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ACTIVATION AS A DISCOURSE STRATEGY IN NIGERIAN PRESIDENT BUHARI'S SPEECHES

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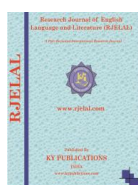
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Abstract

President Muhammadu Buhari's speeches are filled with linguistic nuances characterizing political discourses in Nigeria which is probably the reason why they have attracted more critical studies than those of any other Nigerian president. However, the earlier studies appear to be unidirectional in the different theories of linguistic analysis utilised. There is still a yawning gap in the discourse analytical studies especially with regard to the discourse strategy of *role allocation*, particularly, *activation* which has been largely utilised by the President. The present study fills this gap by employing Van Leeuwen's (2008) and Van Dijk's CDA approaches as well as Halliday's transitivity structures on two selected speeches of President Buhari to discover the activations given to social actors in transitivity processes, and their ideological leanings. The findings reveal that President Buhari builds the ideological image of a political messiah through constant prejudiced activations portraying positive self and negative other representation.

Keywords: Activation, Discourse strategies, Ideology, President Buhari's speeches, Transitivity.

Introduction

In Critical Discourse Analysis, CDA, social actors or participants in discourse can be represented in a variety of discourse strategies that (usually) serve the interest of the text producers or their social orders. Representation in discourse has being a major focus of discourse analyst as different choices of discursive strategies could be informed by different ideological viewpoints which in turn inform social practices and *vice versa*. Discourse/discursive strategy is used in CDA to describe different structures of discourse (semantic structures, formal and sentence structures etc) that could be examined

by discourse analysts for ideological leanings. Text producers can employ different structures to represent actors and actions in ways that convey or sustain certain ideological positions. Hence, Van Dijk (2000) explains that:

Looking at discourse structures and ideology, whether we call someone a 'freedom fighter' a 'rebel' or 'terrorist' is a lexical choice that is very much dependent on our opinion of such a person, and such an opinion in turn depends on our ideological position, and the attitudes we

have about the group that person belongs to (p. 42).

Similarly, Widdowson (2007) avers that CDA is described as “critical” in that it interrogates representations which are usually taken for granted but sustain dominance and inequality, thus:

It is critical, in the sense that it calls into question ideas and assumptions that have become taken for granted as self-evidently valid on the grounds that they preserve a status quo which in effect sustains inequality and injustice by privileging the elite and the powerful at the expense of everybody else (p. 71).

Van Leeuwen (1996, 2008), Van Dijk (1993) and Wodak (2006, 2011) as well as other scholars in CDA, outline categories of discourse strategies that can be deployed in the analysis of discourse representations, ideologies and prejudiced texts. While Van Dijk and Wodak produce categories for the investigation of discourse structures generally, such as *topics*, *presuppositions*, *hedging* and *vagueness*, *topoi* and many others, Van Leeuwen in his representation of social actors approach, offers a “socio-semantic inventory” of categories that can act as discursive tools for the analysis of how social actors basically, are represented in discourse. These socio-semantic categories among many other strategies include *role allocation* which is divided into *activation* and *passivation*.

Activation is the representation of the social actor as the active dynamic force in the carrying out of any social practice be it positive or negative practice. It is a sociological equivalent of the grammatical term, *agentialisation*. According to Van Leeuwen, activation is of sociological and critical relevance in determining which contexts are social actors represented as *agents* or *patients*. Activation manifests in many ways: it can coincide with grammatical agent in a text or be achieved via the use of possessive pronouns, prepositional phrases, and transitivity structures. This is because there is no neat fit between sociological and linguistic agency, (Van Leeuwen, 2008, pp. 23-33). Activation thus, remains a key discourse strategy variously employed

in different representations of social actors in discourse.

Discourse is regarded as a social practice because it is socially constitutive and socially conditioned (Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2000, p. 448). This implies that it index and is indexed by social practices such as politics, advertisement, business, sports and so on. CDA is largely interested in how social actors are represented in structures of discourse and how that relates to existing power play among the actors. Meanwhile, CDA as an area of study is “a multidisciplinary and eclectic research paradigm that engages a wide variety of data and methodologies to investigate different dimensions of power and ideology manifest in discourse as social practice” (Ononye & Chukwuike, 2020, p. 7). Fairclough (1989) avers that the ways in which “discourses are structured in a given order of discourse...are determined by changing relationships of power at the level of the social institution or of the society” (p. 30).

Presidential speeches in Nigeria reveal existing power relations between the two current major political parties in the country, PDP and APC as well as the incumbent government and the previous one as they constantly represent each other as in- and out-group members. According to Fairclough (1989, p. 34), “power relations are always relations of struggle...whereby social groupings with different interests engage with one another”. In the case of Nigeria, ruling parties/incumbent administrations struggle to maintain power by constantly criticising the opposition/previous administration; this many a times results in the abandonment of projects initiated by previous administrations so as to discourage any credit to them by the masses. These criticisms as easily pictured in presidential discourses are ideologically used for the sustenance of domination and inequality in the Nigerian political system. This is why this study has undertaken to examine President Buhari’s use of *activation* as a discourse strategy of representing social actors in his speeches. The objectives of the study are: to analyse the linguistic processes of achieving activation in the data, and to examine the ideological configurations of the activations found.

Previous studies on Nigeria's presidential speeches in general and President Muhammadu Buhari (henceforth, PMB) in particular have been conducted from many linguistic theoretical backgrounds, such as CDA (Kamalu & Aganga, 2011; Emeka-Nwobia, 2015; Eruchalu, 2017; Isa & Abaya, 2019), Pragmatics (Okoro, 2016; Enyi, 2016; Koutchade, 2017; Odogwu & Akpojishi, 2018) and Stylistics/SFG (Ofoegbu & Usar, 2016; Okafor & Issife, 2017; Idegbekwe, 2017; Agbo, Ngwoke & Ijem, 2018); but these studies have failed to give attention to the discourse strategies of representing social actors in their data. Although, the contributions of the studies are significant in their different foci on other discourse structures, they are not illuminating enough with regard to the power relations that exist between different political actors and between political actors and the masses in Nigeria manifest in the representation of the actors in political discourses. As Opeibi (2011, p. 3) observes, language is a pragmatic phenomenon that allows political actors and the public to enter into communicative relations with one another.

Looking at the critical analytic studies to which the current study belongs, Kamalu & Aganga (2011) deploy Van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach to CDA to investigate the rhetorical strategies used by President Goodluck Jonathan in his speech of formal declaration of interest in the 2011 general elections. The study reveals as ideological the use of ethno-religious sentiments, alignment with the suffering majority of the masses and reconstruction of childhood experiences for positive self representation; while criticisms and threats are employed for negative representation of the opposition and criminal elements. Similarly, Emeka-Nwobia (2015) investigates President Olusegun Obasanjo's 1999 and 2003 inaugural speeches as newly sworn-in president using Fairclough's three-tier analytical approach to CDA. The study, like Kamalu & Aganga (2011), uncovers the use of religious rhetoric to ideologically manipulate the populace into accepting the President's emergence as an act of God despite many electoral malpractices. Also, Isa and Abaya (2019) study selected campaign speeches of President Buhari and Jonathan in the 2011 elections in Nigeria using a

combination of Fairclough and Van Dijk's approaches. This study is also geared towards the examination of rhetorical devices used in the data to persuade the masses, and it discovers that repetition, parallelism, metaphor, rhetorical questions and pronouns are pervasively deployed to elicit support from the electorates. These studies illustrate the concentrated effort of scholars on the analysis of rhetorical structures in Nigerian political discourse, which is why the current study will focus on a different discourse strategy. On the other hand, Eruchalu (2017) has a closer link to the current study in its critical discourse analytical study of the deployment of pronouns as a discourse strategy in PMB's Maiden Coup Speech, 1984 and Inaugural Speech, 2015. While the study is similar to the current study in choice of data, the analytical approaches are different. This will make the current study to add to the contributions made by Eruchalu (2017) on the different manifestations of power and ideology in PMB's speeches.

Furthermore, on the pragmatic studies, Okoro (2016) studies selected speeches of PMB using the Speech Act Theory (SAT) to ascertain which speech act(s) has been predominantly employed. It uncovers that assertive and commissive acts are pervasively used in the data to give hope to the masses and gain their support. Similarly, Enyi (2016) carries a comparative study of PMB's Maiden Coup Address, 1984 and Inaugural speech, 2015 using also SAT. The aim of the study unlike Okoro (2016) is to see how the speeches reflect the socio-political contexts in which they were delivered. Again, while Enyi (2016) relates to the current study in choice of data, the objective and theoretical approach remain different. PMB's political speeches are filled with linguistic nuances of political discourses in Nigeria which is probably the reason why they have attracted more critical studies than those of any other Nigerian president. However, the studies as seen above seem to be unidirectional across the different theoretical levels of linguistic analysis utilised. The current study therefore intends to broaden the research by focusing on the representation of social actors in the President's speeches.

On the studies on Stylistics/SFG, Ofoegbu & Usar (2016) undertake a stylistic analysis of PMB's 2011 campaign speech at his party's flag off campaign in North-West Nigeria. The study is centered on graphology, lexis, syntax and semantic levels of the speech and it demonstrates that these levels are effectively utilised in realising the speech. On the other hand, Okafor & Issife (2017) examine the choice of mood and modality in PMB's 2015 inaugural speech using Halliday's SFG. The study uncovers the predominant use of statements and modal auxiliaries in expressing intention and obligation and concludes that the choice of these forms is functionally significant. Also, Agbo, Ngwoke & Ijem (2018) study transitivity structures, using Halliday's SFG in President Buhari's 2015 campaign speech, titled *My Covenant with Nigerians*. The thrust of the study is to uncover the process types used in the speech, their frequency and ideological functions. This study is related to the current study in method but both studies differ in choice of data and objective. While the former is focused on the analysis of transitivity structures in the chosen data to ascertain their type and frequency, the later employs transitivity structures to discover the activations of social actors in processes, and further analyzes the activations for their ideological leanings.

Despite the contributions of the above studies to the understanding of Nigerian political discourse using the speeches of PMB, there is still a shortfall in the discourse analytical studies with regard to the discourse strategies examined and ideological structures. This study intends to fill this

gap by focusing on the hitherto neglected dimension of the representation of social actors in PMB's speeches. This will significantly expose how social actors are represented in the President's speeches and in addition to other discourse structures examined by other studies enhance the understanding of the discursive wielding of power through ideologies by Nigerian political elite.

Theoretical Underpinnings

This paper thrives on two theoretical backgrounds, viz. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG). From CDA, it benefits from Van Leeuwen's (1996, 2008) socio-semantic approach, particularly the representation of social actors as well as Van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach, particularly his idea of the "ideological square" (Van Dijk, 2000). From SFG on the other hand, it employs the concept of the clause as representation or the experiential function, otherwise known as transitivity. Van Leeuwen (1996, 2008) presents what he calls a "socio-semantic inventory" of some strategies of representing social actors in discourse. These include exclusion and inclusion, role allocation, genericisation and specification, association and dissociation, indetermination and determination, nomination and categorisation, functionalisation and identification, personalisation and impersonalisation and overdetermination. These strategies are presented in the table below as summarised by Babaii & Rashed (2017):

Table 1: The inventory of representation of social actors, culled from Babaii & Rashed (2017)

Discourse Feature	Description
Inclusion & Exclusion	When representing a social practice, some of the actors involved may be <i>included</i> (explicitly mentioned), some <i>excluded</i> ; exclusion with no trace (deletion) becomes <i>suppression</i> . Exclusion with the possibility to infer the actor's involvement is <i>backgrounding</i> . In the latter case, the actor is deemphasized, pushed into the background, but not completely deleted.
Role allocation	This feature concerns the roles that social actors are given to play in the representation. They may be

	<i>activated</i> (depicted as active, dynamic forces in an activity) or <i>passivated</i> (pictured as receiving end of the activity).
Genericization and Specification	Social actors can be represented through <i>generic</i> (as classes) or <i>specific</i> (as identifiable individuals) reference.
Association and Dissociation	This feature refers to forming and unforming the groups of social actors in a text as the texts proceeds.
Indetermination and Determination	<i>Indetermination</i> occurs when social actors are represented as unspecified, 'anonymous' individuals or groups, <i>determination</i> , when their identity is, one way or another, specified.
Nomination and Categorization	Social actors can be represented either in terms of their unique identity (<i>nomination</i>), or in terms of identities and functions they share with others (<i>categorization</i>).
Functionalization and Identification	<i>Functionalization</i> occurs when social actors are referred to in terms of an activity, in terms of something they do, for instance an occupation or role. <i>Identification</i> occurs when social actors are defined, not in terms of what they do, but in terms of what they, more or less permanently, or unavoidably, are.
Personalization and Impersonalization	Social actors can be <i>personalized</i> (represented as human beings) or <i>impersonalized</i> (through concrete or abstract nouns whose meaning does not include the semantic features of human).
Overdetermination	This occurs when social actors are represented as participating, at the same time, in more than one social practice. Here the social actor comes to symbolize different social practices which may be related to one another, be opposite, etc.

The present study focuses on the discourse feature of role allocation, specifically, *activation*. The activated social actor according to Van Leeuwen (2008, p. 33) is represented in the discourse as "the active dynamic force in an activity". It can be realized through grammatical participant roles, i.e. the grammatical role of *agent*; transitivity structures in which the actor is for instance, coded as *actor* in a

material process and *senser* in a mental process; as well as through "circumstantialisation", i.e. by propositional circumstantial with *by* or *from*.

Van Dijk's (2000, p. 35) on the other hand, argues that ideologies indirectly control social practices in general, and discourse in particular, providing the basis of dominant group members'

practices (say of in-group and out-group discrimination) and the principles by which forms of power abuse may be justified, legitimized, condoned or accepted. He defines ideology as the basic beliefs that underlie the social representations of a social group (Van Dijk, 2000, p. 12). What this means is that ideology is a common belief of in-group members which accounts for their social practices including discourse. Fairclough (1989, p. 2) refers to this as "common-sense assumptions" which is taken for granted by group members and manifest in their conventional attitudes. He avers that ideologies are closely linked to language because language is a social convention that relies more on common-sense assumptions. Van Dijk (2000, pp. 43-44) explains that the overall strategy of an ideological discourse generally appears as:

- Say positive things about Us
- Say negative things about Them
- Do not say negative things about Us
- Do not say positive things about Them.

He further modified these to accommodate other structures of discourse in the following way known as the ideological square:

- Emphasize positive things about Us.
- Emphasize negative things about Them.

-De-emphasize negative things about Us.

-De-emphasize positive things about Them

Furthermore, the concept of transitivity refers to the processes and participants in discourse. It constitutes one of the meta-functions of the clause known as the experiential function and defined as the organisation of the clause as representation (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014, p. 213). The process centers on that part of the clause that is realised by the verbal group; it can also be regarded as what "goings-on" are represented in the whole clause; while the participants are the entities involved in the process (Bloor & Bloor, 2004, p. 109). There are three major categories of process, viz. material, mental and relational processes; as well as other minor categories viz. verbal, behavioural and existential processes. As earlier mentioned, transitivity process is connected to *activation* in that the activated social actor can be coded as *actor* in a material process, *senser* in a mental process, *attributor* in a relational process, *sayer* in a verbal process and *behave* in a behavioural process.

Methodology

The data for the study comprise of two selected speeches of PMB from his military and civilian administration. The details of the data are as found in the table below:

Table 2: showing the details of the research data

TEXT	TOPIC	SETTING	DATE
1	Maiden Speech of Major-General-Muhammadu Buhari	Nigerian Military coup, 1983	01-01-1984
2	Inaugural speech by President-Muhammadu Buhari	Swearing-in ceremony, 2015	29-05-2015

The speeches are available in the public domain and were downloaded from the internet. The selection of the two texts is purposive; both are delivered upon the assumption of office by PMB as military head and civilian president of Nigeria, and manifest discourse structures that represent PMB's administration and the administration before him differently as in- and out-group members. PMB is one of the most criticised Nigerian Presidents whose political speeches are filled with the linguistic nuances of Nigerian political discourses; hence, his

speeches are considered appropriate in this study for the examination of discursive representation in presidential political discourses in Nigeria.

For the analysis, while transitivity structures are employed to determine which social actor is activated, the ideological theory by Van Dijk (2000) is privileged in discussing the ideological functions of the activation strategies found.

Discussion of Findings

The data analysis focused on the activation of two groups of social actors in PMB's speeches, namely, the in-group, which is PMB and his administration, variously represented as "We", "Federal government", "I", and "This government"; as well as the out-group, which is the previous administration before PMB and the other arms of government, variously represented as, "The second republic", Leadership in the last four years", "Political contestants", "The legislators" and "The judicial system". While the out-group is given negative activations as the active dynamic force in bringing insecurity, unhealthy electoral rivalry, corruption and economic failures to the Nigerian political system, the in-group is positively activated as incorruptible and committed to the security and welfare of the masses, and reviving the economy. These activations are realized using the three major transitivity processes, namely, material, mental, and relational processes which emphasize the in-groups' good things and the out-groups' bad things as seen in the discussion of each of them below.

Material Process

This process relates to outer experiences; to events and actions. According to Halliday & Matthiessen (2014, p. 224), the material clause construes an act of "doing- and happening-". Greater percentage of activations found in our data is encoded in this type of process which represents a social actor as the "actor" in a process of doing a social action. PMB employs the material process to negatively represent the previous administration before his as "actors" in bringing insecurity and corruption to the polity while positively representing himself and his administration as "actors" in economic recovery, provision of security and eradication of corruption. Let us examine some extracts from the data.

EXTRACT 1:

"However, little did the military realise that the political leadership of the second republic will circumvent most of the checks and balances in the constitution and bring the present state of general insecurity" - PMB, 1984

The political leadership of the second republic	Circumvent	most of the checks and balances in the constitution
The political leadership of the second republic	Brought	the present state of general insecurity
Actor	Process: Material	Goal

In the above material processes, PMB represents the ousted civilian administration via coup in December 1983 as *actor* in the processes of overlooking constitutional requirements (for their selfish gains) and engendering of a general level of insecurity. This is construed by the material verbs "circumvent" and "brought" which denote acts of doing something – in this case negating constitutional requirements and causing insecurity. The ousted administration is hence, activated as the active dynamic force in bringing a general level of insecurity to the country. This representation which emphasizes the negative actions of the previous administration, legitimizes the coup that removed it and brought PMB to power; even though this coup was the act that terminated Nigeria's first democratic dispensation and ushered in a thirteen-year long military dictatorial era.

On the other hand, other material activations are used in contrast to represent PMB as a political messiah who has intervened to save the Nigerian economy from collapse due to problems created by the previous administration. This is achieved via promises of positive actions encoded in material processes; the promises are presented to highlight the presupposed failure of the past administration and also as remedies to it. Let us consider extract two below.

EXTRACT 2:

"Fellow Nigerians, finally, we have dutifully intervened to save this nation from imminent collapse. We therefore expect all Nigerians, including those who participated directly or indirectly in bringing the nation to this present predicament, to cooperate with us" – PMB, 1984.

We	have...intervened to save	this nation from imminent collapse
Actor	Process: Material	Goal

The activated social actor, “we” represents PMB’s administration; the material process, which construes an urgent step to salvage the Nigerian economy from “imminent collapse”, presupposes that the economy was on the brink of collapse before the coming of PMB. This activation represents PMB, the head of the administration represented by “we” as a political messiah who comes to save the Nigerian state from collapse. However, this discourse structuring like extract 1, simply serves to ideologically legitimise the 1983 coup. As Van Dijk (2000, p. 35) rightly observes, ideologies are the basis of dominant group members’ practices that provide the principles by which forms of power abuse may be justified, legitimized, condoned or accepted.

Furthermore, the positive activation of PMB/his administration as “actor” in fighting corruption in extract 3 below is also a common representation in President Buhari’s political speeches. It is an established fact that corruption is the major cause of Nigeria’s economic problems as the country is richly blessed with human and natural resources but has failed to develop since her about sixty years of political independence from Britain. PMB however, exploits this fact by positioning himself as an active force in eradicating corruption in Nigeria in order to secure or maintain power. This can be seen in extract 3 below taken from his speech in 2015.

EXTRACT 3:

“While the Federal Government cannot interfere in the details of its operations it will ensure that the gross corruption at the local level is checked. As far as the constitution allows me I will try to ensure that there is responsible and accountable governance at all levels of government in the country” – PMB, 2015

Federal Government	will ensure	that the gross corruption at the local level is checked
I	will try to ensure	that there is responsible and accountable governance at all levels of government in the country
Actor	Process: Material	Goal

In the above extract, there is, as in extract 2 the use of the linguistic feature of presupposition. The first example presupposes that there is “gross corruption” already existing in the system being inherited by PMB, and in the second example, PMB is represented as actor in the material process of ensuring accountability at all levels of governance; that is, in the eradication of the corruption he met. President Buhari has acquired the reputation of an incorruptible politician in Nigeria through this type of discourse strategy. He constantly activates himself in discourses as having zero tolerance for corruption that it has become commonly assumed that he is incorruptible. This is indeed an instance of Widdowson’s (2007, p. 71) explanation about “ideas and assumptions that have become taken for granted as self-evidently valid”, which CDA tries to investigate. Meanwhile, PMB’s positive self portrayal as seen in the activations above can be said to be simply ideological when we consider the huge diversion of public funds constantly reported under his administration.

Similarly, extract 4 below depicts another example of PMB’s action towards economic recovery in 1984, in addition to the one earlier examined in extract 2. It is another instance of positive activation which construes the intervention of the president to rescue the economy.

EXTRACT 4:

“...the federal government wills, with the available resources, import food stuffs to supplement the shortfalls suffered in the last harvest” – PMB, 1984

Federal government	will...import	food stuffs to supplement the shortfalls suffered in the last harvest
Actor	Process: Material	Goal

The above extract exemplifies PMB’s activation of himself as deeply committed to the economic welfare of the citizenry; a situation that has earned him the name ‘Baban talakawa’, meaning ‘father of the poor’ among his Hausa tribe of northern Nigeria during his campaigns for the 2015 elections. The *goal* of the material process of “importing” which is “food stuffs” activates PMB as concerned with the survival need of the masses. The President’s discourse representations constantly reflect improvement of agriculture and food security which makes the vast population of the agrarian poor to see him as a messiah. While the use of this semantic feature can be taken as ordinary, its repetition in PMB’s speeches both in his military and civilian administrations can be ideological. Meanwhile, so far from extract 1 to 4 presented above, the themes of eradication of corruption, provision of security and reviving the economy remain central to PMB’s political speeches. Still in 2018, three years into his current civilian administration, the President continues to assert more stylistically as he did in his military administration in 1984 that the three cardinal points of his administration are “Security, Corruption and the Economy”(President Muhammadu Buhari’s 2018 Democracy Day speech, Vanguard news, May 29, 2018).

Lastly in this section, what is evident in the entire material processes observed in the data which are predominantly used in the military speech, is that the activations are repetitively used around the social actions of economic recovery, curbing of corruption and provision of security. This repetition ideologically sustains (as self-evidently valid) the

believe that PMB comes to power to rescue the economy, curb corruption, and address security challenges. In the next two extracts, PMB activates his administration in the acts of economic improvement and provision of security in a passive structuring of the material process.

EXTRACT 5:

“The economy will be given a new impetus and better sense of direction...the federal government wills, with the available resources, import food stuffs to supplement the shortfalls suffered in the last harvest” – PMB, 1984.

The economy	will be given	a new impetus and better sense of direction	[By PMB’s administration]
Beneficiary	Process : Material	Scope	Actor

EXTRACT 6:

“The morale and combat readiness of the armed forces will be given high priority. Officers and men with high personal and professional integrity will have nothing to fear” – PMB, 1984.

The morale and combat readiness of the armed forces	will be given	high priority	[By PMB’s administration]
Beneficiary	Process : Material	Scope	Actor

In extracts 5 and 6 above, the actor, “PMB’s administration” is elliptical as the discourse

structure is presented in passive transformation, thus yielding the third social actor – beneficiary; but the processes additionally depict the President as one intervening to rescue Nigeria from economic downfall and insecurity. Note that the material processes have the participant role, “scope” instead of “goal” because the expected “goal” of the processes operates within the scope of the material processes and not separable from them. The above material processes are employed to first, represent the previous administration before PMB as active force in bringing economic problems, corruption and insecurity to Nigeria and secondly, to represent President Buhari’s administration as the active force in finding solutions to these problems. This presents an instance of US vs. THEM dichotomy and the ideology of positive self representation and negative other representation as explained by Van Dijk (2000).

Mental Process

This process construes inner experiences of the world of consciousness. According to Halliday & Matthiessen (2014, p. 245), the mental clause is not construed as a material act but as a process of sensing, flowing from a person’s consciousness. The mental process is exploited in our data to activate social actors as *sensors* in a mental clause; that is, as one who undergoes an inner experience. It was employed by PMB in negative activation of the civilian administration removed by him and his fellow coup plotters in 1983. Let us consider the examples in extract 7 below.

EXTRACT 7:

“The premium on political power became so exceedingly high that political contestants regarded victory at elections as a matter of life and death struggle and were determined to capture or retain power by all means” – PMB, 1984

political contestants	Regarded	victory at elections as a matter of life and death struggle
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political contestants	were determined to capture or retain	power by all means
Senser	Process: Mental	Phenomenon

The above extract illustrates an instance of what Halliday & Matthiessen (2014) describe as the mental process of cognition; the activated social actors or the *sensors* referred to as “political contestants” are represented as having a negative cognition about election - they see it as “a matter of life and death struggle”. The processes in the two examples describe negative conscious activities: those of regarding victory at elections as a do or die affair and determining to capture power by all means; the political contestants of the previous administration before PMB are the actors undergoing these negative mental process, hence, activated. This means that the political contestants are prone to electoral violence, hence, deserve to be removed. PMB as in previous instances of negative activations above employed this negative OTHER representation as a political ideology to deligitimise the activities of the civilian administration and justify the coup that brought him to power. Hence, activation in political discourse can be a tool to attribute the carrying out of negative activities to others (like the opposition) and positive activities to self. It can also be used to attribute not only activities but qualities to social actors as seen in the next section on relational process.

Relational Process

Activations coded by this process in our data are characterized entirely by negative representation of the previous administration before PMB as *carrier* of negative attributes. The relational process is a process of “being” and “having”; a relational clause serves to characterize and to identify. According to Halliday & Matthiessen (2014, p. 259) both the outer and inner experience represented by material and mental processes respectively may be construed also by relational clauses; but they model this experience as “being” rather than as “doing” or “sensing”. PMB in 1984 represents the ousted civilian administration of

President Shehu Shagari as being corrupt and possessing of the attributes of “immorality and impropriety” using the relational process. Consider extract 8 below.

EXTRACT 8:

“The corrupt, inept and insensitive leadership in the last four years has been the source of immorality and impropriety in our society. Since what happens in any society is largely a reflection of the leadership of that society, we deplore corruption in all its facets” – PMB, 1984

leadership in the last four years	has been the source of	immorality and impropriety in our society
Carrier	Process: Relational	Attribute

As the *carrier* of the attribute of “immorality and impropriety”, the previous administration is activated in the above example as “the source of” corruption in the Nigerian state. The relational process which is the linguistic means employed to achieve this is typified by the verb BE which relates an attribute to the carrier as seen in the above extract. As with other activations coded in material processes above, this activation fits into the ideological strategy, “Say negative things about Them” (Van Dijk 2000, p. 43) employed by PMB to represent the over thrown civilian government in 1983 negatively and legitimise the coup perpetrated by him and his military cohorts.

Furthermore, PMB constantly represents the legislature and the judiciary both in 1984 and 2015 as corrupt and selfish. This is another glaring instance of the ideological deployment of positive self- and negative other-representation in our data. As a member of the executive arm of government, PMB treats the other arms of government as out-groups and portrays them negatively in the texts studied. He employs relational process to activate the legislative and judicial arms of government as carriers of negative attributes. Consider extracts 9 and 10 below.

EXTRACT 9:

“...the legislators were preoccupied with determining their salary scales, fringe benefit and unnecessary foreign travels, et al, which took no account of the state of the economy and the welfare of the people they represented” – PMB, 1984.

The legislators	were preoccupied with	determining their salary scales, fringe benefit and unnecessary foreign travels
Carrier	Process: Relational	Attribute

EXTRACT 10:

“The judicial system needs reform to cleanse itself from its immediate past” – PMB, 2015

The judicial system	needs reform to cleanse itself from	its immediate past
Carrier	Process: Relational	Attribute

While the attribute of corruption is stated in extract 9, it is presupposed or implied in extract 10. This indicates that representing others as corrupt is a “common-sense assumption” in PMB’s political discourse, hence, sustaining the ideology that other Nigerian politicians are corrupt but PMB is incorruptible. Looking at extract 10, PMB upon coming back to power in 2015, simply declared during his inauguration that the judiciary “needs reform to cleanse itself from its immediate past” - taking the past for granted as corrupt. When we consider the socio-semantics of this extract according to Van Leeuwen (2008), the judicial system is activated as the carrier of the attribute of corruption which needed to be “cleansed”. However, this activation is based on a mere assumption by the text producer that the political system before his election is corrupt and he is coming to sanitise it. This further strengthens the findings noted in this study that President Buhari builds the image of a political messiah in Nigeria via the deployment of the discourse strategy of activation in his political speeches to represent

himself positively in processes construing economic recovery, security and eradication of corruption and other political actors negatively in these processes. Fairclough (1989, p. 2) sees ideologies as believes that are taken for granted as “common-sense assumptions”; and they are closely linked to language because language is a social convention that relies more on common-sense assumptions.

Summary and Conclusion

Linguistic studies on President Muhammadu Buhari (PMB)’s political speeches have largely focused on rhetorical and pragmatic strategies leaving a yawning research gap in the area of discursive strategies especially the representation of social actors in the speeches. The present study attempts to fill this gap by focusing on *activation* as a discourse strategy used to assign roles to social actors in the speeches of PMB. The social actors examined include PMB and his administration variously referred to as “I” “Federal government”, “We” and “This government”, and represented as the in-group, as well as the previous administration before PMB and the other arms of government, variously referred to as “The second republic”, Leadership in the last four years”, “Political contestants”, “The legislators” and “The judicial system”, and represented as the out-group. It is uncovered that PMB activates the out-group negatively as causers of insecurity, corruption and economic failure to the Nigerian state and the in-group positively as the active force behind ensuring adequate security, eradication of corruption and economic revival. The study concludes that PMB arrogates power to himself through the ideological discursive activation of himself as a political messiah in Nigeria.

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