

INTERTEXTUALITY AND THE DISCURSIVE CONSTRUCTION OF INSTITUTIONAL PRACTICES IN SPEECHES OF ORTOM AND TOR-TIV V ON HERDERS-FARMERS CONFLICT (HFC) IN BENUE STATE

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Abstract

In a conflict situation such as the Herders Farmers Crisis in Benue State, language becomes a tool for the expression of grievances and concerns. For instance, parties in conflict situations could employ various discursive strategies to canvass support, mitigate crisis or reinforce other intentions towards the crisis. Thus, this study examines how speeches of Ortom and Tor Tiv V utilise intertextuality to construct institutional roles and practices in the context of the Farmers-Herders Conflict in Benue State. An earlier study has focused on ideologies and power dynamic in Tor-Tiv V's speech. However, this study shifts its focus to intertextuality and how it functions as a mechanism for the representation and legitimisation of the roles of social institutions in the context of the conflict. This study adopts Kristeva's Intertextuality and Fairclough's three-dimensional model of CDA. Qualitative method and descriptive research design were adopted to analyse speeches of Ortom and Tor-Tiv V. The findings reveal that the speakers reference legal, historical, media and global economic realities alongside institutional directives to represent varying roles and positions of state, federal, traditional, media, political and security institutions. Ortom's speech reference global economic practices to justify ranching law and the State government's restriction of open grazing, legalising the action as modern, global and sustainable practice. Whereas, Tor-Tiv's speech alludes to and evokes historical memory and nationalist discourse as well as counter narratives to mobilise support, counter misinformation and condemn actions of complicit political elites, underscoring how traditional authority represents the moral voice of the people. The study concludes that intertextuality functions as a discursive mechanism that legitimises social actions, mobilises support and inspires intervention in the context of conflict.

Keywords: Discourse, Speeches, Intertextuality, CDA, HFC

Introduction

The Herders-Farmers Conflict (HFC) in Benue State stands as one of the most devastating crises in Nigeria since the last decade. This conflict is rooted in competition over land resources, particularly between itinerant armed Fulani herdsman and indigenous cultural groups who are predominantly farmers. This crisis has been documented in terms of its humanitarian consequences (Chiluwa & Chiluwa, 2022; Amnesty International, 2018). However, the

discursive construction of the roles of social institutions like security, media, traditional, state and federal authorities, and how language is deployed to assign blame, mobilise support, and inspire intervention remain underexplored. This study responds to this gap by examining two vital speeches: the welcome address of Governor Samuel Ortom to President Muhammadu Buhari in 2018, and the address of Tor-Tiv V, the Chairman of Benue State's council of traditional rulers, delivered in a similar context to President Bola

Ahmed Tinubu during presidential visit over Yelewata massacre in June, 2025. Fairclough (1992) drawing on Bakhtin (1986) notes that "each utterance is a link in the chain of speech communication... filled with others' words, varying degrees of otherness and varying degrees of our-own-ness." This implies that discourse does not exist in isolation. Invariably, the speeches of Ortom and Tor-Tiv V are not self-contained texts but are constituted by and constitutive of a web of prior and existing discourses. Therefore, the analysis of how prior discourses are woven into the speeches would show how institutional practices are constructed and legitimised in a conflict setting.

Central to this study is the concept of intertextuality as theorised by Kristeva (1986) and reframed by Fairclough (1995). Kristeva (1986) argues that any text is an absorption and transformation of other texts, functioning as a site where history and society are inserted into, and simultaneously produced by language. Building on this, Fairclough (1992) distinguishes between manifest intertextuality where specific prior texts are overtly drawn upon and interdiscursivity which involves the configuration of different discourse types, genres, and styles within a single text. Both forms are evident in the speeches under analysis. The significance of examining these speeches lies in the specific discursive resources they mobilise and the institutional consequences those resources produce. Political speeches in conflict contexts are never merely informational; they are performative acts that constitute social reality (Fairclough, 1992). When a state governor invokes global ranching practices or a traditional ruler evokes the memory of colonial-era protection of indigenous land, they are not simply describing the world but they are constructing it in ways that authorise or delegitimise institutional action. This is consistent with Fairclough's (1995) position that discourse simultaneously represents, enacts, and inculcates social practices, and with van Dijk's (1993) broader argument that political discourse is a primary site for the reproduction of social power. Examining the two speeches together further allows for a comparative perspective on how state and traditional authority differ in their intertextual

strategies, a dimension that has received little attention in existing scholarship on the HFC.

Earlier scholarship on Nigerian political and conflict discourse has examined a range of textual forms and contexts, including intertextuality in presidential inaugural addresses (Ellah, 2022), rhetorical strategies and ideological constructs in Tinubu's 2023 inaugural speech (Eze, 2023), and campaign speech ideology using Fairclough's framework (Agho, 2025). Studies addressing the farmers-herders conflict have employed Critical Discourse Analysis to examine media representations of the conflict and its actors in the press (Chiluwa & Chiluwa, 2022), discursive constructions of the conflict in newspapers (Nwankwo, 2021), online audience discourse on conflict news stories (Onoja, Bebenimibo & Onoja, 2022), farmer-herder conflict framing and Islamisation discourse in the Benue Valley (Nwankwo, 2024), and the uncivil discourses of ethnic associations on the conflict (Nwosu, Okoli, Olumba, Okpaleke, 2025). Additional studies have foregrounded elite political instrumentalisation of the conflict (Achem, & Aderinto, 2025), eco-violence narratives among affected communities in Benue State (Nwankwo, 2024), and multimodal resistance discourses in Nigerian political contexts (Adebomi, 2025). However, the present study extends existing scholarship by foregrounding how intertextuality functions as a discursive mechanism for social mobilisation and legitimisation of legislative actions through nationalist ideologies in the context of the Herders-Farmers Conflict in Benue State.

Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study is to investigate intertextuality and the discursive construction of institutional practices in Ortom's and Tor-Tiv V's speeches on farmers-herders conflict in Benue State. Specifically, the study seeks to:

- i. examine how intertextuality is deployed in Ortom's and Tor-Tiv's speeches on the herders-farmers crisis in Benue State.
- ii. analyse how intertextual references discursively construct social and institutional practices in the speeches.

Methodology

This study employed qualitative method and descriptive research design. The primary sources of data are the speeches of Samuel Ortom delivered during President Muhammadu Buhari's visit to Benue State in March, 2018 over recurring incidents of massacres and Tor-Tiv V's address to President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's during the President's visits to Benue State in June, 2025 in the aftermath of Yelewata massacre in Guma Local Government Area of the State. The speeches were downloaded from *Daily Post* online news in September, 2025. The data were selected given the role of Ortom and Tor-Tiv as political and traditional guardian of the State as well as the significance of their speeches to uncovering the underlying causes and realities of the crisis. Excerpts from the speeches are purposively selected and analysed through Kristeva's intertextuality and Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Model of CDA. The dimension two considers the processes of text production, distribution and consumption. In the production of discourse, Fairclough (1995) notes that no discourse exists independently. Thus, every discursive event draws from pre-existing discourses to represent social reality. Therefore, this study adopts this framework to examine how intertextuality is utilised by Ortom and Tor Tiv to discursively construct institutional practices, mobilise support and inspire intervention in context of farmers-herders conflict. The secondary data are journal articles, textbooks and internet sources.

Theoretical Framework: Kristeva's Intertextuality and Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Model of CDA

This study is anchored on Kristeva's theory of intertextuality and Fairclough's three-dimensional model of critical discourse analysis (CDA). The concept of intertextuality was first introduced by Kristeva (1996) in her essay "Word, Dialogue and Novel". This is based on Bakhtin's dialogic theory of language. Kristeva holds that "any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another" (Kristeva, 1986, p. 37). This implies that the meaning of any text is not intrinsic but can be

derived through the text's engagement with prior and concurrent texts or discourses. Kristeva identifies two axes of text: the horizontal axis and the vertical axis. The horizontal axis connects the text to its immediate context of production and reception whereas the vertical axis connects the text to the vocabulary/corpus of prior texts that have shaped it (Kristeva, 1986, p. 36). These axes constitute what she describes as the intertextual space within which meaning is generated. For this study, Kristeva's framework is employed to analyse how Ortom and Tor-Tiv V anchored their speeches on prior narratives and discourses as the "mosaic" of prior texts absorbed into their addresses.

Norman Fairclough extended the concept of intertextuality from literary theory into critical discourse analysis. In *Discourse and Social Change* (1992), Fairclough differentiates between two types of intertextuality. These are manifest and constitutive intertextuality. Manifest intertextuality refers to the explicit presence of other texts within a given text. This is realised through direct quotation, reported speech, presupposition, negation, and reference (Fairclough, 1992). Constitutive intertextuality, otherwise referred to as interdiscursivity is the hybridity of different genres of discourses and styles within a single text (Fairclough, 1992). These two types of intertextuality are obtainable in the two speeches currently under examination.

Fairclough's three-dimensional model is an approach to CDA studies that was developed in his works *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language* (1995) and *Analysing Discourse: Textual Analysis for Social Research* (2003). He opines that every piece of discursive is simultaneously a text, an instance of discursive and social practice (Fairclough, 1995). This three-tier structure of text, discursive practice and social practice constitutes the analytical architecture of this theory, known as the three dimensions. The first dimension: text, focuses on textual analysis. It attends to the linguistic and textual features of the speeches. Features such as vocabulary, grammar, cohesion, and textual structure are examined to identify how intertextual references are realised at the surface level. The second dimension,

discursive practice, examines the processes of text production, distribution, and consumption. At dimension two, attention is paid to how the speeches draw on and reproduce existing discourses. Fairclough (1995) argues that "no discourse exists in isolation" and that every discursive event draws from prior discourses to represent social reality. This is the dimension most directly interfaced with Kristeva's intertextuality, which is central to the objectives of this study. The third dimension, social practice, situates the discourse within its broader societal context by examining how the texts reflect and reconstitute institutional roles, power relations, and ideological positions. The present study combines Kristeva's theory of intertextuality and institutional and social practices in dimension three of Fairclough's CDA model to analyse excerpts that indicate how intertextual references are utilised to construct social institutions and represent the Herders-Farmers Conflict (HFC) in Benue State.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Intertextuality and the Discursive Construction of Social Institutions in Governor Ortom's speech during President Muhammadu Buhari's Visit to Benue State in 2018

Intertextuality

The speech references Benue's Open Grazing Prohibition and Ranches Establishment Law, 2017 to justify the State government's position on the regulation of open grazing in the State. The law is repeatedly mentioned in the speech to give it a discursive weight and amplify the need for the regulation of open grazing as the only solution to farmers-herders conflict in the State. The speech recounts history of killings in the State and carries records of displacements in the State. The speech chronicles the series of massacres in the state to build up the discourse and demand federal intervention. Ortom recalls Buhari's directive to Inspector General of Police and National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) as captured, "*You quickly directed the Inspector General of Police... At your directive, the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA)...*" to request further actions from the

President.

Ortom also refers to Miyetti Allah's threats to raise security concern. He points that, "*They called on Fulani herders in all West Africa to come into Benue to help them reclaim their land... they declared that more blood will flow in Benue if the ranching law is not rescinded.*" These references amplify the need for legislating open grazing and advance security measures in Benue State. The speaker references his development strides as in this excerpt "*Over 711 schools have been renovated and 16,000 teachers retrained... We have massive rural development in terms of rural roads, rural electrification, bridges and skills acquisition centres.*" In this, Ortom points to his administrative projects to build credibility and give the speech moral authority and responsibility.

Institutional and Social Practices

Ortom's speech shows the activities of numerous social institutions and their roles in the conflict in Benue State. The speech specifically reflects the role of government as an institution that should act through legislation, provide security and humanitarian services. The government of Benue State establishes Ranching Law to regulate grazing activities in the State in order to advance the security of lives and properties of Benue people. This is captured as, "*The Law was duly passed by the Benue State House of Assembly reflects the wishes of Benue People.*" This shows that the Benue State government understands the concerns of her people and addresses their needs via democratic legislation. The speech further highlights President's Buhari's directive to the Inspector General of Police to ensure security in the State but critique the IGP's failure to do so. This is captured in the excerpt "*You quickly directed the Inspector General of Police to relocate to Benue and stop the killings. Issues of capacity and integrity may have accounted for the disobedience of your orders.*" Through this Ortom tackles institutional weaknesses such as non-compliance with State order and lack of accountability in policing as well as security in Nigeria. However it emphasizes government's responsibility to ensure the provision of security of her citizens. More so, Ortom states that "*At your directives, the National*

Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) also distributed some relief materials to the IDP camps. Given the enormity of the situation, this was like a drop in the ocean." This however reveals that government response to the humanitarian needs in the State is insufficient and requires more attention and support for the State. This further re-emphasise the role of government in providing security and humanitarian needs. Other institutions such as education, religion and health are submerged in the crisis. It captures, "*The Primary and Secondary Schools, churches and health centres are destroyed in several communities...*" This reveals a disruption of academic, religious and health activities in some rural communities affected by the crisis, thereby presenting these institutions as victims of the crisis in the State.

Intertextuality and Discursive Construction of Social Institutions in Tor-Tiv V's Address to President Bola Ahmed Tinubu

Intertextuality

Addressing President Bola Ahmed Tinubu, Tor Tiv V's speech directly counters dominant narrative by referencing conflicting and misguided frames circulating in the media. These, as Tor Tiv mentions are: "farmers herders clashes," "reprisal attacks," "communal clashes" to tackle misrepresentation and establish a premise for the description of the conflict. The speech explicitly alludes to Nigeria's history to lay moral claims to intervention and strengthen the need for justice. For instance, "many people died during the civil war. We paid the Supreme Price to keep this country united." This refers to the sacrifice Benue State has made to uphold Nigeria's unity during the Civil War of 1967 to 1970. Tor-Tiv's speech leans on different discourse domains. Some of these domains include discourse of politics, security and military, history, moral and religious discourse. The text critiques politicians and represent them as unfaithful and opportunistic, thus, the text incorporates political rhetoric in its formation. Secondly, security issues in Benue State are the major themes and preoccupation of the speech, therefore, it draws lexical items from war and crisis terminologies such as "genocide,"

"invasion," "war," "terrorists" and "bandits". These situate the text within the domains of security discourse. In essence, Tor-Tiv's speech leans on inter-textual and inter-discursive references in order to convey meaning. The rendition of the speech draws from powerful and crucial domains that give the speech a discursive gravitas and portray the weight of the crisis in Benue State.

Institutional and Social Practices

Tor-Tiv's speech reflects Nigeria's federal political structure where power is centralised and controlled by the federal government. Tor-Tiv's appeal to the President recognises federal authority and reflects state's and traditional ruler's subordination. The federal government is positioned with the power to end insecurity ravaging Benue State. This is captured in the excerpt "We appeal to you to end the genocide going on in Benue State and the insecurity in all parts of Nigeria. We know you are capable of doing this Sir." This excerpt shows that it is only the federal government in Nigeria that is capable of ending insecurity in all parts of the country. The speaker critiques the media in spreading some political framing such as "communal clashes" and "reprisal attacks" which are detrimental to justice by diverting attention from the actual representation of the crisis in the state. The role of the media as a social institution is critiqued in this excerpt, "We do have a grave concern with the misinformation and misrepresentation of the security crisis in Benue State." Thus, the counter narrative tackles and contends discursive power with the media by establishing new perspectives and narrates frames that represent the crisis as "genocide" rather than, "reprisal attacks" or "communal clashes" promoted by the media to undermine the severity of the conflict.

Tor-Tiv's speech also reflects how misinformation and misrepresentation initiated by some politicians get promoted by the media has shaped security actions and strategies in response to the State. The excerpt, "Wrong diagnosis will lead to wrong treatment. We are dealing with something far more sinister... it is dealing with the war" reveal that misinformation weakens security strategies such that attention has not been given as

required. As such, Tor-Tiv frames the crisis as "war" thus demanding an aggressive level of military or security response to the crisis in Benue State. In this, the security institution is presented as misinformed. Summarily, Tor-Tiv's speech reflects Nigeria's political structure and challenges the role of politicians who seek to perpetuate the crisis and present security institution as misinformed contributing to the deterioration of the crisis.

Discussion of Findings

One of the most significant findings of this study is that Ortom and Tor-Tiv V do not deploy intertextuality in the same manner. Each speaker's intertextual strategy is shaped by his institutional position, and rhetorical purpose. Ortom's speech is characterised predominantly by manifest intertextuality. He explicitly quotes and references the Benue Open Grazing Prohibition and Ranches Establishment Law (2017), presidential directives to the Inspector General of Police and NEMA, statistical records of killings and displacements, global cattle industry data, and the statements of Miyetti Allah. These references are directly attributable, verifiable, and specific. Fairclough (1992) describes manifest intertextuality as cases 'where specific other texts are drawn upon within a text,' and Ortom's speech exemplifies this. The effect is that his speech acquires the authority of documentation. It presents itself not as political opinion but as an evidence-based account grounded in law, data, precedent, and accountability.

Tor-Tiv V's speech, by contrast, primarily relies on constitutive intertextuality or interdiscursivity. His address blends multiple discourse domains such as historical, moral, political, military, and religious discourses without explicitly attributing them to specific source texts. Fairclough (1992) defines interdiscursivity as the hybridisation of 'different genres, styles, registers and discourses within a single text. Tor-Tiv draws from the discourse of nationalist ideology (the Civil War sacrifice), the discourse of security (genocide, invasion, war, terrorists, bandits), and the counter-discourse of media critique (farmers-herders clashes, reprisal attacks, communal clashes) without formal citations. This constitutive

strategy is more diffuse but equally powerful as it positions the speech as speaking the collective moral and historical truth of the Tiv people by drawing authority not from documents but from shared cultural memory and communal experience. This finding aligns with Kristeva's (1986) two axes of text. Ortom's speech operates primarily along the vertical axis as it reaches back to specific, nameable prior texts (the law, the presidential directive, global data) and absorbs them explicitly into its discourse. Tor-Tiv's speech operates more intensely along the horizontal axis as it is embedded in the immediate context of its audience and draws from the shared discursive space that the speaker and his community occupy. Together, both speeches confirm Kristeva's (1986) foundational proposition that 'any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another,' though they demonstrate that the manner of absorption varies significantly with the speaker's subject position.

The second major finding is that intertextuality functions as the primary discursive mechanism through which both speakers construct the roles, identities, and legitimacy of social institutions in the context of the HFC. Six institutional domains are constructed across both speeches: the state government, the federal government, the security institution, the traditional institution, the media institution, and international institutions.

State Government: Ortom constructs the Benue State government as a rational, law-abiding, and globally informed institution through intertextual references to the Ranching Law and global cattle industry practices. He cites 'top countries in the global cattle business such as India, Brazil, USA, South Africa, Kenya and Zimbabwe' that practice ranching to situate Benue's legislation within a framework of international best practice. This globalisation strategy performs a two discursive function: it legitimises the state government's institutional action and simultaneously delegitimises open grazing as a backward and unsustainable practice. As Fairclough (2003) notes, the social function of intertextuality includes its capacity to position institutions within

broader orders of discourse. Here, the Benue State government is discursively positioned as modern, responsible institution acting in conformity with global norms.

Federal Government: Both speeches construct the federal government as the supreme institutional authority that is capable of resolving the crisis. However, the two speakers relate to this authority differently. Ortom simultaneously defers to and critiques the federal government, referencing Buhari's directive to the Inspector General of Police: 'You quickly directed the Inspector General of Police to relocate to Benue' while immediately exposing its failure: 'Issues of capacity and integrity may have accounted for the disobedience of your orders'. This simultaneous reference and critique is a sophisticated discursive move as it preserves Ortom's respect for presidential authority while holding the institution publicly accountable. Tor-Tiv similarly frames the federal government as the ultimate custodian of security by stating 'We appeal to you to end the genocide going on in Benue State... We know you are capable of doing this Sir'. This expression concentrates moral pressure on the presidency by positioning it as both the problem and the solution.

Security Institution: Both speakers construct the security institution as compromised or misinformed. Ortom's critique of the IGP by saying 'Issues of capacity and integrity' targets institutional failure at the level of individual actors within the security apparatus. Tor-Tiv's critique is more systemic as he argues that misinformation has weakened the entire security response: 'Wrong diagnosis will lead to wrong treatment.' Tor-Tiv's use of medical discourse here is an instance of interdiscursivity. The language of diagnosis and treatment is imported from the medical domain to construct the security crisis as a problem of misidentification. This constitutive intertextuality reframes the institutional failure as an epistemological failure, thereby demanding not just action but a fundamentally different understanding of the conflict.

Traditional Institution: The most distinctive institutional construction in Tor-Tiv's speech is the elevation of the traditional institution as the moral conscience and legitimate voice of the people. By

invoking the Civil War sacrifice in the expression, 'Many of our people died during the civil war. We paid the Supreme Price to keep this country united', Tor-Tiv deploys historical intertextuality to establish a moral debt owed to Benue by the Nigerian state. This move is significant as it constructs the traditional institution not merely as a cultural body but as a political stakeholder with a validated claim along historical memory to federal protection. The authority of the traditional institution is thus grounded in a nationalist discourse that transcends partisan politics and situates the Tor-Tiv's speech within what van Dijk (1998, p. 67) describes as the ideological construction of 'us' (Benue/Nigeria's unity) versus 'them' (the neglect of the federal government).

Media Institution: Tor-Tiv's speech engages in an explicit discursive battle with the media by directly referencing and rejecting circulating media framings such as 'farmers-herders clashes,' 'reprisal attacks,' and 'communal clashes,' he performs what Fairclough (1992) calls negation, that is the intertextual incorporation of other texts through their contestation. This is an instance of manifest intertextuality deployed as counter-discourse: the prior framings are explicitly named in order to be dismantled and replaced with Tor-Tiv's preferred framing of 'genocide,' 'invasion,' and 'war.' The discursive construction of the media as an institution complicit in misinformation serves a dual purpose such as explaining why the crisis has been inadequately addressed, and it positions Tor-Tiv's speech as a corrective institutional voice.

Conclusion

This study investigates how intertextuality functions as a discursive mechanism for the construction of institutional practices in the speeches of Governor Samuel Ortom and Tor-Tiv V on the Herders-Farmers Conflict (HFC) in Benue State. Through the lens of Kristeva's (1986) theory of intertextuality and Fairclough's (1992; 1995; 2003) three-dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis, the study demonstrates that political and traditional leaders do not merely describe institutional realities, but they actively construct and legitimise them through strategic

intertextual practices. The findings reveal, first, that Ortom and Tor-Tiv V deploy different intertextual strategies that reflect their respective subject positions and rhetorical goals. Ortom's reliance on manifest intertextuality involves referencing legal texts, presidential directives, global economic data, and statistical records to constructs the Benue State government as a rational and globally informed institution. Tor-Tiv V's relies on constitutive intertextuality by blending historical, nationalist, moral, military, and media discourses to constructs the traditional institution as the voice of the Benue people, grounded in collective memory and the ideology of national sacrifice.

Second, the study demonstrates that intertextuality performs specific institutional work

across six domains: the state government is constructed as law-abiding and modern; the federal government is simultaneously referred to and critiqued; the security institution is framed as compromised by misinformation and institutional failure; the traditional institution is elevated as the authentic intermediary between the people and the state; the media institution is constructed as complicit in the misrepresentation of the crisis; and international institutions are invoked to expand the moral and political scope of the demand for intervention. Taken together, these findings extend existing scholarship on Nigerian political discourse and conflict communication. The study contributes to the growing body of critical discourse analysis research on the Farmers-Herders Conflict in Nigeria.

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