

Research Article

This article is published by Jozac Publishers in the *African Social Science and Humanities Journal (ASSHJ)*. Volume 5, Issue 2, 2024.

ISSN: 2709-1309 (Print)
2709-1317 (Online)

This article is distributed under a Creative Common [Attribution \(CC BY-SA 4.0\) International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/).

Article detail

Received: 31 January 2024

Accepted: 24 March 2024

Published: 19 April 2024

Conflict of Interest: The author/s declared no conflict of interest.



Aspersions on THEM, praises on US: Evaluating some Facebook posts on the three presidential candidates in the 2023 general elections in Nigeria

Bibian Ugoala¹

¹Department of English, National Open University of Nigeria, Abuja, Nigeria,
bugoala@noun.edu.ng

 <https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/asshj.v5i2.2>

*Corresponding author: bugoala@noun.edu.ng

Abstract: Language is a veritable tool in the conduct of societal affairs, it can be used to build or destroy a person or a group. This study analyses some Facebook posts on three Nigeria 2023 presidential candidates: Bola Ahmed Tinubu of All Progressive Congress, Peter Obi of Labour Party, and Atiku Abubakar of People's Democratic Party. Five posts for each candidate were randomly selected making fifteen posts in all, the posts constitute the primary data, while the secondary data are drawn from library and internet sources on the subject matter. The study is anchored on van Dijk's Theory of Ideological Square (TIS), which contextualises the posts to be of US-THEM categorisation. The specific objectives of the study are: how is hate encoded in the Facebook posts under study; and what are the inferable common ground ideas in the posts that help the projection of the "US", and the backgrounding of the "THEM" in the posts. The findings show that hate is encoded in the Facebook posts through the use of deprecating words on the "THEM". The authors of the posts show lack of interest and confidence in "the OTHER" two candidates. Each author implicitly praised the favoured candidate. This study concludes that the use of negative words in whatever form has the propensity to cause negative reactions, and cast the target(s) in a deleterious light. The study recommends that fans of politicians should avoid the use of negative, and demeaning language, but should use language in a humane manner bearing in mind that each political position is ephemeral, and humans can change, their preferred candidate can change in attitude as time changes.

Keywords: 2023 Nigeria election, Atiku Abubakar, Bola Ahmed Tinubu, Peter Obi, In-group, Out-group

1. INTRODUCTION

Effective use of language is imperative in all discourses, including political discourse. All discourses are said to be political, because 'each discourse serves as a site of struggle having a semantic space in which meanings are produced and/or challenged' (Seidel, 1985: 45). Similarly, Mbah (2018: 37) posits that 'language has no meaning in itself, but is deployed as a trigger that sets off and creates possible worlds or alternative meaning realities within a discourse situation.' It follows that political discourse, which involves language use, is a site of struggle between and among people of opposing political thoughts, ideas, orientations and identities. The three Nigeria 2023 presidential candidates are: Peter Obi, Atiku Abubakar and Bola Ahmed Tinubu of Labour Party (LP), People's Democratic Party (PDP), and All Progressive Congress (APC) respectively. The various posts on these candidates analysed in this study are political.

This study seeks to show that supporters of the recently concluded 2023 general elections in Nigeria exhibit wrong use of language in their political discourse on Facebook and other social media. It draws evidence from Facebook posts alone. The right use of language for political discourse allows for sustainable national development. This study aims to examine how common ground aids in the construction of negative ideas from one group against the other. The specific objectives of the study are: how is hate encoded in the Facebook posts under study; what are the inferable common ground ideas in the posts that help the projection of the “us”, and the backgrounding of the “other” in the Facebook posts. The three presidential candidates whose posts are analysed each belong to one of the three major ethnic groups in Nigeria (Yoruba, Igbo and Hausa): Bola Ahmed Tinubu belongs to the Yoruba ethnic group (west), Peter Obi belongs to the Igbo ethnic group (east), and Atiku Abubakar represents the Hausa ethnic group (north).

2. LITERATURE SURVEY

There are previous studies that also affirm van Dijk’s socio-cognitive approach and ‘Us vs. Them’ theory to be viable discursive strategies and models that aptly explain situations of hatred, discrimination and conflicts between and among socio-political groups (Djaafri, 2021; Yetkiner, 2021; Azad, 2013; Pasha, 2011). How groups construct “the other” have been perused by some researchers (Pasha, 2011; Bilal et al., 2012; Mayasari et al., 2013). The equivocal findings in these researches is that “we” are always better than “them”. Pasha (2011) drawing from news reports and van Dijk’s ideological square, analyses the representation of Islamic ideology by Egyptian newspaper. The analysis shows that negative ideology grounds the negative attitude towards Muslims. The study concludes that negative ideology about a person or a group like Islamic religion allows for emphasis on bad deeds, while good deeds are de-emphasised. The study lends credence to this present work in terms of religion sentiments among supporters of the three presidential candidates.

Relying on Television talk shows and van Dijk’s socio-cognitive approach, Bilal et al. (2012) explore and establish the relationship between language and ideology and prove that politicians exhibit power manipulation in ideological production. The manipulative tendencies and dispositions of politicians are replicated by some of their followers and made manifest in the Facebook posts on study. Mayasari et al. (2013) couching on Fairclough (1989) three-dimensional framework, investigate the relationship between aspects of language and ideology. The analysis proves that there exists an existential correlation between language and ideology, and there is usually a negative ideology towards the Parliament. The finding lends credence to the present study in that the political ideologies of the three political parties having the fans, whose Facebook posts are analysed, have negative views and ideals that are expressed using language.

Poorembrahim and Zarei (2013) examine the way Islam is represented in western discourse through establishing the connection between language and ideology, the forms it takes and its potential effect. The study draws its data from headlines of selected print media within the periods January 1, 2008 to December 30, 2012. The newspapers are: The Herald Tribune, The New York Times, The Times, and The Independent. The data were analysed through the lens of van Dijk’s and Edward Said’s notions of “Ideological square” and “Orientalism” respectively. Findings show that Muslims are negatively portrayed through the use of derogatory adjectives in the headlines of the newspapers.

Drawing from news broadcasting and van Dijk’s socio-cognitive approach, Azad (2013) makes an analysis of how ideological structures are presented through Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). The analysis reveals that authoritativeness is a hidden ideology exposed and presented by CDA. The finding suggests that socio-cognitive approach is valuable to and employed in news broadcasting and the structures of ideology are presented and unveiled by CDA. Relying on reports and Fairclough’s three-dimensional framework, Behnam and Mahmoudy (2013) make an analysis of how ideologies are reproduced through discourse structure. The finding reveals that ideologies are implicitly entrenched in discourse. These ideologies are given multiple interpretations by readers. The explored posts are characterised by ideologies entrenched in discourse.

Ahmadian and Farahani (2014) discuss how ideological differences are made manifest in newspaper discourse on Iran's nuclear programme. For the method, they rely on news reports and van Dijk's ideological square. Their analysis of data shows that ideologies vary among countries and ideological contradictions lead to prejudices, as in ethnic prejudices. The finding captures the case of the Facebook comments under study in that prejudices are expressed knowingly and unknowingly by the participants involved. The expression of prejudices poses threat to smooth intergroup relations, interpersonal communication, national integration and peace, and sustainable national development. This is further revealed in Ugoala (2022: 177) who aver "a positive use of language is very crucial in interpersonal relationships, otherwise of it leads to conflict". Bolte and Keong (2014) investigate perspectives on language use and ideological representation. The methodology consists of news report and Fairclough's three-dimensional model. The analysis reveals that positive ideology portrays countries in good light. The implication of this finding is that a bad ideology breeds bad deeds and results, while good one breeds good deeds. The finding of the study reflects the concern of this present study, which sees to language use for political discourse and sustainable national development in Nigeria.

Fauzan et al. (2014) examine the ideologies of news reports, relying on TV news programme and Fairclough's three-dimensional framework. Their study reveals a negative ideological position that emphasise bad things, leaving out the good things. This finding reflects the case under study in that some of posts, like many others, emphasise bad rather than good things. Iqbal et al. (2014) deployed magazine and Fairclough's three-dimensional framework to explore the ideology of the Americans about the Muslims. The result of the study shows a negative ideology on the Muslims, this finding is similar to Poorembrahim and Zarei (2013) finding that Muslims are negatively represented in some newspaper headlines. Leaning on news reports and Fairclough's three-dimensional framework, Zhang (2014) investigates the discursivity of text, interaction and social context and reveals that language use in news reports is characterised by bias. The implication of this finding is that the media also create national tension and issues as a result of language misuse. Using language to express bias implies misusing language in any kind of discourse in which the bias is expressed. Wirth-Koliba (2016) investigates diversity and dynamics of interpersonal relationships evidenced in political discourse. It shows that every political discourse presents situations of proposition versus opposition and inclusion versus exclusion between the parties involved. The speaker's intentions in a discourse, which vary, determine the structure of a discourse. The study concludes that inclusive and exclusive relationships in a single discursive event are dynamic and prone to alternations, with the characterising fragments having grave implications. The finding reflects the concern of the present study.

Isa (2020) examines speeches of two presidential aspirants: Muhammadu Buhari of Congress for Progressive Change (CPC) and Goodluck Jonathan of People Democratic Party (PDP) to determine how they used language to seek a political office. They argue that crafty use of language is exhibited by those pursuing and exercising power, as these language users persuade, convince and manipulate the masses with sentimental ideologies in order to gain acceptance and support from them. Power Relations, Rhetorical Devices, Identity Construction, and Ideological Interests methodological mechanisms were employed. The analysis proves that the two aspirants displayed the politicians' attribute of putting forward their tactically constructed images before national interests and issues, using different rhetorical devices to persuade and appeal to the audience in order to attain political power. The study concludes that politicians' campaign speeches are ideological and are usually invested with the tendencies to confuse, persuade, dominate and control the minds of the electorate. It recommends that since there is interplay between language and politics, campaign speeches should be received with contempt and critical evaluation by electorate and scholars. The major finding of the study done by Isa (2020) reflects that of this present study, as it affirms the notion of 'us versus them' to be an ideological construct in politics as well as political discourses.

Relying on van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach, Djaafri (2021) makes an analysis of four speeches by America's President George Bush to reveal the hidden ideology behind the justification of the use of force by USA and understand the role of religion and *othering* in constructing enemies and legalising policies against the Middle East. The analysis done reveals that Bush indeed used the idea of religious superiority and defending freedom to

construct disparities and war against targeted enemies. The study concludes that US has the hidden ideology of pursuing international political and socio-economic hegemony using invasive strategy to launch war against its opponents. The finding of the study highlights the fact that religion and politics are characterised by ideologies that clash among individuals. The posts under study have such characteristics.

Husaini (2023) explores the 25th February, 2023 general elections in Nigeria, highlighting democratic progress and political fragmentation. The study predicts the challenging competition to be faced by candidates of the three political parties having the three candidates under study herein. People's Democratic Party (PDP) and Labour Party (LP) are the opponents to All Progressives Congress (APC). The paper claims that preparedness by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) was an assurance for a fair and free election, as voting and result transmission will be done through biometric technologies. Insecurity and inherent geo-political factors in Nigeria are predicted to be possible threats to the appreciable turnouts by voters. The study submits that the 2023 poll would represent the sustained evolution of Nigerian electoral institutions and political participation in fragmented social contexts and insecurity situations. In the end, the role played by INEC and the election results were the opposite of the predictions, falling short of the expectations.

Zhao (2023) proposes an integrated theoretical and methodological framework for responsibility-related political discourses, pointing at how both traditional and new media constructed the China versus US 2019 and 2020 trade conflicts as the evidential context for the applicability of the framework. From the different literatures, the study proves that Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is applied to numerous fields and contexts to show language use and power, oppression or domination of the Others, and the deconstruction of texts through critical dissection of ideological representations. The authors conclude that CDA is a potent device for deconstructing stereotypes, presuppositions, hegemony, power and ideological stances in texts and practical contexts. It charges researchers to take up more studies on varied themes applying CDA.

2.1. Language use on Facebook

The varied definitions of language all point to the common message that language is a systematic means of communication among humans and animals (Monday & Eze, 2012; Nwala, 2008; Emeka-Nwobia, 2007). All human activities involve language use (Mbah, 2018; Uche, 1994). Facebook as an online platform, is a place where netizens express themselves uninhibited on any topic or issue. Discussing politics in any regard involves the use of language, a means of communication. Communication on social media, other phases of new media, the traditional media, and in all contexts involves the use of language. The way language is used matters a lot. Language is rule-governed and its usage has to follow laid-down linguistic rules (Nwala, 2008). The violation of language rules commonly obtains in communication on social media and other new media (Nwode, 2022; Agwuocha, 2019; Ofuokwu, 2010; Egbe & Ekpe, 2007; Crystal, 2001; among others). Political discourses on social media are commonly characterised by extreme violation of language rules in different ways.

Discourses having insults, abusive, flaming words, and all forms of derogatory words portray language misuse. This study argues that such use of language does not promote sustainable national development; adding that such use of language discourages sustainable national development. That is, when language is used wrongly or negatively, national unity is discouraged and shattered. Language is key interpersonal and inter-group relations; the right use of language in any discourse scenario makes for peaceful co-existence, while its wrong use creates chaos. Similarly, Mbah (2018) is of the view that our thoughts are made and processed using language. In the words of Mbah (2018: 37), 'without language, the world would be a flux of confused states, because it will be impossible to, in the process of thinking, concretise our thought into words.'

Facebook, like other social media, is a technology-based forum where users engage in various forms of interaction and communication with one another, using textual, visual and audio-visual content (Selwyn, 2012). In the course of using it, users make use of Facebook website and its browser (Dewing, 2010). Facebook, as an aspect of the new media, is characterised by the five essential conceptual parts of the new media, which are the message,

the medium, the technology, the time or period, and the social context (Nwode, 2022; Friedman & Friedman, 2008; Lievrouw & Livingstone, 2002; Manovich, 2002). Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, Youtube, Tiktok and MySpace are some examples of social media. Social media, as a concept, is described as the application that allows users to: converse and interact with one another; create, edit and share new forms of textual, visual and audio content; and categorise, label and recommend existing forms of content (Selwyn, 2012).

The essence of media activities is communication. Communication, as Nwankwegu and Nwode (2012) rightly note, is the process of sharing information, ideas, feelings, emotions and so on. This definition highlights what takes place on Facebook and other social media platforms, where communication is undertaken using digital technologies and devices. Nwankwegu and Nwode (2012) are of the view that 'effective communication is imperative for successful human relations and interactions in all spheres of life' (p. 8). Words used in communicating should be neutral, devoid of implied meanings. Ugoala (2020: 93) points out that, "people are uneasy when they feel they have been demeaned in any way through speech or writing". According to Nwode (2022), communicating effectively is essential to social, political, religious, economic and cultural studies and discourses, and to other human endeavours involving both theoretical and empirical ideologies and developments. Also, in every communicative situation, there must be some shared situational knowledge that gives the communication situation a background (Nwode, 2022). The situational knowledge, which can be regarded as communication dependent variables or conditions, determines the extent to which the intended message is extended.

3. PROBLEM STATEMENT

The various works reviewed focused on how ideologies are hidden in discourses. These ideologies are unearth only through a critical analysis of the such discourses. None of the works reviewed focused on proxy war, that is, abuses and counter abuses from one person to another on behalf of another person. This study fills the gap in knowledge through examining the Facebook posts of party faithfuls of the three presidential candidates in Nigeria's 2023 general election to unearth how the party faithfuls linguistically favour their candidates, and demean the other presidential candidates through the use of words. This will add to the body of literature on how discourses in an online platform can help spread ideologies fast.

4. RESEARCH METHODS

This section of the study describes the "how" of the study, this is in line with Birks and Mills (2011: 4) assertion of methods in a research, that methods are "practical procedures used to generate and analyze data". So, the primary data for this study were collected from different Facebook posts on the three presidential candidates (see links at the Reference section). Five posts each on Bola Ahmed Tinubu (BAT), Atiku Abubakar (AA), and Peter Obi (PO) were randomly selected from among the many Facebook posts assessed. The selected posts were purposively selected to suit the research objectives of this study. Each of the posts was copied, pasted and formatted under the "data presentation and analysis" section of this work. According to Saunders et al, (2003: 131), "there are some ethical considerations that researchers must be mindful of, especially during the process of gathering and presenting research data", as a result of this, following ethical consideration, the posts were lifted as posts under anonymity with regards to protecting the rights of the authors of the posts, as their consents were not sought before copying the posts. The initials of the presidential candidates were used to label the posts in the analysis section. Ideas from van Dijk's Theory of Ideological Square (1995 & 1998) were applied to each of the posts, to help bring out the implied meanings in the post, added to this were inferences and implied meanings drawn from the Nigeria society regarding each of the presidential candidate. In addition, the study also relied on secondary data, drawn

from library and internet print materials, these include textbooks, journals, theses, newspaper, conference papers and the internet.

5. DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSIONS

Here, five posts each on the three leading 2023 presidential candidates, adapted from Facebook are presented and analysed accordingly. The acronyms: BAT, PO, and AA stand for Bola Ahmed Tinubu, Peter Obi, and Atiku Abubakar respectively.

BAT 1: *Tinubu is a drug baron. Where has a drug baron ruled a country as a president? Nawao! Nothing no dey happen for Nigeria. Naija will become a drug country. How then will it develop?*

The author of this post obviously deployed negative adjective to describe BAT. According to the post, BAT is a “drug baron”, and as such not fit to rule Nigeria. The author extends this to the country implying that if Tinubu becomes president “Nigeria will become a drug country”, and Nigeria will not develop. This way, the author sets up Tinubu for dislike, indirectly foregrounding his preferred candidate. The author is indirectly foregrounding that his preferred candidate is not a drug baron, and Nigeria will develop if his preferred candidate should become the president.

BAT 2: *BAT followers are evidently like their boss, Bola Ahmed Tinubu (BAT). Like boss, like followers. They are all bad people. Evil doers like them.*

In this post, the originator, used negative adjective to qualify BAT and his followers. To the originator of this post, BAT is a bad person, and an evil doer, and this extends to all supporting BAT ‘Like boss, like followers’ these are the “THEM”. BAT and his followers are “bad people” and “evil doers”. With this post, the author exonerates his preferred candidate and all supporting the preferred candidate, whoever the preferred candidate was are “not bad people”, and “not evil doers”, but BAT and his followers are.

BAT 3: *With money, a criminal turns to a pastor or Imam. That is the case of Tinubu, a monstrous criminal with drug peddling, frauds and forged certificates crimes, who is still being followed by crowds of like believers. Nawao*

In this post, BAT is out rightly being described by the originator this post using negative adjectives “monstrous criminal”, “drug peddler”, “certificate forger”. The author foregrounds BAT’s followers “THEM” as similar to BAT in character. All the negativity ascribed to BAT are also ascribed to his followers “by crowds of like believers”

BAT 4: *What an old guerrilla, bat, owl and baboon offer over 280 million people? I no call name oh! I come in peace Obidiently. Ndi long mouth avoid me, I don’t need your comments. O my post, not yours. Anofia!*

In this post, though the author did not directly mention BAT, but readers know that the post points to BAT. The post is similar to posts 1 and 2 above; the THEM is foregrounded by the derogatory adjectives used to describe BAT “old guerrilla”, “bat”, “owl” and “baboon”, and BAT’s followers, are referred to as “Ndi long mouth” meaning “people with long mouth”, “Ndi” is an Igbo word meaning “people”. The author also used the disparaging Igbo term “Anofia” to describe BAT’s followers; “Anofia” is another Igbo word meaning “bush meat”, Igbo’s use this word to refer to somebody whom is felt to be stupid, referring to BAT’s followers as “bush meat” is demeaning. The author uses the in-group term “Obidiently” to refer to his preferred candidate—Peter Obi.

BAT 5: *I imagine a president, who will be falling and sleeping at meetings and occasions of presidents. After waking up, what follows? Signing any paper presented to him, without reading and dissecting the content.*

It was rumoured during the presidential campaign that BAT was very sick, and that he suffers from narcolepsy, and plummets occasionally. There are no clear evidences that these accusations are true. The author’s worries for BAT, makes him to positions BAT as a weakling; who will not read documents properly before signing them when

he becomes president, invariably, the author's preferred candidate does not "fall", and will not "sleep at meetings of presidents".

Next, we analyse posts about Peter Obi:

PO1: *No presidency for Igbo. We can't watch them rule us. We rather go into war than let him, an Igbo man, rule us.*

Similar to the post in BAT 4, this author did not mention Peter Obi's name, but it is obvious that the post points to Peter Obi. The THEM dichotomy is obvious in this post about Peter Obi and his ethnic group "Igbo man". The author uses direct pronoun "We" and "us" to refer to in-group, that is, his group and his preferred presidential candidate; and used the pronoun "them" to refer to the out-group "we can't watch them rule over us". Peter Obi, is used as a microcosm for the Igbo ethnic group—they are not fit to rule.

PO 2: *I hate to hear that name 'Peter Obi'. Hush! Stingy man! He is praise himself on television for being stingy in the name of being economical. No way for him oh! Somebody help me tell Obi and all his Obidients.*

This post uses a strong derogatory adjective "hate" to refer to Peter Obi. According to the author he hates to hear the name "Peter Obi", he further refers to Peter Obi as a "stingy man". For this, Peter Obi will not get the post of the president he is campaigning for. This post positions the in-group as sensible, and somebody from the in-group should tell the out-group that there is no way for Peter Obi.

PO 3: *Obi and his Obidients followers are liars. They cook lies for us about what we know already. They forget that we were all here in Nigeria when he ruled in Anambra State. Nigeria is not Anambra State.*

In this post, the author refers to the out-group (Peter Obi and his followers) as liars, this is a demeaning adjective. The author further used the plural pronoun "they" to collectively categorise Peter Obi and his followers as those that cook lies. Peter Obi was a onetime governor of Anambra state in Southeast Nigeria. The author implied in this post that when Peter Obi was a governor in Anambra state, he did not perform well, and so will not perform well too if elected the president of Nigeria. According to the author including his group "we were all here in Nigeria..."; with this assertion, the author positions the in-group as watchful observers probably to Peter Obi's non-performance when he was the governor of Anambra state.

PO 4: *Wait oh, apart from saving from what others wasted, what did this your Obi even did when he was a governor? You want to compare Governor Obi with Governor Tinubu? The gap is really large.*

The author of this post clearly used the pronouns "your" and "you" as evident in the post to refer to the out-group (Peter Obi and his supporters). The author insinuates that Peter Obi did not do anything during the period he was governor of Anambra state from March 2006 to November 2006, then, 2007 to 2014. The author asks a rhetorical question "what did this your Obi even did when he was a governor"? According to the author, Peter Obi cannot be compared with Tinubu who was governor of Lagos state from May 1999 to May 2007, implying that Tinubu performed better when he was the governor of Lagos state than Peter Obi.

PO 5: *Biafra Presido! Mr Obi, abeg go and rule Biafra. Even if you get all the states, you are going nowhere.*

Biafra is the name some South Easterners call themselves, they agitate for secession, and desire to be an autonomous country. The author of this post refers to Peter Obi as Biafra president, indirectly saying that Peter Obi cannot be the president of Nigeria. Even if Peter Obi gets votes from all the states in Nigeria, he will not be president. The implication of this is that the presidential candidate of the in-group which the author belongs to is fit to be president of Nigeria, but Peter Obi belonging to the out-group is not fit.

Below are posts and analysis on Atiku Abubakar:

AA 1: *That stupid man Atiku who said God does not answer the prayers of poor people cannot win because he is not going to rule only the rich. Let him go and rule rich people that God answers their prayers.*

The adjective “stupid” used to describe the out-group, Atiku Abubakar in the post above is derogatory. According to the post, because of what was allegedly said by Atiku Abubakar sometime ago, he is not qualified to contest for the post of the president.

AA 2: *Atiku Abubakar is dubious, too mean and incompetent. These attributes of his, among others, are why Obi vowed never to let him rule as President. Somebody help me tell Atiku that being a Vice President does not make it compulsory to be a President.*

The adjectives “dubious”, “too mean”, and “incompetent” used to describe the out-group Atiku Abubakar are derogatory. Apart from these negative adjectives, the author had some more negative attributes which he did not mention, he sums up that Atiku has so many negative attributes that disqualifies him from being eligible for the post of the president. The author also links up former president Obasanjo as also being aware of Atiku’s negative attributes.

AA 3: *Atiku is out to steal big time from Nigeria and use the loots to expand his businesses. Thief! I bet you, structure or no structure, social media presidential candidate or not, Obi has the capacity to develop Nigeria meaningfully and sustainably, unlike Tinubu and Atiku.*

The author of this post insinuates that the reason Atiku is contesting for the presidential position is with the intention of stealing Nigeria’s resources; so, the author referred to the “out-group” Atiku as a thief. The “in-group” Peter Obi, the author says has the capacity to develop Nigeria meaningfully and sustainably. The author grouped the two other presidential candidates Tinubu and Atiku (the out-group) as not having the capacity to develop Nigeria meaningfully and sustainably.

AA 4: *We are more than them whether they like it not. Them no reach us jare! Atiku and Tinubu should clear road for Obi. They are incompetent when compared to Obi. Obidients and Obi for real!*

The author of this post— an obvious supporter of Peter Obi used the pronouns “them” and “they” in the first sentence to refer to the “out-group” Atiku and Tinubu. The author used “us” to describe the “in-group” as being more relevant than the “out-group” with the pidgin assertion “Them no reach us jare”, meaning that the out-group is not as powerful as the in-group. To the author of this post, the “out-group” is not as competent as the “in-group” (Peter Obi). They, the “in-group” Obidients— Peter Obi’s followers, and Peter Obi are for real, implying that others are fake.

AA 5: *Atiku is a religious fanatic. That is not the kind of person we need to be our president.*

This post refers to Atiku as a “religious fanatic”, being a religious fanatic, he is not the kind of person according to the post “we” need to be “our president”. That is, Atiku does not have what it takes to be our president, but our candidate has what it takes.

The findings of this study, reiterates O’Driscoll (2020: 16) view of offensive or deprecating words as “any word or string of words which has or can have a negative impact on the sense of self and/or wellbeing of those who encounter it”. The study found that in the Facebook posts analysed through the use of deprecating words such as: “drug baron” as seen in (BAT 1), “Evil doers” (BAT 2), “criminal” (BAT 3), “old guerrilla” (BAT 4), “owl and baboon” (BAT 4), “Stingy man” (PO 2), “liars” (PO 3), “stupid man” (AA 1), “dubious” (AA 2), “too mean” (AA 2), “thief” (AA 3), “incompetent” (AA 4), and “religious fanatic” (AA 5). These negative words are used by the fans of each of the presidential candidates to refer to “the other”, that is, the THEM. Each of the authors shows lack

of interest and confidence in “the other two” presidential candidates that are outside their own circle that makes up the ‘US’ dichotomy. This is in concordance with Qasim & Al-Ghizzy (2022: 171) view that “a derogatory comment made on social media about a group with certain characteristics such as religion, race, ethnic origin, or sexuality can make someone who has that characteristic feel insulted even though the comment is not addressed to him as an individual”. Member of each political party feel they and the candidate they are supporting are superior to those of the two others. This negative representation of others not within “our circle” explains Lippi-Green (1997) view that although we have no regret about language, accent, its aspect, is made by society to be ‘a litmus test for exclusion, an excuse to turn away, to refuse to recognise the other’ (p. 64).

6. RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS

The implications of this research is that common ground ideas like knowledge of societal happenings also assisted the authors of the various posts to construct their posts, knowing that the readers share the same common ground knowledge that will help to unravel the meanings of each posts, for instance the knowledge that Peter Obi and Bola Ahmed Tinubu were once governors of Anambra state, and Lagos state respectively helped the author of PO 4 to construct his message. Also, the author of BAT 3 constructs his message using the wide spread allegations levelled against Bola Ahmed Tinubu, to refer to BAT as “drug peddler”, and “certificate forger”.; likewise the author of AA 2 was aware and knows that the readers too are aware that Atiku Abubakar was once a vice president in Nigeria when Olusegun Obasanjo was the president, and Atiku Abubakar had contested the position of the president, and Olusegun Obasanjo seem not to be disposed to Atiku Abubakar getting the position because of Atiku’s alleged negative attributes. This author reminds the readers about Obasanjo’s position on Atiku Abubakar being dubious, too mean and incompetent. National interest is not evident in the posts. Rather, personal and group interests are placed above national interest. The US and THEM Dichotomy which guide the analysis of the data is reinforced in Stollznow (2020: 2) assertion that deprecating or offensive language is “something said to US that WE find to be morally repulsive or personally insulting. It is a language that strikes the core of OUR beliefs or identity and affects us on a fundamental level”. The pronouns in caps in Stollznow (2020: 2) proposition point to the fact that the “others” are not included in the deprecating or offensive words they hurl at “us”.

7. CONTRIBUTIONS TO SCIENTIFIC COMMUNITY AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This study has shed light on the intricate nature and power in language to make or mar an individual or a group. In a heterogeneous and multi-ethnic society like Nigeria, the way language is used especially on Facebook posts is key to national development. How language is used is instrumental to how referents are perceived in any discourse setting. Facebook as a platform is site where supporters of each presidential candidate struggle to outdo the others in portraying the favoured candidate in a positive light, meanings are challenged in the platform. Through unearthing the ideologies encoded in each group’s posts, this study adds to existing knowledge that the choice of words in each discursive setting can help to spread ideas either positive or negative about a group or a person. The supporters of each group use language as a weapon to demean the other group, and also use language to promote the candidate of his/her choice. Future researches can focus on how party faithfuls use code-mixed items to cast negative aspersions on candidates of other political parties; this way they can compare the derogatory words use in both the indigenuous language and English language.

8. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the use of negative words in whatever form has the propensity to cause negative reactions, and cast the target(s) in a deleterious light. The way in which language is used in political discourse, as evident in the presented and analysed Facebook posts, shows how ideological construction of each other US and THEM helps strengthen stereotypes. The claims of the authors in the posts are not justifiable and they lack merit being that the claims have no legal proof. The posts exemplify how language use for political discourse can mar

unity in the diverse ethnic groups that make up Nigeria. National disunity arises from conflicting political and group interests. The study recommends that fans of politicians should avoid the use of negative, and demeaning language, but should use language in a humane manner bearing in mind that each political position is ephemeral, and humans can change, their preferred candidate can change in attitude as time changes. Fans should desist of foregrounding the “others” and “them” in negative attributes.

9. FUNDING

This research paper received no internal or external funding.

ORCID

Dr Bibian Ugoala  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6628-4400>

REFERENCES

- Agwuocha, U. A. (2019). Language use in the social media and national integration: Current trends and challenges. *International Journal of Development and Management Review (INJODEMAR)*, 14 (1).
- Ahmadian, M., & Farahani, E. (2014). A critical discourse analysis of the Los Angeles Times and Tehran Times on the representation of Iran’s nuclear program. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 4(10), 2114-2122.
- Azad, O. (2013). Critical discourse analysis of 20: 30 news broadcasting. *Modern Journal of Language Teaching Methods*, 3(2), 78.
- Behnam, B., & Mahmoudy, B. (2013). A critical discourse analysis of the reports issued by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Director General on Iran’s nuclear program during the last decade. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 3(12), 2196-2201.
- Bilal, H. A., Ahsan, H. M., Gohar, S., Younis, S., & Awan, S. J. (2012). Critical discourse analysis of political TV talk shows of Pakistani media. *International Journal of Linguistics*, 4(1), 203-219.
- Bolte, S., & Keong, Y. C. (2014). The refugee swap deal in Malaysian online news reports: ideology and representation. *GEMA Online of Language Studies*, 14(2), 93-108. <http://dx.doi.org/10.17576/GEMA-2014-1402-07>
- Crystal, D. (2001). *Language and the internet*. Cambridge University Press.
- Dewing, M. (2010). *Social media: An introduction (vol. 1)*. Library of Parliament.
- Djaafri, Y. (2021). Religious conflict and the depiction of othering in George W. Bush speeches post 9/11: A critical discourse analysis. Unpublished Master Dissertation M'hidi University- Oum El Bouaghi.
- Egbe, G. B. and Ekpe, S. (2007). New literacy, new English: Aspects of the grammar of SMS text messages. *Proceedings of the 24th Annual Conference of the Nigeria English Studies Association (NESA)*, Uyo, 38-50.
- Emeka-Nwobia, N. (2007). *Sociolinguistics: An introductory reader*. Larry Caleb-Copy Craft International Ltd.
- Fauzan, U., Subroto, H. E., & Poedjosoedarmo, S. (2014). A CDA of the ideology of Indonesian metrotv news report. *International Journal of Linguistics*, 6(4), 71-86.
- Friedman, L. W., & Friedman, H. H. (2008). *The new media technologies: Overview and research framework*. City University of New York.
- Husaini, S. (2023). Nigeria’s 2023 election: Democratic development and political fragmentation. *Notes de l’Ifri, Ifri*.
- Iqbal, A., Danish, M. H., & Iqbal, F. (2014). Critical discourse analysis of attributive words used with the word Muslim: A corpus based study. *International Journal of Linguistics*, 6(4), 1-11. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5296/ijl.v6i4.6077>
- Isa, S. S. (2020). Critical discourse analysis of selected campaign speeches of President Muhammadu Buhari and President Goodluck Jonathan in the 2011 elections. Unpublished thesis Ahmadu Bello University, Nigeria.
- Lievrouw, L., & Livingstone, S. (2002). *The handbook of new media*. Sage.

- Lippi-Green, R. (1997). *English with an accent: Language, ideology, and discrimination in the United States*. Routledge.
- Manovich, L. (2002). New media from Borges to HTML. In N. Wardrip-Fruin and N. Montfort (eds.), *The new media reader*. The MIT Press.
- Mayasari, M., Darmayanti, N., & Riyanto, S. (2013). Critical discourse analysis of reporting on 'Saweran for KPK Building' in media Indonesia Daily Newspaper. *International Journal of Linguistics*, 5(4), 213-224.
- Mbah, B. M. (2018). *Nsara uche, nzubere onoduna akara (Mental space, domain construction and the limitations of possibilities)*. An Inaugural Lecture of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka.
- Mills, J., & Birks, M. (2014). *Qualitative Methodology: A Practical Guide*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Monday, H. G., & Eze, C. C. (2012). *Basic studies in English and communication skill for tertiary institutions*. Shola Publishers.
- Nwala, M. A. (2008). *Introduction to linguistics: A first course (revised edition)*. Osi & Alozie Limited.
- Nwankwegu, J. A., & Nwode, G. C (2012). *Effective use of English*. De Envoy.
- Nwode, G. C. (2022). Impact of new media on students' performance in written composition in selected tertiary institutions in Ebonyi State, Nigeria. PhD thesis, Department of Languages and Linguistics, Post-Graduate School, Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki.
- O'Driscoll, J. (2020). *Offensive Language: Taboo, Offence, and Social Control*. London: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Ofuokwu, D. (2010). Exploring the relationship between text messaging and note-taking. Paper presented at the 27th Conference of the Nigeria English Studies Association (NESA), Covenant University Ota.
- Oko, A. E. (2023). Leadership Responsibility, Justice and integrity in Public life: A Panacea to Sustainable National Development. *International Journal of Humanitatis Theoreticus*. 7(1), 50-60.
- Pasha, T. (2011). Islamists in the headlines: Critical discourse analysis of the representation of the Muslim brotherhood in Egyptian newspapers. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Utah, USA.
- Poorebrahim, F., & Zarei, G. R. (2013). How is Islam portrayed in western media? A critical discourse analysis perspective. *International Journal of Foreign Language Teaching and Research*, 1, 45-62.
- Qasim Abbas Dhayef Al-Tufayl, & Mohammed Jaasim Dakhil Al-Ghizzy (2022). A Linguistic Study of Offensive Language in Online Communication Chatgroups. *International Journal of Linguistics Studies*. 170-175.
- Saunders, M., Lewis, P., & Thornhill, A. (2007). *Research Methods for Business Students*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education.
- Seidel, A. D. (1985). What is success in E&B research utilization? *Environment and Behavior*, 17(1), 47-70.
- Selwyn, N. (2012). *Social media in higher education: The Europa world of learning*. Routledge. Retrieved from www.worldoflearning.com
- Uche, B.G. (1994). The interaction between science and language. *The Nigeria Teacher Today: A Journal of Teacher Education, Kaduna, NCE* 3(1) 101.
- Ugoala, B. (2020). Face Mitigation Strategies in Former Nigeria President of Nigeria Goodluck Ebele Jonathan's Memoir *My Transition Hours*, *International Journal of Humanitatis Theoreticus*, University of Yaounde 1, Cameroon. 3(2), 80 - 93.
- Ugoala, B. (2022). Power in words: An Analysis of the Flaming Devices in President Vladimir Putin's Speech Before the February, 2022 Attack on Ukraine. *Kampala International University Journal of Humanities*, 7 (2), 171 – 179. Retrieved from <https://www.kampalajournals.ac.ug/ojs/index.php/kiuhums/article/view/1482>
- van Dijk, T. A. (1995). Discourse analysis as ideology analysis. *Language and peace*, 10, 47- 142.
- van Dijk, T. A. (1998). *Ideology: A multidisciplinary approach*. Sage.
- van Dijk, T. A. (2000). *Ideology and discourse: A multidisciplinary introduction*. Barcelona.
- Wirth-Koliba, V. (2016). The Diverse and dynamic world of 'us' and 'them' in political discourse. *Critical Approaches to Discourse Analysis across Disciplines*, 8(1), 23-37. <http://cadaad.net/ejournal>.
- Zhang, M. (2014). A critical discourse analysis of political news reports. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 4(11), 2273-2277.

Zhao, X. (2023). Constructing the 'us' and 'them' dichotomy through the notion of responsibility: An integrated framework. *Global Media and Communication*, 19(1), 119–138. <https://doi.org/10.1177/17427665231161805>
journals.sagepub.com/home/gmc

