

Discourse Strategies and Discourse Markers in 2019 Presidential Campaign Advertisements

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Abstract

The use of social media to advertise presidential candidates and to get support for them has increased drastically. However, many research efforts have not been done to critically investigate the discourse strategies and the meanings that text composers try to portray with campaign advertisements. This study, therefore, attempts a critical content analysis of discourse strategies and discourse markers used to garner support in the 2019 presidential campaign advertisements. 14 texts were purposively selected from social media platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, twitter and other online media, like punch.ng.com, sunnews.com, to mention but a few. The chosen texts featured the two major political candidates in the 2019 presidential campaign advertisements: Atiku Abubakar of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) and Muhammadu Buhari of the All Progressives Congress (APC). The study adopted Vadijk's socio cognitive model and his principles of ideological stances for the analysis of texts in this study. The findings revealed that there was a deliberate choice of certain words by text composers to create certain desired meanings. Other notable discourse strategies used were rhetorical questions, repetition, symbolism and the use of emotional appeal. The study also found out that discourse markers were ideologically used to show contrast, consequence and time that an action took place. The study concludes that semantic stratagems were used to show polarity between the out group and the in group.

Keywords: discourse strategies, discourse markers, advertisements, ideology

Introduction

Presidential campaign advertisements are done to garner votes for a preferred candidate but this purpose cannot be achieved if the message is not conveyed properly; the message should be conveyed in a manner that enables the reader get the understanding of what the message is. This is why Emodi (2011) says that the choice of diction in an advertisement to create the right meaning

involves exceptional skills. The 2019 presidential campaign advertisements combined written texts and visuals to create meaningful texts. The visuals were also carefully chosen to create a discourse that engages the reader to get a desired meaning.

Asemah and Edogoh (2012) defined advertising as any communication that is paid for, directed at a target audience, through the various mass media like radio, television, newspaper, magazine, motion pictures and the internet. The aim is to create awareness about goods and services and also to sell a candidate. That is, to make the candidates known to the electorate. Crystal and Davy (1983) in Keiko (1994) state that there are two main functions of advertising, namely, informing and persuading. According to Mello (2020), a political advertisement is any paid mass communication or advertisement that has the goal of influencing voters directly or indirectly. Mello added that for a political advertisement to be effective, it has to be convincing to get people to vote or not vote for a candidate.

Nott (2020) avers that political ads on social media have several unique qualities that distinguish it from the media that came before it. The first noticeable advantage is that there is no limit on how social media platforms exist. For example Facebook and its subsidiaries (Whatsapp and Instagram), Google, YouTube and Twitter are not like the newspaper and television stations. Social media platforms are not conventional publishers; rather, they are internet service providers, and so they are not liable to what other people post on them. They cannot be sued for allowing false political ads. This is in line with the view expressed by Halpern (2019) that the problem of political advertising on social media is that, in spite of the high cost of money spent on social media advertising, one cannot ascertain that they are true and the service providers do not care what the content is. For example, the Trump team falsely accused Biden on Facebook of offering Ukrainian officials a billion dollars to drop a case against his son, Hunter. The ads were seen by over four million people and a second video was edited to make it seem like Biden openly confessed to the scheme. Nott (2020) asserts that this is a very bad situation that any politician can find him or herself in because most times before a new advertisement is released to counter or repair the damages done by the false political advertisement, the damages would have become fatal.

Discourse markers are words or phrases used to show the relationship between texts. It is sometimes called linking words because it binds a piece of writing together. It makes a text logically constructed. Camarero (2012) opined that discourse markers link textual fragments, facilitating the transition between them and ensuring that the texts become cohesive. He further added that discourse markers have the ability to connect elements like sentences or a group of sentences inside a paragraph and they can even introduce a linguistic

element which connects with an extra-linguistic event. Discourse markers include words such as the following: because, consequently, but, when, also, however, then, to mention but a few.

Methods and Theory

This study is basically a qualitative research. It is a critical content analysis of the meaning of language and visuals used in the 2019 Nigerian presidential campaign advertisements and the functions of discourse markers utilized in those advertisements. The texts were purposively selected from social media platforms, with the largest selection taken from WhatsApp. Other platforms from where selections were made include Facebook, Twitter and online media outlets like punch.com, tribuneng.com, among others. The texts reflect presidential campaign advertisements of the two major political parties and their presidential candidates. The two major parties were the ruling APC (All Progressives Congress) and the major opposition party PDP (Peoples Democratic Party). The candidates were Muhammadu Buhari of APC and Atiku Abubakar of PDP. 12 texts were purposively selected which were products of the text creators from the parties, party supporters or cartoonists. Van Dijk's socio-cognitive model and his principle of ideological stances (2012) were adopted for this study.

Van Dijk (2000) espoused his four principles regarding the use of subtle ideological analysis to express various ideological stances. They are summarised below:

1. Emphasise positive things about us. This when all the things that will make 'US' look good are said, and images that portray 'US' in good light are used in text creation.
2. Emphasise negative things about them. Here all the texts are written in the negative about 'THEM' and images that portray 'THEM' are all negative.
3. De-emphasise negative things about us. This is when any written text that will make 'US' look bad is avoided and all negative images are also avoided.
4. De-emphasise positive things about them. This is when there is a deliberate avoidance of written texts and images that will recognize positive things about 'THEM'. Even when they have done what is praise worthy, it is not mentioned.

These four moves, according to Ramanathan and Hoon (2015), play a vital role in broader contextual strategy of positive self presentation and negative other presentation. Self presentation, they argued further, presents the individual's action as a member of the group while firmly expressing various ideological notions. Positive self-representation emphasises the individual's positive behaviour by saying positive things about 'US' and saying negative things

about ‘THEM’. This positive stance is an abstract characteristic of group conflicts as the interaction pattern opposes the other group. They explained further that the negative other representation depicts that no negative saying shall be directed to ‘US’ and no positive saying should be directed to ‘THEM’. In other words, the pronoun ‘US’ always refers to positive sayings and beliefs in a social context while the pronoun ‘THEM’ refers to negativity, condemnation and other negative stances about the other group.

Data Analysis

The Use of Rhetorical Questions

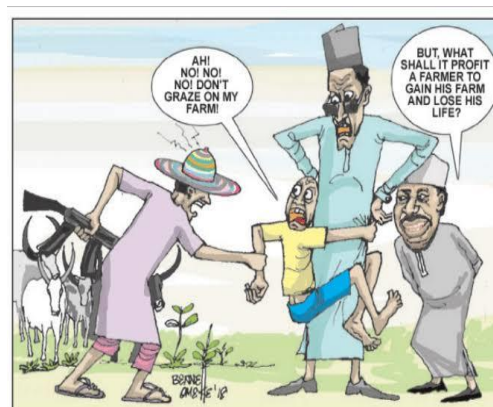
Rhetorical questions are questions asked to make a point and not to get an answer. Its purpose is to make an effect. They were used in the 2019 presidential campaign advertisements to make effects on the reader. Some examples are shared below:

A



The rhetorical question in text A is ‘Next 4 year with a president who is not aware?’ This text is not meant to be answered but to create an effect on the reader who is likely going to be voting whether they are ready to have this clueless president for the next four years.

B



The rhetorical question in text B is; ‘What shall it profit a farmer to gain his farm and lose his life?’ This question is very pregnant with a lot of meanings. This is because the question is coming from a close ally of Buhari. The effect it creates on the reader is that the government is indirectly tolerating the nefarious activities of the herdsmen. The presentation of visuals and written texts portray the president and the man behind him as members of the out group.

The Use of Emotional Appeal

Another semantic stratagem used in the 2019 presidential campaign advertisements is emotional appeal. An emotional appeal is the use of words in such a way that it sways the emotion of the readers of a text. Emotion could be used as the basis of an argument without factual evidence; writers may appeal to the emotion of the reader by using ethos, pathos and logos in their writing.

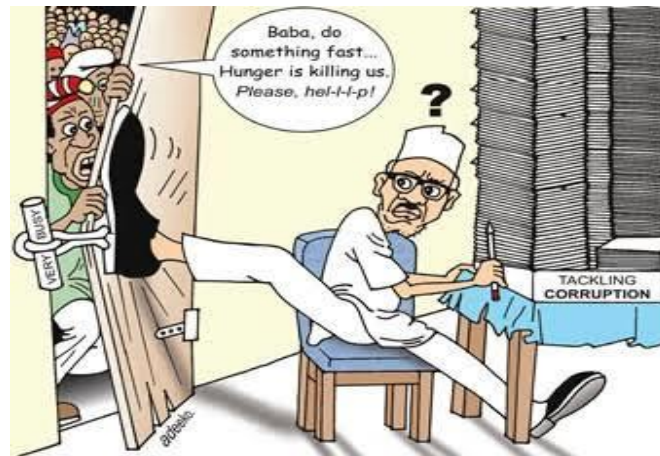
Ethos has to do with citing authority to claim that a text is credible. If it is true, then it can appeal to people’s emotions. Pathos is the use of language and images in such a way that they appeal to people’s emotion. Logos is the use of logic and reasoning to appeal to people’s emotion. Here are some examples:

Text D



This picture is a good example of the use of pathos to appeal to the emotion of reader. Buhari became very popular before the 2015 presidential elections because there was a lot of hype about his incorruptibility. This text is coming before the 2019 presidential election; the text composer has created a picture that this man is not actually what people think he is and that this is what he does as represented in the picture. The EFFC (The Economic Financial Crimes Commission) is actually a lap dog that only barks at those it is commanded to bark at. Criminals can get away with their loot if they join the president’s party, the APC, which is represented by the broom (the party’s symbol).

Text E



Text E, like text D, is on the theme of corruption. Buhari's government claimed it would fight corruption during the campaigns, a claim that gave them a lot of support at the beginning of his first term. But later on, the president seemed to be too busy with files to care about basic policies that will improve the economy and give people food. This text has the ability to appeal to the emotion of the reader and create the impression that Buhari is insensitive to the plight of the reader or the masses.

Text F



Another interesting text is F, the words and visuals in this text appeal to the emotion of the reader. It is a good example of pathos. The visual shows Buhari and his vice president Osibanjo laughing heartily and the purpose of their laughter is that they have deceived the youths about giving them N5000 monthly during the 2015 presidential election campaigns. The text has the ability to evoke anger from the reader.

Text G



Text G appeals to the emotion of the reader by presenting president Buhari as a man who does not play by the rules. The text creator has used pathos which is the use of visual and language to evoke the emotion of neglect in the reader who does not share the same ethnicity with Buhari. The Federal Character is enshrined in the Nigerian constitution since 1979. It states that appointments into Federal Service, admissions into Federal Schools must fairly recognize the ethnic, religious and geographical diversity of Nigeria, but Buhari concentrated on choosing his service chiefs from the same ethnic group, region and religion, hence killing Federal Character. This stratagem is very effective, if many feel left out, they might not vote for Buhari for a second term in office. It is interesting to note, especially from his outfit (the cap and *agbada*) that the complainant is most likely a Yoruba man from south west Nigeria; Buhari and all the service chiefs are wearing the same cap which represents their being from the north, and their sharing similar religious and ethnic background. Buhari feigned ignorance of the zebra crossing after killing the man symbolizing Federal Character.

Text B



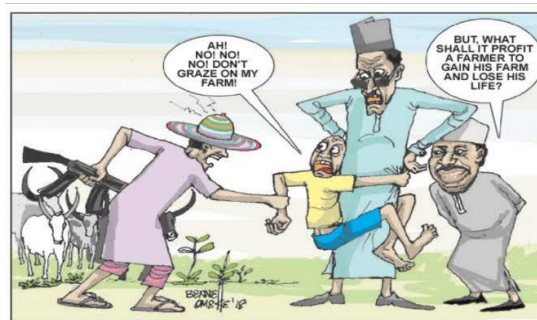
The herders'/farmers' clash escalated shortly after the election of Muhammadu Buhari into office in 2015 and many Nigerians have claimed that government is tolerating the activities of the herders. The text has been able to provoke the emotion of neglect on the part of the farmers who are constantly threatened by the armed herders and the emotion of empathy from other Nigerians who are

not in their shoes but also fear that this may soon come near them too. The body language of the president is very important; his hands are at akimbo, not making any attempt to help the farmer. The response of the man behind him, ‘What does it profit a farmer to gain his farm and lose his life?’ further reveal that the herders are being aided.

The Use of Repetition

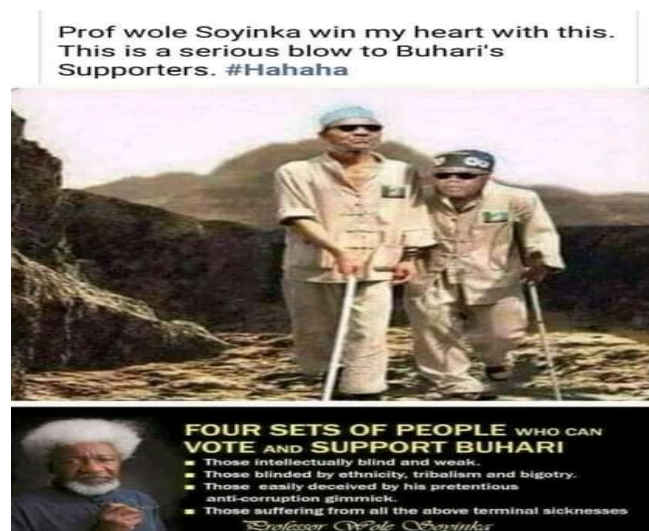
The use of repetition is another semantic stratagem used in some of the 2019 presidential campaign advertisements. Repetition is a literary device that repeats a word or phrase. It helps to stress or highlight important points. A number of them are used in the chosen texts.

Text H



In this text, the word, ‘NO! ‘NO! NO!’ is repeated three times with an exclamation mark. This relates the meaning of desperation on the part of the farmer. He does not want the cattle to graze on his farm but he is helpless because the herdsman is armed while he is not. This text portrays the plight of many farmers. It is their livelihood, their investment of several months that is often destroyed within hours.

Text I



In this text, the pronoun ‘Those’ is repeated four times. It lays emphasis on the group of people who can vote for Buhari’s second term bid. The repetition is used to categorize these four sets of people in the negative. The reader unknowingly tries to see if he belongs to any of the categories.

Text J



This text repeated Buhari three times. The purpose is to draw attention to the personality of the president as a trust worthy man that is being ganged up against because he ‘failed to steal’ and ‘refused to let them loot the treasury’. Buhari is the hero in this text; this is the meaning that the text creator tries to portray: that ‘Buhari must succeed’ by being voted for.

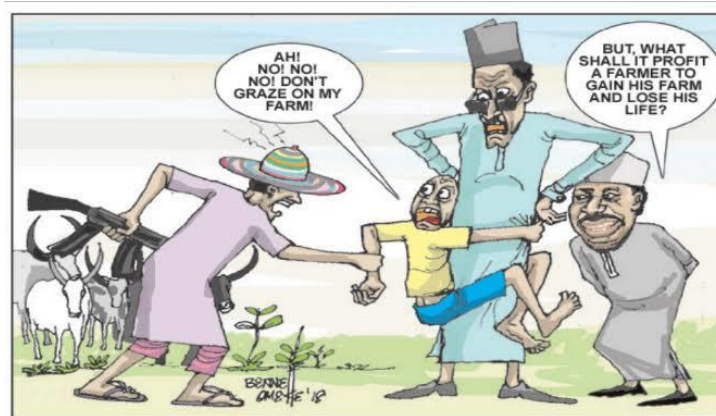
Discourse Markers in the Selected Data

Text A



The discourse marker in text A is ‘While’. This word makes the whole written text in text A logical. It tells us when the corruption that the text composer alleges that Atiku Abubkar was guilty of happened. It connects the subordinate clause ‘they were in power’. It is ideologically used because it tells us that this corruption happened the last time Atiku was given the opportunity to be a vice president. It implies that he should not be given the opportunity to steal again.

Text B



The discourse marker in text B is 'But'. The use of but here serves as a contrastive element between the agitations of the farmer who is concerned about the destruction of his farm and the comment of the man behind the president who thinks that his land is not as important as his life.

Text C



The discourse marker in text C is 'But'. It functions as contrastive maker in this context. It sheds more light on the initial statement, 'I don't know'. The speaker is of the opinion that restructuring might be the slogan that would replace 'Change'. It presents the politicians as people who do not mean what they say to the electorates.

Text D



Text D has a discourse marker which is; ‘As a result of’. This discourse marker shows us the consequence of Buhari’s actions of refusing to steal and loot the treasury. The consequence is that ‘They’ are broke and want to retire Buhari. The text composer is saying that the reason why Buhari is being opposed is that he is incorrupt.

Text E



The discourse marker in text E is, ‘When’. This discourse marker connects the clause, ‘The cow was grazing peacefully...’ with the subordinate clause, ‘Two hungry looking fanatics pounced on it and slaughtered it’. It makes the whole statement more cohesive. It is ideologically presented because the cows seem so important to the president that he is being briefed about their welfare.

Text F



Text F begins with a discourse marker; ‘And’. This marker indicates continuity of a discourse that is not stated in the text above but the statement continues an idea that others were not spared but the speaker and his partner were spared because Buhari saw the broom. This paints the president’s anti-corruption fight

as biased.

Text G



The discourse marker here is, 'Then'. The marker in this context was used to start a response to the little boy's ambition to become a president. It shows continuity in discourse in relation to the boy's statement. It functions as a marker of consequence. The consequence of wanting to become a president according to the mother is to read hard and earn a good certificate.

Conclusion and Findings

The meaning that readers get from campaign advertisements is highly dependent on the choice of the right words to establish the original meaning behind textual composition and the ability to make the structure cohesive by using the right discourse markers. The study set out to look at the discourse strategies and ideological discourse markers used in the 2019 presidential campaign advertisements. The study found out that presidential campaign advertisements were used to communicate messages to the electorates during the 2019 presidential campaign. The study showed that rhetorical questions were used to create effect of doubt about the candidates, and to show lack of commitment on the part of the government. For instance, 'Next 4 years with a president who is not aware?', 'What shall it profit a farmer to gain his farm and lose his life?' are excerpts from the texts analysed. Emotional appeal is another semantic stratagem used to garner votes in the campaign advertisements that were analysed. Emotions like anger, fear, neglect and empathy were portrayed using emotional appeal. Symbolism was also an effective tool used to create discourse and meanings like APC is a disunited party, Buhari's corruption fight is insincere, Buhari's administration encouraged nepotism and tribalism, and that Buhari has improved Nigeria in his first term in office. Repetition is another semantic stratagem used to draw the attention of the reader to certain effects in the texts used. Examples are 'Buhari', 'Mr President was not aware', 'No!' The instances tried to portray Buhari as a patriotic Nigerian, and desperation and fear was communicated using, 'No!' The study also showed that discourse markers were used not just for linking purposes but to show

ideology. For example, the use of ‘while’ is ideological because it does not just connect the clauses, it lays emphasis on the time or period that Atiku Abubakar allegedly squandered 5 million dollars. This is to make the electorates or readers reconsider their support for Atiku Abubakar. Other discourse markers used are ‘and’, ‘but’, ‘then’ and ‘as a result’.

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Writers’ Brief Data



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