

# A Lexical Analysis of an Inaugural Speech of the Speaker of Benue State House of Assembly in Nigeria

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**Abstract**—Language of Nigerian politics has been given attention in previous studies from various linguistic approaches such as pragmatics, pragma-stylistics, stylistic, syntax and discourse strategies. However, most of the research works that border on the political speeches are mainly concerned with the speeches of the executive leaders in Nigeria. This study, therefore, investigated the pattern and functions of lexical devices in the Inaugural speech of the Speaker of State House of Assembly as an avenue to expand the frontiers of knowledge on language of politics by legislators. The data were drawn from the speech of the Speaker of Benue State House of Assembly (2011-2013) and analysed based on the Lexical Cohesion theory of Halliday and Hassan (1976). The study reflected that legislators employed lexical cohesive devices such as repetition, synonymy, antonym, collocation, superordination to achieve certain purposes such as interconnectivity, directness, emphasis, appreciation and appeal in the process of negotiating meaning in their use of language.

**Index Terms**—lexis, linguistic, stylistic, cohesion, legislature

## I. INTRODUCTION

The legislative branch is one of the three branches of government in Nigeria, others are the executive branch and judiciary branch. The legislative arm of government is important as it is the arm responsible for making and changing laws. These laws are made effective by the executive while the judiciary interpret the laws of the country. The legislative branch of government in Nigeria is tasked with symbolic functions, most of which are accomplished through the avenue opened up by language because they use language to debate legislative issues such as passing of bills. Consequently, the network of language usually provides the tool for making formulating laws and policies that govern a given state, including Nigeria.

A critical survey of the legislative structure of state government in Nigeria as a country portends a cliché of lawmakers that it is made up of individuals that represent different constituencies at the state level. Each state is usually divided into electoral units known as constituencies. Hence, the lawmakers, who are specifically referred to as legislatures are led by 'The Speaker' in all legislative functions. Ojo (1973) identify certain legislative functions which include but are not limited to 'checking the Executive by questioning, policy criticism, annual budget criticism, motion of censure'. The various legislative functions can be summed up as basically three: representation, making laws and oversight functions according to Section 4 of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. All legislative procedures from passing bills to moving motions depend largely on language use.

Be it as it may, a legislature is an elected member whether at the federal level or state level. Each State House of Assembly or State Parliament is headed by a Speaker, who presides over the legislative functions of the House just there exists a *Senate President* in the Senate and a *Speaker* in the House of Representatives at the Federal level in Nigeria. The government structure in Nigeria is akin to the British structure of government. The reason for this is perhaps based on the fact that Nigeria was colonized by the British (Kolawole 1998).

Inaugural speeches are precisely the first speeches presented by people occupying leadership positions. In Nigeria, such speeches serve as a major means of winning people's hearts after a major selection, election, or appointment is announced or confirmed. Especially, to people that were not initially in support of such candidates either by signifying express disapproval or by not casting their votes. More so, leaders know the level of acceptance from the result of votes cast for and against them after election. The presentation of inaugural speeches further serves as a diplomatic means of selling new leadership to the people or subjects.

The Inaugural Speech of the Speaker of State House of Assembly can also be referred to as Acceptance Speech, as the speech serves different purposes: to make the appointed Speaker lay claim to leadership; to make other legislators accept his selection; and to commence assignment as Speaker by performing linguistic acts. An Inaugural Speech could also be regarded as a Maiden Speech. Usually, a maiden speech is popular as the first speech delivered by military rulers on assumption of power which are meant to inaugurate the government and prepare the ground for their consolidation (Ayeomoni 2007).

The socio-political history of Nigeria has revealed various crises that have followed the emergence of candidates that were not acceptable by a major minority of the people. Against this background, Nigeria has over four hundred languages from various ethnic groups divided into six geo-political zones, hence, the nation is susceptible to political crises which have heated up the polity of Nigeria many times. By implication, inaugural speeches are meant to promote and make leadership acceptable to the people through the avenue opened up by language, when this fails; or is not done properly or accordingly to achieve a desirable effects, a leadership crisis cannot be ruled out.

It is essential that all legislators are duly elected to represent their constituencies in the States House of Assembly. Each member is qualified to be appointed as a Speaker. Several instances abound whereby a Speaker is removed by a majority of the legislators, and immediately replaced with another legislator. In Delta State, the speaker has been changed two times in the 2011-2013 Assembly. Therefore, leadership tussles and crises are major factors affecting the socio-political development, whether at the state or federal level in Nigeria. But, when dialogue or communication works effectively through the resource of language, such a leadership crisis can be averted.

Though one cannot rule out the possibilities that most of the political speeches were not personally written by the Speakers, at the same time, one cannot deny the fact that they are the originators of the messages. The writers only employed language to encode their various thoughts and ideas. More so, nobody will deliver a speech that is against his wish, opinion or intention. Hence, the concept of 'ghost writing' which Johnson (1988) cited in Ayeomoni (2007) is referred to as a problem does not really pose difficulties in the lexical analysis of speeches of government functionaries.

Language is distinctively a human phenomenon. In fact, Akinkulore (2013) argues that language as the best gift to man is as old as man himself. More so, the society at large depends so much on language for its continual existence; this is to say that survival of an individual will be difficult without language. Once an individual acquires a language, it becomes the greatest tool in his hand as a social being. No wonder, Akindele and Adegbite (1999) define language as a system of sound or vocal symbols by which human beings communicate experience. Considering this definition, it is therefore obvious that language is not an end on its own but a means to an end.

In Nigeria, the English language serves as an alternative to indigenous languages. Opeibi (2009) posits that English serves as the language of wider communication in the socio-political context of the Nigerian nation. It is obvious that the English language is employed in political activities such as campaign, election, speeches, meeting, etc. As such, language has been a powerful tool in the hands of political leaders as they manipulate the tool to suit their purposes since politics is basically about struggling to control power. Then, it is only through language that such could be accomplished, thereby making language a very strong political weapon.

The English language functions from the field of education to other spheres, politics inclusive, within and outside Nigeria. Owusu-Ansah and Torto (2013) posit that, in Ghana, English serves 'as the language of formal education, English had to be learned at school. Without it, there could be no full participation in the social, economic and political life of the urban societies that were emerging... political, social and economic prestige was attached to English alone'. We are not oblivious of the fact that major indigenous languages function along side with the English language in Nigeria polity. Thus, Ayeomoni (2012) rightly observes this and submits thus:

*The three major languages in Nigeria perform official functions side by side with the English language. They are used in some cases for conduct of business in the civil service, law, commerce and education and other official domains. For instance, English, Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba are allowed for the conduct of legislative functions in the States' Houses of Assembly in Nigeria. They also play a prominent role in education in recent years.*

The various functions allotted to the English language and various other indigenous languages are clearly stipulated in the National Policy on Education (NPE) and the Constitution. Despite the fact that the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria that major indigenous languages should function with English language in the legislative houses. In implementation, documentations in legislative houses are done through the English language solely. Ayeomoni (2012) argues that 'as far as the written mode is concerned, English can be said to be the predominant language at all levels of government'. He further posits that government publication and documents are published in English and so we experience isolated cases of records in the indigenous languages.

Languages spoken in Nigeria are many to the extent that the actual figure is not clear but it falls within the range of 450 and 500 (Omodiagbe 1992, Adegbite 2010 and Ayeomoni 2012). These languages perform various functions. Majorly, three indigenous languages are given official status in Nigeria. The fact remains that various instances of political rallies and campaigns are characterized with the use of indigenous languages apart from the three major ones.

One basic function of language as a social activity is that it serves as instrument of making laws that govern day to day human interactions. The legislative system provides one of the contexts through which this function is carried out. Legislative discourse is a sub type of political discourse and thus, legislative speech is one of the legislative discourses. Legislators as political actors are meant to perform appropriate linguistic acts, in a preordained sequence, and within the context of the procedural expectations of legislative sittings (Oyeleye and Ayodele 2012).

The speeches of the speakers in Nigeria reflect features of legislators' speeches as politicians and law makers. The importance of speeches in politics can never be over emphasized as Adeyanju (2009) acknowledges this and opines that 'right from the colonial era to date, eminent personalities in the nation's political landscape have made notable speeches that have had a long lasting effect not only on individual, but also on the destiny of the entire nation'.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The study aims at investigating a lexical enquiry into the Inaugural Speech of Speaker of Benue State House of Assembly in Nigeria as a distinct variety of political speech. Thus, the main thrust of this research is to achieve the following objectives:

- i) to identify the lexical features of the speech;
- ii) to analyse the identified features of the speech; and
- iii) to determine how the analysed features project the messages in the speech as a political speech.

### **Linguistic Approach**

Diverse options in linguistics are opened to any scholar embarking on research on language of politics. It ranges from sociolinguistic, psycholinguistic, discourse analysis, linguistic- stylistic, stylo-semantic, grapho-syntactic, pragmatic to stylistic. However, this study is based on the approach of Linguistic-stylistics as modern linguistic approach derived from the field of stylistics. This approach has been tested and adjudged reliable for analyzing and interpreting discourses (Dada 2012, Friday-Otun 2004). The Inaugural speech of Benue State Speaker in Nigeria offers a rich data for stylistic analysis. There is the need to define stylistics as an insight into the research paper.

Stylistics is a sub-linguistic field that grew out of the work of great scholars like Sebeok (1960), Fowler (1966), Leech (1969) and Freeman (1971) in the second half of the twentieth century (Ayeomoni 2007). Alan B. et al (1988) gives an all encompassing definition on the concept of style and stylistics thus:

*A branch of linguistics which studies the characteristics of situationally distinctive uses of languages with reference to literary language, and tries to establish principles capable of accounting for the particular choices made by individuals and social groups in their use of language.*

Communication occurs in diverse ways and manners. So also, individuals and community have particular ways of utilizing language. Hence, the peculiar way and manner through which language is utilized by an individual or community is style. It is observable that in studying the style of any language, linguists attempt to account for all the linguistic devices that serve specific purposes in the text.

In essence, Language does not occur in vacuum, but in context. There various and different contexts such as court, church, marketplace, school, hospital, politics and several others through which language is utilized. Thus, the context has a great influence on the choice made as 'style' at every level of language consideration.

## II. METHODOLOGY

The linguistic framework of any linguistic research serves as the tool for the analysis of data. Legislators perform linguistic acts in the process of performing their statutory functions. Oyeleye and Ayodele (2012) aver that the linguistic acts performed by legislators are reflective of their political role as law makers and politicians. Although, we acknowledge the fact that linguistic acts are important in speeches of legislators, but more important are the lexical choices made in the process of performing the acts, which are of high significance. It is this background that informed the choice of the theoretical framework for this study as the lexical cohesion of Halliday and Hasan (1976).

The data for the present research were drawn from the Inaugural Speech of Speaker of Benue State House of Assembly in Nigeria. Precisely, the Assembly of 2011 to 2013 was chosen as it is the current assembly all over Nigeria. It is pertinent to state that the data was got from State House of Assembly Hazard where such Inaugural speech is usually documented. The data is adjudged suitable be considered for lexical analysis based on its length since it comprises about 1,300 words apart from the title. The present study is adopting a linguistic-stylistic approach that goes beyond superficial analysis to an in-depth method of capturing meaning through lexical analysis. Lexical cohesion of Halliday and Hasan (1976) serves as the framework for the purpose of enhancing our interpretation of meaning as the lexical choices of the texts are context-influenced. Thus, the speech is subjected to analysis in line with the empirical goal of data within the ambit of linguistic-stylistics.

The purposive choice of Systemic Functional Linguistics as the grammatical model for this study is premised on the fact that it enables linguists to account for the forms and functions of language as Bloor and Bloor (2004) posit that 'For Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), a language is a 'system of meanings'. That is to say that, when people use language, their language acts produce or more technically construct meaning'.

## III. RESULT AND ANALYSIS

The lexical analysis was based on Halliday and Hasan (1976). Its choice was based on the relevance to the subject matter and the intention to limit the focus of the work. The lexical cohesion ties that manifest in the whole speech are identified and classified according to Halliday and Hasan (1976) schema of lexical cohesion. Lexical cohesion provides for identification of lexical items or words that have relationship in one way or the other. The speech for this study is a discourse that is made up words based on the choices of the Speaker. Therefore a schema that is based on words is important to the study of the speech as a political speech. The lexical cohesion devices that were explored in the data according to Halliday and Hassan (1976) analysis are: Repetition, Synonymy, Antonymy, Superordination and Collocation. The following tables represent the lexical cohesion devices, words employed and their frequencies.

TABLE 1  
THE RESULT OF REPETITION TERMS

Serial	Simple Repetition Terms	Frequencies
1.	members	8
2.	house of assembly	2
3.	speaker	5
4.	legislature	3
5.	responsibility	2
6.	congratulate	2
7.	last four years	2
8.	God	8
9.	opportunity	7
10.	elected	2
11.	state	3
12.	trust	2
13.	constituency	3
14.	seventh assembly	4
15.	His Excellency	4
16.	address	2
17.	collaborate	2
18.	ladies & gentlemen	3
19.	privileged	2
20.	doubt	2
21.	colleagues	2
22.	parliament	2
23.	staff	3
24.	endeavours	2
25.	thank	3
26.	party	4
27.	legislators	2
28.	let	2
29.	me	2
30.	leadership	2
31.	agenda	4
32.	assembly	13
33.	people	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>114</b>

TABLE 2

Serial	Complex Repetition Terms	Frequencies
1.	development... developmental	2
2.	legislature ... legislation ... legislations	8
3.	honourable ... hon.	2
4.	develop...developmental... development	4
5.	strength ... strengthening	2
6.	trained ... training	2
7.	appreciate ... appreciates ... appreciation	6
8.	member ... members	2
9.	priviledge ... priviledged	2
10.	constituency ... constituents	2
11.	elected ... election ... reelection	5
12.	responsibility ... responsibilities	3
13.	lawyer ... lawyers	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>42</b>

TABLE 3  
THE RESULT SYNONYMY TERMS

Serial	Synonym Terms	Frequencies
1.	legislative... parliament	1
2.	legislators ... lawmakers	2
3.	consolidate ... collaborate	1
4.	problems ... challenges	1
5.	understands... appreciate	1
6.	efficient... competent	1
7.	congratulate ... salute	2
8.	gratitude ... appreciation	1
9.	the leadership ...the speaker	1
10.	opportunity ...privilege	1
11.	first ... foremost	1
12.	rare... exceptional	1
13.	trust ... confidence	1
14.	deeply ...sincerely	1
15.	state ... say	1
16.	filed ... industries	1
17.	assembly ... hallowed chamber	1
18.	dynamic... hardworking	1
19.	unprecedented ... monumental	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>21</b>

TABLE 4  
THE RESULT ANTONYMY TERMS

Serial	Antonymy Terms	Frequencies
1.	last ... another... first	3
2.	doubt ... trust	3
3.	like ... hesitation	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>7</b>

TABLE 5  
THE RESULT OF SUPERODINATE TERMS

Serial	Superordinate Terms	Frequencies
1.	lawyers ... businessmen ... captain of industries	1
2.	6th assembly /7th assembly 1st... 5th assembly	6
3.	PDP ... CAN	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>19</b>

TABLES 6  
THE RESULT OF COLLATION TERMS

Serial	Collation Terms	Frequencies
1.	Governor... His Excellency... tenure... political party	1
2.	party... men ... women... associates	3
3.	separation of powers... checks and balances	3
4.	legislators ... legislative agenda ... chamber ... assembly	16
5.	staff ... training	4
6.	speaker ... deputy speaker ... legislators	6
<b>Total</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>43</b>

TABLE 7

TYPES OF LEXICAL DEVICE	NUMBER OF WORDS	FREQUENCIES
Repetition	47	156
Synonymy	19	21
Antonymy	3	7
Superordination	3	19
Collocation	5	43
<b>Total</b>	<b>number of lexical ties</b>	<b>77</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>number of sentences</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>number of frequencies</b>	<b>246</b>
	<b>Mean ties per sentence</b>	<b>7.02</b>

#### IV. DISCUSSIONS

From Tables 1 – 7, we observed that the five categories of lexical devices manifested in the Speaker's speech. Repetition in this study was divided into two for a clear interpretation: Simple and complex repetition. It was obvious from both simple and complex repetition tables that words that relate to the field of legislature are frequently repeated. Though, instances of simple repetition identified are more than of complex repetition. The reason for this is not far fetched as the Speaker had a large audience which cuts across all walks of life to address. He therefore needed to ensure

simplicity as much as possible. The use of repetition in speech enhanced clarity and emphasis. In fact, words such as 'members', 'Assembly' and 'God' are words with higher frequency under simple repetition. This implies that the Speaker gave prominence to God as a major determinant of whatever happened in the lives of members and people of the state. At the same time, he ensured that he gave due recognition and reference to members of the Assembly, each of which is qualified to be appointed to the position of Speaker.

Wu (2010) opines that such could achieve special rhetorical effect such as the repetition of a word in a sentence. The speaker repeated Benue State in the first sentence of his speech thus:

A while ago, distinguished Honourable members of the *Benue State* House of Assembly gave me the exceptional opportunity and privilege to lead them as Speaker of the Seventh *Benue State* Legislature.

Apart from the rhetorical effect, there is emphasis on Benue State, this implies that the speech is important, relates and central to the Assembly of Benue State. As such, repetition whether simple or complex is a ready tool in the hands of the Speaker as a political leader as he wishes to make himself understood by his colleagues and public. Repetition, whether simple or complex, makes less room for synonyms. That is, synonyms are alternatives to repetitions. It is clear from the speech that the Speaker employed 177 instances of repetition. Hence, there is high dependence on repetition. This further demonstrates the level of competence the Speaker based on his knowledge of vocabulary.

There were 19 instances of synonymy and 3 instances of antonymy in the Speaker's speech. The skillful use of synonymy enhances rhetorical device in parallelism in order to avoid repetition (Wales 1989). It is observed that the Speaker might have actually avoided the use of repetition in the few instances of synonyms. But, instances of synonyms are just about 11% of instances of repetition. More so, the Speaker employed the use of synonymys which is mostly in form of coupling; 'first and foremost', 'deeply and sincerely', 'dynamic and hardworking', and the likes for the purpose of enhancing and emphasizing meaning in the speech. This demonstrates simplicity which is greatly desired on such occasion considering the linguistic background of majority of the people that attended the inauguration ceremony. Most of the people are Tiv/English Bilinguals that learnt English language as second language. Therefore, the Speaker needed to be as simple as possible since the speech was written and delivered in English, which is the official language in Nigeria.

It is important to state that synonym as 'sameness in meaning of words' and antonymy as 'opposite in meaning of words' were employed by the Speaker to create variability in meaning in the process of passing across his messages. It is more important to emphasise the fact these instances were rather too few for such a speech, but for the linguistic background of the audience in the state. This implies that the status of English language among other languages in the environment directly influences choices made by the Speaker, especially at this lexical level which the lexical cohesion schema has brought to fore. Though, the essence of communication is for the message to be understood. The skillful employment of more instances of synonyms when compared to antonyms is highly significant for meaning in the speech. It is a way of enabling deeper understanding of lexical items utilized in the process of passing across the goodwill messages as a newly elected Speaker of the Benue State House of Assembly.

Instances of superordination and collocation are few compared to repetition and synonyms, yet, they have contributed in no small measure towards cohesion in the speech. Thus, achieving one major function of cohesion in discourse, that is, enabling readers or listeners to rely on continuity that eventually creates interconnecting relationships of words in the process of filling the missing information, by this, lexical devices that manifested in the Inaugural speech of the Speaker enhanced the interpretation of the speech as a legislative discourse.

## V. CONCLUSION

In the study of political speeches, one of the major theories that have been effective and adequate for analysis is lexical cohesion theory. It provides the framework for researchers to explore the connectedness between what is said and the effects such achieve through the choice of lexis. The connectedness that is brought to fore in lexical analysis is not important for its own sake but for its usefulness in aiding meaning. As observed from the research paper, it was realised that the use of lexical cohesive devices makes a legislature discourse to be easily interpreted as result of the predominant use of indigenous language in the state to cater for different parties with different linguistic background from Tiv ethnic group because the audience were predominantly people of Benue. These lexical devices emphasize feelings, expressions for purpose of clarification.

No doubt, the lexical analysis of the Inaugural speech of a Nigeria Speaker from the linguistic - stylistic approach through the framework of lexical cohesion has added an academic contribution to debates that bother on political speeches in Nigeria and lexical cohesion. Hence, it is therefore recommended that further researchers should beam their searchlight on other speeches of Speakers in Nigeria. Also, linguistic approaches that differ from linguistic-stylistics could be applied to Speakers' speeches. Subsequent researchers could also throw light on linguistic- stylistic approach through other frameworks.

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