**Deixis in President Muhammadu Buhari’s 2015 Campaign Speech**

**Justus C. Ugwu (2016)**

Department of English and Literary Studies, Godfrey Okoye University Enugu

Email: [jc.ugwu@gouni.edu.ng](mailto:jc.ugwu@gouni.edu.ng)

*Abstract*

*Drawing on William Hank’s deictic field and Karl Buhler’s deictic centre, this paper examines the use of deixis in President Buhari’s February 6th campaign speech in the build-up to 2015 general elections in Nigeria. The paper reveals that Buhari, systematically, sets up the deictic field by issuing several person, spatial, temporal and social deictic elements in a, hitherto, plain field called “ground zero”. His deployment of deixis in the text creates a deictic field where Nigerians (the electorate) are thrust at the deictic centre and Buhari and his opponents are set in binary opposition. The placing of Nigerians at the deictic centre and the use of the person deixis “we” and “our” index a closer relationship and, thus, brings Buhari and his party closer to the deictic centre where Nigerian people assess him and his party favourably and his opponents otherwise.*

**Key Words: deixis, origo, deictic centre, ground zero, Buhari**

**Introduction**

Actors engage in verbally mediated interactions under specific social conditions that both constrain and enable their abilities to relate to one another and the world around them. The varying conditions are captured in the literature under the rubric of *context.* The role of context in helping to determine reference is largely concerned with the ways in which the interpretation of utterance depends on the analysis of the context of utterance. It is generally acknowledged that perception of and orientation in space are determinant factors in human actions and interactions. Consequently, speech heavily depends on knowledge of the context: where, when and by whom is a sentence uttered. These three dimensions are traditionally seen as the *deictic centre* of all linguistic events without which no linguistic expression can be properly interpreted. Karl Buhler in his *Theory of Language: The Representational Function of language,* captures the deictic centre as the *Origo* (The reference point in relation to which a deictic expression is to be interpreted), and goes further to demonstrate the same on a larger canvass with the phrase “Here Now I” (39), where *here* is for spatial deixis, *now* for temporal deixis and *I* for person deixis. Accentuating the fact that context is the centre of all deictic anchorage, William Hank asserts that “Deixis occupies a central place in the study of context because it is the single most obvious way in which the speech setting is embedded in language structure itself” (19). Part of the objectives of this paper is to rethink the relationship between language and context through the lens of *deixis* with particular reference to President Buhari’s 2015 campaign speech.

In linguistics, *deixis* refers to words and phrases such as ‘me’, ‘there’ or ‘after the flood’, which cannot be fully understood without additional contextual information. Yule (99) is credited with the view that “deictic expressions generally are bits of language which can only be understood in terms of speaker’s intended meaning”. In a similar vein, Renkema sees deictic words as “words with a reference point that is speaker or writer-dependent and is determined by the speaker or writer’s position in space and time” (40). The scholars cited above hold the view that the reference of deictic expressions cannot be determined without the knowledge of extra-linguistic context of the utterance. *Deixis* are often classified into: *Person deixis* which refers to interactants in a communicative event such as *I, we, me, you, he, she, it, they*; *place/spatial deixis* referring to spatial relations in a communicative event such as: *there, here, this, that*; *time/temporal deixis* which refers to time relation in a communicative event such as: *now, then, yesterday, tomorrow* and *social deixis* which refers to social relation in a communicative event.

*Deixis* has also been seen by scholars as instrument of persuasion and ideological posturing, and campaign speeches readily fit into this functional canvass of *deixis*. Campaign speeches are veritable tools in the hands of politicians in their attempt to sell their views and feelings to the public, with the sole aim of reshaping the minds of the electorate to agree with theirs. A campaign speech centers on, among other things, the programme of successive governments and goes further to present the speaker, or his party, as the antidote to the people’s problems. Politics, being the ideas and activities relating to gaining power in a country or place, only thrives through the instrumentality of linguistic resources. This is as political actions are prepared, influenced and played through the instrumentality of language. An understanding of the deictic anchorage of a text facilitates the understanding of its rhetoric intent.

The researcher has embarked on an investigation of the use of *deixis* in President Buhari’s 2015 campaign speech because as the *standard bearer* for his party, APC (All Progressive Congress), it is within the ambit of logic to say that his manipulation of linguistic resources serves as interface between his political party and the people, embodying the norms, philosophy, aspirations, and the persuasion of the APC.

Language and power relation has become an object of linguistic inquiry among scholars who, in line with our view, hold the opinion that campaign texts are, often, sites of struggle of differing ideologies which are contending and struggling for dominance in a polity. In his take on language and power relations, Wodak posits:

The constant unity of language and other social matters ensure that language is entwined in social power in a number of ways: language indexes power, expresses power, involved where there is contention over power and where power is challenged(11).

Since part of the cardinal concern of politicians is to manipulate linguistic codes to actualize their political ends, it is in the view of the present researcher that there is need for awareness on the side of the electorate that they (the electorate) should become conscious of the potential of text to hide dominant ideological position, using linguistic resources as objects of deception. It is his hope, therefore, that an explication of the application of deictic elements in President Buhari’s speech will help to reveal the reality of his intentions.

This study is theoretically anchored on William Hank’s theory of *Decitic Field* and Karl Buhler’s *Deictic Centre*. In his *Exploration in the Dictic field* Hank asserts:

The deictic field is composed of (1) the position of communicative agents relative to the participant frameworks they occupy (that is, who occupies the position of speaker, addressee and others as defined by the language and the communicative practices of its speakers, (2) the position occupied by objects of references and (3) the multiple dimensions whereby the former have access to the latter (193).

Hank maintains that to perform an act of deictic reference is to take up a position in the deictic field and to be the object of reference is to be thrust into a position. The notion of deictic field in this work is further enriched by the concepts drawn from Buhler (34), specifically with *ground zero* and *Origo* (deictic centre), where *Ground Zero* refers to the moment before the first deictic expression is issued, while the *origo* which is also called *the deictic centre* is the reference point in relation to which a deictic expression is to be interpreted.

**Statement of the Problem**

Politicians use campaign speeches as instruments for propaganda and persuasion in their quest to sell their views and reshape the minds of the electorate. They manipulate linguistic codes to actualize their political ends at the expense of the electorate who are, largely, ‘naïve’ optimists. A naïve optimist, in the context of this paper, is someone whose interpretation of an utterance proceeds as though he does not know that speakers are not always sincere. Allot argues that “given an utterance, a naïve optimist simply looks for an interpretation that makes the utterance relevant to him and accepts it without considering whether the speaker could have intended another thing than his interpretation” (48). The researcher has, therefore, decided to investigate the communicative function of the different kinds of deixis found in President Buhari’s campaign speech in relation to his ideological posturing to determine the extent to which the *naïve optimist hypothesis* is implicated in the context of our study.

Previous studies in our area of investigation seem to have placed higher premium on the use of deixis in political speeches without recourse to politician’s manipulation of deixis as linguistic codes in their attempt to reshape the minds of the electorate to agree with theirs. It is the above condition that, evidently, creates the research slot which this study hopes to fill.

**Objective of the Study**

This study aims at investigating the deictic features of President Muhammadu Buhari’s 2015 campaign speech. To realize the aim of this study, the following specific objectives were formulated:

1. To specifically identify the use and effect of deictic elements in President Buhari’s 2015 campaign speech.
2. To apply the analytic tools of *deictic field* and *deictic centre* in the explication of the text.
3. To awaken the consciousness of the electorate on the ideological connotations of the deictic elements employed in campaign speeches.

**Research Questions:**

In order to realize the above objectives, the following research questions were, accordingly, formulated:

1. What are the prevalent deictic features in the speech?
2. What effect do deictic choices create on the electorate?
3. Of what relevance are *deictic field* and *deictic centre* as analytical tools in the explication of the use of deixis in a narrative universe?

**Justification for the Study**

Results got from the examination of the use of deixis in a campaign speech stand to be of great significance to the academia and the society at large. The Nigerian political space, since the inception of the Fourth Republic in 1999, is fraught with fierce campaigning and marketing of political ideologies to the electorate. The overall aim is to gain the attention and patronage of a broad section of the electorate and to ultimately win elections. Campaign, in any democratic society such as Nigeria, is largely achieved through language use; a unique means of communication which is an intrinsic inheritance of man. It follows, therefore, that man’s political instincts manifest in his choice, and use of particular categories of words which carry broad and specific measure of meaning. A careful effort must, therefore, be made to assess, holistically, the linguistic nuances in his campaign speeches that coalesce into his ideological consciousness which, he hopes, will also arouse the consciousness of the people to support him.

This study hopes to provide insights on the language of politics and the strategies that are used to achieve persuasion. It will, no doubt, constitute a worthy addition to the literature of political discourse in Nigeria. Furthermore, the study has pedagogic relevance as the information on the English language usage from this study will contribute to the information data bank on the richness and dynamism of English in meeting various communication ends in Nigeria.

**Review of Related Literature**

This chapter examines related literature in the field in order to situate the work in a proper canvass and delineate the niche it will fill in the discipline. Points of convergence and divergence between the scholarly works in our area of investigation are identified, articulated, and ranked in relation to their utility to the present study.

In 1999, Lwaitama did a deictic study on the use of ‘I’ and ‘we’ by Nyerere and Mwinyi (former Tanzanian Presidents). Differentiating between scripted and unscripted speeches, he maintains that Nyerere used more exclusive forms while Mwinyi used more inclusive forms in scripted than unscripted speeches. He insists that the distinction is informed by the speaker’s Kiswahili-speaking statuses (Kiswahili being Mwinyi’s first language but Nyerere’s second).

Shpresa, Gjergji did “A Pragmatic Analysis of the Use of Deixis in Poetry and Novels of Ismail Kadare.” He reaffirms the interconnectedness between *deixis*, *context* and *indexicals* in the argument that:

Pragmatics allows us to investigate how *meaning beyond the words* can be understood without ambiguity. The extra meaning is there, not because of the semantic aspects of the words themselves, but because we share certain *contextual* knowledge with the writer or speaker of the text. The term *deixis* and *indexicality* are frequently used almost interchangeably, and both deal with essentially the same idea: *Contextually dependent references* (139).

He maintains that deictic reference occurs whenever a linguistic sign receives part of its meaning from extra-linguistic context such that in order to know what is meant by such expression as “she brought this flower to me yesterday”, we need to know who uttered it, on what occasion and where.

In his study, Wilson (19) focused on the shifting status of ‘I’ and ‘we’ as used by Gerald Ford and Jimmy Carter in the United States debate of 1976. He concludes that politicians’ shift of reference from ‘I’ to ‘we’ and vice versa manifests the necessity to spread the load of responsibility, and their fear of being misinterpreted by the audience or co-debaters.

Edward Jay Mansarate did a detailed “stylistic Analysis of Deictic Expressions in President Benigo Aquino’s October 30th speech. In the study guided by a framework anchored on Hank’s deictic field, Mansarate concludes that president Benigo “extensively and strategically made use of referring expressions in order to set up the deictic field in a way that he and his critics stand in binary opposition and the Fillipino people at the deictic centre” (13).

There is a sense of unanimity in the findings of the scholars whose works on deixis we have reviewed. They all hold the view that in political discourse, politicians use deictic elements to persuade the people to believe that they have clean and honest intentions and, as Adetunji (14) puts it, they “Conscript the audience to accept their view in a political discourse.” The available literature in the field, therefore, replicate our view that deictic elements are used by politicians to curry favour from the electorate.

**Theoretical Framework and Methodology**

The theoretical underpinning for this work is William Hank’s *Deictic Field* and Karl Buhler’s *Deictic Centre* and *ground zero.* We note after Hank that “the deictic field is a single field composed of, first, the positions of communicative agents relative to the participant frameworks they occupy; second, the positions occupied by objects of reference and third, the multiple dimensions whereby the former have access to the later” (191). For clarifications, the *Communicative agents* refer to person deixis in a narrative universe; *Participant framework* addresses the issue of deictic position in a narrative universe (whether at subject position as a speaker; object position as audience or deictic centre as a reference point in relation to which a deictic expression is to be interpreted) while *object of reference* could be any of the deictic elements in a narrative universe.

Hank’s notion of *deictic field* share a common boundary with Buhler’s theory of *deictic centre* but differs from it in that the former is as Mansarate rightly puts it, “based on practice and foregrounds the embedding of language in social fields” (4). Hank maintains that through *embedding,* social relations of power, conflict and value are merged with deictic field. Drawing on the works of Buhler, Goffman and Bourdieu, Hank asserts that his framework adapts the field concept to the semiotic structure of deixis where the result is “an analysis of deictic practice as an emergent construal of socially embedded deictic fields involving practical equivalences, counterpart relations among objects and rule of thumb” (191).

In karl Buhler’s theory, he defines speech context in terms of two interlocking terms: (1) *The Symbolfeld* (symbolic field) made up of words, other signs and the concept they represent and (2) *The Zeigfeld* (demonstrative field), the experiential present of utterance production which he labeled “Here Now I.” Other concepts associated with Buhler’s theory are: *Ground Zero* and *Origo.*

*Ground zero* is concerned with the moment before the first expression is issued. At this point, the deictic field is free from any deictic expression. When a speaker begins to make utterances and the first deictic expression is issued, the hitherto ground zero begins to get occupied with different context-based information through a process called *deictic reference.* To perform an act of deictic reference is to take up a position in the deictic field. We note after Hank that “deictic reference takes place in every field in which agents communicate with language” (194). To be the object of reference, in a deictic field, like we have pointed out earlier, is to be thrust into a position. The two acts of taking up and thrusting into a position are both performed by the speaker. Consequently, the speaker has the power to use deixis in such a way that he situates himself, and other communicative agents in a manner that judgment by other communicative agents will be favourable to him.

*Origo* is a reference point in relation to which a deictic expression is to be interpreted. It is also called the *deictic centre*. The deictic centre captures the present time, location, participant role and social relevance of the speaker. Consequently, in deictic reference, establishing the deictic centre is so important as it facilitates the identification of other time, location, participant roles and social statuses in the field.

A concept that is related to Hank’s idea of field is Goffman’s *social situation,* as captured in his classical essay of 1972 entitled “The Neglected Situation.” He opines that “a social situation is an environment of mutual monitoring possibilities, anywhere within which an individual will find himself accessible to the naked senses of all others who are present and similarly find them accessible to him” (63). Goffman’s contention is that a deictic field offers the communicative agents the opportunity to cross – examine all the agents that have taken up a position in the deictic field.

**Method of Data Analysis**

Using Hank’s deictic field and Buhler’s deictic centre, the researchers analyzed deictic expressions in the data following Fillmore’s “Major grammatical types of deixis” (7). They include: *person, place* and *time*. The fourth category is *Social deixis* as put forward by Azzawi (34).

Person deixis deals with the grammatical persons involved in a communicative event. First and second person pronouns refer to what Michael Silverstein calls *the speaking and hearing speech – participant(s)* and he designates third person pronouns as *the non-speech or narrated participant* (7). The study begins the analysis by x-raying the kinds of personal pronouns used by President Buhari in his speech. The analysis traced the roles assigned to persons involved in the speech to establish the position of each person relative to the deictic centre to see how the distance established would help to reveal the overall idea advanced in the text.

The data is also examined through the lens of spatial deixis. Spatial deixis is a deictic reference to a location relative to the location of a participant.

Equally captured in the analysis are the researchers’ identification of temporal deixis, and the frequency of its occurrence in the text studied. The purpose was to determine the different periods of time involved in the speech and their semantic import.

Social deixis which we defined in the context of this study as the marking of social relationships in a narrative universe with either direct or indirect reference to the social statuses of the agents was equally examined in our analysis. The textual analysis is presented in the next section of the paper.

**Textual Analysis**

**Structure**

The speech which serves as the data for this analysis, contains twelve paragraphs, seven hundred and fifty-one words and seventy-one deictic elements. The deictic words are further broken into:

Person deixis 21

Spatial deixis 25

Temporal deixis 15

Social deixis 10

**Ground Zero**

The deictic field is referred to as *ground zero* before the first deictic reference is issued. That is the time the field is plain and free from any deictic elements and their corresponding roles. Consequently, on the eve of February 6th, 2015, President Buhari established the ground zero. As soon as he issues the first deictic reference in his first sentence, the deictic field begins to be filled with different person, spatial, temporal and social relations which create certain effects in the speech. The first deictic reference is captured in Buhari’s first sentence labeled (1):

1. First *I* would like *Mr. Chairman*, if *I* may pay tribute to *Nigerians* as a whole who are enduring all sorts of hardship and deprivations on *daily* basis.

Sentence 1 contains 5 deictic words which can be further broken into:

First person deixis “I” 2

Third person deixis “Nigerians” 1

Social deixis “Mr. Chairman” 1

Temporal deixis “daily” 1

**Person deixis in the text**

The second most salient deictic category used by Buhari in the speech is person deixis. The speech contains 21 person deixis which can be further classified into:

First person singular, subjective ‘I’ 4

First person plural, subjective ‘we’ 7

First person plural, objective ‘us’ 3

Second person singular/plural, subjective/objective ‘you’ 4

Third person plural, subjective ‘they’ 1

Third person plural, objective ‘them’ 1

Reflexive pronominal form ‘myself’ 1

Total 21

The role assigned to persons involved in the speech exposes the position of each person relative to the deictic centre and shows how the distance established aids our understanding the meaning of the text.

Buhari’s deployment of second and third person deixis to refer to Nigerians places his addressees at the *origo* or *deictic centre* and himself near the deictic centre. The second person deixis establishes a near-each-other relationship between the speaker and his addressees while his use of third person to refer to Nigerians connotes far-apart relationship relative to the speaker. Buhari has, therefore, issued more second person pronoun in the text to achieve the desired symmetry.

In theory, Buhari and his major opponent, the PDP led government, should have the same distance from deictic centre, certainly, from opposite directions. However, his use of first person deixis to refer to himself and his party and third person for his opponents brings him and his party closer to Nigerians who are thrust at the deictic centre while his opponents are far removed from the deictic centre. This is captured in the extract labelled (2).

1. Since *1999*, PDP has presided over our country’s decline – *Nigeria* in my experience has never been so divided, so polarized by an unthinking government hell bent on ruling and stealing *forever* what befalls the country… *we* in APC are resolved to bring change to *Nigeria.* *We* plan to do things differently. *We* plan to put priority on protection of lives and property for our collective good.

The use of ‘we’ and ‘our’ in the extract index a closer relationship, shared principle and common aspiration between President Buhari, his party and the Nigerian people. Conversely, the opposition are treated as outliers with the use of third person deixis which is farthest from the deictic centre.

The only time President Buhari uses second person for his opponents, he does for a reason. The researchers hold the view that Buhari intentionally uses the second person deixis to bring the opposition closer to himself to show a strong stance and challenge them. The challenge, we think, should have been of low import if he used third person. His use of second person deixis for his opponents is captured in the extract labeled (3).

1. Simply because *you* sell oil and steal part of the money does not entitle *you* to cook figures and announce phantom economic growth when all the major indices are on the decline.

Buhari’s use of second person for his opponents in extract 3 indexes his bravery to directly address them, an effect that the use of third person could not have created. In all, Buhari deploys person deixis in a way that he effectively foregrounds himself and party and backgrounds the oppositions.

**Place/Spatial Deixis**

Place deixis has the highest frequency ratio in Buhari’s deployment of deictic elements. While we understand that the communicative event takes place in a physical space in Lagos, where the speech is delivered, there is no deictic evidence for the above since Buhari does not mention it in the text. However, his use of the term ‘Nigeria’ (eleven) 11 times in the text makes ‘Nigeria’ the spatial deictic centre. The de-emphasis on ‘Lagos’ and emphasis on ‘Nigeria’ is understandable since the speaker is not addressing only Lagosians but the entire Nigerians. The Nigerian deictic centre could attract the addresses to favour the speaker in the discourse as the addresses would surely identify themselves more with Nigeria which is the only country they have got and, may do anything to protect. Buhari’s use of Nigerian deictic centre aids in the setting up of a deictic field where the Nigerian people assess him and his party favourably and his opponent otherwise.

**Time/Temporal deixis**

Buhari makes use of temporal deixis 15 times in the narrative universe. Such temporal deictic items include *daily, an occasion to celebrate ourselves, until victory is won, in the last 18 months, since 2003, since 1999, the last 16 years of PDP government, now, when, then.*

It is obvious from the above that phrasal – temporal deixis occur more in the text than single-word temporal deixis. Given the distribution of temporal deixis in the text, the origo seems to be that of President Jonathan’s administration indexed as *now*. Buhari’s reference to the past and present administrations of PDP as *then* and *now* and his reference to his party’s possible take-over of power from the present administration as *when* thrust the PDP and the APC in binary opposition and Nigerians at the deictic centre. He effectively sets up a temporal deictic field where the person deictic centre, Nigerians, would hold favourable judgment for him and his party and the reverse for his opponents.

**Social deixis**

Of the four categories of deixis examined in this work, social dexis has the least distribution in Buhari’s text. We have pointed out in our previous section in our method of data analysis that social deixis gives us information on the social statuses of deictic agents, especially person deictic agents. Social deixis is captured in the text with such expressions like *hawkers, the poor, Mr. chairman, we in APC,* with *Mr. Chairman* having the highest number of distribution.

It is evident that the social deictic element *Mr. Chairman* refers to the national chairman of the APC Chief John Odigie whereas *hawkers,* and *the poor* index Nigerians who have been impoverished by the PDP led government. He, therefore, uses the social deictic category to present the PDP led government as the greatest enemy to the Nigerian populace and the need for change.

**Findings**

The findings from this study are consistent with the previous results from studies on deixis in political discourse. The study reflects tactical manipulation of pronominal elements by the speaker to curry favour from the electorate. The speaker’s use of two and three –participant deixis is strategic. More strategic is his switching back and forth from two to three-participant person deixis which evidently pushes his opponent farther from him and Nigerians. Buhari’s preference for ‘we’ as against the use of ‘I’ indexes the president’s deliberate attempt to establish an identity that is close to the electorate’s collective persuasions and aspirations, in order to achieve what Adetunji (191) terms “anchorage in political discourse.”

The president’s reference to three different time deixis: the time before 1999 (which he judges favourably), the sixteen (16) years of what he termed “PDP’s misrule” and the future which he insists that the electorate can only secure by voting out the PDP led government and enthroning an APC led government evidently endears the APC to the person deictic centre, the Nigerian people.

The high frequency of the term ‘Nigeria’ in the text makes ‘Nigeria’ the spatial deictic centre. This aids in setting up a deictic field where Nigerians assess the speaker and his party favourably. `Expressions like *Mr. Chairman, we in APC, hawkers* and *the poor* are all social dectic references that give information on the social statuses of the deictic agents in the deictic field.

**Conclusion**

Guided by a framework anchored on Hank’s notion of *deictic field and* Buhler’s *ground zero* and *origo*, the paper found that President Buhari strategically set up the deictic field in a manner that he and his opponents are thrust in binary positions and Nigerians at the deictic centre. Personal pronouns were used by Buhari to move himself from the binary position close to the deictic centre to create a sense of conviviality between himself and Nigerians while his opponents are placed far from the deictic centre with the use of third person pronominal forms.

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