

# A Critical Discourse Analysis of President Goodluck Jonathan's CONFAB Speech

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## Abstract

Throughout political history politicians have exercised one form of power or another over other human beings through the use of language. The use of language in such political activities creates different impacts on the individual and society and therefore elicits different reactions. This writer examines the language of Politics as it was used during the inauguration of the National Conference by President Goodluck Jonathan. Politics is a struggle for executive power in order to control political, economic and social ideas and put them into practical use. Most political activities are prepared and effectively manipulated through the use of language for the purposes of allocation of resources. This discussion which belongs to the larger corpus of Critical Discourse Analysis examines the role of language in political discourse using the theoretical approaches of M.A.K Halliday and Bloor & Bloor. Having critically analysed the linguistic devices used in the speech, the writer has arrived at the conclusion that the speech is well composed and has achieved its desired purpose of message delivery.

## Introduction

Politics is a struggle for executive power in order to control political, economic and social resources and put them into practical use. In this process, language plays a critical role. Every political action is prepared, accompanied, influenced and acted out using language. This paper analyses the discourse of politics as contained in the inaugural address of President Goodluck Jonathan. Given the enormous domestic and global significance of the said speech in times of national and international compelling need for a national conference, it is crucial to decipher ideological traits enshrined in Jonathan's inaugural address predestined hitherto the direction in which the National CONFAB will follow beckoning on the delegates to maintain the dicto of 'our heroes past'.

## Theoretical Ideas

### The concept of discourse

The term 'discourse' is very broad with diverse definitions, "which integrates a whole...palette of meanings" (Titscher et al, 1998), ranging from Linguistics, through Sociology, Philosophy, Social Psychology and many other disciplines. It is used in analysing literary and non literary texts and it is frequently used to indicate a certain theoretical sophistication in ways which are vague and sometimes obfuscatory (Sara Mill, 1997). Considering the diverse nature of the term 'discourse' some theorists contrast discourse with ideology and assert that:

Discourse is a speech or writing seen from the point of view of the beliefs, values and categories which it embedded; these beliefs etc., constitute a way of looking at the world, an organisation or representation of experience- ideology in the neutral non-pejorative sense. Different modes of discourse encode different representations of experience; and the source of these representations is the communicative context within which the discourse is embedded (Roger Fowler, 2012)

Although very broad, several writers have attempted to narrow down the meaning of the term to linguistic usage. Hence, the term discourse in mainstream Linguistics refers to a revision from the way in which sentences are used in abstract which is the examples of the way that language is structured as a system, to a concern with language in use (Brown and Yule (2003). The term 'discourse', to other scholars, implies a concern with the length of a text or utterance which is an extended piece of text that has some form of internal organisation, coherence or cohesion (Sinclair & Coulthard, 2012). According to Carter & Simpson (2013), discourse is defined by the context of occurrence of certain utterances namely; discourse of religion, discourse of advertising, discourse of engineering, etc. These contexts of production of texts determine the internal constituents of the specific texts produced. However, Stubb (2003) notes that although the terms text and discourse are more or less synonymous,

... in other usages a text may be written, while a discourse is spoken, a text may be non-interactive whereas a discourse is interactive... a text may be short or long whereas a discourse implies a certain length, and a text must possess of surface cohesion whereas a discourse must be possessed of a deeper coherence.

The term 'discourse' as used in Linguistics may spoken or written. For instance, according to Crystal(2007), Discourse focuses on the structure of naturally occurring spoken language, as found in such 'discourses' as conversations, interviews, commentaries, and speeches. Text analysis focuses on the structure of written language, as found in such texts as essays, notices, road signs and chapters.... discourse and texts can be used in a much broader sense to include all language units with a definable communicative function whether spoken or written. Some scholars talk about spoken or written discourse; others about spoken or written texts Short(2013) however further conceives of the term discourse in terms of linguistic communication when he asserts that:

Discourse is linguistic communication seen as a transaction between the speaker and hearer, as an interpersonal activity whose form is determined by its social purpose. Text is linguistic communication (either spoken or written) seen simply as a message coded in its auditory or visual medium

For the purpose of this paper we apply the definition of discourse based on Van Dijk(1977) and his general concept of discourse as text in context, seen as "data that is liable for empirical analysis" (Titscher et al. 1998), with focus on the fact that "discourse" is a wider term than 'text'. I shall use the term 'discourse' in the words of Fairclough (1989) to refer to the whole process of social interaction of which a text is just a part".

### **Critical Discourse Analysis**

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is previously not a homogenous model, nor a school or a paradigm, but at most a shared perspective on doing Linguistics, Semantics or Discourse Analysis (Van Dijk 1993). Critical Discourse Analysis objective is to perceive language use as social practice. These users of language do not function in isolation, but in a set of cultural, social context and studies the connection between textual structures and their functions in interaction within the society. This perhaps explains why Bloor & Bloor(2007) attempt to make a distinction between the objective of Linguistics and Critical Discourse Analysis by asserting that:

The aims and objective of Linguistics differ from the aims of CDA. Linguists in general, are concerned with the way in which language or discourse works and their interest is in language for its own sake. Critical discourse analysts, on the other hand, are interested in the way in which language and discourse are used to achieve social goals and in the part this use plays in the social maintenance and change

Such an analysis is a complex, multi-level one, given the obvious lack of direct, one to one correspondence between text structures and social contexts. This explains why Bloor & Bloor(2007) further stresses that:

Critical Discourse Analysis is frequently used to refer to the general communication that takes place in the specific institutional contexts. For example we can talk about the discourse of science, legal discourse and so on. This is useful shorthand, but, of course, it is an abstract concept that does not bear much relationship to individual communicative events since each of these discourses is realised in different ways depending on the situations involved. Thus, the discourse of science includes many types of interaction, including lectures, research reports, theoretical discussions, etc. similarly, legal discourse embraces actual written laws, statutes, contracts, wills, conventional courtrooms, exchanges, cross-examination, and so on.

What the followers of Critical Discourse Analysis try to achieve has been summarized by Batstone (1995).

Critical Discourse Analysis seeks to reveal how texts are constructed so that particular (and potentially indoctrinating) perspective can be expressed delicately and covertly; because they are covert; they are elusive of direct challenge facilitating what Kress (1955) calls the "retreat into my stification and impersonality

Bastone's assertion is quite complete although, but it requires further specification of how CDA is undertaken. Fairclough( 2009) wishes to examine how the ways in which we communicate are constrained by the structures and forces of those social institutions with which live and function. Fairclough(2009) further gives his opinion on the actual nature of discourse and text analysis. In his view, there are three levels of discourse. The first is the social conditions of production and interpretation i.e. the social factors, which contribute to the origination of text, and, at the same time, how the same factors effect interpretation. Secondly, the process of production and interpretation, i.e. in what way the texts was produced and how this effect interpretation. Thirdly, the text being the product of the first two stages, commented on the above. Fairclough (2009) subsequently gives three stages of C.D.A which are accorded with the three above mentioned levels of discourse:

- 1) Description is the stage which is concerned with the formal properties of the text.
- 2) Interpretation is concerned with the relationship between text and interaction with seeing the text as a product of a process of production and as a resource in the process of interpretation.
- 3) Examination is concerned with the relationship between interaction and social context with social determination of the process of productions and interpretation and their social effects (Fairclough 1989).

We may summarise the role of Critical Discourse Analysis in the words of Bloor & Bloor (2007) thus:

CDA analysts identify and study specific areas of injustice, danger, suffering, prejudice, and so on, even

though the identification of such areas may be contentious. While it is now widely accepted that many social problems arise from the injudicious use of language or other forms of communication, it is an open question how far beneficial effect can result from intervention in discourse alone... we take the view that CDA can help to raise awareness and point people in the right direction.

### **An overview of the speech**

1. Welcoming the delegates to the national conference – (Paragraph 1)
2. Acknowledging aptness of the conference (Paragraph 2)
3. Acknowledging the national crisis and envisaging a better end (Paragraph 3 – 7)
4. Expressing the consensus of the national conference (Paragraph 8 – 9)
5. The main aim of the conference (Paragraph 10 – 11)
6. A change from national laxity and inaptitude.
7. Pointing out its enormous contribution to nation building.
8. Stating the unwarranted views of stooges and dissidents of the national conference (Paragraph 19 – 21)
9. Stating the yearnings of the people (Paragraph 19 – 21)
10. Inadequacy of the Nigerian Constitution (Paragraph 22 – 25)
11. Major issues for deliberations at the conference (Paragraph 28)
12. Stating the necessary atmosphere for deliberation (Paragraph 29 – 31)
13. Stating the task before the delegates and urging for oneness to succeed (Paragraph 32 – 42)
14. Reminding the delegates about the enormous task before them (Paragraph 43)
15. Acknowledgement of God's aid in this task (Paragraph 44)
16. Appreciation to Nigerians, National Assembly Members, Members of Presidential Advisory committee for their contributions (Paragraph 46 - 47)
17. Charging delegates to be apt in their business (Paragraph 49)
18. Stating his selfless agenda on the conference (Paragraph 55)
19. Declaration of the conference open (Paragraph 51)
20. Closing Remarks (Paragraph 52)

### **Textual Analysis**

“I am delighted to welcome you all to the inauguration of this historic national conference which promises to be another significant landmark in our efforts to strength national unity and consolidate democracy governance in our beloved country”. {Paragraph 1 }

The president in his opening speech acknowledged the importance of the national conference as a formidable approach to the strengthening of our nationhood. The paragraph further buttresses this point. The President Jonathan declared that the national conference has just come at the right time. The national conference will help us build a strong and prosperous nation, because issues bothering on both majority and minority will be deliberated on the table of the national conference. The paragraph opines this thus: “this we can achieve by building a more inclusive national consensus on the structure and guiding principles of state that will guarantee our emergence as a more united, progressive and prosperous nation”.

The president acknowledges the various problems this country has faced. He subtly reminded Nigerians that our present crises of terrorism is not so strange to this country, thus: (4) in our history as political entity, we have experienced high and lows but have always forged ahead....”. It is a way of affirming that there is a beam of hope in Nigeria situation. The president went further to buttress his points, that despite the bombing in Nigeria, our togetherness in weathering the storm shows we are on the right direction. Thus: (4)..... “The fact that we have weathered all storms and continued with the mission of evolving a true national identity signifies that we are going on the right direction”.

In paragraph (5), the president informed Nigerians that the bombing, killing and abduction of innocent citizens in Nigeria are not peculiar issues to Nigeria. He calls it a “formative stage” which means that Nigerian is going through a state of definition. The crises of this country will finally define this country. He reminded all and sundry that other countries have suffered worst, some foe a decade, others for a century, but in the end, they turn out to be better. Thus: “the strongest nations in the world today also went through their formative stage”. Paragraph five avouches one of the fundamental functions of Critical Discourse Analysis which examines the ideological position of the speaker toward socio-political issues such as the current insecurity situation in the country as conveyed by the use of language. Hence according to Bloor & Bloor(2007),

An ideological position can be hidden by the use of words, such as when an act of war is term peacemaking. The critical discourse analyst must always be on the lookout for hidden ideological positions since one of the main ways in which CDA achieves its aim is by making explicit those aspects of ideology that underpin social interaction. The process of investigating meaning by breaking it down into its component parts is known as *deconstruction*. We can engage in this process in various

ways, but one way is to analyse the grammar and choice of words in a text to reveal the undercurrents of association and implication.

This writer therefore has set out to deconstruct the President's speech which he delivered during the inauguration of the nation conference, the purpose of which was to deliberate and find solutions to the teething problems that are threatening the peaceful coexistence of Nigeria as a nation. The writer intends to analyse the President's grammar and choice of words in order to discover the government ideological position on these socio-political issues as encapsulated in his choice of words

(Paragraph 3 – 7) envisage those values necessary for nation building. Thus: ".....Nation building is a journey of dedication, commitment, diligence, perseverance and patriotic vision". These values are the bedrock upon which our success depends. Though these values are old, they are true, they have been the quiet force of progress throughout history. What the president demanded in his speech is a return to these truths and values. What is required of us now is a new era of responsibility – a recognition, on the part of every Nigerian, that we have duties to ourselves, our nation and the world, duties that we do not grudgingly accept but rather seize gladly, firm in the knowledge that there is nothing satisfying to the spirit of defining of our character than giving out all to a difficult task.

The world 'history' in (Paragraph 4) is interpreted as an endless source of inspiration. The society is reminded to through history that the process of nation building is not an easy one. It involves ups and downs, but the inspirations drawn from historical countdowns, will lead us to a gradual success. Paragraph four of the speech has revealed one of the major functions of historical discourse. The knowledge of the history of a people is one of self-realisation and identity; therefore one of the reasons of the national conference was to enable Nigeria rediscover her history and identity in order to promote national unity and peaceful coexistence as it is encapsulated in the one of the major function of a discourse:

Discourses structure both our sense of reality and our notion of our own identity. Discourse is also very useful in that it enables us to consider ways in which subjects can come to a position of self-identification, whereby we not only locate and isolate the ways in which we as subjects have been constructed and subjected, but also map out for ourselves new terrains in which we can construct different and potentially more liberating ways in which we can exist( Sara Mills, 1997)

The word 'Constitution' appears four times in (Paragraph 24 & 25). The president used the inadequacy of the constitution as one of his potent points for convening the national conference. Through the use of non-**Thematization**, he hides behind a web of words to criticize the inadequacy of the constitution and lack of political will for its implementation. President Jonathan uses this occasion to silent his critics and affirms the aptness and importance of this conference in Nigeria at this time. He further drew attention to the United States of America who amended her constitution for twenty seven times (27) since its adoption in 1787 as a more potent reason why the national conference should hold despite obvious criticisms.

In (Paragraph 27) the president emphasised the present unrest in Northern Nigeria by referring these crises as challenges. 'Challenges' as a word appears four times in the paragraph. He acknowledges these challenges as necessity for nation building. He also sees these present challenges to be different from those of the past; hence they demand new approaches for tackling them. The Nigerian civil war of 1967 – 1970 which claim several lives and properties is seen as another. Thus: "The challenges of 1954 are certainly not the challenges of 1954 are certainly not the challenges of 2014. The difference is only on the mode and amounts embezzled. Yet the president sees these others as mere challenges which he believes, the national Conference will help to address.

In (Paragraph 32 – 43), the president is aware that the national conference is not the solution to Nigerian problems by acknowledging the same perennial problems which have thwarted the effort of oneness in this country:

(38)...we must jettison the poisonous mindsets of the past, which were built on unhealthy competition among our diverse groups and people.

These forces of nepotism, ethnicity, sectionalism, marginalizing the minority groups will not disappear suddenly because the president with his administration has heralded the delegates to hold a national conference. Other past presidents of this great country have come out with similar programmes to redress the injustice in this country, yet to no avail. President Obasanjo instituted the late justice Oputa Panel for the country's growth. Yet, nothing has changed so much. The president is aware of this fact and only urges the delegates verbally to lay down their selfish interest for the sake of building a credible nation. The President knows, that this conference, even if properly deliberated, its deliberation will lack the will power for implementation.

In (Paragraph 44), we notice that despite the length of the President's speech God is mentioned for the first time. This reveals his religious status and faith. Does this suggest that the President is not an ardent believer in God?. In Obama's Speech, there is a proliferation of the name God; and a reminder of the American creed and a total submission to His will. The triviality in which Goodluck Jonathan presents God in his speech shows his religious ideology. However, yet still, ideologically Critical Analyst like Laclau and Mouffe(2005) have this to

say:

The fact that every object is constituted as an object of discourse has nothing to do with whether there is a world external to thought (God), or with realism/idealism opposition. An earthquake or the falling of a brick is an event (or God) that certainly exist, in the sense that it occurs here and now, independently of my will. But whether their specificity as objects is constructed in terms of natural phenomena or expressions of the wrath of God depends upon the structuring of a discursive field. What is denied is not that such objects (or God) exist externally to thought, (about God) but the rather different assertion that they could constitute themselves as objects outside any discursive condition of emergence

Therefore in the course of a discourse whether the speaker mentions the name of God or not does not determine his faith in God. In (Paragraph 46 & 47), the president acknowledges those who had made it possible for the conference to be a reality and their contributions thus: The National Assembly, Senator Femi Okurounmu and members of the conference, Justice Idris Legbo Kutigi and the principle officers.

Paragraph 49 presents in conclusion, the importance of the next election to the National Assembly. The president urged delegates to hasten the process of nation building for a more important national exercise. The president summarised his speech by stating unequivocally his agenda for convening this national conference. It reveals to us that there is actually something beneficial in this national exercise to the political class.

#### **Percentages of key words used in the speech to illustrate the field of discourse**

Conference	0.50%
Nation	0.29%
Country	0.26%
Nigeria	0.13%
Nigerians	0.14%
National Assembly	0.10%
People	0.2%
National	0.46
Consensus	0.11%
Government	0.16%

#### **Key Words Density Report in the President Jonathan's Inaugural Address.**

Phrases:

National Conference

National Assembly

National consensus

Nationhood

The result of the key word analysis can be interpreted as President Goodluck Jonathan's attempt to concentrate on the national issues with "Nation", "National Conference" being the most prominent words and collocations and also begin a "new" chapter in the relations with "world". At the same time, the very attribute of Goodluck Jonathan's speech is the adjective "National" which characterises the strategy and ideals of a newly sworn-in President with national interest at mind.

#### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the ideology of President Goodluck Jonathan CONCAC SPEECH is embedded in the Fairclough notion of meaning residing in the text which can be uncover through the process of deconstruction. A national ideology may be a set of religious, political, economic or cultural beliefs or attitude shared by the citizens of the nation (or a particular social group). These beliefs can be embedded in the thought patterns and can only be revealed through a critical discourse analysis of the language used to convey the message. The paper has attempted to decipher the possible interpretations of the various references made in the President's speech in order to discover the national ideology implicit in the speech. The paper has been able to identify deeper meaning of the speech and has arrived at the conclusion that the President has a good intention for his country. The speech is well composed and perhaps has achieved its desired purpose of message delivery.

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