

## CULTURAL CONTEXT IN POLITICAL DISCOURSE: AN EXAMINATION OF EVIDENTIALITY AND GENERALIZATION IN THE SPEECHES OF NNAMDI KANU AND SUNDAY IGBOHO

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### **Abstract**

The paper examines the relationship between cultural contexts and discursive strategies of evidentiality and generalization in selected political speeches by Nnamdi Kanu and Sunday Igboho. This aim is to reveal how the two political activists employ evidence to establish truth and knowledge, as well as how they use claims about ethnicity and marginalization to construct collective identity and promote secessionist ideologies. The paper also highlights how substantiated claims not only enhance the credibility of the activists but also garner support from their respective audiences. The study adopts a qualitative approach, analyzing two purposively selected speeches from each activist. Descriptive analysis was used in interpreting the data, which were gathered from online sources. Using Tajfel and Turner's Social Identity Theory (SIT) as a theoretical framework, the study demonstrates how evidentiality enhances group cohesion and fosters a strong group identity. Furthermore, the research provides evidence that references to historical events and the use of statistics lend credibility to the activists' arguments. On the other hand, generalizations evoke shared emotions and foster collective identities, galvanizing support for their cause. By referencing past injustices, the activists evoke emotional responses tied to collective memories of suffering and marginalization. Finally, the paper recommends that activists should not only highlight negative truths but also project positive evidence that promotes national progress, especially in multilingual societies like Nigeria.

Key words: Political discourse, cultural context, evidentiality, generalization, group identity

### **Introduction**

The function of language goes beyond the use in communication to means of constructing social identities and realities. Political discourse serves as a socially and culturally embedded means of communication, often characterized by not only the speaker's intent but by sociocultural norms of their audience. Nigeria's political discourse is highly influenced by diverse cultural heritage as well as ethnic divisions. Thus, in Nigeria's multilingual and multiethnic contexts, political language usually functions as a significant tool of identity construction. The ethnolinguistic situation in Nigeria provides a fertile ground for cultural contexts upon which political actors including activists leverage to communicate their messages and shared ideologies. In line with this, Finnegan as given by Xu (2022) attests that speeches usually draw on culturally symbolic language and shared historic experiences. Thus, ethnic identities and historical narratives significantly inform political language, with leaders often inciting shared histories to resonate with their audiences. This is evident in the speeches of Kanu and Igboho as they draw extensively on the cultural references and past events to reinforce their political discourses and heighten their audiences' perception. Their speeches centre on linguistic devices such as evidentiality and generalization to assert claims and build solidarity. While evidentiality refers to evidence the speaker has on their statement, generalization are statements often based on limited evidence (Chilton 2004).

In political discourse, cultural context plays a crucial role in influencing the substance of speeches given by political actors. Cultural context implies the shared values, beliefs, values, practices as well as sociohistorical experiences that influence the way people live. It shows itself in various dimensions which include language, shared history, ethnic identity and so on. Political discourse is a form of written or spoken communication used in political contexts not only to influence public opinion but shape ideologies. Cultural context and political discourse therefore work together. It is not an overstatement to say that cultural context is the bedrock upon which political discourse lies. Political actors usually centre their messages to connect with specific cultural group. The way political narratives are framed is often influenced by cultural issues. Kanu and Igboho superbly integrates historical references, assertive statements and shared cultural experiences to highlight their claims. The study therefore examines how evidentiality and generalization are used in the speeches of Nnamdi Kanu and Sunday Igboho to show how cultural context shapes political discourse in contemporary Nigeria.

### **Language and Politics**

Language and politics are two indispensable elements. They are so closely related in politics that the two sometimes cannot individually function effectively without the other. No wonder politics has become a linguistic issue while language has become a political issue. Citing Chilton, Ike Nwofor (2015) asserts that language is the universal capacity of humans in all societies to communicate while politics is the art of governance. By implication, language is seen as an instrument to interact or transact in various situations and /or in diverse organizations being conventionally recognized as political environment. Hence, there exist a strong relationship between language and politics. In confirmation, Opeibi as cited by Ike Nwofor (2015:8) buttresses: “the relationship that exists between language and politics is symbiotic. Language greatly serves as a connection to the hearts of the audience”. Language of political activities has a major role in the exchange of values in social life. It also extends to transforming power into right and obedience into duty. Politics is a struggle for power so as to put some political, economic as well as social ideas into practice. Thus, language plays a vital role since every political action is influenced and played by language. All through history, politics and persuasion have been indispensable entity. A good number of political leaders have relied heavily on several rhetorical skills so as to effectively achieve their aims.

Language and politics are intimately interwoven. Politicians are quiet conscious of the inseparability of language and politics, thus, they apply language as an instrument of construction as well as destruction based on their political aims. In other words, language can be used to include, exclude or disenfranchise.

### **Language and Identity in Nigeria Linguistic Landscape**

Language function in Nigeria is not only for communication but as a strict marker of identity, both as a group and an individual. Nigeria is one of the most linguistically diverse countries harbouring over 500 indigenous languages and dialects. This has placed her as one of the most multilingual countries of the world having three dominant ethnic languages: Igbo, Hausa and Yoruba and host of other minor languages listing Efic, Fulfulde, Ogoni and so on with English as the official language (Bamgbose 1991, Obeng & Adegbija ). Kanu and Igboho play significant roles in advocating for the rights of their ethnic groups in the face of marginalization and injustice faced by the communities. Thus, they framed some of the evidences including generalizations of their various ethnic domains. It is not odd, therefore, to say that speakers of the same language within the same ethnic group express the feeling of solidarity. Language becomes a veritable tool for performing identity. It is a symbol of collective histories and political consciousness. Adegbija (1994) captures it clearer when he says that indigenous languages strengthen in-group solidarity while reinforcing inter-group distinctions.

Language in Nigeria is used to perform the role of inclusion and exclusion. It serves as a powerful tool through which identity is established. People bound by the same language usually stick together in challenging periods of unrest and even in celebration ( Lystra 2016). No wonder Nnamdi Kanu of Igbo ethnic group and Sunday Igboho of Yoruba ethnic origin attract much solidarity and attention from their audience. This is partly because they share identical language and ethnic groups. They tactically exhibit how linguistic choices are strongly rooted in social power and cultural identity.

### **The Concept of Evidentiality and Generalization**

Evidentiality or statistical evidence provides proof or facts in relation to collection of information using some mathematical model. It refers to the linguistic means by which speakers indicate the source and reliability of their knowledge. ( Aikhenvald 2004) A good combination of statistics as well as facts becomes efficient particularly to analytical audience. Information will be regarded as valid since statistics and facts are irrefutable. In political discourse, evidentiality functions in diverse ways: Political actors often use evidential markers to legitimize their claims or to delegitimize opposing views. This is deeply rooted in Van Dijk’s ideological structures. ( Van Dijk 2002). The choice of evidential markers reflects the speaker's degree of commitment to the truth of their statements. In cultures with strong oral traditions, personal anecdotes and communal knowledge serve as powerful evidential tools, reinforcing collective identity and solidarity (Akinseye & Adebiji, 2019).

Conversely, generalization implies a general statement coined from mere inference. It involves making broad statements or claims that extend beyond sufficient proofs. It is used to tell commonly held positive beliefs which help make certain claims logical. By generalizing, speakers can present complex socio-political issues in a clearer term. Generalizations can evoke shared emotions and collective identities, galvanizing support for a cause (Igwebuikwe, 2018). Through generalizations, speakers can delineate in-groups and out-groups, fostering unity within the group and antagonism towards others. Both Kanu and Igboho utilize generalizations to frame their struggles as part of a larger historical narratives. Kanu's portrayal of the Biafran cause as a fight for justice and Igboho's depiction of Yoruba’s resistance against oppression are examples of how generalizations can serve ideological purposes.

Kanu and Igboho's discourses frequently employ evidential strategies to bolster their narratives. Kanu often references historical events and alleged conspiracies, while Igboho invokes personal experiences and community testimonies to substantiate his claims.

### **Evidentiality and Generalization in Political Discourse: An Interface**

The relationship between evidentiality and generalization is crucial in political discourse. While evidentiality provides the foundation for claims, generalization enlarges their reach and emotional appeal. Xu (2022) strongly suggests that the strategic use of evidential, such as shared knowledge or authoritative sources, can lend credence to generalized statements, making them more convincing. In the case of Kanu and Igboho, their discourses often blend specific evidential claims with broad generalizations to create compelling narratives that connect with their audience. This combination enhances the persuasive power of their messages and strengthens their ideological stands.

While evidentially is concerned with the source of knowledge, generalization involves drawing wider conclusions from particular cases. The activists through framing combine the two linguistic realizations to achieve massive support. Kanu heavily relies on inferential evidentiality, Igboho applies experiential evidentiality in actualization of their causes. Again, while Kanu frames sweeping statements to reinforce ethnic nationalism, Igboho equally frames generalized statements to mobilize ethnic security. Kanu and Igboho's discourses frequently employ evidential strategies to bolster their narratives. While Kanu often references historical events and alleged conspiracies, Igboho invokes personal experiences and community testimonies to substantiate his claims.

Extant scholars have researched on political discourse using various lens. Abid Hmood and Hameed Maner in 2021 worked on critical discourse analysis of discursive strategies representing ideology and social power in *The Help* (sikh). The aim of the study included showing the discursive strategies used in revealing ideologies and social power in *The Help*. Data were selected from several texts that contained different discursive strategies. The analysis was carried out discursively using Fairclough's 2001 approach. The study concluded by listing various discursive strategies employed in the novel which included presupposition, intertextuality and speech acts. Though the data for the study was a novel, it is still beneficial to the present study.

Xhongyi Xu in 2022 studied pragmatic functions of evidentiality in diplomatic discourse toward a new analytical framework of classifying English evidentiality. Adopting a data-based approach, the researcher analysed thirty English political speeches from three US presidents. The findings showed that evidentiality can be classified into three categories of personal sources, shared source, and others. It also revealed that apart from the function of legitimation, evidentiality can also be used to normalize the speaker's ideology.

Alaba Akinwotu in 2016 studied rhetoric in selected speeches of Obafemi Awolowo and Moshood Abiola; two past political figures in Nigeria political history. The study was driven by Aristotle's theory of rhetoric to examine the deployment of political rhetoric in communicating intentions in the selected speeches with the view to find out the persuasiveness of the speeches and the influence of the speakers' intentions on rhetorical choice. The findings showed that the selected speeches were not only highly persuasive but they also employed two types of rhetoric; tact and combat. The researcher further explained that tact rhetoric features mostly in pre-election speeches such as campaign and acceptance speeches whereas combat rhetoric is exclusive to post election speeches.

Ingrida Staugaite in 2014 analysed linguistic realization of rhetorical strategies in Barack Obama and Dalia Grybauskaiter's political speeches. The principal objective of the study was to explore what rhetorical strategies and stylistic devices presidents Dalia Grybauskaiter and Barrack Obama used in their political speeches and how these devices helped them to gain the audience's attention and render the message. The results of the research showed a significant contribution of stylistic means to persuade the listeners on an emotional level or even to manipulate them.

Addae, Aikins, Daniel Arkoh Fenyi and Hamidu Alhassan in 2021 carried out a research in Ghana, through the analytic guide of critical discourse analysis of selected speeches of Kwame Nkruma, to investigate the role of language in creating ideology and sustaining power and ideological discursive structures in political speeches. The study employed the qualitative research approach and textual analysis design. The purposive method was used to draw sample. The theoretical frameworks of Fairclough's CDA and van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach were combined to achieve the objectives of the study. The study revealed that the ideologies were carried out through discursive structures such as metaphor. The study also revealed that Nkruma relied on language to produce ideologies of nationalism, power and dominance in his speeches.

From the foregoing, none of the above researches has dealt on local figures employing evidentiality vis-a-vis generalization under the analysis of SIT. There is no evidence of theoretical framework in some of the studies. Hence, the present study on Cultural Context in Political Discourse: An Examination of Evidentiality vs Generalization in Kanu and Igboho's Discourses.

## **Theoretical Framework**

### **Social Identity Theory (SIT)**

Social identity theory (SIT) as developed by Tajfel and Turner in the 70s explains one's sense of belonging to a group and the positive or negative feelings related to the membership. It focuses on people's inherent need to make themselves outstanding among other group as a result of group membership. Individuals categorize themselves and others into social groups and seek to maintain a positive self-concept through the promotion of their in-group. In addition to this, they exhibit willingness to sacrifice pure levels of rewards to keep minimum superiority over members of other groups (Harwood 2020). The author further states that the willingness can lead to intergroup prejudice and conflict. Grouping of social world is a natural instinct geared to simplify our environment. Other scholars such as Tajfel as given by Aharpour (1999:11) conform:

Social identity is that part of an individual's self-concept which derives from the knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the significance attached to that membership. It follows from this that individuals may be judged on the basis of the value of the group (or groups) they belong to ... Individuals look for positive valued distinctiveness from other groups, adding to the identification process the motivation of a positive self-esteem.

The author further summarizes the meaning of SIT by saying that it predicts that a person will normally group the social reality differentiating between the groups they belong and other ones they do not belong. They will be propelled to compare the groups and evaluate them the way it will be favourable to their groups. By so doing they gain a positive identity against the other group they are not members. The strength of this theory lies on three primary elements which include social categorization, differentiation and social comparison. These elements provide a strong description of intergroup conflict. Among the three cognitive processes in social identification theory, social categorization is a *sin qua non* within any group. The author views perception as the element that separates the world into "us and them" (Aharpour 1995:9). Trepte (2014) also adds that in discussing intergroup conflict, the knowledge that people must understand a particular background that characterizes the presence of two or more groups is the foremost in the discourse.

## **Data Analysis**

### **Evidentiality**

**Excerpt 1** ...Look at the amount of money Magu looted as EFCC chairman...If Magu was Yoruba man, he would be in prison till date. How much did my father from Ila, Tafa Balogun embezzle that he was imprisoned by Obasanjo? It was because he is a Yoruba man. Look at how much Magu embezzled only for himself. Aishat, a thirty something year old girl was made head of Tinker in our father's land here in Lagos where she embezzled about one hundred and something billion and was asked to suspend her (559- 565).

Looking at the above extract, it could be discovered that Igboho has a clear historical evidence of what actually transpired in the Nigeria politics at the time of making this speech. It was on record that Ibrahim Magu the then EFCC (Economic and Financial Crimes Commission) acting chairman between 2015-2020 embezzled some huge amount of money of about 431,000,000.00 (forty-three million) that was not properly accounted for. However, he was later cleared of the corruption and acquitted. On the contrary, Ila Balogun, an Inspector General of Police in 2005 was charged of a similar crime of stealing and money laundering of about 4 million. Unfortunately, he was remanded in custody where he fell ill and finally gave up the ghost (Kokus in This Day August, 5 2022). This proof of fact brings the point home as the marginalization becomes evident.

**Excerpt 2** : Look at the 6 million Fulani, less than 6 million, they control 220 million people

The above statement is a clear statement though framed to compare the groups and evaluate them the way it will be favourable to their group. This is done to gain a positive identity against the other group. From history, Fulani ethnic group are often regarded as alien who should not be given such opportunity. Igboho successfully brings in this comparison based on the value of the Fulani and Yoruba ethnic groups. This is perfectly in line with Tajfel and Aharpour (1999:11) theory of SIT that "individuals may be judged on the basis of the value of the group (or groups) they belong to ... Individuals look for positive valued distinctiveness from other groups, adding to the identification process the motivation of a positive self-esteem".

**Excerpt 3 :** On the 14<sup>th</sup> of September, 2017, the terrorists of the zoo came to kill me . The Army of the zoo killed my dog Jack and few other people in my compound. IPOB military intelligent evacuated me from my compound when the Army of the zoo attacked me.

In this excerpt, Kanu brought to light the heavy attack that was launched on him and his family which led to the killing of his father, Jack his dog and several other household workers. He narrowly escaped death through the effort of the IPOB trained security troupe. He meticulously employed personal experience in his argument. There is direct personal experience and involvement of the speaker thereby reinforcing the reliability and authenticity of the claim. The use of the pronoun 'my' signifies that Kanu was an eye witness, hence, he has a firsthand information on his argument.

**Excerpt 4 :** Initiated and continued annual 30<sup>th</sup> May Biafra Heroes Remembrance Day. The 2015 Edition at Aba recorded over 3million attendees without a single adverse incident recorded .

Throughout South East, it has become an annual event to observe Biafrans Day on every May 30. The day is dedicated to remember the Biafran Heroes who lost their lives in one way or the other in the bid to actualize their aim. Through such events, the Biafran movement voice their message of defiance against oppression and redress for historical grievances and solidarity.

Both activists carefully harnessed the statistics records of important events in the course of their agitation. This projected them as worthy leaders with charismatic qualities. On the other hand, this strategy enhances commitments, engagements and above all solidarity and support towards his cause.

### **Generalization**

**Excerpt 5:** They (Fulani) are the ones who are changing money. They are also the ones making dollars high because Buhari's wife gave the money to her family to make and sell it.

Here is another mere speculation with no concrete fact to substantiate the claim. Though he is not ignorant of the effect of his statement, he only used it to draw more support from his people for them to believe his ideology. Drawing from Tjfel and Turner's SIT, Igboho used this generalization to win the massive support of his group by tactically reducing the character of his opponents by accusing them of causing dollar inflation and other financial challenges as they were compelled to buy money from them.

**Excerpt 6:** We are different, Yoruba is different in everything .We have respect, we have humility. God created us the Yoruba people to be humble and respect people.

Similarly, Igboho makes more mere metaphorical speculations without any proof. In other words, the speculations can be highly refuted. However, he used them to project a positive image of his people to the world. He said that to exclude his people from corruption and presented them responsible against their opposition. He employed the rhetorical strategy in order to gain attention, recognition and above all, solidarity. This undoubtedly, spurred the group to gain positive self-esteem and self-enhancement. The emphasis on positive things about the group is in consonance with social identity theory (SIT) which emphasized solidarity within one's group and discrimination against out-groups as a unit of social identity process. This is because positive discrepant comparisons produce positive social identity and vise vasa (Trepte 2014).

They will be propelled to compare the groups and evaluate them the way it will be favourable to their groups. By so doing they gain a positive identity against the other group they are not members.

**Excerpt 7:** God knows that what we want in the first place is the Yoruba Nation and he has already done it for us.

In the above extract, Igboho uttered a general statement which implies that all Yoruba people are in agreement with his motive. However, a good number of Yoruba people including the so called fathers are not in support of his mission. Besides, he strongly asserts that God has already granted them the freedom even when no tangible evidence is at hand even till date. This strategy is geared towards touching the emotive appeal of his audience to believe that their struggle is yielding beautiful fruits of success.

**Excerpt 8:** Buhari died on the 27<sup>th</sup> of January, 2017. Even Atiku knows that Buhari is dead.

The above statements are proofs of mere speculations that refute tangible evidence. They were only deployed by the activist to paint a good picture of us and bad picture of them. Eight years after making such a debunked statement about the said former president of Nigeria, President Muhamadu Buhari, he is still living till date. Hence, the conclusion is not logically justified as it lacks sufficient evidence. They were only used to achieve the discursive strategy of good representation of us and bad representation of them as explored in SIT.

**Excerpt 9:** The Igbo speaking Biafrans are known for their resourcefulness and resoluteness.

They make up their mind to embark on a mission. The Igbos from all I know about them do collectively abhor evil, they love hard work, helped one another, and tenaciously believed that “**nwanne di na mba**”.

The above declarations are mere generalizations from Kanu who stands so firm in projecting the good image of Biafrans. Though there have been the speculations that ‘Ndi Igbo’ are zealously diligent and hardworking, living in harmony with one another especially in diaspora, there has not been any tangible proof of such as there are many lazy Igbo people especially the youths who have taken to laziness and money rituals in place of hard work. This therefore leaves the statements unfounded. He only used the generalization to frame the Igbo people as marginalized in Nigeria which prompted their self- defense mechanism of resorting to hard work for survival in the face o the marginalization. Conversely, we see a good number of Igbo people especially youths who are living aimlessly and indulging in some nefarious activities including kidnapping their so called “nwanne” instead of working hard to make money.

**Excerpt 10 :** Biafrans are adventurous and are not afraid to venture into the unknown. Biafrans are known for their industrious and enterprising lifestyle propelled by sheer hard work and the “can do it spirit”.

Kanu’s framing of Biafrans as industrious, brave as well as entrepreneurial is a calculated effort to reinforce a powerful and unified group solidarity. Using the above description of Biafrans, Kanu presents characteristics that set them apart from other ethnic groups. This positive generalization fosters solidarity and a sense of distinctness and superiority.

### Conclusion

Nigeria’s political landscape is greatly influenced by ethno-linguistic affiliations, which provide a strong foundations for political actors to leverage in satisfying their political interests. This study has explored the use of evidentiality and generalization in the discourses of Nnamdi Kanu and Sunday Igboho, revealing the complex dynamics through which cultural contexts shape political rhetoric in a multilingual Nigerian setting. By tactically employing these linguistic strategies, the activists framed narratives that not only reflect their cultural identities but also serve to mobilize support and legitimize their causes. Evidentiality serves to validate claims, while generalization magnifies the perceived differences between allies and adversaries. The study argues that both activists strategically used evidentiality and generalization to construct persuasive claims, deeply rooted in their ethnic identity and historical injustices. Both activists carefully harnessed statistics records of significant events in the course of their agitation. At the same time, they framed certain pieces of evidence, including generalizations, to emphasize the uniqueness of their respective ethnic domains. This strategy enhances commitment, engagement, and, above all, solidarity toward their cause.

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