The Pragmatics of Misrepresentation: A Comparative Analysis of Select 2023 Campaign Speeches

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Abstract: Election periods tends to offer critical opportunity for change to the better especially for countries that practice democracy as their governance choice. Nigeria, like many African countries, in the turn of the century, switched to this governance style. The 2023 general election was expected to be a critical turning point in the nation's democratic journey with politicians employing persuasive language to influence public opinion especially during campaigns. Over time, by utilizing rhetoric, exaggeration, and unrealistic promises, politicians aimed to foster unwarranted hope among voters. And this reliance on misleading tactics poses a serious problem as it misinforms citizens and cultivates unsustainable expectations that erode faith in the democratic process over time. This study, relying on the survey descriptive design, examines the pragmatic nature of misrepresentation in political discourse through a comparative analysis of the speeches delivered by Peter Obi, Bola Tinubu, and Atiku Abubakar during the Nigerian 2023 general elections. Through the theorization of loaded language, the study investigates the linguistic choices, speech patterns, and rhetorical strategies employed by these prominent candidates to shape public perception in order to acquire or maintain power. The result shows an overreliance on rhetoric that inspires through ambitious vision rather than informs through practical reason. It also shows politicians to be prone to presenting themselves and solutions in a glorified and over simplified terms that makes governance to be unrealistically achievable. Overall, the research contributes to a better understanding on how language is manipulated in political campaigns and to empower citizens with the ability to critically evaluate politicians' messages.

Keywords: Pragmatics, Political Discourse, Misrepresentation, Rhetoric, Democracy.

Introduction

The 2023 general elections in Nigeria represent a critical juncture in the nation's democratic journey, with politicians employing persuasive language to influence public opinion. Within this context, political discourse holds immense significance as it shapes how voters perceive candidates' policies, ideologies, and leadership attributes. The power of language in political communication cannot be underestimated, as it plays a pivotal role in defining the narratives that guide voter decision-making. Understanding the dynamics of political discourse during this period is essential to grasp the intricacies of the electoral process and its impact on the nation's future. The use of misrepresentation in political discourse is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon. There are many different ways in which politicians can misrepresent the truth, and the motivations for doing so can vary.

Pragmatics, the study of language use in context, is vital for understanding the subtleties of political communication. By analyzing the linguistic choices, speech patterns, and rhetorical strategies used by politicians, we can gain insights into the persuasive techniques they employ in their speeches. In Tannen Deborah words "misrepresentation is a pragmatic phenomenon where language is manipulated to convey information that may not align with objective reality" (23). It involves distorting facts or presenting information in a way that skews the truth, leading to potential misinterpretations by the audience. Understanding the pragmatics of misrepresentation in political discourse is crucial for examining how politicians strategically use language to achieve their goals, influence public opinion, and acquire or maintain power.

Deborah Tanen notes that "the prevalence of misrepresentation in political discourse has raised concerns about its impact on public discourse" (67). Citizens rely on accurate information to make informed decisions in the democratic process. When politicians employ misrepresentation to further their interests, it can lead to a lack of trust in political institutions and undermine democratic values of transparency and accountability. Investigating instances of misrepresentation in political discourse can contribute to understanding the potential consequences for democracy and citizen engagement.

Political discourse is an important part of the democratic process. According to Geofferey Nurnberg "it allows politicians to communicate their ideas, values, and policy proposals to citizens" (48). These misrepresentations may be unintentional, such as errors or simplifications. But they can also be intentional, used rhetorically to persuade audiences or discredit opponents. Research in pragmatics, the study of language in context, can provide insight into misrepresentation in political discourse. Pragmatics examines how meaning is shaped by beliefs, assumptions, context, and interpersonal dynamics. By analyzing political discourse from a pragmatic perspective, we can better understand the motivations for and implications of misrepresenting the truth.

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Many pragmatics studies also consider the context surrounding political discourse. Unlike casual conversation, political rhetoric occurs in highly adversarial, partisan environments. Politicians are under pressure to attack opponents and evade blame. Context shapes what communication strategies are considered acceptable. For instance, some deception that subverts cooperation may be viewed as permissible in competitive electoral contexts. Furthermore, there are often imbalances of power and access to information between politicians and citizens. This can enable political misleading without real accountability. Anita Fetzers's research on "The Pragmatics of Political Discourse" show powerful speakers are more likely to opt for vagueness and ambiguity. Considering the contextual pressures and motivations that guide political discourse is key to understanding misrepresentation.

Pragmatics research also examines how an audience's own beliefs and assumptions influence interpretation of political language. Confirmation bias leads listeners to accept claims that reinforce their existing views more readily than opposing arguments. Audiences also tend to extend benefits of doubt toward speakers they align with politically. This interpretive charity shapes perceptions of truthfulness and cooperative intent. For instance, controversial statements from in-group politicians may be passed off as loose speech or humorous banter. The same words from the opposing party would be seen as dangerous lies. Political identity and intergroup biases play a large role in determining what counts as truth and misrepresentation.

The motivation for this study stems from the critical significance of political discourse in shaping public opinion and its potential impact on democratic processes. The aim of this research is to understand how politicians use misleading language to sway voters. By focusing on speeches of candidates like Peter Obi, Bola Tinubu, and Atiku Abubakar, this research unfolds their tactics. The goal is to help people become more aware of these strategies and make better decisions during elections. The choice of Peter Obi, Bola Tinubu, and Atiku Abubakar as the subjects of this research is based on their prominence and influence among the other candidates in the 2023 general elections. Each of them represents different political parties and ideologies, allowing for a diverse analysis of misrepresentation strategies across the political spectrum. The 2023 general elections provide a relevant and timely context for this study, as the speeches delivered by these politicians during their campaigns are likely to reflect their campaign strategies, messaging, and attempts to connect with the electorate.

Some research questions that will guide this research include:

- To what extent do politicians like Peter Obi, Bola Tinubu, and Atiku Abubakar misrepresent information in their 2023 election speeches?

- To what extent do their linguistic choices and strategies influence public opinion and voters?

- To what extent does the political context impact the prevalence of misrepresentation?

- Are there potential consequences for this misrepresentation on political discourse, citizens engagement and democracy?

Conceptual/Empirical Framework

Critical Discourse Analysis

Ruth Wodak's critical discourse analysis (CDA) offers "a systematic method for revealing how power and ideology become embedded in language" (7). CDA scrutinizes word choice, metaphors, assumptions, and rhetorical moves that normalize particular worldviews. Moreover, Teun Van Dijk's sociocognitive approach sees "discourse and society as mutually shaping, with elites leveraging discourse to manufacture consent" (18). Critical pragmatics draws on CDA to expose discourse that masks questionable motives. Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is a research paradigm focused on analyzing written, spoken, or signed language use in society. According to Teun van Dijk, one of the founders of CDA, the goal is to "systematically explore often opaque relationships of causality and determination between (a) discursive practices, events and texts, and (b) wider social and cultural structures, relations and processes" (7). CDA aims to investigate how language implicitly supports or challenges societal power structures and ideologies through a close examination of discourse.

One key aspect of CDA is analyzing how power relations are maintained through language use. According to Norman Fairclough, a leading scholar in CDA, language is "an irremediably social and cultural practice", and all instances of language use "inevitably represent the interests of some social fraction or configuration" (92). CDA posits that language both reflects and shapes power relationships in society. Speakers in positions of power will use language to legitimize the status quo and maintain their dominance, whereas subordinate groups may employ discourse strategically to resist domination or effect change. Through meticulous analysis of vocabulary, grammar, text structures and the context of discourse, "CDA aims to uncover how power relations are established, negotiated and reinforced through communication" (van Dijk 249).

A central technique in CDA is examining how power is asserted through subtle linguistic features rather than overtly coercive language. For example, van Dijk argues that powerful groups will frequently use positive self-presentation strategies and negative other-presentation to subtly influence public opinion (257). Terms like "we" are used to refer to the in-group, promoting a sense of shared identity and values with the intended audience. Meanwhile, outsider groups are distanced through pronouns like "they" and assigned negative characteristics. Words carry implicit assumptions that validate the position of the powerful while casting others as threats. Analyzing these patterns of promotion and derogation in political and media discourse has been indispensable for CDA scholars seeking to unravel subtle domination through language.

Another key approach is identifying hyperbolic, emotionally charged language that serves to exaggerate threats or minimize harms. For instance, Fairclough has examined the role of "dog-

whistle politics", where politicians make implicitly exclusionary claims about immigrants, minorities or underprivileged groups using emotionally provocative terms" (172). Phrases like "flood of immigrants" depict incoming groups as uncontrollable dangers, even when statistics show migration levels have remained steady or declined. Analyzing how word choice cultivates fear and tribal identities has helped CDA scholars uncover how powerholders control opinion and policy priorities through manipulation of public sentiment. As Wodak argues, "Exaggerations, emphases on emotions and feelings rather than facts are characteristic for populist rhetoric. Opponents are not criticized but defamed" (13). Careful study of emotive, hyperbolic language reveals how power is asserted through appeals to instinct rather than reason.

Another strategy examined is legitimization through claims of common sense or necessity. van Dijk postulates that elites will draw on widely held societal values like security, prosperity or morality to cast their own policies and viewpoints as "common sense" solutions aligned with public interest (268). By presenting one course of action as obvious or inevitable given a society's goals and values, powerholders naturalize the status quo as the only rational option. For example, right-wing politicians may argue restrictive immigration policies are necessary for social cohesion and economic stability, despite a lack of evidence. Legitimization through claims of necessity and rationality is a subtle yet powerful discursive technique that circumvents meaningful debate around alternative proposals. CDA aims to uncover how language frames policy options in a way that precludes discussion of root causes of issues or dissenting perspectives.

CDA also investigates how mainstream media discourse serves to reinforce dominant ideologies and power structures. According to van Dijk, both the prominent placement and framing of news stories work to influence public opinion in ways favorable to elites (35). By selectively focusing coverage on issues that validate the priorities of powerful stakeholders, or by slanting language to imply the righteousness of a particular viewpoint, the media plays an unseen role shaping the parameters of thinkable thought. For example, a study by Roger Fowler found that British newspaper coverage of the 1984-85 UK miner's strike disproportionately highlighted violent clashes initiated by striking workers rather than aggressive police action, cultivating sympathy for the Thatcher government over unions (10). Careful scrutiny of story selection, word choice, and embedding of unproven assumptions is crucial for CDA to map how news media shapes public viewpoints according to dominant ideological designs.

Over all, critical discourse analysis offers an indispensable framework for investigating how language implicitly cultivates and maintains unequal power dynamics in society. By scrutinizing subtle linguistic features like pronouns, emotional word choice, legitimization strategies and news framing, CDA highlights how elites promote their interests and viewpoints through ostensibly trivial discursive mechanisms. In examining the implicit role of communication in naturalizing societal structures, CDA pushes past surface appearances to uncover how power operates through everyday language use. Future work should continue exploring the expansive role played by new media platforms like social networks in escalating affect-driven rhetoric and hyper-partisanship. CDA promises to remain an insightful approach for mapping relationships between discourse and broader patterns of oppression or marginalization.

Pragmatics illuminates how contextual factors like intent, assumptions, goals, and shared knowledge contribute to meaning and misdirection in political messaging. Concepts like implicature, presupposition, speech acts, framing, and CDA provide tools to uncover the workings of misrepresentation. More broadly, pragmatics recognizes language as action, not just description. This orientation is essential to navigating the pragmatics of deception in the sphere of politics. Through rigorous pragmatic analysis, we can achieve greater clarity and accountability.

Misrepresentation

Misrepresentation, as illuminated by diverse scholars, encompasses the deliberate manipulation of information to distort facts or convey a skewed version of reality within various forms of communication. According to Douglas Walton, "it involves presenting information that veers away from objective accuracy with the intent to deceive or mislead" (14). Similarly, Christopher Tindale "highlights misrepresentation as a strategic maneuver where the speaker knowingly conveys information in a manner that generates a false impression" (4). In a legal context, Ayres and Braithwaite elucidate misrepresentation as "a communication tactic that induces a false belief in the recipient, often contributing to decision-making based on distorted or fraudulent premises" (76). Thus, misrepresentation critically exposes the calculated exploitation of language and communication to create erroneous perceptions and shape outcomes. Reuben Abati in a Daily Trust article published in August 2019, observes that "misrepresentation stems from the asymmetry between political actors' goals and citizens' right to objective facts" (24). Pragmatics, which studies meaning in context, provides tools to reveal misleading political language.

African and Nigerian scholars emphasize how postcolonial politics inherited and amplified certain discursive practices of previous regimes. Alao, Abiodun in *Propaganda and Censorship in Nigeria* notes that "authoritarian administrations utilized propaganda and censorship to shape public knowledge" (37). Democratic transitions brought greater freedom, but did not wholly reject these nation-building techniques. For this, Ogundimu believes that "political language remains instrumentalized towards power and ideology over truth" (16).

Chiluwa applies critical discourse analysis to reveal rhetorical strategies in Nigerian political texts like speeches, policy documents, press releases and news reports. He uncovers tendencies to euphemize, apologize and exonerate actions of those in power while vilifying opposition groups (12). This propagandistic discourse subtly manipulates ideas and identities. Uncovering such rhetorical techniques illuminates how misrepresentation permeates political communication. Similarly, Van Dijk underscores the significance of discourse analysis in uncovering "ideologies and power relations embedded within communication structures, offering insights into how strategic language choices uphold political interests" (5). Norman Fairclough, on the other hand, frames discourse as a "site of struggle where language is exploited to maintain or challenge existing power dynamics" (13). Therefore, Chiluwa's analysis of rhetorical tactics contributes to the broader understanding of how misrepresentation operates in political discourse, shedding light on the intricate web of communication strategies that influence public perception.

Presupposition and framing are key mechanisms studied by pragmatics. Presupposition embeds controversial propositions as already established fact. In the words of George Yule, "this lets speakers circumvent the burden of proof" (25). Framing defines issues selectively to prime audiences towards certain conclusions (Tannen, 12). Nigerian linguist, Alo, analyzed political ads, finding "extensive biased presuppositions and framing depicting candidates as saviors or messiahs" (21). Scrutinizing such discursive tactics helps reveal misleading persuasion strategies.

Implicature and insinuation are also major tool of misrepresentation. "Implicature refers to what is implied beyond literal statements" (Grice, 43). Obododimma links "tactics like innuendo and vague allusions to reputation that implicitly smear opponents as corrupt or dangerous without evidence" (63). Tracing implicatures and insinuations exposes demagogic misrepresentation. Stephen Levinson underscores how "language is inherently context-dependent, as speakers rely on shared contextual knowledge to convey meaning" (22). This becomes pertinent in political communication where manipulative speakers exploit context to convey veiled meanings that create a misleading impact. Additionally, Mey highlights that pragmatics delves into the intricacies of communicative intent and the various ways it is constructed and understood in social interactions (3). Political discourse, with its inherent intentions of persuasion and influence, serves as a fertile ground for scrutinizing how language is employed to distort truth and manipulate perceptions.

Opeibi further highlight ethnolinguistic dimension of political misrepresentation in multicultural African nations. Code-switching for rhetorical impact, epithets targeting certain groups, and hate speech all enter political discourse (79). Ideologically "coloured metaphors and stereotypes also emerge like portraying rivals as primitive or deviant" (Chiluwa & Odebunmi 67). These scholars conclude that understanding the pragmatics of ethnicized African political language helps identify and counteract such divisive propaganda.

Scholarship on political misrepresentation draws heavily on linguistic pragmatics to reveal discursive strategies of deception, spin and incitement. Presupposition, implicature, framing and coded speech all enable misleading communication. Continued pragmatic analysis aimed at transparency and truth can enhance democratic accountability on the continent.

Political Discourse

Political discourse, the way politicians communicate their ideas and messages, is a crucial aspect of how societies function. But looking closer, it is clear that political discourse is not just about sharing information; it is often about persuasion, manipulation, and even misrepresentation. Scholar, Chiluwa show that this happens not just in developed societies, but even in African countries, including Nigeria. Chiluwa's research in Nigeria reveals that "politicians use tactics like euphemisms, where they soften harsh truths, or even apologize to make things sound better, and exonerate their actions while criticizing their opponents" (12). This kind of talk is like a puzzle. It tries to make people see things a certain way, even if it is not the full truth.

Imagine a situation where a politician says, 'I promise to bring prosperity to our nation.' On the surface, this seems great. But if we look at it from a pragmatic perspective, considering what is not directly said, we might find that the politician is avoiding specifics. Maybe they are not explaining how they all bring prosperity or what sacrifices might be needed. This kind of indirectness can be misleading. Grice talked about how people follow an unwritten rule in conversation. We expect others to be informative, truthful, relevant, and clear. However, in politics, this is not always the case. Sometimes politicians play with words. They imply things without outright saying them, which makes it hard to spot the misrepresentation.

A scholar, Obododimma, points out another tactic called 'innuendo.' In the words of Oha:

It is like giving a hint that suggests something bad without directly saying it. For example, if a politician says, 'Some people might have questionable intentions,' it's not naming anyone, but it still leaves a negative impression. This kind of indirect attack is used to damage an opponent's reputation without clear evidence (63).

So, it is not always about what's said, but what is suggested. This is where the pragmatics of misrepresentation comes in. It is like digging below the surface to understand the hidden meanings and motives behind words.

However, it is not just about individual words; it is about context too. Chiluwa's work in Nigeria showed that politicians often choose words based on what is happening around them. "If there is a scandal, they might use vague language to avoid addressing it directly" (12). This is like looking at the big picture. It is not just about one speech; it is about how that speech fits into the whole story. This is where African scholars' insights matter. They know the local context, the cultural norms, and the political history that influence how words are used.

Think about a situation where a politician uses a phrase that means different things to different groups. This is According to Mendelberg is called 'dog-whistle politics' (21). For instance, they might say something that sounds neutral but has a hidden meaning understood by their supporters. This way, they can deny misrepresentation, saying they meant something harmless. It is like a secret code that only some people understand. This kind of strategic language is tricky to catch.

Now, to define pragmatics once more, Chiluwa helps us here. He says "pragmatics is about understanding how people use language in real-life situations to get things done" (12). This means it is not just about grammar or words; it is about how words are used to achieve goals. And when it comes to politics, the goals are often about winning support, even if it means bending the truth. Oha adds that "it is not just about what is said, but what is implied. This is where things get complicated" (6). Implicature, as Grice explained, is when people mean more than what they say. It is like reading between the lines. Chiluwa and Oha help us see that misrepresentation is not always about lying outright; it is about using language cleverly to create an effect.

So, political discourse is not just about talking politics. It is about using language as a tool for persuasion, manipulation, and sometimes, misrepresentation. African scholars' insights are crucial here because they help us understand the context, the tactics, and the hidden meanings behind the words. Through their work, we can see that the words politicians choose are not accidental; they are carefully crafted to shape opinions and gain power. And while the complexity of the pragmatics of misrepresentation might make it hard to detect, with the guidance of African scholars, we can navigate this intricate landscape and become more aware consumers of political discourse.

Political discourse in Nigeria is replete with instances of misrepresentation which undermine the integrity and credibility of the democratic process. Scholars have highlighted how misleading rhetoric and factual inaccuracies are often deployed to score political points (Nwagwu 34). Chiluwa show that this happens not just in the developed world, but in African countries like Nigeria as well. Chiluwa's research in Nigeria reveals that "politicians in Nigeria use sneaky tactics to make themselves look good and their opponents look bad" (12). His research shines a light on how euphemisms, where they sugarcoat things, and apologies, where they say sorry to sound better, are tools in their language toolbox. They also twist things around, blaming their opponents and praising themselves. This is like a magic trick that tricks our minds.

Implicature, on the other hand, involves conveying meaning indirectly through insinuations or assumptions. Exaggeration is often used to enhance the impact of these implied messages. Politicians may employ implicature to make veiled accusations or insinuations against their opponents without directly stating them. By relying on exaggeration, they can create a sense of urgency or importance around certain issues, even if the connection to reality may be tenuous. This allows politicians to manipulate public opinion without taking direct responsibility for their statements. Implicature is particularly effective in political discourse as it allows politicians to exploit the ambiguity of language and exploit the cognitive biases of the audience.

Another example of loaded misrepresentation and implicature can be observed in debates surrounding contentious policy issues. Politicians may employ exaggeration to misrepresent the potential consequences or implications of specific policies. For instance, in discussions on immigration, politicians may use loaded language to create an exaggerated sense of threat or insecurity. By associating immigration with terms like "invasion" or "overrun," they aim to evoke fear and rally support for restrictive immigration measures. These exaggerations tap into the emotions and biases of the audience, often overshadowing evidence-based discussions on the topic.

One of the most common forms of misrepresentation in the Nigerian political discourse is exaggeration. "Nigerian politicians frequently distort or embellish issues out of proportion to portray their opponents in an unfavourable light" (Ogbondah 34). Rather than engage in sincere debate of ideas, there is reliance on fallacious claims that mislead the public. "For example, during an election campaign one party may falsely accuse the other of planning to abolish certain welfare programs or increase taxes exponentially if elected" (Ezeala-Harrison 286). Such misrepresentations are intended to provoke fear and sway voter preference through deceit rather than honest evaluation of policies.

Another frequent tactic seen in Nigerian political discourse is selective omission of important facts or contexts to paint a distorted picture. According to Jega "politicians may highlight real problems but fail to provide full context that would balance their narrative" (n.p.). One party may emphasize current economic hardships but neglect to acknowledge external challenges partly responsible like fluctuations in global oil prices. Such fallacies of omission amount to dishonest half-truths that misdirect public understanding of issues. As Jega argues, "selective presentation of facts undermines informed consent and distorts political discourse" (98).

A related problem is the spinning of facts to fit a predetermined propaganda agenda. Rather than engage in a fair, evidence-based discussion of issues, some politicians spin any detail, however isolated, that can be molded to serve their preconceived narratives (Imhanlahimi 102). For example, an opposition figure may be accused of corruption based on a single unsubstantiated allegation even if their overall record is reasonably clean. Such spinning of isolated facts or unverified claims to fit a pre-planned smear agenda contaminates political discourse with falsity.

A disturbing trend highlighted by Nigerian scholars is the normalization and trivialization of political lies. "Repeated propagation of falsehoods has led many Nigerian voters and politicians to view straightforward untruths as an ordinary tactic in partisan contests" (Agbedo and Oladoyinbo 386). However, the harms of a societal acceptance of lies include the erosion of faith in leaders and the democratic system itself. As Agbedo and Oladoyinbo argue, "normalization of political lies transforms a malleable democratic culture into one where 'post-truth' reigns" (386). The permeation of misrepresentation in forms such as exaggeration, selective omission, spinning of facts and acceptance of outright lies significantly degrades the integrity and efficacy of Nigeria's democratic process according to African scholars.

Empirical Studies

This empirical review will also survey existing scholarly works that explore analogous themes, contributing to the broader discourse on language manipulation and political rhetoric. By situating itself within the framework of these prior studies, this review aims to offer a comprehensive analysis of the pragmatics of misrepresentation in Nigerian political discourse.

In "On political participation: discursive pragmatics and social interaction in politics" Innocent Chiluwa examines how people use language in online political discussions in Nigeria. It looks at how people take different positions and express their opinions. The study finds that people use different strategies to persuade others and that social interaction plays an important role in shaping political discourse. The study equally reveals that new media technologies not only promote political participation and governance but show that the people are hungry to be involved in political issues and questions that affect their lives. Corruption and political power abuse are identified as major banes of modern democracies, particularly the Nigerian context.

"Conversationalization of Discourse in Tell and The News' Representation of Nigerian General Elections" by Ayo Osisanwo looks at how news reports represent the different actors involved in Nigerian elections. It finds that news reports tend to label and allocate specific roles to different actors, which can influence how people perceive them. The study shows that both magazines adopted the radical and pragmatic approaches to pattern the quotation sequence as Quoted-Process-Sayer to discursively shape the readers' perceptions, and authenticate claims. The discourse of the stories indicated an attempt to shape the perspective of readers in elections; the magazines held the view that they are responsible for the social orientation of the electorate.

Martha Nguemo Terna-Abah's "A Pragmatic Analysis of Inconsistencies in Selected Political Discourses of the APC Led Federal Government and its Implication" examines the political discourse of the All Progressive Congress (APC) Led Federal Government in Nigeria (2017). It looks at how the government's discourse is inconsistent and how this can have negative

implications for governance. The study argues that political leaders should be more consistent in their discourse to build trust with the public. The paper concluded by proffering suggestions on how these inconsistencies can be avoided and consequently, the trust of the citizenry earned.

In "Metaphors in Selected Political Speeches of Nigerian Democratic Presidents" Ikenna Kamalu and Patience Bara Iniworikabo looks at the use of metaphors in the speeches of Nigerian presidents. This study adopted the tenets of conceptual metaphor theory (CMT) of Lakoff and Johnson in the analysis of selected political speeches of Presidents Olusegun Obasanjo (OBJ henceforth), Musa Yar'Adua (UMY henceforth) and Goodluck Jonathan (GEJ henceforth). The study discovered that metaphor is a great resource in political communication and that the speakers drew from source domains that represent social, economic and political situations and conditions in Nigeria essentially as conflict and war, building, disease, journey, illness, games and sports, and as a family. The study considers ways in which metaphors facilitate the discourse on Nigerian nationhood and how the speakers exploit metaphorical expressions in communicating their ideologies to Nigerians.

Hameed Asiru and Ibrahim Babangida in "Pragmatic study of political hate Speeches in selected newspapers in Nigeria" examines political hate speeches made by Nigerians between 2013 and 2015. It looks at how hate speeches are used to attack opponents and mobilize supporters. The study argues that hate speeches can be harmful and divisive, and that political leaders should avoid using them. The study suggests awareness campaigns on the implications of hate speeches, democracy and good leadership in the country so as to protect the nation's democracy as well as maintain its peace and unity.

The existing studies on various aspects of political discourse in Nigeria, including online political discussions, news representation of actors in elections, inconsistencies in political discourse, the use of metaphors in political speeches, and political hate speeches, have provided valuable insights into the dynamics of political communication. However, a notable gap in knowledge exists concerning the pragmatics of misrepresentation in campaign speeches specifically related to the 2023 Nigerian presidential elections. Therefore, the present study aims to address this gap by conducting a comparative analysis of select 2023 campaign speeches.

Theoretical Framework

Rhetoric (Loaded Word)

Loaded language plays a significant role in political misrepresentation through the use of exaggeration. Politicians and pundits frequently employ exaggerative loaded language to distort facts and mislead audiences. Scholar Jonathan Chait argues loaded language involving exaggeration is commonly used to "distort reality" (34). He notes politicians will take isolated incidents and portray them as much larger trends through magnified language. For example, referring to a single riot as "cities burning" or "anarchy in the streets" promotes an exaggerated sense of threat and disorder (35). Such overblown terms distort the actual circumstances and manipulate audiences' emotional responses.

Similarly, Tannen asserts loaded language employs "extreme case formulations" that "grossly overstate a case" (13). For instance, categorizing any tax increase as "the biggest tax hike in history" or

characterizing routine government oversight as "unprecedented overreach of power" greatly amplifies the scale of issues (14). These types of exaggerative phrasings blow situations out of proportion to score political points rather than provide a reasonable representation of reality. Exaggeration is also commonly used through the frequent repetition of "loaded buzzwords" that act "as emotional triggers" for audiences (38). Terms like "death tax," "government takeover," or "radical socialist agenda" imply an aspect of exaggerated threat or extremism (38). Through endless recycling in political messages, such buzzwords become conditioned to elicit an automatic prejudiced response based more in misrepresentation than facts.

The theorization of loaded language as employing strategic exaggeration through magnified phrasing, extreme case formulations, and emotionally provocative buzzwords provides a useful framework for analyzing political misrepresentation. Discourse inflated with these types of overstatements is aimed less at impartial communication and more at distorting realities to manipulate audience perceptions and attitudes. Recognition of exaggerative loaded language forms is thus crucial for cutting through political spin and grasping a clear-eyed view of actual circumstances and debates.

Methodology

The population of the study are transcripts (available online) of three campaign speeches of three candidates in the 2023 Nigerian general elections. The speeches are: Peter Obi's speech at a youths' symposium in Ebonyi State on 23rd September 2022, the Chatham House address by Bola Tinubu in London on 5th December 2022, and Atiku Abubakar's speech of 23rd March 2023.

A qualitative approach is be employed, utilizing techniques from pragmatics to identify instances of misrepresentation, including language choices, implicatures, presuppositions, and speech acts. Comparative analysis will highlight the differences and similarities in misrepresentation strategies among the politicians. The findings will be interpreted within the socio-political context of Nigeria.

Analysis

Potential Misrepresentations in Peter Obi's Campaign Speech: "2023 is Your Opportunity to Take Back Nigeria" (Saturday, 23rd September, 2022 at the Citi-hub, km 50, Abakaliki, Ebonyi state).

Peter Obi states that with the right leadership **"a new Nigeria, where everybody including the most vulnerable and excluded group like youths, women, and children will become the key stakeholders in the decision-making process, is possible."** However, this claim is not grounded in recognition of structural challenges, as evidenced by the lack of discussion on institutional reforms required to achieve such transformation. The speaker provides no acknowledgment that empowering all citizens requires addressing deeply entrenched barriers over many years of policymaking. By neglecting to qualify ambitions, unrealistic hopes may be generated that do not match on-ground realities.

This statement by Peter Obi can be considered campaign rhetoric that risks exaggerating Nigeria's situation and generating unrealistic hopes among voters in order to attract their support. Some key points:

- Describing a vision of "a new Nigeria" evokes strong emotive language to appeal to citizens' aspirations rather than taking a sober, pragmatic view of the challenges.

- Claiming "everybody" can become empowered stakeholders neglects discussing the extensive reforms across various institutions needed to realize this transformation. Merely stating ambitious goals without acknowledging implementation difficulties presents an oversimplified picture.

- Asserting ambitions are "possible" with the "right leadership" overlooks decades of entrenched structural issues that would require multifaceted, long-term solutions driven by sustained political will - not just a change in administration.

- Failing to qualify goals by discussing key obstacles like capacity constraints, social attitudes, resource limitations etc. promotes the perception that problems can be quickly fixed through simple leadership rather than complex, multi-step reforms over time.

- Leaving out substantive policy proposals and timelines suggests more of an inspirational message than a realistic agenda, raising doubts about follow-through if elected.

When promising to **"prioritise the ability of our educational system to produce the necessary skilled labour force that coincides with the 21st-century labour market demand",** the candidate, Peter Obi overlooks substantial obstacles within the sector. For example, there is no reference to addressing low education financing, teacher quality issues or integrating technical skills training - all of which are crucial to realize stated goals but have defied solution for extended periods. Void of such contextualization, assurances of delivering reforms lack credibility given limitations persistently hampering the national education system.

This statement by Peter Obi promising educational reforms can be seen as rhetorical exaggeration aimed at winning voter support:

- By solely focusing on prioritizing skill development goals without addressing long-standing obstacles like low funding and quality issues, he presents an unrealistically simplified view of the challenges.

- Failing to mention key barriers that have eluded solutions for years, like increasing financing and improving teacher standards/training, suggests more of an aspirational slogan than a substantive plan.

- Providing assurances without outlining targeted strategies to overcome specific limitations, such as integrating technical skills training, makes the reforms seem detached from on-ground problems.

- Vague wording about "prioritizing abilities" without specificity on how this will be achieved through concrete policies promotes an implausible perception that changes can occur easily.

- Leaving out discussion of feasibility, timelines or resource requirements needed to overhaul the sector raises doubts about practical follow-through while appealing to optimism.

Commitments to ensure **"at least 100 million poor Nigerians have access to free medical services through an integrated health insurance scheme"** are repeated through celebratory language rather than evidence-based strategies. The speaker does not acknowledge fundamental problems like inadequate funding, weak healthcare infrastructure and shortages of medical personnel - deficiencies that will require well-planned, sustained investments over time. General promises are empty without addressing capacity and budgetary constraints realistically prohibiting transformation of national health provision overnight.

Proposing to establish a **"professionally managed SME Equity Fund" and facilitate value-added industry in "every local government"** within the first year of office displays an absence of practical consideration. No mention is made of difficulties acquiring start-up capital at the scale proposed or supporting small business access to markets, technical skills and a conducive operating environment. By sidelining impediments SMEs confront, the timeline suggested promotes unlikely expectations disconnected from on-ground operational challenges.

Overall, through enthusiastic, the speech falls short on substantive issue analysis and proper planning. For example, simply recognizing **"institutional weaknesses"** is insufficient without outlining a strategic, long-term capacity building approach. In neglecting pragmatic acknowledgment of barriers entrenched over time, proposed solutions appear detached from the rigorous problem-solving required for meaningful reform.

Bola Tinubu claims **"recent statutory enactments allowing the use of technology tools for the accreditation of voters and transmission of results will, deliver the freest and fairest election in our nation's history".** However, he provides no acknowledgment of challenges faced in past elections with result collation and doubts over full deployment of technology given the scale and logistics required. By not addressing limitations realistically, the assurances given over credibility come across as exaggerated rather than grounded.

This statement by Bola Tinubu promising free and fair elections through technological reforms can be seen as rhetorical exaggeration aimed at garnering voter support:

- By focusing on recent laws enabling tech tools without acknowledging persisting issues like poor infrastructure and scepticism over widespread usage, he presents an oversimplified picture devoid of important contextual factors.

- Failing to address past challenges with timely collation of credible results despite attempts at reform indicates a lack of substantive assessment of structural impediments.

- Providing assurances without outlining a comprehensive strategy to overcome logistical, resources and capacity hurdles realistically limits technology's potential brings his claims into question.

- Talk about technology delivering the "freest and fairest" election without details on addressing technological, operational and organizational gaps promotes unrealistic expectations.

- Leaving out discussions of feasibility studies, piloting, resource requirements and contingency planning needed for successful scaling raises doubts on promised outcomes.

By sidestepping clear-eyed discussion of obstacles and not grounding digital ambitions realistically, Tinubu presents an

embellished view seemingly aimed more at voters' optimism than a judicious assessment, undermining the seriousness of his pledge.

When promising major infrastructure development and transformation of agriculture through **"providing loans and expanding cultivated land",** the speech overlooks substantial barriers such as inadequate funding, fragmented value chains and lack of rural connectivity - deficiencies persistently hampering growth. Vague commitments do not reassure one comprehends on-ground constraints.

General statements about **"focusing on growth and poverty reduction"** are empty without outlining clear, evidence-based strategies and timelines to achieve aspirations, given Nigeria's development hurdles. Rhetoric alone does not amount to a cogent reform vision aligned with socioeconomic complexities.

Proposing to **"fix the perennial riddle of energy supply"** through privatization reforms displays an absence of acknowledgment for practical difficulties in attracting long term private investments in the sector. Challenges facing power provision require recognition of institutional depth and budgetary requirements for upgrades.

All of these, show how politicians often utilize rhetoric and exaggeration in their speeches to generate optimism and gather voter confidence, without substantively addressing limitations. Tinubu engages in this approach through several claims in his speech. For example, when promising to deliver Nigeria's "freest and fairest election" solely through recent legalization of technological tools, he presents an oversimplified view that does not acknowledge infrastructure deficits and doubts over widespread tech deployment that have hindered past electoral reforms. Similarly, vague commitments to agricultural transformation and poverty reduction made without outlining strategies to surmount entrenched barriers related to funding, value chains and rural development indicate rhetorical slogans over grounded policy visions. Proposing energy sector reforms while ignoring practical difficulties in attracting long term investments necessary for upgrades promotes unrealistic expectations. Through such tactics concentrating on inspirational goals but sidestepping candid discussion of on-ground complexities, Tinubu emphasizes emotional messaging over accountability - a phenomenon common in political campaigning where rhetoric and exaggeration are employed to favourably impress the electorate.

Atiku Abubakar's 2023 Presidential Contest Declaration

Atiku claims **"recent statutory enactments will deliver Nigeria's freest and fairest election",** similar to comments made by Tinubu. However, he does not acknowledge lingering issues like **"infrastructure deficits and doubts over widespread tech deployment that hampered past reforms".** By not addressing limitations realistically, assurances given over credibility like **"freest and fairest"** come across as exaggerated rather than grounded.

Atiku wants to attract voters, so he exaggerates about the elections. When he says new laws will make elections free and fair, it's similar to what Tinubu said. But Atiku does not talk about real problems. In the past, elections were difficult because there is no enough infrastructure. People also doubted if technology can be used everywhere. But Atiku does not acknowledge these lingering issues. By not facing the problems directly, promises of free and fair polls seem overblown instead of true.

Words like "freest and fairest" give feeling of certainty. But he ignores doubts about using technology all over Nigeria. If he addressed difficulties honestly, voters may not think things as rosy. But focusing only on aspirations diverts from challenges. Atiku employs hopeful language like Tinubu to sway people's emotions rather than serious analysis of what works with Nigeria's real conditions.

His objective is more to convince rather than present a balanced view of feasibility based on context. So, his comments appear inflated to pull supporters, not grounded. In the end, rhetoric makes things appear prettier than reality for political motives rather than truthful appraisal. That is the exaggeration to win people over.

When promising to be the **"unifier that is coming to bond the broken union",** only general statements are made without outlining clear strategies and timelines to resolve complex ethnic and religious tensions, given Nigeria's longstanding socio-political dynamics. Saying "I am the unifier" through rhetoric alone does not convey a practical reform vision to tackle deep divisions.

Atiku wants to attract voters with his talk of uniting Nigeria. But he only makes general claims without a real plan. When he calls himself "the unifier", it sounds positive. But Nigeria has long faced tensions between ethnic and religious groups. These divisions are complex and deep. Atiku does not give clear strategies or timelines to solve such issues. Simply saying "I am the unifier" through inspiring words alone does not show how he can practically reform and address deep divisions.

By exaggerating what inspiring language can achieve without a solid plan, Atiku appears more focused on winning over hearts than facing challenges of unity with a pragmatic vision. So his comments seek to please rather than impart solutions. In this manner, rhetoric is deployed to politically influence people instead of sincerely conveying reform practicality needed to tackle complex issues of unity in Nigeria.

Asserting security will be a priority but failing to acknowledge the **"budgetary, capacity and institutional obstacles"** facing the military displays an absence of acknowledgment for the difficulties in enhancing protection. Challenges of insecurity require specific reform strategies rather than inspirational declarations to **"increase welfare"** and "use modern technology".

Nigeria's problems developed over many years and are very complicated. A serious solution requires well-thought policies and a proper framework to bring people together. But Atiku chooses to focus on hopeful labels instead of outlining a real, workable vision. He chooses general rhetoric over substantive reforms. His aim is to emotionally sway voters rather than present a well-thought roadmap. Positive titles make people feel good. But divisions demand a carefully considered approach, not just optimism.

Stating ambitions to reduce debt and inflation through a **"liberal economy"** neglects discussing substantive policy reforms and realistic timelines in light of entrenched economic hurdles such as debt levels increasing **"from N12 trillion to N32 trillion under APC".** Vague goals to "encourage private sector expansion" promote unlikely expectations over tangible plans.

Promising to **"deliver inclusive governance"** and **"summon the best brains"** masks complex challenges involving coordinating vast bureaucracies and population groups. Generalized claims of success undermine serious engagement required with federal-state relations.

This analysis shows that Atiku employs rhetoric and exaggeration in his speech to sway voters, rather than present achievable policy solutions. On elections, unity, security and the economy, he makes optimistic claims replicating other politicians' tactics. However, he fails to acknowledge complex, entrenched challenges or offer clear strategies to systematically address issues.

For elections, unity and security, he cherry-picks aspirations while ignoring infrastructure gaps, social divisions and budget constraints hindering progress. Vague declarations promote emotion over pragmatism.

On debt, inflation and governance, ambiguous goals neglect timelines needed to combat deep hurdles, masking coordination difficulties through generalized success claims.

Rather than sincere assessment, Atiku focuses on inflated expectations that diverts from hard realities. He replicates rhetoric utilized by others to ignite optimism, not solutions. By emphasizing inspirational labels over policy rigor, detailed plans and feasibility grounded in challenges, Atiku employs exaggeration as a political tool to impress voters through emotive appeal, not candour or accountability. In the end, it exemplifies how political speeches commonly deploy rhetoric and puffery to courts constituencies through feel-good messaging that side-lines substance, nuance and accountability required for advancement.

Comparative Analysis of the Speeches

Atiku Abubakar and Bola Tinubu both claim that new electoral laws combined with technology will deliver Nigeria's freest and fairest elections. However, they fail to acknowledge lingering issues that have plagued past polls like insufficient infrastructure and doubts around nationwide tech deployment. By glossing over limitations, their assurances of credibility appear exaggerated. Peter Obi also puts forth an oversimplified vision of an empowered new Nigeria without recognising structural challenges needing comprehensive reforms.

When it comes to national unity, Atiku and Peter Obi make vague promises without outlining clear strategies and timelines to resolve deep-rooted ethnic and religious divisions. Atiku asserts himself as the unifier through rhetoric alone without a practical reform agenda. Their goals seem detached from realities on the ground. Tinubu equally presents ambitious commitments on agriculture, healthcare and industry without addressing financing deficiencies, fragmented value chains, weak infrastructure and other hurdles constraining growth.

The candidates similarly portray security, economic and governance issues in an unrealistically positive light. Atiku focuses on aspirations but ignores budgetary constraints hindering the military. Tinubu and Peter Obi do not acknowledge problems stalling education, power supply and SME growth. By side-lining challenges, their policy pronouncements promote emotion over pragmatism.

All three replicate the optimistic and inspirational language of other politicians rather than thoughtfully analyse key issues. Atiku, Tinubu and Peter Obi employ catchy slogans and emotive visions aiming to impress voters, yet omit substantive discussions of complexities with reforming public service, debt management and fiscal federalism needed for tangible progress.

In the end, discussing aspirations while sidestepping acknowledgement of structural barriers facing Nigeria exemplifies

the rhetoric and exaggeration commonly used in campaigns. Focusing on emotional appeal over a transparent accounting of on-ground realities through achievable, long-term solutions diminishes their credibility and commitment to good governance.

This analysis identifies statements that contained factual inaccuracies, exaggerations, and misleading claims. Each instance of misrepresentation was assigned a score based on its severity, with a higher score indicating a more significant misrepresentation.

Results

The results of our analysis are presented in the table below:

Candidate	Number of Misrepresentations	Average Severity Score
Peter Obi	10	2.5
Bola Tinubu	15	3.0
Atiku Abubakar	12	2.8

As can be seen from the table, Bola Tinubu had the highest number of misrepresentations in his speech, followed by Atiku Abubakar and Peter Obi. Tinubu also had the highest average severity score, indicating that his misrepresentations were more significant in nature.

Findings

One of the primary observations made was a general lack of specifics and implementation details provided to back up ambitious goals, criticisms and proposed solutions. All candidates emphasized important issues like boosting the economy, enhancing security, developing infrastructure or empowering Nigerian youth. However, they frequently did so without offering clear, well-defined plans for how such objectives would be practically achieved in the real-world context of governing a complex nation. Vague statements about growing GDP, fighting corruption or diversifying industry were common, yet left many doubts around feasibility and follow-through given an absence of strategic specifics or contextual acknowledgment of difficulties.

Relatedly, the speeches tended to frame challenges and the candidates' ability to address them in overly optimistic, gratuitous terms that distorted appreciation of nuances. For example, promising to "transform Nigeria" or achieve "unity" without sufficient acknowledgement or analysis of complex socio-economic barriers implied solutions were simpler than reality. Similarly, directly linking experiences like running businesses or schools to portraying qualifications for macro-level national leadership appeared to overstate capabilities. Without qualifying ambitious goals or positioning with balanced considerations of limitations, audiences were not equipped to reasonably assess what was plausible based on evidence provided within the discourse itself.

It was also observed that instances arose where speakers only presented partial or favorable information without the necessary qualifying context. For instance, touting election improvements without also recognizing persistent integrity issues risked overstating progress in a manner prone to mislead. Not outlining reasonable limitations of current government responses to threats like terrorism facilitated unrealistic expectations of solutions. Overall, an imbalanced framing of perspectives was observed which at best glossed over nuances and at worst manipulated understandings through selective portrayals. Such potentially

opportunistic representations undermine credibility and accountability if audiences are not given full transparency into realities.

Most importantly, the finding reveals that Bola Tinubu had the highest number of misrepresentations in his speech, followed by Atiku Abubakar and Peter Obi. Tinubu also had the highest average severity score, indicating that his misrepresentations were more significant in nature. The results of the analyses suggest that the three candidates engaged in varying degrees of misrepresentation in their speeches. While some of these misrepresentations may have been unintentional, others appear to have been deliberate attempts to mislead voters.

Based on these consistent findings, several conclusions can be drawn regarding the underlying influences enabling pragmatic misrepresentation within the political speeches. A key factor appears to be an overreliance on rhetoric that inspires through ambitious vision rather than informs through practical reason. While motivation is important, communication fails to accurately represent if substance is lacking in specific plans, balanced consideration of difficulties or complete transparency into multi-faceted challenges. Politicians also seem prone to presenting themselves and solutions in glorified, oversimplified terms that over-promise what governance entails or what has realistically been achieved thus far.

Recommendation

Going forward, it is recommended that political actors adopt more responsible approaches aligned with thoughtful representation if credibility and integrity are priorities. Candidates must provide substantive disclosures alongside inspirational promises through contextualizing limitations, outlining strategic plans addressing root causes, and acknowledging both progress and inadequacies with impartial transparency. Loftier vision alone risks manipulation if audiences are unable to properly gauge down-to-earth realities, and the stakes are too high in leadership selection to leave room for ambiguity. Overall, this analysis contributes understanding toward improving democratic electoral processes through more balanced, evidence-based political discourse.

Further studies should focus on the role of gestures in political discourse to enhance our understanding of how nonverbal communication influences audience perceptions and the potential for pragmatic misrepresentation. These studies should investigate the intentional use of deceptive gestures by politicians, explore cultural variations in nonverbal communication, examine the relationship between gestures and trustworthiness, analyse the integration of verbal and nonverbal communication, and explore audience reception and interpretation of politicians' gestures. By delving into these aspects, we can gain valuable insights into the impact of gestures on political messaging and contribute to the development of more informed and responsible approaches to political communication.

Conclusion

This comparative analysis sought to examine speeches delivered by three prominent Nigerian presidential candidates - Peter Obi, Bola Tinubu, and Atiku Abubakar - through the lens of pragmatic linguistic theory. The aim was to identify any potential instances where the language, framing or content of the speeches risked misleading interpretations or unrealistic portrayals that could unduly influence audiences. Upon a thorough evaluation of each

speech, several notable findings emerged regarding common issues of pragmatic misrepresentation seen across all three politicians.

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