in the analysis, how metaphorical expressions are employed in the 'politico-religious' discourse of the hard-line Islamist politician to represent liberal and secularist political enemies. The researcher concluded that Ridha Belhadj's discourse is manipulative and heavily based on polarization. Hence, liberal political opponents are discursively represented as being wicked politicians who are working for Western agendas, while Islamists are positively represented as patriots. The negative representation of his opponents was achieved through the use of metaphor.

On election campaign, Mwiinga (2019) carried out a discursive analysis of the 2016 presidential election in Zambia. He analyzed different political campaign speeches of Mr Hakainde Hichilema using Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar. In the analysis, it was found that Mr Hichilema employed, in his campaign speeches, linguistic strategies such as allusion, propagandistic language as well as a provocative language among others. The study concluded that aside from the effectiveness of discourse in political struggles and power play, it also foregrounds cultural, linguistics, and social factors which influence on the linguistic choice of political actors in Zambia.

This paper contributes to the body of works on campaign speeches and representations in political discourse, and it gives insights to the political structure of Nigeria as well as the structure of the discourse of election campaigns.

Theoretical framework

Van Dijk's Socio-cognitive Model of CDA

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is not a single theory; it has various approaches with respect to different theoretical backgrounds that drive specific methodologies and data. There is the need to specify the approach and specific researcher that is being adopted in a critical examination of texts (Wodak, 2002). Against this backdrop, van Dijk's (2006) socio-cognitive approach was adopted for analysis in this paper. This analytical approach is relevant because it focuses on political

discourse and offers systematic framework of investigating discourse structures.

Van Dijk's (2006) framework consists of two main discursive strategies of 'positive self-representation' (semantic macro-strategy of in-group favouritism) and 'negative other representation' (semantic macro-strategy of derogation of out-group) which are materialized through 27 discursive moves. This paper focuses on 'negative other representation', therefore, five discursive moves that are relevant to the data and purpose of study are as follows: 'actor description' (how actors – in this case, PDP – are described with references to their positive or negative characteristics), 'evidentiality' (how text producers – in this case, APC – back up claims and opinions with proofs and facts), 'lexicalization' (utilization of specific lexical items that overtly reveal the text producer's opinion about the identity of 'self' or 'other'), 'metaphor' (indirect and abstract reference to actors through the characteristics and features of another entity), and 'presupposition' (according to van Dijk, 2006: 739) 'strategically, presuppositions are often used to assume the truth of some proposition when such truth is not established at all').

Methodology

The qualitative approach was used in data collection. The data were drawn from different YouTube campaign videos during the campaign period that precedes the 2019 general elections. The campaigns began in November 2018 and ended in February 2019. The scope of the campaign videos is Kwara state campaigns. The videos come in the form of coverage of live rallies, jingles, as well as organized campaigns.

This research was carried out to investigate different identity representations used in the electioneering campaign strategies in 2019 general elections in Kwara State by the All Progressive Congress (APC) party against its major political opponent, Peoples Democratic Party (PDP). Out of ninety-one registered political parties for the 2019 general elections in Nigeria, these two parties (APC and PDP) were selected because they are regarded as the two major parties. In Kwara state, for instance, the serving governor during the campaign period was a PDP member while the serving president was in APC.

Through the use of the search word '*O to ge Kwara*', videos were randomly retrieved from *YouTube*. *YouTube* was chosen because it serves as a repository for political campaign videos in Nigeria. The retrieved videos were sorted as they relate to APC and PDP in Kwara state during the campaign period, and 15 videos were selected to be transcribed because of their relevance to the focus of the paper. In the selected videos, there is the manifestation of the negative portrayal of PDP

as targeted towards “*enough is enough*”. The language in the videos varies from English to Yoruba (the indigenous language of Kwara state). In the analytical section, the English translation of Yoruba data is provided below the original transcript (italicized). The data were subjected to discourse analysis, as the representations identified were investigated through discursive moves discussed in the theoretical framework.

Findings and discussion

The All Progressive Congress carved various negative representations for the Peoples Democratic Party during the 2019 general election campaigns in Kwara state. Such negative representations were achieved by direct negative labeling of PDP or indirect labeling by targeting Saraki (PDP statesman in the state and then-incumbent Senate president of the country). The labeling of Saraki in the analysis is an indexical signification; where Saraki is used as ‘a-part-for-whole’ substitute of PDP. Thus, the denigration of Saraki is also the denigration of PDP. Five negative representations were identified, and they are ‘Reckless Ambitious Person’, ‘Dirt’, ‘Looters’, ‘Cheat’ and ‘Glutton’.

Reckless Ambitious Person

A reckless ambitious person is a person that can do anything to get power. It connotes desperation in trying to realize a political ambition. This points to something negative, as such a person, in an extreme case, can even kill a fellow human being to realize his political ambition. This is another strategy employed by politicians to present other politicians before the electorate in a bad manner.

Excerpt 1

And I believe you listened to the tutorial of Asiwaju on the need to use your PVCs (permanent voters’ cards) to terminate the reckless ambition of a man who was a number 2 citizen when the best of Nigeria was destroyed.

In *excerpt 1* above, there is an instance of ‘actor description’, manifested in the description of the face of the party PDP. Atiku, who is the presidential candidate of PDP and one-time vice president of Nigeria is described here as a man with inordinate political ambition. Here, without mentioning the name of Atiku, the description of his former executive position presupposes the referent of ‘a man’. This is a sign or symptom of political desperation, which is a politics of ‘*do or die*’. To project the ideological discursive strategy, the APC makes use of discursive move evidentiality (which is bringing about evidence to support a claim), to present PDP in general, as a bad party which should not be voted. There is evidence provided that their party PDP once destroyed the country. Also to give the reason why they should be rejected, there is the use of the lexical verb ‘terminate’ to create a kind of

rebellious expression in the mind of the unsuspecting electorate. This is a significant style used by politicians, in Nigeria's political situation, to discredit opponents and discourage electorates from voting the opponent (Omozuwa & Ezejideaku, 2010). To achieve the aforementioned, the opposition APC refers to something that has earlier been said when the speaker says that 'I believe you have listened to the tutorial of Asiwaju'. Politicians utilize lexicalization as a strategy to make definite reference to persons (Darweesh & Muzhir, 2016).

Dirt

Dirt is something unclean, which must be done away with. In a wider context, it is something negative that one must not come in contact with. Politicians are in habit of using derogatory language to describe or represent their opponent (van Dijk, 2006). Using the word 'dirt' to describe somebody means that such a person should be treated as a pariah, anathema. The negative representation is done to discredit PDP. This is evident in the excerpt below.

Excerpt 2

*APC!!!...Change!!! Igbale yin da?
Igbale yin da? Oya e gba won danu.
E gba won danu. E ma gbawon danu.
E ma gbawon danu.*

APC!!!...Change!!! Where is your broom?
Where is your broom? Now, sweep them away.
Sweep them away. Start sweeping them away.
Start sweeping them away.

In *excerpt 2* above, APC indirectly refer to their opponent as something unclean with the intent of influencing hatred in the electorate. In achieving this, they use employ actor description and metaphor. 'Dirt' is a metaphor for something unclean in this context. Hamrita (2016) explains that metaphors are deployed by politicians to persuade people to carry out actions. In this case, the campaign constructs the metaphor of PDP as dirt, and the projection of broom (a symbol of APC) presupposes that the state would be made clean by sweeping away PDP through voting for APC. Similarly, 'sweep them away' is conjured by APC to incite a feeling of hatred in the mind of the electorate so that they can rebel against their opponent.

Looters

In the Nigerian political context, the word 'looter' – even though it means more than financial stealing in term of definition – has been

streamlined by the APC in term of its definition to mean massive financial theft.

Excerpt 3

Ti o ba wu won, kiwon loot gbogbo apo ti won ba fe loot...

O ti to ge... O to ge...

Omo ale Gambari nikan ni yoo sope ko to ge; so be fun won.

If they like, they should loot anything they want to loot...

It is enough... Enough is enough...

It is only a bastard child of Gambari that will not say 'enough is not enough'.

APC presented their opponent party PDP and of course, by implication, every member of the party as a 'looter'. The *O to ge* rhetoric is deployed to subtly persuade people to act against voting for 'they', which is an index to PDP. As revealed by Sharndama (2015), political discourses are marked with subtle ideological drives that negatively represent other. Knowing that the electorate would not want a leader that will be plunging, stealing their commonwealth, the APC used that strategy to negatively present their opponent and its candidate. This is achieved through the actor description and lexicalization. PDP and Saraki were described and represented using lexis 'loot(er)'. The action verb 'loot' is projected in strong terms, thus describing the opponent as people who exert voracious energy in stealing public funds. This kind of rhetoric is profound in political discourse to drive political actions (Omozuwa & Ezejideaku, 2010).

Cheat

A cheat is someone who takes advantage of others, exploiting a weakness or loophole to deceive, fool or trick his targets. This is very typical of politicians; they take advantage of the hapless electorate, especially in taking what belongs to them. They may be collecting a particular allocation but giving them a meager portion from such allocation. A senator may be collecting a huge constituency monetary allocation for his constituency but takes an insignificant amount to build cosmetic projects for people. Meanwhile, the people of his constituency would think that he is a good politician, but little will they know that he is far from being such. Also, governors and other political office holders divert the money and other benefits that belong to people to their private purse and use. This is the inference making about Saraki in the *excerpt 4* below.

Excerpt 4

Eyin omo Yooba ti n be nipinle Kwara, o ya e ji giri dide. Ibo yin se koko, ninla lo je ba fe bo lowo arenije. Eya Yooba la mo to tobi ju ni ipinle Kwara

Yoruba descendant in Kwara state, it is time to arise with alacrity. Your vote is important; it means so much if we are to be free from the cheater. We know the Yoruba tribe as largest tribe in Kwara.

In the above *excerpt 4*, there is an instance of actor description and metaphor. An actor, a political actor in this instance, is described as someone that can either be negatively or positively described. But here, Bukola Saraki is described by his traducers as a cheater, who takes undue political advantage of Kwaran people and the only way to emancipate themselves is through their vote. Similarly, the metaphor ‘cheater’ is a direct comparison to Saraki. The expression from this excerpt, that projects these two discursive moves (actor description and metaphor) is ‘Your vote is important; it means so much if we are to be free from the cheater’.

It can be argued that the essence of actor description, in line with van Dijk (2006), is to ultimately inform the electorate about the person of Saraki that are probably not visible. The word ‘cheater’ as used in the excerpt above is a negative reference and representation to his person before the uninformed and unsuspecting electorate. Politicians make use of hate speech in the desperate need to negatively label their opponent (Mwiinga, 2019). This they do, most times, to incite the unsuspecting masses against their opponents. In short, extreme negative representation is what politicians engage in to represent their opponents in the eyes of the masses. If a man is described as worthless or he is so in the real sense of it, nobody will want to associate with him.

Excerpt 5

A se bi Bukola (Saraki) se je gomina tan ni 'pinle Kwara, Jagunlabi tun n gba'wo osu lo ni rebetu ni.

(Not knowing) that even after Bukola (Saraki) stepped down as governor in Kwara state...the scoundrel was still earning salary massively.

In the excerpt above Saraki is negatively represented by using ‘actor description’ to achieve ‘negative other representation’. Saraki is described as a thief, collecting salary that he was not supposed to be collecting having finished his tenure as governor. Describing him with metaphor ‘scoundrel’, he is negatively represented as someone who is worthless and person without honour collecting salary when he was not meant to. The accusation of him collecting salary after he had left office as governor will enable APC to negatively nail him before the masses as a thief, corrupt, morally bankrupt, which will ‘*demarket*’ him before the masses.

Saraki is accused of collecting what is not meant for him thus exposing him as a thief and as someone that cannot be entrusted with power or anyone that is endorsed by him. To expose him of such indecent act of corruption, reference is made to when he was in government and what transpired then, which was hidden to the masses.

Glutton

A glutton is someone that is not content with whatever he has; he is somebody that has insatiable appetite; he is covetous. Within the political context, a glutton is someone who has an insatiable, immoderate appetite for political power. Also, this is evident in how a politician will never be satisfied with holding political positions. As such a person is done serving in one political office; he seeks to jump to another political post even if it is at the expense of overriding and jeopardizing another person's political ambition. This can be supported by popular parlance in politics that politicians do not retire. Saraki is perfectly captioned in *excerpt 8* below as somebody who wields unquenchable thirst for power.

Excerpt 6

Ko I jekan tan lenu, o tun garun lo lee wo mi si nitokanjua tolohun o jare le wa lori. Nibo ni a ti kan awon alainitelorun bi awon eeyan wonyi bi?

He's not done chewing one, he's already straining his neck for more. This describes the glutton who said he wanted to be our leadership. Where did we encounter such insatiable people like these ones?

In the excerpt above, Saraki is described as a glutton. Giving the contextual background of how he became governor in two terms, ditto senator two terms, and how he also strove two terms to wanting to become president, his traducers APC described him as a glutton. The discursive moves that projected this are actor description, metaphor and evidentiality to negatively represent him. In as much that politicians must present evidence for whatever accusation they bring against their opponent, they provide evidence to back their claim, even if such evidence cannot be verified or is not true. To prove their accusation against Saraki as a glutton, they cited different instances where Saraki can be nailed to be a glutton indeed. This is a negative way of ideologically representing him. Ultimately, the excerpt is laden with language of rebellion and resistance as those pieces of evidence are meant to enlighten and awaken the people so that, upon having those words worked on their mind, they will realize that they have been enslaved, denied their rights, taken for a ride, thus, they rebel and resist him.

Excerpt 7

Mesumejamba taraye maa n fi ki awon eeyan ilu IlorinBaraye tiwi gan gan lori; Woobia oselu Saraki gan gan lo tun so won lenuBukola Saraki ti baba won se

*Senator laye gomina Lawal Oya o tun je gomina fun saa meji otooto Otun wa lo je
Senator leeketa E wowa wobia toun tiwa wonbiliki*

The derogatory epithet that people call the Ilorins by. The word is right with what they have called them. Greedy politicking which Saraki engages in has portrayed them in bad light. Bukola Saraki whose father was a Senator during governor Lawal's tenure; and later became governor for two distinct terms; and still went ahead to become Senator the third term. Behold the display of greed and lack of contentment.

Saraki is represented before the electorate as a greedy politician. This description of Saraki was projected using actor description, metaphor and evidentiality. The words 'greed' and 'greedy' are metaphors to describe Saraki as someone who does not have contentment and with no self-control in term of his bid to actualize his political ambition. Also, the words greed and being greedy are negative actor descriptions and representations of Saraki. Very importantly, to substantiate the description and representation of Saraki as a greedy politician, the APC employed discursive move evidentiality. The expressions like 'Bukola Saraki whose father was a Senator during governor Lawal's tenure', 'and later became governor for two distinct terms', 'and still went ahead to become Senator the third term', are pieces of evidence that substantiate the greedy nature of Saraki as a politician. These are done in the bid to emphasize the bad of Saraki. As stressed by Oyeleye and Osisanwo (2013), de-emphasizing the good deeds of others is prevalent in Nigerian political discourses.

Conclusion

The negative representation of PDP (other) by one of the major political parties in Kwara State 2019 general election as motivated and predicated upon the 'O to ge' rhetoric is highly evident in the data examined. The paper also reveals how the APC maximizes one of the slants of discursive strategies ('negative other representation') to negatively represent its opponent, PDP. The negative representations of PDP by APC are 'Reckless Ambitious Person', 'Dirt', 'Looters', 'Cheat' and 'Glutton'. The representation as looters is the prevalent representation, as it is rooted in Nigerian politics where positioning one's opponent as corrupt is a norm. To oust the incumbent political party, the opposition must present them as those looting the wealth that belongs to the people. In Nigeria, this wealth, or resources is referred to as the 'National Cake'. These representations were done so that APC would make their major opponent become less popular ahead of the general elections. In line with earlier studies on political discourse (Omozuwa & Ezejideaku, 2010; Darweesh & Muzhir, 2016; Oyeleye & Osisanwo,

2013; Hamrita, 2016), the findings of this paper reveal that politicians tend to use metaphors, lexicalization, actor description among other strategies to negatively label and mark opponents. A new pathway marked by this paper is that these representations are consciously evoked in discourses and they are used by politicians as persuasive tools to drive desired electoral outcomes.

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