

**THE POWER OF INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE IN POLITICS: STUDY OF PETER OBI'S ONLINE SPEECHES AS PANACEA FOR POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA.**

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**Abstract**

*In the dynamic landscape of Nigerian politics, the utilization of inclusive language has emerged as a potent force for transformation. This paper explores the significant role played by inclusive language in fostering political unity, diversity, and social cohesion within the Nigerian context by examining the historical and cultural context of Nigeria, as well as recent political developments. It also underscores how the language used by political leaders can bridge divides, build trust, and promote inclusivity among the diverse ethnic, religious, and regional groups that constitute the nation. Through case studies and analysis, it becomes evident that inclusive language not only enhances political communication but also paves way for more representative and accountable governance in Nigeria, and offers a glimpse into the nuanced and multifaceted relationship between language, politics, and national unity, highlighting the transformative power of inclusive language in the Nigerian political sphere. In other to do justice to this work, Peter Obi's online Political Speeches was selected and analyzed using Communication Accommodation theory developed by Howard Gills and Narrative Theory. Four research questions were formulated for the study. Based on the findings, it's resolved that the use of inclusive language in politics peacefully resolves conflicts and encourages justice, and fairness in politicking.*

**Key words:** Inclusive language, political discussion, Development /Political Development, and Social Cohesion.

**Introduction**

The power of inclusive language in politics is a topic of significant importance, especially in diverse societies like Nigeria. Inclusive language refers to the use of words and phrases that promote unity, respect, and understanding among different social and cultural groups. In the context of politics, it plays a vital role in fostering political development and social cohesion.

Peter Obi, a prominent Nigerian politician, has been an influential figure in Nigerian politics. Studying his online selected speech provides valuable insights into the ways inclusive language can be employed as a

solution for political development in Nigeria. By analyzing his speeches, researchers can explore how he employs inclusive language to bridge gaps between different ethnic, religious, and social groups within the country.

Understanding the impact of inclusive language in Obi's speeches can shed light on the role of political leaders in promoting harmony and cooperation among diverse communities. This study is particularly relevant in the Nigerian context, where political and social divisions often challenge the nation's stability and progress.

By examining the language strategies used by Peter Obi, researchers can gain a deeper understanding of the effectiveness of inclusive language in politics. This knowledge can contribute to the development of policies and practices that promote inclusivity, tolerance, and political development in Nigeria.

### **Statement of the Problem**

In the diverse socio-cultural landscape of Nigeria, political discourse often grapples with challenges related to ethnic, religious, and social divisions. The effective use of inclusive language in politics has been acknowledged as a means to promote unity, respect, and cooperation among these diverse groups. However, there is a gap in understanding how political leaders, exemplified by figures such as Peter Obi, strategically employ inclusive language in his speeches to bridge these divides. This study aims to address this gap by investigating the specific language strategies used by prominent Nigerian politicians, focusing on Peter Obi, and evaluating their impact on fostering social cohesion and political development in Nigeria. By delving into this aspect, the research seeks to provide valuable insights that can inform policy-making and promote a more inclusive and harmonious political environment in the country."

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to delve deeply into the strategic use of inclusive language in the political speeches of influential Nigerian figures, with a focus on Peter Obi. The research aims to achieve the following objectives:

1. **Analyze Language Strategies:** Investigate the specific words, phrases, and rhetorical devices used by Peter Obi in his speeches that promote inclusivity, unity, and understanding among diverse social, ethnic, and religious groups in Nigeria.
2. **Examine Impact:** Evaluate the impact of inclusive language employed by political leaders like Peter Obi on social cohesion, political stability, and the overall development of the nation. Understand how these language strategies contribute to fostering cooperation and mutual respect among different communities.
3. **Identify Patterns and Success Factors:** Identify patterns in the use of inclusive language across various speeches and contexts. Determine the factors that contribute to the success of inclusive language in bridging social and political divides, examining how these strategies might be applied in different situations.
4. **Compare with Existing Policies:** Compare the inclusive language strategies used by political leaders with existing governmental policies related to social integration and inclusion. Assess the alignment between rhetoric and policy, highlighting areas where there might be discrepancies or where policies can be improved based on the language strategies employed.
5. **Inform Policy Development:** Provide actionable recommendations for policymakers, political leaders, and communication experts on how to effectively incorporate inclusive language into political discourse. Suggest ways to enhance existing communication strategies to promote unity, respect, and cooperation among diverse groups, thereby contributing to the political development and stability of Nigeria.
6. **Contribute to Academic Knowledge:** Contribute valuable insights to the academic discourse on political communication and linguistics. By thoroughly analyzing the language techniques used by Peter Obi, the study aims to expand the understanding of inclusive language in the context of diverse societies, thereby enriching the academic literature on the subject.

By fulfilling these objectives, this study seeks to shed light on the nuanced ways in which inclusive language can be harnessed as a powerful tool for political development and social harmony in Nigeria. Ultimately, the research aims to guide future political leaders and policymakers in fostering an inclusive.

### **Research Questions**

1. How does Peter Obi's speech promote unity among diverse groups in Nigeria?
2. What is the impact of inclusive language on Nigeria's social cohesion and political stability?
3. What patterns and success factors characterize the effectiveness of inclusive language in bridging divides?
4. How do political leaders' language strategies align with existing social inclusion policies, and where are the discrepancies

### **Conceptual Clarifications**

There are so many concepts related to the study such as; Inclusive Language, Political Communication, Social Cohesion, Ethnic and Religious Diversity, Rhetorical Devices, Policy Alignment and Political Development, but only 4 were discussed because of space. These are inclusive language, political communication, social cohesion and development.

1. **Inclusive Language:** Inclusive language according to Ama (2017), refers to the use of words and phrases that are respectful and considerate of all people, regardless of their gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or other characteristics. In politics, it involves using language that promotes unity, understanding, and cooperation among diverse social and cultural groups within a society.
2. **Political Communication:** According to Swanson and Dan Nimno (2014) defines political communication as the strategies and techniques used by politicians and political leaders to convey their messages to the public. It includes verbal and nonverbal communication, public speeches, social media interactions, and other forms of political discourse aimed at influencing public opinion and behavior.
3. **Social Cohesion:** Social cohesion according to Larsen (2023), refers to the willingness of members of a society to cooperate with each other to survive and prosper. In the context of politics, inclusive language fosters social cohesion by bridging divides between different social, ethnic, and religious groups, creating a sense of belonging and mutual respect among citizens.
4. **Development/Political Development:** Political development refers to the process through which political institutions, practices, and attitudes evolve to enhance the well-being of citizens and promote democratic governance. Inclusive language contributes to political development by fostering a positive political environment, encouraging active citizen participation, and promoting social harmony.

The definitions of political development are legion but that best fits into the topic is chosen and this is the definition by Samuel in (1965) which sees the concept as Modernization in the society as a whole. According to him, modernization affects all segments of the society and the political aspect of Modernization constitute "political modernization".

Understanding these concepts is essential for analyzing how inclusive language functions in the Nigerian political landscape, its impacts on social cohesion, and its role in shaping political development within the country.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The Theoretical Framework will be based on two theories of Communication Accommodation theory by Howard Gills of 1976 and Narrative Theory.

#### **1. Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT)**

Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) is a sociolinguistic theory developed by Howard Giles in the 1970s. It focuses on how people adjust their communication style to match that of others in a conversation. The theory suggests that individuals modify their language, speech patterns, and even nonverbal behaviors to either converge (make their communication more similar to the other person) or

diverge (emphasize the differences between their communication style and the other person's) during interactions.

People tend to accommodate their communication based on various social factors such as age, ethnicity, social status, or group membership. Accommodation can happen consciously or unconsciously and plays a crucial role in social interactions, affecting the effectiveness and dynamics of communication between individuals or groups. CAT helps in understanding the complexities of interpersonal communication and how individuals adapt to create a sense of connection or maintain social distance in different situations.

Communication Accommodation Theory, developed by Howard Giles, posits that people adjust their communication style to accommodate others. In the political context, politicians employing inclusive language adapt their rhetoric to accommodate diverse audiences, bridging linguistic and cultural gaps. Understanding these accommodations help analyze the effectiveness of inclusive language in promoting unity and peace in politics.

## **2. Narrative theory or Narratology**

Narrative theory, also known as narratology, is a field of literary theory, film theory, and other forms of cultural analysis that focuses on the structure and function of narratives, or stories. It explores how stories are constructed, how they convey meaning, and how they shape our understanding of the world. Narrative theory delves into elements such as plot, character development, point of view, and the way stories are told. The origins of narrative theory can be traced back to ancient times when philosophers and scholars discussed the nature of storytelling. However, the formalization of narrative theory as an academic discipline occurred in the 20th century. Scholars like Vladimir Propp, Roland Barthes, and Tzvetan Todorov made significant contributions to the development of narrative theory in the mid-1900s.

It's important to note that there isn't a specific year when narrative theory was "pronounced" because it has evolved over centuries through the works of various thinkers and scholars, gaining prominence in the 20th century within the realms of literary and cultural studies. Different aspects of narrative theory continue to be studied and discussed by researchers and scholars in fields such as literature, film studies, psychology, and communication.

Narrative theory focuses on the storytelling aspects of communication. Inclusive language can be analyzed within this framework to understand how narratives of unity and diversity are constructed in political speeches. By examining the narratives created through inclusive language, researchers can gain insights into the underlying values, beliefs, and aspirations that drive social cohesion efforts in diverse societies like Nigeria.

These theoretical perspectives provide a foundation for analyzing the strategic use of inclusive language in politics, offering insights into its impact on social relations, political discourse, and democratic processes in multicultural societies like Nigeria.

## **Methodology**

The research design was a qualitative research design which was done by gathering two online Speeches of Peter Obi and the numerical data related to his speech were analyzed using frequency of the number of times that the inclusive language usage occurred, specific words or phrases used and their impact to audience engagements.

## **Empirical Studies**

A lot of works had been written on Peter Obi's Speeches which are related to this work. Some of these works will be revealed under the empirical framework. Four of such works were reviewed.

On October 1st, 2016, Peter Obi delivered a highly impactful speech entitled "Cutting the Cost of Governance in Nigeria" during a programme called The Platform Nigeria, organized by the Covenant Christian Centre. Obi's speech rapidly gained widespread attention on various social media platforms and became the subject of extensive debate and scrutiny by legacy media. This study conducted a discourse-as-text level analysis of the speech, utilizing Norman.

Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) approach. The analysis focused on identifying and evaluating the rhetorical devices employed by the speaker to persuade and influence his audience regarding

the possibility of reducing administrative costs in Nigeria. The findings revealed the presence of five distinct rhetorical devices, including anecdote, hypophora, anaphora, repetition, and allusion. The anecdotes used were entertaining and illustrative and served as persuasive tools, allowing the speaker to bond with his audience. The hypophoras enabled the speaker to transition smoothly through his address while affording opportunities for positive self-presentation. The anaphoras, on the other hand, helped to capture and maintain the audience's attention, creating rhythm and cadence throughout the speech. Finally, the repetition and allusion devices allowed the speaker to emphasize his stance on the possibility of administrative cutbacks and further reinforce solidarity and identity with his audience. In addition, the study highlights the significant contribution of political discourse in shaping political ideology and language as a strategic political tool.

Another writer Ikeke, Mark in (2021) did a paper on "The (Mis)Use of Language in Nigerian Political Campaigns. He saw Language as an important instrument of communication in every society. Through it, human beings interact, relate, and forge ahead. Through language, human beings are able to adapt to their environment and make meaning out of life. It can be used for good or for evil. Language can be used properly or it can be abused or misused. This paper examines the use of language in political campaigns in Nigeria. It argues that language is often misused or abused in political campaigns in Nigeria. Language is used to cajole, intimidate, demean and degrade human dignity in Nigeria. Ethically the way language is used in political campaigns in Nigeria is unacceptable. The paper used a critical analytic and hermeneutic method to decipher the issues involved. It finds and concludes that there is a need for politicians to behave morally in their use of language during political campaigns to build a better society.

Omoniyi Ibieta (2022) commenting on social cohesion in Nigeria has this to say, "I advocated that appointed and elected elites must be ready to walk the talk on federal character principles and similar FC affirmations in all they do, particularly in ensuring inclusiveness, diversity, and representativeness in appointing even their personal aides. I also called for a policy that incentivise those who have acted to promote social cohesion, and punishment for those who have promoted divisiveness".

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7th October, 2022

### **Data for Analysis**

#### **Peter Obi's first speech after Presidential Election by Rachael Omidiji March 2, 2023**

Peter Obi, the Labour Party (LP) presidential candidate in the 2023 election, had a post-election press conference with the media on Thursday, 2nd March 2023.

This was the first speech by Peter Obi since Saturday's election and Wednesday's announcement of Bola Tinubu as president-elect.

First-time senators barred from contesting Senate president, deputy

Obi observed a minute of silence for those who lost their lives and suffered injuries during the election periods.

#### **His speech reads:**

"Again, my dear people, let me correct an impression because I'm seeing some people saying in the media that I released one news or the other. I have never, directly or indirectly, spoken or released any message since after voting on the 25th. My last comment to the media was immediately after voting on the 25th, and I've never done so until now. So, whatever you see in the media please disregard. It's not coming from me directly or indirectly.

"This is my first time of speaking to the media, and I thank all of you for your understanding. For me, it is a very simple thing to speak to Nigerians who on the 25th of February trooped out en masse as committed citizens to participate in what all of us have called an existential election, for a supposedly free, fair, credible presidential and national assembly election. We give thanks to God.

"For me, the number one thing is gratitude. Gratitude to God Almighty that continues to protect and bless our dear country Nigeria. Number two is gratitude. Gratitude to Nigerians that participated in the election, answering the call as true citizens in our dear country. Number three is gratitude to those of you Nigerians,

especially the youth, that believed and worked tirelessly for a new Nigeria, I thank them for the hard work. Gratitude to the Obidients, Youths, those who believe that a new Nigeria is possible, and I say to them that a new Nigeria is possible, and we will work for that new Nigeria.

“The resilience, the hard work, for a new Nigeria should not wane. Datti and I remain committed to that new Nigeria. I know how they will be feeling now because of the way the elections have come and gone. The commitment of Nigerians, even in the face of unwarranted attacks, is a testimony that a new Nigeria is indeed possible. I look at people like Lady Jennifer who was stabbed but insisted on voting, and that gives me courage to believe that a new Nigeria is indeed possible –and there are so many other Nigerians.

“The election that we just witnessed has been conducted and results announced as programmed. It is a clear violation of the electoral rules and guidelines as we were promised. This election did not meet the minimum standard expected of a free, transparent, credible fair election. It will go down as one of the most controversial elections ever conducted in Nigeria.

“The good and hardworking people of Nigeria have again been robbed by our supposed leaders whom they trusted. However, very humbly, I must appeal to all Nigerians to remain peaceful, law-abiding, and conduct themselves in the most responsible manner. Please be assured that Datti and I, and indeed all of us, this is not the end but the beginning of the journey for the birth of a new Nigeria. Datti Baba-Ahmed and I remain undaunted and committed to the project of a new Nigeria that will be built on honesty, transparency, fairness, justice, equity.

### **Analysis of Data Using Communication Accompanying Theory**

First speech titled Peter Obi's First Speech after presidential Election.

The data are categorized into words, phrases and sentences, all demonstrating communication accommodation.

Generally, the whole speech is so simple that the audience were not encumbered by linguistic sophistication. Any literate person will read it with ease and also understands it. No dictionary is to be consulted before meaning is deduced.

Furthermore, the words that demonstrated accommodation tendencies are :

- a. Gratitude
- b. Youths
- c. Obidients
- d. Us
- e. Silence
- f. Nigerians.

Under phrases we have:

- a. My dear people
- b. Please disregard
- c. Gratitude to Almighty God
- d. Answering the call as true citizens
- e. Gratitude for the youths
- f. Our dear country Nigeria
- g. Gratitude to the Obidients
- h. Dear country
- i. We will work.
- j. New Nigeria

### **Sentences**

1. Obi observed a minute silence over those who lost their lives and suffered during the election. (This is a sign of honour to the dead and it's a non verbal convergence accommodation communication).
2. I thank all of you for your understanding.

3. We give thanks to God.
4. We will work for that new Nigeria.
5. Datti and I will remain committed to that new Nigeria.
6. The good and hardworking people of Nigeria have been robbed.
7. However, very humbly, I must appeal to all Nigeria to remain peaceful, law-abiding, and conduct themselves in the most responsible manner.
8. Please be assured that Datti and I and indeed all of us, this is not the end but the beginning of the journey for the birth of a new Nigeria.
9. Datti Baba-Amed and I remain undaunted and committed to the project of a new Nigeria that will be built on honesty, transparency, fairness, justice and equity.
10. It is my believe that if you must answer" His Excellency " the process must be excellent.
11. We must now require that we do the right thing.
12. As you know, the destruction of a society begins and gradually progresses when we act rascally with the deliberate manipulation of the rule of law and the suppression of the will of the people.
13. During my campaign we have been saying that we will govern by rule of law because we know what not doing that will bring about.
14. I assure the good people of Nigeria that we will explore all legal and peaceful options to recall our mandates.
15. "We won the election, and we will prove it to Nigerians.
16. Please, do not despair.
17. Please come out and be part of the election.
18. I assure you that I will be part of it. I assure you that I am totally committed to a better future in this country and nothing will stop me.
19. Datti's commitment, my commitment, is total.
20. "Be rest assured that your support will not be in vain and you will not find us wanting.
21. We must build a better Nigeria where Nigerian youths will be happy, glad to call their own country.
22. Thank you all and may God Almighty continue to bless the Federal republic of Nigeria.

A total number of 38 convergent communication accommodation features were realized in his first speech without a divergent feature.

### **Peter Obi's Second Speech**

The Presidential candidate of the Labour Party (LP), Peter Obi says he is aware of some evil designs against himself and his supporters in the coming months.

The former Anambra State governor disclosed this in a statement released on his verified Twitter handle on Monday, May 29, 2023.

The release of the statement coincided with the inauguration of Bola Tinubu of the All Progressives Congress (APC) as Nigeria's President at the Eagle Square in Abuja.

1. For all Nigerians, this is a time for deep reflection. It is also a time to re-examine our assumptions, even as we reaffirm our hopes. Let us calmly review our aspirations, in order to recalibrate our expectations and pin down the causes of our missed opportunities and disappointments.
2. We stand at that critical moment in time when, as a people, we must collectively come to grips with the reality of our injured destiny as well as the reasons for that injury. It is for us to reassess our plight as a young democracy and identify clear pathways to a better and greater future for us all. As we await the verdict of the election tribunal, I urge all Nigerians to use this opportunity to renew their commitment to the Nigerian ideal. That ideal remains noble and worth every sacrifice we can make.
3. Nigeria remains our only patrimony and it is a patrimony we must protect, rather than violate. We have no other nation but this, so let us remain committed to rescuing and rebuilding it.
4. The judiciary is part of the democratic enterprise and a critical governance tool for determining the propriety of the decisions and actions of every citizen and every institution of state. To that extent, and for that reason, I urge everyone to treat it with the respect and dignity it deserves.

5. We expect that the Nigerian judiciary will use the election cases now before it to reaffirm its independence and integrity. It has to do so, for all our sakes and for itself.
6. Nigerians must, therefore, remain peaceful and law abiding. No matter the depth of anyone's reservations about what is going on in the polity today, no matter the real and imagined provocations, and no matter the disagreement out there, we should remember that this will not last forever.
7. I remain committed, and untiring, in my determination to work with like-minded fellow Nigerians to end the curse of missed opportunities and squandered hope that has become our lot here.
8. I will never shrink from that original commitment, because I firmly believe that we must change from the present politics of criminality, and corruption, in order to make a new Nigeria possible.
9. I call on fellow Nigerians, especially the youths to remain steadfast, calm, patient, and peaceful. Our journey may be long and difficult but it is worth it in every way. Victory is assured.
10. We have to work together to move our beautiful country from corruption and criminality to a center of productivity rather than aimless consumption.
11. I am aware of some evil designs being hatched against me and my supporters in the coming months. Efforts will be made to taint my image. Campaigns of calumny are being perfected to defame my character and diminish my hard-earned integrity.
12. These schemes will aim at degrading our support base and confusing the public. But, no evil campaign will alter the substance of my character; nor diminish my patriotic commitment to a better Nigeria. It is about the future of our youths. it is about ending the Years of Locust.
13. In all of this, I thank Nigerians, our great party (LP) and the media. The latter, as the Fourth Estate of the realm, has remained a trusted ally.
14. This Estate must continue to guide our people on the immense promise of a future in a new Niger

### **Analysis**

In the analysis of Obi' second speech, there are about 13 sentences written in block paragraphs. All the paragraphs are accommodating with one sentence or phrase showing accommodation principle.

In the two speeches a total number of fifty(50) accommodation convergence were analyzed without divergences.

### **Conclusion**

Peter Obi's political speeches utilized elements of accommodation theory in communication. Accommodation theory, developed by Howard Giles, suggests that individuals adjust their language and communication style to either converge with or diverge from the speech patterns and behaviours of their audience to establish a sense of connection or distinction.

In this speech, Peter Obi is attempting to correct an impression that has arisen in the media. His use of phrases like "my dear people" and "whatever you see in the media please disregard" demonstrates an effort to connect with his audience by using inclusive language and expressing concern for their understanding and perception. Furthermore, he emphasizes that he has never spoken or released any messages indirectly or directly since voting on the 25th, which can be seen as an attempt to diverge from any false claims in the media. This divergence strategy can also be viewed as an accommodation tactic, as he distances himself from the misinformation in the media to establish credibility with his audience.

Overall, Peter Obi's speech shows elements of accommodation theory by adjusting his communication to connect with his audience emotionally while simultaneously diverging from any false information to maintain credibility. It can also be concluded that Peter Obi speech is an accommodationist who used inclusive language to bring peace to the politics of Nigeria.

### **Recommendations**

Having carefully researched on this, the researchers came out with the following recommendations:

1. **Encourage Political Leaders to Embrace Inclusive Language:** The researchers Recommend that political leaders, like Peter Obi, should actively promote and practice inclusive language in their



speeches and public communication to foster unity and representation among diverse communities in Nigeria.

2. **Enhance Public Awareness and Education:** They suggest creation of public awareness campaigns and educational programs aimed at sensitizing citizens and politicians alike about the importance of inclusive language in political discourse and its positive impact on national development.
3. **Monitor and Evaluate Inclusive Language Usage:** The researchers Advocate for the establishment of monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to assess the usage of inclusive language by political leaders, enabling accountability and transparency in political communication.
4. **Incorporate Inclusive Language in Policy:** Recommend the integration of inclusive language principles into political and communication policies at both the federal and state levels in Nigeria, ensuring that it becomes a fundamental aspect of political discourse and governance.

These recommendations can contribute to a more inclusive and politically developed Nigeria by emphasizing the significance of language in shaping political narratives and outcomes.

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