

Language and Power Relations in Selected Political Crisis Speeches in Nigeria: A Critical Discourse Analysis

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Abstract : Human speech is capable of serving many purposes. Power and control are not always exercised overtly by linguistic acts, but maybe enacted and exercised in the myriad of taken-for-granted actions of everyday life. Domination, power control, discrimination and mind control exist in human speech and may lead to asymmetrical power relations. In discourse, there are persuasive and manipulative linguistic acts that serve to establish solidarity and identification with the 'we group' and polarize with the 'they group'. Political discourse is crafted to defend and promote the problematic narrative of outright controversial events in a nation's history thereby sustaining domination, marginalization, manipulation, inequalities and injustices, often without the dominated and marginalized group being aware of them. They are designed and positioned to serve the political and social needs of the producers. Political crisis speeches in Nigeria, just like in other countries concentrate on positive self-image, de-legitimization of political opponents, reframing accusation to one's advantage, redefining problematic terms and adopting reversal strategy. In most cases, the people are ignorant of the hidden ideological positions encoded in the text. Few researches have been conducted adopting the frameworks of critical discourse analysis and systemic functional linguistics to investigate this situation in the political crisis speeches in Nigeria. In this paper, we focus attention on the analyses of the linguistic, semantic, and ideological elements in selected political crisis speeches in Nigeria to investigate if they create and sustain unequal power relations and manipulative tendencies from the perspectives of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). Critical Discourse Analysis unpacks both opaque and transparent structural relationships of power dominance, power relations and control as manifested in language. Critical discourse analysis emerged from a critical theory of language study which sees the use of language as a form of social practice where social relations are reproduced or contested and different interests are served. Systemic function linguistics relates the structure of texts to their function. Fairclough's model of CDA and Halliday's systemic functional approach to language study are adopted in this paper. This paper probes into language use that perpetuates inequalities. This study demystifies the hidden implicature of the selected political crisis speeches and reveals the existence of information that is not made explicit in what the political actors actually say. The analysis further reveals the ideological configurations present in the texts. These ideological standpoints are the basis for naturalizing implicit ideologies and hegemonic influence in the texts. The analyses of the texts further uncovered the linguistic and discursive strategies deployed by text producers to manipulate the unsuspecting members of the public both mentally and conceptually in order to enact, sustain and maintain unhealthy power relations at crisis times in the Nigerian political history.

Keywords : critical discourse analysis, language, political crisis, power relations, systemic functional linguistics

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