



Stylistic Foregrounding in President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's Inaugural Speech

By

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Abstract

This study analysed foregrounding techniques in the inaugural speech of President Bola Ahmed Tinubu. Political speeches play an important role in political discourse and the inauguration speech sets the tone for political leadership. There are many academic papers on political speeches, but no stylistic foregrounding analysis has been conducted on President Tinubu's inauguration speech. Hinged on the theory of Foregrounding developed by Leech (2007), this study used a qualitative and quantitative approach which systematically analyses the speech to identify foregrounding devices embedded within it. Foregrounding, on the other hand, is based on how a text is interpreted from a linguistic point of view. It involves deliberately deviating from the standard language pattern, such as unusual word choices, and analysing the speech to see how these deviations, as well as the repetition, antithesis, and the graphology, all contribute to the overall meaning of the message. The findings of this study revealed that President Tinubu strategically used foregrounding in his inaugural speech. Precisely, specific patterns of repetition were identified in his speech that serves rhetorical functions like persuasion and emotional appeal.

Keywords: *Deviation, Foregrounding, Inaugural speech, Parallelism, President Bola Ahmed Tinubu, Stylistics.*

Introduction

Linguistics provides methods and tools for the objectivity and accuracy of literary style, as well as other types of writing. The study of style in linguistics is not a mundane task of turning literature into mathematics, but actualises imagination and fantasy. It complements the traditional approach to literature, and literary style, and serves as a crossroads between literature, criticism, and linguistics. Stylistics is a branch of applied linguistics that focuses on the study and analysis of various literary and linguistic devices used in texts to convey meaning, emotions, and other communicative aspects. Stylistics is the science which examine how readers interact with the language of texts to explain how we understand and are affected by texts when we read them (Rana, 2018). Stylistics, as a discipline within linguistics, plays a vital role in understanding the nuanced aspects of language use, particularly in political discourse.



One of the fundamental applications of stylistics is foregrounding analysis, which seeks to unveil the subtle linguistic choices employed to emphasise specific elements in a text. Previously, in the studies on political discourse, language choices, rhetorical functions and meanings were focused on (Kaewrungruang & Yaoharee, 2018). Chilton (1998) refers to language as 'the universal capacity of humans in all societies to communicate and politics is the art of governance.' Language enables politicians to conceive and transmit ideologies to the electorates (Sharndama & Ajayi, 2019).

Politics as the art of governance is dependent on language, because it plays a crucial role in communicating political ideologies and performing other political activities. Political speech is aimed to motivate and convince the nation or society and to make them familiarised with the socio-economic policies, plans and actions of the speakers.

The inaugural speech of President Bola Ahmed Tinubu serves as the focal point for a comprehensive foregrounding analysis. Foregrounding analysis is a method within stylistics that examines how certain linguistic features are emphasised in a text, drawing attention to their significance and effect on the reader. The year 2023 witnessed the success Bola Ahmed Tinubu who became the 16th President of Nigeria despite only few political experts believing that he would have serious chances against Peter Obi (Omotunde, 2024).

As a prominent Nigerian politician and former governor of Lagos State, Tinubu's inaugural speech has served as a platform for him to convey his vision, goals, and political ideology to the Nigerian people. People give comments about his inaugural address on television, newspapers, and other media. The politicians share conflicting educational backgrounds, cultures, and geographical locations. These enhance diversities in choice of words, clauses to suit and convince their congregations. In most cases, the potentiality of the politicians determines how excellent the speeches are composed and presented to their congregations. Some of the speeches contain ambiguities that create communication gaps to their audience (Sani, 2022). Understanding the linguistic and stylistic choices made by Tinubu in his speeches is therefore vital in comprehending his communication strategies and overall political discourse. President Tinubu utilises stylistic devices to foreground certain elements and themes. Stylistic devices, also known as rhetorical device are techniques employed to convince, persuade and emphasise certain word choices in language. Stylistic devices such as alliteration, parallelism, antithesis, metaphor and simile in addition to neologism are utilised in a political



speeches. However, the use of stylistic devices works best among people who speak the same language.

Foregrounding as a concept involves the use of linguistic devices to emphasise certain elements in a text thereby, making them stand out. The study aims to provide insight into how these stylistic devices contribute to the overall effectiveness and persuasiveness of the speech. The significance of this study lies in its exploration of the linguistic devices used in President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's inaugural speech, specifically focusing on foregrounding. Overall, this study is significant as it offers a comprehensive analysis of the linguistic techniques employed by President Bola Ahmed Tinubu in his inaugural speech, providing valuable insights into his communication strategies and the key themes he wishes to convey to the Nigerian people.

Literature Review

The concept of Stylistics

Scholars have described the concept of style as vague, having no distinct meaning. Ordinarily, style refers to a peculiar way of doing things, such as a person's style of eating, dressing, speaking, writing and so on. Mode (2015) argues that in its most general interpretation, the word 'style' has an uncontroversial meaning: it refers to the way in which language is used in each context, by a given person, for a given purpose and so on. This definition suggests that the circumstances surrounding a speech event or situation, the socio-cultural background of the speaker and what he/she wants to achieve constitute style (Sharndama & Ajayi, 2019). Style can also be used to refer to the effectiveness of a mode of expression or to suggest appropriateness of usage. Hence, Akinwotu (2018) describe style as saying the right thing most effectively. Style in language study refers to the actual way language is used in a particular context for achieving a particular purpose. It includes language use that typifies an era, age, epoch, setting or domain (law, politics, social, culture) and language use in literary genre, among many others. The concept of style has a wide currency as it is applied to diverse human endeavours. The purpose of this study is to understand how these stylistic elements affect the overall impact and credibility of the speech. Invariably, it looks at the language devices used in President Tinubu's inaugural speech, with a particular focus on foregrounding. Stylistics is often defined as the study of styles. Linguistically, stylistic analysts are engrossed with the "analysis of both style and stylistic variation". Stylistics aims to investigate and analyse the



significance of the linguistic forms in terms of their interpretations in each text. It is that branch of linguistics which is concerned with the study of style (Wadi & Jamsheer, 2021).

Broadly, stylistics is a branch of applied linguistics, is the study and interpretation of texts of all types and/or spoken language concerning their linguistic and tonal style, where style is the particular variety of language used by different individuals and/or in different situations or settings. For example, the vernacular, or everyday language, may be used among casual friends, whereas more formal language, with respect to grammar, pronunciation or accent, and lexicon or choice of words, is often used in a cover letter and résumé and while speaking during a job interview.

Foregrounding

Foregrounding is a literary device that emphasises ideas and symbols through the use of attention-seeking linguistic techniques, which either repeat content or break established patterns. Foregrounding is commonly seen when linguistic features or parts of the text stand out. This happens when something in the text is placed in the foreground.

According to Najm, (2021), Foregrounding is developed by the Russian Formalists and Prague school structuralist which refers to any linguistic feature (at any level of language) whose prominence in a text is motivated for literary purposes. Foregrounded items are 'defamiliarised' in that they deviate from the established background patterns of language in a text.

Formally, foregrounding is a deviation, or departure, from what is expected in the linguistic code or the social code expressed through language; functionally, it is a special effect or significance conveyed by that departure (Leech, 2013).

The foregrounding techniques include any stylistic distortion of some sort, either through an aspect of the text which deviates from a linguistic norm or where an aspect of the text is brought to the fore through repetition or parallelism. And Leech (2007) defined foregrounding in two ways: parallelism and deviation. Parallelism can be thought of as an unexpected degree of regularity, whereas deviation can be thought of as an unexpected degree of irregularity. Foregrounding can occur on all language levels (phonology, graphology, morphology, lexis, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics). It is frequently employed to emphasise a text's latent significance, to aid in its prominence, or to inspire interpretation (Sun, 2022).



The term foregrounding refers to specific language device i.e. deviation and parallelism, that are used in literary texts in a functional and condensed way (Van Peer & Hakemulder, 2006).

Parallelism and deviation are used to call your attention to the peculiarity of a word or a character's actions in a literary work. Foregrounding is achieved by these techniques. By examining how President Tinubu uses foregrounding in his inaugural speech, we can uncover the key themes and ideas that he wishes to emphasise to his audience.

Deviation entails breaking away from the ordinary or expected linguistic patterns to create a specific effect, such as italics, capitalisation, and bold. In fact, it is usually associated with neologism, which is the invention of new words or items of vocabulary, relying on an existing rule of word formation. Besides this, deviation attracts attention and aids memory retention.

By studying the deviations present in President Tinubu's speech, we can unveil the ways in which he challenges conventional language norms and constructs a unique and impactful message to his listeners. He graciously utilised graphological features including capitalisation, abbreviations, and numbers. It signifies "the whole writing system: punctuation and paragraphing as well as spacing". Politicians rely heavily on graphology to create a powerful effect on the readers through "slight changes in font styles, text layout, use of parentheses, spacing, bullets, or underlining". Graphological foregrounding means manipulating typographical manoeuvres "such as a change in type face/font; the presence of italics, capitalisation, bold, or spacing for emphasis; the presence of unconventional punctuation or the lack of punctuation; the use of colour" (Wadi & Jamsheer, 2021).

Parallelism, however, involves the repetition of a grammatical structure or idea to create symmetry and rhythm. By analysing the parallelism in President Tinubu's speech, we can uncover the patterns and motifs that underpin his rhetoric, shedding light on the coherence and unity of his message. Parallelism is associated with the quantitative aspect of foregrounding. It embodies repetition of words, phrases, clauses, and sentence structures in the extract. The repetition of certain words and expressions is intended to attract the audience's attention to the message being conveyed. Above all, repeated expressions are instantly appealing and often simple to remember. Politicians use rhetorical devices to reach their audience, and what is mostly used are metaphors, comparisons, synonyms, and others, but antithesis is not often heard in political speeches and public presentations. President Bola Ahmed Tinubu uses the



antithesis in his speech, which is an interesting and quite powerful tool in the discourse of any politician.

While inaugural speeches are significant political events that shape public perception and set the tone for a leader's agenda, there is a need to examine the specific stylistic devices employed by President Tinubu in order to understand their rhetorical impact and the underlying messages they convey. Although the linguistic strategies employed in these speeches, especially regarding foregrounding, are often overlooked.

The linguistic strategies employed in political speeches, especially regarding foregrounding, are often overlooked. Although many research has been done on stylistic analysis of speech as well as on President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's inaugural speech by researchers such as (Sani, 2022),

Notably, many studies have been carried out on political speeches titled, "*A Stylistic Analysis of Selected Speeches of Prominent Politicians in Adamawa State of Nigeria*" (Sani, 2022), *A Linguistic Stylistic Analysis of Political Commentaries on Ondo 2020 Gubernatorial Election on Online Newspapers* (Ajayi, 2023), *Political Speeches of Some African Leaders from Linguistic Perspective (1981-2013)* (Al-Fak, 2014), and Exploring manipulative rhetorical choices in Nigerian political speeches (Oparinde et al., 2021). Consequently, most of these works were based on different themes as well as a theoretical framework. Hence, the researcher decides to investigate the foregrounding techniques employed in President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's inaugural speech.

(Kilani & Ajayi, 2024) investigated the ideological concepts present in President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's inaugural speech. Fairclough's 3D model of Critical Discourse Analysis, which defined a discourse in three structures, was deployed to examine the speech to understand the ideologies, future strategies and vision of the president. The speaker, through the speech, conveys the message of optimism, dedication, reliability, tolerance, peace, unity, development and so on to Nigerians. He clearly declared his agenda of renewed hope with his mastery of diction and consideration of his audience.

Furthermore, Sani (2022) examined the stylistic analysis of two speeches of His Excellency Murtala Nyako the then governor of Adamawa State and Dr. Jonathan Silas Zwingina, Deputy Senate Leader and Senator representing Adamawa South Senatorial District respectively. The



corpus was analysed based on Leech and Short's (1981) theory; graphology, lexical, syntactic and rhetorical features. The lexical features of the speeches show that the politicians used the lexical items and rhetorical devices for self-identification to capture the minds of the audience.

Though Sani, (2022) studies is based on stylistic analysis, and the work and other studies revealed different perspectives from the present research. Thus, to the best of our knowledge, no foregrounding stylistic work has been done on President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's inaugural speech. Hence, this forms the background on which this research is based.

Methodology

This research is hinged on stylistic foregrounding theory developed by Leech (2007). It used a qualitative and quantitative approach that systematically analysed the speech to identify foregrounding devices embedded within it. The inaugural speech delivered by President Bola Ahmed Tinubu on Monday, May 29, at Eagle Square, Abuja, was selected as the primary data source. For data collection, the speech was transcribed and analysed for instances of deviation and parallelism. The steps involved in the collection of data reading include re-reading of the transcript, selecting and collecting the data, classifying the foregrounding tools and coding the data. The researcher thoroughly read the speech multiple times to gain a comprehensive understanding of its content, context, and purpose. This step helped in identifying the key themes and issues addressed in the speech. In analysing the data, the procedures are identification of foregrounding elements such as repetition, rhetorical devices, and graphology will be identified in the speech. A simple Microsoft Word count is used to examine the words and their occurrences.

Data Presentation and Analysis of Foregrounding in President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's Inaugural Speech

Parallelism

Parallelism means that some structures have similar features or are structurally equivalent in certain aspects, which may include symmetry, juxtaposition, repetition, and parallel clauses. In English advertisements, parallelism is represented by repetition in phonology and clauses (Sun, 2022). It is the repetition of two or more words or phrases in a sentence that are grammatical as well as in meaning. The focus of the study here is repetition, anaphora, and antithesis.

Repetition



The speaker can reinforce an argument by repeating letters, words, phrases, and sentences. Such a device is helpful as it lets the speaker's point of view stay in the audience's mind (Hassan Sallomssi, 2018). One of the key stylistic features of President Tinubu's inaugural speech is the use of repetition to emphasise important themes and ideas. Obviously, President Tinubu generously utilised the personal pronouns to convey his message. The personal pronouns are used to refer to people or things that the speaker is talking to or talking about and they can be used as a way for him to refer to himself. There are two kinds of personal pronouns: subjective personal pronouns and objective personal pronouns. The subjective personal pronouns are used to refer to a subject complement or subject of a clause; they include I, we, you, he, she, it and they. Objective personal pronouns refer to the same people or things as the equivalent subject pronouns. Object pronouns are used as either object, subject complement or prepositional complement of a clause. The objective personal pronouns are: me, us, you, him, her, it and them (pronoun speech).

Table 1

Personal Pronoun found in President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's inaugural speech

Word	Frequency
Our	49
We	37
My	18
I	15
You	13
Us	13
Me	8
They	6

Ourselves	3
Them	3
His	2
Your	2



Tinubu utilised the pronouns of unity, such as our, we and us (49 times, 37 times, 13 times respectively) in his speech. They convey his intent to create a society of oneness and solidarity in his country. Although he used such pronouns, Tinubu never hesitates to place himself as the focus of responsibility for the development and implementation of the various policies that he explains throughout his speech

President Tinubu employed inclusive language throughout the speech, using pronouns like "we" and "our" to create a sense of shared identity and collective responsibility. By emphasising the idea of a united nation, he aimed to foster a sense of togetherness and encourage the audience to participate in nation-building. Repeating inclusive language conveys respect to all people. Inclusive language communicates a message effectively through precise language. Inclusive language recognises diversity and involves continual improvement.

Personal Pronoun

Inclusive language is represented by using words like (we, our, us) to create the impression that the speaker and the audience are on the same side of the issue and to make the audience think that the speaker is talking only to them. Exclusive language is shown by the use of (them, they, their) which is used to persuade by the audience (Hassan Sallomi, 2018).

Extract 1

We have long ago decided to march beyond the dimness of night into the open day of renewed national hope

We are too great a nation and too grounded as a people to rob ourselves of our finest destiny.

We have endured hardships that would have made other societies crumble.

We have more firmly established this land as a democracy in both word and deed...

They shall forever be my fellow compatriots. And I will treat them as such.

They represent important constituencies and concerns that wisdom dare not ignore.

They have taken their concerns to court. Seeking legal redress is their right, and I fully defend their exercise of this right. This is the essence of the rule of law.



In extract 1 above, ‘We’ is used to evoke a sense of collectiveness. The president consistently used the pronoun ‘we’ as a way for the speaker to refer to himself indicates that he is speaking as a representative of a group or organisation, rather than speaking as an individual. The repetition of ‘we’ in the above statements clarifies the confidence and renewed hope the president has in the people. The essential meaning of “we” is collective identity or group membership. To achieve different effects, the president uses a variety of contexts of using ‘we’ to refer to the Nigerian citizens. Tinubu said, ‘We have endured hardships that would have made other societies crumble’. This emphasises in the listener a sense of shared responsibility and collectiveness rather than an individual task. Besides, it welcomes communication, collaboration and creates a sense of respect for the citizens by the government.

On the other hand, ‘they, them and their’ were specifically chosen by the president to exclude his opponents. It breeds negativity towards these small fractions of the people. This can damage the credibility of the president, undermine his argument and alienate the audience.

Anaphora

Anaphora is the repetition of a word or words at the beginning of a phrase, while parallelism is the repetition of parts or an entire sentence in a similar way. It is employed to convey several ideas in a series of similar constructions. The use of Anaphora and parallelism enables speakers or writers to make emphasis or draw the audience’s attention to a particular part of the message. The repetition of similar structures creates rhythmic flow and appeals to the readers (Sharndama & Ajayi, 2019).

Extract 2

We shall consult and dialogue but never dictate

We shall reach out to all but never put down a single person for holding views contrary to our own.

We shall invest more in our security personnel, and this means more than an increase in numbers.

We shall provide better training, equipment, pay and firepower.

We shall ensure that investors and foreign businesses repatriate their hard-earned dividends and profits home...”



Anaphora is the repetition of words or phrases at the beginning of successive verses or clauses. “We shall....” appeared 13 times at the beginning of successive clauses. The repetition of the phrase ‘we shall’ at the beginning of multiple sentences is used to appeal to the emotions of the people. It must be noted that they helped to convey the President's vision and ideals with greater rhetorical effect and engage the audience's emotions and attention. These declarations serve to assert Tinubu's vision and goals for Nigeria, expressing his determination and resolve. **The use of ‘we shall’ is used to make predictions and talk about intentions or decisions.**

Antithesis

Antithesis is a stylistic device which represents two contrasting ideas in order to highlight (emphasise) differences. There are several variants of antithesis based on different relationships between the ideas expressed. It is a contrast of ideas or words in a parallel structure to create a strong effect.

In antithesis, two opposite ideas or things are placed side by side to entice the audience to make a critical judgment. It establishes clearly, the contrast between two ideas (Sharndama & Ajayi, 2019).

Extract 3

As a nation, we have long ago decided to march beyond the dimness of night into the open day of renewed national hope.

The question we now ask ourselves is whether to remain faithful to the work inherent in building a better society or retreat into the shadows of our unmet potential.

We have stumbled at times, but our resilience and diversity have kept us going.

Our burdens may make us bend at times, but they shall never break us.

Our administration shall to further mend and heal this nation, not tear and injure it.

We shall consult and dialogue but never dictate.

We shall reach out to all but never put down a single person for holding views contrary to our own.



Stylistic Foregrounding in President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's Inaugural Speech

We are here to further mend and heal this nation, not tear and injure it. However, my victory does not render me any more Nigerian than my opponents. Nor does it render them any less patriotic.

President Tinubu employed antithesis to attract the attention of the audience as well as emphasise the importance of the message. He tries to clarify the differences through vivid situations. The president utilised the above antithesis to evoke emotion and instil in the audience the feeling of relief and confidence. Moreover, all efforts channelled towards the success and progress of the nation shall be duly recognised and rewarded accordingly. Thus, the following were contrasted: to march beyond the dimness of night into the open day of renewed national hope; to remain faithful to the work inherent in building a better society or retreat into the shadows of our unmet potential; stumbled at times, but our resilience and diversity have kept us going; make us bend at times, but they shall never break us; to further mend and heal this nation, not tear and injure it; to further mend and heal this nation, not tear and injure it; consult and dialogue but never dictate; reach out to all but never put down a single person; not render me any more Nigerian than my opponents. Nor does it render them any less patriotic.

Deviation

Deviation entails breaking away from the ordinary or expected linguistic patterns to create a specific effect, such as italics, capitalisation, and bold. In fact, it is usually associated with neologism, which is the invention of new words or items of vocabulary, relying on an existing rule of word formation. Besides this, deviation attracts attention and aids memory retention.

Graphology

Graphology is the analysis of handwriting in an attempt to determine the writer's personality traits. According to Crystal (2008), graphology is the study of the writing system of a language, including the orthographic conventions that have been devised to turn speech into writing, using any available technology. These could be pen, ink, typewriter, electronic screen and printing press. On the same view, linguists often find it useful to draw parallels between this system and the system of spoken language; this is based solely on punctuation usage in the selected speeches, as it is more notable than other graphological items. The use of capitalisation is clearly notable in the speech selected. The primary objectives for capitalisation in the



speeches are to attract the attention of the readers and ease the comprehension of the texts (Sani, 2022).

Capitalisation

Capitalisation is a common graphological feature. Capitalisation as a form of deviation stands out among other elements in the text. This is a type of foregrounding which M.A.K Halliday refers to as “prominence”. It is used in for the purposes of prominence and emphasis (Obobolo & Dick, 2023).

Extract 4

Yet, we have shouldered the heavy burden to arrive at this SUBLIME moment where the prospect of a better future merges with our improved capacity to create that future.

As citizens, we declare as one unified people devoted to one unified national cause, that as long as this world exists, NIGERIA SHALL EXIST

‘SUBLIME’ is used to picture the envisaged brighter future. ... NIGERIA SHALL EXIST is written in capital letters, in other to lay emphasis on its importance in the speech.

Subheading

Extract 5

The subheadings of the different parts of the speech were also written in capital letters throughout the speech. Examples include ARCHITECTURE, SECURITY, THE ECONOMY, INFRASTRUCTURE, FUEL SUBSIDY, MONETARY POLICY, and FOREIGN POLICY. The use of capital letters for these section headings provides structure and clarity to the speech. These were written in capital letters to show their importance and also serve as sub-headings of areas the incumbent government will focus on, as well as where the people should expect development.

Abbreviation

Words such as GDP, CBN, ECOWAS, and AU were abbreviated and written in capital letters. This makes the speaker concise, saves time and space in the speech.



Numbers

Extract 6

The principles that will guide our administration are simple:

1. Nigeria will be impartially governed according to the constitution and the rule of law.
2. We shall defend the nation from terror and all forms of criminality that threaten the peace and stability of our country and our sub region.
3. We shall remodel our economy to bring about growth and development through job creation, food security and an end of extreme poverty.
4. In our administration, Women and youth will feature prominently.
5. Our government will continue to take proactive steps such as championing a credit culture to discourage corruption while strengthening the effectiveness and efficiency of the various anti-corruption agencies.

Numbers are written or used in the address to itemise the principles that will guide the administration in growth and development. Thus, making it easier for understanding by anybody who comes across the speech.

Conclusion

In line with the findings of this study, it was concluded that the speech entails different levels of foregrounding. The president employed this technique to communicate and enhance the comprehension of the message. Besides, one prominent foregrounding tool used in the speech is the repetition of personal pronouns, rhetorical devices, parallelism and deviation to foreground his promises, unity and vision for the future. These devices enhanced the rhetorical impact of his speech as well as underscore the strength and determination of his speech.

Additionally, the repetition of personal pronouns is a common rhetorical strategy used by political leaders to enhance the effectiveness of their speeches. In his speech, President Tinubu repeated certain phrases or words to reinforce his message and make it more memorable. This linguistic device aids in building rapport and engendering a sense of trust and mutual understanding between the speaker and the listeners.



Accordingly, the study revealed that President Tinubu adequately utilised parallelism and deviation under the canopy of repetition of pronouns, anaphora, antithesis and graphology. It is noteworthy that the theory of foregrounding is the most pertinent aspect of stylistic analysis, as it makes a writer's work more interesting and creative. In the same vein, antithesis is harnessed as a strong persuasive tool in political discourse. Additionally, the speech is laced with repetition of pronouns, which include inclusive and exclusive language and anaphora in a successive manner to create a rhetorical effect on the audience. Thus, it is envisaged that this research topic will contribute to insightful knowledge and aid researchers in the field of political discourse.

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