

## **DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF SELECTED HATE SPEECHES AGAINST PRESIDENT MUHAMMADU BUHARI**

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### **Abstract**

Politics has been part of every society since the beginning of man's civilization. Speeches at every circumstance are geared towards explaining, persuading, amusing, informing or influencing ideas. The link between language and politics has long been recognized. In every political dispensation of every human society, politicians and political players usually resort to hate speeches. In the course of doing this, there might be issues of misinterpretation. This paper investigates social media politics and hate speeches against President Muhammadu Buhari. The population of the study consists of Nigerians and international communities. The data analysed were taken from 2014 to 2023. The source of data for this study is the social media (Facebook, WhatsApp, YouTube, Instagram, Twitter, etc.) and also the print media. The participants cut across different categories of people who in some cases are not necessarily or directly the hate speakers. The study was conducted using qualitative descriptive design in order to describe the hate speeches on social media against President Buhari. The Political Discourse Analysis (PDA) perspective of Fairclough and Fairclough (2012) formed the basis for the analysis. In this paper, ten hate speeches were selected and analysed. It was found that the forms of the hate speech which manifested in the data are: accusation, insult defamation, blasphemy, slander, provocation, incitement and distribution of fake news. The findings also show that the hate speeches against President Muhammadu Buhari have great impact on his personality and government. The study recommends the need to educate the public about the negative effects of hate speech and the need to promote a culture of tolerance and respect. This will help to reduce the prevalence of hate speech in the society.

**Keywords:** Language, Politics, Social media, Hate speeches

### **Introduction**

Language is a unique human attribute which is used as a medium of communication. It is a formidable instrument by which human experience is analysed (Martinet, 1970. ke P20). According to Kekere-Ekun (2006) it is through language that man features effectively in the society. As a system of communication, it does not exist in a vacuum, but operates in a context of

situation. It is these contexts which determine the variations in language that we call register. Language is very crucial to human survival and existence. The primacy of language cuts across all facets of human life - government, education, health, religion, politics, and so on. Taiwo (2009. P.92) observes that language conveys power. It moves people to exercise their franchise, debate and even revolt. It therefore has impact on political stability or polarization.

The election of President Muhammadu Buhari in 2015 made history in Nigeria as it was the first time an incumbent and a member of the ruling party; the People's Democratic Party (PDP) was voted out of office and the main opposition taking over mantle of leadership as the President and Commander-in-Chief in a democratic dispensation. It is therefore of paramount importance that a democratically elected president or government should place premium attention on the electorates as democracy is government of the people by the people and for the people; good governance therefore, is the primary means of building, establishing and strengthening these social relationships. From this point of view, it is quite agreeable that politics has now become a linguistic affair while language has become a political issue, (Ayeomoni and Akinuolere 2012) that must be ventured into and this has prompted this study which attempts a discourse analysis of hate speech against President Muhammadu Buhari on social media from year 2014-2023.

### **Objectives of the study**

This study has the following objectives:

- (i) To find out whether there are hate speeches against President Muhammadu Buhari as the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria
- (ii) To ascertain what kind hate speeches are found on social media against President Muhmmudu Buhari
- (iii) To identify the factors responsible for the hate speeches;
- (iv) To find out the implications of the hate speeches on President Mohammadu Buhari's administration

### **Languages and politics**

Since this study is on a discourse analysis of hate speech against President Muhammadu Buhari, it is important to understand the relationship that exists between language and politics. In doing this, we subscribe to the view of Chilton (1998. P.20) which states that politics is "the art of governance and power" while language is "the universal capacity of humans in all societies to communicate. Politics is a struggle for power in order to put certain political, economic and social ideas into practice, Bayran (2015. P.23). It is concerned with power to make decisions, control resources, and control other people's behaviours and values. In this process, language plays a crucial role, since every political action is prepared, accompanied, influenced and played out with language. Therefore, language plays an important role in politics because its main function in different political situations is to enable politicians form structurally stable social relationships. Fairclough (2006. P.1) observes that it can "misrepresent as well as represent realities, it can weave visions and imaginations which can be implemented to change realities and, in some cases,

improve human well-being but it can also rhetorically obfuscate realities and construe them ideologically to serve in just power relations”. In order words, language use in politics when put into action can yield democratic dividends or achieve the reserve.

The intrinsic link between language and politics has long been recognized, even in the days of Aristotle, when he opines that man is more of a political animal than bees or any other gregarious animals and man is the only animal which God has endowed with the gift of speech (Politics 1-11). Beard (2000. P.2) suggests that it is necessary to study the language of politics because it enables us to “understand how language is used by those who wish to gain power, those who wish to exercise power and those who wish to keep power.”

### **Hate speech**

Several attempts have been made to define hate speech. The Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe conceived hate speech as covering of expressions which spread, incite, promote or justify racial hatred, xenophobia, anti-semitism or other forms of hatred based on intolerance. As a result, it generates stigmas, stereotypes, prejudices and discriminatory practices against those who are construed as being different (ICIR 2015). Hate speech to Kukah (2015), is any communication that denigrates a particular person or a group on the basis of race, colour, ethnicity, gender, disability, sexual orientation, nationality, religion, or other characteristics. It can be in the form of any speech, gesture or conduct, writing or display and usually marks incitement, violence or prejudices against an individual or a group. It is a speech that employs discriminatory epithets to insult and stigmatize others on the basis of their race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation or other forms of group membership (Adibe, 2015).

In the Nigerian context, hate speech include acts of insulting people for their religion, abusing people for their ethnic or linguistic affiliation, expressing contempt against people because of their place of origin (Umar, 2015. P.5). From the foregoing definitions, it suffices to align with the thought of a political scientist and media commentator, Adibe (2015), that hate speech is a catalyst for violence and that it is very doubtful if there would be hate-motivated violent attack anywhere without hate speech and the hatred that it purveys.

In the same vein, according to Neisser (1994 P. 337), hate speech refers to “all communications (whether verbal, written, symbolic) that insult a racial, ethnic and political group, whether by suggesting that they are inferior in some respect or by indicating that they are despised or not welcome for any other reason”. On the other hand, Kayambazinthus and Moyo (2002) refer to hate speech as “war waged on others by means of words.” This understanding of hate speech is particularly true when it comes to hate speech on social media networks. Online hate speech is mainly characterized by the use of words and symbols.

As regards motivation of hate speech, many scholars have pointed out several factors, such as lack of tolerance, political clashes, discrimination, enmity and the openness of social media as motivating hate speech online. For instance, even before the emergence of social media, Spiegel (1999. P.375)

predicted that the internet will be another communication tool for racists and “hate-mongers” to spread their messages. Nemes (2002. P. 193) considered the internet a very important channel for those who want to spread messages of hate. Withschge (2008. P.75-92) however, present a more balanced understanding of the Web’s potentials within political communication. On the one hand, he endorses Brant’s views of a “horizontal, open and user friendly nature of the internet,” which affords people with opportunities for greater participation in the public sphere. On the other hand, however, he subscribes to Dahlberg’s counter arguments that the Web might facilitate abusive postings and even contribute in silencing some voices. Witschge argues that whether the Web enables deliberation or not, it depends on how people utilize the opportunities provided online.

Stating the effects of hate speech, Leets (2002 P.223) says it violates the individual’s dignity, result in humiliation, distress and psychological or emotional pain. Similarly, Nemes (2002) avers that hate speech can provoke pain, distress, fear, embarrassment and isolation to individuals. While hate speech towards groups of people can bring inequality problems and isolation, it creates the feeling of fear and discourages them from participating in the community and expressing their opinions. Adding to the argument, Nielsen (2002. P.165) avers that the degradation and humiliation brought by hate speech can silence the ‘victims’ and therefore reinforce existing hierarchies in society; while Parekh (2006) says it can also lead victims to become aggressive and dangerous.

According to Gagligardone et al. (2014. 13-15) online hate speech is not essentially different from similar expressions found offline. However, there are some specific characteristics as well as challenges unique to online content and its regulation. They summarize these characteristics as permanence, itinerant, anonymity or pseudonym and trans-nationality. On permanence, hate speech can remain online for long period of time and in different formats across different platforms and can be repeatedly linked. In this sense, the architecture of any particular platform influences how long topics ‘stay alive’. For instance, Twitter is built around the idea of trending topics, which may facilitate quick and wide dissemination of hateful message. However, if topics are ignored, discussion rapidly fades. Facebook on the other hand, provides the opportunity for long lasting discussion threads. Notwithstanding, online hate speech content may particularly be itinerant, which means that even when it is removed from one platform, it may find expression elsewhere, possibly on the same platform under a different name or on different online spaces. If a website is shut down, it can be quickly reopened using a web-hosting service with less stringent regulations or via reallocation to a country with laws imposing higher threshold for hate speech. The itinerant nature of hate speech also means that poorly formulated thoughts that would not have found public expression and support in the past may now arrive on spaces where they can be visible to a large audience.

Essentially, the office of the president is the highest political office in any country; therefore, it needs to be in constant touch with the people and this

can only be made possible through deliberate efforts to avoid clashes and resentment from the citizens.

The lacuna which this study recognizes is that hate speech against President Buhari has not been studied and analysed to the best of the researchers' knowledge. It is therefore this gap in scholarship that this research work intends to fill.

### **Empirical review**

Very recently, researchers are beginning to show interest in hate speech as it is taking over our political and social media spaces. Attempts have been made by researchers to analyse hate speech in our society. One of these attempts was made by Bassey who in 2020 carried out a study on electoral campaign and hate speech in the print media. His study focused on the use of hate speech before, during and after the 2015 general elections. The study does an analysis of the January 19, 2015 advert on the Punch Newspaper. The research design adopted was the content analysis. The paper discovered that the advertisement should not have been allowed because it promoted hate speech and was against the ethics of the Nigeria Press Council. The study therefore concludes that the advertisement was inimical to democracy and against the ethics of journalism. However, Bassey's study differs from the present one because while the study focused on hate speech in electoral campaign in print media, the present study pays attention to discourse analysis of hate speech against President Muhammadu Buhari on social media.

Okoro in 2016 conducted a research on pragmatic analysis of selected political speeches of President Muhhamadu Buhari. The study was undertaken to identify the pragmatic acts of locution, illocution and perlocution of President Muhammadu Buhari's speeches during the campaign build-up of the March 2015 general elections. To do this, the study adopted the Speech Act Theory of Austin (1962) and Searle (1969) using the illocutionary acts of expressive, commissive, declarative, directive, assertive and verdictive. The data for the study were drawn from five purposively selected speeches of President Buhari. Formal Declaration of Interest for Presidency, My Manifesto and Vision for Nigeria, his speech at Chatham House, London, Acceptance Speech and Inaugural Speech. The quantitative research methodology was used, of which the descriptive survey method was employed for the analysis of data. These speeches were labelled A, B, C, D and E and ten sentences were extracted from each speech thereby generating a total number of fifty sentences from which one hundred speech acts (direct and indirect illocutionary acts) were obtained. The result of the analysis showed that the Overall Relative Frequency Percentages (ORFPs) of the selected speeches were: directive 28%, assertive 60%, expressive 16%, declarative 20%, commissive 42% and verdictive 34%. The result further revealed that these speeches were characterized by a preponderance of assertive and commissive acts which are mostly used as mobilization strategies especially in political campaigns by candidates to persuade their listeners in order to win elections. The study was concluded on the note that President Buhari should match his words with actions in order to

fulfill all his campaign promises as Nigerians expect a complete turn around and positive change in all aspects of their nation's life.

Bamigbola (2017) did a critical discourse analysis of Gen. Muhammadu Buhari's Post-Election Speeches. The two speeches analysed were his acceptance speech as the president-elect on April 1, 2015 and his inaugural speech after his swearing-in on May 29, 2015. This study relying on Fairclough and Dijk's models for Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar examined the rhetoric in the language use of the speaker and the trend of the speeches. The findings of the study revealed that the use of language of the speaker center's on current happenings and pervading feelings in the society. The study also found that the speaker's propositions and views are based on his previous experiences as a minister, a military head of state and a long-term participant in the political arena of the nation.

Fiberesima in 2021 examined social media and hate speech with a view to looking at its implications for socio-political stability in Rivers State. Seven hundred (700) questionnaires were retrieved from the public to whom these questionnaires were distributed. Responses to questions were analysed and statistical results revealed a significant positive relationship between social media and hate speech. His findings revealed that those that propagate hate speech are usually elected officials, political parties candidates for elective positions, opinion makers and civil society officials (26-51).

From the foregoing, it is clear from the available findings that some scholarly works have been done on hate speech on social media. It is, however, important to note that there is still a gap to fill in that, no study has been carried out on the analysis of hate speech against President Muhammadu Buhari on social media. This present study will be of a great significance to knowledge and scholarship.

### **Theoretical framework**

Political discourse analysis (PDA) is the analysis of political discourse from a critical perspective (Fairclough and Fairclough, 2012). It focuses on the reproduction and contestation of political power through political discourse. "PDA should answer genuine and relevant political questions and deal with issues that are discussed in political science" (Van Dijk, 1997). In discussing PDA, three major scholars have contributed in terms of theory and method. These scholars include: Van Dijk (1997), Chilton (2004), and Fairclough and Fairclough (2012). Van Dijk's approach will be centered on in this study.

Van Dijk (1997) gives an adequate explanation on the theory and application of PDA. According to him, PDA is about political discourse as well as a critical enterprise. It is a critical enterprise because it is an offshoot of CDA. He further contends that the relationship between CDA and PDA lies in the fact that CDA is interested in how power, power abuse and dominance are reproduced and that one cannot isolate power when discussing politics.

For Van Dijk (1997), political discourse simply means 'doing politics'. He notes that not all discourses that mention 'politics' is qualified to be called political discourse. He identifies certain factors that determine if a discourse is actually a political discourse. These factors include; actors or authors, viz,



politicians; activities or practices; and context. Aside politicians who are both the actors and authors of political discourses, “we therefore should also include the various recipients in political communicative events, such as the public, the people, citizens, the masses and other groups or categories” (Van Dijk, 1997).

On the other hand, it is not all the actions performed by politicians and other participants that can fit in as political discourse. Thus, Van Dijk (1997) contends that it is not enough to conclude that a discourse is political because a politician partakes in it, rather the activities and practices of the participants constitute factors that will determine if a discourse is political or not. Political discourses must have political implications and functions. Van Dijk (1997) highlights that political activities or practices of participants could be participating in political actions, such as governing, ruling, legislating, protesting, dissenting, or voting. In addition to activities and practices, Van Dijk recognizes context as another important factor in determining a political discourse. Just like in any other model of discourse analysis, context is an indispensable tool for arriving at an unbiased and objective result. Van Dijk (1997:14) opines thus:

Participants and actions are the core of such contexts, but we may further analyse such contexts broadly in terms of political and communicative events and encounters, with their own settings (time, place, circumstances), occasions intentions, functions, goals, and legal or political implications. That is, politicians talk politically also (or only) if they and their talk are contextualized in such communicative events such as cabinet meetings, parliamentary sessions, election campaigns, rallies, interviews with the media, bureaucratic practices, protest demonstrations and so on.

In addition, the outcome of such contexts must be political in nature such as enactment of laws and norms, distribution of social resources etc. Van Dijk (1997) remarks that gender, medical, corporate and educational discourses, even though the outcomes affect people, do not fall under political discourse.

The choice of PDA for the analysis of hate discourse data is because PDA is a perspective of discourse analysis which is concerned with analyzing politically related discourses. It is more appropriate because since this study is on hate speeches used in the Nigerian political domain, it then became imperative to adopt PDA to enable us highlight the political discourse structures of hate speeches and achieve other objectives of this work. More so, PDA is an approach that seems to be nominally applied to the study of hate discourses. The hate discourses that form the data for this study qualify as political discourses because they were uttered by political actors, in a political context and about a political activity.

### **Methodology**

This study applies a qualitative descriptive design in order to describe the hate speech on social media against President Muhammadu Buhari. Data gathering for this study involves two methods. The first part of the data used

cover the period of 2014 to 2023 during which President Buhari had his campaigns, was declared president-elect and acted in office as President and Commander-in-Chief of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. This set of data was sourced from the social media (Facebook, WhatsApp, YouTube Instagram, Twitter, etc.) and also print media. The data was collected through automated technique. Different categories of people, (civil servants, health workers, teachers, market women, students, artisans, commercial drivers, etc.) were added up into a WhatsApp group where they were made to forward posts from different sources that relate to hate speech against President Muhammadu Buhari. Fifty hate speeches were gathered through the WhatsApp group created. The participants in the WhatsApp group are not necessarily the speakers of the hate speeches. For this paper, ten out of the fifty hate speeches gathered were analysed.

### **DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS**

The data presented and analysed below are ten of the hate speeches gathered from the social media for the purpose of this study.

#### **HS 1**

*Major General Muhammadu Buhari has emerged as the APC flag bearer and President Goodluck Jonathan has emerged for the PDP. Now the battle for the soul and future of our nation begins. The focus of light shall prevail over the forces of darkness and God's counsel alone shall stand over Nigeria. I stand with Jonathan. Let's get it on.*

(Ayo Fayose former Governor of Ekiti State.)

Fani Kayode, commonly called FFK in a frantic effort to discredit the APC and its flag bearer, Mohammadu Buhari, termed it the “forces of darkness and his party then, “forces of light. The darkness symbolizes that no good can come out of Buhari and his party, and therefore the future of Nigeria is at stake if APC and indeed Buhari emerged victorious in the election. The representative of the force of darkness is definitely a misfit for a country that has enough darkness already. Therefore, no wise Nigerian would vote for APC (Buhari) with this type of derogatory description and representation.

#### **HS 2**

*Buhari is likely to die in office if elected, like the late President Yar'adua.* (Ayo Fayose former Governor of Ekiti State.)

The nation's first lady Dame Patience Jonathan at the presidential campaign rally in Kogi State, described Gen. Buhari as unfit to be Nigeria president, calling him old and brain death. This hate speech could result in damage to the individual's dignity, that is damage the qualities that make a person valuable to someone else (Harenm, 1994). Making jokes and mockery of a person's age can result in normalizing negative aspects which is an effect of hate speech. This reinforces prejudice and it is hard to overcome (Costelloe, 2015).

#### **HS 3**

*Anybody that comes and tells you change, stone that person.* (Credited to Patience Jonathan, *Nation* 15/03/15)



Change is the slogan of the All-Progressive Congress (APC) and indeed Buhari during 2015 general elections. The then Nigerian first lady, at a presidential rally held in Calabar was recorded to have given this insightful statement to the members of Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP) to stone anyone that promises them change.

**HS 4**

*Our people no dey born shittren wey dem no dey fit count.  
Our men no dey born shidlrren troway for street. We no dey  
like the people for that side. (Credited to Patience  
Jonathan, politics rally at Uyo)*

At the same rally in Calabar, the First Lady then openly mocked and sarcastically castigated Buhari by saying "Our people no dey born shildren wey dem no dey fit count. Our men no born shildren thruway for street. We no dey like the people for that side is a derogatory statement obviously referring to the Northern parts of the country where the awful practice of child abandonment known as 'Almajiri' is still practiced. Normalizing negative aspects of a hate speech reinforces stereotyping and very difficult to overcome, therefore group stereotyping creates tension between people, which can lead to a more serious situation in future (Costeline 2015).

**HS 5**

*Buhari is a mistake, Northerners can't vote someone like  
him again in 2023. (Credited to Northern Elders Forum).*

This statement credited to Northern elder's forum fits into hate speech classification because it evidently reveals the name of the person been attacked. This implies that the statement is a direct affront against the person of Buhari. Therefore, it is explicitly a hate speech. Implying that the President did not fulfill the expectations of the citizens and this has made people to lose confidence in him.

**HS 6**

*The Buhari government is a calamity that befell the  
Nigeria state (AIT News Review)*

Yes, this comment could be seen as coming from a frustrated and disappointed person. In the comment, Buhari's government has been reduced to calamity.

**HS 7**

*Nowhere is safe, not the President's hometown nor his  
region, ... nor BRT buses on Lagos roads; Buhari has  
failed us a President. (Credited to Northern Elders Forum).*

This comment is a direct and explicit speech showing the speaker's negative attitude towards President Buhari. The extract represents judgment and accusation that Buhari is a failure. In this case President Buhari is also accused of not being able to protect Nigerians and in indeed his own people.

**HS 8**

*Overfeeding gave us energy to fight Jonathan, Now Buhari  
has caused mass starvation. (Credited to Omokiri)*

This comment is credited to Reno Omokri, one of the most known critics of Buhari. Here, out of curiosity and outspokenness, he expresses his thoughts by

comparing Jonathan's government and Buhari's in relation to the welfare of the citizens. His judgement on Buhari's government is negative and sentimental. It is an open confrontation full of hate speech.

#### **HS 9**

*Bandits were created by Gen. Buhari to oust Jonathan*  
(Credited to Omokiri)

This statement was made by Nuhu Ribadu, former EFCC boss. This comment is a strong accusation leveled against President Buhari. The speaker shows a kind of dislike towards Buhari by uttering this statement which sparked tension and uproar across the country. The seriousness of this can be understood from the fact that many northern politicians and rulers are being pointed at as being responsible for the unrest in the North East and indeed Nigeria generally.

#### **HS 10**

*Buhari is now being used to define a global example of horrible and destructive leadership* (Credited Robert Gordon University).

A good and successful leader possesses traits and attributes that qualify him as one, such as fulfilling campaign and electioneering promises, empowering the people and taking absolute responsibilities of the welfare of his people. Buhari is been described as a "horrible and destructive leader" before the whole world because he did not perform well.

#### **Conclusion**

The findings of the study at this point affirm that there are hate speeches against President Muhammadu Buhari. It was found that the forms of hate speech that are prevalent in the data are: accusation, insult, defamation, blasphemy, slander, provocation, incitement and spreading of fake news. The study concludes that there are hate speeches against President Muhammadu Buhari on the social media.

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