LINGUISTIC ELEMENTS IN THE NIGERIA POLITICAL ARENA: MARKETING AND DEMARKING OF 2023 PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES
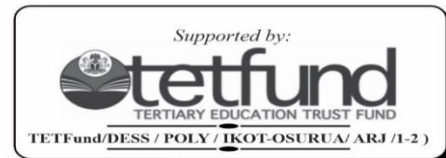
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Abstract

This study deals with the use of linguistic elements in marketing and demarketing of 2023 Nigerian presidential candidates. Nigerians want a developed nation for all citizens. This has eroded them for many years. The nation has been rated very low in human capital development, education, security, employment, and energy. The general election of 2023 becomes more interesting due to the participation of Nigerians. Evidence is seen in all social media platforms. Supporters of each candidate utilise the power and potential of language to promote the public image of their candidates while relegating the opponents. This study is anchored on Socio-semiotics analysis. Images and inscriptions used as data are collected from Twitter and Facebook posts. The illustrations are the basis for the analysis. The study finds that supporters of LP, Peter Obi, dominate the media space by using powerful linguistic elements. They also create negative images of PDP and APC candidates while their candidate, Peter Obi, enjoys the best support. The study recommends that the potential of language, be it literary, stylistic, creative, visual elements, or extra-linguistic features, be deployed in political discussion. Also, social media should be allowed for free expression as this will encourage the total evaluation of the candidates and contribute to transparency in present and future elections in Nigeria.

Keywords: demarketing, marketing, language, images, media

Introduction

Language is a powerful tool that allows people to share their ideas, aspirations and desires. (Udom,2013). In politics, language plays a significant role during campaigns as it promotes one candidate over another and shapes public opinion. Political discourse in linguistics is an interesting study area as it can evaluate the quality of political actors and raise awareness among the masses. Nowadays, political speeches and presentations go beyond mere words and sentences, as they incorporate various linguistic elements such as signs, symbols, images, and other art forms to market or demarket candidates. Additionally, literary devices have become increasingly common in the language of politics, all to convince voters to support a particular candidate.

The relationship between language and politics has yet to receive enough attention, particularly in today's society, where technology plays a major role. Various studies have examined political speech, linguistic stylistics, discourse analysis, and critical discourse analysis. Political speeches, campaigns, parliamentary debates, interviews, broadcasts, and written texts are all used to inform, persuade, and educate the public on important issues. Language has the power to convince, persuade, entertain, promise, educate, and inform people. In the English-speaking world, George Orwell's 1946 article titled "Politics and the English Language" brought attention to the link between language and politics. Orwell believed that language could manipulate people's thoughts and that propaganda could be combated by rational analysis and argument.

Politicians use language as a tool to connect with people emotionally and intellectually. The language they use can have a significant impact on how their messages are received. While the language of politics is based on rhetoric and propaganda, it is not always manipulative. Instead, it is often used to conceal or obscure the truth from the public. Although physical coercion is also present in politics, language remains integral to political action. Politicians understand the importance of language in politics and use it as a tool to build or destroy their reputations.

The Nigerian public believes that the country's underdevelopment is due to the current political leaders' incompetence, lack of ideas, old age, and tribal and religious biases. Nigeria has one of the weakest economies globally,

with high unemployment rates, terrorist activities, kidnappings, tribal and religious conflicts, poor health facilities, an inadequate education system, and frequent labour strikes. The Nigerian state faces numerous challenges that cannot be listed in one day.While citizens of different countries look

to their governments to solve social problems, Nigerian political leaders seem indifferent to the suffering of the masses. They live an expensive lifestyle, go abroad for medical treatment, embezzle public funds, and send their children abroad for education, leaving the people with no hope.

In 2023, many Nigerians hope for a change in government to improve the country. Among the many political parties, most young people on social media have chosen Mr Peter Obi of the Labour Party (LP) as their preferred presidential candidate. The Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) is the main opposition party. At the same time, the All Progressive Congress (APC) is the ruling party, with Alhaji Atiku Abubakar and Mr. Bola Ahmed Tinubu as their presidential candidates. Most young people believe that these candidates are too old and part of the system that has underdeveloped Nigeria.

As a result, they are determined to vote out the ruling party and the main opposition party in the 2023 elections. To achieve this, young people have become creative in using language to market LP presidential candidate Peter Obi and demarket Bola Tinubu and Atiku Abubaka, the candidates of APC and PDP. This work analyzes the linguistic elements used to market and demarket the 2023 presidential candidates in Nigeria, focusing on social semiotics, which is the use of images and expressions in favour of and against the candidates. While eighteen candidates from different political parties exist, attention will be given to LP, PDP, and APC candidates.

Review of Basic Concept
Political Campaign
Political campaigns refer to organized efforts by political groups to win public support through persuasion to bring about changes in government policies that benefit them. This includes various types of campaigns, ranging from local groups trying to influence politicians to political parties and candidates seeking

to change policy through elections. In pluralist societies, campaigns are essential to give voice to people with shared concerns and invite others to join their cause.

Most academic studies have focused on election campaigns, especially those run by political parties or presidential candidates. Effective political participation is achieved through well-informed and trained citizens ready to act. Language plays a crucial role in politics, as politicians use words to communicate, connect, organize, and engage people. In Nigeria, political involvement and mobilization depend on using language and communication facilities effectively. Bamgbose (2005) argues that in a democracy, people must participate, be represented, and help others, all of which require language.(cf: Udom,2016). Wrighton (2013) supports the idea that political campaigns are full of information and thoughts that every political activist needs. Language is the cornerstone of political participation and mobilization in Nigeria. Politicians communicate with citizens using language which mobilizes them to participate in the political process, such as voting, petitioning, or supporting a candidate or party. Therefore, language is the lifeblood of politics in Nigeria.

According to Onuigbo, Eme, Adadu & Ikechukwu (2018), political campaigns are important in educating the masses about politics. A politically educated Nigerian has the basic knowledge and awareness required to participate in political activities such as voter registration, voting in elections, running for political office, joining a political party, and engaging in political discussions. Politicians use language to create political awareness at all levels of government in Nigeria. Through language, citizens are educated about political ideologies, developmental plans, government goals, their rights and privileges as citizens, and other politically related issues.

Language is the driving force behind political awareness in Nigerian politics. Nigerian citizens become politically educated and aware through language and other language devices, thereby creating political consciousness. Citizens use language to make the government aware of their political rights. For example, during political campaigns, language is used to deliver manifestos and promises of the benefits of democracy. Citizens also criticize and appraise the government through language and other language facilities. Language plays a central role in every aspect of

political education, culture of the people, besides creating awareness. (cf: Udom, 2017)

Language, Political Campaign and the Media

It is highlighted in the paper that when it comes to political campaigns, one must consider the significance of language and media. Kriesi (2013) explains that the 21st century has brought about a new perspective on democracy due to the inevitable rise of mediatization. The use of language and media has become increasingly important for politicians to communicate with the public, especially in light of globalization and the influence of new media such as social media platforms. Marshal McLuhan, a renowned scholar, believes that new mass media like film, radio, and television have transformed how people communicate and express themselves. Social media is a perfect example of how language and media affect politics. It provides an inclusive platform for anyone with an internet-enabled device to express themselves. However, it also has the power to influence language and bring new words and expressions that were previously non-existent. The influence of media in political campaigns is undeniable. Political organizations rely heavily on the media to reach a broader audience, and they strategize their campaigns around it. They use phrases called "sound bites" in speeches to fit naturally into short news items, plan events that will fit media priorities, and provide pictures that will fit news bulletins.

Politicians are now more willing to share their private lives with the media to engage potential supporters in a way that traditional news may not. The personalization of politics has led to more strategic and professional political campaigns. While the effectiveness of political ads is debatable, campaigns aim to gain media attention to increase voter awareness. Burton, Miller, and Shea (2015) note that political actors use language and media to manipulate viewers systematically. In today's society, politicians must be crafty in their use of language to dominate the media space and convey their ideology to the masses.(cf: Udom, 2019) In conclusion, using language and media in political campaigns is vital, and politicians must be aware of their impact on one another. The media provides a valuable platform for politicians to reach a broad audience, but politicians must also be mindful of how they use language to convey their message. Political campaigns refer to organized efforts by political groups to win public support through persuasion to bring about changes in government policies that benefit them. This includes various

campaigns, ranging from local groups trying to influence politicians to political parties and candidates seeking to change policy through elections. In pluralist societies, campaigns are essential to give voice to people with shared concerns and invite others to join their cause.

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through language and other language facilities. Language plays a central role in every aspect of political education and awareness.

Socio-Semiotics Analysis

This approach to discourse pays attention to how meaning is built up via various media of interaction. Examining a model's element is a high point in this approach. Elements such as colour, illumination, composition, etc., are included in the visual mode (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006). As a communication phenomenon, socio-semiotics marks the unification of different semiotic resources or modes in communication events with distinctiveness. As an area of study, it concerns itself with the developmental process of theories, tools for analysis and approaches to assessing multimodal resources.

Social semiotics provides the theoretical, descriptive and analytical tools for describing and analyzing the different modes of making meaning. The social semiotic of Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006) to a multimodal discourse utilizes the linguistics orientations of Halliday's systemic functional grammar (SFL) (1985) that see language as a social semiotic. Social semiotics is interested in how semiotic resources like images, speech, writing, colours and architecture are combined to extract meaning. The study also derives insight from the analytical basis of discourse analysis (DA) to examine the ideologies housed in the visuals critically.' critical' means 'unmasking' or 'denaturalizing' ideologies in discourse (Mayr, 2010). Even though the basic interest of SSA has been the examination of linguistic structures, in recent times, its analytical perspectives have been put to visuals, encouraged by scholars who have included visuals in topics of discourse and have approached broader multimodal conceptions (Machin, 2007).

Owing to the nature of SSA as a concept that pays attention to multiple disciplines, it has been put to relevant use as elucidated in various ways by scholars from different backgrounds. As Wodak (1999, p.8) views it, SSA takes on a divergent outlook from the conventional discourse analysis methods mainly concerned with the structure and characteristics of a text. The goal of SSA to her is "to unmask ideologically permeated

and often obscured structures of power, political control, and dominance, as well as strategies of discriminatory inclusion and exclusion in language in use". Many studies have used SSA to solve social issues like inequality,

power, dominance and hegemony as effected, recreated, and challenged in text and talk (Tischer et al., 2007).

In the quarters of discourse, it is regarded as the 'social practice of language, written and spoken (Fairclough & Wodak. 1997). Discourse as social practice sees discourse as a product and determinant of ideology.

Hence, the ideology operational in a particular society or social setting is presented clearly and challenged through discourse. Van Dijk (1998) believes that ideology is a complete system of values, beliefs, and ideas that presents a parochial worldview; it covers social contradictions that offer legitimacy to those at the helm of affairs. Van Dijk (1995) states that "ideologies are typical, though not exclusively, expressed and reproduced in discourse and communication, including non-verbal semiotic messages such as pictures, photographs and movies" (p. 17). SSA is heterogeneous in its operation, a multi-faceted perspective that derives its materials and analytical methods from various backgrounds. The concept of power and social power of teams and institutions is central to studies in SSA. Wodak (2011) says that studies in SSA, in particular, analyze gender, political, institutional and media discourses, which testify to more or less overt relations of struggle and conflict. Groups and institutions now introduce and make their social power effective by taking and exercising control over people's minds, attitudes and behaviours through discourse (Van Dijk, 2008).

The media is one of the chief means/methods of exercising such power. Access to the media arid to the discourse of media is one of the crucial yardsticks for exercising power, as any group with greater access to the means of production enjoys the powerful place of exercising control of the text and the situation of the discourse and, as time progresses, the minds and then behaviours of the people in line with its plan or intention. Thus, in media, the power is exercised via persuasion, manipulation, and dissimulation. Information from powerful groups forms the belief and shapes the worldview of the general public because they believe that powerful groups have dependable information. This understanding is

formed to appear naturally agreeable (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999). Another firm area of concern in the study is ideology. Eggins (2004) notes that to use language at all is to use it ideologically. She says that "... our ideological positions will also influence our use of language: the values we

hold (consciously or unconsciously), the perspective acquired through our particular path through culture" (p. 10).

In light of the above, an analysis of images and inscriptions created by supporters of the LP candidate is presented. The images are collected from social media platforms (Facebook and Twitter).

IMAGE 1

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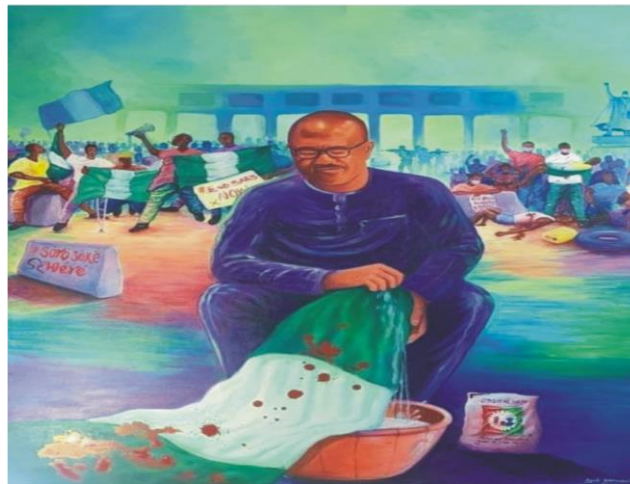
The supporters of the LP candidate have managed to use the failure of the present administration to promote the LP candidate. In image 1, Peter Obi is considered a candidate who is coming to wash away the stain of the blood of the victims of bad Governance in Nigeria. The image shows a Nigerian flag stained with blood. This quickly brings to mind the Lekki shooting during the EndSARS protest. The current administration of APC allegedly employed the services of the military to shoot innocent youths who were protesting for a better and improved Nigeria. In the process, the white colour in the Nigerian flag, which symbolizes peace, was stained with the blood of innocent citizens. In this manipulation, the image gives the sense that Peter Obi, through LP, which is presented as a detergent, is coming to wipe the tears of Nigerians and possibly erase the memory of the tragedy, which the APC government directly apparatus. This image is a powerful way of marketing the LP candidate.
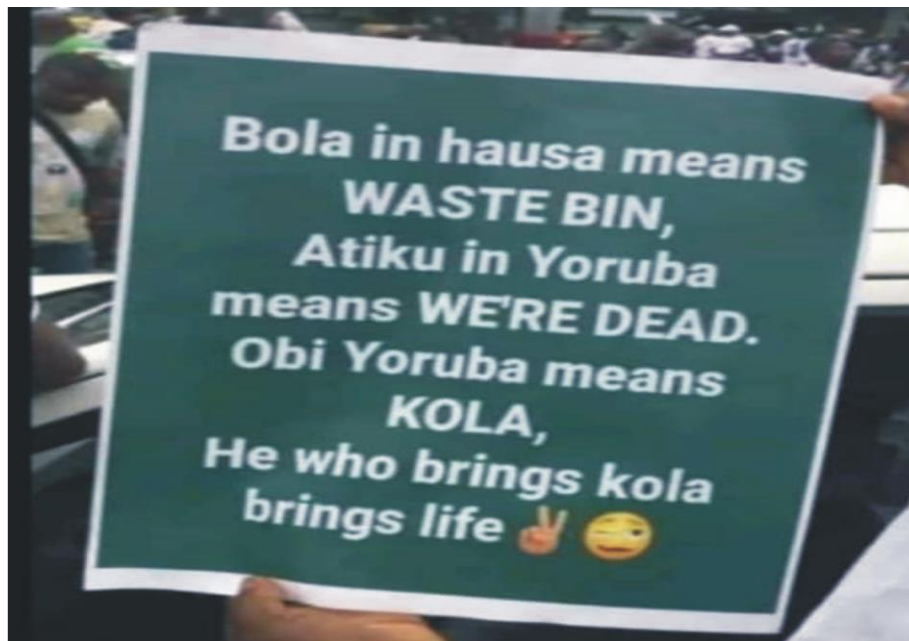
IMAGE 2

Image 2 shows a write-up which has the name of the candidate of APC, PDP and LP. A quick translations of Yoruba and Hausa languages are presented. According to the presenter, the following are the translation of the names:

Bola --- waste bin (Hausa)

Atiku --- we are dead (Yoruba)

Obi --- Kola (Yoruba)

The poster concluded that "he who brings kola brings life". The creator has utilised the multi-linguistic   nature of Nigeria to expressions his idea that the only hope for improvement in Nigeria is to vote Peter Obi in as the president of Nigeria.

IMAGE 3

Image 3 shows the candidates of PDP, LP and the running mate of APC candidate. This event was captured at signing of peace accord by the Major candidates in 2023 general elections. Atiku sits by the right-hand side of Obi, Shettima sits by the left hand side of Obi. The creator of this image achytypes the event of Jesus' death in the Bible. Two thieves were nailed alongside Jesus, one by the right and the other by the left. Arrows are used to point who represents each of the individuals on the torture stake as recorded in the Bible. Although, with no write-up every reader of the bible will clearly understand that Atiku and Shetima are here represented as thieves while Obi in the centre is presented metaphorically as Jesus. This image uses allusion to market Peter Obi the LP candidate and condemns PDP and APC candidates.

IMAGE 4

Image 4 is a Twitter post of Peter Obi on the left and Bola Tinubu at the right side. Obi stands upright and looks energetic. He moves with confidence and appears vibrant with no circles of people. To the creator of the image, Obi is strong, capable and the Nigerian people should follow him. The image of Bola Tinubu depicts someone who is fragile, sickening and old. In fact, the message from this image suggest a man who constantly needs support to

move, incapable of independence of daily life activities. The simple phrase which is used as the title of "noun and pronoun". The word noun is placed over the head of Obi while the pronoun is placed over the head of Tinubu. In linguistics concepts a noun refer to persons, animal, place and things why pronoun refer to the grammatical item which substitute or stand in place of now referring to Obi as a noun suggest that he is a person. People are meant to run for the office of the president therefore the choice of Obi is acceptable. The referent to Tinubu as pronoun indicates that APC instead of using a person maybe the vice president Osibanjo or honorable Rotimi C. Amaechi they mistakenly used something else therefore, while Nigeria need a person they cannot settle for less especially at the level of presidency.

IMAGE 5

Image 5 also shows Tinubu's curtsey visit to the Emir of Sokoto. The image shows that Tinubu is tired and stressed to the point he dozed off. The creator writes, "after creating Lagos and everything in it on the 7th day

he rested". The readers of the Bible are conversant with the passage of Genesis. There is a strong claim that Tinubu built Lagos State by his supporters. If an individual could construct a city similar to Lagos, the wealthiest state in Nigeria, this person could be suitable to lead Nigeria. The supporters of Obi use this picture to agree that Tinubu has built Lagos but needs rest from his hard work. The presentation of Tinubu's picture while asleep indicates that he needs rest instead of running for the office of the presidency, which is more complicated.

IMAGE 6
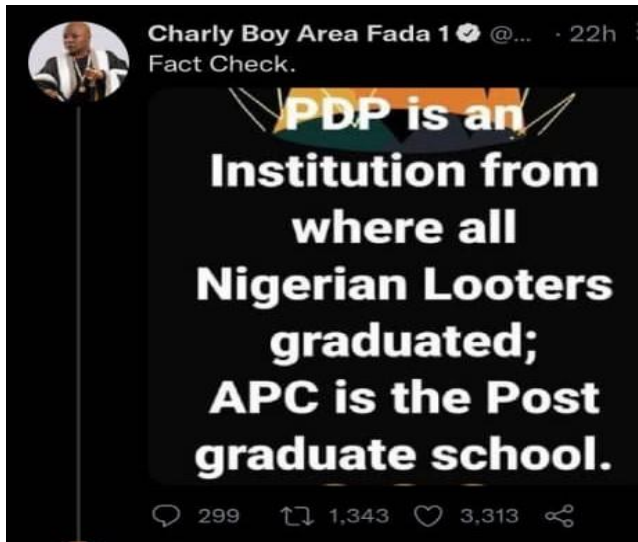
Political marketing promotes a political party's principles, ideas, and candidates (Baines, 2012). It involves the communication of the party's policies, leaders, and issues that resonate with voters based on the party's strategic stance and the interests of the public and voters. Marketing and demarketing are crucial for shaping the country and winning elections. The interaction and relationship between political groups and stakeholders facilitate dialogue, feedback, and participation in the political system (Lilleker, 2006). There is intense competition for power in Nigeria's government today. This is partly due to the increasing demands of the public, the ease of obtaining information by voters, changing voter behaviour, the use of technology in politics, and the systematic and scientific approaches adopted by rival groups. Canal and Voltmer (2014) argue that technological advances have caused a paradigm shift in the reasons and ways people engage in politics. It is now easier to verify candidates' statements and claims. Numerous online platforms exist to find information about public officials' past performance. This has positively and negatively impacted candidates' campaigns and performance.

The emergence and widespread adoption of social media platforms for communication, social relationships, and political activities have ushered in a new paradigm and endless opportunities within the political system (Himelboim et al., 2012). Social media is gradually transforming the concept and extent of political participation. New digital technologies, including social media, have created a new form of political engagement. Interestingly, social media has enabled minority

and previously marginalized groups to influence politics meaningfully (Howard & Park, 2012). This is evident in the increased participation of young adults in political processes, largely attributable to their use of social media. Supporters of Obi, the LP candidate, who are popularly known as "Obidients," have leveraged meaningful linguistic components to engage in the electioneering process. The use of simple images and succinct expressions in the form of phrases has had positive effects on the masses. The political scenario is a contest between the Obidients and other political parties. Other candidates have developed an inferiority complex or are currently intimidated.

Conclusion

The political landscape in Nigeria has recently become more dynamic and interactive, with a larger number of individuals engaging in political activities than ever before. The widespread use of the internet and social media platforms has played a pivotal role in political mobilization across the country. As such, the outcome of Nigeria's 2023 elections depends on the language used in social media communication.As noted by Lilleker (2014), the cognition and perception of voters are heavily influenced by the manner, mode, and creativity of political campaigners. The combination of linguistic elements and media platforms stimulates political participation, whether by merely paying attention, chatting online, or casting a vote. A recent study investigated the use of language in marketing and de-marketing the 2023 Nigerian presidential candidates. The demand for a quality candidate has motivated Nigerian youths to take a more active political role.

The primary competitors are the APC, PDP, and LP, with individual party members actively marketing and de-marketing their candidates. Language use has proven to be a crucial tool in achieving this purpose. However, the media is equally critical in this regard, as it helps unleash the full potential of language in Nigeria's development. Therefore, individuals should not be restricted in their expressions, especially those who genuinely seek to see Nigeria develop.Supporters of all political parties must engage with their respective candidates, as this will enhance the credibility of aspirants in future elections. With the current political activities in Nigeria, political parties are poised to present good candidates beyond 2023.

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