

Critical Discourse Analysis of Gubernatorial Debates in Abia State 2015 and 2019 Elections

Ifunanya Laurencia Ebekue, PhD

Directorate of Information and Communication Technology (Hardware Services)

Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka

li.ebekue@unizik.edu.ng

Abstract

Critical discourse analysis is a type of discourse analytical research that views language as a powerful means through which specific ideologies, identities, and culture become dominant in a society. This is captured in the debates of gubernatorial candidates in Abia State 2015 and 2019 elections. The study examines language use, politics, the relationship between language and politics and ideologies employed by the candidates. The study uses tripartite theoretical framework in analysing the data for the study. The tripartite theories are Fairclough's Three Dimensional Theory, van Dijk Socio-cognitive Theory and Systemic Functional Theory. The choice of this framework is to ensure that every aspect of the debates is not neglected. The analytical tools are applied to gubernatorial debates in Abia State held in 2015 and 2019 elections. The study uses multi-method approach. The findings reveal that the gubernatorial debates encode power and dominance with ideological undertone. Also that power of dominance is achieved through the use of pronominal selection which allows the speaker to enforce his views on others. The study concludes that the text produced in 2015 and 2019 gubernatorial electioneering debates in Abia State, not only promote unequal power relations, rather they also produced, reproduced, legitimized and maintained social structures that sustain domination.

Keywords: Discourse, discourse analysis, critical discourse analysis, political discourse

Introduction

Discourse is a practice and a form of language use. As a practice, it does not just represent the world but signifies, constitutes and constructs the world in meaning. Simply put, discourse brings out a particular domain of practice from a particular perspective. Discourse Analysis (DA) is the analytical framework which was created for studying actual text and talk in the communicative context while Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a type of discourse analytical research that primarily studies the way social power abuse, dominance and inequality are enacted, reproduced and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context. CDA views language as a powerful means through which specific ideologies, identities, and culture become dominant in a society. CDA scholars believe that the choice of language interlocutors make reflects their intentions, ideology, and thought. This is an effective means for polarizing power in the society (van Dijk cited in Rahimi and Rasati, 2011). Distinctively, critical discourse analysis wants to know the role of discourse in the production and challenge of power and dominance; how language is used and abused by the elite class and their discursive strategies for the maintenance of inequality; how language can be an instrument of persuasion and impression, justification, propaganda, oppression and suppression, manipulation and misrepresentation.

This study is classified under political discourse since it has to do with politics. Political discourse is a distinctive discourse token that replicates the dynamicity of its environment. Political discourse according to Wilson "is concerned with formal and informal political contexts and political actors, politicians, political institutions, governments, political media, and political supporters operating in political environments to achieve political goal" (2003:398). This means that political discourse involves all aspect of human endeavour. This present study, therefore, arises from the need to address the important features of the language of political debates in Abia State from the perspective of discourse patterns taking into consideration the ideological and power patterns encoded in the texts. Again, the linguistic features and discursive strategies used by the candidates in the debates are explored to show the role of language in establishing, creating and sustaining power relations, inequalities as well as ideological structures of society within the framework of CDA.

Literature Review

There are different concepts discussed under the conceptual framework of this study. They are discourse, text, critical discourse analysis and political discourse. Speaking in a layman's language, when we talk of discourse we see discourse as what we get when language is used in communication between people. In linguistics, discourse is used to describe an extended stretch of language beyond the boundaries of the sentence. The implication is that as in a sentence, there is internal structure (subject, verb, object, or complement), elements beyond the sentence which also contain similar structures. According to Ricoeur (qtd in Akwanya, 2002), discourse has five characteristics that the semantics of ordinary language must take account of. They are: that discourse is an act, it unites sense and reference, it identifies and predicates, it is simultaneously event and meaning and it is anchored in the present. Texts and discourse are intertwined. Fairclough(2001b) highlights a text as the product of a process in which discourse is closely related to social structures in its production and interpretation. Not minding the knit

between text and discourse, there is a difference between the two. Stubbs (1983) differentiates between written and spoken languages in terms of text and discourse respectively. Whereas text is written and non-spoken monologue, discourse is spoken and interactive dialogue. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is another concept discussed in the study. Different scholars gave different definition of CDA.

Summarily, CDA sees language as an action. Its main duty is to elaborate relationship of power, dominance, and inequality produced in discourse. A critical discourse analysis of language seems as a critical factor as the embodiment of particular power. A text produced particular ideology. The development of critical discourse analysis creates various theories and approach which are also used in the research field. Political discourse is also a concept that featured in the study. Political discourse is an umbrella term for various political talks made at different political forums such as political campaign rallies, party manifestoes, inaugural speeches, bills among others. Schaffer (1996) sees political discourse, as a sub-category of discourse in general, which can be based on two criteria: functional and thematic. Political discourse is a result of politics and it is historically and culturally determined. It fulfills different functions due to different political activities. It is thematic because its topics are primarily related to politics such as political activities, political ideas and political relations (qtd in Ebekue, 2023).

Empirical Studies

The empirical studies of this study looked at different studies by scholars to buttress the study. There are few scholarly studies on debate discourse in Nigeria. Other studies on Nigerian political discourse and CDA are also reviewed to boost this study. A review on Political discourse on debate is first reviewed. Bayram (2010) in the work titled: *Ideology and Political Discourse: An Analysis of Erdogan's Political Speech* analyses the ideological component and linguistic background enshrined in the Turkish Prime Ministers' speech during a debate. Fairclough's assumptions in CDA was used in doing the analysis. The result aligned with Fairclough's notion of ideology residing in text and that "ideology invests language in various ways at various levels". Importance is attached to our attitudes to language. Our perceptions of the characteristics of a person or social group may be influenced by these attitudes. This study did not cover aspects of power relations in the form of liberalism, manipulation and domination which is the pivot of the present study. This study unmasked the discursive strategies of Erdogan during a debate within the context of his ideological, cultural and linguistic background and it tried to affirm the assertion that ideology is both "property of structures and of events". Also the account of linguistic items drawn from members' resources according to Fairclough is omitted. Their data are entirely different from each other. Another review shows the investigation of two authors, Khoirunisa and Indah (2017) investigate the argumentative statements of Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump during the debates. The study made use of two theories; van Dijk's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Toulmin's model of argument. The main purpose of the study is to expose how various ideologies are expressed in the structure of arguments. Toulmin's model was used to analyze the structures of argumentation during the debates which consists of six elements (claim, data, warrant, backing, qualifier, and rebuttal). Van Dijk's framework was used to analyze the reproduction of racism, manipulation, and Islamophobia. The framework covers three levels of discourse structure (the meaning, the argumentation and the rhetoric). The result shown the difference in the way they use argumentative statements, the way they formulate their arguments and the way they present some various ideologies during the presidential debates. The findings revealed that the discourse of the candidates contributes the reproduction of manipulation by focusing on the positive self-presentation of "us" (civilized) and negative other-presentation of "them" (terrorists) as a mind control of the audience. This study is ideologically driven likewise the present study but are different from each other in methodology, nature of data and institutional framework.

Reviews on other aspect of political speeches such as campaign/inaugural/victory/manifestoes are stated below. An attempt by Oni (2010) examines how language encodes power in some selected speeches of former President Olusegun Obasanjo within the framework of CDA. The framework for the study is based on Fairclough's 2001 members' resources and Halliday's (1970) system of mood and modality. The results showed that Obasanjo deployed language as a strategy of suppression by exploiting lexical items with negative expressive values to stifle oppositions as well as make them unpopular. From the findings, the study revealed that the use of power as strategy of domination is mainly achieved through imperatives which allow the speaker to impose his opinion on others. The study used declaratives to neutralize the asymmetrical power relation that exists between Obasanjo and the Nigerian Labour Congress and this has the consequence of dipping the authority of Obasanjo. The present study is different from Oni's study in data usage. While this study provides verifiable empirical evidence on how linguistic expressions encode power and unequal power relations, the present study examines power relations and ideological projections encoded in the 2015 and 2019 gubernatorial debates in Abia State. It also adopts van Dijk's approach of CDA to account for mental representation of individuals.

Another scholar Ezeifeka (2013) discusses the interpersonal meaning in two inaugural political speeches of Nigerian past leaders-President Olusegun Obasanjo's "The New Dawn" (1999) and Alhaji Shehu Shagari (1979).

The result showed that there is a high prevalence of finite temporal operators (be, have, do). This gives the speeches their propositional structure-that of exchange of information. These gave rise to a high prevalence of propositions as against proposals exchange of goods and services- expressed by modal operators (must, will). This conclusion was further illustrated by the high prevalence of declarative clauses. The choices in the lexicogrammar can be instruments by the politicians in dominating the masses. As a result of this, the dominated accept the status quo as legitimate. The implication of this study is that the language use among the power elite should not be deceitful rather it should gear towards transparency. The present study uses three theories and this makes it different from the previous study. Also nature of data is different.

Theoretical Framework

The study made use of tripartite framework. They are Fairclough's three-dimensional framework plus members' resources, van Dijk's socio-cognitive framework (all within CDA); and Halliday's systemic functional grammar (SFG) model. The choice of the usage of two CDA approach is to ensure that no aspect of the data suffer negligence. Fairclough's model helps in analyzing the ideological implication and hidden agenda in the work; van Dijk's assists in discovering the distortion of realities in the process of discourse production. Fairclough's method tries to make explicit the ideological and power patterns in texts. He provided three-dimensional framework for text analysis which is widely used today in the field of CDA. The three dimensions are:

- (i) Description: This is the stage which is concerned with formal properties of the text.
- (ii) Interpretation: This is concerned with the relationship between text and interaction – with seeing the text as the product of a process of production, and as a resource in the process of interpretation.
- (iii) Explanation: This is concerned with the relationship between interpretation and social context – with the social determination of the processes of production and interpretation, and social effects. (Fairclough, 1989).

Van Dijk's socio-cognitive model is based on the assumption that cognition mediates between "society" and "discourse". He argues that the semantic macro structure (global meaning) and semantic micro structure (local meanings) are mentally organized by language users (van Dijk, 2004). In analyzing power in discourse, he states that attention should be given to the description and explanation of how power abuse is enacted, reproduced or legitimized (van Dijk, 2004). Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) is adopted as the study's grammatical approach. SFG is a system of meaning. As a system of meaning it makes it a relevant grammatical model for this study since the 'grammar' of the language which the speaker selects within this system is not in a vacuum but in the context of speech situations. It sees language as a social activity. The two fundamental aspects of these functions have been categorized as reflection and action (Halliday 1978); language as a means of reflecting on things (ideational) and language as a means of activity on things (interpersonal). Halliday's interpersonal function is relevant to the study of power in speeches. The interpersonal component is concerned with the expression of the speaker's angle: his attitude and judgement, his encoding of the relationships in the situation, and his motive in saying anything at all. This functional component is represented by mood and modality. The notions of transitivity, mood/modality and theme realize respectively these meaning potentials at the lexicogrammatical level and these are also related respectively to the contextual dimensions of field, tenor and mode. (Eggs, 2004 and Halliday 1978). Interpersonal meaning is expressed in the lexicogrammar by the features of Mood and Modality while textual functions are covered by the features of register.

Methodology

This study adopts qualitative research design which is based on the qualitative interpretation of the data obtained from debate speeches in Abia State 2015 and 2019 elections. They are nine aspirants (four in 2015 and five in 2019)involved in the debates. The aspirants' speeches are purposely selected. The debates are transcribed and analyzed to show how social relations, identity, knowledge and power are constructed and reproduced through words. The textual orientations of SFG which is discursive in nature and contains relevant analytical categories are used to explain the features and meanings of the significant expressions of the aspirants. The systemic functional grammar is used to analyze the internal structures of the utterances in the debates while CDA is used to uncover the hidden agenda in the study and to identify the power structures and ideologies/strategies evident in the debates. Halliday's system of mood and modality is used to emphasize meaning as exchange of information, goods and services between interactants and functions of the clauses as propositions or proposals.

Data analysis

The basic principles of CDA and SFG are applied to analyze selected utterances with a view to providing workable and more in-depth interpretation of the utterances. The utterances presented answered the research questions presented in this study.

1. What mood and modality choices are prevalent in the gubernatorial debates selected for the study

2. How do these mood and modality choices position the candidates as modally responsible agents to their propositions and proposals?
3. What register choices are deployed by these candidates to persuade their electorates and win/manufacture consents?
4. What power structures are exploited by these linguistic choices in the debates by each candidate?
5. What ideologies/strategies are evident in these linguistic choices?
6. What are the implications of these ideologies/strategies and power structures for critical discourse analysis and critical language awareness?

Mood and Modality Structure of the Debates: The mood and modality choices are prevalent in the Abia State gubernatorial debates. The data is presented in table form to show the utterances, mood and modality types and modal values extracted. Five utterances are selected from the debates to accommodate all the candidates that participated in the debates and to cover both propositions and proposals made by the candidates. From the data gotten, it shows that the aspirants used more of propositions than the proposals in order to impress the voters with their achievements. The propositions are three in number while the proposal are two in number which featured the two types of mood types- declarative and interrogative. The declarative mood type is more in number than the interrogative because more of statements are used in the debates. Medial modal value occurred more than other modal values. Below is sample of the data:

S/N	Utterances	Mood Types	Modality Types	Modal Values
1	Abia has been serially subchanged by the successive government. (Emeka Uwakolam, Accord aspirant)	Declarative	Proposition	Median
2	Our intervention in Aba road is legendary. (Okezie Ikpeazu, PDP aspirant)	Declarative	Proposition	Median
3	Are we talking of the roads? (Blessing Nwagba, SDP aspirant)	Interrogative	Proposition	Median
4	I offered myself in 2015 for this position. The election was won by me but the mandate was stolen. (Alex Otti, APGA aspirant)	Declarative	Proposal	High
5	I will make my contributions and others will make their contributions. (Okezie Ikpeazu, PDP aspirant)	Declarative	Proposal	Median

Mood and Modality Structure of the Debates as Modally Responsible Agents: The focus of this is to see how the candidates are positioned as modally responsible agents to their propositions and proposals. The extracts from the utterances show that the speaker is positioned in Subject positions as the modally-responsible agent in the role relationships of the debates. There are four functions of the Subject; as Speaker (I), as Speaker + (we), as addressee (you) and as non interactant subjects (others). The speaker takes full responsibility of his actions when he uses the personal pronoun "I". In other words, it functions as modally-responsible agent. There is a deliberate shift in the use of "I" to "We" and "my" to "our" as seen in the second row. This is so to suit the opinion of the speakers. The usage of "we" shifts modal responsibility away from the speakers. In the third row, the usage of "you" in the Subject position shifts the modal responsibility to the addressee, the speakers and other participants. The last row describes non interactant in the Subject position. The non interactants take modal responsibility of the claim in the utterance. This is so because the speakers tried to avoid being linked to in case of failure. The table below captures the analysis.

S/N	Utterances	Mood	Function
1.	I have done the best roads in Abia.(Okezie Ikpeazu, PDP aspirant)	Subject	"Speaker" (I, my government/ administration)
1.	We must handover this state to God. (Emeka Uwakolam, Accord aspirant)		"Speaker +" (we, our government/administration)
1	You know the economic works on consumption and expenditure. (Alex Otti, APGA aspirant)		"addressee(you)"
1.	Abia is one of the smallest state in land area. (Blessing Nwagba, SDP aspirant)		Non interactant subjects (others)

Register choices and power structures: The implications of ideologies/strategies and power structures in the debates

There are register choices used in the debates. These are selected using the field of discourse. The field of discourse has five headings; introduction, employment/human development, infrastructure/economy/agriculture, education and security. Under each heading, there are words peculiar to it. The register choices are selected and placed based on the headings. For example in the heading; employment/human development as a field of discourse has its peculiarity such as accessibility to government programme, revitalize alien industries, human resources, creative and skilled etc. Coming to power structures, three power structure types are identified in the debates. They are power as dominion, power as manipulation/mind control and power as liberalism. In power as dominion, the aspirant used the strategy to show authority and control as seen in the extract below.

700,000 jobs will be created. With what we are doing with oil palm and cassava I am sure that very very soon the problem of unemployment in Abia will truly be a thing of the past". (Okezie Ikpeazu, PDP aspirant- AED- 2015)

The lexical item "created" shows power and authority. The speaker sees himself as the provider of jobs thereby equating himself with God who does all things. The second power structure is Power as manipulation/mind control. The speaker deploys this strategy to influence the thought of the masses. This strategy works hand in hand with the ideologies mentioned in the debates. The third strategy is power as liberalism. In this strategy the speaker presents his opinions as suggestions. It does not impose his suggestions on the audience as seen in this extract: *"As a governor if I am elected, I will look at other ways of generating internal revenue. We have a lot of ways"* (Blessing Nwagba, SDP aspirant). The audience are free to make their choices. Looking at the ideologies/strategies evident in the debates, two ideologies are identified and three strategies. They are ideologies of positive self-representation of "us" and negative other representation of "them" ideology of isolation/personality profiling, strategy of self-glorification, strategy as a weapon of negotiation and strategy as a weapon of persuasion and pleading. These ideologies/strategies are used by the speakers to present themselves in different ways. The extract below is a sample of ideology of isolation/personality profiling where the speaker presents his ability to govern the people.

My commitment is to serve God and humanity. Therefore, I am driven by a strong determination to achieve results. I am propelled by the fundamental needs of our people. I believe that to successfully achieve this, there is need to consult and involve a wide spectrum of our society

There are implications of these ideologies/strategies and power structures for critical discourse analysis and critical language awareness. Base on the study, they are eight in number which covers the ideologies, strategies and power structures. The implication of positive self and negative other is self worth. That of isolation/personality profiling is self-confidence. The implication for strategy of self-glorification is egocentric while that of weapon as negotiation is compassion. That of weapon of persuasion and pleading is manipulation. Implication for power as dominion is capability, hopefulness for that of power as manipulation/mind control and essentiality for that of power as liberalism. The table below explains further.

S/ N	Utterances	Ideology/Strategy types	Power structures	Implication
1	We know in 2013, the time we are picking AK47 in the streets of Abia. Since 2015 till now there is no single case of bank robbery in Abia state to the glory of God. (Okezie Ikpeazu, PDP aspirant)	Positive self representation of "us" and negative other representation of them		Self-worth
2	I am a sociologist by training. I have a doctorate degree in sociology. I have over the years played politics. (Blessing Nwagba, SDP aspirant)	Isolation/personality profiling		Self-confidence
3	I am one Abia that is very passionate about Abia. That really believes that Abia should go forward. (Emeka Uwakolam, Accord aspirant)	Self-glorification		Egocentric
4	20 years is a long time for even a child to begin to grow up. Abia state has not started the journey of development so I am passionate about developing my state of Abia	Weapon of negotiation		Compassion

	and that is why I am offering myself and a lot of things that we can do. (Alex Otti, APGA aspirant)			
5	I was interacting with the keke people, you take N60 when they are going and coming back. At the end of the day they pay more than N1000 and the roads through which it's passing is not built. (Emeka Uwakolam, Accord aspirant)	Weapon of persuasion and pleading		Manipulation
6	The second reason I am offering myself is to lift Abia people from suffering. (Alex Otti, APGA aspirant)		Power of dominion	Capability
7	No past administration in the state built any road that lasted up to 10 years. I have built roads that would outlive my administration. I have done the best roads in Abia. (Okezie Ikpeazu, PDP aspirant)		Power as manipulation/mind control	Hopefulness
8	This is the first time we are running on what we have done or doing and we think the essence of this debate is to say what we have done in the past and how we intend to put to bare on what we will do in Abia. (Okezie Ikpeazu, PDP aspirant)		Power as liberalism	Essentiality

Discussion of findings

The mood and modality system specify the interpersonal structure of the clauses inherent in mood: clause as exchange of information and clause as exchange of goods and services as seen in the data. Two operators are prevalent according to the data; finite temporal operators (be, have, do) and modal operators (must, will, can). There is a high occurrence of finite temporal operators more than the modal operators. These finite operators give the debates their propositional structure- that of exchange of information hence a high occurrence of propositions as against proposals-exchange of goods and services. There are two mood types used in the debates; declarative and interrogative. The declarative mood type was in high occurrence. The modal values show that median modal value is on the high side more than low and high modal values.

In the debates, there are uses of personal pronouns (I, we, you) and possessive (my/our government). These are in potential Subject positions of the clauses. They are seen as ideologically motivated. The Subject in the Mood and modality structures specify the responsible element in the proposition or proposal as stated in the review of literature. The result shows that majority of sampled clauses position the speakers in Subject positions as the modally-responsible agent in the role relationships of the debates. There was a shift in the use of "I" and "we", "my" and "our" in potential Subject positions. This shift is intentional to fit the view of the speakers. In interpreting the shift, we could say it is purposeful manipulation by the speakers which is designed at either claiming or disclaiming responsibility depending on the matter at stake. The speaker made use of "I" when the speaker is confident and wants to claim responsibility for positive achievement. Nevertheless, "we" is used when the speaker is in doubt of the verifiability or acceptability of the proposition or proposal. This is so in other not to hold the speaker modally responsible for the claim in case of any failure. Explaining further to the shift in the use of singular and plural personal pronouns in Subject position, it could be that "I" is used when the speakers want to adopt what Yule calls a "face threatening act". This is done when the speakers want to affirm authority as those in charge. However, the speakers change to face-preserving acts by the use of plural "we" when they need the comradeship of their audience, to identify with them and win their consent as well as carry their hegemonies.

Also there is the use of "you" and some instances of "we" in subject positions in the debates. This usage tried to place the burden of modal responsibility on the addressee (the electorates) and the Speakers plus other participants (masses) even when the speech-functional import of such propositions are questionable. They leave the addressee with no option for acknowledgement or denial of the proposition. The data as well showed low occurrence of non-interactant Subjects with finite temporal operators in declarative clauses. These non-interactants totally remove modal responsibility away from the speaker's persona. The register choices inherent in the debates are

showcased. This is done base on the field of discourse which were stated into five. Register choices suitable to the field of discourse are placed accordingly across the debates chosen for the study. For instance, the introduction as a field of discourse has its characteristics such as greetings, brief introduction of the aspirant and educational background.

Power structures used in the debates are not left out. In analysing the various dimensions of the relations of power and language, two levels of micro and macro levels showcase by van Dijk are looked into. The analysis captures discourse structures that have implications of power and unequal power relations in terms of power as strategies of domination, mind control/ manipulation and liberalism. Power as Domination is a strategy used by the political aspirants to show power, authority and supremacy, especially supremacy of a particular view or belief over that of others. For instance in the example below: “ 700,000 jobs will be created... (Okezie Ikpeazu, PDP aspirant-AED-2015). The lexical item “create” in the above extract shows dominance and supremacy. The speaker draws attention to himself as the great provider (equating himself with God) of jobs.

The asymmetrical power relation between the speaker and the audience is best revealed in the lexical item “create”. This by implication means that he is all-powerful governor aspirant who is incharge and wants the less privileged to see things in the light of his view, as the messiah who has come to salvage their plight. Power as manipulation/mind control, a strategy positioned to sway the thought of the masses is used in the debates to win the electorates through the formation of biased mental models and social representation. The strategy is not just used but in one way or the other uses the ideologies inherent in the debates to drive home its message. In other words, power as manipulation/mind control does not work in isolation but work hand in hand with the ideologies mention in the debates. Implicitly, this strategy awakens the consciousness and sub-consciousness of the people to activities around them. The text producer admits that the people have the command to choose who becomes the next governor and as a result of this, he uses mental model to work on their psyche. Coming to power as liberalism we see it as an endeavour by a speaker to bridge the gap between him and the electorate. A speaker uses power to liberalise when he or she does not impose any constraint on the audience. With this common identity between the speaker and his audience, the speaker only presents his opinions as suggestions.

In the debates, there are uses of ideologies/strategies. The study identifies two ideologies and three strategies that are prevalent in the debates. The ideologies are ideology of positive self-representation of “us” and negative other representation of “them” and ideology of isolation/personality profiling. In ideology of positive self-representation of “us” and negative other representation of “them”, the candidates presented themselves and their groups in positive terms and other groups in negative terms. In achieving this, they selected some socially shared mental model with a negative connotation in the text and the essence of doing this is to capture different ideological positions. For instance, in the following example: “Your inability to sack the management of parastatals for their poor performance shows that you are not competent.” (Emeka Uwakolam, Accord aspirant). The Accord candidate for the election attacked the incumbent governor and tried tarnishing his image by presenting him as incompetent. The aim of this fact-giving strategy is to make the audience reject their opponent and accept the speaker(s). The background information recalled by the speaker is a prejudiced platform to project his own ideology. Ideology of isolation/personality profiling brings out the belief of the masses that personality is the key thing in politics not the political affiliation one belongs to. The speaker using this ideology believes that his profile paves way more than the political party he/she belongs to. It is under this ideology that Members’ Recourses is at work. A candidate is eligible to get the people’s vote based on his personality, contributions and involvement in the society and not simply because of his/her affiliation (party). What this ideology implies is that the candidate is seen as the right person to be elected because of his/her achievements, involvement in state affairs and personality. This is time when political party one belongs does not count rather the person’s personality and achievement. The study identified three strategies. Strategy of self-glorification is related to positive self representation of “us” and negative other representation of “them”. But this strategy is a bit different from the ideology because it anchors on personal achievement without the help of the party. For instance, in the example below:

No past administration in the state built any road that lasted up to 10 years. I have built roads that would outlive my administration. I have done the best roads in Abia(Okezie Ikpeazu, PDP aspirant)

The extract indulged clearly in self- glorification. The speaker projects himself as the capable person for the job. The expression: “I have built roads that would outlive my administration” establish his reliability to deliver. I have done the best roads in Abia is an implicit way of spurring the electorates’ minds in believing in his capability. This assertion may not be right in reality but to win people’s vote he used it gain their votes. This type of opaque ideological representation is a veritable tool in the hands of Nigerian politicians to deceive unsuspecting electorates. The essence of the expressions to the masses is to appeal to their minds and consciences in seeing the candidate as the “Saviour”. Another strategy that is seen in the debates is strategy as a weapon of negotiation.

Here the speaker(s) align with the thoughts of the masses in his statements. In so doing he is seen that have the interest of the masses at heart. Again, strategy as a weapon of persuasion and pleading in engaged by the candidates to appeal to the ideological common sense that stems from the candidates' background knowledge of the important position the masses occupy in the country, hence, the assertion, "for any meaningful progress to be made, you have to put the people first." The expressions are used implicitly to gain the support of the people. The ideologies and strategies are not used in isolation. They are either positioned as a device to manipulate people and control their mind or as a device to convince the listeners. The implications of these ideologies/strategies and power structures for critical discourse analysis and critical language awareness congeal the analysis. The ideologies/strategies do not work in isolation but work hand in hand with the power structures as seen in the extract below.

I am a sociologist by training. I have a doctorate degree in sociology. I have over the years played politics. (Blessing Nwagba, SDP aspirant).

The speaker deployed the ideology of isolation/personality profiling in the above extract. By so doing, the candidate indulged in power structure of manipulation/mind control to win the vote of the masses. Looking at the analysis, it shows political debates that are skilfully constructed to manipulate, deceive and dominate the masses, consequently, to gain the votes of the electorates. Their sole aim is to get their target which is the votes of the electorates. Whether the promises made are fulfilled is secondary so far they hit their target. The politicians mostly make snooty promises to gain the support of the people and this is the main purpose of the debates.

Conclusion

This study, having examined the gubernatorial debates in Abia State 2015 and 2019 elections, looked at the linguistic choices implored by the candidates. The paper revealed also that a critical discourse analysis of the elections was done. From the discovery, it was observed that the candidates made use of register, mood and modality choices to gain their votes from the electorates. The deployment of the linguistic elements was seen as genuine instruments of the power elite in manipulating, propagating, deceiving and denying of the basic subsistence of the less dominant to the point that they accept the existing conditions as justifiable. In conclusion, Abia State candidates made use of their debates as tool for establishing, maintaining, sustaining power and unequal power relations in the elections.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study recommends that politicians should refrain from offensive words that assail the individuality of their opponents. By doing so, they will be seen as reliable and sustainable leaders who are mature and emotionally balanced. Again, it will portray them as capable leaders that concern themselves with national values rather than frivolities and character assassination. They should be more frank in making statements either to present themselves as 'saints' and others as 'evil' by self-glorification and personality profiling. Our leaders should be compliant and imitate the qualities of humility in their dealings with their opponents.

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