
Discursive strategies of manipulation in President Bola Tinubu's subsidy removal discourse

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Abstract: This study attempts to explore the discursive manipulative tactics deployed by President Bola Tinubu in the subsidy removal discourse. Although studies on discursive manipulative strategies abound, this particular study specifically focused on subsidy removal discourse in Nigeria, which none has hitherto considered. This study is an attempt to fill this gap in literature. The study, which employed Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Speech Act Analysis as its theoretical framework, was aimed at unravelling the manipulative strategies President Bola Tinubu deployed in the subsidy removal discourse in Nigeria. Using a descriptive research design, the study derived its data online from YouTube channels. Findings from the study indicated that President Bola Tinubu explored and exploited the emotions of the recipients in order to manage their minds. The author also made use of metaphorical allusions that helped to compare his ideologies to experiences that are very familiar to the recipients. Further, in order to achieve buy-in, President Tinubu portrayed himself as the helper, and the removal of fuel subsidy as the only way for the dreams and aspirations of Nigerians to be achieved. Among other things, the study recommends that other studies should consider the speeches of other political actors, on this subject and compare their discursive strategies and ideological positions. The study concludes that, language is a power tool in the possession of man and has been utilized to justify various actions with political undertones, and the removal of fuel subsidy in Nigeria, is one of such actions.

Keywords: Bola Tinubu, Language, Ideology, Manipulation, Politics, Subsidy

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1. Introduction

Language has remained a critical asset in the possession of man. Without it, arguably, man may not be able to co-exist. This is because, with it, man has continuously carried out his transactional and interactional functions. Humans, solely rely on language (in whatever form) to carry out their day-to-day communicative activities. In fact, language has been defined severally by different scholars, and one of such definitions noted that language is the instrument by which social groups co-operates (Tragger & Bloch, 1942: 5). However, language is a very flexible tool, and man puts it to whatever use he deems fit. Further, Richard and Nwizug (2019) in their study on legalese, described language as the most powerful weapon in the possession of man. Referencing Austin's *How to do things with words*, they surmised that man has utilized language in shaping the world, just as it is also used to influence the decisions, actions and world view of fellow man. Also, textual representations with political, social, or economic motivations are shaping people's lives more and more. Similarly, Adesanmi (2010) emphasized the interdependence of language and politics. In the same line of thought, Rudyk (2007) surmised that with language one could influence others with different interest and Ayeomoni (2005) added that, such language forms could also be figurative. Accordingly, Crespo-Fernández (2014), drew a conclusion that language almost serves a different purpose in hands of politicians, as they use it to achieve compromise and sustain their support base. Consequently, language has been utilized to justify various actions with political undertones, and the removal of fuel subsidy in Nigeria, is one of such actions.

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On Monday, 29 May, 2023 a new administration took over the leadership in Nigeria. President Bola Tinubu was sworn in as the Commander-in-Chief. During his inaugural speech President Tinubu declared that ‘fuel subsidy is gone’ and at other platforms described subsidy as a ‘scam and disincentive to growth. The fuel subsidy was an interventionist policy put in place by the Nigerian government. It started in the 1970s with the promulgation of the Price Control Act. With this Act, government started regulating the fuel pump price. The concept of subsidy was introduced to cushion the effect of the high cost of petroleum products. This high cost was partly a result of the fact that petroleum products in Nigeria are imported from Europe. Funnily, Nigeria exports its crude abroad and buy the refined products from overseas, hence the high cost of the products. Thus, government shoulders the burden of the cost as subsidy, thereby reducing the cost of fuel for the final consumers. Consequently, the burden of reducing fuel price for the final consumers increased, and gradually became too much for the government to bear. In January, 2012, Nigeria former President, Dr Goodluck Jonathan made an attempt at stopping subsidy and the price of fuel rose from 65 naira to 140 naira per litre. This move was immensely opposed with intense aggression by people from different works of life. Subsidy became a catchphrase in Nigeria. The government could not withstand the opposition and went back to status quo.

On arrival, Monday, 29 May, 2023, President Bola Tinubu took the bold decision to scrap subsidy. This change in policy resulted to the increment in fuel pump price from N189 to over N500 per litre, depending on the region. Consequently, this increase in fuel pump price has impacted various sectors of the economy from the hike in transport fares all over the country to high cost in the production of goods and services. Needless to count the spiral effect it has on the general well-being of citizens. Thus, this study intends to ascertain how political actors have used language to justify and ensure buy-in on the fuel subsidy removal policy on the other hand as well as the various discursive strategies they have employed to drive their ideologies as a result of this policy. In the views of van Dijk (2006) Discursively, manipulation usually involves the usual forms and formats of ideological discourse, such as highlighting our good things, and stressing their bad things.

The wrong use of social dominance and manipulation as enacted through language use, have preoccupied critical discourse analysts. One major concerns of studies in Critical Discourse Analysis (henceforth CDA) is manipulation. Thus, the interest of researchers has been drawn to it; there are plethora of studies on manipulation in media discourse. Still, there is a dearth of study on manipulation in political statements concerning subsidy removal in Nigeria.

It has been established that political discourse is characterized by manipulation, and van Dijk (2006) added that the manipulation of people involves controlling their minds, beliefs, knowledge, opinions, values and emotions. This will inadvertently influence their actions. Also, due to the intricate nature of the human mind, a discourse that is targeted at it must also involve some complex processes. Language as a tool is used in the creation of awareness and can also be deployed in distorting awareness; it is a vehicle that helps man to express his intentions. However, with language, one can also mask intentions. With the removal of fuel subsidy, political actors have talked so much about the policy, some justifying, while others condemning. Thus, this study intends to penetrate the intentions of political actors, specifically, President Bola Tinubu however blurred, as he justifies the fuel subsidy removal policy and the various discursive strategies, he has employed to drive his ideologies. There are plethora of studies on manipulation (Ramanathan & Hoon 2015; Shin 2019; Barzin & Samiei 2013) which focused on media discourse and other forms of political discourse. However, this study, is specifically concerned with how discursive strategies of manipulation are utilized in justifying the fuel subsidy removal in Nigeria.

2. Literature review

2.1. Critical discourse analysis

The study is anchored on the theoretical foundation of critical discourse analysis. In addition, insights from Searl’s speech acts analysis helped to classify what utterances are used to achieve as well as how meanings are implicated in the subsidy removal discourse. The term ‘critical’ primarily means ‘denaturalizing’ or ‘unmasking’ ideologies imbedded in discourse (Simpson & Mayr 2009). CDA multidisciplinary in nature, hence, it has been applied and described differently by different scholars from different discipline. In the views of Wodak and Reisigl (1999) CDA aims at unmasking ideologically pervaded and often concealed structures of power, political control, and dominance, as well as discriminatory maneuvers of inclusion and exclusion in discourse. Emeka-Nwobia (2014) added that CDA hoists the voices of the oppressed and defenseless sect of society by confronting the statements and voices of those who have access to power.

Although a great deal of research has used CDA to address many social issues including hegemony, domination, inequality, and power as they are expressed, replicated, and contested in talk and text, others like the current study employs it (CDA) to investigate the subtle ways that talks and text manipulate the mind and produce consent. The ultimate task of studies in CDA is to unshell meanings that are under the layers of words, in the same vein, this study aims at revealing the manipulative strategies employed to influence the thought and actions of people in the subsidy removal discourse.

2.2. Literature review

Studies on political discourse abound. This is because the subject has attracted the interest of language scholars. The interest is to ascertain how language is utilized to drive ideological position, emphasize positive self-image and negative others as well as persuade electorate, all in a bid to gain power and sustain power. Blending CDA and rhetoric as a means to unravel different ideological stances in political discourse, Abdulkadir (2023) examined how language was used to

manipulate other people's opinions in political interviews by conveying the ideological beliefs of individuals or groups. The study randomly chose two interviews conducted by Channels Television. The data were video files that were downloaded from Channel Tv's official YouTube page. Relevant excerpts were then extracted through transcription. The study which was anchored on CDA, revealed that an individual's view or experience of the world is their ideology. Additionally, it demonstrated how the respondents in the chosen interviews used language as a tool for dominance and supremacy, taking advantage of lexical items and strong imperatives to force their opinions on others.

Similarly, Kaksina et al. (2022) examined the discursive techniques used by Jair Bolsonaro and Donald Trump in COVID-19 political discourse. It was found that the manipulation in both speeches is accomplished by emphasizing the speaker's authority, moral superiority, and power, as well as by presenting what appear to be indisputable evidence of their views and motivations. In the same vein, Oparinde (2018) combined CDA and Multimodal discourse analysis to deconstruct (mis)representation and manipulation in Nigerian politics. The study which employed the descriptive design examined the use of language in Nigerian politics, in an attempt to understand how discourse and symbols are used to manipulate the masses, as well as (mis)represent the politicians. The study found that a variety of strategies, including service provision, religion, the state of the country, deft language use, ethnic influence, and imagery, could be used to manipulate political discourse. The study strongly contend that discourse is powerful, and thus, has the ability to exploit and influence people. The study concluded that power resides within discourse and as such, discourse can be used to achieve several goals. Among such goals are to manipulate and misrepresent, which often permeates political scenarios. In another study, Oparinde et al. (2021) employed Fairclough's (1992) three-dimensional approach to analyzing discourse to examine how politicians manage to engage language in their favour. Employing the purposive sampling technique, they analysed the rhetorical choices found in six Nigerian presidential speeches, with a specific focus on the lexico-semantic features of the speeches. They also considered the figurative expressions embedded in the speeches. According to the study, pronouns, modalities, repetition, exaggeration, and metaphor are all used by Nigerian politicians in their political discourse. The study concludes that politicians in Nigeria deliberately employ deceptive language in public discourse.

Kaksina et al. (2022) is a similar study to this present one as it considered an issue that affected public interest. Just like the policy on subsidy, the public opinion as well as perception about the subject was quite crucial. Thus, both Donald Trump and Jair Bolsonaro skillfully deployed language strategically to manage the mind of their respective people. In spite of its similarity to this present study, this study differs in its subject matter, as it attempts to evaluate language use in managing the subsidy discourse.

3. Research methodology

The descriptive research method was used in this study. For a study like this that falls within diachronic linguistics, a descriptive design is appropriate. Diachronic linguistics describes data as they are and investigates the immediate nature of language. Secondary and primary data were used in the investigation. Data on Ịzọn were derived from native speaker's intuition and introspection and other Ịzọn literature while data on English were sourced from select expression from English grammar textbooks. The data then were analysed using a comparative analysis of adjectives in English and Ịzọn languages.

4. Data presentation and discussion

Research Question one: What are the discursive manipulative strategies deployed in President Bola Tinubu's subsidy removal discourse?

4.1. Emotionalizing the argument

Generally speaking, emotive language describes a communication style that evokes an emotional response in the listener, that is, feelings that go beyond the literal meaning of the word or phrase utilised. As a result, it can be an effective strategy for persuading others that a certain message is true. Politicians employs emotive language to explore the fear, anger, greed etc. of recipients in the direction they want to in order to drive their ideologies. BT adopted this strategy in the subsidy removal discourse as shown in the data below:

1. *I understand the hardship you face. I wish there were other ways. But there is not. If there were, I would have taken that route as I came here to help not hurt the people and nation that I love.*

BT's argument in the data above is could be described as emotional blackmail. The reason is that, hike in prices, the struggles in businesses and in household as well as the uncertainties are creation of his policy. However, BT decided to go emotional in order to appeal to the emotions and feelings of the recipients. This is a discursive strategy that helps to evade logical processing of the argument. In other words, it helps to evade logical processing and evoke emotional sentiments. In the statement 'I understand the hardship you face' he was able to identify with the people supposedly going through the hardship. This discursive strategy helps to create a form social affinity, closeness with the people. Hence, the people will not perceive him as others but as one who cares and is concerned about the plight of the people. Similarly, he created the impression that this decision is taken not because he wants it, but because it is the only way out by appealing to the emotions of the people.

Further, the data shows that BT conveys the reason that brought him as Nigeria's president emotionally; one of which is to help and not to hurt the people. This is a strategy aimed at the emotions of the recipients. This statement presupposes

that the people have been in dire need of help and it is this need of the people that provoked him to contest to be Nigeria's president. Further, it is this desire to help the Nigerian state that has informed the decision of such policy (subsidy removal). BT used this manipulative frame to penetrate and stir the feelings and emotions of the people. He portrayed himself as the helper of the people, underscoring that as the only reason he has come. In the same vein, BT expressed his love for the people and the nation, Nigeria. He tactically connected this love for the people and the nation to justify the reason for the removal of fuel subsidy. This very expression is manipulative as there is no means of verifying the sincerity of the alleged love. One could liken this love to the common romantic love men would confess to women just in a bid to get underway and after that you see same women who received love proposal heart broken by the same supposed lovers. Nigeria and Nigerians have gone through several heartbreaks from political suitors who always profess their love to the nation and its people. Hence, BT is not the first to have professed his love and burning desire for Nigeria, however, Nigeria as a country has continued to groan in heartbreak. As women who after several heartbreaks continue to look for love, BT was able to penetrate the hearts of Nigeria's with such love line.

2. *The subsidy cost us trillions of Naira yearly. Such a vast sum of money would have been better spent on public transportation.... Instead, it was being funnelled into the deep pockets and lavish bank accounts of a select group of individuals.*

In data two above, BT attempted to manage the minds of the people by presenting to them the huge sums involved in the subsidy policy. Instead of investing /utilising the trillions mentioned for the benefit of the people, BT argued that this sum is channelled into the deep pocket/account of few. This is an invitation to the people. BT mentioned such amount to explore and exploit the greed of the people. This position find support in the popular quote of Mahatma Gandhi "there is sufficiency for man's need, but not for man's greed. The intention is to show the people that subsidy was never truly to their benefits; the subsidized fuel pump price was just crumbs that are thrown to the people to distract them, the real beneficiaries are the select few with DEEP POCKET and LAVISH bank accounts. This is intended to evoke anger, not against BT for the removal of fuel subsidy, but, for a policy that favoured a select few, and of course anger towards past administrations who continued the policy; he framed as accomplices. This, BT believed would consequently arouse dislike and resistance of such policy that benefit a few. Further, BT also noted that such huge amount should rather benefit masses by providing the people social amenities. Thereby, framing the support for the removal of subsidy as support for the benefit of the masses.

3. *The whims of the few should never hold dominant sway over the hopes and aspirations of the many.*

In trying to gain buy-in from the people, BT had to tie the hopes and aspirations of the majority of Nigerians to the success of his policy. He created the impression that fuel subsidy is the monster or the bane to the actualization of the hopes and aspirations of majority of Nigerians. We could also infer that the youths make the majority of Nigeria's population. Also, one major attribute of youthfulness is hope; the hopes of a bright future. The dreams and hopes of the youths becoming future leaders is no longer good enough as a cliché in Nigeria. BT's statement frames the subsidy policy as a causative factor to this age-long problem in Nigeria. He created a picture in the minds of the people that portrays an anonymous few who enjoys the dividends of subsidy, holding powerful control over the dreams and ambitions of the many. Thus, the removal of fuel subsidy will lead to the removal of this few and subsequently result into the actualization of the hopes and aspirations of the many. In other words, support for the removal of subsidy is support for the actualization of the hopes and aspirations of majority Nigerians.

4.2. Naturalizing the argument through metaphorical allusion

Politicians frequently employ allusions as a potent rhetorical tool to engage their audience. Allusions refer to specific persons, places, occasions, or narratives. They have the power to arouse curiosity, convey a message, or a feeling in an audience. For political actors, allusions are necessary weapon. They make it possible for a speaker to access the collective consciousness of their audience and strengthen the emotional bond between them.

A speech can be affected in a number of ways by allusions. By making a recognisable reference, they can deepen and expand the meaning of the piece. In addition to evoking feelings or associations with the original source, allusions can also be used to establish links between various concepts or works. Allusion is fundamentally about evoking something else. That "something else" is thus brought into the conversation together with all of its details and implications, which might assist clarify whatever is being addressed. BT employed this strategy metaphorically, as shown in the data below:

4. *...but these pains are pains of birth; birth of a new nation and if you want to celebrate a child, a baby, then the mother must go through some pains. "But at the end of the day, there is joy, ...we will certainly be there.*

The allusion to the birth is metaphorically framed to create a correlation with the subject of discourse; subsidy removal. As noted above, the intention is to bring to fore in the minds of the recipients the details and implications of what is alluded to, in this case child birth. This is a discursive strategy BT employed to manipulate the recipients by drawing their minds to every detail of childbearing. He used the childbirth metaphor to frame the birth of a new Nigeria, and just like the process of childbearing, where almost every mother goes through 'labour' pains, the birth of a new country also

comes with such pains. Further, as a mother must endure the pains in order to be delivered of the child, Nigerians must also endure the pains occasioned by the subsidy removal. In this case the mother that must bear the pains is Nigerians.

BT implicitly made it clear that in order to actualize the birth of a new Nigeria and celebrate it, these pains are inevitable. BT frames the removal of subsidy as the labour which mothers must go through in order to give birth. The pains associated with labour (labour pains) as the necessary pains Nigerians must go through if they must have and celebrate a new Nigeria. BT characterized it as just a phase; a difficult phase. This is an insinuation that the pains are just momentary and would eventually transit Nigeria to a phase of permanent joy and merriment. He emphasized, 'we will certainly be there' This clause provides a form of reinforcement. BT assured the recipients of the 'day'. The use of the word 'certainly' shows complete confidence of the process and frames the process as a flawless process.

4.3. Ideological /we vs them polarization

When people connect, both verbally and nonverbally, they transmit group identities. In discourses that encode inclusion and exclusion, where self and other presentation play a truly important role, they are significantly more conspicuous. strategies like legitimising self, and delegitimizing others, as well as increasing the polar opposites of "us" and "them" are abundant in political discourse and help to achieve the ultimate goal of political discourse, which is power. When power struggles arise, one can therefore find discursive projections of a positive self-image and a bad other image almost always. BT also adopted this strategy in the subsidy removal discourse as demonstrated in the data below:

1. *..., we have saved over a trillion naira that would have been squandered on the unproductive fuel subsidy, which only benefitted smugglers and fraudsters. That money will now be used more directly and more beneficially for you and your families,*

In the data above, BT presented what seem like ideological differences between his administration and previous administrations. In doing this, BT used the first-person plural pronoun 'we' to portray his administration as an inclusive, people driven administration. He noted that Nigerians have been able to save over a trillion naira in about two months. By this he portrayed his government not just as an inclusive one, but as a government that is prudent. He presented a positive self-image. BT also implicitly presented the ideology of other administrations that supported the subsidy policy negatively. He implied that unlike his, this sum is just another national cake to be misspent. The implication of this statement is that it was the tradition of previous administrations to squander this huge amount within the space of every two months. BT presented an image of prudence as against extravagance. His administration as prudent and the others before him as extravagant.

Similarly, BT implicitly presented how other administrations handled national funds. The word 'squandered' means to waste. Hence, BT implies that the fuel subsidy policy that guarantees end users to get fuel at a reduced rate is a waste of resources. We must note that, Nigerians believe that since the country has crude the basic raw material for fuel in abundance, this commodity should not be sold at an exorbitant price. The subsidy policy specifically ensured this. Contrarily, BT describes this policy as unproductive fraud and a waste, noting that this policy only benefitted what he described as smugglers and fraudsters. BT presented previous administrations who upheld this policy negatively; as administrations that support and promote unproductivity and fraud. He went on to note that the savings made from the policy will benefit majority of the people and not just a select few. The adverb of time now as we see in the data above refers to the present administration. After presenting how other administrations wasted the nation's resources, BT told Nigerians that the narrative is now different. This is because, the government in place is a people oriented, prudent government that will prudently invest this money in the people.

BT succeeded in presenting the WE vs THEM as;
People oriented vs few/smugglers and fraudsters oriented;
Prudence vs extravagance.

This finds support in Abdulkadir (2023) who argued that politicians majorly use their ideological stances to build dichotomy between us vs them and to project members of in-groups in good frame while defacing members of ou-groups.

5. Implications of the study

This study has shown how BT tactically used language; emotive words to explore and exploit the emotions of Nigerians to achieve buy-in for the subsidy policy. Similarly, it has revealed that political actors use language chiefly to cajole and explore the emotions of their audience and redirect the interest of people in order to gain and sustain power. Another implication is that this study has shown that the buy-in the policy has received so far is a product of manipulation. Hence, as a CDA study, it has created awareness on the implicit aims of political actors, thereby equipping the people with requisite knowledge of such powerplays and how they should be resisted.

6. Contributions of the study

This study has been able to validate the assumptions and concerns of critical discourse analysis as it has shown how language is utilised in the management of the minds of people. Further, the study has shown that beyond the use of emotive languages to explore and exploit the emotions of people, the deployment of metaphorical allusions is a potent rhetorical tool to engage audience effectively. This strategy is aimed at evoking some better experiences the audience can easily relate with and on the basis of what such experiences afford, the audience is expected to react the same way.

This study has further shown that the art of foregrounding positive self and discrediting others is a key component of political discourse.

7. Conclusions

Discourse is powerful and thus has the ability to exploit and influence the decision, perception and opinions of people. The exploration and exploitation of the emotions of recipients through discourse, is an effective manipulative strategy. President Tinubu effectively deployed this strategy in the subsidy removal discourse. The emotionalization of the argument was strategic in winning the minds of Nigerians.

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