

## Language as a Propaganda Tool of Electioneering in Nigeria

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### ABSTRACT

Words perform actions. Language and in fact words have different functions and according to the speech act theory of J. L Austin, utterances both written and spoken have a particular effect it should have on the listener. Many researchers have written on political campaign speeches and a universal trend in them - propaganda in Nigeria. The language use on the aspirants and the electorate with regard to campaign of calumny (propaganda) is yet to be fully studied. Politicians all over the world embellish their language in a unique way to give extra effect and force to their message in order to achieve their objective of winning more votes. This can be embodied in rhetoric or propaganda, involving repetition, promise, colloquialism, word coinages, pidginized and figurative expressions. The denotative and connotative meanings of the figurative expressions are analysed. It is argued that propaganda as an aspect of this register is characterized by exaggeration, rhetorical questions, and abusive utterances.

Keywords: Politics, Political campaign, Language politics, Communication, Campaign, Propaganda.

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### INTRODUCTION

Language use in political campaigns has certain characteristic features which differentiate it from other varieties of language use. Common as some of these features may be in everyday situation, they remain very unique with politicians and politics. The language of political campaign embodied in propaganda and rhetoric, is persuasive. Politicians adopt these linguistic devices to cajole the electorate to vote for them and their parties by presenting themselves as the only capable persons for the job. The language of political campaign as a variety of language use is intended to pass the needed information to the electorate with a view to convincing or appealing to them. It is usually laden with emotion and has the effect of causing the electorate to have a change of mind on an issue. Szanto describes the language of politics as a "lexicon of conflict and drama, of ridicules, and reproach, pleading and persuasion, colour and bite permeated. A language designed to valour men, destroy some and change the mind of others."

Politics is one aspect of human activities that use by far the greatest amount of propaganda. The word is often associated with deceit because propagandists have seldom scruples to lie or to distort the truth in order to persuade and gather people behind them. In fact, propaganda can be honest or dishonest, while its purpose might be to elicit help or tarnish image. Propaganda is a fundamental instrument of the language of politics. It is used in moulding and changing opinion.

Another feature of the language of political campaign that make it distinct and different from other forms of language use is rhetoric, which involves promises, biblical reference to God, repetition, figurative expressions etc., all at the same time. The politicians use rhetorical devices to embellish his words in order to cajole the electorate. This can sometimes determine the number of votes he eventually gets at the poll. In fact the success of a politician depends, to a large extent, on his rhetorical style in a truly democratic situation. A politician must be

thoroughly equipped rhetorically in order to tie up an opponent and at the same time imbued with the power of arousing emotions of anger or pity in the electorate. The language of political campaign, whether it is in the interrogative, declarative, imperative or exclamatory mode, contains some forms of promises to the electorate.

Language is used for informative, emotive, expressive, persuasive and directive purposes [1] [2]. The above hallmarks the role of language in political campaigns for the elements enumerated by Teilyo above are the elements exploited as instruments of both rhetoric and propaganda in political campaigns. As [3] has noted, "current rhetoric is rediscovering linguistics as a provider of more explicit tools and explanations than are otherwise available". Propaganda, on the other hand, would be apparently non-existent if the linguistic techniques it exploits were unavailable. By implication, language provides the 'raw material' for both rhetoric and propaganda, and these are what political campaigns in the Nigerian media are all about.

The purpose of political campaigns is to inform potential voters about the candidate, their political party and manifestoes or programmes; to appeal to their emotion through recourse to tribe or ethnic group, sectional interest, religious affiliation, etc, all aimed at persuading the voter to vote for the campaigner. To be able to do all these effectively, the campaigner must be able to use language in a way that goes beyond normal communication. Hence, the campaigner often resorts to propaganda and rhetoric devices in their attempt to persuade the potential voter. While propaganda has to do with persuasive techniques such as intimidation, blackmail, distortion of facts and telling the 'truth' with dubious intent, rhetoric deals with the figurative use of language aimed at exploiting the aesthetic qualities of language and making it more appealing and persuasive to the hearer.

Propaganda has been defined as "the more or less systematic effort to manipulate other people's beliefs,

attitude or reaction by means of symbols" [4]. The symbols used in propaganda, says the encyclopedia, may be linguistic, paralinguistic or material in the form of stickers, flags, hairstyles, dressing, music, etc. To achieve the goals of propaganda, the propagandist: deliberately presents a selection of facts, argument and displays of symbols in ways he thinks he will have the most effects. To maximize effects, he may omit pertinent facts; he may try to divert the attention of the reactors (the people he is trying to sway) from everything but his own propaganda.

From the foregoing, it can be seen that propaganda can deliberately distort facts and figures in an attempt to persuade the audience. [5] [6] adds that "the success of the propagandist in achieving his overall aim depends on his ability to exploit tradition and sentiment". Propaganda may manifest in any of the following five ways: false statement made in the genuine belief that they are true; deliberate lies; the suppression of truth; the suggestion of falsehood; and the slanting of news [7].

According to [8], there are four types of propaganda, namely: political and sociological propaganda; agitation and integration propaganda; vertical and horizontal propaganda; and rational and irrational propaganda. Our interest in this paper, however, is limited to political propaganda, which according to [9] is what obtains when a group, which may be a political party, government or any of its agencies, adopts persuasive techniques to influence people in order to achieve their goals. Sociological propaganda, which is the flipside of the political propaganda coin, is aimed at making an individual accept or assimilate the dominant economic and political ideologies of the propagandist. Thus, political and sociological propaganda go hand-in-glove. Political propaganda adopts different persuasive techniques whose aim is to persuade the electorate to vote in the interest of the party mounting the campaign. Campaigners adopt the following linguistic devices in their propaganda to persuade voters to vote for them: Cohesion, focusing, deictic, diction,

catchy phrases and slang, among others. They equally appeal to tradition and existing solidarity with the voters as a way of persuading the voters that the candidate is one of them [10] [11].

### **Ways of Using Language for Propaganda Exaggeration**

Exaggeration is one of the peculiar features of political propaganda. It could be through the exaggeration of one's little achievements or the over-bloating of the wrong acts of the opposition. Politicians present the wrong doings of their opponents in such a way that even their opposition's supporters would want to reconsider their stand [12] [13] [14]. In propaganda through exaggeration, the information contained in the sponsored advertisement are exaggerated.

### **Rhetorical Questions**

[15] [16] defines rhetorical question as "a forceful question which has the form of a question but which does not expect an answer." Going by this definition, rhetorical questions are questions for which the speakers already have the answers (or they are self evident) but sarcastically ask them to discredit the opponent. The propagandists ask questions that do not need any answer;

Language in any society serves as ingress to development, since it is a vehicle which conveys the identity and culture of the people from one generation to another [21] [22]. Though, political language is an aspect of languages often used by active political players to persuade and influence the electorates to support and champion their political interest [23] [24] [25]. These political languages are employed for various reasons; to educate the electorate on policies and programmes of a political party, to

the answers are already evident with the facts provided by the propagandists [17]. This stylistic device is very effective as the propagandists use such rhetorical questions to provoke thoughts on the part of the audience; to make the audience see why they must reject their opponents.

### **Vague Utterances**

Politicians make use of certain words that are vague or indefinite, i.e., words that have no realistic ways of validating them. Like rumour, they lack verifiable facts. When politicians use this tool, one person speaks for everybody [18]. The opinion expressed may not necessarily be everybody's.

### **Abusive Utterances**

Politicians, in their desperation to discredit their opponent, use some utterances that may be termed abusive. These utterances may be consciously or unconsciously used. Abusive utterances the recklessness in the use of language by politicians [19]. They become too emotional in spreading propaganda that they resort to abusive language. The abusive language deployed by politicians are meant to defame the character of the opponent [20].

## **CONCLUSION**

deceive, manipulate, sway the electorate with propaganda and half-truth information, to malign and vilify the opposition to attract more votes from the electorate. Certain languages are used by political actors to convey meaning and credibility of information meant for public consumption, it becomes imperative to note that speeches delivered during electioneering campaign is one of the deciding factors that influences the result of the election.

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