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**A SOCIO-LINGUISTIC ANALYSIS OF DELL HYMES' SPEAKING MODEL IN
SELECTED 2023 PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN SPEECHES IN NIGERIA**

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Abstract

This study examines how language was used as a strategic tool during the 2023 Nigerian presidential campaigns, with a focus on the speeches of Bola Ahmed Tinubu and Peter Obi. The main aim of the study is to analyze how campaign speeches conform to Dell Hymes' SPEAKING model and how linguistic features such as code-switching, code-mixing, metaphors, and culturally meaningful expressions were used to connect with Nigeria's diverse audiences. The study is anchored on Dell Hymes' ethnography of communication, which explains speech as a social and cultural activity shaped by context. Using a qualitative research design, the study purposively selected ten campaign speech excerpts from publicly available YouTube videos across different geopolitical zones in Nigeria. These speeches were transcribed and analyzed using the SPEAKING model to capture setting, participants, goals, tone, and language choices. The findings reveal that both candidates consciously adapted their language to suit regional and cultural contexts, frequently using code-switching and, in limited cases, code-mixing to express solidarity, identity, and inclusion. The study concludes that language played a crucial role in political persuasion and voter mobilization during the campaigns, showing that effective political communication in Nigeria depends largely on sensitivity to linguistic and cultural diversity.

Keywords: Dell Hymes' SPEAKING Model, political discourse, campaign speeches, code-switching, political communication, Nigeria

1. INTRODUCTION

Language and culture are two vital components of human society that directly shape how individuals frame their opinions and identities; how they define boundaries between themselves or the preferred multiplicity of language use within so-called borders; the degree to which people engage in social or political efforts. This interplay is particularly noticeable in political campaign, where language works as both a means for the communication of political ideas, an ideological carrier, and as cultural representation, or a mobilizing device that shapes personal identity. Political communication sits firmly at home in the realities of culture in a multilingual and multicultural country like Nigeria, where the land is rich with over 250 ethnic nationalities of more than 500 different languages. The 2023 presidential races offered a highly visible opportunity to explore political language deployed across the nation, how it drew on audience diversity, built cultural bridges, created Connectedness, and shaped perceptions of candidate viability from coast-to-coast. Beyond the paradigms of presentation of manifestoes and policy proposals, what these campaigns exemplified is that political communication in Nigeria is performance linked to culture along axes like ethnicity, religion, history and language.

This study is motivated by the view that language is a fundamental medium of negotiating cultural diversity in Nigeria's democratisation process. This research investigates the coordinated deployment of linguistic resources by candidates competing for votes, under an institutional framework in a multilingual-cultured nation seeking acceptance during the 2023 presidential election. Existing research recognizes the significance of language in political persuasion but focuses primarily on illustrative cases, without investigating how linguistic choices are strategically deployed to align with cultural differences and cohere electoral results. Thus, it becomes important to study the inter-play of language and culture in influencing political messages and their effect on voter behavior. As a result, this study focuses on the convergence of language and politics in Nigeria's 2023 presidential campaigns looking for how candidates try to attract people while being careful not to offend ethnic, regional and religious sentiments by deploying specifically linguistic strategies; code data switching/ mixing, using metaphors with local relevance, culturally coded expressions.

The research aims to add to the more general field of political communication by understanding how language works as a tool for negotiations over culture, the technology of identity, and mobilization in a diverse society. Specifically this study intends to, identify whether the campaign speeches align with the Speaking Model and also evaluate how language and politics, code-switching, code-mixing influence the communication of political messages relevant to specific groups in 2023 presidential campaigns. The time period assumed for the research is limited to campaign speeches that were made certain times in the presidential election 2023 and thus it mainly deals with interaction of language and culture as seen in political discourse. The research proposes to enhance the understanding of the extent to which linguistic strategies both reflect and construct cultural realities, impacting political communication and democratic participation in Nigeria.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Conceptual Review

Linguistics

Linguistics is the scientific study of language, examining its structure, meaning, acquisition, and relationship with other disciplines such as anthropology, sociology, philosophy, and psychology (Yule, 2). The discipline has a long history, beginning with early linguistic records in Mesopotamia, followed by the contributions of Pāṇini and Aristotle, as well as Arabic and Hebrew grammatical traditions during the Middle Ages (Robins, 81). Modern linguistics emerged as an independent social science through the work of Ferdinand de Saussure, who viewed language as a structured system and laid the foundation for major branches such as phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, sociolinguistics, and computational linguistics (Robins, 81).

Language and Politics

Language and politics go hand in hand, since language itself is a much-used tool for Political action by means of expression, persuasion as well as Identity construction or negotiation (Fairclough, 21; Chilton, 3). Politics concerns the ways in which power is achieved, exercised and used within society (Heywood, 2). The connection between language and politics is visible in the way that linguistic devices (rhetoric, metaphors, code-switching etc.) are used to sway public opinion or attain political aims (Wodak, 12).

Politicians in political discourse use repetition, slogans and metaphors to render messages attractive and unforgettable for people (Lakoff, 15). Examples of such strategies include the Nigerian presidential campaigns, held in 2023 where candidates fashioned their messages for particular cultural and regional audiences (Opeibi, 45). Code-switching, for example, allows politicians to express solidarity with specific ethnic groups and reinforce communal ties (Myers-Scotton, 47; Kamwangamalu, 119). Another function of political language as cultural resources relates to the use of symbols and historical references that seeks to legitimize authority, criticize opponents, and write identity/coalition concepts into political narratives (e.g. “us versus them”) — Van Dijk 26, Chilton 56. But in Nigeria, where linguistic diversity predominates, these choices can either transcend or entrench ethnic and regional divisions (Kamwangamalu 122)

In addition, political debates embody the deeper struggles of ideas and power. For instance, although there are social processes that can reproduce or resist hegemonic relationships between groups (Jordan, 66); and politicians tend to use inclusive or divisive rhetoric depending on the goals they aim for (Wodak, 15), —as Fairclough points out about power structures of language reproduction in his book *Discourse and Social Change*—; Poll rhetoric: In the statements "broom revolution" of Tinubu and “*ndi mmadu bu structure*” of Obi, this shows an example of how localised language was deployed while trying to open wider channels to achieve modern political purposes in 2023 campaigns (Opeibi, 47). And so, language is still a critical weapon of persuasion, political mobilization and cultural engagement.

Code-Switching and Code-Mixing

The sociolinguistic phenomenon of code-switching and code-mixing is more evident in multilingual society like Nigeria where speakers switch between indigenous languages, Nigerian Pidgin and English. Such practices reveal linguistic competence, social identity and communicative intention.

Code-switching is the use of more than one language or more than one variety of a language in conversation: the alternation between two or more languages, etc. Gumperz defines it as the alternating of speech segments from distinct grammatical systems inside a single interaction (59). Holmes elaborates on the social functions of code-switching such as solidarity, authority, group membership or social distance (35). In Nigeria, code-switching is not just prominent in every day conversation, but also a reflection of identity status, emphasis and appropriateness to context.

In contrast to this in code-mixing, you insert a word or phrase, sometimes even a grammatical element of several feature to one language into one sentence written another. They are defined as the use of lexical and grammatical elements from two languages within one utterance (Poplack 583). For instance, the Hausa-derived *wahala* is incorporated in an English lexicon. Code-switching is where you see an explicit change from one language to the next, but code-mixing builds a bridge between these languages.

Myers-Scotton's Matrix Language Frame Model, which states that one language typically provides the grammatical frame and materials from another language are inserted inside it (98). In Nigeria, for example, English functions as the matrix language and an indigenous language can supply embedded items. The dual usage of different languages has become a part and parcel of mass communication, education and casual conversations as it makes understanding easy for the audience. According to Bamgbose, multilingualism is a typical attribute of the Nigeria society; consequently, code alternation is not a sign of linguistic incompetence but rather an ordinary communicative model. (24) In a similar vein, Adegbija (1994) also asserts that code-switching has pragmatic functions in such aspects as emphasis, clarification, humour and identity negotiation (75). As a result, both phenomena function as viable communicative resources in contexts of multilingual discourse and social interaction.

2.2 Empirical Review

Several research works have been carried out by various researchers in attempt to decipher the use of language during campaigns. Some of the works are being reviewed by the researcher.

Barnali Chetia (2004) conducted a qualitative study on rhetorical devices in 25 English advertisement texts from Nhuan Street, India, using discursive rhetorical analysis. The findings revealed that metaphors, similes, and personification were used to influence audience thoughts, recommending careful rhetorical choices in advertising (Chetia, 2004).

Emma Ezejideaku and Esther Ugwu (2007) explored Nigerian political campaigns of PDP and AC using a descriptive design and Speech Act Theory, analyzing two speeches. They found heavy reliance on rhetoric and propaganda, concluding that pragmatic elements

distinguish propaganda and urging politicians to avoid manipulative utterances (Ezejideaku & Ugwu, 2007).

Lena Kulo (2009) investigated implicit moral statements in two 2008 U.S. presidential campaign speeches by Obama and McCain, using a survey design and purposive sampling. The study concluded that both used rhetorical strategies to convey moral values (Kulo, 2009).

Luu Trong Tuan (2010) used a qualitative design to study rhetorical structures in 48 Vietnamese advertisements, finding that rhetorical figures distinguish figurative from non-figurative texts, enhancing attention in advertising (Tuan, 2010).

Moses Alo (2012) analyzed 16 speeches by African leaders using a descriptive design, Fairclough's socio-semiotic model, and Aristotelian rhetoric, revealing recurring persuasive strategies and cultural identity expression (Alo, 2012).

Remi Aduraola and Chris Ojukwu (2013) qualitatively examined 21 newspaper advertisements and handbills from Nigeria's 2011 campaigns, noting language's role in reducing tensions between social needs and realities (Aduraola & Ojukwu, 2013).

2.3 Theoretical Framework

This research is grounded in Dell Hymes' SPEAKING model (1974), which provides a structured approach to analyzing speech events through eight components: Setting and Scene, Participants, Ends, Act Sequence, Key, Instrumentalities, Norms, and Genre. The model highlights the sociocultural dimensions of communication, showing how language reflects and shapes social interactions and cultural identities. In this study, the SPEAKING model is used to examine the campaign speeches of Bola Ahmed Tinubu (APC) and Peter Obi (LP) during Nigeria's 2023 presidential elections. By analyzing elements such as settings (e.g., regional rallies or palace visits), participant roles (e.g., candidates as unifiers or reformers), objectives (e.g., rallying voters or promoting ethnic solidarity), and linguistic strategies (e.g., metaphors or code-switching), the study investigates how these candidates'

language choices reflect cultural identities, engage diverse audiences, and influence political narratives within Nigeria's multilingual and multicultural context.

3 METHODOLOGY

The research design employed for this study is a qualitative method and uses the language of the 2023 Nigerian presidential campaign speeches of Bola Ahmed Tinubu and Peter Obi. Data were from online freely available campaigns speeches both from official campaign websites, trusted media and verified youtube sources. Speech parts of 5 sentences from each candidat were randomly selected based on theories related to language-switching (using two or more languages), language-mixing, metaphors and culturally relevant expressions using purposive sampling especially since only a small amount of causative speech would serve the study goals. These excerpts were chosen from various geopolitical zones so that the linguistic and cultural diversity of Nigeria is reflected, and comparisons between both candidates can be made. Transcription of the speeches were taken directly from the videos, while indigenous language expressions were used in block capitals and translated to English as-needed. This data was analysed using the SPEAKING model by Dell Hymes (1974), in order to describe the communicative situation, which characters are involved, what do they want from it, how they communicate and sociocultural meaning of the campaign speeches.

3.1 Data Presentation

Table 1: Selected 2023 Campaign Speech Excerpts from YouTube

S/N	Candidate	Party	Region/State	Raw Excerpt
1	Bola Ahmed Tinubu	APC	Katsina	“We are the people who want peace and progress for the country. It’s a progressive party. That the 16 years of those poverty developers—poverty rice—will never allow them to come back to govern our country again. We are saying NO! NO! NO!”
2	Bola Ahmed Tinubu	APC	Kano	“God will give you alubarka and give your family peace and harmony. I will serve you. I will serve Nigeria... Today I have come home to Kano. All I want to do is dance!”
3	Bola Ahmed Tinubu	APC	Kwara	“Broom broom broom broom broom! The symbol of freedom, cleanliness, cleaning the money away. Sweeping corruption away. Sweeping insecurity away is the broom. You don’t vote for anybody else. You vote for me!”
4	Bola Ahmed Tinubu	APC	Ebonyi	“We are closing the door to darkness—both in spirit and reality. 16 years of PDP government—we had no flicker of electricity... They could not even make a ‘dem’ payment for a roasted corn for that electricity. Should they come back?”
5	Bola Ahmed Tinubu	APC	Anambra	“When you hear Atiku say walayi-talay, just reply him: na lie you lie! They privatized the industry into their pockets... The City Boy is here. Hope is here. Job is here. Prosperity is here.”
6	Bola Ahmed Tinubu	APC	Imo	“Igbo kwenu! What did we bring? Broom revolution! That is the memory of my dear good friend, Okadigbo... Hope Uzodimma—Awụ Imo! You hear me, Awụ Imo!”
7	Bola Ahmed Tinubu	APC	South West Youth	“You wan rejoice? You wan enjoy? You wan progress? You want education? You want

				employment? You must go and take your PVC... If you vote APC from top to bottom, then you have passed. I go come back to pay my debt.”	
8	Bola Tinubu	Ahmed	APC	Ebonyi (Closing)	“This thing is not done by conflict; it is by sitting around the table to complain... It is by electing visionary leaders (he pointed to himself)... I will work with the Governor of the state. And I will come back to pay it.”
9	Bola Tinubu	Ahmed	APC	Kano (Emir’s Palace)	“We are talking about promises of development, industrialization, to change Kano from a commercial city to a mega city.”
10	Bola Tinubu	Ahmed	APC	Kaduna	“All those troublemakers, violent kidnappers, killers, evil troublemakers who are disturbing the security of Kaduna—I assure you, we will eliminate them.”
11	Peter Obi		Labour Party	Ebonyi	“Ndi be anyi, ndi nwere mmuo ogu... Anaghi m enye shishi! I am here to offer a different Nigeria. They say we have no structure—I say: Ndi mmadu bu structure! Obi di anyi mma! Obi ga-agbapu Nigeria n’ochichi ojoo.”
12	Peter Obi		Labour Party	Anambra	“Ndi Anambra, ndewo nu! O bu m, nwaafu unu... They say Peter Obi is an Igbo project. Kedu mgbe ibu onye Igbo ghoru mmehie? Obi gi kwere, Obi m kwere, Obi Nigeria kwere!”
13	Peter Obi		Labour Party	Imo	“Ndi Imo, ndewo nu ooo! Unu nwere ogu. Obi anyi abughi onye n’akwado onwu na ohi. Obi ga-edozi ihe. Otutu n’ime ha bu umu Imo. Anyi ga-eweta ha n’ulo. Obi ga-ewu obodo anyi.”
14	Peter Obi		Labour Party	Kano	“They say I have no business in Kano. But poverty is not Igbo. Corruption is not Hausa. I have

				no insults—only ideas. I am not your master. I am your servant. Kano, the new Nigeria begins with you.”
15	Peter Obi	Labour Party	Kaduna	“They call us online noise makers. But go to the streets, the markets, the polling units—who is louder? I will serve every Nigerian, not divide them.”
16	Peter Obi	Labour Party	Lagos	“They called me ‘a tenant in Lagos’. But Lagos is not anybody’s personal property. They say ‘I tamed the Atlantic.’ But did they tame the poverty? I’m not here to dance. I’m here to fix.”
17	Peter Obi	Labour Party	Enugu	“I will not marginalize any region. My presidency will serve Enugu as it will serve Kano and Katsina. Let’s build a Nigeria of fairness and inclusion.”
18	Peter Obi	Labour Party	Oyo	“A vote for Labour is not a waste. It is a vote to end bad roads, bad schools, and bad leadership. This is a vote for our children’s future.”
19	Peter Obi	Labour Party	Ondo	“Our cocoa must work again. Ondo has no business being poor. I will support agriculture, not empty promises. Let Ondo rise again.”
20	Peter Obi	Labour Party	Edo	“They say we are just social media. But we are the movement. We are the future. We are the change! I will not build political godfathers—I will build trust and infrastructure.”

3.2 Data Analysis

Objective One: To Determine the Extent to Which the Campaign Speeches Conform to Dell Hymes’ SPEAKING Model

To systematically examine the selected campaign speeches, each datum was analysed using Dell Hymes’ SPEAKING model. The coding matrix below illustrates how the speeches correspond to the eight components of the model.

Table 2: SPEAKING Model Coding Matrix for Selected Campaign Speech Excerpts

Component	Datum 2 (Tinubu – Kano)	Datum 11 (Obi – Ebonyi)
Setting and Scene (S)	Campaign rally in Kano before a predominantly Hausa audience.	Campaign rally in Ebonyi before an Igbo-speaking audience.
Participants (P)	Bola Ahmed Tinubu and APC supporters.	Peter Obi and Labour Party supporters.
Ends (E)	To seek support, establish solidarity, and mobilise voters.	To persuade voters and promote political change.
Act Sequence (A)	Greeting → Blessing → Promise of service → Appeal for support.	Greeting → Self-presentation → Rejection of corruption → Call for support.
Key (K)	Humorous, friendly, and energetic tone.	Emotional, hopeful, and reform-oriented tone.
Instrumentalities (I)	English mixed with Hausa expressions.	English combined with Igbo expressions and Pidgin elements.
Norms (N)	Audience participation through applause and positive responses.	Audience participation through chants, cheers, and agreement.
Genre (G)	Political campaign speech.	Political campaign speech.

The coding matrix demonstrates that the selected speeches contain all eight components of Dell Hymes’ SPEAKING model. The campaign events occurred within identifiable sociocultural settings, involved specific participants, pursued clear communicative goals, and followed recognizable patterns of political discourse. Variations were observed mainly in the linguistic resources employed by the candidates, particularly their use of indigenous languages and culturally significant expressions to establish rapport with different audiences.

Based on the analysis, the speeches substantially conform to the SPEAKING model, indicating that political campaign discourse in Nigeria functions as a culturally situated communicative event shaped by context, audience, and communicative purpose.

4 FINDINGS

Analysis of the selected campaign speeches shows that they conform to Dell Hymes' SPEAKING model fairly closely. Every data point being analyzed has identifiable settings, speech sequences, tones, linguistic channels, communicative goals and involvement from participants that have to follow interactional norms and occupy recognizable political speech genres.

The results also demonstrate that both candidates used different types of linguistic features to improve political communication. The salient features include code-switching/code-mixing, metaphor, repetition, rhetorical questions, symbolism and inclusive pronouns.

Speeches to culturally homogeneous audiences were more likely to employ code-switching. Tinubu used Hausa expressions like *alubarka* and Igbo terms such as *Igbo kwenu*, while Obi frequently featured Igbo expressions like *Ndi be anyi*, *Obi di anyi mma* and *Obi ga-edozi ihe*. Such language selections mirrored their social settings of where the speeches were made.

Results also provide evidence for the few occurrences of code-mixing. One of the most salient instances was in the expression by Obi, “*Anaghi m enye shishi*,” where Igbo and Nigerian Pidgin were combined in a single utterance.

Metaphorical language was often used in speeches. Metaphorical constructions were identified by Tinubu's repeated use of the broom symbol and phrases like ‘closing the door to darkness. Also, Obi's phrase “*Ndi mmadu bu structure*” stood out as a kind of metaphor for people-centred politics.

Another important characteristic to come out of this was Repetition. Expressions such as “*NO! NO! NO!*” You trained (on) Tinubu speeches where the audience responded with “*broom broom broom*” and reflection of change, service and inclusion in Obi speeches to sharpen campaign messages.

Hence, linguistic adaptation, cultural references and rhetorical strategies became integral in political communication throughout the 2023 presidential campaigns.

4.1 Discussion of Findings

The results show that political campaign speeches in Nigeria as interactions are communicatively contextualized in cultural founded events reflectors of the principles of SPEAKING by Dell Hymes. The presence of all eight SPEAKING components is evidence political discourse transcends mere information transfer and is contextually, socially, and communicatively dynamic.

Code-switching one last time Despite participative pluralisation, the heavy usage of code-switching by both candidates indicates that language choice is still an important tool to navigate identity and bond together in multilingual contexts. Politicians hoped to flaunt their cultural competency and ability to connect with different populations by using indigenous languages in their speeches. This supports sociolinguistic views, in which language is an important signal of group identity and social bonding.

Results on metaphor and symbolism suggest that political messages are often conveyed with culturally accessible images rather than formalistic political appeals. Such slogans reduce complicated political issues to their simplest form breathing life into campaign messages that are easier to understand and remember. The salience of repetition also tells us about the political leverage of rhetorical devices in holding listeners' attention and redoubling political messages.

The paper goes on to say a few words about mobilizing language in politics. The inclusive, local and culturally relevant terms employed by the four candidates imply a key finding about political communication overall: political success depends on matching messages to social realities. This perspective corroborates the assertion of Dell Hymes who argued that speech events cannot be separated from their bigger sociocultural scenes.

4.2 Conclusion

Using the SPEAKING model developed by Dell Hymes, this study analyzed some samples of Bola Ahmed Tinubu and Peter Obi's campaign speeches in the 2023 Nigerian presidential elections. Analysis shows that these speeches contain several of the communicative features identified in the model, including identifiable settings, participants, and communicative goals plus linguistic channels, interactional norms and recognisable speech genres.

The analysis also finds that for both candidates the strategies included linguistic maneuvers: code-switching, code-mixing, metaphor and repetition, inclusive language to create different audience segments to send political messages. These linguistic choices

allowed candidates to build solidarity with their audience, assert political identities, and increase the persuasive power of their campaigns.

These implications indicate that language appears to be an important connect in shaping the mode of political communication for the 2023 presidential campaigns. Hence the study shows how effective a useful framework Hymes' SPEAKING model is in analysing language, culture and politics in Nigeria as a multilingual state.

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