A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF PETER OBI'S SPEECH AT THE PLATFORM NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

On October 1st, 2016, Peter Obi delivered a highly impactful speech entitled "Cutting the Cost of Governance in Nigeria" during a programme called *The Platform Nigeria*, organized by the Covenant Christian Centre. Obi's speech rapidly gained widespread attention on various social media platforms and became the subject of extensive debate and scrutiny by legacy media. This study conducted a discourse-as-text level analysis of the speech, utilizing Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) approach. The analysis focused on identifying and evaluating the rhetorical devices employed by the speaker to persuade and influence his audience regarding the possibility of reducing administrative costs in Nigeria. The findings revealed the presence of five distinct rhetorical devices, including anecdote, hypophora, anaphora, repetition, and allusion. The anecdotes used were entertaining and illustrative and served as persuasive tools, allowing the speaker to bond with his audience. The hypophoras enabled the speaker to transition smoothly through his address while affording opportunities for positive self-presentation. The anaphoras, on the other hand, helped to capture and maintain the audience's attention, creating rhythm and cadence throughout the speech. Finally, the repetition and allusion devices allowed the speaker to emphasize his stance on the possibility of administrative cutbacks and further reinforce solidarity and identity with his audience. In addition, the study highlights the significant contribution of political discourse in shaping political ideology and language as a strategic political tool.

Keywords: Peter Obi, rhetorical devices, The Platform Nigeria, Obidients, Elanhub

Introduction

On 1 October 2016, Peter Obi delivered a speech titled *Cutting the Cost of Governance in Nigeria* at *The Platform Nigeria* – an event organized by the Covenant Christian Centre. Obi's speech went viral on several social media platforms, becoming the subject of much legacy media debate and scrutiny. October 1 is a national holiday to celebrate Nigeria's independence from Britain and typically, the President delivers an Independence Day speech, outlining his vision for the country and/or achievements while in office. The President's address usually is a media event and is discussed and analyzed on media platforms. Although on the said day, President Muhammadu Buhari had in keeping with tradition, delivered an independence broadcast, his speech did not garner as much attention as Obis' did.

At the time Peter Obi was delivering his presentation, he was mainly recognized as a former governor of Anambra State, one of the states in southeastern Nigeria. After the speech, however, Peter Obi emerged as one of the most popular, celebrated, and respected politicians in Nigeria. In what has been described as "a revealing presentation" (Oyemade, 2016, para. 2), Obi, based on his lived experience as a former governor, provided Nigerians with deeper insight into the actual causes of Nigeria's over-bloated administrative expenditure.

According to Iyoha et al., (2015) and echoed by O'Peters (2021), Nigeria's high governance costs are a product of corruption and other unethical governance practices and have persisted because it serves the interest of Nigeria's ruling class and other elites. However, unchecked costs of governance in Nigeria have been a major drain on the nation's limited resources and as such a source of major concern for many Nigerians. Obi's appearance at this event also offered Nigerians an opportunity to listen to a firsthand account of the speaker's accomplishments as well as his uncommon achievements during his tenure as Governor of Anambra State. Nevertheless, it is important to emphasize that this was no ordinary speech but a political one and political speeches are important strategic political communication instruments designed to influence public opinion and behaviour.

Politicians seek to persuade audiences of their views and a political speech is one of the ways they go about achieving this goal. A political speech is a discourse about political activities, ideas, or relations a political actor addresses to an electorate or the public. This type of discourse, therefore, plays a crucial role in garnering public support and legitimizing prescribed policies (Rojo & van Dijk, 1997). Finlayson and Martin (2008) describe a political speech as

> an argument of some kind: an attempt to provide others with reasons for thinking, feeling or acting in some particular way; to motivate them; to invite them to trust one in uncertain conditions; to get them to see situations in a certain light. ... [also] in some measure, adapt to audiences, confirming their expectations and respecting their boundaries, even as it tries to transform them (p, 450).

Political speeches are typically presented orally or in written formats using carefully selected language designed to persuade, influence, and/or control the audience. The deliberateness of language employed in political speeches is borne from the understanding that language can be weaponized for positive self-representation, toppling governments, diminishing the relevance of the opposition, and/or invading territories (Uduma, 2012). Language is, therefore, a tool employed in political speeches for inclusion, that is, identification and solidarity with the audiences and/or othering of outsiders, elements that are critical in the context of politics.

Based on the foregoing, this paper examined the linguistic features employed in Peter Obi's speech with a particular focus on rhetorical devices. Rhetorical devices as detailed in the literature review section, carry out communicative and linguistic functions and are thus, instrumental toa speaker's capacity to successfully persuade and influence an audience. Political actors use different types of rhetorical devices to convey their thoughts, ideologies, and perceptions on issues of political relevance in ways that will enhance their acceptance and relevance in their respective ecosystems.

As earlier mentioned, Peter Obi's speech at *The Platform Nigeria* became the subject of much media debate, facilitating his meteoric rise to fame and acceptance by many Nigerian youths, many of whom are social media users. Thus, when in 2022, Peter Obi resigned from one of Nigeria's most popular

political parties, the People's Democratic Party (PDP) to join a smaller, lesser-known political party – the Labour Party (LP), LP's numbers swelled owing to Obi's popularity. Obi's emergence as LP's presidential flagbearer in the February 2023 elections led to the rise of *Obidients* (Obi's staunch supporters), who are chiefly responsible for LP's relevance and possibly new stature as Nigeria's new national party. Obi has also been projected as Nigeria's next president based on the results of polls by the ANAP Foundation, Nextier, and Bloomberg News (ANAP Foundation, 2022; Clowes, 2022; Yusuf, 2022). It would seem, therefore, that Peter Obi's rhetoric at *The Platform* 2016, which was widely circulated, applauded, and debated especially on social media, may have set the stage for the rise of the *Obidients*. It may also have contributed to the uncommon popularity and organic support he has attracted since his declaration to vie for the position of President of Nigeria.

Review of Related Literature Review and Theoretical Framework
There is a large volume of published studies describing the nexus between language, politics, and society. This body of work has gone on to establish the relevance of language in the context of politics and has defined language as being critical for effective political rhetoric. Sarfo and Krampa (2013) investigated language use in terrorism, a concept that is open to subjective interpretation owing to its various expressions and applications. As Joe (2020) noted, "terrorism means different things to people and the characteristic features of people who get labelled as terrorists differ depending on who is making the judgment" (p. 40). Sarfo and Krampa'spaper on *Language at War* explored President Bush's (JNR) and Obama's framing and coding of terrorism as Negative and antiterrorism as positive in their rhetoric. The Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) of six speeches by the ex-presidents revealed the careful curation and use of words by the addressers that appealed to the emotional sensibilities of the audience.

Koutchade (2017) contributed to understanding the relevance of speech acts by locating the illocutionary acts in President Buhari's address at the 71st UN General Assembly. The study found the dominance of representative or assertive acts at 52.56%, an indication that the speaker was "committed to the truth of the utterances" (p. 227) he produced in the address. The study also showed an absence of declarative acts, meaning the president did not include statements that could result in any change in the current situation. The text, however, included to varying degrees, directive (19.23%), commissive (11.53%), and expressive acts (16.66%), which point to what Buhari wanted members of the UN assembly to do, his attitude and psychological state, and his commitment to embark on some action in the future, respectively.

Nyako (2013) examined language use in selected speeches by two Ghanaian presidential candidates - Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo and John Dramani Mahama during the 2012 general elections using CDA. Nyako detailed that both candidates developed power relations and utilized ideologically driven strategies in persuading the electorate. Some of the persuasive strategies deployed by the candidates include "self-projection, blurred agency, literary devices, intertextuality and speech acts" (p. v).

Zhu and Wang (2020) used Fairclough's three-dimensional discourse model to investigate speeches by Donald Trump of the United State of America and Wan Yi of China during the general debate of the 72nd session of the United Nations Assembly. The researchers noted that at the textual and discursive levels of analysis, Trump and Yi preferred judgement and intertextual resources. Whereas Yi cited Chinese ancient sages, Trump relied on laws, government documents, and other legal texts as intertextual resources. Addy and Ofori (2020) also relied on Fairclough's three-dimensional approach in exploring language use in the context of a campaign speech. Their analysis of Nana Akufo-Addo, a Ghanaian opposition leader's speech during his party's (New Patriotic Party, NPP) manifesto launch revealed Akufo-Addo's use of rhetorical devices like pronouns and repetition to forge a bond and facilitate camaraderie with voters whom he persuaded to endorse his candidature as President.

Sharififa and Rahimi's (2015) paper paralleled the speeches of President Obama and President Rouhani at the UN in 2013. The study sought to understand the art of linguistic spin used in both speeches

using Halliday's systematic functional linguistics. The researchers observed that the Presidents used a combination of material processes, modal verbs, and personal pronouns to inspire the audience to have faith in the abilities of their respective governments to handle both future and present problems that may arise in governance.

Shardama (2016) conducted a CDA of 2015 inaugural speeches of six Nigerian governors - Ibrahim Gaidam (Yobe), Ifeanyi Ugwuanyi (Enugu), Ifeanyi Okowa (Delta), Aminu Waziri Tambuwal (Sokoto), and Abiola Ajimobi (Oyo). The author observed firstly, a macro-level structural similarity across the speeches. Each speech had an opening remark, content, and closing statement. Secondly, the body of the texts contained carefully selected topics and themes designed to stimulate acceptability and engender hope in the new government. The author also highlighted the use of first-person pronouns (*We, I*) for inclusion or othering, and directed at the self or a group.

Whereas a lot of the research in this area focuses on written speeches, which contain larger vocabulary and are more formal, there is a dearth of research on the analysis of unscripted speeches. In addition, while the analysis of the campaign and inaugural speeches as well as internal, external, intra-state, and inter-state communication dominate the literature, little focus has been given to the analysis of political speeches given in not-so-political settings like events organized by nonpoliticians. This study addresses these gaps by looking at the communicative and discursive functions of the rhetorical devices Peter Obi employed in his address at The Platform Nigeria, in 2016.

This research is underpinned by the rhetoric theory - a communication theory that explores how rhetors use language and other persuasive strategies to influence listeners. The theory has its origin in ancient Greece around 600 BC where it was developed as a system for training speakers to effectively share their ideas and effective engage with audiences in public settings (Torto, 2020).The earliest known rhetoric texts were written by the ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle, who identified three primary forms of persuasive appeals: logos (appeals to logic), ethos (appeals to credibility or character), and pathos (appeals to emotions). These three appeals have since become a foundational concept in rhetoric theory. Over time, rhetoric theory has been influenced by various scholars and movements and is often applied to analyse and critique speeches and other forms of public communication. When analysing a politician's speech for instance, researchers examine the use of rhetorical devices, such as metaphors and anaphoras, and repetition to influence audience behaviour and convey emotional appeals.

Method

The CDA is a multi-methodical and multidisciplinary area interested in the discursive manifestation and replication of social injustice, power abuse, and dominance. It is chiefly concerned with discourses that socio-political actors like the political class, big businesses, or the media construct since they have control over and regulate public discourse and as such offer researchers a way of analyzing language use in social settings. Studies in critical discourse explore relationships between discourse (semiosis), that is, "conversational interaction, written text, gestures, facework, typographical layout, images" (van Dijk, 2001, p. 98) and the social institutions that shape it by treating discourse as a type of social activity. CDA provides the theoretical framework for this study because it facilitates linguistics to social analysis, enabling an understanding of the role of language in the construction and distribution of social problems.

Research using the CDA approach can be conducted from various perspectives as propounded and popularized by some of the key researchers in the field. These approaches include discourse-historical, social actors, socio-cognitive, corpus-linguistics, and dialectical-relational. The discourse-historical approach (DHA) is championed by Ruth Wodak and Jacob Reisigl. Using the DHA, researchers can examine the linguistic and discourse strategies employed in written or spoken texts, as well as carry out in-

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depth analyses of the historical dimensions of the issues investigated (Reisigl &Wodak, 2001). This explains its applicability in research on issues relating to antisemitism, racism, and sexism. Closely linked to the DHA, is Van Leeuwen's Social Actors CDA approach. Here, researchers are primarily interested in how social actors such as immigrants, families, and religious and cultural groups are represented in texts.

Teun van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach (SCA) advances the absence of a linear relationship between semiotic and social structures and argues instead, that discourses operate via a cognitive interface - "the mental representations of language users as individuals and as social members" (Van Dijk 2015, p. 64). It, therefore, facilitates the understanding of discourse within its social context (Lim &Cheatam, 2021, p. 307). Despite being socially conditioned and having an impact on societal functioning, discourse is formed and understood because of individuals' fundamental cognitive processes, as well as their personal and socially shared knowledge (van Dijk, 2014).

Corpus-Linguistics (CL) is an empirical-based method of linguistics analysis, which relies on corpora as its primary data source to locate "probabilities, trends, patterns, co-occurrences of elements, features or groupings of features" (Teubert& Krishnamurthy, 2007, p. 6). Unlike the other CDA approaches, CL is rooted in the quantitative research tradition, thus allowing for the use of random samples, analysis of large bodies of texts, comparing linguistic features with language norms in a dataset in a bid to make generalizations about archetypal language use (Stubbs, 1997). Blending CL with CDA addresses to some degree concerns that CDA lacks rigour, is not generalizable, and reproduces researchers' prejudices (Widdowson, 1996, 2000; Orpin, 2002, p. 38).

Norman Fairclough's dialectical-relational approach (henceforth DRA) is one of the most widely adopted perspectives for conducting CDA-based research. The DRA to CDA enables researchers jointly analyze the linguistic and social dimensions of texts based on the understanding that language is a form of social practice. To this end, Fairclough's three-dimensional approach made up of text, discourse (process), and social analysis, is designed to address three interlinked dimensions of discourse – the object of the analysis (speech, images, gestures), the process via which the object of analysis is produced, consumed, or distributed by people (writing, speaking, viewing), and the socio-political and historical context that define these processes. Each dimension according to Fairclough calls for a unique type of analysis. Whereas the textual level requires description, the other two levels of analysis demand interpretation and explanation, respectively (Fairclough1995; 1998). The DRA is adopted for this study because it allows for several points of entry into the analysis. As Janks (1997) stated:

> It does not matter which kind of analysis one begins with, as long as in the end they are all included and are shown to be mutually explanatory. It is in the interconnections that the analyst finds the interesting patterns and disjunctions that need to be described, interpreted, and explained (p. 329).

Following the DRA, we conducted a discourse-as-text-based analysis of Peter Obi's speech at *The Platform* 2016. In doing this, we examined primarily, the linguistic features of the speech while unearthing the discursive and social practices of the texts. As Addy & Ofori stated, while "critically analyzing a text, it is imperative for analysts to explore the hidden agenda from the linguistic features used in the text" (p. 1281). The study paid particular focus on the rhetorical devices employed by the speaker in addressing his audience. This is based on the understanding that rhetorical devices carry out both communicative/linguistic and discoursal functions.

According to Taping et al. (2017), rhetorical devices such as analogy, hypophora, anecdote, anaphora, metaphor, and repetition are speech strategies or techniques employed by political actors to achieve their objective of garnering support, evoking emotional reactions, or attracting the attention of an audience (p. 225).For instance, repetition entails the restatement of words or phrases in a text and serves the purpose of drawing attention to an idea (Addy & Ofori, 2020, p. 1282) while an analogy "draws a parallel between two unlike things that have several common qualities of points of resemblance" (Chang, 2012, p. 2587)and is used to persuade, explain or for the exposition of an issue.

Data Collection
        The speech analyzed in this study was collected from www.elanhub.net an online media platform that regularly publishes political news stories. We compared the published speech by listening to and transcribing the YouTube version and observed an exact match. The website's version was adopted because it had been arranged in numbered paragraphs, thus facilitating our analysis. In total, the text comprised a corpus of 163 paragraphs (6,521 words) (Elanhub, 2023).

Analysis and Discussion

Relying on Fairclough's approach to CDA and with a focus on discourse-as-text, our analysis of Obi's address revealed the presence of five dominant rhetorical devices. These include **Anecdote** (Paragraph hereinafter P, 24-29, P30-33, P34-35, P37-39, P41-48, P51-52, P54-P64, P65, P69-71, P73-74, P94-100, P109, P125-127, P130-131, P137-142, P146-148, P151-152); **Hypophora** (P13, P29, P50, P67, P70, P83, P97, P104, P117, P120, and P133); **Anaphora** (P16, P17, P19, P21); **Repetition** (P6, P7, and P8) and **Allusion**(P5, P127, and P141). These devices jointly enabled Peter Obi to clarify his argument on the possibility of reducing governance costs in Nigeria and in addition, boost his positive self-representation and negative-other characterization.

Anecdotes
The most frequently applied rhetorical device in Peter Obi's address is anecdotes. Anecdotes are short, compelling stories detailing past events or people that a speaker deems relevant in a given context or conversation. Speakers typically employ anecdotes to provide an example of an event, issue, or subject, thereby humanizing or personalizing abstract ideas or concepts. Speakers incorporate anecdotes in a speech to make it more conversational and relatable.

        In P24-29, Obi narrated the story of how he reduced his Abuja travelling entourage from 30 to one person, just him. According to him, the other 29 persons had no real cause for embarking on trips to Abuja for state meetings to which he was the only one invited. In his words:

> So, after about the third or fourth trip, I sat down and said, I want you to write down the names
> of everybody for me and tell me why and what is the purpose of this person going to Abuja,
> And what did they do? What happened? What did they do? When they finished, I found out
> that the only person that needs to go to Abuja is me, so I said to them, leave it, because some
> of you must have heard, "Peter Obi travels alone" (Elanhub, 2023, paras. 28-29)

Obi also gave accounts regarding his cutbacks on unnecessary security costs (P30-33), exaggerated budget estimates for state house renovation and furniture purchase (P41-48), a state visit by the president (P54-64), courtesy calls by the clergy and businessmen (P65), and entertainment (P137-142). In addition, he shared

with the audience personal life stories on his relationship with his wife and children (P72-74; 129-131) and detailed how he repurposed saved funds (P85-90) and made investments in startups (P94-100), and the future generation via education (P82).

Taken together, the anecdotes in Obi's speech illustrated his argument on the possibility of drastically reducing the cost of governance in a more memorable and convincing way than just expressing facts. The stories, which included some personal life details, were entertaining and emotion-triggering thereby facilitating bonding between Obi and the audience. This made this speaker more relatable and, therefore, believable. Obi's account of his stewardship while in service, set him apart as prudent, resourceful, and forward-thinking unlike the government at the time, which was incurring debt, unable to fund its budget, and, therefore, reckless. Obi's strategic positive self-representation and negative-other depiction via this address, which was recirculated across different media platforms, was a boost to his political profile.

Hypophora

The second most visible rhetorical device in Obi's speech was hypophora also known as anthypophora. A hypophora is a rhetorical device in which a speaker poses a question and then, answers it. According to Fahnestock (2011), hypophoras are "useful for managing issue construction and flow of support in arguments and for arranging subtopics in expository texts" (p. 299).

For instance, Obi had in his speech argued that he could save a trillion naira of the government's N5.4 trillion expenditure for states. He then proceeded to ask: "…and people will say to me, how are you going to save it? How?" (Elanhub, 2023, para.13). In P29, Obi launched another set of hypophoras when he asked: "And what did they do? What happened? What did they do?" (Elanhub, 2023, para. 29) and in P67, he said: "…and what did we discover when we did poverty mapping?" (Elanhub, 2023, para. 67),

These hypophoras played important roles in the speech. First, they facilitated his flow of thought and presentation of argument. Obi visualized these questions as being in the minds of the audience. He imagined for example, that the audience may have thought it impossible to save that amount of money given that the government was in debt and looking to borrow to cover the budget deficit. By asking the question in P13, he was able to assuage their supposed curiosity and at the same time, unpack sequentially, how saving was possible. Second, the questions helped distinguish him as different from other members of the political/leadership class, presenting him as someone who relies on facts and is responsive to the needs of the people, features which are rare in Nigerian politics.

Therefore, the hypophoras employed in Obi's speech strengthened his argument and flow of thought, contributing to his overall objective of positive self-evaluation as sagacious. a panacea to one of Nigeria's complex problems, and the new touchstone of leadership in Nigeria. The other, in this case, the Nigerian government and ruling class, are characterized as corrupt and irresponsible.

Anaphora

We also located anaphoras in our analysis. Anaphoras are a type of strategic repetition where an expression is duplicated at the start of successive lines, clauses, or sentences. We observed two sets of anaphoras in Obi's speech. The first occurred in P16-17, and the second in P19-21. The speaker in both instances repeated the conditional clause – *if you decide* at the beginning of sentences. These anaphoras strategically drew the

attention of the audience rhythmically, to Obi's illustration of how Nigeria could save and check excessive wastage of public funds. It would also seem that by using the second person pronoun, *you,* and not the third person pronoun, *they*, he was drawing the attention of the audience to their role in what has become a menace in Nigeria. By holding them accountable in this way, he was reminding them of their larger societal function of holding their leaders accountable in order words, in the next elections, vote them out! This is evidenced in P132 where he declared: "Take back your country! This country belongs to you! It is your future that they are toying with. You must take it back from them. It is not their country and you must take it back from them" (Elanhub, 2023, para. 132). By using anaphoras, Obi was able to link his ideas together, creating a sense of cohesion, coherence, and cadence.

Repetition

Repetition is another rhetorical device Obi employed in his 2016 *The Platform Nigeria* speech. Repetition involves doubling or duplicating a word, phrase, or sentence. Whereas anaphoras refer to the duplication of a word or phrase at the start of successive clauses or phrases, repetitions apply to doubling any element of language. For instance, in P7 and P8, Obi said: "There is nothing wrong with borrowing, but the question is, what are you borrowing for?"In repeating this question, Obi meant to emphasize his stance on the issue of taking loans and persuade his audience of the need to be resourceful with borrowed money. Obi also wanted the audience to remember his line of thought, especially for future reference.

Allusion

The last type of rhetorical tool in Obi's speech is allusion - a direct or indirect reference to something thought to be common knowledge. In P5, P127, and P141, Obi used the expression, *you know* to refer to information that he presumed the audience was already aware of including Nigeria's revenue projections (P5), corruption (P127), and his state of origin (P147). In doing this, Obi displayed solidarity and identity with the audience, elevating their relevance, and depicted himself as not condescending.

Summary and Conclusion

On 1 October 2016, Peter Obi was asked to speak at *The Platform Nigeria* on the topic, *Cutting the Cost of Governance in Nigeria*. Although the speaker set out to make an analogy between subnational governance and governance at the federal level, on closer examination, Obi's speech was more of an account of his stewardship as Governor of Anambra State. However, by drawing on his phenomenology as governor and detailing how he reduced expenditure and repurposed saved funds, he was able to provide deeper insight into some of the causes of high administrative costs in Nigeria. He cited for example costs linked to running the Office of the Governor and First Lady, faulty procurement procedures, security (purchase of bulletproof vehicles, jeeps, dispatch riders, and Police escorts), and travel as some items that contribute to the waste of public funds. Exaggerated governance costs as earlier mentioned serve the interest of a few but are a drain on Nigeria's depleting resources and have, therefore, been a major pain point (Iyoha et al., 2015).

Our analysis revealed the presence of 17 instances of anecdotes, 11 hypophoras, four anaphoras, and three repetitions and allusions respectively. Together, these rhetorical devices helped Obi elucidate his points on a critical problem. The anecdotes were entertaining, illustrative, persuasive, and facilitated bonding. Whereas the hypophoras enabled the speaker to segue more easily through his address, affording opportunities for him to positively self-project, the anaphoras arrested the attention of the audience,

establishing rhythm and a cadence through the presentation. The repetition and allusion enabled the speaker to emphasise his stance on the possibility of administrative cutbacks and show solidarity and identity with the audience.

Politicians speak to persuade and influence audiences with their views and in some instances, they reach this goal. Obi's 2016 *The Platform Nigeria* speech is a good example of a speech that reached this goal judging by the reaction the address sparked across the media space and more importantly, the level of support the presidential aspirant has garnered in recent months. This is especially considering much of Obi's rhetoric in the periods leading to the election and during the campaign season, has centred on the same arguments, particularly on the need to reduce governance costs and put borrowed funds to more sustainable use.

This research contributes to the literature by providing additional empirical evidence on the critical role of language in political discourse. It also adds to understanding the possible long-term effect of political speeches.

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