

POLITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF RHETORIC IN HATE SPEECHES IN NIGERIA

BY

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Abstract

Hate speech is a prevalent phenomenon in Nigerian politics. As an aspect of political discourses, political actors engage in hateful discourses in order to showcase political and cultural sanctity. This paper examines rhetoric in hate speeches in Nigeria through the analytical lens of Van Dijk's political discourse analysis. Data for the study were obtained from Nigerian online media and Twitter. The study reveals that hate speeches in Nigeria follow the repetition, addition, deletion and substitution rhetorical components of Van Dijk's political discourse analysis. From the analysis, it was revealed that certain words were repeated as a means of emphasising out-group's negative deeds as seen in Hate Speech 5 (HS5) and HS8. As a means of de-emphasising the in-group's bad deeds, certain words were deleted for partisan reasons (HS4, HS13) whereas metaphors (HS3, HS5, HS6, HS10, HS11) with negative semantic imports serve as substitutes when describing the out-group. The study concludes that by over-emphasising the deficiencies of out-group members through the rhetorical device of repetition, ethnic tensions are entrenched and the hope of peaceful co-existence vanishes into thin air.

Keywords: Political discourse analysis, rhetoric, hate speeches, Nigeria

1. Introduction

Language performs different functions for different groups or individuals in different contexts. It can be likened to a two-edged sword, which can make a society to be tranquil and free from terror, abuse, or war. On the other hand,

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it can serve the purpose of stimulating war, chaos, anarchy and protest. Due to the power and functions of language, it is used in all human endeavours. It can appear in form of text, talk or gestures. For Anagbogu, Mbah and Eme (2010), language is a medium through which humans share their ideas, feelings, emotions and desires in form of complex vocal or written symbols.

Language is employed in virtually every aspect of human enterprise. One of such areas where language is employed is politics. Man as a political animal uses speech or language to indicate what is just and unjust (Aristotle, 1932; Fairclough and Fairclough, 2012) and by so doing, forms a political society (Appadorai, 1975). In essence, one of the things that make man a political animal is the ability to discern what is good and evil. In an attempt to hold on to this philosophy, politics was created and leaders who will ensure that there is a just world were appointed or elected. Their decrees and proclamations were then communicated through 'speech' (language). Gee (1999) concurs that politics and language are intertwined. He further remarks that an interest in politics demands that one should undertake empirical details of language and interaction.

However, language has been used in different ways by politicians and public office holders. One prominent way in which Nigerian politicians utilise language is to incite violence. The form of language, which they employ, is hate speech. Hate speech has been prevalent in Nigeria since Independence. Osaghae and Suberu (2005) observe that the principal factor that led to the Nigerian-Biafran war of 1967-1970 can be traced to hate speech between Igbo and Hausa/Fulani traders in Northern Nigeria. This war took the lives of over three million Igbo people (Madiebo, 1980). Ironically, Nigeria failed to learn from this disaster. In the present dispensation, hate speech is the order of the day as it manifests between the ruling party and the opposition party as well as among ethnic groups.

Hate speech has been investigated by some researchers. Okafor and Olanrewaju (2017) conceive hate speech as a sum total of all negative discourse, which incites violence against individuals or group of persons because of their race, gender, age, ethnicity, nationality, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, language ability, moral or political views. International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) (2018) avers that electoral violence is sparked by hate speech with elected officials, political parties, candidates, other opinion makers, and members of the civil society as perpetrators.

It has been observed that hate speeches in Nigeria are embedded with rhetoric, which entrenches political and ethnic disunity. Rhetoric is a form of persuasive discourse, which has the potential of stimulating an action in humans. The objective of this work is to examine rhetoric in hate speeches in Nigeria through the lens of van Dijk's (1997) political discourse analytical model. In this research paper, a total of sixteen (16) hate speeches obtained from Nigerian online newspapers and Twitter serve as the data for analysis.

2. Rhetoric in political discourse analysis

In discussing Political Discourse Analysis (henceforth PDA), three major scholars have contributed to PDA in terms of theory and method. These scholars are: Van Dijk (1997), Chilton (2004), and Fairclough and Fairclough (2012). Van Dijk (1997) gives an adequate explanation on the theory and application of PDA. According to him, PDA is about political discourse as well as a critical enterprise. It is a critical enterprise because it is an offshoot of CDA. For van Dijk (1997), political discourse simply means 'doing politics.' He notes that not all discourses that mention 'politics' is qualified to be called political discourse. He identifies certain factors that determine if a discourse is actually a political discourse. These factors include; *actors* or *authors*, viz., *politicians*; *activities* or *practices*; and *context*. Aside politicians who are both the actors and authors of political discourses, "...we therefore should also include the various recipients in political communicative events, such as the public, the people, citizens, the 'masses', and other groups or categories (van Dijk, 1997:13).

However, it is not all the actions performed by politicians and other participants that can fit in as political discourse. Thus, van Dijk (1997) contends that it is not enough to conclude that a discourse is political because a politician partakes in it; rather, the *activities* and *practices* of the participants constitute factors that will determine if a discourse is political or not. Political discourses must have political *implications* and *functions*. van Dijk (1997) highlights that political activities or practices of participants could be participating in political actions, such as governing, ruling, legislating, protesting, dissenting, or voting.

Van Dijk (1997) identified different structures of political discourses. These discourse structures include: topics, superstructures or 'textual schemata', local semantics, lexicon, syntax, expression structures, rhetoric, speech acts and interaction. Rhetoric, which is a focal point in this paper, is

used in political discourse analysis as a garrulous, persuasive and deceitful form of language, which is significant in political communicative events. According to Van Dijk (1997), the use of rhetoric in political discourses takes the structures of positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation we have found in the ideological square. He further contends that rhetoric in PDA manifests in the form of repetition of sounds, sentence forms and meaning, additions, deletion, substitution in the form of irony, metonymy and metaphor. As it concerns hate speeches, the shortcomings of the out-group are repeated whereas those of the in-group are deleted. Non-factual information is added when speaking hateful of out-group members. In terms of substitution, the actions of the out-group are metaphorically presented with negative meanings whereas the actions of the in-group have positive metaphorical meanings. It is based on the structures of repetition, addition, deletion and substitution that this study will approach rhetoric in hate speeches.

3. Conceptualising hate speeches

Generally, hate speech is seen as any form of language, mostly in the form of text and talk that is defaming, abusive and provoking, which is directed to an individual or group of people due to differences in race, sex, gender, religion etc. The aftermath of hate speeches could be violence, insecurity and hatred.

The European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) (2017) conceives hate speech as every means of expression, which expands, stimulates, propagates, or justifies racial hatred, xenophobia, anti-Semitism or other forms of hatred based on intolerance expressed by aggressive nationalism and ethnocentrism, discrimination, and hostility towards minorities, migrants, and people of immigrant origin. From this definition, it could be seen that hate speech is often uttered by a 'highly placed group' to 'a lowly placed group or individuals.'

For Tsesis (2002:211), hate speech is an "...antisocial oratory that is intended to incite persecution against people because of their race, color, religion, ethnic group, or nationality, and has a substantial likelihood of causing . . . harm." Jidefor (2012) remarks that hate speech is a terminology for speech aimed at degrading a person or group of people based on their race, gender, age, ethnicity, nationality, religion, sexual orientation, language ability, ideology, social class, occupation, appearance, mental capacity, and any other distinction that might be considered by some as a

liability. According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (2015), hate speech can be conveyed through text, images or sound for the purposes of dehumanising and diminishing of members of a group to which the hate speeches are addressed.

Lillian (2007) argues that the inclusion of women as victims of hate speeches have not received proper attention. The reason behind this, according to her, is the overlap between linguistic/discourse analysis of prejudiced discourse and legal discussion of hate speech which may discourage researchers from using the term hate speech, even while they treat discourse that encourages and prolongs existing unjust power engagements. Hence, she advocates the inclusion of women as victims of hate speeches. Lillian (2007:720) opines that the term 'sexism' which is an ideology which sees women as inferior in the social hierarchy because of their femaleness is "...an integral component of neoconservative thinking, and one way that such sexism is produced and reproduced is through language." She criticises Gairdner (1994) for regarding feminism as a cancer which characterizes this age. She tags Gairdner's comments like 'man-hating, politically motivated feminists, virulent, cultish, man-hating, tradition-hating, and family-hating program' as examples of hate speech against women. From an electoral perspective, the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) (2018) concurs with Lillian (2007) that the hate directed at women during election is hate speech. IFES further remarks that the purveyors of hate speech during electioneering period are elected officials, political parties, party candidates, other opinion makers, the media and the masses. The reason for the use of hate speech in election, according to Denton (2000), is that campaigns provide fecund ground for hate speeches and incitement to hatred.

Scheffler (2015) opines that words are poisonous and they are catalyst of wars. In some countries like Nigeria, hate speeches are seen as acts of terrorism although no law has been signed in that regard. Koestler (1978) as cited by Richter (2010:1) avers, "Wars are not fought for territory, but for words. Man's deadliest weapon is language. He is susceptible to being hypnotized by slogans as he is to infectious diseases. And where there is an epidemic, the group mind takes over." Levin (2010) enunciates that harming people through words and actions retards the development of the country. For this study, hate speeches are implicit or explicit defamatory words directed to individuals through face to face or electronic-mediated

discourses, which incite violence between people from different social background.

4. Rhetoric in hate speeches in Nigeria

Rhetoric has political significance in political discourses because of its persuasive functions. In PDA, rhetoric is analysed based on four key elements: repetition, addition, deletion, and substitution. These elements are explored hereunder. The seventeen hate speeches used in this work have been numbered in the appendix from one to seventeen. For ease of reference, the abbreviation Hate Speech (HS) is employed in the analysis where HS1 refers to 'hate speech one' and HS7 makes reference to the number seven hate speech in the appendix.

4.1 Repetition

Repetition may occur at the level of sounds (alliteration and rhymes), sentence forms (parallelisms) and meaning (semantic repetition) as one of the major strategies of drawing attention to preferred meanings. In HS8, there is an example of sentence form repetition where Nnamdi Kanu repeated "He cannot jail me" twice. In the same speech, the meaning of describing Buhari as a mad man was repetitive as can be seen hereunder:

They are killing my people in public, after killing my people they want to try me in private? *That person is mad.* I won't allow it. Tell Buhari that's what I said; *that he is mad.* He cannot jail me. He cannot jail me. *He is a mad man.*

The italicised words show semantic repetition of 'madness.' On the other hand, in HS5, there is a semantic repetition of the parasitic nature of herdsmen described by Femi Fani-Kayode. These repetitions appeared in the italicised words in the excerpt below:

These herdsmen have become the *pests* of our nation. They are like the East African tse-tse fly; wherever they go they *suck the life blood out* of their hosts and like the locust, they *destroy everything in their path*. They are leeches: they indulge in a *parasitic mode of nutrition* and they *suck the blood* of the carcass until their victim is *left for dead*.

'Suck the blood out of their hosts' denotes that the herdsmen only collect without giving anything useful instead they "destroy everything in their path" until everything they come in contact with is "left for dead."

4.2 Addition

Addition is often used to elaborate one's own group beneficial actions, on the one hand, and horror stories about their enemies on the other hand. Sometimes, these additions are irrelevant. In HS₃, after describing those who counter the election of Uche Nwosu as the APC flag bearer for the gubernatorial election as "food-is-ready politicians," Onwumedo went further to add:

Otherwise, why won't they look for a virgin Party and file behind one of them as candidate and let us see how far they can go.

The added information gives a clearer view that the "food-is-ready politicians" are minorities in APC and if they need a party where their voices will be heard, they should form a new party or register with a newly formed political party.

The statement "That is how God has created him" in HS₄ is an added information to support the claim that the herdsman values the life of the cow more than his own life. The Buhari Media Support Group gave negative stories about Fayose in HS₅ when they described him as a "serial liar and born agent of confusion." More so, in HS₁₃, Oba Akiolu added a reason Igbo people and other ethnic groups in Lagos must vote Ambode whom he has chosen. He said:

When they were coming to the state, they didn't come with all their houses. But now they have properties in the state.

This statement suggests that non-indigenes in a state do not have the freedom to choose and that the Oba is not comfortable with the progress and exploits of other ethnic groups in Lagos. Another instance where addition is used to elaborate in details the horror stories of the out-group is in HS₁₅, where Dame Patience Jonathan referred to Buhari as one whose brain has died completely. In HS₁₁ also, the phrase, "Because he whom God favours" was added to lay emphasis to the claim that God is with Musiliu Obanikoro.

4.3 Deletion

Deletion occurs where information that is expected in a given context is deleted for similar partisan reasons. Deletion in PDA is similar to Gricean maxim of quantity where a speaker does not give information as required. In HS₁, Omokri gave information about the present state of APC as they did not remove Oshiomole but failed to include the state of PDP before they removed Sheriff. In HS₂, as Buhari charges the Army to be ruthless as humanly possible to bandits, kidnappers, and criminals, he deleted the herdsmen who actually go about killing people. In HS₆, Timi Frank did not give the reasons he is being probed because he is defending his personality. Oba Akiolu in HS₁₃ did not give information on ethnic groups that fall under "others" as highlighted in his statement. This denotes that his statement was primarily referring to Igbo people. Other ethnic groups are secondary. Lastly, in HS₁₀, the phrase "the dog and the baboon" is vague and it is a technique used to hide the real identities of the people being referred.

4.4 Substitution

In PDA, substitution refers to the act of using or expressing a concept differently in a particular context as in the case of irony, metonymy and metaphor. In the hate speeches used in this research, metaphors with positive attributes were used to characterize the in-group whereas metaphors with negative attributes were used to characterize the out-group. The table below shows metaphorical expressions embedded in the hate speeches and their possible implications.

Table 1: Metaphorical expressions embedded in hate speeches

S/N	Domain/ Source	Metaphors (in-group)	Interpretation	Metaphors (out-group)	Interpretation
1.	HS ₃			Food-is-ready politicians	Those who come to enjoy the efforts of others
2.	HS ₅ & HS ₆			Zoo	Nigeria
3.	HS ₆			Kangaroo committee	A committee that ignores recognized standards of law or justice

4.	HS10			Kitchen, living room, and other room	Cook, a being to be admired, and a sexual partner
5.	HS11	97%	States that recorded the highest votes for Buhari	5%	States that recorded the lowest votes for Buhari
6.	HS14			Cockroaches	Negligible and worthless (referring to political opponents)
7.	HS10	Baboon	Congress for Progressive Change (CPC)	Dog	People's Democratic Party (PDP), the opposition
8.	HS11			Witches and Wizards with broomsticks	Action Congress of Nigeria members who carry broomsticks during campaigns because broomsticks are their party logo.

From the table above, it can be seen that metaphors with negative connotation were mainly used by members of an in-group to refer to members of an out-group.

From the foregoing, we have done an analysis of the discourse structures of politically-based hate speeches in Nigeria. By adopting PDA as a framework, it has been understood that PDA is not just interested in context of speech alone; rather, it also looks at the micro-linguistic elements embedded in such speeches. It then holds that in political discourses, linguistic competence is as important as communicative competence. More so, political actors make use of sounds, words, syntactic units and meaning to achieve their political aims and objectives.

5. Conclusion

Under rhetoric as a discourse structure, the findings revealed that words and meanings are repeated (HS5, HS8) and added for emphasis, deleted for partisan reasons (HS4, HS13) whereas metaphors (HS3, HS5, HS6, HS10, HS11) with negative semantic imports are used to describe the out-group. Based on the analysis, it can be concluded that hate speeches in Nigerian political context exhibit, to a great extent, the discourse structures highlighted under PDA. In the Nigerian political arena, members of the in-group use negative terms to describe the members of the out-group as well as de-emphasising 'our' bad deeds and emphasising 'their' bad deeds.

The rhetorical use of language for hate speeches in Nigeria stimulates the feeling of hatred in individuals who share the same cultural or political background with the hate speaker. By over-emphasising the deficiencies of out-group members through the rhetorical device of repetition, ethnic tensions are entrenched and the hope of peaceful co-existence vanishes into thin air.

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Appendix

1. "Adams Oshiomole is to @OfficialAPCNg, what Modu Sheriff was to @OfficialPDPNig. The only difference is that PDP had enough time before the election to eject Modu Sheriff, while the APC has no such luxury. Alas, today APC now resembles Oshiomole's physical appearance" – Reno Omokri on his Twitter handle (October 22, 2018).
2. "Nigerians are looking up to you [the Army] and us to secure the country. What is happening in the areas of operations are disgraceful. I'm very pleased with the way officers and men are firmly putting it down and I want you to be as ruthless as humanly possible. Nigerians

deserve some peace." Buhari in reaction to operations Sharan Daji and Diran Mikiya against bandits, criminals in Zamfara and neighbouring states (August 25, 2018).

Source: <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/new/top-news/281336/>

3. "Their target is to destroy APC but they must be resisted by owners of the Party of the state. They are food-is-ready politicians. Otherwise, why won't they look for a virgin Party and file behind one of them as candidate and let us see how far they can go." - Sam Onwumedo, Chief Press Secretary to the Governor of Imo State, Rochas Okorocha in reaction to those who criticised the Governor during the APC ward congress (May 12, 2018).

Source: <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2018/05/988400/>

4. "Yes, the herdsman values even the life of the cow more than his own life. That is how God has created him." – Aishatu Dukku; January 27, 2018.

Source: punchng.com/benue-killings-knocks-over-lawmakers-comparison-of-cow-with-human-life/

5. "I'm a Biafran and we are going to crumble the zoo. Some idiots who are not educated said that they'll arrest me, and I ask them to come. I am in Biafra land. If any of them leaves Biafra land alive know that this is not IPOB. Tell them that's what I said." – Nnamdi Kanu; August 27, 2017.

Source: saharareporters.com/2017/08/27/nnamdi-kanu-anyone-who-tries-arrest-me-biafraland-will-die-thecable/

6. "No Igbo man should attend any Church where the pastor is a Yoruba man, they are criminals and fools." – Nnamdi Kanu; September 29, 2017.

Source: dailypost/2017/09/29/biafra-nnamdi-kanu-terrorist-asked-ipob-members-kill-yorubas-group/

7. "The comments of Fayose did not come as a surprise because of his penchant for exhibiting the characteristics of a serial liar and born agent of confusion over the years who thrives in hate speeches and campaigns of calumny." – Buhari Media Support Group on Fayose's statement that Buhari has been on life support in the last 20 days, on June 29, 2017.

Source: dailypost.ng/2017/06/29/buhari-fayose-serial-liar-enjoys-hate-speeches-bmsg/

8. "They are killing my people in public, after killing my people they want to try me in private? That person is mad. I won't allow it. Tell Buhari that's what I said; that he is mad. He cannot jail me. He cannot jail me. He is a mad man." – Nnamdi Kanu on December 14, 2016.
Source: opera.pulse.ng/news/local/nnamdi-kanu-tell-buhari-he-is-mad-ipob-leader-says-video-id5894478.html/
9. "I will do everything possible to defend my position as acting publicity secretary of this party. I won't appear before APC probe panel, it is a Kangaroo committee." – Timi Frank on October 28, 2016.
Source: <http://www.dialytrust.com.ng/news/politics/i-won-t-appear-before-apc-probe-panel-frank/169052.html>
10. "I don't know which party my wife belongs to, but she belongs to my kitchen and my living room and the other room." – President Muhammadu Buhari on October 14, 2016.
Source: punchng.com/wife-belongs-kitchen-buhari/
11. "I hope you have a copy of the election results. The constituents, for example, who gave me 97% [of the vote] cannot, in all honesty, be treated on some issues with constituencies that gave me 5%" – President Muhammadu Buhari on July 23, 2015.
Source: punchng.com/buharis-presidential-salvos-from-foreign-lands/
12. "These herdsmen have become the pests of our nation. They are like the East African tse-tse fly; wherever they go they suck the life blood out of their hosts and like the locust, they destroy everything in their path. They are leeches: they indulge in a parasitic mode of nutrition and they suck the blood of the carcass until their victim is left for dead." – Femi Fani-Kayode on September 29, 2015.
Source: vanguardngr.com/2015/09/the-herdsmen-from-hell-by-femi-kayode/
13. "On Saturday, if anyone, I swear in the name of God, goes against my wish that Ambode will be next Governor of Lagos state, the person is going to die inside this water... For the Igbos and others in Lagos, they should go where the Oba of Lagos heads to. When they were coming to the state, they didn't come with all their houses. But now they have properties in the state. So they must do my bidding." – Oba Rilwan Akiolu of Lagos on April 3, 2015.
Source: www.premiumtimesng.com/news/180657-oba-of-lagos-rilwan-akiolu-relunctant-to-clarify-anti-igbo-comments.html/

14. "They are cockroaches, crush and kill anyone on your way." – Kastina State Governor, Shema on February 2, 2015.
Source: www.premiumtimes.com
15. "Wetin him dey find? Him dey drag with him pikin mate. Old man wey no get brain, him brain don die pata pata." – Dame Patience Jonathan on February 24, 2015.
Source: www.vanguardngr.com/2015/03/now-buharis-brain-is-bracing-up/
16. "If what happened in 2011 (alleged rigging) should happen again in 2015, by the grace of God, the dog and the baboon would be soaked in blood." – Muhammadu Buhari on May 14, 2012.
Source: www.vanguardngr.com/2012/05/2015-ll-be-bloody-if-buhari/
17. "...Next Step. To become the popularly elected Governor of Lagos state in 2007, by the grace of God and the will of the people. Because he whom God favours, no amount of witches and wizards with broomsticks can prevent against! Musiliu Obanikoro For Lagos state Governor 2007" – Senator Afikuyomi (Punch, Friday March 16, 2007: 36) (Culled from Omuzuwa & Ezejideaku, 2008).