

## A CRITICAL STYLISTIC ANALYSIS OF SELECTED DEMOCRATICALLY ELECTED GOVERNORS' HANDING OVER SPEECHES IN GOMBE STATE

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### **Abstract**

This study dwelt on a Critical Stylistic Analysis of selected democratically elected Governors' handing-over speeches in Gombe State where it examined how language is strategically used to form or shape political reality in handing-over speeches. Political handover addresses are often seen as routine ceremonial speech; however, they are ideologically loaded texts that reflect power relations, governance accounts, and continuity strategies. The problem that motivates this study was the tendency to treat such speeches as neutral, thereby overlooking the linguistic mechanisms through which leaders legitimize their administrations and influence public perception. Consequently, this study investigates how language choices in two selected speeches, Text 1 (Danjuma Goje, May 29, 2011) and Text 2 (Ibrahim H. Dankwambo, May 29, 2019), represent and shape reality beyond surface meanings. The study was anchored on Critical Stylistics as proposed by Jeffries (2010), which provided analytical tools for revealing ideological meanings in texts. A qualitative descriptive methodology was adopted, with data purposively selected and analyzed concurrently using textual-conceptual functions such as naming and describing, exemplifying and enumerating, implying and assuming, prioritising, and modality. The findings revealed that both speakers employ inclusive deixis, evaluative language, and extensive enumeration to form a positive image of governance, while challenges are minimized through strategic prioritisation. Additionally, modality and presupposition were used to project certainty and ensure continuity of leadership. The study finally concluded that handing-over speeches are discursive tools for asserting authority, forming collective perception, and sustaining political ideology.

**Keywords:** Critical Stylistics; Handing-over Speeches; Political Discourse; Ideological Representation

### **Introduction**

Language and ideologies are inextricably linked because language can both express and support ideologies. An ideology is a system of beliefs or concepts that drive the behaviours and decisions of an individual or group. Language can be used to communicate these views and ideas and to guide how individuals think about and perceive their surroundings (Freeden, 2013). Certain political ideologies, for instance, may be associated with certain words or phrases used to communicate those views. Similarly, unique language and vocabulary may be linked with certain theological doctrines. Language usage can reflect and strengthen societal, cultural, and personal opinions (Stewart, 1999). It is critical to understand how language can be used to express and reinforce ideas, as this can help us better comprehend the viewpoints and beliefs of others and communicate with them. Simultaneously, it is critical to

acknowledge that language is not neutral and that how it is used substantially impacts how people think and act (Fowler & Kress, 1996).

Politics as a discourse activity thrives on language and the ability of the user to encode ideologies, maintain relationships encode power –relations so as to convince the people. Certain words and phrases used in political discourses represent their ideas or biases, which can influence how they describe and interpret events things to the electorate. Fairclough's main argument revolves around the concept of "discourse," which refers to language's role in expressing meaning. He posits that discourse is shaped by language and ideology and plays a crucial role in constructing social and cultural reality. Language is one important natural gift to man. It is hard to imagine how meaningful the existence of humankind will be without language. This is because its value, usefulness, and impact is felt in all areas of human endeavour such as education, business, entertainment, religion, politics. Politics is a struggle for power in order to put certain political, economic and social ideas into practice. In this process, language plays a critical role since every political action is prepared, accompanied, influenced and played by language.” In the contemporary world, it appears as if one of the most acceptable means of gaining political power is through democracy of which election is an integral part.

Reflecting on the relationship between language and democracy, Eyisi, Omazu and Akaegbobi (n.d, p. 98) declare that “the relationship between democracy and language as well as language and free society may not be immediately clear to a casual observer. But the truth is that language is related to both democracy and free society that it can contribute greatly in building a free and democratic society.” The argument of the scholars is that it is through language that the differing views of the people living in a country are aggregated and passed on to those in power. When talking of the relationship between language and democracy, it is equally important to bring to the fore the fact that it is through the instrumentality of language that politicians, through campaigns and political rallies, make their intentions known to the electorates. It is equally through language that political leaders at all levels advise, inform, warn, exhort, persuade and manipulate the minds of the electorates. No wonder that many scholars have variously asserted that the relationship between language and politics is undebatable. According to Fairclough, language is not neutral but rather laden with ideology and acts as a site of power and identity conflict. Language usage reflects and influences our perceptions and interactions with the world.

Jeffries (2019) introduced the concept of critical stylistics, which combines stylistic tools analysing language choices in a text with critical discourse analysis examining the text's impact in social and political contexts. Critical stylistics focuses on the connection between language and ideology, emphasizing how language is infused with ideology and shapes social and cultural realities. It particularly highlights how language in literature and other works reflects and reinforces power dynamics, and how critical stylistic analysis can uncover and resist these power dynamics. Additionally, it underscores language's role in shaping our worldview and the communication and support of ideologies.

Despite extensive research on critical stylistic analysis in political discourse, this study has revealed some gaps it plans to fill. Previous study attempts by many researchers have explored language of political speeches from pragmatic , linguistic stylistics, rhetorical analysis , discourse analysis and critical discourse analysis , this research however differs from the others on critical stylistics as it will adopt a combined critical assisted method consisting of critical discourse analysis and critical stylistics .The research will adopt the twenty two tools of analysis as against other

researches that centred on segments of the tools. This study believes that the language used by the democratically elected governors are unique in their bid to perform social functions. The research also intends to examine if the governors in their language choices encode same ideological leanings via same linguistic resources representative of their party affiliation or it is individualistic

### **Statement of the Problem**

Though researchers have relied on critical stylistics analytical framework to study texts from different perspectives and in different contexts, more of these studies have centred on literary texts, few studies have investigated non-literary texts like political speeches. However most of these studies have used some of the tools of CSA to study these speeches however, this research is hinged on the premise that in political speeches, linguistic choices are not mere evidences of the speakers style rather they are an assemblage of carefully selected linguistic and representational choices to explicate and implicate meanings beyond the surface level of shaping reality. These linguistic and representational strategies are tools of ideological positioning. It is against this background that this research intends to use the 22 tools of critical stylistic analytical framework to study the speeches of two democratically elected Governors of Gombe state. The research also intends to examine if the governors in their language choices encode same ideological leanings via same linguistic resources representative of their party affiliation or it is individualistic

### **Objectives of the Study**

The aim of this research is to carry out a critical stylistic analysis of selected democratically elected Governors' handing over speeches in Gombe State. The study would be guided by this objective:

- i. to identify the language choices used to represent reality in the speeches.

### **Research Question**

- i. What are the predominant linguistic choices used in the speeches?

### **Review of Related Literature**

#### **The Concept of Stylistics**

Stylistics, as a branch of linguistics, delves into the study of linguistic style, examining how language choices contribute to the overall meaning, tone, and effect of a text (Abdelalim, 2025). The origins of stylistics can be traced back to the early to mid-20th century when scholars began exploring the relationship between language and literature in a more nuanced and systematic manner (Abdelalim, 2025).

One of the foundational figures in the development of stylistics is the Russian formalist Roman Jakobson. In the 1920s, Jakobson emphasized the importance of studying linguistic devices and patterns within literary texts to understand their artistic and communicative functions (Outes, 2024). His work laid the groundwork for the structuralist approach to linguistics, which later influenced the emergence of stylistics. The structuralist ideas were further developed by the Prague School, a group of linguists, literary critics, and semioticians who explored the structural aspects of language and their impact on meaning. Jan Mukarovsky, a key figure in the Prague School, contributed significantly to the analysis of literary devices and their role in shaping style.

As structuralism gained prominence, scholars in different parts of the world began incorporating linguistic principles into the study of literature. In the 1950s and 1960s, British linguists like Michael Halliday and Randolph Quirk played pivotal roles in the development of stylistics. Halliday's systemic functional linguistics provided a framework for analyzing language in context, focusing on the social functions of language and its role in communication (Wang & Ma, 2022). Quirk, on the other hand,

contributed to the study of stylistic variation, emphasizing the importance of context and register in linguistic analysis.

The 1960s and 1970s saw the rise of transformational-generative grammar, led by Noam Chomsky, which also influenced stylistics. Chomsky's theory emphasized the innate structures of language and the generative rules that govern linguistic creativity (Chomsky, 2012). Stylisticians began to explore how these underlying structures manifest in the stylistic choices made by writers.

Stylistics continued to evolve with the advent of pragmatics in the late 20th century. Linguists like Erving Goffman and Roman Jakobson expanded the field by examining how context, social roles, and communicative intent contribute to linguistic style. Pragmatic stylistics became a valuable approach for understanding how language functions in real-life communication, influencing the analysis of both literary and non-literary texts. In recent years, advances in computational linguistics and corpus linguistics have provided new tools for stylistic analysis (Hickey, 2014). Researchers now use computer programs to analyze vast amounts of text, identifying patterns and stylistic features that may have been challenging to uncover manually.

### **Critical Stylistics**

The advent of critical stylistics can be attributed to the release of Jeffries (2010) work on Critical Stylistics, titled "The Power of English." It is a systematic approach of analyzing textual data that integrates techniques from stylistics, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), and Critical Linguistics (CL). It is, as indicated by Alaghbary, Alazzany, & Al-Nakeeb (2015), a continuation of the CL tradition of prioritizing the text in the examination of ideologies. For Jeffries, this framework focuses on "the stylistic choices and textual analysis" employed by text producers, whether they are deliberate or unintentional. Such texts involve certain ideological content that has an impact on the recipients of these texts. The objective of employing critical stylistic strategies is to enhance the recipient's awareness of these concepts, regardless of whether they manipulate their perception or not (Ahmed & Abbas, 2019). It emphasizes the concept of 'text' as the focal point of its operations, encompassing many manifestations of language usage (Jeffries, 2015).

The investigation of textual meaning holds significant importance within the field of stylistics, as it centers on the manner in which language is employed to convey a certain interpretation of reality, hence yielding ideological implications (Abeed, 2017). In this respect, Halliday argues that the interpretation of textual meaning is consistently influenced by the stylistic choices of language features within texts, which possess the potential to be ideological and manipulating (Jeffries, 2017). Jeffries asserts that CDA mostly focuses on socio-political aspects, whereas critical stylistics primarily focuses on linguistics and provides a comprehensive analytical toolset for textual analysis. Besides, critical stylistics focuses on analyzing the ideological meaning within texts by separating the meaning within the text from the intentions of the author and the interpretations of the reader.

Critical stylistics as a theoretical framework was put forward by Jeffries in 2010 with the publication of a book titled *Critical Stylistics: The Power of English*. The theory is a combination of insights from existing linguistic theories such as critical linguistics, critical discourse analysis and functional linguistics. Citing Ibrahim (2017), Onoja (2023) writes that critical stylistics attempts to serve as a bridge connecting stylistics (with its emphasis on textual choices) and critical discourse analysis which is known as an analytical framework "that studies how ideology, identities and inequalities are produced, reproduced and maintained in text in social and political contexts."

In the word of Jeffries (2014a, p. 417) “critical stylistics is a new field of stylistics related to critical discourse analysis as well as to stylistics itself. It has the aim of bringing the rigour and textual focus of stylistics to the analysis of non-literary texts with a view to identifying the ideological underpinnings of such texts.” The above reveals that critical stylistics is a fusion of two linguistic approaches, that is, CDA and stylistics. Stylistics is believed to be a reliable analytical tool for analysis of a text because it is “rigorous, retrievable, and replicable” (Simpson, 2004, p. 2). CDA, too, is an approach that is very useful in analyzing a text because it has the capacity to reveal the hidden meanings behind the lexical choice and sentence structure used in a text (which often may have an ideological undertone).

### **Theoretical Framework**

The critical stylistics analytical (CSA) framework by Leslie Jeffries is adopted for this research. CSA believes that the producer of a text (spoken or written) may or may not desire the resulting ideational content from their communicative products. Correspondingly, the receivers of the products may react either deliberately or subconsciously to the notions that underneath the text's ideational value. Jeffries argues that no single conversation, knowingly or unwittingly, is free of ideologies. According to Hall (1985), ideology serves as a meaning-making system where ideologies are the ideas which people use to figure out how the social world works, what their place is in it and what they ought to do. Ideologies can be expressed through language and ideas in literature and other media types. By carefully examining the language and ideas in a text, it is possible to discover and comprehend the ideologies that the study reflects or promotes. This includes investigating how a text's language and themes promote or challenge prevalent ideas and how the text's language and themes may disclose the author's or creator's ideologies. The textual-conceptual functions toolkit developed by Jeffries (2014) which consists of 10 tools. The description of each tool is discussed below.

**Naming and describing:** Texts identify and characterize the entities in their imagined world. This function is more than just naming things, as it also involves choosing words and phrases with different connotations. The way in which noun phrases are constructed can also be significant. Adjectives and post-modification can be used to convey evaluative or ideologically sensitive information. Nominalized verbs are another interesting feature of naming. They reify processes and remove any indication of agents or actors, making it difficult to attribute actions to specific people or groups.

**Representing actions/events/states:** The linguistic portrayal of events can substantially shape readers' perceptions. Verbal choices, particularly verbs, hold the power to highlight diverse facets of an event while maintaining the core information unchanged. For instance, an event like someone conversing with their mother can be depicted using various verbs, such as "telling," "talking," "being close to," or "gossiping." These verb choices conjure distinct impressions, whether the action was deliberate, a conversation, or an unintended revelation.

**Equating and contrasting:** The ability of texts to create unconventional synonyms and antonyms was noticed during a UK Conservative Party's election poster campaign. The campaign featured statements like "The Labour party describes him as black, while the Tories portray him as British," with images of an Afro-Caribbean man and an Asian man. The structure of using conventional opposites (Labour/Tory) suggests an expectation that the two object complements (black/British) should also be opposites.

**Exemplifying and enumerating:** The well-known three-part series symbolizes completeness and is often employed as a rhetorical tool by politicians (Atkinson 1984).

It encompasses a wide range of meanings, from itemized lists that enumerate category members to using items as mere illustrations without aiming for comprehensiveness.

**Prioritising:** The arrangement of information in main and subordinate structures is a significant element of textual meaning, linking the systematic language structure with its contextual application. Subordination follows established syntactic rules, but the organization of information in main and subordinate clauses provides valuable insights. Reordering the subordinated parts can highlight different aspects of the same information, showcasing how prioritization shapes understanding and unveils the producer's values.

**Implying and assuming:** Implicature, belonging to pragmatics, is expected to be under the interpersonal meta-function, but its textual nature and similarity between 'assuming' and 'implying' make it an ideational function as well. Like other textual-conceptual functions, implicature shapes a worldview reflecting the producer's (or narrator's) opinion, making it less interpersonal than a speech act, though it can still produce one. Implicature, initially developed for interaction, is applicable to written language, allowing the use of Gricean maxims when analysing politicians' statements that may contain excessive or insufficient information, leading to accusations of protesting too much or concealing the truth.

**Negating:** Negation can significantly influence readers' ideologies when the text producer aims to encourage envisioning the positive version. The level of detail in the negated version affects how likely the recipient is to imagine the positive counterpart. Nahajec's research (2009, 2012) demonstrates the influential role of negation in texts, regardless of text type or genre. Moreover, she shows that negated meaning operates at the textual level, striking a delicate balance between semantic and pragmatic meaning and between the system and its use.

**Hypothesising:** The Hallidayan modality system is seen as an interpersonal system by SFL followers, representing the producer's viewpoint. Modality plays a significant role in the production of meaning and aligns well with the ideational aspect of the critical stylistics model.

**Presenting others' speech and thoughts:** At the textual level, quoting others' speech and thoughts is an important aspect of meaning. Short (2012) extensively discussed the subtle effects of a wide range of possibilities in speech presentation. This includes indications of speech occurrence, varied versions of verbatim speech, and direct speech with the strongest claim of faithfulness.

**Representing time, space and society:** Deixis is inextricably linked to interaction, as deictic words and phrases refer to real-world elements via referencing time, geography, or social systems. The use of deictic aspects in decontextual texts, particularly written ones, enables humans to explore uncharted "worlds" only through the text, whether they are fictional, mythological, or representations of the real world. This skill has enormous ideological consequences since it allows for the building of "text worlds" that reflect political realities and dogmas.

This paper adopts these ten tools of critical stylistics as it will help the researcher identify the linguistic choices, representational strategies and the ideological structures in them.

### **Methodology**

This study is designed as a qualitative descriptive research that seeks to examine and interpret the linguistic features and ideological meanings found in political discourse. The data for the study is drawn from two purposively selected handing-over speeches delivered by democratically elected governors in Gombe State. These speeches were Address delivered by His Excellency, Alh. (Dr.) Muhammad

Danjuma Goje on Sunday, 29<sup>th</sup> May, 2011 at Pantami Township Stadium, Gombe (hereafter referred as TEXT 1) and Address delivered by his Excellency, Dr. Ibrahim Hassan Dankwambo FCA, OON on Wednesday, 29<sup>th</sup> May, 2019 at the Exco Chamber, Government House, Gombe, (hereafter referred as TEXT 2). These speeches were selected based on their relevance on transition and continuity in governance. The data were concurrently analyzed using Leslie Jeffries (2010) critical stylistics theory, a theory that incorporates and integrates both stylistics and critical discourse analysis in the analysis of texts.

### **Data Presentation and Analysis**

#### **Identification of Language Choices Used to Represent Reality in the Texts**

##### **Inclusive Deixis**

###### **Text 1:**

*“...we made sustained efforts to bring the dividends of democracy to the citizens of Gombe State...”* (para. 3)

###### **Text 2:**

*“...we have without doubt, significantly improved on infrastructural development in all sectors of the economy...”* (para. 6)

The use of inclusive first-person plural pronouns “we” in both Text 1 and Text 2 shows the critical stylistic tool of representing time, space and society (deixis), specifically social deixis, which forms governance as a collective duty rather than an individual endeavour. In Text 1, the expression “we made sustained efforts” distributes action across the administration and implicitly includes the people of Gombe State, thereby raising a sense of shared ownership of achievements. Similarly, in Text 2, “we have... improved” performs the same ideological function of collective success. This linguistic choice disguises individual responsibility and spreads accountability across all and sundry. In this way, the speakers form a reality in which development is not imposed but collaboratively achieved.

##### **Enumerating and Exemplifying Achievements**

###### **Text 1:**

*“...we have constructed 62 standard, asphalt-laid township roads... The total amount spent... is about N44.5 billion...”* (para. 5)

###### **Text 2:**

*“...we have constructed over 1,012.50kms of urban township roads.....”* (para. 12)

Paragraphs 5 and 12 in Texts 1 and 2 respectively exemplify the use of exemplifying and enumerating, a major tool in Critical Stylistics, where numerical and listing are used to form a reality of measurable achievement. In Text 1, the mention of “62 roads” and “N44.5 billion” provides an impression of precision, transparency, and accountability, which enhance credibility. Similarly, Text 2’s reference to “1,012.50kms” functions to amplify the scale of development. These enumerations are not merely informative; they serve an ideological function by presenting governance as realistic success, thereby discouraging incredulity. The strategic quantification transforms abstract claims into seemingly objective facts, positioning both administrations as efficient and development-driven while pre-empting criticism through data-based evidences.

##### **Naming and Describing**

###### **Text 1:**

*“...transforming Gombe from a sleepy rural State into a fast-growing socio-political and economic hub...”* (para. 15)

**Text 2:**

“...the people of Gombe State are patriotic, peace loving, enterprising, hospitable.....” (para. 4)

Furthermore, the excerpts gotten from paragraphs 15 and 4 in Text 1 and 2 respectively, show the tool of naming and describing, where lexical choices are used to bring about ideological evaluation. In Text 1, the transformation narrative from “sleepy rural State” to “fast-growing... hub” forms a before-and-after contrast that magnifies the speaker’s achievements. The adjectives “fast-growing” and “economic hub” carry positive connotations that elevate the state’s status. In Text 2, the sequence of adjectives (“patriotic, peace loving, enterprising...”) form an idealized identity for the people, thereby making the speaker to be aligned with worthy citizens. These descriptive choices are not neutral; they are used to bring about reality by attributing positive qualities to both the administration and the governed.

**Implying and Assuming**

**Text 1:**

“...we were forced to secure some facilities... it is better to secure these loans... than allow them to rot away as abandoned projects...” (para. 17)

**Text 2:**

“...we have encountered several challenges... dwindling revenue... however... we have prevailed...” (para. 9)

The critical stylistic tool that the above excerpts employ is implying and assuming, where fundamental meanings are embedded beyond the statements. In Text 1, the justification for loans presupposes that borrowing is a responsible and necessary decision, thereby masking potential criticism of indebtedness. The phrase “better... than abandoned projects” forms a binary that forces acceptance of the speaker’s choice as the only rational option. Similarly, in Text 2, the mention of “challenges” followed by “we have prevailed” implies resilience and competence without giving prominence to failures. Both speakers strategically frame difficulties in a way that enhances their leadership image, transforming potential weaknesses into evidence of strength.

**Prioritising**

**Text 1:**

Long detailed listing of projects (paras. 5–14) and brief mention of challenges (paras. 10, 17)

**Text 2:**

Extensive achievements (paras. 11–35) and short reference to challenges (para. 9)  
Structurally both texts show the critical stylistic tool of prioritising where certain information is foregrounded while other aspects are not. In both speeches, achievements occupy extensive textual space and are elaborated with detail, whereas challenges are compressed into brief mentions. This imbalance is not accidental but ideologically motivated; it directs audience attention toward success while minimizing awareness of shortcomings.

**Hypothesising**

**Text 1:**

“...I am certain that Gombe State would experience tremendous development during his tenure...” (para. 19)

**Text 2:**

“...I have no iota of doubt... he would take the State to the lofty heights...” (para. 3)  
In the same vein, the excerpts above portray hypothesising (modality), where modal verbs and expressions of certainty are used to construct a projected reality of future success. In Text 1, “I am certain” and “would experience” show strong epistemic

modality, presenting the future as predictable and positive. Similarly, the expression “no iota of doubt” in Text 2 expresses absolute confidence. These modal constructions go beyond simple prediction; they function ideologically to affirm the incoming administration and ensure continuity of political ideology.

### **Discussion**

From the data presented and analyzed above, the findings of this study reveal that both texts contain systematic and ideological linguistic choices to form a favourable representation of governance and leadership in Gombe State. Through the consistent use of inclusive deixis (“we,” “our”), both speakers present governance as a collective business that fosters solidarity. Additionally, the reliance on exemplifying and enumerating, through statistics, figures, and detailed listings of infrastructural projects, serves to construct a reality of measurable development and administrative success. This representation of achievements gives the impression of objectivity and transparency, even though it is rhetorically selective. Furthermore, the use of naming and describing with many evaluative lexical items (e.g., “fast-growing,” “peace loving,” “enterprising”) contributes to the construction of a positively framed social and political reality, where both the state and its citizens are portrayed in idealized terms.

Furthermore, the study finds that these linguistic choices perform deeper ideological functions by forming audience perception, asserting authority, and ensuring continuity of governance. Through implying and assuming, both speakers justify controversial actions (such as borrowing or governance challenges) by framing them as necessary and beneficial, thereby guiding the audience toward favourable interpretations without obvious argument. The tool of prioritising is also evident in the structural organization of the speeches, where achievements are stated extensively while challenges are minimized, creating a persuasive narrative of success. Moreover, the use of hypothesising and modality (e.g., “I am certain,” “no iota of doubt”) shows a future of assured progress under the incoming administrations, thereby validating political continuity and stability. Notably, while both speakers employ similar linguistic strategies, Goje’s speech is more assertive and legacy-driven, whereas Dankwambo’s incorporates elements of reconciliation and humility, such as apology and forgiveness, which serve to soften leadership and strengthen emotional appeal.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, this study has demonstrated that the handing-over speeches are not merely ceremonial or informative texts, but carefully constructed discourses shaped by strategic linguistic choices that reflect and project ideological meanings. By applying the framework of Critical Stylistics, the analysis has shown that both speakers systematically make use of the tools in their speeches to their achievement, unity, and continuity in governance. These linguistic patterns show that governance is represented as collective, successful, and should be people-oriented. The speeches serve deeper ideological purposes and while both texts share similar stylistic strategies, differences still exist in tone, particularly Dankwambo’s more reconciliatory and humanistic approach, highlight the flexibility of language in adapting to changing political contexts while maintaining core ideological functions. Therefore, language in political speeches works as a resource for meaning-making, through which leaders actively construct social, political, and institutional realities rather than simply describing them.

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