

## **‘Emi Lo Kan’ Concept in Nigerian Politics: A Critical Discourse Defragmentation**

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**ABSTRACT:** *Text and context, mind, and domination are key concepts whenever we consider language and politics. This study examines the ways in which political and ideological undertones were conveyed in political speeches, as well as how texts reproduce and maintain power and unequal power relations. In order to understand how language shapes and maintains power relationships and ideological structures the study employs the principles of critical discourse analysis by Norman Fairclough. Critical Discourse Analysis helps us to see how specific language techniques produce, enact, and legitimise power relations. The study found out that the aspirant used the expression to reflect both good self-ideology and negative self-ideology in order to neutralise the asymmetrical power relationships that exist between his group and the other groups within the APC at the point of liberalising power. It was a declarative. Typically, this resulted in the other aspirants’ power being politically diminished. The aspirant also used discourse structures that have implications for ideology as weapons of persuasion and pleading, positive self-representation of “Emi”, meaning “I”, negotiation and personality projection. The researchers conclude that language of politics has the power to weave visions and “imaginaries” that can alter, obfuscate, and politically interpret realities.*

**KEYWORDS:** CDA, language, politics, Nigerian politics, discourse, defragmentation

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## INTRODUCTION

Preparatory to the Nigeria's 2023 general elections, there seemed to be a sharp division among the ruling All Progressives Congress (APC) as to who becomes its presidential candidate. In May 2022, the then National Leader of the APC, now the Nigeria's President-elect, Asiwaju Bola Ahmed Tinubu at a sensitisation/stakeholders meeting in Abeokuta, Ogun State made a speech from which we extracted the expression that birthed our research. The statement reads:

*...To ba je tiwe, mo kawe ...If it's about education, I am educated*  
*To ba de je oro agba, emi l'egbon ...If it's by age, I'm the most senior*  
*Apemora eni la n pe temi dire ...You use your mouth to confess good things about yourself*  
*Mo ti n sin yin bo, ojo ti pe ...I have been serving you all the while;*  
*E gbe kini yi wa ...bring this thing (presidency)*  
*Emi lo kan ! ...It's my turn!*

This expression has been described by many Nigerian as an outburst from a politician who has not only felt suppressed by the Aso Rock faction of the APC but is struggling to retain relevance in the scheme of things. However, our attention in this study is on the strength of such expression that navigates the user to the threshold of power.

### Language, Politics and Power

Language is a social process, which suggests that it is a product of civilization and is influenced by social factors. Public perception can be greatly influenced and shaped by language. Language has frequently had a significant impact on a wide range of human concerns, including political, social, educational, economic, artistic, etc. Language is the most distinctive feature of man. Language primarily serves to educate, change, and alter man and his society. Because these functions are in harmony with the purpose of politics, the two ideas are mutually beneficial. It is significant to point out that language and politics meet at the threshold of power. Politics is primarily preoccupied with the exercise of power, and language is a potent tool. Men are involved in politics because they want to establish their social places, compete for limited resources, and persuade others to agree with them. There is an internal and dialectical connection between particular discursive practices and the specific domains of action (including circumstances, institutional frameworks, and social structures) in which they are embedded because we use words in ways that are susceptible to social convention. The situational, institutional and social settings shape and affect discourses, and on the other hand, discourses influence discursive as well as non-discursive social and political processes and actions.

Since language has power potentials to influence, make or mar individuals and shape public opinions, in the context of this present work, we shall see how feelings, emotions as well as ideological beliefs of individuals or groups are conveyed through linguistic expressions to project personal and group ideology as well as to encode power. This conforms to my earlier assumption that language and politics are social events that are inextricably intertwined. In light of this,

intellectuals, including discourse analysts, should be able to make judgments about what is actually the truth, what is false, and what is "hidden" or "absent" or misrepresented in discourse that distorts the truth, thereby empowering the less privileged group to debunk the hidden messages through linguistic means. Language use during election campaigns can be characterised as a social process and a socially conditioned process that can be used to do great social work (Schiffrin 1994,15). Politics is therefore by definition a verbal and social affair that exploits language and social practise. Second, the current work is motivated by the idea that with the current explosion in information technology, people need to become more aware of how these representations should be internalised because people's lives are increasingly being shaped by textual representations that are politically, socially, or economically motivated. Any discourse, whether it is spoken or written, derives from a variety of factors, including authority, social or cultural heritage, religion, or social standing. Every speech is both the result of the social event it was inspired by and the product of the social organisation it is a part of. As a result, we can discuss discourse in the context of politics, women, the legal system, the media, education, and ads, to name a few. Mey (2001, 297) describes these various "institutionalised discourses" as having various "ideological discursive forms" (IDFs) that govern their various institutional topics. According to Fairclough (2013), IDFs refer to "conventional ways of talking or writing and seeing the world that both create and are created by conventional ways of thinking". These linked ways of talking and thinking have been implicated to constitute ideologies (patterns of beliefs, values and habitual actions as well as patterns of language) which serve to circulate power in society. He claims that there is typically just one IDF that is obviously prevalent. Each IDF functions as a kind of "speech community," with its own discourse norms. However, these norms are also embedded in and symbolised by the IDF's "ideological norms," and institutional subjects are created in accordance with those norms in subject positions with ideological underpinnings they may not be aware of. The ability to "naturalise" ideas, or to gain support for them as "common sense" that is not ideological, is a trait of a powerful IDF (Original emphasis). Dominant discourses are said to serve the interest of the dominant social group, usually the group with greater access to social privileges and especially to the media communication. This gives them the advantage to control what can and should be said and which perspective to foreground.

Language of political activities and political relations has a key role in the exchange of values in social life and transforming power into right and obedience into duty. It may create power and become an area where power can be applied. In essence, politicians' campaign is quintessentially a language game. Political candidates seek to mould public perception of themselves and their programmes and elicit support through speeches, campaign activities, symbolic appeals, and various strategies. Meyerhoff (2006, 65) points out that we draw very powerful inferences about people from the way they talk. Supporting Meyerhoff, Jones and Pecci (2004, 44) maintain that "politicians throughout ages achieved success thanks to their skilful use of "rhetoric" by which they aim to persuade their audience of the validity of their views and their delicate and careful use of elegant and persuasive language in order to woo voters". However, the ability of the electorate to interpret political messages and intentions of the politicians and then respond appropriately is a function of how effective these candidates are in exploring and deploying the linguistic facilities available to them. Texts have been described as „sites for struggle“, sites through which individuals and groups convey their personal and collective ideologies which struggle with each other for dominance

(Wodak, 2001, 10). A text is made up of words and sentences whose importance is its meaning. These meanings are coded in words and sentences whose meanings are more than the additive value of these raw linguistic data. Since every text has some hidden meaning, Critical Discourse analysts, therefore, advocate a critical reading of or listening to texts with a view to uncovering the hidden messages. This is done by paying attention to linguistic and extralinguistic discourse characteristics in the criticism of linguistic practices that hide how they are manipulative and to raise consciousness among the "subjected," even likely among the majority group that may be ignorant of them. In other words, CDA can be used to undermine and dismantle unequal power relations since speech is used to create them. Nigeria is known for its ethical and moral issues with corruption, injustice, denial of fundamental human rights, mismanagement and theft of public funds, lack of transparency and accountability, theft, arbitrary award and inflation of contracts, diversion of funds, gender inequality, and a general lack of consideration for other people's feelings. Most Nigerians were conversant with the political manifestoes with such claims and inscriptions as: *Change! Next Level! Rebuilding Our Nation! National Rebirth! Obedient! Batified! Atikulated! Etc.*

In these manifestoes, we find catchy lexicalizations that hold political audience spell bound. The essence of these promises is to persuade the audience to vote for them at the polls. It is common knowledge that politics is concerned with power; the power to make decisions, to control resources, to control other people's behaviour, and often to control their values.

### **Objectives and Research Questions**

In light of the idea of *"it's my turn"* in Nigerian politics, the study's goals are to: investigate how powerful cliques control the weaker groups; apply critical discourse analysis as an analytical tool to explain the text's content in order to learn the expression's social repercussions; and investigate the linguistic characteristics of expressions with ideological overtones. These are interdem with the research questions asked by Van Dijk (2015, 470): How do powerful groups influence the language and setting of public discourse? What are the societal repercussions of such control, such as social inequality, and how does such power talk influence the thoughts and behaviours of less powerful groups? What characteristics do strong groups', institutions', and organisations' speech have, and how do those characteristics manifest themselves in abuses of power?

### **FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY**

We have adopted the basic principles of the Critical Discourse Analysis. Fairclough (2013) identifies text, interaction, and social context as three elements of a discourse, and he drew corresponding distinction among three stages of critical discourse analysis; description of text, interpretation of the relationship between text and interaction, and explanation of the relationship between interaction and social context.

The purpose that language serves in social organisations is how functional and pragmatic linguists view language. As was already mentioned, language is a type of social activity and social practise. The theoretical foundation for this research is provided by critical discourse analysis (CDA). According to this theory, discourse analysis goes beyond simple transparency and involves a

viewpoint and methodical strategy that includes looking at the network of social processes that the discourse is affected by. According to Fairclough and Wodak (1997, 258), "CDA sees itself not as dispassionate and objective social science, but as "engaged and committed". In other words, the theory considers discourse as a social process. Language or discourse, which is inclusive of its own as well as representational in nature, is an aspect of social process. Accepting discourse as a social practice means having to reveal the covert nature of social process embedded in discourse. Discourse is not merely a linguistic category or communicative medium; it is mediation between social structure and process /cultural practice (Fairclough and Wodak, 1997, 259). Discourse is a social activity that is closely connected to the sociocultural setting in which it takes place. It cannot be created nor can it work in a hoover. Instead, it is a contextual speech that is integrated into governmental and societal ideologies. Social practise describes real human deeds, words, or writing. Economic, political, societal, and ideological views are all part of social practice. (Fairclough, 1992, 66). CDA proposes that a close and systematic analysis of discourse can reveal the nature of social practice in discourse. It examines the social practices of individuals and institutions that involve concerns such as the use and abuse of language, social change as well as conflict, domination, contest and leadership.

## ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

### a. Text Control and Discourse Context

Evidently, we discovered that among many other resources that determine the power base of a group or organisation or influence over public speech and communication is a significant "symbolic" resource, and that the same is true for knowledge and information. (Kedar 1987; Mayr 2003; Sarangi and Slembrouck 1996; van Dijk 1996, 2008b, 2014). In the light of this, the All Progressive Congress (APC) as a party is believed to be in control of the mass and social media as they maintain prominence in public discourse and domains. Also, at this crucial time, various policies of the government of the APC pervade public discourse. So, the general public was always willing to read, hear and follow what would come to the public domain from the government. Therefore, the context of *Emi lo kan* penetrated into every part of the Nigerian society. People were seen singing and re-contextualising the expression to suit their purposes because it came from a member of powerful social group in the Nigerian society. In terms of text, *It's my turn to be the president or I'm next* was prominent in the media and religious circles as well as among both the elite and laity while it also dominated the political space comprising the ruling party and other opposition parties. It drove the public space.

The expression also presuppose an arrangement or ordering that has not been known to the public. It brings to the fore the various political covenants that might have existed within members of the ruling party. In effect, *Emi lo kan* shaped the knowledge, opinion, attitudes and ideology of the general public. The communicative situation of the expression may, however, be further investigated in order to determine its pragmatic appropriateness.

The local specifics of lexical or syntactic style, propositional meaning, turn-taking in conversation, rhetorical devices, and narrative structures (among many other discourse structures) may be

controlled by powerful group members (in this context, Asiwaju group in the APC), professionals, groups, organisations, or institutions, even though much discourse control is contextual or topical. For illustration, powerless group (Aso Rock faction of the APC) may be seen “keeping their volume down” or “keeping silent”.

### **b. Mind Control**

Controlling the contexts and structures of text and conversation is a significant form of power exercise, and doing so indirectly but fundamentally through such speech is a way to perpetuate hegemony and supremacy. Discourse management does, in fact, frequently seek to control the receivers' intentions, plans, knowledge, views, attitudes, and ideologies, as well as their ensuing actions. This is evident in the argumentative structure of editorials and other media contents on the Asiwaju's expression:

- i. **OPINION Emi Lokan: Beauty of understanding time and seasons** - Guardian Newspaper, March 14, 2023
- ii. **Emi 'lokan: Beauty of understanding time and seasons** - The Nation, Newspaper, Oct. 22, 2022
- iii. **'Emi lokan' inspired my album'**- The Hope Newspaper, Sept. 8, 2022
- iv. **'Emi Lo kan' politics will breed dictatorship – Tunde Bakare** - Vanguard Newspaper, Jan. 16, 2023
- v. **'Emi lokan' wrong leadership attitude for Nigeria - Obasanjo**- Punch Newspaper, Jan., 1, 2023

Consequently, minds of the people are controlled through repeated political or media discourse about similar expression or event, and through specific discourse generalisation movements, they may limit the generalisation and abstraction of specific mental models to more encompassing doctrinal frames which people's minds will continue to ponder on. Thus, we find a situation where recipients tend to accept the beliefs, knowledge, and opinions (unless they are inconsistent with their personal beliefs and experiences) of people or institutions they define (in their context models) as authoritative, trustworthy, or credible sources, such as scholars, experts, professionals, or reliable media (Nesler et al. 1993).

As part of contextual influences on the interpretation of *Emi lo kan*, we find a situation where there are no public discourses or media that may provide information from which alternative beliefs may be derived. This affirms Downing's (1984) and Wodak's (1997) earlier insinuations that the recipients may not have the knowledge and beliefs needed to challenge the discourses or information they are exposed to.

### **c. Discourse of Domination**

The Asiwaju's (dominant) expression shows the fact that he is not only in the control of the discourse of others but also in its own discourse. Here you find the index of power in the choice of words by the Asiwaju:

*...To ba je tiwe, mo kawe ...If it's about education, I am educated*  
(literacy as index of power)

*To ba de je oro agba, emi l'egbon ...If it's by age, I'm the most senior*  
(age as index of power)

*Apemora eni la n pe temi dire ...You use your mouth to confess good things about yourself*

*Mo ti n sin yin bo, ojo ti pe ...I have been serving you all the while;*  
(previous benevolence as index of power)

*E gbe kini yi wa ...bring this thing (presidency)*  
(command as index of power)

This also lends credence to the assertion that discourse participants may arrive at approximately the same meaning or different ones, and others may be forced to accept the interpretation of the more potent member. So, having authority could imply having the ability to identify presumptions. Presuppositions are a component of how text producers perceive the inter-textual environment; they are not characteristics of texts.

## CONCLUSION

The claim that the biggest battles are not waged on battlefields but rather in people's minds has been supported by this research. The best battles are those that are waged with no weapons at all. It is best to wage psychological warfare to first destroy the attackers' thoughts, destroying their arsenals in the process. Asiwaju's rage in Abeokuta has received a variety of interpretations from Nigerians. Many have questioned his audacity and right to adamantly insist that it was his time to run as the flagbearer of his party, which he stated quite explicitly as *Emi Lo kan*, and many have questioned his right to do so. In this piece, the author will contend that the claim "*Emi Lo kan*" can be understood in a variety of ways, including as the ability to predict when to strike a match that is already well under way. *Emi Lo kan* reverberates the idea that those who must win battles must understand time – the time to fight and not. That was what Asiwaju Bola Ahmed Tinubu did. He did not need to fight; he only made a demand using language they understood when he knew it was time. Asiwaju simply knew the time to reap where he had sown over the years. His declaration to run for the office of the president quite unexpectedly shows strategy and ingenuity.

This study believes that one of the reasons people do not succeed at a venture to which they invest their resources and time is their failure to understand the appropriate time to use certain language. It also shows that if we use appropriate language when it is our time and turn, there is a tendency that we labour less and achieve more. The strategy of *Emi Lo kan* holds the promise of helping individuals, organisations and states in understanding their responsibilities and expectations and making the right statement at the right time. To confront injustice even while it was being planned – he turned to language and politics before it turned on him, Just a demand, perhaps *Emi lo kan* concept stems from many painful years of labour to build heroes, building several of them but realising that he is the finest of them.

However, majority of Nigerians, according to this research, lose interest in voting and faith in their ability to listen to political manifestoes as a result of the consequences of the country's current political system. This study's foundation is based on this unsatisfactory condition of things. Language is envisioned as an instrument for carrying out goal-directed activities as well as a means of communicating concepts. It is an extremely effective tool for supporting specific ideas, organisations, and distorting reality. The aspirant also used discourse structures that have implications for ideology as weapons of persuasion and pleading, positive self-representation of “Emi, meaning I”, negotiation and personality projection. The researchers conclude that campaign language has the power to weave visions and “imaginaries” that can alter, obfuscate, and politically interpret realities.

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