

Contextualising “Change” Slogan in Nigerian Political Discourse

OGUNJOBI, Olumide Samuel

Department of Mass Communication
Federal University, Oye-Ekiti, Ekiti State, Nigeria

LIMAN, Alhaji Musa, PhD

Department of Mass Communication
University of Maiduguri, Borno State, Nigeria

ADEYEMO, Julius Abioye, PhD

Department of Public Relations and Advertising
School of Communication, Lagos State University, Lagos, Nigeria

Abstract

The meaning of “change” in different discourses presents different meanings hinged on the context in which the word “change” is being used. In this study “change” as a slogan was crucially analysed concerning President Muhammadu Buhari and its deployment in select presidential and religious addresses. Thus, the researchers analysed four (4) presidential speeches of President Muhammadu Buhari, employed a contextual method of analysis and theoretically hinged on critical discourse analysis. The findings showed that the use of the change slogan in Nigerian political discourse is very common; yet, change does not exist in itself. It is always tied to key economic issues, which, in the Nigerian case, encompasses insecurity, insurgency and petroleum scarcity. Also, from the speeches analysed, it was seen that while Muhammadu Buhari presented himself as an agent of “change” in his 2014 Declaration Speech, employing linguistic forms of positive nomination and predication to describe himself and his party as “transparent” and “credible, he criticised his opponent with negative formations of the same strategies: “unthinking government” and “oppressive.” The findings also showed that while the incumbent government was perceived to have accrued a high rate of corruption and misappropriation of funds, the media were used to prime President Buhari using his policy of War Against Indiscipline (WAI). The researchers concluded that political slogans are not confined to the domain of politics and the analysis is the determination of the new government to strengthen foreign relations and policies, strengthen democracy, fight corruption and insecurity and improve the power sector and economic sector of the country which some are yet to be affected.

Keywords: Slogan, Political Discourse, Critical Discourse. Muhammadu Buhari, Contextualisation

Introduction

By creation, man is a social and political animal. This explains the irresistible nature of man’s social and solitary nature. This is why Saka & Fapetu (2019, p. 902) submit

that a higher standard of man depends on philosophical contemplation which can be demonstrated or expressed through employment of social values exercised in the company or association of others. Therefore, in the company or association of others that man finds himself, communication is cyclic and the need to understand the complex interplay that exists in the communication sphere gave rise to the use of short and striking memorable phrases known as “slogans.” All over the world, political campaign and electoral processes are delicate time for both aspirants and electorate because election remains an important requirement to enthrone and sustain democracy in any given society. According to Asemah, Nwammuo & Edegoh (2014, p. 84), election period is also the time when all the eligible voters exercise their rights as citizens to participate in the government. This implies that the right to vote and to be voted for. However, like any form of communication, political actors formulate messages to proclaim and legitimise their position in political have always been a thing of discussion in the academia. How political messages formed and encoded, how to make discrete, formulate concrete goals relating and affecting social events and practices. Therefore, when political actors construct messages, they seek to educate their audience to better understand their view point.

In a long time, slogans have become an essential part to selling an effective advertising campaign or political campaign. Like creative arts to get the attention of desired audience, slogans are invoked by corporate organisations or other social group who share a common goal to champion a cause. Supporting this statement, Sharkansky (2002, p.75) opined that slogans, when deployed in political communication, simplify the task of communicators for a place in political agenda and a great deal of noise from competing messages. Thus, the frequent use of slogan in political sphere all over the world has become a pervasive exercise, whereby most political aspirants employ the use of slogans as alluring ideology to articulate ideological standpoint and persuade their audience as well as drive a political action. Albeit, slogans can be positive or negative, yet desired audience slogans represent the foundation laid by analysts given to political discourse in cases where the political messages are ambiguous or difficult to understand. Thus, political aspirants often deploy language strategically to proclaim mandates and win electoral support (Olayemi 2018, p. 8).

From a different perspective, slogans are incorporated into political advertising to get desired result as the main aim of either slogan or advertising is to persuade the electorate to take a desired action. Supporting this assertion, Edegoh, Ezebuenyi & Asemah (2013) purport that political advertising is one of the several ways politicians and political parties mobilise the electorate which can be done in several ways, such as television programmes, radio, newspapers and display of candidates’ portraits, with several promising and persuasive inscription on the billboard, magazines and even the new media of communication. They further explained that part of the basic objectives of this political advertising is to gain attention of the electorate and for this reason, political advertising sometimes involves orthodox strategies to achieve its aim.

Every political slogan used during campaign to create a distinctive brand that the electorate can relate with its uniqueness in its own way as its ultimate goal is to win election. In the light of this, Saka & Fapetu (2019, p. 903) opined that although, there is no single best campaign slogan/strategy, but the right slogan/strategy may differ from one candidate to another and for each election. All over the world, what seems to be

very important about slogans is the message passed across to the electorate. This encompasses the meaning of the slogan, how it is used, how effective the slogan is and the meaning the slogan proposes on the electorate. Little wonder Kamalu & Aganga (2011) succinctly capture this, arguing that the language of politics is essentially aimed at persuading the audience or addressee to accept the perspective of the speaker (p. 33). In Nigeria, a political campaign slogan is a potent tool used by politicians to communicate views and manifestoes to the public with an intention of persuading the electorate to align with their opinion, views and take through party campaigns. This perhaps explains why Asemah (2010) notes that political communication plays a crucial role during electioneering.

Taking a few steps back to 2014, Muhammadu Buhari presidential election in Nigeria, which is significantly proclaimed for its “change” ideology which seeks to address the need for major transformation in all sectors and inform political accountability and transparency in public financing. The “change” slogan was developed as a counter effect to Goodluck Jonathan and the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) rule, with claims that the administration was responsible for Nigeria plummeted economic achievements and increased corruption in every facet of the society. Therefore, President Buhari’s 55th independent day address call for quick intervention in oil industry, electricity supply and security. President Buhari made this statement arguing for slow progress, telling Nigerians that “change” must begin with them.

From the aforementioned, it can be deduced that slogans discursive representation of actors, actions and processes explaining the what, who and how; establishing the implications that emerge from what they represent without losing sight of the processes. Thus, the study sought to textually analysed President Mohammadu Buhari speech on four different occasion, highlighting the trend as well as comparison between the “change” slogan and the results so far promised Nigerians.

Research Question

The following questions were designed to guide the study:

1. How was “change” used by President Muhammadu Buhari during his campaign?
2. What was the possible shift and implication in the use of “change” as a slogan?
3. How effective was “change” slogan to achieving attitudinal change?

Theoretical Framework

Theories are important in every research work; this is because they direct researchers on areas to observe and areas not to observe (Yarosan & Asemah, 2008; Asemah, 2011; Asemah, Nwammuo & Nkwam-Uwaoma, 2017). The study is hinged on critical discourse analysis. The principle of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is centered on perspectives and approaches geared towards explicating the discursive dimensions of language, power and ideology in relation to humans’ socio-political milieu. According to Olalemi (2018), critical discourse analysis, was developed in the 1980s from a group of critical social science and humanities researchers who share a common orientation to the ways language shapes social realities. In the same vein, Roma, Wening & Yahya (2013) explains that critical discourse analysis is a special approach in discourse

analysis, which focuses on discursive conditions, components and consequences of power abuse by dominant (elite) groups and institutions. Over the years, the study of critical discourse analysis has become a general label for a special approach to the study of texts and talks emerging from critical linguistics, critical semiotics and oppositional way of investigating language, discourse and communication. Thus, this theory is applicable to this paper as it bridges the missing link in studying social problems and establishing a relationship that exists between discourse and society (including social cognition, politics and culture). It is therefore noteworthy that CDA specifically focuses on the strategies of manipulation, legitimisation and the manufacture of consent and other discursive ways to influence the minds of people in the interest of politicians.

In application to this paper, the political concept in critical discourse analysis framework is a robust one. Olayemi (2018, p. 32) asserts that existing CDA theories did not fully conceptualise how humans’ mental models and conceptual knowledge of space or spatial cognition construct ideologies in our minds and shape how we interpret political messages. He argues further that political discourse relies on “conceptual frames” or “presumptive frames” (p. 203) deduced through cognitive processing, by which more abstract usages in the domains of social context may then be illuminated.

Review of Related Literature

Ayoola (2005) studied the speech of President Obasanjo during his third term agenda bid. Applying the techniques of critical discourse analysis, the author revealed that President Obasanjo’s speech was laden with his views and ambitions which were made transparent by the rhetorical strategies. Ayoola (2005) captured these rhetorical strategies succinctly by stating that ‘the President’s choice of words, their lexical set and collocations point to a hidden agenda at best or a sit-tight syndrome at worst.’ In the same vein, Adedun & Atolagbe (2011) examined the discourse of Chief Olusegun Obasanjo’s farewell speech to Nigerians in 2007, presenting former President Umaru Musa Yar’Adua as the best candidate to succeed him. In their study, the authors analysed the speech, with focus on speech act theory and making recourse to the socio-political situation of the country and the personal health challenges of President Yar’adua which culminated into his death on May 5th 2010. President Olusegun Obasanjo in his speech presented Alhaji Yar’Adua as the solution to Nigeria’s problem and the best candidate that can deliver quality administration to the Nigerian people. However, the paper argued that based on the unfortunate happenings after the emergence of Yar’Adua, especially regarding his failing health, President Obasanjo must have been insincere about his proclamation that Yar’Adua was the best candidate for presidency at that time. The paper concluded that having been aware of the health problems of Yar’Adua before presenting him to Nigerians, Obasanjo must have been acting in a way that promoted his personal interest above the national interest.

Ademilokun’s (2015) analysis on attitudinal meaning of President Mohammedu Buhari’s inaugural speech focuses on the effect of the speech on subjects’

attitudes. The study attempted a linguistic appraisal analysis of the speech with a view to showing how President Buhari construes attitudinal meanings in the speech. The theoretical framework he employed for the data analysis in the study was the appraisal theory of Martin and White. The analysis revealed that President Buhari expresses different kinds of attitudinal meaning in the speech as he deployed affectual meanings, judgements and appreciations in order to achieve his aim of connecting effectively with his audience. While the attitudinal meanings in the speech were largely for interpersonal consolidation as the President thanked and sought the cooperation of stakeholders in the Nigerian project, there were also some meanings relating to the displeasure of the new President about some persons and institutions in the Nigerian nation.

A look at all the studies reviewed so far exposes that many scholars and researchers in the past have focused on the study of political campaign speeches in Nigeria, but only few have focused on the speeches of President Muhammadu Buhari and none has focused on the textual building strategies which he adopted in his speeches. This is the gap which the present study aims to cover.

Methodology

There are two types of data for this study- the primary and the secondary data. The primary data for this study were four speeches of President Muhammadu Buhari of Nigeria. The secondary data include the opinions of scholars in journal, textbooks and other textual materials outside the four speeches of Buhari under consideration. Four speeches of Buhari were used for the primary data for this study. In collecting them, these speeches were downloaded from online media websites. The researchers read them and the extracts needed for the study were taken from the speeches written out and analysed. *Guardian*, *The Nation*, *Pulse Ng* and *daily post* were purposively selected based on the fact that they are foremost dailies. For completeness, the issues textualised fell within the study timeline, were selected and analysed.

Data Presentation and Discussion of Findings

Textual analysis of President Muhammadu Buhari Speech

The study analysed four speeches of President Muhammadu Buhari which on “change” which is significant to the study:

- I. President Buhari on the 15th of October, 2014 in his Declaration Speech, identifies some challenges faced by Nigeria with a promise that the All Progressives Congress (APC) party would bring changes, reversing the decline in the Nigeria economy, fight Boko Haram and address corruption.
- II. Muhammadu Buhari’s Acceptance Speech on April 1st 2015, shown on Channels TV. In the speech delivered, President Buhari praised his audience for having voted for “change” and identifying himself and his party with the “change” slogan.

- III. 55th Independence Day address (October 1, 2015), witnessing the president systematically highlighting and proposing implementable strategies of argumentation to address the myriad of challenges faced by the Nigerian people.
- IV. The launching of the “Change Begins With Me” campaign, where President Buhari admonishes his audience to embrace themselves, as change begin with them and only then can they see the change promised by government.

Analysis of President Muhammadu Buhari’s Presidential October 15th Declaration Speech

A declaration speech is an oratory notable for highlighting the intervention an aspirant seeks to make when voted into office. Thus, to enact their influence, politicians prime their opponents using negative predications for their activities, while presenting themselves as the promising alternative. During President Buhari’s declaration speech, he characterised his party in good light while attributing bad governance to his opposition.

Excerpt 1 (a)

Many millions are grappling with extreme poverty and barely. Nearly all are in fear of their lives or safety for themselves and their families due to insurgency by the godless movement called Boko Haram; marauding murderers in towns and villages; armed robbers on the highways; kidnappers who have put whole communities to fright and sometimes to flight.

In the excerpt above, it can be seen that Buhari criticised the incumbent government, highlighting the living condition of Nigerian people, the hardship and life threatening situations faced Nigerians. According to Wodak & Meyer (2016) opined that Linguistic nomination, including the attribution of people, events and processes are one of the ways speakers may justify their position in political discourse. In the light of this, Buhari stressed the change of leadership by intensifying the challenges faced by Nigerians by highlighting the numerous problems using some demeaning nouns in statements such as “Nigeria as a whole” “many million” are experiencing “extreme poverty.” He therefore pronounced himself and the party as a change agent, capable of turning Nigeria into a safe nation and savaging the country from economic ruins.

Excerpt 1 (b)

We have tried to ensure all processes in our party formation to be transparent and credible. These structures will lead to free and fair polls. The Interference in the form of rigging elections, which PDP Government has practiced since 2003 is the worst form of injustice – denying people their right to express their opinions.

In the above excerpt, Buhari’s resolution towards PDP as an opposition party is attributed electoral malpractice through rigging, describing this action as “the worst

form of injustice.” However, he legitimised APC in his speech by depicting the party as transparent and credible, trying to establish the need for change, Buhari proclaims that if he is given the presidential mandate, he and his party will solve all the problems he has identified and propel the needed “change” in Nigeria. This is seen in the following excerpt where he accepts agentive responsibility for change.

Excerpt 1(c)

The last 16 years of PDP Government has witnessed decline in all critical sectors of life in Nigeria. The economy continues to deteriorate while the (PDP) Government continues to announce fantastic growth figures...Simply because you sell oil and steal part of the money does not entitle you to cook figures and announce phantom economic growth.

From the excerpt above, the argument here is focused on blaming the predicament of the country on the PDP governance in the last 16 years in Nigeria. Nwammuo, Edegoh & Asemah (2013, p. 54) expressed that the administration of President Goodluck Jonathan seems to be battling the security challenges in the country. This is to the detriment of the pursuance of the 7-point agenda which he inherited from the previous administration. Nwammuo *et al* (2013) further explains that the 7-point agenda include: power and energy, food, wealth, security and agriculture; wealth creation and employment; mass transportation; land reform, security, qualitative functional education. The argument further nails the incumbent government to the cross in public eye submitting that there is less accountability and high rate of corruption in government. Prior to the election, the fight against corruption has been words chanted in the media, priming Buhari to succeed in the fight against corruption which stands to be one of the “changes” promised. According to (Olalemi 2018, p. 34), this was based on widespread belief that Buhari’s former military government (1983-1985) arguably succeeded in the anti-graft crusades of the time, known as War against Indiscipline (WAI). The foregoing discussion depicts the basis for Buhari’s implicit argument for change in excerpt 1(b) as well as his explicit invocation of the word in excerpt 1(b and c), in which he presents himself with positive forms of predication and nomination and processes associated with his party; whereas, he designated negative characteristics to the incumbent (PDP) government.

Presidential Acceptance Speech: The Change Crusade

In Buhari’s acceptance speech, there was a downplay in the criticism against the opposition party, instead chanting encomium on the party stakeholders and Nigerians who actively contribute to the success of his election. In his acceptance speech, some excerpts depict Buhari’s identification with “change.”

I am immensely grateful to God for this day and for this hour. I feel truly honoured and humbled that the Nigerian people have so clearly chosen me to lead them... INEC has announced that I, Muhammadu Buhari, shall be your next president. My team and I shall faithfully serve

you. There shall no longer be a ruling party again: APC will be your governing party. Today, history has been made and change has finally come. We shall faithfully serve you. We shall never rule over the people as if they were subservient to government (*Vanguard*, 2015).

In the above excerpt, President Buhari deploys linguistic forms of positive predications by celebrating his electoral victory, commending Nigerians and stakeholders, trusting him with the huge electoral mandate. The use of the intensifier (adverbial phrase) “so clearly” is evident in this sentence: an argument that the election results should be taken as irrefutable evidence of the electorate’s huge mandate. He took a positive appeal to INEC which according to Machin & Mayr (2012, p. 28), is a creditable institution to officially declare the legitimate winner of an electoral process. Thus, officially, “Muhammadu Buhari shall be your next president” illustrate APC victory against PDP. However, in the excerpt, Buhari stressed “we will bring change” thereby conceptualising that PDP has been defeated and now that Buhari emerged president, there are going to be positive significant change to the challenges attributed to PDP.

Analysis of President Buhari 55th Independence Address: Proposing Implementable Strategies

The 55th independence address by President Muhammadu Buhari, explicitly shows the shift in the challenges faced by the government while in office and why the “change” is not happening as fast and quickly as predicted during campaign and few months in office. In this address, President Muhammadu Buhari commenced the address with a celebratory remark about Nigeria’s victory and independence from the British rule to a sovereign state.

Excerpt 3(a)

October 1st is a day for joy and celebrations for us Nigerians whatever the circumstances we find ourselves because it is the day, 55 years ago; we liberated ourselves from the shackles of colonialism and began our long march to nationhood and to greatness. No temporary problems or passing challenges should stop us from honouring this day (*Guardian*, 2015).

Buhari commends Nigerians on the independence, urging Nigerians at large to unite for change. According to him, the temporary problems and challenges should not dissuade the citizens from applauding Nigeria’s political history and its post-independence accomplishments. Going further with the speech, President Buhari, admits to the slow progress to “change” process in Nigeria economy and other aspects concerning the country. Buhari assigns economic recession to predicative adjectival forms such as “passing” and “temporary” in order to downplay criticism against the new government. He blames this on the former government to have inherited their problems and for Nigerians looking for quick solutions to these challenges without

thinking of the problems the government has inherited. He, however, pushed forward to sustain Nigerians. According to him, consulting with the stakeholders in government to look for possible solutions to the challenges inherited.

Excerpt 3(b)

My countrymen and women, every new government inherits problems. Ours was no different. But what Nigerians want are solutions, quick solutions not a recitation of problems inherited. Accordingly, after consultations with the Vice President, senior party leaders and other senior stakeholders, I quickly got down to work on the immediate, medium-term and long-term problems which we must solve if we are to maintain the confidence which Nigerians so generously bestowed on us in the March elections and since then (*Guardian*, 2015).

Buhari in his 55th independence speech also took credit for some accomplishment while in office in the first few months.

Excerpt 3(c)

As you know, I toured the neighbouring countries, marshal a coalition of armed forces of the five nations to confront and defeat Boko Haram. I met also the G-7 leaders and other friendly presidents in an effort to build an international coalition against Boko Haram. Our gallant armed forces under new leadership have taken the battle to the insurgents, and severely weakened their logistical and infrastructural capabilities. Boko Haram are being scattered and are on the run...I have instructed security and local authorities to tighten vigilance in vulnerable places (*Guardian*, 2015).

The president in his speech highlights and claims effective success in the efforts made to combat terrorism in the country and improve security. Until fresh attacks were recorded by arrays of media, this is one of the many areas that Nigerians felt real change. The 55th independence speech, though delivered and geared towards celebrating Nigeria, nonetheless antagonised the opposition party arguing that Nigeria's resources were mismanaged, wasted and looted and that APC will ensure prudence in public financing. Supporting this argument, *Guardian* (2015) reporting President Muhammadu Buhari's speech that we have seen in the last few years how huge resources were mismanaged, squandered and wasted. The new APC government is embarking on a cleanup, introducing prudence and probity in public financing.

Analysis of “Change Begins with Me” Campaign: The Representation of Attitudinal Change

Buhari's ascension to the political throne is one hinged on the idea of change, which as seen in his speeches beginning with the declaration speech, purported economic and political change. However, the first 100 days in office witnessed a change in President

Buhari’s administration towards promoting economic and political change to emphasising “attitudinal change.” Albeit, this can be said not to have been out of place in the president’s anti-graft ideology, here is how Buhari makes an ethical appeal to various kind of “attitudinal change” in the national orientation campaign called “Change Begins with Me.”

Excerpt 4(a)

There is no doubt that our value system has been badly eroded over the years. The long-cherished and time honoured, time-tested virtues of honesty, integrity, hard work, punctuality, good neighbourliness, abhorrence of corruption and patriotism, have given way in the main to dishonesty, indolence, unbridled corruption and widespread impunity. I am, therefore, appealing to all Nigerians to be part of this campaign. Our citizens must realise that the change they want to see begins with them, and that personal and social reforms are not theoretic exercise (*The Sun*, 2016).

In the above excerpt, Buhari makes an appeal to attitudinal change, persuading the Nigerian people to embrace his administration’s national orientation campaign. According to *The Sun* (2016), low levels of political and economic achievement are attributed to the total breakdown of our core values over the years. In the concluding part of the speech, Buhari maintain his argument for change by appealing to the general public to be part of his campaign so as to effect the desired change. In the concluding part of his speech, the President Muhammadu Buhari put forward a strong case for reasons Nigerians must share the blame for slow progress. His position was that there is need for Nigerians to first see change in themselves and only then can they see the desired changed promised. The excerpt below lends weight to this submission:

Excerpt 4(b)

If you have not seen the change in you, you cannot see it in others or even the larger society. In other words, before you ask ‘where is the change they promised us?’ you must first ask how far have I changed my ways ‘what have I done to be part of the change for the greater good of society?’

This can be seen as a strategy to lessen the attack of the electorate on the government just in case they fail to deliver on their promise.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The analysis of “change” in this study focuses on the contextual significance of the word, and the economic activities or processes it is linked to. The result depicts the realisation of power struggles in the political domain. As this analysis reveals, political slogans are not confined to the domain of politics. The analysis of four major speeches, appreciation of the electorate by the president and unveiled the ideologies and plans on which the administration would run and spelled out the direction of the new government. It could also be concluded that President Mohammadu Buhari speech

reflects the party's manifestoes and promises made during electioneering campaigning processes. Revealed in the analysis are the determination of the new government to strengthen foreign relations and policies, strengthen democracy, fight corruption and insecurity, and improve the power sector and economic sector of the country which some are yet to be effected.

The adoption of critical discourse analysis highlight how political agents seek ideological consensus and power through linguistic manipulation and how this may be resisted through discursive reappropriation. Thus, the analysis of the "change" slogan foregrounds how political tensions are discursively constructed thereby laying the groundwork for the applicability of Critical Discourse Analysis to build active citizenship. Furthermore, it is seen that speakers make discreet choices of what they want to make prominent and what they want to deemphasise as late news. It is seen that texts convey more than the words used in them not so much because of their semantic load but because of the way they are positioned in the grammar of the clause.

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