

# Language and Democracy in Nigeria: A Stylistic Study of Late President Umar Musa Yar'adua's Inaugural Speech of May 29, 2007

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## Abstract

Language is central to the activities of politics as it is employed by politicians throughout the world to gain, use, delegate and retain power. In the inauguration of a new president, a requisite component of the rites is the delivery of address marking the formal beginning of a new government. Traditionally, it is a speech marked by its persuasive and commission orientations besides its request for solidarity. This paper attempts a stylistic analysis of President Musa Yar'adua's inaugural speech of May 29, 2007 for its peculiar appeal at the time of delivery and the trust it gained though the speaker died during his tenure of office. The analysis covers the various levels of stylistic description to establish the choices that account for the effectiveness of the address. It finds that the speech is typical in its promise of good leadership and appeal for support. It identifies the devices of style in the speech to include purposeful capitalization, sustained rhythmic flow, complex verbal group, flexible sentence types, apt lexical and syntactic choices, dislocation and vocative. The paper concludes that the unity of purpose which characterizes the address is a product of the apt choices made and its overall quality is marked by tactfulness. It thus recommends that the kind of felicitous oratorical techniques used in the speech translates to administrative ingenuity needed for salvaging Nigeria from poverty, political cabals, disease and underdevelopment by Nigerian presidents henceforth.

**Keywords:** language, democracy, stylistics, inaugural address, President Yar'adua

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## 1. Introduction

Nigeria is about the most popular and populous of the (West) African nations. She earns the appellation, the giant of Africa, as a result of these factors. In spite of her enormous population and obvious popularity, her political climate has often been turbulent. Six decades after her independence, Nigeria is still battling to wriggle herself out of recession, insecurity

and misrule. Her initial predicament was the long period of military misrule terminated with the enthronement of democracy in 1999. Unfortunately, close to three decades of democratic rule in the nation, the economy is still characterized by failure orchestrated by successive bad leadership which has grossly affected the quality of the followership, national loyalty and general democratic ethos. A

successful nation is blessed with a disciplined and foresighted leader who controls the cabinet and ensures through exemplary leadership the right attitude in the citizenry.

One of the major ways by which a nation attains peaceful co-existence and long-lasting unity is through tactful use of language by political leaders. Language makes or mars a system. Reckless use of language by some political leaders and political office seekers in Nigeria is a common phenomenon. This too has had a negative impact on the national democracy. At every four years, Nigeria like many other democratic nations of the world elects a new set of political leaders headed by the president. Next to President Olusegun Obasanjo, the pioneer democratically elected president after the end of the military rule was President Umar Musa Yar'a dua whose tenure began in May 2007. Nigerians were hopeful especially with the overwhelming electoral success and particularly that his assumption of office finally marked the end of his predecessor's grand scheme for a third term in office.

The inaugural address is usually crafted to achieve the purpose of a felicitous beginning for the new president. This is more so as first impression lasts longer. The inaugural address of President Umar Yar'adua attracts the writer's attention for some reasons – to reveal its style, interpret its message, show the rationale for the obvious calm and optimism that greeted its presentation and employ it as a basis for a call on the need for future presidents of Nigeria to match their promises with beneficial action.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 *Language and Political Persuasion*

Language is a major identity of the human race. It is a natural means through which humanity thrives. Osisanwo (2003) says language is the human beings supreme tool of communication. To Alisah (2007:2), it is 'an instrument of identification, integration and affiliation within a particular culture' all of which are possible through interaction. These definitions show that language is essentially for communication.

Politics, the activities involved in getting and using power in public life, is possible mainly through communication. Orwell (1968:154) notes that 'politics is concerned with power the power to make decision, to control resources, to control other people's behavior and often to control their value'. Robert (1997) similarly argues that

politics involves competition for the control of resources including the behavior of others so as to achieve the desired end. In a democracy, the desired end which is good governance is only achievable through conscious use of power to this end. Power is often achieved and demonstrated through language and political power exists by means of it (Wareing, 1999). On the language of politics, Orwell (1968) observes that this is consisting largely of euphemism, question, begging and sheer cloudy vagueness. This same opinion is supported by Ayodabo (1997:3) who notes that there is possibility of politicians exploiting the social context to manipulate and even deceive people through their use of language. Beneficial politicians employ language to achieve peace, justice and good leadership within the power of man.

Political discourse is characterized by persuasion, and this is especially the case with the speech at inauguration. Dewet (2010) observes that language in political persuasion is informed by the need to guide the recipients' attitudes and orientation in relation to political issues or propel them to act. To this end, the political discourse is marked by identity creation and solidarity quest. Umar (2014) this discourse essentially requires language choices effectively made to achieve the goal of persuading the electors to take one form of action or another. Exploring choices made to achieve efficacy in text composition is the realm of stylistics and invariably the thrust of this paper.

### 2.2 *Stylistics and Theories of Style*

Stylistics is the aspect of linguistics that studies styles in language use. Its emphasis is on the question of how a text is constructed in terms of the various linguistic choices involved in its composition and how these inform its effectiveness. This is in tandem with Lawal's (1997) position that stylistics is concerned with the analysis and description of linguistics features of text in relation to their meaning. Crystal and Davy (1969:9) assert that 'style' though a familiar word attracts many definitions. The multiplicity of definitions to which style is amenable informs the different views and theories of style. Osundare (2003:14-31) points out different views of stylistics as: (a) choice, (b) difference which includes variation and deviation and (c) iteration. Similarly, Crystal and Davy (1969:10) describes styles variously as: (a) the language habit of a person; (b) some or all of the language habits shared by a group of people

at one time or over a period of time; (c) the effectiveness of mode of expression and (d) literary language. Linguistic stylistics is the study of all these variables of choice, iteration, variation, idiolect and more while literary stylistics studies the language of literature. Style is a derivative of the interrelated elements of language rather than a product of individual features in isolation (Simpson, 2014).

Writing on the aim of linguistically oriented stylistics approach, Crystal and Davy (1969:8) note that 'the varieties of a language need to be studied in as much detail as possible so that stylisticians can point to the formal linguistic features which characterize them and understand the restriction in them'. Simpson (2014) asserts that the interest of stylisticians is in establishing the reason one particular kind of depiction is privileged from among possible several ways of presenting the same happening. In establishing this rationale, the fact that the writer's or speaker's choices are motivated consciously or otherwise is also ascertained. The highest goal of the stylisticians is to move from formal description of styles to a rhetorical interpretation of texts. This movement is possible because the written text has linguistic and social status which can allow the stylisticians investigate the text at the intended levels (Olajide, 1997). The idea of stylistics transcending the levels of mere formal analysis has also been championed by Cassier (1975:39) who sees the relevance of stylistics in 'its endeavor to establish the meaning of the text, the writer's purpose and sometimes his psyche'.

Obviously, the writer of every text is engaging in communication and, therefore, meaning production. The stylistic analysis of a text thus, essentially reveals the form of the text produced through a constant choice-making processing in order to show the function or content of the text more clearly. For this reason, every major stylistic analysis involves investigation into and analysis of choice made during text construction. This paper relies heavily on this in its reading of the address under analysis.

### *2.3 Features of Presidential Address at Inauguration*

Inauguration ceremony is a common practice for newly elected presidents in nations of the world that practice democracy. Central to this ritual is the delivery of inaugural address by the new president. This address, Balogun and Murana (2018) note, is usually delivered amidst fanfare

and jubilation. The reason for this arguably is optimism for novel opportunities and better future as contained in the manifesto of change by the new president. In most cases, the electorates are happy to see the end of the last administration as a result of certain dashed hope and failed promises or the other.

Usually, every inaugural speech is crafted as a 'projected conversation' (Welsh, 1968) and it is often greeted with immediate reaction in the form of applause and sometimes backchannels. Alimole (2002:2) describes it as 'a writing for the ear.' Conventionally, the listeners more especially those not present at the venue react overtly or otherwise for they cannot be actually completely passive. As a form of political oratory, Adebisi (2006) posits that in the inaugural address, the president informs and persuades members of the audience. He further lists the issues that are of interest particularly to the Nigerian president at inauguration to include: unity, national issue, international issue and Nigerian tradition. These issues are contained in the address under study.

### **3. Methodology**

President Umar Musa Yar'adua's maiden speech no doubt created a positive impression in the mind of Nigerians. The written version as published in the 'New Nigerian' edition of May 30th, 2007 is used for the purpose of this analysis. The eighty (80) sentences constituting the address are numbered serially after careful reading of the text. The reading complements the audio recording of the address played and listened to several times to feel its effect and recapture its phonological appeal. The analysis is done at the various levels of linguistic or stylistic description to achieve considerable coverage. Its emphasis is on the perspective of style as choice and therefore, choices made at the different levels are identified and justified in relation to the thrust of the address. The abbreviation 'sc' is used to refer to a sentence and 'scs' to sentences throughout this paper.

### **4. Stylistic Analysis of the Address**

#### *4.1 Graphological and or Phonological Analysis*

Starting with the graphological level of analysis, certain features in the address are of stylistic relevance. These are features that provide graphical clues for their prominence and or peculiarity. The title of the speech – 'Building a Humane and Just Society' is written in capital letters all through. This makes it prominent and

memorable. This is important as it foregrounds the aim of the speaker and the major message of his speech. Also, the first word of the speech ‘fellow’ follows the same autographic pattern. The pride of place given to this pre-modifier especially through its capitalization seems to spell volume about the regard the writer of the speech has for his audience.

The preponderant use of the hyphen (-) makes it obvious in the speech. This is found in such words as half-century (sc 2) well-established (sc 4), Vice-President (sc 7), seven-point (sc 21) and servant-leader (sc 60). The hyphen performs a morpho-graphological function. It is used in the various instances cited to form compound words. Compounding of this nature is the device primarily for achieving economy of words through resourcefulness. It could be indicative of the writer’s desire for a united society. After all, the hyphen as exploited here unites rather than divides. This is in contrastive of its disjunctive or divisive function in the context of such words as pre-eminent, co-operate, re-enter, etc. The paragraphs are scanty as almost half of the sentences are simple. This becomes more glaring towards the end of the address. Preference for much action and less talk could be given as the reason for this laconic style. Of stylistic relevance is the single exclamation mark found in sentence 59 of the speech. This is suggestive of the writer’s passion: his enthusiasm and hope for success.

Being a speech written to be presented, certain phonologically relevant features are conspicuous in the address. Most noticeable are the ones in sentences 29 and 68:

Over the next four years, we will see  
dramatic improvement in power generation  
transmission and distribution (sc 29)

Let us join together to ease the pains of  
today while working for the gains of  
tomorrow (sc 68)

The first of these two sentences features alliteration of the semi-vowel /w/ in *we will*, end rhyme as indicative in *we... see* and more prominently the end rhyme of the last three content words *generation*, *transmission* and *distribution*. These trios are also composed of four, three and four syllables respectively culminating in a balanced sonority. Smooth rendition or delivery is assured with these phonologically induced choices. Besides, this

technique of consistency in the choice of sound and rhythm could implicate a strong resolve and confidence of the presenter. In the second, besides the recurrence of *to* in *to ease*, *today*, and *tomorrow*, *gains* and *pains* also rhyme to pave way for a rhetorical ease of presentation. This is to sustain the interest of the reading audience and glue the listening audience to their media of information. Johnstone (2008) describes this rhythmic flow as presentational persuasion calculated at creating long lasting memory in the listening minds.

#### 4.2 Lexico-Semantic Analysis

Certain groups of words and structures in the address are of stylistic importance for various reasons. In the first category are those that collocate perfectly to mark the field of discourse as political/politics. The following set exemplifies

a maturing democracy	(sc 1)
Shackles of colonialism	(sc 2)
our general elections	(sc 6)
transitional generational shift	(sc 7)
Just and human nation	(sc 8)
national conversation	(sc 12)
physical infrastructure	(sc 20)
rapid growth and development	(sc 24)
constitutional responsibility	(sc 32)

The set examined paradigmatically presents the thrust of the address that the democracy achieved from the yoke of colonialism by means of general election which is transitional is to ensure development, the president’s constitutional duty or responsibility. The sampled set, therefore, serves as a nexus for deciphering the gist of the speech.

Politics is a game of conviction played on the pitch of tact expression, and democracy is a game of number. This is why the slogan –united we stand, divided we fall, is popular in the political circle. Another group of words and phrases points to the writer’s realization of this fact and (his) call for support. Examples include *fellow citizens* (sc 1), *our democracy* (sc 22), *our country* (sc 34), *all stakeholders* (sc 37), *servant-leader* (sc 61), and *our Nigerian family* (sc 65). Yar’adua’s recognition of the importance of collectivism is climaxed in the tact that is imbued in sentence 35 of the address:

I will use all resource available to me with

your help to address the crisis in the spirit of fairness, justice and co-operation.

The initial *I-me* self-reference in this sentence is deftly modulated by the intervening adverbial phrase of manner - *with your help* - to provide the requisite condition for success in the bid to attain peace. This prerequisite is re-echoed via lexicalization by the last word in the sentence, *cooperation*.

The use of the personal pronoun 'we' in the address attracts double interpretation. It is used mostly in its exclusive sense. This orientation limits its coverage to the writer and probably his cabinet but obviously not including the audience - the ordinary Nigerians. In three places, however, it is used inclusively covering both the writer-speaker and the audience. This is seen in sentences 2 (...*since we cast off the shackles of colonialism*), 4 (*we are all in this together...*) and sentence 67 (...*that we know is within our reach*). This use of *we* in the latter sense reiterates the premium the writer placed on unity and solidarity.

#### 4.3 Morphological and Syntactic Patterns

These two levels which constitute textual grammar are also relevant to the style of the address. Beginning with morphology, sentence 72 which is a paragraph on its own provides justifications.

Let us recapture the mood of optimism that defined us at the dawn of independence, that legendary can-do spirit that marked our Nigerianness.

The agglutination of the verbs 'can' and 'do' to form the adjective *can-do* is a purposeful deviation and apt variation. Verbs do not modify nouns! However, this is necessary to avoid repetition of the word *optimism* earlier used in the first clause. This same conscious stylistic variation is obvious in the substitution of the verb *defined* by its synonym *marked* in the same sentence. Besides, the informative and expressive capacity of 'can' and 'do' transcends denoting mere hope; it implicates reality and therefore, possibility. This interrogation, as Gee (2014) observes, can account for the writer or speaker's lexical choice. The formation of the final word in the sentence, *Nigerianness* patterns like that of 'selfishness', 'effortlessness', 'usefulness' and similar others in the English lexicon. Its formation is, therefore, motivated by

the existence of these words. 'Nigerianness' could be replaced by phrases like 'Nigerian citizenship', 'Nigerian family', and 'being Nigerians'. Economy of words, however, seems to have prevailed in the choice making decision by the text producer. This is also a way of justifying the writing of the only two personal names in the speech - Obasanjo and Jonathan, without their other names.

An examination of the verbal group in the speech under analysis reveals both simple and complex types at almost equal proportion. Majority of the complex verbal groups show a polarity in their choice between the two modals - *will* and *must*. The former features as the first element of the two-member verbal group in 15 sentences (scs: 6, 21, 24, 27, 29, 30, 35, 37, 38, 41, 44, 47, 51, 57 and 62), while the latter precedes different verbs as found in *must continue* (sc 23), *must devote* (sc 56), *must act* (sc 64) and *must be* (sc 67). The stylo-syntactic essence of the verbal group is that it shows the commitment and resolve of the presenter to ensure the success of the Nigerian state. The simple verbal group also corroborates this. The verbs 'commit' (sc 18) and 'offer' (sc 61) are apt for their commissive orientation.

The sentences constituting the address vary in their structures and constituents. Five of these are sampled and analyzed below.

#### Sample 1

VOC		S	P	C	A
Fellow citizens, this is a historic day for our nation					
A	S	P	C		A
for it marks an important milestone in our march					
A					
towards democracy. (sc 1, complex)					

#### Sample 2

S					P
The administration of president Obasanjo has laid					
C	A	S	P	C	
the foundation upon which we can build our future					
prosperity. (sc 16, complex)					

#### Sample 3

A		S	P		C
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To our larger African family, you have our commitment

A      A

to the goal of African integration. (sc 50, simple)

**Sample 4**

S      P      C      P      A

I will be a listener and doer and serve with humility.

(sc 62, compound)

**Sample 5**

S      P      C

Let us recapture the mood of optimism

S      P      C      A      A

That defined us at dawn of independence

C

that legendary can-do spirit

S      P      C

that marked our Nigerianness. (sc 72, compound complex)

The opening sentence (sc 1) is complex and its first and main clause opens with a vocative – a device used to call and get attention. This is appropriate in the context of speech presentation. The complex nature of the sentence helps the writer-speaker to achieve two purposes: to assert and justify his assertion so as to gain conviction. The second sample is also complex and similar to the first in its constituents. Its subject is, however, heavily modified to help the writer specify clearly the exact government to which he was giving a credit.

The third sample is a simple sentence with three adverbial phrases. Functionally, the first patterns like a vocative. The last two give direction or focus to the complement, *our commitment*. This multiplicity helps the writer to be exact or to mean accurately. The penultimate sample is a compound sentence which enables the writer-presenter to state his two equally important resolutions. These two promises or resolutions are sacrosanct in achieving success in any democracy. With the last sample, a compound complex sentence, emphasis is laid heavily on the need for optimism. This is necessary because the audience had been disappointed by several governments. The subject of the first and the third clause – *let us*, Halliday and Mathiessen (2004:139) note, is best

interpreted ‘as a wayward form of the subject **you** and **I**’. The subject thus introduces a face saving act, a positive or fellowship face, showing the writer-speaker’s belief that he and the members of the audience owed it a collective duty to change their attitude and salvage the nation.

Two general observations can be made about the samples. First, there is dislocation of the elements of the clauses constituting each of them. Second, all sentences constituting the samples are active. The stylistic importance of the first may be to suggest the writer’s resolve to bring about a new order in the nation’s politics, while the second obviously stylistically implies the resolve of the presenter to lead and serve. The thematization of pronoun ‘I’ and the exclusive ‘we’ in many sentences in the speech support this claim.

*4.4 Discoursal or Rhetorical Pattern*

It is germane to make certain relevant observation about this aspect of the address to complete its style study. The unity achieved in the speech is done through the various cohesive devices. A second look at some of the samples used for syntactic analysis reveals instances of the devices. In sample 1, the pronoun *it* in the second clause makes anaphoric reference to the noun *day* in the first. The pronoun *you* in sample 3 makes a similar anaphoric reference to the noun phrase *our larger African family*. The additive *and* in sample four as well as *also* in sentences 5, 7 and 44 shows incremental propositions in the speech. The extensive repetition of the nominals: *we*, *I*, *let us* and the vocative *fellow citizens* help in further ensuring textness or connectedness in the address.

**5. Summary and Conclusion**

The stylistic analysis of President Musa Yar’adua’s speech reveals unity of purpose in the various choices made at the different levels of analysis. Capitalization is a graphic clue used in the speech to achieve the purpose of honoring the audience, while the scanty nature of the paragraphs seems to suggest the President’s resolve to talk less but act right. At the lexico-semantic level, it is made obvious that the topic of the address is maintained through the writer’s adherence to the choice of the appropriate collocates. The president’s effort at committing himself to good governance is revealed through two major choices made as the verbal group level, and his employment of

face-saving act. The strong promise and appeal that characterize his speech as well as his respect for the audience, therefore, account for the audience reaction and optimism after listening to it. The overall quality of the speech is its tactfulness. Democracy in Nigeria will become sustainable for good if politicians and political office holders are not only tactful but also sincerely commit themselves to the truth of their speech. The kind of felicitous oratorical techniques used in the speech should be matched with great administrative ingenuity that will set Nigeria free from poverty, diseases and underdevelopment.

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