

DISCURSIVE STRATEGIES OF POSITIVE SELF-PRESENTATION AND NEGATIVE OTHER-PRESENTATION IN THE SELECTED SPEECHES OF NNAMDI KANU AND SUNDAY IGBOHO

Grace Ikechukwu

Phone-08139046332

Email: graceifyikechukwu@gmail.com

Abstract

This study explores the discursive construction of positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation in the political speeches of Nnamdi Kanu and Sunday Igboho, with the aim to understanding how language is deployed to construct collective identity and resistance. Anchored on Critical Discourse Analysis of van Dijk's (2006) socio-cognitive framework, the research investigates how both activists linguistically differentiate between the in-group and the out-group, thereby reinforcing ethnic consciousness and political mobilization. Adopting a qualitative research design, the study consists of purposively selected speeches based on their thematic relevance to identity construction. The analysis dwells on how linguistic and rhetorical features such as inclusive pronouns, and framing are used to foster in-group cohesion. Findings show that the activists consistently use the ideological square of positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation to create a polarized worldview that legitimizes their resistance agendas. They draw on shared historical experiences and collective grievances to solidify solidarity among their ethnic groups that form their teeming audiences. The study argues that othering and solidarity-building are not merely linguistic acts but powerful socio-political tools that shape perception, reinforce group boundaries, and sustain resistance movements. The study concludes that in-group and out-group solidarity are powerful discursive instruments that goes beyond mere linguistic choices to shape perception, influence cognition, and sustain socio-political movements. The study contributes to current scholarly readings on discourse and identity construction in multilingual and politically complex societies like Nigeria. It provides insight into how political actors including activists manipulate language to build ideological divisions in Nigeria's socio-political context.

Key Words: positive self-representation, negative other-representation, critical discourse analysis, identity construction, rhetorical features

Introduction

Language is a powerful medium of communication that is mainly used by political leaders. It is a communication tool in which a piece of linguistic structure can represent several meanings, depending on the context, situation, purpose, participation, inclusion, exclusion, and other cultural features. It is an essential means of communication among human beings. Language plays an important role in shaping social realities, particularly in socio-political context. In multilingual and multi-ethnic societies such as Nigeria, discourse is often used to construct identities, express grievances, and mobilize collective action. Political actors strategically deploy language to influence public perception and reinforce ideological positions. (Addare, Alhassan and Sarkode 2017) Politicians as well as political activists are much aware of the power of language to persuade and influence people's thoughts. Thus, they choose language strategies that will aid in achieving their aim. They resort to strategies that will effectively transmit their messages and ideologies to their audience. The language of politics provides politicians and activists with the opportunity to explore the available resources through language in order to manipulate words to suit their goals. In other words, language is a means that humans, especially public speakers, use for communication, manipulation, mobilisation, as well as persuasion. Public speakers formulate their utterances in order to achieve their aims and intentions of communication. They deploy certain strategies to request, condemn, appeal, criticize, warn, insult, persuade, and do lots of other things. Nnamdi Kanu and Sunday Igboho are prominent figures associated with separatist movements in southeastern and southwestern Nigeria respectively. Their speeches provide rich data for examining how discourse constructs ethnic identity and resistance. This study investigates how out-group and in-group solidarity are discursively constructed in their speeches

Review of Literature

Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) considers how language works within political as well as institutional discourses so as to unveil overt and covert inequalities that exist in social relationships. CDA, in a similar vein, according to Sipra and Rashid (2013:27), highlights "the relationship between language and power". Citing Brown and Yuke, Sipra and Rashid (2013) state that CDA analyses the use of language in a real context as well as how language reveals their social, cultural, and ethnic backgrounds. The authors believe that CDA choice of lexical and syntactic features of a language depicts the socio-cultural background of the speakers. Thus, language is not

only used in describing things but also used in doing things. CDA is an approach of doing discourse analysis that focuses on the study of language and discourse in social institutions. It emphasises how social relations, knowledge, identity, and power are constructed through spoken as well as written texts. CDA throws insight into the ways discourse either reproduces or resists social and political inequality, domination, as well as power abuse. Collaborating with this stance, van Dijk (2006:52) rightly asserts:

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is a type of discourse analytical research that primarily studies the way social power abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context. With such dissident research, critical discourse analysts take explicit position and thus want to understand, expose and ultimately resist social inequality ... Thus, the typical vocabulary of many scholars will feature such notions as power, dominance, hegemony, ideology, class, gender, race, discrimination, interests, reproduction, institution, social structure, and social order, besides the more familiar discourse analytical notions.

CDA is viewed as an approach that consists of different perspectives and methods for studying the relationship between language and social context. It is particularly interested in power abuse, breaches of laws, rules and principles of democracy, equality and justice by those who wield power. Critical analysis aims to produce interpretation as well as explanations of aspects of social life which identify the causes of social wrongs and come up with knowledge which could yield to righting or mitigating them (Fairclough, 2010)

van Dijk approaches CDA on the basis of understanding ideological structures and social relations of power involved in discourse. Hence, he introduces four principles for the analysis of ideology. Quoting van Dijk, Hahed, Abdullah and Makundan (2014) state these principles called ideological square thus: (i) emphasize positive things about us (ii) emphasize negative things about them (iii) de-emphasize negative things about us (iv) de-emphasize positive things about them. These ideological square, they continue, contribute to polarization of in-groups cum out-groups in order to favourably represent them

Rhetorical Devices and Discursive Strategies in Political Text

Rhetorical devices are the ways that speakers and writers use words and language in order to persuade the audience. They are specific techniques used within language to create an effect. By implication, rhetorical strategies help in no small measure to exhaust all avenues that allow us to most convincingly convey our point on a particular topic. These devices/strategies help efficiently present our material on a chosen subject. Again, it helps to connect facts into a sequence and provides clusters of information necessary for conveying a purpose or an argument (Staugaite, 2014).

Rhetorical devices help to create imaginative and creative effects together while making speeches lively and interesting. Speakers who actually want their words to be memorable employ several stylistic devices to figuratively demonstrate their views. That goes to prove, as observed by Staugaite (2014:28), that a good speech does not only depend on a collection of statements worthy of belief, but also on “effective arguments, logical and progressive arrangement, and above all, on effective style”

Discursive strategies incorporate techniques employed in communication to shape the ways ideas are presented and understood. Discursive strategies are intentional and organised ways of using language to accomplish particular communicative, persuasive, or ideological purposes (van Dijk, 2006). They comprise deliberate linguistic choices designed to influence audience perception, construct group ideologies, and legitimise particular viewpoints or positions. Such strategies may entail labelling social actors, assigning negative or positive qualities, framing events from selective viewpoints, and employing metaphors, stories, or evaluative terms to influence interpretation. They function as instrumental in defining in-groups and out-groups, justifying policies, reinforcing or contesting power relations. CDA views such strategies as tools to expose embedded ideologies and social structures.

Metaphor

Metaphor compares two different things. It asserts that one thing is not just like another, but that one thing is another thing (Akprinlola, 2016) .

Hyperbole

Hyperbole describes the undue exaggeration of events or human situations (Ogbe 1994)

Allusion

Allusion is a short, informal reference to a well-known place, event or person. It is a casual reference to a historical or literary figure, object, or event in order to create a resonance in the reader or to assign a symbolic meaning to the character or object of allusion.

Repetition

Repetition involves repeating words, sounds, and expressions in succession for the sake of emphasis. (Oparinde, Rapeane, and Mheta, 2021).

Direct Address/Inclusive Language

Direct address occurs when a speaker includes the audience. It involves the use of words/pronouns such as we, us, and our.

Consensus- This means forming agreement and solidarity (Osisanwo2016).

Negative other- presentation- Classifying out-groups as bad.

Positive self- presentation- Classifying in-groups as good.

Framing

Framing embraces everything that is going on in a situation. It involves the process of shaping public opinion by selecting some information to influence beliefs and decisions. Framing defines the focus of an argument. It is a normal aspect of the communication process (Kuypers, 2009). By implication, the way a topic is framed determines the audience's interpretation of the information. Similarly, the choice made in framing can produce significant effects on how the audience responds to the message. Some framing techniques, as listed by the author, include storytelling, metaphor, slogans and catchy phrases, and so on.

Toeing the line of argument, Kuypers (2009) asserts that framing is the process whereby communicators act consciously or not to produce a particular point that supports a given situation to be presented in a way that some facts are made more pronounced while some are sometimes ignored. The author continues that frames act to define problems and suggest causes, place moral judgements, and proffer suggestions. They are found in the communicator, the text, the audience, as well as the culture. Framing, the author concludes, is a central organising idea within a narrative account of an issue. They also supply hints to neutral realities. Leaders' framing of actions and situations helps keep things in order. Thus, framing is viewed as a powerful tool for leaders. It is used as a strategic tool for leaders as well as a communicative strategy for training people (Fairhurst in Johansson, 2023). By strategically using framing, leaders can interpret actions that employees or the audience can embrace and act upon.

Previous studies on political speeches in Nigeria have addressed issues on its challenge. For instance, Casmir Uchenna Obiakor and Emman Owums Owuamalam in 2023 conducted a comparative analysis of Nigerian print media coverage of Mazi Nnamdi Kanu and Mr Sunday Igboho's secessionist movements. The aim of the study was to examine the news stories on both activists in order to ascertain whether reportage and framing are dependent on background/ownership of the press and ethnic orientations. The objectives that guided the study include to compare the frequency of reportage and the prominence given to Mazi Nnamdi Kanu and Mr. Sunday Igboho to examine the framing of media reports on the both activists by the press. The study centred on agenda setting and framing theories, utilized the content analytical research method, to examine six Nigerian Dailies based on different ethnic. The content analysis was conducted from January to August 2021. Findings revealed that Mazi Kanu enjoyed high frequency and more prominence than Mr. Igboho in the Nigerian press. The study concluded that reportage and framing of news were dependent on background of the press, and influenced by ethnic sentiments

Patience Akunna Osondu and Florence Ebere Ubah in 2023 researched on Nnamdi Kanu's speech at the European Union parliament in 2019 on the objective of how language is used in our community. Using the theoretical framework of identity construction by Bucholtz and Hall (2005), the study revealed that Nnamdi Kanu used all the principles of identity construction theory, such as emergence to explain to the whole world how the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) are relegated and marginalised in Nigeria. The study showed Nnamdi Kanu as a skillful political propagandist who uses language effectively to profile identity, thereby presenting his political claims. The study recommended that researchers should not neglect the use of identity construction theory in the analysis of literary discourse and other forms of political discourse

In 2022, Theresa Eze and Ephraim Chukwu investigated a comparative analysis of rhetorical devices in selected political speeches of Nelson Madella and Nnamdi Kanu. Adopting persuasion theory and van Dijk's critical discourse analysis, the work attempted to find out if the use of rhetorical devices and hate language in political speeches can help politicians persuade their audience and make them align with their political ideologies. The population of the study comprised political speeches that contained rhetorical devices and hate speech. Data for the study comprised excerpts from three political speeches, each made by Nelson Mandela and Nnamdi Kanu. The study adopted a textual analysis. The findings revealed that the above political activists copiously employed rhetorical devices to persuade their audience and influence them to align with their political ideologies and pledge their unalloyed support to their political struggles. The study also revealed that Nnamdi Kanu used hate speech to incite hatred in the hearts of his followers.

Ehizojie Precious, Adeline Nkwam-Uwaoma and Blessing Ajirioghene Omoevah in 2022 conducted a study to investigate netizens' reactions to Sunday Igboho's declaration of a Yoruba Nation. The objectives of the

study were to ascertain the frames of netizens' reactions to Igboho's declaration of Yoruba nation and to explore issues elicited in reaction to the declaration. Using public sphere theory, data were purposively gathered from 200 Twitter comments in reaction to the declaration. Hermeneutic approach to textual analysis was used in interpreting the social media texts which was grouped into frames. The findings showed that netizen's reactions to Igboho's declaration of a Yoruba nation were framed for freedom, restructuring and justification. The issues raised in the frame of wisdom were the lack of progress as a country, tyranny and the diversity of the country emphasizing that there is nothing in common that binds us as a country. Thus, there is need to pacify secessionist agitations and frame of justification raised issues of nepotism. On this, the researchers recommended that government should give heed to the clamour to restructure the country to align with the tenets of true federalism

Thus, this paper critically attempted a study of discursive strategies in the selected speeches of Nnamdi Kanu and Sunday Igboho. It focused meticulously on their use of discursive strategies to unveil how they communicate their ideologies, construct in-group identities, and pursue their political ambitions.

Theoretical Framework

The present study adopts critical discourse analysis (CDA) framework of van Dijk's (2006) ideological discourse structures. van Dijk's (2006) framework comprises two major discursive strategies of positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation, which become visible by means of other discursive processes referred to as categories of ideological discourse structure. Osisanwo (2016).

Van Dijk approaches CDA on the basis of understanding ideological structures and social relations of power involved in discourse. In fact, Amousson and Allagbe (2018:8) summarise van Dijk's claim thus:

Language approach to use and discourse always presuppose the intervening mental modals, goals, and general social representations (knowledge, attitudes, ideologies, norms, values) of the language users. In other words, the study of discourse triangulates between society/cultural/situation, cognition and discourse/language ... As is obvious from most of van Dijk's studies, his critical analysis of texts tends to make explicit the ideological dimension of 'Us versus Them' and to demonstrate the discursive structures and strategies used in exercising the dominant power.

The ideological square is provided below:

- Emphasise positive things about us
- Emphasise negative things about them
- De-emphasise negative things about us
- De-emphasise positive things about them
- Igboho Data were purposively selected from media broadcasts, interviews, and public addresses.

Methodology

Data for this study were drawn from speeches and addresses delivered by the activists; Nnamdi Kanu and Sunday Igboho in the course of their agitation and resistance. Out of the numerous speeches, four speeches were purpo

sively selected for this study owing to the discursive strategies of positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation. The data were analysed using CDA with emphasis on van Dijk's framework which has two basic discursive strategies of positive self-presentation as well as negative other-presentation.

Analysis

The data revealed that there are two broad ideological strategies employed in the speeches; positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation. Each of the ideological strategies equally has other discursive strategies. For instance, the discursive strategies used under the positive self-presentation include metaphor, appeal to history, experience and past achievements. However, the analysis is organized below under two broad ideological strategies: positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation.

1. Positive self-presentation

In the speeches, the activists use different positive strategies to influence the perception of their audience. Each of them tries to present their image positively by emphasizing their good deeds and de-emphasising their bad deeds. This is discussed below:

Excerpt 1

IPOB is exceptional, we never change. We remain the same, today, yesterday, and forever.

Excerpt 2

The Igbo-speaking Biafrans are known for their resourcefulness and resoluteness when they make up their minds to embark on a mission.

Here, Kanu carefully assigns good attributes to Biafrans. He positively associates them with uniqueness, faithfulness, resourcefulness and resoluteness. He carefully illustrates in a very short story the strengths of the Igbo, all to emphasise their goodness. Invariably, this will spur a feeling of pride and hope in his audience.

Excerpt 3 Biafrans are adventurous and are not afraid to venture into the unknown... Biafrans don't run away from history, rather, they make history.

Excerpt 4 -I am not a Nigerian.

I am a Biafran with British Nationality.

IPOB is the largest mass movement in the whole world.

IPOB is registered and recognised by various countries all over the world. The Igbos, from all I know about them, do collectively abhor evil, they love hard work, help one another, and tenaciously believe that “*nwanne di na mba*”.

From the above excerpts, Kanu employed metaphor as a framing technique to present a good image of himself and the entire Igbo ethnic group. He used this to influence the beliefs and decisions of his audience. Telling them that he is not a Nigerian, that he is a Biafran who does not recognise Nigeria, are all carefully and consciously selected and framed. Kanu, therefore, employed frimist ideology to strategically describe his new identity in order to support hints to realities on the ground; separation and freedom from Nigeria. He decided to first exclude himself from being a Nigerian to give strong proof of his agitation and ideology. By so doing, he presents himself as a strong and credible leader who leads by example. Again, the above metaphorical statements were carefully chosen to project a positive image of the Biafrans. Kanu strategically employed these light metaphors to promote the distinguishing qualities of the Biafrans against their opposition. He paints the dogmatic nature of the Biafrans such as hard work, which qualifies them to be an independent nation.

In addition, Kanu exaggerates the size of their movement, attributing it to the largest of its kind, with global recognition, while projecting the Igbos as hard working, friendly and helpful to one another.

Excerpt 5... I stand before you today in Los Angeles, California, in the presence of the light, the custodian of our traditions in faraway lands, the bringers of hope and saviour of the Black race, the World Igbo Congress.

Kanu presented the Igbo people as the symbol of light and custodian of traditions even in the distant land of California. The World Igbo Congress is represented in grand, heroic style as bringers of hope and saviour of the black race. This portrays the group's status, portraying them as a global liberating force, not only a local political movement. Kanu showed his optimism in his ethnic group as the source of hope and succor not only to Nigeria but to the entire African race.

Igboho also concurs:

Excerpt 6 I am a visionary father, I am a big man.

I was a king before you.

We are not poor either.

In the above excerpts, Igboho establishes his own personal identity, which makes him stand out as an outstanding, charismatic leader. He refers to himself not only as a big man but also as a visionary father who is more real than every other person. In other words, he presents himself as a credible leader who possesses all the necessary qualities: realism, vision, and wealth. By saying this, Igboho craftily appeals to the audience's emotions. Thus, he makes a good representation of himself as one who is different from many other leaders. He tactically presents himself as someone willing to give freely not only his time but also his money, without being motivated by selfish or greedy interests. Knowing what people need at that time, someone who can selflessly and financially handle the issue of herdsmen without making financial demands from the people, Igboho, therefore, leveraged on the need of his people to front his credibility and content in the cause of realising the people's mandate.

Excerpt 7 I am an entertainer. I am endowed by God.

Igboho projects himself as an entertainer, well rooted in divine endowment rather than personal efforts. By attributing his abilities as a divine gift, he validates his authority and frames his position as unquestionable and divinely ordained. Again, he exhibited a high level of trustworthiness and credibility in his speech, exerting huge confidence in himself.

Excerpt 8 We are an empty barrel full of water that is actually bigger than others (238).

Contrasting 'an empty barrel full of water, Igboho places the group as underestimated but inherently more substantial. This projects latent strength and superiority over others. This reinforces the group's sense of pride, dignity, and solidarity.

Excerpt 9 We are different, Yoruba is different in everything.

We have respect, we have humility.

... We want to let you know that Yoruba is different from Fulani.

In this extract, Igboho compares Yoruba ethnic group with the Fulani ethnic group and categorically states that Yoruba are better. He lists their good qualities which are respect and humility. This invariably proves that Fulani are the opposite, that is, disrespect and pride.

Some hyperbolic instances are evident:

Excerpt 10 Look at the number of Yoruba people around, Yoruba is the largest country in the world. Igboho employed hyperbolic instance to project tribe not only as an ethnic group but as a whole country.

B. Negative other-Representation

Excerpt 11 Those who call themselves senators, honourables who are our leaders... they are destructive, they are not real leaders. Those who call themselves Senators, Honourables, who are our leaders, will be in traffic, and they will see a four-year-old, five-year-old selling popcorn, puff-puff, and they will still be buying it from them, you see, they are destructive, they are not real leaders.

Through the activists' description of their leaders as destructive and not real, he delegitimises their authority, thereby portraying them as harmful rather than protective of the people. He presents them as a source of danger rather than worthy representatives of interest.

Excerpt 12 The Fulanis are killing us, destroying our fathers' property, and using it to restore their lives. They are raping our aunties and sisters. These Fulanis are destroying farms, they are destroying yams, pepper, and things so that they can import and sell their peppers, tomatoes, and yams to us, making us slaves.

Here, Igboho associates the Fulani with different vices such as killing, destroying, betraying, and raping. By so doing he paints them as dangerous aggressors. This shows the 'them' as a direct threat to life, property as well as dignity. He draws a sharp contrast between the Fulani and the Yoruba, depicting the Fulani with bad characters while presenting the Yoruba as innocent and helpless victims.

Excerpt 13 We found out that all our political fathers were selling us, playing games with us, using us to do business, and signing contracts by using us.

Igboho used the strategy of polarisation to assign bad attributes to their leaders. Similarly, he also popularised their political fathers as betrayers, and self-centred individuals who betray the people's trust. This justifies calls for alternative leadership. He draws a sharp contrast between the Fulani and the Yoruba. He framed 'them' as perpetrators of violence while 'us' as the oppressed. He used the argument to justify his ideology and appeal to the emotions of his audience, thereby mobilising the 'us' around a shared sense of urgency and obligation.

Excerpt 14 ...I say it all. They have collected money. They cannot help but say that if I have ever taken money from someone, it should be so for me...

In the above extracts, Igboho portrays 'them' (the leaders) as selfish and corrupt, while he separates 'us' (himself) as selfless and trustworthy leader, wholly driven by justice against financial profit. He reaffirms his mission that is devoid of financial benefit from any top politician.

Excerpt 15 What I am saying is that you Fulanis are killing our people and kidnapping us. Look at this Lagos road, we can no longer travel at night. I am urging President Muhammadu Buhari, and I take this opportunity to advise him to join us in clearing all the Fulani abductors and appeal to them from Yoruba land, we no longer want them. We do not want Fulani, bandits, and herdsmen in our land again. We do not want them anymore.

Igboho referred to the Fulani as both killers and abductors, making Lagos road uncomfortable to plight. He therefore framed the Fulani as violent 'them' whose presence threatens life and security of 'us'.

Kanu equally employed different negative strategies, some in heavy metaphors, emphasising 'their bad' deeds and de-emphasising 'their good' deeds.

Excerpt 16 I do not recognise the court of the zoo.
The zoo called Nigeria cannot jail me.
I cannot be tried by a court I do not recognise.

Strong metaphors referring to Nigeria as a zoo seemed so heavy and incisive that it could cause the risk of aggressive actions from the audience. The framing strategy dehumanizes the Nigerian state, labelling it as lawless and chaotic. Kanu reinforces an us-versus-them ideology that strengthens in-group identity

Excerpt 17 Buhari is a compound illiterate.

Some idiots who are not educated said that they'll arrest me.

The expression that Buhari is a 'compound illiterate' is a powerful instance of hate statement. This sometimes leads to government stern measures of increased enforcement actions, such as abrupt arrest and detention. Not ignorant of the consequences, but he used it to emphasise the bad things about them, which invariably appeal to the emotions of his audience. Kanu dismisses Buhari as an unqualified leader by calling him a 'compound illiterate'. Again, he ridicules those threatening to arrest him as ignorant and uneducated. Through these insults, he undermines their authority while positioning himself as intellectually and morally superior.

Excerpt 18 Every right-thinking human being knows that the slogan 'One Nigeria' is a ruse.

Kanu argues that the slogan 'one Nigeria' is a deceptive political construct, asserting that any rational observer can testify to its falsity. Using this framing, Kanu portrays Nigeria as deceitful and illegitimate. He polarised an 'us' truthful and 'them' deceitful and false.

Conclusion

Discourse is a powerful tool for constructing social reality. The speeches of Kanu and Igboho vividly highlights some discursive strategies that aimed at mobilising support against the accumulated grievances and struggles of their respective audiences. Positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation are not merely linguistic strategies but mechanisms for shaping cognition and influencing political behavior. These strategies contribute to identity formation and can intensify socio-political tensions. This study shows that the speeches of Kanu and Igboho are rich in discursive strategies that construct identity and resistance. The analysis proves that positive self-representation and negative other-representation are central to political discourse in separatist movements. Through out-group and in-group solidarity, the activists garner support and reinforce ideological positions. They employed all these so as to prove to their followers their loyalty and patriotism

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