LINGUISTIC- STYLISTIC INVESTIGATION OF HATE SPEECH IN THE 2015 NIGERIAN GENERAL ELECTIONS

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Abstract
Language is a potent human resource which can be deployed for various ends. This study examines its exploitation, as a tool for propagating hate, in the Nigerian 2015 general elections. To achieve this aim, Leech and Short's (2000) framework served as the theoretical base to analyze ten text-extracts of speeches of political actors drawn from seven (7) news sources that contain elements of abuse, denigrating and insulting remarks targeted at political opponents between 2014 and 2015. The corpora were drawn from print media sources (*Premium Times Nigeria News*: November 19, 2014 & 22 Dec., 2014; *Daily Sun,* January 19, 2015; *The Guardian*, 20 June, 2014; *The Nation*, 29 October, 2015; *Vanguard News* of 14th June, 2015; *Express News; Sahara Reporters News,* 24th July, 2014). The study found that the vocabularies of hate as used in Nigerian political discourse are simple everyday words. There is low or near absence of technical vocabularies. The main lexical items of hate speeches in Nigerian political discourse include nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs. These help the politicians to communicate hate succinctly and aptly. It recommends, among others, that the Federal Ministry of Information and Culture should regulate hate speech based on a well-articulated and mutually agreed road map.
Keywords: Language, Hate speech, Political discourse, Political opponents, Print media

Introduction
        Election all over the world involves acute competition. Often, people describe it as a war. Nigerian politicians do not regard it with any less seriousness. This is so because they muster and manipulate every available resource within their control to prosecute what has seemingly become a war. Amongst these veritable tools employed by political actors is language.

According to Leech and Short (1985), language is 'a vehicle of communication where one person conveys messages to another for a range of purposes, e.g informing, ordering, persuading, reassuring etc.' Also, Waba (2015) submits that language is 'a device or tool that can be used by human beings for their negotiation, construction and information transmission'.

The important role which language plays in politics has been confirmed by ancient philosophers such as Aristotle and Plato (Chilton and Schaffner, 2002), communication scholars (Shappiro, 1988; Gorsevki 2004) cognitive linguists (Chilton and Lakoff, 2004) and discourse analysts (Fairclough, 1989; Musolf 1991). Underscoring the solid relationship between politics and language, Michira (2014) posits that 'politics is essentially concerned with power and authority: how to obtain and appropriate it, how to make decisions and control resources within a jurisdiction, how to control and manipulate the perceptions, behaviour and values of those who are governed, among other things'. In order to do all these, politicians rely on one key resource – language. The implication of this intrinsic dependence on language explains why there is the traditional notion that 'language is an instrument of power'.

Indeed, the 2015 general elections were arguably the most fiercely contested elections in Nigeria's political history. These elections came at a critical time: 2015 being the year that the US reportedly predicted disintegration of the nation with majority of Nigerians becoming impatient with the ruling party's seeming over stay in power. Two main political parties (the then ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP) and the All Progressives' Congress (APC) which was the then opposition machine) squared against each other. The PDP was led by the then incumbent president, Dr. Goodluck Ebele Jonathan as presidential flag bearer and the APC was led by General Muhammadu Buhari (rtd) as its presidential candidate. In an attempt to win the support of the Nigerian electorates and sway sympathy to their side, the politicians in these two main parties employed all manners of strategies and techniques. Amongst these strategies was the open deployment of hate speech by political actors especially in their campaigns and rallies.

A lot of literatures abound on political discourse. In Nigeria, many scholars have written on political discourse within the country (Olajide, 2010; Sharndama and Mohammed, 2013; Oluremi, 2013). It has been observed that despite the volume of work on political speeches in the country, little or none has been done on the stylistic analysis of hate speeches in Nigerian political discourse. This study therefore seeks to fill this gap by carrying out a stylistic analysis of extracts of hate speeches of political actors in Nigeria during the run up to the 2015 general elections, paying particular attention to the lexical choices utilized selected news sources. It is hoped that the study will unravel

what makes hate speeches particularly effective and able to generate tensions in the country.

Conceptual clarification
Concept of Language

The concept of language is complicated. According to Williams (1977, p.21) 'a definition of language is always, implicitly or explicitly, a definition of human beings in the world'. This is because language permeates every facet of human experience and creates as well as reflects images of that experience. Basically, language is a means of communication. Olateju (2004), cited in Waba (2015, p.5) asserts that language is a means of communication which can be expressed verbally or non-verbally. Through language human beings are able to communicate and interact with one another. It is language that distinctly differentiates humans from animals. Language can also be viewed as knowledge or behaviour, skill, habit, an event or object that enables people to share feelings and information (Corder, 1973). Thus one can posit that language is an agency or device that enables man to achieve an important task - communication.

Also, Sapir (1921, p.7) proffers a serviceable definition of Language when he avers that language is 'purely a human and non-instinctive method of communicating ideas, emotions, and desires by means of a system of voluntarily produced symbols'. According to Martin and Veel (1992) cited in Kefas (2015), language is 'simultaneously a part of reality, a shaper of reality and a metaphor for reality'. A clearer explication of this perspective is offered by Schiepper (2004) cited in Kefas thus:

> "That is to say that through selection of particular lexico-grammatical items available in language, speakers and writers are able to simultaneously engage in presentation of topic, negotiation of role relationship and structuring of text."(p.47)

Language is thus more than simply a channel of communication. It assumes the stature of an indispensable resource which enables man to survive in his environment. Traditionally, language is seen as a vehicle for the transmission of thought and reality. However, Systemic Functional Linguistics sees language as a semiotic tool used for negotiation, construction, organization and reconstrueing of human experience (Halliday, 1987; 1994). Language in this sense is man's essential tool which complements his creative nature. Through language man can shape his society and project the reality of his environment.

From the foregoing, one can aver that language occupies the apex of all man's abilities, without which he remains unfulfilled, unproductive, backward

and unknown, for it is only through its mechanism that he understands others and himself is understood by his fellows. In the next subsection, the study will review the intrinsic relationship between language, power and ideology.

Language, power and ideology

The relationship between language and power is deep and inherently unmistakable. It is through language that power relations, orientations and ideology are expressed. According to Murcia and O'Donnell (nd) the word, 'power' refers to the ability of an entity (eg company, individual, social group, etc) to make change or conversely, to allow things stay the way they are. Fairclough (2001) avers that the exercise of power can be done in two ways – by physical coercion or through the creation of consent. He goes on to opine that the exercise of the former is time consuming and works only on small numbers of people at any given time. The latter involves making people accept things the way they are or accept proposed changes. This is where language comes in to rescue power through linguistic persuasion.

According to Shotter (1993), the term 'rhetoric-responsive' is used to describe how social constructions exist, not in the minds of individual people but within the constant interaction and exchange of information in a society. This goes to show that language, which is the vehicle for interaction and exchange of information is a purveyor of power. The construction of political realities in Nigeria through the use of hate speech impacts not only the individuals involved but also democracy in the country. This is because language is intimately involved in the 'practice of not just representing the world but of signifying, constituting, and constructing the world in meaning' (Fairclough, 1992:64).

Ideology on the other hand is viewed in various ways. According to Van Dijk (1997), ideology and social cognition is the link that exists between society and discourse. He views ideology as the thought and practice developed by dominant groups in order to reproduce and legitimize their domination (p.25). Similarly, Stibbe (2001) posits that ideologies which are embedded and disseminated through discourse influence the individual mental representations of a society's members, which in turn influence their actions. This is to say that the nature of language used in political discourse and the attendant reality created through the use of such language will have some consequence on how people will view political or democratic practice in a particular context and here in Nigeria.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study is based on two models. Principally, this study will be analyzed based on Halliday (1985) Systemic Functional Linguistics theoretical model. According to Yeibo (2011), SFL is a model that emphasizes the correlation between form and function. This framework provides for the accounting of syntactic features (**form)** of the text-extracts while availing a researcher the opportunity of determining the meaning (**function**) in context through the analysis of field, tenor, and mode.

Also, in order to tease out and examine the lexical features inherent in hate speeches as employed by Nigerian politicians, this study will utilize the theoretical model of linguistic analysis as put forward by Leech and Short (2000:78-82). Leech and Short provides a checklist and stylistic categories that will guide the researcher in examining the text-extracts under study in order to reveal those lexical and grammatical features that characterize hate speeches of politicians in Nigeria.

The corpus

The corpus of this paper was ten text-extracts of speeches of political actors drawn from seven (7) news sources that contain elements of abuse, denigrating and insulting remarks targeted at political opponents between 2014 and 2015. The analysis was limited to this period to enable the researcher obtain authentic data on the hate speeches used during the 2015 general elections. The corpora were drawn from Print Media sources (*Premium Times Nigeria News*: November 19, 2014 & 22 Dec., 2014; *Daily Sun,* January 19, 2015; *The Guardian*, 20 June, 2014; *The Nation*, 29 October, 2015; *Vanguard News* of 14th June, 2015; *Express News; Sahara Reporters News,* 24th July, 2014).

Analysis of lexical features

Sentences are built into meaningful units of conversations by means of lexical items. Consequently, lexemes are integral to the expression of meaning in spoken or written discourse. Certain words can convey meaning alone whereas others do so when attached to one or more other words as in the case of collocations. Lexical analysis is useful to the end that it makes for proper understanding of the writer's intended meaning. Lexical analysis is the analysis of meaning of lexical items. For this analysis, the elements considered for analysis are open class items (nouns, main verbs, adjectives and adverbs) employed in the corpus. Open class items are similarly referred to as content words because they convey the intended meaning of a given grammatical construct. This category of words is supported by closed system items which

serve to hold the various components of the sentence together. Closed system items are used to ensure the grammatical correctness of a sentence.

Nouns and noun phrases

The study showed that the predominantly used word class is noun. This implies that the writers dwelt more on using concepts in communicating the messages intended rather than using verbs which would have served to describe actions or states of being, or adjectives/adverbs to describe these concepts. Instances from the corpus can buttress this assertion, thus:

> "Several months ago, we warned that Nigeria (proper noun) under the watch of President Goodluck Jonathan (proper noun) was sliding into fascism (abstract noun) and we were pilloried in certain quarters (collective noun) for daring to make such a statement (concrete noun).Today, we have sadly been vindicated.
>
> "Not even in the worst days (concrete noun) of the abhorrent military dictatorship (abstract noun) were things done brazenly, with citizens (collective noun) being denied their fundamental rights (abstract noun) of free movement (collective noun),free assembly (collective noun) and free expression (concrete noun),all because of the desperation (abstract noun) by the ruling party (collective noun) to win elections (concrete noun) at all costs". (*THE GUARDIAN*, Friday, June 20, 2014. An APC Press Release authored by Alh. Lai Mohammed APC spokesperson; text 8)

The above text contains information which is presented in declarative sentences. The sentences have nouns which are mostly concrete nouns followed by collective nouns. This aids to form a mental picture in the mind of the reader which promotes effective comprehension of the message. In the above extract the speaker tried to portray his emotions and feelings about the ruling party which in his opinion was dragging the whole country down in order to provoke a sense of sympathy in the reading audience as well as establish bonds with them and make them align with him in fighting against a common concrete enemy: ***President Goodluck Jonathan***. According to Mazlum and Afshin (2016) when such emotional invitation is accepted the listeners will be open to broader ideological perception. By using such nouns as ***Nigeria***, (the country's international) ***friends***, ***Nigerians***, (high) ***office*** etc, the speaker is able to create image of real actors whose actions and inactions have terrible consequences on the political future of the country. Political campaign speeches typically contain

several concrete nouns intended to refer to tangible concepts the electorates can easily identify and come to terms with. It is for this reason that the political actors, as documented in the corpus, are judicious in their use of concrete nouns.

Verbs and verb phrases

The nucleus of every grammatical construct is the verb. It is for this reason that there is hardly a grammatically correct sentence in English without a verb in it. Next to nouns, the study found that main verbs, particularly dynamic verbs or verbs that denote actions were also frequently used. The following dynamic verbs have been isolated from Text 8which has the highest number of words, to serve as instances of the use of verbs in the corpus as follows:

> "Several months ago, we <u>warned</u> that Nigeria under the watch of President Goodluck Jonathan was <u>sliding</u> into fascism and we were <u>pilloried</u> in certain quarters for daring <u>to make</u> such a statement. Today, we have sadly been <u>vindicated</u>.
> "Not even in the worst days of the abhorrent military dictatorship were things <u>done</u> brazenly, with citizens being <u>denied</u> their fundamental rights of free movement, free assembly and free expression, all because of the desperation by the ruling party <u>to win</u> elections at all costs". (*THE GUARDIAN*, Friday, June 20, 2014. Being an APC Press Release authored by Alh. Lai Mohammed, the party's spokesperson, text 8)

The use of this important grammatical component helps the politician achieve articulation of directive speech acts. According to Brown and Levinson (1987), directive speech acts are interpreted as Face-Threatening Acts subordinated to the specific strategies of political discourse of discrediting the political opponent and flattering the political allies and the audience. Again the few instances of verbs and verb phrases above represent the material process of "doing" without which the speakers will be unable to create the feeling of urgency in the readers which is necessary for them to act and change the existing state of things as it concerns governance in the country. By using the word ***sliding*** in describing the condition of the nation, there is a powerful conjuring of an atmosphere of panic and alarm in the reader(s)**.** The reader(s) is(are) placed in a situation where they can no longer remain undecided but forced to take definite action to save the country from imminent collapse. ***Warned*** here makes the reader feel that something is happening – that the speaker is interested in his welfare and has acted on realizing that things were getting out of hand as

result of the mismanagement of the country by sounding a note of alarm for the reader to be aware. By using the word ***pilloried*** the speaker creates an atmosphere of victimization in the course of a righteous and noble cause. This word ***pilloried*** is forceful because it targets the audience's feelings. Politicians know that human beings are emotional beings and they effectively deploy words that can appeal to the feeling of their audience in order to gain massive support from them. From the foregoing it is obvious that politicians use verbs to achieve their overall aim of effectively positioning themselves while negatively assessing opponents.

Adjectives

        Words that are used in sentences to provide the grammatical function of giving additional information about or describe nouns are adjectives. When adjectives are placed before the noun(s) being described, it is said that the adjectives have been used attributively. Predicative use of adjectives results when an adjective is placed after the noun (s) described. The study revealed that adjectives have been judiciously used in the corpus. The table above shows that adjectives come next in frequency to nouns and main verbs. The adjectives are used as pre-modifiers (attributive). The implication of using attributive adjectives in political hate speeches is to attract the readers' consciousness to lexical items intended to malign or mudsling a political opponent. An excerpt is taken from Text 8 which has the highest number of adjectives (16) in the overall corpus to buttress the assertions made:

> "**Several** months ago, we warned that Nigeria under the watch of **President** Goodluck Jonathan was sliding into fascism and we were pilloried in **certain** quarters for daring to make such a statement. Today, we have sadly been vindicated.
>
> "Not even in the **worst** days of the **abhorrent military** dictatorship were things done brazenly, with citizens being denied their **fundamental** rights of **free** movement, **free** assembly and **free** expression, all because of the desperation by the **ruling** party to win elections at all costs.
>
> "We therefore call on all **good** people of Nigeria and indeed all the country's **international** friends to speak out against what is happening before things get out of hand. If **democratically-elected** governors could be so shabbily treated, despite the **high** office they occupy, what will happen to **ordinary** Nigerians in the hands of **an increasingly-fascist** government?" APC queried. (*THE GUARDIAN*, Friday, June

20, 2014. Being an APC Press Release authored by Alh. Lai Mohammed, the party's spokesperson, text 8)

The above extract comprises 16 adjectives. All the adjectives are used attributively. It can also be observed that the writer has made use of more than one adjective to modify the head noun on three occasions within the text above. For example: **abhorrent military** dictatorship, **democratically-elected** governors and **an increasingly-fascist** government. In these examples, the adjectival phrases are formed by combining adjective + noun (abhorrent military), adverb + verb (democratically-elected) and adverb + adjective (increasingly-fascist). There is nothing unusual about the form in which these adjectival phrases have been formed and used in the text. Usually adjectives are used to paint a clearer picture of concepts. The use of the words **worst, abhorrent military, democratically-elected** and **ordinary** in the above extract were for strategic reasons. By making a comparative reference to the days of military rule (abhorrent military) when the rights of ordinary citizens were abused, the speaker intends to create an atmosphere of fear within the electorates which is essential in achieving eventual rejection of the government in power at the polls. It also helps him in creating an exaggerated situation where even highly placed individuals (such as governors) are now being deprived of enjoying fundamental rights. This is an exaggeration used to paint a forlorn picture of a bad and pathetic situation in the country. In the final analysis, one can say, however, that adjectives have been used appropriately to drive home the message of hate communicated in the political speeches.

Adverbs

The corpus has adverbs as the least used grammatical item. An adverb is a word or group of words that serves to modify a whole sentence, a verb, another adverb, or an adjective; for example, probably, easily, very, and happily respectively as in the sentence *They could **probably** **easily** envy the **very happily** married couple.* The implication of using fewer adverbs in the corpus is that the dynamic verbs employed have lesser or no modifiers to express the actions denoted in the texts which make up the corpus for this study. Text 8 has the highest number of adverbs used as the extract below indicates:

"Several months ago, we warned that Nigeria under the watch of President Goodluck Jonathan was sliding into fascism and we were pilloried in certain quarters for daring to make such a statement. Today, we have sadly been vindicated.

"Not even in the worst days of the abhorrent military dictatorship were things done brazenly, with citizens being

denied their fundamental rights of free movement, free assembly and free expression, all because of the desperation by the ruling party to win elections at all costs". (*THE GUARDIAN*, Friday, June 20, 2014. Being an APC Press Release authored by Alh. Lai Mohammed, the party's spokesperson, text 8)

The emphasis in political hate speeches is the propagation of spiteful statements which are aimed at negatively presenting a political opponent to the electorates who are seen as the ultimate judge. Consequently, political actors are more interested in choosing such words which have more capacity to enable them achieve this. It is against this backdrop that there has been a very scanty use of adverbs in the corpus under investigation. However, in the few instances of its use, the speaker skillfully used them to promote his aim in maligning his opponents and gaining the electorates support. The use of ***sadly, brazenly***, and ***shabbily*** are strategic. Here, ***sadly*** serves to help the speaker convey the personality of an emotionally over-burdened patriot who is deeply concerned over the state of affairs in the country and needs the support of like minds to effect the needed change in the nation. It is used to appeal to the listeners' sense of patriotism and thus made to enlist in the fight against a common enemy. ***Brazenly*** has an affective use. It portrays the government as one that is unconscionable, careless and conscienceless who bothers little or nothing about the effects of its actions and policies on the citizenry and who carries on government business in a way that even dictators might not. Through this the speaker is able to leave his audience with little or no choice than hating the administration in power.

Conclusion

The following are some conclusions drawn from the analysis of the data: the vocabularies of hate as used in Nigerian political discourse are simple everyday words. There is low or near absence of technical vocabularies. The motive for this is not only to foreground their messages but also to impress their audience/readership. The main lexical items of hate speeches in Nigerian political discourse include nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs. These help the politicians to communicate hate succinctly and aptly. Contextually, the use of affective language served the purpose of achieving positive in-group and negative out-group emotional assessment as seen in the portrayal of opponents of writers/speakers in bad light and the presentation of self or party members in messianic hue.

Recommendations

This study attempts to stylistically analyze text – extracts of hate speeches in Nigerian political discourse. The methodology used effectively served to guide the researcher to tease out the unique features inherent in hate speeches in Nigerian political discourse in the fourth republic. Based on the findings of the study, the researcher makes the following recommendations:

1. Government should regulate hate speeches: The mass media role in curbing proliferation of hate discourse should be promoted by the Federal Ministry of Information and Culture based on a well-articulated and mutually agreed road map. This will prove an effective strategy of platform demobilization.
2. Considering the powerful effect of hate communication on the socio-economic lives of citizens as well as its retarding effect on the nation-building efforts of Nigeria, state and national houses of assembly ought to enact laws against hate public speaking among politically exposed persons with stringent punishment for violation.
3. National institutions such as INEC and EMBs (Election Monitoring Bodies) must, from time to time, organize workshops for party men and women on the destructive effects of hate speech and the need to tone down their violent rhetoric.

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