

## Intertextuality in Political Discourse: A Study of President Muhammadu Buhari's 2015 Inaugural Speech

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### Abstract

This study examines the intertextual references in President Muhammadu Buhari's 2015 presidential inaugural speech. The speech was purposively selected from the online version of *The Guardian* newspaper because it marked a change of government at the federal level from a ruling political party, People's Democratic Party (PDP) to a hitherto opposition party: All Progressives' Congress (APC). The data was then subjected to a discourse-pragmatic analysis using the theoretic concept of intertextuality. The findings reveal that the President dexterously intermixed political discourse with religious, literary, and historical discourses through manifest intertextuality and interdiscursivity. The study also indicates the President's positivist, liberalist and religious ideological orientation. The study concludes that all texts are constellation of several other texts which are used to index the text producer's ideology.

**Keywords:** President Muhammadu Buhari, political discourse, inaugural speech, interdiscursivity, ideology.

### Introduction

Every human society is characterised by politics. It is against this premise that Ellah (2019, p.48) posits that "the current reality is that politics is pervasive, that is, it permeates all human endeavours". The implication of this is that no human society can be insulated from politics since the activities of politicians affect all citizens. By politics, I mean "the struggle for power and the mechanism for resolving conflict of interest in human societies" (Ellah, 2019, p.48).

Political discourse relates to any talk that is concerned with politics. Put differently, political discourse is any discourse that deals with political engagements and enterprises. It is identified by "its actors or authors, viz., politicians. Indeed, the vast bulk of studies on political discourse is about the text and talk of professional politicians or political institutions, such as president[sic] and prime ministers and other members of government, parliament or political parties, both at the local, national and international levels" (van Dijk, www.discourses.org). Political discourse takes different trajectories: political campaigns, inaugural speeches, Independence Day speeches, interviews, debates, parliamentary debates, among

others.

The present study focuses on inaugural speech, that is, the first public speech delivered by a democratically elected individual on the occasion of their swearing-in which informs the people of their policy direction. In other words, inaugural speech is "a speech delivered at a ceremonial induction of an individual into a new office" (Osisanwo, 2017, p. 298). In delivering inaugural speeches, political leaders do not only "express themselves", but also "perform different actions" (Ellah & Nta, 2020, p.148) such as making promises and stating their intentions and ideologies in the communicative event. In Nigeria, the inauguration of a newly elected president or governor since the return to democratic government in 1999 usually takes place on the 29th May, except in some states (e.g. Anambra, Edo and Ondo) where off season elections are conducted due to court judgments. During this event (inauguration ceremony), the elected individuals reaffirm their campaign promises and make public pronouncements regarding their policy direction.

The fact that "language is a social phenomenon that exhibits a close relationship with

socio-political matters in all human societies” (Ellah, 2014, p. 134), makes its investigation in political discourse inevitable. Hence, the inextricable relationship between language and politics has attracted linguistic investigation of political discourse from different theoretic perspectives. For instance, in Nigeria, studies have been carried on the discourse tactics in military coup speeches in Nigeria (Adegbija, 1995); pragmatic features in political speeches of six prominent Nigerian leaders, namely: Alhaji Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, Chief Obafemi Awolowo, Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, (civilian leaders); General Yakubu Gowon, General Olusegun Obasanjo, and General Ibrahim Babangida, (military leaders) (Adeyanju, 2006); stylistic features of political campaigns (Omezuwa & Ezejideaku, 2008); and nomination acceptance speeches of two Nigerian Presidential candidates – Chief Obafemi Awolowo (Presidential candidate of the Unity Party of Nigeria -UPN- in 1979) and Chief Moshood Abiola (Presidential candidate of the Social Democratic Party -SDP- in 1993) (Akinwotu, 2013).

In this study, I examine President Muhammadu Buhari’s 2015 inaugural speech from a discourse-pragmatic perspective with special interest in the incorporation and inculcation of other texts in the speech, an area that is yet to be explored by scholars.

### **Studies on inaugural speeches**

The discourse of inaugural speeches has received significant scholarly attention from different theoretic orientations. For example, Adetunji (2009) undertakes a comparative pragmatic investigation of the second inaugural speeches of President Olusegun Obasanjo of Nigeria and President George Bush of the US. The study shows that two similar political speeches may not necessarily share the same pragmatic and rhetorical features elements.

Akinseye (2015) studies President Buhari’s 2015 inaugural speech using Halliday’s systemic functional grammar. The study reveals that President Buhari used modulation and modalisation such as will, can, shall, must, would and should to indicate his commitment, willingness, assurance, obligation to the growth

and development of Nigeria.

Sharndama (2015) examines President Buhari’s 2015 inaugural speech using Norman Fairclough’s model of critical discourse analysis. The study reveals that through the speech, the president declared his intentions, expressed his appreciation and ideologies.

Kubát and Čech (2016) embark on a stylometric analysis of US presidents’ inaugural speeches. The study which covers 57 inaugural speeches of all US presidents from George Washington to Barack Obama reveals that the three indices used in the analysis: vocabulary richness (using Moving-Average Type-Token Ratio (MATTR)), secondary thematic concentration (STC), and text activity (*Q*) were independently used without clear general tendency, and that “the style of the speeches is rather influenced by personality of each president” (Kubát & Čech, 2016). The study also indicates that the stylistic features of the individual presidents were “not relevant to the political affiliation”.

Aremu (2017) undertakes a cognitive pragmatic study of inaugural speeches of Nigerian presidents between 1979 and 2015 using a combination of Lakoff and Johnson’s (1980) conceptual metaphor theory, Charteris-Black’s (2004) critical metaphor theory and modified model of Mey’s (2001) pragmeme. The study reveals that Nigerian Presidents’ inaugural speeches feature conceptual mappings such as the political leader as a father, builder, manager, servant; election is a battle, a sport, a journey, among others. The study further indicates that the conceptual mappings “are used as pragmatic strategies for appealing, remembering, thanking, warning and promising (p.32).

Osisanwo (2017) studies President Buhari’s 2015 inaugural speech through the lens of Mey’s (2001) pragmatic act theory. The study indicates that the president, through his inaugural speech, performs the pragmatic acts of proposing, promising, stating, acknowledging, thanking, appealing, reminding, instructing, advising, charging, informing, among others.

Akinwotu (2018) examines the inaugural speeches of Governor Olusegun Mimiko of Ondo State from a stylistic perspective. He observes that

the speeches “are characterised by lexical items (adjectives, adverbs, pronouns) which the speaker creatively deploys to promote his political programmes, and to present himself as a committed, sincere and responsible leader” (Akinwotu, 2018, p.1). The study also indicates “a preponderance of declarative sentences and declarative mood which Mimiko engages in promising, assuring and stating to persuade and mobilise listeners” (p.1). The present study differs from the previous ones in the sense that it investigates President Buhari’s first inaugural speech with a view to accounting for the incorporation of different texts in it.

### **Theoretical orientation: Intertextuality**

This study is anchored on the theory of intertextuality. Intertextuality was first introduced in 1966 by Julia Kristeva (Zengin 2016:300) in her explanation of Bakhtin’s work, especially his “Dialogical” principle in which he argues that a text is understood based on its relationship with other texts. In the words of Kristeva (1986:36), a given text is “a permutation of texts, an intertextuality: in the space of a given, several utterances, taken from other texts, intersect and neutralize one another”. This implies that intertextuality emanates from the heterogeneity and dialogic nature of texts, that is, the interaction of texts or the relationship that a text enters into with other texts. Put differently, intertextuality describes textual interdependence, and a process of knowledge production that is thought to be complete and especially useful to its era or time of production when it echoes another or other texts. The focal argument put forward by proponents of intertextuality finds articulation in the ideological persuasion that knowledge production is a construction of an amalgam of previous ideas.

In the context of this study, a text is conceptualised to mean any meaningful spoken, written, visual or multimodal unit of language. Fairclough (2003:44) identifies two basic relations of texts, namely “internal and external” relations. In Fairclough’s thoughts, internal relation encapsulates semantic, grammatical and lexical relations of texts; while the external relation deals with the outside relations of texts, that is, the social practices, elements of social events and social structures, and what is brought from one text into

another. Central to the concept of intertextuality is the external relationships of texts which cover other people’s voices, allusions and responses to prior texts, shared knowledge, the interaction of different texts and the contextual beliefs. These “contextual beliefs in communication needs are believed to account for the differences (which could be accidental or deliberate) in the communicative activities of interactants of different experiences” (Uwen, 2020: 255) which often show some level of text relation. Fairclough’s (2003) internal and external text relations correlate with Hernandez-Guerra’s (2013:65) citing Plett’s (1991) intratextual and intertextual coherence of texts.

In discussing the basic components of analysing discourse, Foucault (1972:98) avows that “there can be no statement that in one way or another does not reactualize others”. This implies the pervasiveness of intertextuality which has aptly been articulated by Bakhtin (1986) cited in Fairclough (1992:102) thus:

each utterance is a link in the chain of speech communication. All utterances are populated, and indeed constituted, by snatches of others' utterances, more or less explicit complete: 'our speech... is filled with others' words, varying degrees of otherness and varying degrees of "our-own-ness" varying degrees of awareness and detachment. These words others carry with them their own expression, their own evaluative tone, which we assimilate, rework, and reaccentuate.

The above quotation presupposes that all texts echo one another directly or indirectly. So, “for any particular text or type of text, there is a set of other texts and a set of voices which are potentially relevant, and potentially incorporated into the text” (Fairclough, 2003:36). Such set of other texts and voices are representatives of others and in a way the social processes, ideologies that influence the production of a text. Such ideologies may be the expression of “a conventionally legitimized social power and discourse rules that consciously regulate that field of discourse” which echoes its text (Uwen & Ukam, 2019: 131). The obvious or subtle echoing of other texts is what is referred to

as intertextuality. Intertextuality, therefore, is the “presence of a text in another text” (Genette, 1983). For Fairclough (1992:104), it “entails an emphasis upon the heterogeneity of texts, and a mode of analysis which highlights the diverse and often contradictory elements and threads which go to make up a text”. Bauman (2008:4) sees intertextuality as the “relational orientation of a text to other texts”, while Hodsdon-Champeon (2010) conceives it to be the different ways in which different “texts refer to other texts”. It is the indexing of one text into another. Olateju and Oyeboode (2014:10) consider intertextuality as “the interface between discourse practice and the text.” This involves processes such as text production, distribution and consumption. In the opinion of Zengin (2016:300), intertextuality is “a poststructuralist, deconstructionist and postmodernist theory that changed the concept of text, recognizing it as an intertext owing to the interrelations between texts and texts’ absorptions of other texts.” Implicated in Zengin’s theorisation of intertextuality is the shared network of links between or among texts.

Arising from the different definitions of intertextuality above, we describe it as the complex nature of the interrelatedness of texts or co-presence of other texts in terms of genre, style, structure, meaning figuration, period and other contextual variables. It is the inculcation, constellation or embodiment of concepts such as reference, allusion, context, presupposition, quotations, paraphrase, among others in the production and interpretation of a text for the purpose of reinforcement and cohesion. In addition to the inculcation of a text into another, intertextuality incorporates the complex relations which texts have “with conventions (genres, discourses, styles, activity types) which are structured together to constitute an order in discourse” (Fairclough 1992: 103).

Highlighting the relevance of intertextuality to a text, Bakhtin (1986:162) states that a text:

lives only by coming into contact with another text (with context). Only at this point of contact between texts does a light flash, illuminating both the posterior and anterior, joining a given

text to a dialogue. We emphasize that this contact is a dialogic contact between texts . . . Behind this contact is a contact of personalities and not of things.

The thrust of the above quote is that no text can be produced or read in isolation, but in relation to other text(s). Also, the “contact of personalities” as enunciated by Bakhtin above underscores the ideological orientations of discourse participants which are brought to bear in the production of other texts. Thus, intertextuality is used in a combination of power relation theory – Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to uncover the hegemonic and ideological inclination of text producers.

There are two main stakeholders in the theorisation of intertextuality: literary semiotics; and discourse analysis and critical discourse analysis. Prominent among scholars from the literary semiotics are Kristeva (1986), Frow (1986), Barthes (1998, 2001) and Allan (2000). They mainly “concern themselves with exploring the complex and heterogeneous nature of literary works by appropriating the concept of intertextuality. Their studies range from the search for influences or antecedents for a particular literary work to the analysis of literary conventions and codes as prerequisites for literary communication” (Oyeleye & Oduola, 2016: 430). Scholars from discourse analysis and critical discourse analysis (e.g. Beaugrande & Dressler 1981, Lemke 1992, Fairclough 1992, 1995) focus on non-literary texts.

This study is based on discourse analysis and critical discourse analysis, since it investigates a non-literary text from a discourse-pragmatic perspective. The adoption of intertextuality as a theoretic base for this study is considered most appropriate because of its ability to provide insights into the heterogeneous nature of political discourse.

### **Methodology**

The data for this study is President Muhammadu Buhari’s 2015 presidential inaugural speech which was purposively selected from the online version of *The Guardian* newspaper. The choice of this inaugural speech was informed by its significance in the political history of Nigeria

since it marked a change of government at the federal level from a ruling political party to a hitherto opposition party. To understand the incorporation of elements from other texts or the intermixing of different genres, and the conduit ideological disposition of the President and his party – All Progressive Congress (APC) in the selected data, the concept of intertextuality was deployed for its analysis.

### **Analysis and discussion**

In this section of the study, aspects of Fairclough's (1992) analytical model are adopted to analyse President Muhammadu Buhari's Inaugural speech of 29th May, 2015 against the backdrop of manifest intertextuality and interdiscursivity as dimensions of intertextuality in building a "framework for discourse analysis" (Fairclough, 1992:105). The inaugural speech was his first public and official speech as a democratically elected President of Nigeria. Therefore, his audience was Nigeria in particular and the world at large. In this analysis, effort is also made to show how the intertextual references in the selected text reflect the ideological positions of President Buhari and his party, the All Progressives Congress (APC).

### **Manifest intertextuality in President Buhari's inaugural speech**

Manifest intertextuality reflects the explicit or obvious presence of other text(s) in another through discourse representation (direct or indirect speech). It is the 'case where specific other texts are overtly drawn upon within a text' (Fairclough 1992:115) through the exploration of discourse cues such as quotation marks (Fairclough 1992:104). Other aspects of manifest intertextuality as identified and discussed by Fairclough (1992:118 - 123) are presupposition (propositions that are taken as given or taken for granted by the text producer), negation (propositions that contest or reject others), metadiscourse (distinction of different text levels within a text by the text producer) and irony (the opposite of what is being said).

President Buhari's speech illustrates patterns of manifest intertextuality based on discourse representation, presupposition, negation and reference. Let us consider each of them in turn.

### **Discourse representation**

Discourse representation is concerned with "speech reportage", that is, direct or indirect speech. In direct discourse representation, an intertextual form is clearly marked by quotation marks; while in indirect discourse representation, a reporting clause is used. Discourse representation is clearly and ambivalently present in President Buhari's Inaugural Speech. An instance of direct discourse representation is seen in the direct quotation from Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* (Act iv, Scene iii) where Brutus addresses Cassius saying:

There is a tide in the affairs of men which,  
Taken at the flood, leads on to fortune;  
Omitted, all the voyage of their life,  
Is bound in shallows and miseries.

From the above excerpt, the voice of the reporter (Buhari) is explicitly marked from the voice of the reported (Shakespeare) through the indented quotation. The quotation is not arbitrarily deployed; rather, it is used to remind Nigerians of the great opportunity that they (purportedly) have to develop during his administration. It is also used to warn Nigerians of the imminent sufferings and hardships if they fail to use the opportunity. The extract underscores President Buhari's messianist ideology as he sees himself the true leader who has come to deliver Nigeria and Nigerians from sufferings. Also, the President deliberately chose first person pronominal (I, we, our) to, among other things, thank, state his intention and that of his ruling party, the APC. Though, there are no formal means such as quotation marks to portray most of the sentences as direct speech, the use of the above pronominal makes it attributive of direct discourse representation.

In terms of indirect discourse representation, the expression; "A few people have privately voiced fears that on coming back to office I shall go after them" illustrates the use of indirect speech. The reporting clause is introduced by the subordinating conjunction "that" to indicate the voice of the reported, that is, those who had expressed their fear of being victimised somewhere else.

### **Presupposition**

Presupposition relates to the background information or proposition that is common or

shared between the speaker and hearer which the speaker does not need to assert any more. Within the context of manifest intertextuality, “presupposed propositions are a way of incorporating the texts of others” (Fairclough 1992:121). Presupposition could either be manipulative or sincere.

In President Buhari’s Inaugural Speech, presuppositions are cued in intertextually. For example, in “our supporters who believe in us...”, the presupposition that some people do not believe in them is cued in from another nebulous text. Also, the expression, “The judicial system needs reform to cleanse itself from its immediate past” presupposes the alleged corrupt practices in the Nigerian judiciary. This shared knowledge is inculcated into the new text to justify the need for the reformation of the judiciary.

### **Negation**

Negation refers to a proposition that rejects another proposition. Negative statements are “often used for polemical purposes” (Fairclough 1992:121) and intertextually incorporate other texts by disagreeing with or rejecting them. President Buhari’s Inaugural Speech contains instances of negative sentences that incorporate other texts in an intertextual way. For example, the negative expression “There will be no paying off old scores” presupposes the proposition by some people that “there will be paying off old scores”. This presupposed proposition is what has been ambivalently inculcated into the new text in a negative form. The expression “There will be no paying off old scores” is also used to project President Buhari as a pardoner who does not believe in vindictivism.

Another example of negation is “I belong to nobody” which presupposes in some other text that he belonged to some people. Again, the negative sentence “Nigerians will not regret that they have entrusted national responsibility to us” rejects the proposition in some other text that Nigerians will regret voting the APC to power. Also, “Boko Haram is not only the security issue bedeviling our country” presupposes the proposition in some other text(s) that Boko Haram is the only security concern of Nigeria. This presupposition works intertextually to reject the proposition that Boko Haram is the only security

issue in Nigeria.

### **Reference**

Instances of references through definite and indefinite tokens, and phoric references are found in the President’s speech. These references are intertextually utilised to identify specific and non-specific persons, places, entities or things to provide useful contextual clues to the audience. For instance, the President made reference to “God” and the “Holy Book” in order to intextualise religious ideology which explains Nigerians’ passion for or regionalisation of events. The President in his speech also made direct reference to former “President Goodluck Jonathan for his display of statesmanship...” He uses this reference to boast to “the world that despite the perceived tension in the land we can be a united people capable of doing what is right for our nation.” Reference is also made to prominent nationalists and founding fathers such as Sir Herbert Macauley, Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, Chief Obafemi Awolowo, Alhaji Ahmadu Bello, and so on; to connect the past to the present. The President also referred to the past leaders as “spoilt children” who through their actions or inactions have brought “disorder to the house”. Here, “the house” is a metaphor for Nigeria. Domestic and global challenges such as insecurity, corruption, power, terrorism, sea piracy, climate change, diseases, and many more are also intertextualised in the President’s speech. Closely related to this is the reference to countries like “Cameroon, Chad and Niger” in their collaboration with Nigeria to fight Boko Haram.

The use of the pronominals, “his” and “he” in the second paragraph of the speech anaphorically refers to former President Goodluck Jonathan. Also, the pronoun, “their” in the third paragraph of the speech makes an anaphoric reference to “the million of supporters who believed in us...”, where “us” refers to the president and his political party, the APC.

### **Constitutive intertextuality/ interdiscursivity in President Buhari’s inaugural speech**

Constitutive intertextuality / interdiscursivity deals with the general convention of discourses and how different genres are hybridized or mixed in a particular text. It is an instance in which the voice of a particular genre is

also heard in another genre. For instance, the informative and persuasive language of advertising genre also features prominently in the language of politics. Hence, we can say that each of such genres is an intertext of the other. Constitutive intertextuality also accounts for the vocabulary items and turn-taking organisation in conversation. In its broad sense, constitutive intertextuality or interdiscursivity is the blend of different “genres, style, register and discourse” (Fairclough 1992:124).

President Buhari’s Inaugural Speech exhibits features of both explicit and implicit genre-mixing based on Nigeria’s socio-political experiences and his party’s (All Progressives’ Congress) ideologies. Specifically, the president explores Nigerians’ shared knowledge of religion and history to build his speech. For example, the statement “Today marks a triumph for Nigeria and an occasion to celebrate her freedom and cherish her democracy” shows a hybridization of religious and political discourses as it reminds one of Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem as recorded in Matthew 21: 1 – 11 of the Bible.

Further exploitation of religious discourse is seen in the text producer’s reverence of God in “I am immensely grateful to God who has preserved us to witness this day and this occasion” and swearing by the “Holy Book” as an effective strategy to enact his religious ideology and to legitimise his mandate and influence Nigerians and the international community at large to believe in his honesty and integrity. His acknowledgement of God is in consonance with the religious belief that human affairs are controlled by God.

The discourse of history is also woven into political discourse to enable the text producer and consumer relate the past to the present in order to make the right decision for the future. For example, the President draws up on history to invoke the common goal of Nigeria’s founding fathers, who were poised to ensuring that Nigeria became a viable and an egalitarian society. Drawing further from history, the President delves into pre-colonial Nigeria to refer to the then great empires and kingdoms and their ancestors. Listening to or reading this speech would certainly remind one of a history class.

The President also intertexts political

discourse with literary discourse in quoting Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar* to emphasise the great opportunity that Nigeria now has through his administration to realise her mission of becoming a great nation. The excerpt is as follows:

There is a tide in the affairs of men  
which,  
taken at the flood, leads on to  
fortune;  
Omitted, all the voyage of their life,  
Is bound in shallows and miseries.  
(Act iv, Scene iii)

By incorporating this literary text, President Buhari builds his argument on the need for Nigerians not to squander this opportunity which his administration offers. In referring to the above text, President Buhari also engages in ideological work as he sees himself as the messiah that has come to save Nigeria.

By and large, the intertextual elements in the text are also used to enact some ideologies such as positivist, liberalist and religious ideology. For example, positivist ideology is seen in the expression “with the support and cooperation he has given to the transition process...we can be a united people capable of doing what is right for our nation.” Here, the President expresses optimism that Nigeria can succeed in dealing with her affairs. This positivist ideology is further illustrated in his use of negative sentences to reject all forms of unhealthy propositions.

The president’s liberal ideology is aptly captured in the catchy statement ‘I belong to everybody and I belong to nobody’ which implies that he would be fair to every Nigerian, irrespective of who or what they are, their ethnic, religious or political affiliations.

### **Conclusion**

This paper has discussed and characterised intertextuality in discourse. It has explored the pervasive nature of intertextuality, explaining how all texts echo other texts manifestly and constitutively. Through the analysis of President Muhammadu Buhari’s Inaugural Speech of 29th May, 2015, the paper has illustrated how political discourse explores manifest intertextuality (using discourse representation, presupposition, negation and reference) and constitutive intertextuality. The

paper has also demonstrated that intertextuality is used to construct and maintain ideologies in societies. Although, this study has added to the exiting body of knowledge on intertextuality, and political discourse, especially inaugural speeches,

researchers can still apply intertextuality to the analysis of other genres of political discourse to further establish the multiplicity of texts and voices in political discourse.

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