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LINGUISTIC STRATEGIES IN NIGERIAN PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN RHETORIC: A CORPUS-BASED COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF TINUBU, OBI, AND ATIKU'S 2023 CAMPAIGN SPEECHES

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ABSTRACT

This study presents a corpus-based comparative analysis of linguistic strategies deployed in campaign speeches by Nigeria's three major presidential candidates in the 2023 general elections: Bola Ahmed Tinubu (APC), Peter Gregory Obi (LP), and Atiku Abubakar (PDP). Using Jeffries' (2010, 2014) Critical Stylistics framework, the research systematically examines three speeches delivered in different geopolitical zones—Rivers State (Tinubu), Niger State (Obi), and Ondo State (Atiku)—totaling approximately 940 words. Four primary linguistic features were analyzed through mixed-methods approach combining frequency analysis with qualitative interpretation: personal pronoun distribution, promissory language patterns, metaphorical constructions, and code-switching strategies. Findings reveal distinctive rhetorical profiles: Tinubu demonstrates audience-centered minimalism with high "you" frequency (55.6%) and minimal promissory commitment; Obi employs participatory visioning with balanced pronouns, intensive modal usage (23 instances), and construction metaphors; Atiku exhibits depersonalized pragmatism with zero "I" usage and concrete specifications. These patterns reflect divergent approaches to political identity construction within Nigeria's multilingual democratic context, illuminating contemporary political communication strategies during a significant electoral moment.

KEY WORDS: corpus stylistics, political discourse, Nigerian presidential rhetoric, campaign speeches, Critical Stylistics, comparative analysis

1. INTRODUCTION

Language constitutes the fundamental medium through which political power is negotiated and contested in democratic societies. As Emeka-Nwobia (2016, p. 13) observes, language serves as "the central focus of human existence and the paradigm of expression of intent, thought and actions." In campaign contexts specifically, politicians strategically deploy linguistic resources to construct political identities, differentiate themselves from opponents, and

mobilize electoral support (Fairclough, 2003; Van Dijk, 2006). The relationship between language and politics becomes particularly complex in multilingual nations such as Nigeria, where linguistic choices carry implications extending beyond communication to encompass ethnic solidarity, regional representation, and national unity.

Political language is never ideologically neutral; it is deliberately constructed to elicit specific emotional, cognitive, and behavioral responses from target electorates (Rahmani & Saeed, 2024). Campaign speeches represent a particularly significant genre of political discourse, requiring candidates to simultaneously establish credibility, critique opponents, articulate policy visions, and mobilize supporter's commitment. As Ike-Nwafor (2015, p. 25) explains, "the support that citizens have for the politicians will be determined by what they say and how they say it for success to be achieved."

1.1 The 2023 Nigerian Presidential Elections Context

The 2023 Nigerian general elections presented an exceptionally compelling context for political discourse analysis, characterized by unprecedented youth political engagement, social media activism, and grassroots mobilization, particularly through the "Obidient" movement. Three major candidates emerged representing distinct political traditions: Bola Ahmed Tinubu (APC, Yoruba-South West) represented continuity with the outgoing administration, leveraging his reputation as former Lagos State Governor; Peter Gregory Obi (LP, Igbo-South East) positioned himself as a generational change agent and technocratic alternative to establishment politics; and Atiku Abubakar (PDP, Fulani-North East) presented himself as an experienced administrator with private sector credentials. This diversity in ethnic backgrounds, regional bases, and political lines made comparative linguistic analysis particularly valuable for understanding how politicians navigate Nigeria's complex sociopolitical landscape.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Recent studies have examined Nigerian political speeches. Mobolaji, Oyebamiji, Bilewumo, and Ayo (2024) analysed selected Tinubu speeches, identifying rhetorical strategies but without systematic frequency validation or comparative analysis. Omotunde (2024) analyzed Peter Obi's Chatham House speech, focusing on ideological construction but limiting analysis to a single international address rather than domestic campaign rhetoric. Amoussou, Allagbe, and Toboula (2024) and Chinyere and Bibian (2023) analyzed Tinubu's post-election speeches, providing insights into inaugural rhetoric but not campaign discourse.

It is noted that limited research employs systematic comparative analysis of multiple candidates from different ethnic and regional backgrounds within Nigeria. This study addresses these gaps by conducting systematic corpus-based comparative analysis of campaign speeches from Nigeria's three major 2023 presidential candidates to show how politicians with different backgrounds navigate Nigeria's complex linguistic landscape, employing distinct strategies to construct authority and differentiate themselves from opponents during a significant electoral moment.

1.3 Research Objectives and Questions

The primary aim is to conduct corpus-based comparative stylistic analysis of campaign speeches by Nigeria's three major presidential candidates in the 2023 elections, employing systematic frequency analysis to identify and interpret distinctive linguistic patterns. Specific objectives include: (1) systematically identifying and quantifying linguistic features in campaign speeches delivered by Tinubu, Obi, and Atiku; (2) comparing frequency patterns across the three candidates; (3) interpreting the rhetorical functions and ideological implications using Critical Stylistics framework; and (4) contributing methodologically transparent approaches to small-scale political corpus analysis.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study employs Lesley Jeffries' (2010, 2014) Critical Stylistics as its primary theoretical framework, supplemented by corpus stylistics methodology. Critical Stylistics bridges the traditional divide between linguistic description and ideological interpretation, providing systematic tools for examining how language choices construct meaning and encode political positions in texts. As Jeffries (2010) argues, no text is ideologically neutral; all texts carry ideological perspectives that may be implicit or explicit. This framework "brings the rigour and textual focus of stylistics to the analysis of non-literary texts to identify the ideological underpinnings of such text" (Jeffries, 2014, p. 417), making it particularly well-suited to political discourse analysis where language serves simultaneously as communication medium and site of ideological construction.

Corpus stylistics employs computational and statistical methods to identify patterns in linguistic data, providing empirical validation for stylistic claims (McIntyre & Walker, 2019). Frequency analysis establishes whether observed features represent genuine stylistic markers or random occurrences, while comparative corpus analysis enables identification of distinctive features by comparing frequency patterns across different speakers.

The integration of Critical Stylistics with corpus methods creates a powerful analytical approach: corpus methods identify what linguistic patterns exist, while Critical Stylistics interprets why these patterns matter ideologically and rhetorically. For political discourse analysis specifically, this integrated approach enables documentation of both empirical patterns of linguistic choice and interpretive significance of ideological meaning.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study employs a mixed-methods approach combining quantitative frequency analysis with qualitative critical stylistic interpretation (Jeffries, 2010; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). The corpus comprises three campaign speeches - one each from Bola Ahmed Tinubu (APC, Rivers State, 245 words), Peter Gregory Obi (LP, Niger State, 430 words), and Atiku Abubakar (PDP, Ondo State, 265 words) - delivered in different geopolitical zones during the January-February 2023 campaign period, totaling approximately 940 words. Speeches were compiled from video recordings downloaded from the internet, and transcribed verbatim, preserving code-switching, repetitions, and informal oral discourse features. Based on political discourse literature (Van Dijk, 2006; Jeffries, 2010; Fairclough, 2003), four primary linguistic features were selected for analysis: personal pronouns (I, we, you), promissory language and modal verbs (will, going to, can, must, shall, would, want), metaphorical constructions, and code-switching instances. Quantitative frequency analysis examined each speech using Microsoft Word's search function for pronoun and modal verb counting with contextual verification, while metaphorical constructions and code-switching instances were manually identified through close reading. Frequencies were calculated as both raw counts and normalized rates per 100 words to enable comparison across speeches of different lengths. Inter-coder reliability was established through independent analysis by a second coder, achieving 98.5% agreement for pronouns, 97.2% for modal verbs, 89.3% for metaphors, and 94.1% for code-switching. Qualitative critical stylistic interpretation then examined identified frequency patterns using Critical Stylistics analytical tools. The small corpus size (940 words) falls substantially below the 100,000+ words typically recommended for statistical corpus linguistics (McEnery & Hardie, 2012), meaning observed patterns should be understood as preliminary exploratory findings rather than statistically validated

characterizations. Limited sampling of one speech per candidate cannot capture potential variation across different contexts, and the absence of statistical significance testing means we cannot assess replication probability. This study is therefore positioned as exploratory descriptive research generating hypotheses for future large-scale validation

4. DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

4.1 Data Presentation

Excerpt 1: Tinubu's Campaign in Rivers State

1. APC, APC, Rivers, Rivers. The great youth of river state, The great youth of river state. The greatest of the greatest, of the greatest, of the greatest..... God bless you.
2. Let me, as the national chairman already done on our behalf, appeal to you, beg you, apologise, for us getting here late. It is not our fault; this politics is political. We know you are very good people to have waited till this time. We thank you from the bottom of our heart.
3. Here we are, again, in Nigeria, and in rivers, saying it's not fish that we are looking for. It's not crayfish, he dey Lagos too. What we are looking for is authority, authority to change your life for prosperity. Power and mandate to give you the best of life. To take care of your inheritance.
4. To make sure that all of you, particularly the youth are empowered to have the best skill in the world. The best skill that can manufacture, that can produce things that other country need, that can produce for export from Nigeria. Skills that can make Nigeria proud, that can make Nigeria a nation of prosperity, joy and happiness beyond one day.
5. We are talking about prosperity in Nigeria. Without our own factory, without better utilization of our ports, without peace and stability, we cannot achieve those aims and those dreams. We want you to take your life seriously beyond politics.
6. You want the president? Here I come. I will, by the grace of God, become the President by the power of your vote. Make sure you have your PVC, make sure your vote and your ballot is ready...

Excerpt 2: Atiku Abubakar's Campaign in Ondo State

1. PDP, Power. Power to the people.
2. Thank you very much. We have started our campaign rally from Ondo state in the South West. It is deliberate because we want to show you that we appreciate what you have done for us in the last election. You have given us the highest vote in the South West.
3. We will never forget you. That is why, if you repeat it second time again, we promise, we will definitely eliminate insecurity. We will also make sure that all the Federal roads linking Ondo State with other parts of the country are made motorable.
4. Our young men and women, you are the ones who are gathered here today, you are the ones who are suffering in the sun today, and you are the ones who will vote for us and protect it for us. We promise you, that we will set aside enough money to make sure that we empower you for your job, for your security and for your family.
5. That is why, in our policy document, we said we are going to set aside 10 billion us dollars to make sure that we

provide small and medium enterprises for young men and women to empower themselves. It's our number one priority; we must empower young men and women so that they can have future for themselves and their families.

6. Our people of Ondo State, we have also promised that we shall, by the grace of God, we will provide enough funding for education so that our universities can continue with their work. not what the APC are doing today. Today, more than eight months, our universities have closed simply because they don't care about their education, they don't care about their future. We promise it would not be the same again.

Excerpt 3: Peter Obi's Campaign in Niger State

1. A new Nigeria is possible. What we say we are going to do is to have agrarian revolution. And we cannot have that revolution without cultivate the land in Niger state. If you cultivate the land, you will have job, you will have opportunity.
2. In the last 20 years in your country, the only thing they produce is insecurity, poverty, out of school children, mystery, fuel scarcity. everything that is bad is what they produce in the past 20 years.
3. All I and Dati are offering you is a new Nigeria. Help us to build a new Nigeria. A Nigeria where you will be proud of. A Nigeria where we will fight insecurity. Nigeria will be able to travel anywhere they will be able to travel to anywhere they want to. So, help us to build that Nigeria. We are begging you. Help us to build a new Nigeria where we will bring you out of poverty by making Nigeria to move from consumption to production. We want a Nigeria where if student go to the university, four years will be four years, no ASUU strike. We want a Nigeria where Nigerians, especially our youth will have job and earn a living. That is the Nigeria we want to build.
4. So, this year election, let nobody come and tell you about tribe. Every tribe is hungry. There's no tribe that buy bread cheaper. Let nobody tell you about religion, no religion buy bread cheaper. Every tribe is suffering; every religion is suffering. Let nobody tell you it is his turn; it is your turn to take back your county. This year election will be based on the character we can trust. Dati and I talk tough, we are going to have a new generation, a change that is a new change, not change of old generation, but change of true change. That is what we want to offer you. When people talk about their turn, nobody can claim more turn than me. The south east can claim turn, I am a proud Ibo man, I am a proud South Easterner, but I am even more proud Nigerian. I am contesting this election as a Nigerian, who is more qualified to be president today. And I want you to hold me responsible, Dati and I will change Nigeria. You will be happy to live in the Nigeria we are going to build. Not a Nigeria where people tell you lie.
5. You voted for umbrella, it leaks, poverty pour on you. You voted for broom; they sweep you into poverty. We now want you to vote for human beings – mama, papa, pikin. Vote for human being, so that we can start building Nigeria. Let nobody tell you anything, if they give you money, take it, it is your money they've stolen, and vote for us. That is what we want you to do.
6. So, we thank you for being here, thank you for supporting us. We are telling you, go out there on the 25th, vote for LP, stand there on the Nigerian seat, and we will win, and

we will commence the journey of a new Nigeria. Mama, Papa, Pikin, Mama Papa, Pikin.

4.2 Frequency Analysis

Table 1 presents the overall frequency summary of analyzed features across the three campaign speeches.

Table 1: Overall Frequency Summary of Analyzed Features

Feature Category	Tinubu (Rivers)	Obi (Niger)	Atiku (Ondo)
Personal Pronouns (Total)	27	50	28
I	2 (7.4%)	9 (18.0%)	0 (0%)
We	10 (37.0%)	18 (36.0%)	15 (53.6%)
You	15 (55.6%)	23 (46.0%)	13 (46.4%)
Modal Verbs (Total)	6	23	10
will	1	11	6
going to	0	3	1
can	4	4	1
must	0	0	1
want	1	5	0
shall	0	0	1
Metaphorical Constructions	3	9	3
Code-Switching Instances	1	2	0
Speech Word Count	245	430	265

Note: Percentages in pronoun distribution rows indicate proportion of total pronouns in that category.

Observable patterns reveal significant variation across candidates. Atiku demonstrates the highest “we” usage (53.6%) with zero “I” instances, while Tinubu shows the strongest “you” orientation (55.6%). Obi demonstrates the highest overall pronoun density, 50 instances, with relatively balanced distribution. Modal verb analysis reveals Obi’s substantially higher frequency of 23 instances compared to Atiku 10, and Tinubu 6. Obi demonstrates the highest metaphor frequency of 9 instances, substantially exceeding both opponents of 3 instances each. It is noted that code-switching remains minimal across all the candidates.

4.3 Personal Pronoun Distribution and Relationship Construction

Tinubu’s pronoun distribution reveals a distinctive you-dominant pattern with 15 instances (55.6%), substantially exceeding his “we” (37.0%) and minimal “I” (7.4%) usage. This constructs rhetoric of direct audience engagement while de-emphasizing both personal authority and collective movement framing. His Rivers State speech employs “you” systematically in empowerment promises as shown in excerpt 1, items 3, 5 and 6: “*change your life for prosperity*”, mobilization appeals “*We want you to take your life seriously*”, and capability assertions “*make sure you have your PVC*”. The normalized rate of 6.12% “you” per 100 words represents the

highest you-density among the three candidates. Tinubu’s remarkably low “I” frequency, occurring in only 2 instances, (7.4%) suggests deliberate rhetorical avoidance of personal authority claims, with “I” appearing only in the direct commitment statement “*I will, by the grace of God, become the President.*” Excerpt 1, item 6. This minimal first-person singular usage contrasts with traditional Nigerian “big man” political rhetoric emphasizing individual power.

Obi demonstrates the most balanced pronoun distribution alongside the highest overall pronoun density occurring in 50 instances, showing intensive relational construction. His “you” usage leads with 23 instances (46.0%), followed closely by 18 instances of “we” (36.0%), with substantial “I” presence of 9 instances (18.0%). This, as shown in excerpt 3, items 4 and 3 constructs dual rhetorical positioning -accountable individual leader “*I am contesting this election as a Nigerian*”, building collective movement “*we will fight insecurity*”, while maintaining intensive audience engagement “*you will be happy to live in the Nigeria we are going to build*”. The balanced distribution enables Obi to shift fluidly between personal accountability, collective vision, and direct audience address. His normalized pronoun rate of 11.63% per 100 words substantially exceeds both opponents, revealing the use pronoun-intensive rhetorical style, and prioritizing relational marking. Obi’s “I” usage appears primarily in identity assertions “*I am a proud Ibo man... but I am even more proud Nigerian*” and accountability claims “*I want you to hold me responsible*”, constructing personal credibility while framing leadership as individual commitment to collective project. Excerpt 3, item 4.

Atiku exhibits the most striking pronoun pattern with zero instance of first-person singular “I” combined with the highest “we” concentration (53.6%). This suggests radically depersonalized collective rhetoric, entirely avoiding individual authority claims or personal accountability language. Excerpt 2, items 2 and 4 record his Ondo State speech where he deploys “we” exclusively for collective action framing. “*We have started our campaign,*” “*We promise you*” without any personal statements. The absence of “I” represents the most extreme de-individualization strategy observed in the data presentation, potentially reflecting either deliberate rhetorical positioning as servant of collective will or cautious avoidance of personal commitment language. Atiku’s 13 instances of “you” usage (46.4%) appears primarily in audience recognition and reciprocal obligation framing through triple repetition: “*you are the ones who are gathered here today, you are the ones who are suffering in the sun today, and you are the ones who will vote for us.*” Excerpt 2, 4. This creates rhythmic emphasis while positioning citizens as active agents, emphasizing audience sacrifice “suffering in the sun” and obligation “will vote for us”.

The pronoun patterns reveal fundamentally different approaches to political relationship construction. Tinubu’s you-dominance with minimal “I” constructs audience-centered rhetoric while avoiding personal authority claims. Obi’s balanced high-density distribution suggests integrated leadership model combining personal accountability, collective vision, and intensive audience engagement. Atiku’s I-absent, we-dominant pattern constructs the most depersonalized collective rhetoric, entirely eliminating individual subject position.

4.4 Promissory Language and Modal Verb Patterns

Obi demonstrates substantially the highest modal frequency of 23 instances of usage compared to Atiku 10 and Tinubu 6, suggesting intensive deployment of commitment and capability language. Obi’s usage of the modal verb “will” in 11 instances substantially exceeds both Atiku 6 and Tinubu 1, constructing strong future certainty. His

Niger State speech deploys “will” across multiple promise categories: capability assurance “*we will fight insecurity*”, outcome promises “*you will have job, you will have opportunity*”, process guarantees “*four years will be four years, no ASUU strike*”, and victory confidence “*we will win, and we will commence the journey*”. This intensive “will” deployment presents promised actions as certain outcomes rather than aspirational goals. Excerpt 3, items 3, 1 and 6.

Obi’s distinctive modal pattern includes the highest “want” frequency occurring in 5 instances, which is absent entirely in Atiku’s speech and appearing only once in Tinubu’s. The repeated construction “*We want a Nigeria where...*”, appearing 3 times in excerpt 3, item 3, projects policy preferences as collective desires: “*We want a Nigeria where if student go to the university, four years will be four years... We want a Nigeria where Nigerians, especially our youth will have job and earn a living.*” This rhetorical strategy constructs political vision as participatory aspiration rather than leader prescription, inviting audience identification while maintaining “will” constructions for specific commitments. Obi’s use of the phrase “going to” (3 instances) supports his use of “will” with more informal promissory construction, reinforcing future commitment through stylistic variation.

Atiku demonstrates moderate modal frequency of 10 instances, with “will” occurring in 6 instances as dominant form, though appearing primarily within promise clusters: “*We will never forget you... we will definitely eliminate insecurity. We will also make sure that all the Federal roads linking Ondo State with other parts of the country are made motorable.*” Excerpt 2, item 3. This clustering creates concentrated commitment moments rather than sustained promissory rhetoric. Atiku’s modal deployment includes “going to” in his most specific promise as shown in excerpt 2, item 5: “*we are going to set aside 10 billion us dollars to make sure that we provide small and medium enterprises.*” The precise monetary specification provides concrete verifiability contrasting with opponents’ more abstract commitments. His use of “must” and “shall”, each occurring in 1 instance adds obligatory and formal dimensions: “*we must empower young men and women*” and “*we shall, by the grace of God, we will provide enough funding for education.*”

Tinubu exhibits the lowest modal frequency usage of 6 instances of occurrence. The modal “will” appears in only 1 instance in his singular direct commitment in excerpt 1, item 6 above. This represents the only explicit future promise using “will” in his entire Rivers State speech. Tinubu’s modal pattern instead emphasizes “can”, occurring in 4 instances, focusing on capability and potential: “*the best skill that can manufacture, that can produce things that other country need, that can produce for export from Nigeria. Skills that can make Nigeria proud, that can make Nigeria a nation of prosperity.*” Excerpt 1, item 4. This repeated “can” construction frames promises as potential capacities to be developed rather than certain future deliverables, suggesting either rhetorical caution regarding commitment language or strategic emphasis on empowerment (what citizens can do) rather than provision (what government will deliver). His single “want” usage in excerpt 1, item 5: “*We want you to take your life seriously*” appears as exhortation rather than policy promise.

The modal patterns reveal three distinctive promissory strategies. Obi’s high-frequency, will-dominant pattern with substantial “want” usage constructs confident commitment to certain outcomes framed as collective aspiration, encoding participatory certainty where promised transformation depends on both leader commitment and citizen engagement. Atiku’s moderate-frequency, clustered pattern

with concrete specifications constructs focused pragmatic promises emphasizing deliverable commitments, encoding transactional pragmatism where specific promises provide verifiable accountability standards. Tinubu’s low-frequency, can-dominant pattern constructs empowerment potential rather than delivery commitment, encoding capability rhetoric where political leadership enables citizen capacity.

4.5 Metaphorical Constructions and Ideological Framing

Obi demonstrates substantially the highest metaphor frequency usage with 9 instances of occurrence in the data, revealing figurative framing as potent rhetorical strategy. His Niger State speech is dominated by construction/building metaphors appearing systematically. In excerpt 3, items 3 and 6, the need to have a new Nigeria appears 3 times as refrain: “*Help us to build a new Nigeria*” “*we can start building Nigeria,*” and “*we will commence the journey of a new Nigeria.*” These construction metaphors frame nation-transformation as architectural project requiring systematic effort, proper materials, collaborative labor, and foundational work. The “new Nigeria” frame suggests existing structure requires demolition and reconstruction from foundation, emphasizing process over personality while constructing patience expectations and quality standards.

Obi’s construction domain extends to agricultural development through “agrarian revolution” and “cultivate the land” metaphors, framing economic transformation as cultivation requiring proper preparation, sustained nurture, and patience for harvest. This agricultural extension connects to Niger State’s farming context while maintaining process-oriented transformation framework. His most distinctive metaphorical innovation involves party symbol inversion: “*You voted for umbrella, it leaks, poverty pour on you. You voted for broom; they sweep you into poverty. We now want you to vote for human beings – mama, papa, pikin.*” Excerpt 3, item 5. This metaphor cluster performs multiple functions: delegitimizing party-symbol voting by demonstrating symbol failure (umbrellas that leak and brooms that sweep incorrectly fail their basic functions), constructing causation between party choice and poverty outcomes through concrete imagery, and positioning LP candidacy as authentic humanity versus failed symbolic abstraction. The “mama, papa, pikin” (mother, father, child) construction frames the Obi-Datti ticket as family unit, invoking kinship solidarity.

Obi’s generational metaphors in excerpt 3, item 4 provide temporal framing: “*we are going to have a new generation, a change that is a new change, not change of old generation, but change of true change.*” This distinguishes his candidacy through generational rather than merely partisan difference, framing the election as epochal transition. The “new generation” metaphor constructs age/experience as potentially disqualifying, suggesting older politicians are structurally incapable of delivering transformation. His journey metaphor “*we will commence the journey of a new Nigeria*” portrays governance as process with clear starting point and directional movement, emphasizing commencement rather than completion while managing expectations.

Atiku’s metaphorical usage occurs in 3 instances, focusing centrally on empowerment framing as shown in item 4 of excerpt 2: “*we will set aside enough money... 10 billion us dollars....*” The empowerment metaphor constructs governance as enablement of citizen capacity rather than direct service provision, treating citizens as resources requiring investment for productivity. This frames political relationship economically - citizens possess hidden productive capacity that government investment unlocks - positioning government as facilitator/enabler. The empowerment

frame carries neoliberal connotation, emphasizing individual economic capacity, though Atiku's specification of "job," "security," and "family" grounds empowerment in concrete welfare outcomes. His infrastructure reference to "Federal roads linking Ondo State" provides tangible, verifiable promise contrasting with Obi's more abstract transformational metaphors.

The 3 instances of Tinubu's metaphorical usage emphasize transformation and capability constructions: "*change your life for prosperity*," "*take care of your inheritance*," and repeated "*skills that can...*". The transformation metaphor frames political power as directly altering individual circumstances, constructing active governmental agency rather than citizen empowerment model. His inheritance metaphor positions current citizens as temporary custodians of patrimony to be preserved and enhanced for future generations, constructing governance as protective/conserving function alongside transformative ambition. The skills emphasis "*the best skill in the world... that can manufacture, that can produce things that other country need*" frames economic development through human capital and technical capacity, with export orientation suggesting competitive international positioning. See excerpt 1, items 3 and 4.

The metaphorical patterns reveal distinctive ideological framings. Obi's construction/building dominance with generational and symbol-inversion metaphors constructs transformational break requiring systematic rebuilding from foundations, encoding progressive rupture ideology. Atiku's empowerment focus constructs governance as economic enablement through resource allocation, encoding facilitative pragmatism. Tinubu's transformation-inheritance combination constructs governance as simultaneously protective of legacy and agentive in changing circumstances, encoding conservative progressivism balancing innovation with preservation.

4.6 Code-Switching and Multilingual Strategies

The analyzed speeches show remarkably minimal code-switching compared to patterns documented in some previous researches on Nigerian campaign rhetoric. Tinubu's Rivers State speech contains only one code-switching instance: "*It's not crayfish, he dey Lagos too*," employing Nigerian Pidgin construction "he dey" (it is available/present). Excerpt 1, item 3. This serves dual rhetorical functions of colloquial intimacy and emphasis through variety shift. The specific content addresses Rivers State's famous crayfish industry, demonstrating regional knowledge while asserting Lagos also possesses desired resources. However, this single instance represents minimal code-switching for a politician with extensive multilingual repertoire, potentially reflecting audience-specific adaptation (Rivers State's linguistic ecology differs from Yoruba-speaking Southwest), and time constraints.

Obi's Niger State speech contains two code-switching instances, both employing the colloquial phrase "Mama! Papa! Pikin!" as campaign slogan contrasting his candidacy with party symbols. This Pidgin-influenced family triad construction serves multiple rhetorical functions: humanization rhetoric positioning "human being" against abstract party symbols, familial solidarity invoking kinship bonds, memorable simplification creating easily-recalled three-word slogan, and anti-elite positioning through colloquial register. The strategic repetition suggests deliberate construction as campaign signature rather than incidental code-switching. The absence of Hausa greetings, Islamic phrases, or local language code-switching in Niger State (North-Central region with substantial Muslim population) may reflect Obi's Southern Christian identity constraining authentic deployment of Northern Islamic linguistic

markers, or strategic choice to maintain inclusive secular register.

Atiku's Ondo State speech contains zero code-switching instances, maintaining Standard Nigerian English throughout without any Pidgin, Yoruba, or other language variety deployment. This monolingual approach potentially reflects several strategic considerations. The speech's emphasis on concrete deliverable promises may be judged to require formal Standard English register for credibility. Also, as Northeastern politician campaigning in Southwest stronghold of his main opponent, Atiku may prioritize clear, formal communication over cultural-linguistic performance.

The minimal code-switching contrasts sharply with previous research documenting extensive multilingual switching in Nigerian campaign rhetoric (Ayeomoni, 2005; Opeibi, 2000), suggesting code-switching is highly context-dependent. Several contextual factors explain this divergence: abbreviated rally addresses (245-430 words) with time constraints; each candidate spoke outside their home region, constraining code-switching to linguistically "safe" Pidgin; youth audience composition may prioritize Pidgin and Standard English over indigenous languages; and intensive social media mediation may encourage standardized English for content shareability. These findings suggest Nigerian political code-switching involves strategic multilingual calibration based on audience composition, regional context, speech formality, time constraints, and media circulation expectations.

5. DISCUSSION

The frequency analysis enables construction of preliminary rhetorical profiles for each candidate based on this limited corpus. These profiles describe observable patterns in the analyzed speeches while acknowledging that whether they represent each candidate's characteristic style more broadly requires larger samples.

Tinubu's rhetorical profile demonstrates audience-centered minimalism characterized by you-dominant pronouns (55.6%), remarkably low "I" usage (7.4%) avoiding personal authority claims, minimal modal deployment (6 instances, only 1 "will"), capability-focused "can" modals (4 instances) emphasizing potential rather than delivery, transformation and inheritance metaphors balancing innovation with preservation, and minimal code-switching (1 Pidgin instance). This constructs political identity as audience facilitator rather than commanding leader. The avoidance of intensive promissory language in favor of capability language suggests either strategic risk minimization regarding delivery commitments or philosophical emphasis on enabling citizen capacity. The single direct commitment ("I will, by the grace of God, become the President") focuses on electoral outcome rather than policy delivery. This profile encodes facilitative pragmatism where political leadership creates conditions for citizen-driven prosperity.

Obi's rhetorical profile reveals engaged participatory leadership characterized by highest overall pronoun density (50 instances) with balanced distribution combining substantial personal accountability ("I": 18%), collective vision ("we": 36%), and intensive audience engagement ("you": 46%); highest modal frequency (23 instances) including strongest "will" usage (11 instances) signaling confident commitment combined with aspirational "want" framing (5 instances); most elaborate metaphorical framing (9 instances) dominated by construction/building imagery; generational change metaphors framing election as epochal transition; party symbol inversion constructing LP as authentic humanity versus failed abstraction; and colloquial code-switching ("mama papa pikin") creating populist solidarity. This constructs political identity as

accountable individual leading collective generational transformation. The combination of high personal accountability, intensive promissory commitment, and participatory framing creates integrated leadership model where individual leader takes responsibility while emphasizing collective action requirements. The elaborate metaphorical construction with repeated refrains suggests sophisticated rhetorical strategy creating memorable campaign language. This profile encodes transformational populism combining confident leadership assertion with anti-establishment positioning and participatory mobilization.

Atiku's rhetorical profile exhibits depersonalized collective pragmatism characterized by complete absence of first-person singular "I" (0 instances) representing extreme de-individualization strategy; highest "we" concentration (53.6%) constructing radically collective rhetoric; moderate "you" usage (46.4%) appearing in audience recognition and obligation framing; moderate modal frequency (10 instances) with "will" deployed in clustered promise sequences; concrete specification providing verifiable commitments (10 billion dollars, federal roads, university funding); empowerment metaphors positioning government as facilitator of citizen economic capacity; and zero code-switching maintaining formal Standard English register. This constructs political identity as depersonalized collective servant delivering pragmatic economic solutions. The complete I-absence represents remarkable rhetorical choice—no personal claims, no individual accountability language—potentially reflecting either strategic positioning as servant of collective will or rhetorical caution avoiding personal commitment exposure. The empowerment metaphors combined with concrete monetary specifications construct governance as economic resource allocation enabling citizen-led development. This profile encodes facilitative social democracy where government provides resources and enabling conditions within existing structural frameworks.

The comparative analysis reveals fundamentally different approaches to political identity construction and authority relationship. Tinubu constructs leadership as audience facilitation minimizing both personal authority assertion and promissory commitment. Obi constructs leadership as accountable individual driving collective generational transformation through confident commitment and participatory mobilization. Atiku constructs leadership as depersonalized collective service delivering concrete economic enablement. These differences encode distinct governance philosophies: Tinubu's capability rhetoric emphasizes enabling conditions over delivery commitments; Obi's transformational framing positions politics as epochal rupture requiring systematic rebuilding; Atiku's empowerment focus treats governance as resource allocation for citizen-led economic development.

The analyzed speeches illuminate how politicians from different ethnic and regional backgrounds navigate Nigeria's complex linguistic landscape while campaigning outside home regions. All three candidates primarily employed Standard Nigerian English as foundational medium, supplemented minimally with Pidgin but notably avoiding indigenous language code-switching. This pattern suggests Standard English serves as neutral common ground when campaigning outside home regions, with politicians prioritizing clarity over cultural-linguistic performance when addressing audiences whose indigenous languages they do not share or cannot deploy authentically. Youth audience composition, abbreviated speech formats, and social media mediation all shape linguistic choices toward pan-Nigerian accessibility rather than region-specific performance.

This study makes methodological contributions to political corpus

stylistics while acknowledging significant limitations. It demonstrates systematic frequency documentation in small political corpora while maintaining methodological transparency, framing findings as preliminary observations rather than definitive characterizations. The mixed-methods integration provides both empirical rigor and interpretive depth, with quantitative frequency analysis identifying patterns while qualitative Critical Stylistics interprets their potential significance. The comparative framework illuminates distinctive choices by examining how different politicians address similar rhetorical challenges through varied linguistic strategies.

6. CONCLUSION

This corpus-based comparative analysis has systematically documented observable linguistic patterns in three campaign speeches from Nigeria's major 2023 presidential candidates. Through systematic frequency analysis combined with Critical Stylistics interpretation, the study examined personal pronoun distribution, promissory language patterns, metaphorical constructions, and code-switching strategies.

Key findings reveal distinctive rhetorical profiles. Tinubu demonstrates audience-centered minimalism with you-dominant pronouns, minimal "I" usage, lowest modal frequency, and capability-focused rhetoric. Obi employs engaged participatory leadership with highest pronoun density, strongest modal commitment, elaborate construction metaphors, generational change rhetoric, and populist framing. Atiku exhibits depersonalized collective pragmatism with zero "I" pronouns, highest "we" concentration, concrete specifications, empowerment metaphors, and formal register maintenance.

These patterns potentially encode distinct ideological positions: Tinubu's facilitative pragmatism emphasizing enabling conditions; Obi's participatory populism positioning politics as generational rupture; Atiku's facilitative social democracy treating governance as resource allocation within existing frameworks. The minimal code-switching observed reveals context-dependent strategic calibration based on audience composition, regional context, and media circulation expectations rather than fixed ethnic linguistic performance.

The small sample size (940 words) prevents statistical validation of observed patterns. We cannot determine whether frequency differences represent stable characteristic styles, context-specific adaptations, or random variation. Single-speech-per-candidate sampling cannot capture potential variation across different audiences, campaign phases, or speech contexts. Feature selection necessarily omits other potentially significant linguistic dimensions. Despite these limitations, the study demonstrates systematic frequency documentation while maintaining rigorous transparency, modeling responsible reporting practices for exploratory political corpus research.

Future research should compile larger corpora (50,000+ words per candidate) enabling statistical validation, incorporate multivariate analysis controlling for contextual factors, conduct diachronic comparison across multiple electoral cycles, investigate audience reception through empirical methods, expand feature analysis to additional linguistic dimensions, and situate Nigerian findings within cross-national comparative frameworks.

The distinctive linguistic strategies deployed by Tinubu, Obi, and Atiku—Tinubu's audience-centered capability rhetoric, Obi's transformational participatory vision, and Atiku's depersonalized

collective pragmatism—reveal both the richness of Nigerian political rhetoric and the methodological care required to analyze it responsibly. These preliminary findings document observable patterns worthy of expanded investigation while resisting premature generalization, thereby advancing political corpus stylistics methodology alongside substantive understanding of Nigerian democratic communication practices.

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