

Inflammatory and Hate Speech by Nigerian Political Class and the National Question: A Discourse

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Abstract

This paper attempts a critical discourse of hate speech in Nigeria with special focus on the 2015 and 2019 general elections. It focuses on the effects of political activities and hate speeches that accompanied the heightened political activities during the elections. The paper utilized the content analysis of secondary/published speech/articles on hate and other related publications in the context of the provisions of the Nigeria Constitution, the Nigeria Electoral Act and Journalism Ethics Code provisions on hate speech. The analysis of volumes of speeches in the newspapers, magazines and other recorded public speeches on campaign grounds showed that the media have been used by politicians to promote hatred and instigate violence among ethnic and political groups during the electioneering periods and beyond. It is recommended that media practitioners/journalists should always be careful in publishing politicians' messages by evaluating the wordings, innuendoes and falsehood. The government should intensify actions on the reduction of divisive manipulations by the political class and should formulate policies and legal framework to stem the tide of national, anarchy, and disunity, and achieve real and sustainable national reconciliation.

Keywords: Hate speech; Media, Discourse analysis, Political class, Ethnic relations

Introduction

In developing countries, the phenomenon of ethnic, religious and political-related rivalry and violence seems to be recurrent, phenomena hence, numerous studies have been conducted on the post-election violence but little has been devoted to analyzing the principal causal factors of this violence in the context of hate speech, as well as the role of the media in propagating and spreading falsehood through the instrumentalities of their organizations. Politics and the media have long been closely related with media strongly stressing the importance of politics (Harris, 2008). In particular, print media has long covered political campaigns, and the level

of political rhetoric has sometimes been far more venomous which is why across the world, election periods are marked with series of events that increase the tempo of the political environment. However, the situation is more obvious in developing countries where electioneering proceedings are accompanied by the presence of security operatives aimed at calming the atmosphere and preventing violence (Okakwu, 2015).

In Nigeria particularly, the effects of political activities show that hate speech have become more vivid in the successive democratic dispensations than in previous years. The deeds of politicians have only amplified the situation negatively by keeping the citizens more divided than ever which therefore, signals great anxiety for Nigerians at home and in diaspora. With a population of over 170 million and over 250 ethnic groups, the country is very diverse in terms of ethnic orientations, cultural practices, religious beliefs and linguistics. According to Joel (2013), these variances have been a source of tension since the colonial era under British rule. However, its current indicators are speedily dividing the country into pockets of religious as well as ethnic cleavages, which is worrisome to the extent that, the remote causes of the Nigerian civil war of 1967- 1970 which claimed millions of lives was attributed to hate speech between Igbo traders and Hausa/Fulani traders in Northern Nigeria (Osaghae and Suberu, 2005).

While the media may contribute to discourse and understanding, they can also be a factor in spawning social tension through stereotyping and promotion of hate speech (Adisa, Mohammed, & Ahmad, 2015). The newspaper can disseminate hate speech or remarks based on racial or ethnic discrimination (Odera, 2015). Tartius (2015) is of the view that the newspapers need to play a constructive role in their reporting of electioneering activities. The media also need to be strategic in deploying communication skills which is important, given the obligation of the media, as contained in Sections 22 and 39 of the Nigerian 1999 Constitution, to hold government and individuals accountable for their actions, adding that such freedom and power, however, entailed responsibility.

In most nations of the world, the newspapers strongly set the agenda that politics is a very important concern as political campaigns, candidates, and issues, especially at the national level, receive heavy coverage. Looking at coverage more closely, it is revealed that some aspects receive more coverage than others and those politicians have resorted to using the media for hate speech campaigns. The challenges of hate speech cut across all countries, for instance, the 2016 presidential election of the United States was a fertile ground for hate speech such that long after the election was won and lost, the American society remains divided on account of the unparalleled hate speech that attended the election. Specifically, in Nigeria, hate speech is very present (Ugbechie, 2017). It was the Peoples' Democratic Party versus the All People Congress hate speech campaign of 2015 that birthed the current President Muhammadu Buhari led administration. Both parties were relentless in their harsh

debauches of hate speech campaigns including profiling of candidates and trying to provoke different ethno-religious groups against each party's candidate.

Meanwhile, ethnic-induced hate speeches define the people's daily lives as the Yoruba, Igbo, Hausa, Kanuri, Ijaw, Efik, Ibibio and the over 250 ethnic nationalities that make up the entity called Nigeria all have hate tags for one another. Despite this, there has been no official response or policy to ban hate speech in the country, although there are laws against slander and perjury (Joel, 2012). Meanwhile, discourse analysis can be applied to any kind of text that has meaning especially ethnic and political induced hate speeches. Therefore, with this study, the analysis is based on generated texts published in Nigerian newspapers. Accordingly, the analysis examines the various ways in which the objects under study, that is hate speeches are constructed in the specific texts selected (Parker, 2002).

Literature Review

Hate speech is a communication that employs intolerant appellations to insult and denounce others either on the bases of their race, religion, ethnicity, gender, or other forms of group membership (Bagdikian, 1997). Consequently, it exemplifies rhetorical strategies which drive some people to a level of hostility in which they openly wish physical harm on others or political leaders, contravening vital norms that enable the democratic government to function (Chaiken and Eagly, 1978).

According to Mrabure (2016), hate speech is commonly used to describe any message that disparages a specific person or a group of people. It can be in the form of speech, gesture, behaviour, writing, or display. On the basis of this, politically motivated hate speech is generally an antecedent to election-related provocation and violence in Nigeria. Essentially, such speeches rob others of their dignity. Therefore, the United Nations (2016) highlighted that hate speech includes: (a) all dissemination of ideas based on racial or ethnic superiority or hatred, by whatever means; (b) incitement to hatred, contempt or discrimination against members of a group on grounds of their race, colour, descent, or national or ethnic origin; (c) threats or incitement to violence against persons or groups on the grounds in (b) above; (d) expression of insults, ridicule or slander of persons or groups or justification of hatred, contempt or discrimination on the grounds in (b) above, when it amounts to incitement to hatred or discrimination; and (e) participation in organizations and activities which promote and incite racial discrimination.

Furthermore, hate messages lead to low personal self-esteem and a diminished sense of security. According to Kiai (2007), hate speech leads to short and long term consequences which are similar in nature to the effects of other types of traumatic experiences. Given this, Malik (2015) reiterated that as a way forward, the media has a key role to play, principally

with regards to whittling down the effect of hate speech, as well as provocative comments, by way of not promoting such. Adopting this policy can be much more effective than the lengthy and sometimes cumbersome process of litigation, especially in Nigeria. After all, the provisions of the Code of Practice (1998: 10) state thus: "A media organization shall not publish or air political adverts, advertorials and sponsored political news that seek to create hatred or incite violence." Therefore, "A newspaper organization shall reject any material intended for publication or airing by parties, candidates and other interests that contains hateful or inciting words and messages." In addition to that, "A newspaper organization shall refrain from publishing or airing abusive editorial comments or opinions that denigrate individuals or groups on account of disability, race, ethnicity, tribe, gender or belief." Though the provision of the code is self-explanatory, the issue is where to draw the line between freedom of expression, hate speech and the right not to be discriminated against.

Hate Speech and Political Campaigns in Nigeria

Various analysts and media contributors have noted the role of the print media in helping to curtail hate speeches and their many effects. It is in the light of this that the current role played by some print media organizations, particularly popular newspaper outfits in the country, in the name of political campaigns become worrisome. Despite the Nigeria Electoral Act (2010) which spells out detailed provisions specifically barring politically inspired hateful speech, cases of offensive images of major aspirants, to create a vivid picture of a bad person flourish and have been described by Nigerians as 'one step too far'.

Specifically, Section 95 of the Act provides that no political campaign or slogan shall be tainted with abusive language directly or indirectly that is likely to injure religious, ethnic, tribal or sectional feelings. Similarly, abusive, uncontrolled, slanderous or base language or insinuations or innuendoes designed or likely to provoke violent reaction or emotions shall not be employed or used in political campaigns. Section 102 of the Act further provides:

"Any candidate, person or association who engages in campaigning or broadcasting based on the religious, tribal, or sectional reason to promote or oppose a particular political party or the election of a particular candidate, is guilty of an offence under this Act and on conviction shall be liable to a maximum fine of #1,000,000 or imprisonment for twelve months or both" (Nigeria Constitution, 1999).

Similarly, paragraph 10 (c) of the Guidelines for Political Rallies issued by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) of Nigeria also prohibits the use of hate speech and discriminatory rhetoric during campaigns. The print media organizations, more than any other outfit have more responsibility and need to understand that they have a moral, legal and social obligation to protect the lives of Nigerians, through their actions or inactions.

Hate Speech and Critical Race Theory Perspective

The critical race theory (CRT) provides a compelling structure by which media concepts and hate speech can be analyzed and understood. According to Odera (2015), the theory indicates that the media use phrases that are sponsored by politicians who refer to other opposition groups from descriptions that are not merely rhetorical but pedestals on which hate flourishes (Hintjens, 1999). Therefore, theoretically, the critical race theory underscores that violent political rhetoric can produce the same psychological dynamics as violent entertainment (Calvert, 1997).

Through the critical race theory, framing of words on the assumption that a subtle change in the wording of the description of a situation might affect how the audience interpret this situation portends that media coverage can help influence how people think about objects like candidate, events and other issues. As a result, priming refers to the impact of news coverage on the weight assigned to specific issues in making political judgments. Meaning, that the media may draw more attention to some aspects of political life like the elections and the aftermath at the expense of others. The interpretation of the theory is that in choosing and displaying news, editors, newsroom staff and broadcasters play an important part in shaping political reality. Consequently, readers learn not only about given issues but how much importance to attach to that issue from the amount of information in a news story and its position. In response to that, the theory is used to support a legal-structural response to hate speech which aims at transforming the relationship between race, law, and power. The critical race theory recognizes that the vested interests of the economic-political elite shape racial and ethnic stratification. This theory is important because it enables us to critically view statements and speeches that hitherto were taken for granted when critically viewed in this context, we will see embedded in such speeches animosity, acrimonious inclinations and absurd innuendo which tend not only to belittle some Nigerians but equally creates a tensed atmosphere that are inimical to good and orderly society that encourages peace, progress and harmonious coexistence as a pluralized nation. This theory therefore helps us to view political statements through the lens of a researcher and to critically analyze the hared embedded in the speeches and other dispositional utterances by politicians in Nigeria. This theory is therefore apt in the understanding the nature, dimensions and possible impacts of hate and volatile speeches by politicians in Nigeria.

Methodology

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) as its name suggests is a critical device. Although it is not attached to any special theory and philosophy it is a method of analyzing texts (Jahedi, Abdullah, & Mukundan, 2014). The discourse analysis approach is an empirical examination of text that is produced (created), consumed (received and interpreted) and viewed as an important form of social practice which contributes to the constitution of the social world including social identities and social relations (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002). Consequently,

critical discourse analysis as an explanatory critique that draws attention to the existence of stereotyped categorizations in daily talk, elite talk and texts. Therefore, the aim of application of the analysis in this paper is to shed light on the linguistic discursive dimension of hate speech published in newspapers during Nigeria's 2015 general elections which have become social and cultural phenomena and possible helix of violence. With discourse analysis, this paper examines language in use along with the emotions which are traditionally presumed to underlie talk and be revealed through it.

Before proceeding to build the sample, there is the need to identify the material that potentially constitutes data for this paper which is referred to as the population or universe of discourse (Bell, 1991). Meanwhile, owing to the size of the population which is the total number of newspaper news and articles about hate speech may be unknown (Bauer & Aarts, 2000), the cyclical process has been recommended. Therefore, the sampling was done by first selecting a small but relevant and consistent hate speeches across newspapers online and thereafter analyze their perceived implication in the context of themes and the strands running through them in arriving at the findings of this discourse. According to Bauer and Aarts (2000) and Mautner (2008), in cyclical sampling process more material are added up to the point when, following the law of diminishing returns, new data no longer yield up new representations.

The data selected for this study were from the online version of Nigerian daily newspapers. These data were selected in two periods before Nigeria's 2015 general elections and after the elections. The periods were selected for the following reasons: firstly, the period before the election was within the stretch of months that Nigeria experienced an increase in the rate of religious, ethnic and political conflicts across the six geo-political zones. It was the period when the political activities in the country heated ethnic tension and hate speeches reached the tipping point that placed it on the edge of crisis. Secondly, the post elections era where the political gladiators were now polarized into the winning and the losing parties. Similarly, the periods were suitable for this study having been confirmed by several scholars (Carment, James & Taydas, 2009; Okoli & Iortyer, 2014) that politics and political campaign periods are likely stimulants of hate speeches, especially in a multiethnic society.

The Critical Discourse/Analysis of Published Hate Speeches

Hate speech is the precursor to violence in every electioneering year and volatile societies like Nigeria. Therefore, the ability to discern properly and understand the implied language and use of language and management of the interaction of the speakers is imperative. To achieve this, the discourse was based on three levels of analysis namely, the constructive aspect of language, rhetorical strategies and subject positions.

The Constructive Aspect of Language

A basic assumption underlying discourse analysis relates to the constructive aspect of language, which is the assumption that texts construct the objects to which they refer. That is to say, they create specific versions of the phenomena and processes they set out to describe. Therefore, under this theme, the study examined all instances where hate speech was implied and focused on the constructions. The Nigerian polity has become hate-dominated and it shows in the numerous abuses, threats, curses in addition to outbursts that dominate the newspapers as identified in the analysis. Consequently, in this paper, these aspects were subjected to a critical analysis with a view to knowing how much they reflect the use of social power and the ideologies that underlie their construction.

Ethno-religious Tension

It must be a Northerner or no Nigeria. If President Goodluck Jonathan wins the Peoples' Democratic Party's endorsement to contest the 2011 presidential election, there would be violence" - Guardian Newspaper, 2nd November 2010. From the quoted text credited to the National Coordinator of the Coalition of Northern Politicians, it is implied that the speaker, through a hate speech was promoting ethnic and religious tension. This is because; the subject being referred to here was a Christian and South-South presidential candidate unlike him and his candidates were from the northern part of the country. After establishing the manner of construction of the hate speech' to ethno-religion, the focus is broadened to discover the constructions and intensity of speech within discourse analysis.

(b) "That short man we gave him power had joined the Awolowo people; the people that killed Igbos" - Premium Times, November 13, 2013. This quoted statement fits into hate speech classification as it revealed the name of the individual being accused of betrayal, having joined and aligned politically with another ethnic group. Similarly, the construction portrayed someone as a betrayer of his ethnic group, a sensitive and inciting statement. Contrary to this, however, the guidelines for political parties by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), the body constitutionally recognized to conduct elections, permit alliance of ethnic groups in political formations. So the attempt to castigate him for the political alignment with south- west was a high level of hate speech and capable of instigating crisis.

Inter-communal tension "Nigeria will disintegrate if President Jonathan contests in 2015" - Daily Independent Friday, March 8, 2013. Within this statement, evidence of hate speech is constructed and as such can be inferred as the story is credited to a northerner and published by Daily Independent Friday, March 8, 2013. The statement is coded inter-communal tension having heightened tension on the future of Nigeria negatively over his support for a Northern kinsman against a person from another geo-political zone.

"The Yorubas are an ungrateful kind of people, who do not appreciate what others have done for them" - Sun Newspaper, March 16, 2013. The analysis construction of hate speech

becomes obvious in the quoted statement having categorically made a sweeping attack based on ethnic superiority which implied hatred, on one of the dominant ethnic groups in Nigeria, the 'Yorubas'. The seriousness of this can be understood from the fact that the Yoruba's constitutes close to 40 million people in total, found largely in Nigeria, they make up about 21% of its population of roughly 35 million in 2012 (CIA World Factbook, 2013) making them one of the largest ethnic groups in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Language as Functional: Rhetorical Strategies

The second level of analysis examined the dynamics of interaction, how the participants' use of language and management of the interaction serve interpersonal functions. The paper also examined the speaker's utterance concerning the discursive context that is 'hate speech' in which it is produced.

The threat of violence/ Hate crime

(a) God willing, by 2015, something will happen. They either conduct a free and fair election or they go a very disgraceful way. If what happened in 2011 should again happen in 2015, by the grace of God, the dog and the baboon would all be soaked in blood - Vanguard Newspaper on May 15th, 2012. This statement was credited to the then presidential candidate of the Congress for Progressive Change (APC), Muhammadu Buhari now the incumbent president. The statement was widely condemned for its hate speech and threats of violence.

(b) "Unless efforts are made to ensure that the 2015 general elections are free and fair, it may turn out to be the last election in the history of the nation" - Leadership March 29, 2012. The National Coordinator of the Coalition of Northern Politicians made this venomous statement which sparked tension and uproar across the country. The threat of possible 'last election' coming from an elder statesman was unbecoming.

(c) "You should not be bothered with cockroaches of politics. Cockroaches are only found in the toilet even at homes, if you see a cockroach in your house, crush them" - Premium Times on 19th November, 2014. This implied hate speech was made by the then Governor of Katsina State who reportedly urged his supporters to attack opponents and referred to his political opponents as cockroaches urging his supporters to kill them as they kill cockroaches. This kind of rhetoric is an incitement of one ethnic group against another.

(d) "Those who want to take power through the back door will die. They will die" - Punch Newspaper, 17th July 2011 Former Governor of Akwa Ibom State was acknowledged as the source of this statement. As a state governor, the statement was a hate speech and a clear directive to his followers. This was condemned as highly capable of stimulating violence.

(e) "We assure those cold-blooded murderers that this time, their bloodthirsty campaign will not go un-replied" - Vanguard Newspaper, 5th December 2014. The analysis was credited to

South East Self Determination Coalition (SESDC) who made this statement which was categorized as copy- cat of the earlier ones made by another politician. The group responsible for this was known for its hatred for other ethnic groups.

Hate crime/death wish

(a) A former Ekiti State Governor in January 2019 repeatedly took out front-page newspaper advertorials warning voters not to vote for the APC presidential candidate. These adverts, now widely known as "death wish advertorials," insinuated that the presidential candidate was likely to die in office if elected. In one of the most controversial headlines ever in the campaign history of Nigeria, a Peoples' Democratic Party loyalist refers to the holy bible. Life and death are placed side by side and we are asked to choose accordingly. The politician appeals to history by displaying erstwhile leaders from the north who met their end while in power as Heads of State. He asked a rhetorical question here: will you allow history to repeat itself? That is, do you want another northerner to die in office as the president again?

(b) "Major General Muhammadu Buhari has emerged as the All Progressive Congress flag bearer and President Goodluck Jonathan has emerged for the PDP. Now the battle for the soul and future of our nation begins. The forces of light shall surely prevail over the forces of darkness and God's counsel alone shall stand over Nigeria. I stand with Jonathan. Let's get it on" – Daily post of Nigeria December 12 2014. Fani-Kayode, commonly called FFK in a frantic effort to discredit the All Progressive Congress and its flag bearer has termed it the "forces of darkness" and his party the "forces of light". The darkness symbolizes that no good can come out of Buhari and his party, and therefore the soul and future of Nigeria are at stake if the All Progressive Congress should emerge victorious. So the battle against this is the main focus of the People Democratic Party and its acolytes. The representative of the force of darkness is a misfit for a country that has enough darkness already. Therefore, no well-meaning Nigerian will readily vote in the All Progressive Congress with this kind of description and representation.

Political Groups Tension or Violence

(a) "It is going to be rig and roast. We are prepared not to go to court but drive them out" - Tell, July 7, 2014. The national leader of APC that would later become the ruling political party went wild against those he claimed are agents of the PDP, the opposition party, alleged to have been sent to disrupt his party's rally. He said: "If you are an agent of PDP here and you are sent to disrupt this rally, we will roast you". This is a clear hate speech and a call for violence which is unprecedented of a national figure.

Inter-communal Tension

(a) "There will be no peace, not only in the Niger Delta but everywhere if Goodluck Jonathan is not president by 2015, except God takes his life, which we do not pray for" - Vanguard,

May 5, 2013. The leader of the Niger Delta Peoples Salvation Force (NDPSF) was known for his hate speech and an attempt to threaten other ethnic groups in Nigeria. On many occasions, he bragged to break Nigeria and attack the northern part of Nigeria. This was one of the many of his tension-ridden utterances.

Subject Positioning

Another important theme in the analysis is that of subject positions, that is the identities of the speaker and specific ways of talking (Davies & Harré, 1990). The questions raised and being answered at this level of analysis are: Who speaks? Whom do they address? Whom do they speak for? Already, as noted by Ukwu (2015), one of the key variables for determining the gravity of speech or when speech transforms from offensive to hate is the level of a speaker's influence. Therefore, in answering these questions, hear the position of the speaker. "It must be a northerner or no Nigeria... Goodluck Jonathan wins the PDP's endorsement to contest the 2011 presidential election, there would be violence".

Reported by Lika Binniyatin of Vanguard, May 15, 2012, PDP National Coordinator of the Coalition of Northern Politicians boasted that unless efforts were made to ensure that the 2015 general election was free and fair, it may turn out to be the last election in the history of the nation. Leadership Newspapers, March 29, 2012, APC National Coordinator of the Coalition of Northern Politicians, declared that there will be bloodshed as those who felt short-changed might take the war path and the country may not be the same again. From the discourse so far, it is clear that hate speech was the focal point and became an instrument of campaign in the 2015 general election. Therefore, the presentation and analysis of various hate speeches in several newspapers showed that the media has been used to stoke hatred and stimulate violence among ethnic and political groups during the electioneering periods as well as in normal daily life.

Similarly, though prominence is a determinant of news worthiness, however, when public figures try to outdo each other through the use of hate speeches, the media has to make sure it does not draw undue attention. More so, that politicians and other influential people who mostly perpetuate hate speeches do it for selfish interest, journalists must examine speakers and evaluate their words, scrutinize their facts and claims, and judge carefully, the intention and likely impact on the society (Cowan & Mettrick, 2002). According to the Ethical Journalism Network (2016), though it is not the job of journalists to adopt counter positions, claims and facts should be tested irrespective of whoever is speaking.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The main mission of journalism is basically to be the fourth estate for good speech and serve the public interest by reporting the truth, with positive language, in total independence and with a sense of responsibility, without any form of hate speech. However, based on the

analysis carried out, it can be concluded that the media, particularly the print media was used by politicians to achieve their selfish interest. Similarly, it can be inferred that most of the newspapers did not take into consideration, the wider context in which politicians expressed themselves. Therefore, newspaper organizations are required to focus not just on what politicians say, but what they intend. The paper recommends that the media as the watchdog of society should take up the responsibility of bringing to the forefront, the fiercely devastating effect of hate speech. Also, politicians should be told in clear, unambiguous terms that hate speech do not win the election; but good governance, good manifesto do.

Following the divergent views on what constitutes hate speech; there is an urgent need to develop, in conjunction with media unions and practitioners, categorization of what constitutes a hate speech. Media houses, through their unions, should incorporate these as part of good journalism practice and impose sanctions on erring members who publish or broadcast materials that are laden with hate speech. The National Orientation Agency, in collaboration with civil society groups, political parties and community leaders, should also moderate their speeches and embark on campaigns against the use of hate speech.

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