

CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF SELECTED SPEECHES OF PETER NDUBUISI MBAH

Aruah, Virginus Onyebuchi (Ph.D)
Department of Linguistics, Igbo and Other Nigerian Languages
University of Nigeria, Nsukka
onyebuchi.aruah@unn.edu.ng
08039482647

Ugwuoke, Priscilla Ebere (Ph.D)
Department of Linguistics, Igbo and Other Nigerian Languages
University of Nigeria, Nsukka
ebere.ugwuoke@unn.edu.ng
08037786613

Onyegiri Chikodi Dympna (Ph.D)
Department of Linguistics, Igbo and Other Nigerian Languages
University of Nigeria, Nsukka
Corresponding Author email: chikodi.onyegiri@unn.edu.ng
08038870826

Abstract

This study investigates the role of language in constructing political legitimacy, ideology and governance in the discourse of His Excellency, Gov. Barr. Peter Ndubuisi Mbah. By using the Critical Discourse Analysis as its framework, the study is anchored in the theoretical perspectives of Norman Fairclough and Teun A. van Dijk. The study adopts a qualitative design to analyse selected speeches and public statements delivered between 2023 and 2025. The analysis focuses on key discursive features such as pronoun usage, modality, lexical choices and rhetorical strategies. Findings reveal that the discourse is strategically structured to construct a collective political identity through inclusive language, legitimise authority through performance-based narratives and reframe political actions as public-oriented initiatives. The study further demonstrates how ideological meanings are embedded in development-oriented expressions and how power is enacted through persuasive and authoritative linguistic forms. By foregrounding governance as a central theme, the discourse positions leadership as responsive and result-driven. The study contributes to existing literature by extending Critical Discourse Analysis to sub-national political communication in Nigeria and highlights the significance of language as a tool for shaping political realities and public perception.

Keywords: Critical Discourse Analysis; Political Discourse; Ideology; Power; Governance

1. Introduction

Political discourse remains a central mechanism through which power is constructed, negotiated and sustained in contemporary societies. Within the framework of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), language is conceptualised not merely as a neutral medium of communication but as a form of social practice that reflects and reproduces ideological structures and power relations (Fairclough, 1995; van Dijk, 1998). This perspective underscores the role of discourse in legitimising authority, shaping public perception and sustaining institutional dominance across political contexts.

In emerging democracies such as Nigeria, political actors rely extensively on discourse to construct legitimacy, particularly in contexts marked by electoral contestation, socio-economic challenges and heightened public scrutiny (Opeibi, 2004; Adegaju, 2015). Political communication functions as a strategic tool for framing governance, projecting competence and aligning leadership with the perceived interests of the populace. As Chilton (2004) observes, political discourse is inherently persuasive, serving to justify actions, mobilise support and construct ideological consensus.

Recent Nigerian-based studies have further reinforced the relevance of CDA in analysing contemporary political communication. For instance, Adedayo and Asonibare (2026) demonstrate how discursive strategies in Nigeria's 2023 general elections were deployed to construct ideological positions and manipulate public opinion through fake news. Similarly, Muhammad (2025) reveals how presidential rhetoric evolves over time to reframe governance challenges as reform-oriented achievements. In another study, Ogunlana and Oamen (2024) examine the use of metaphor, pronoun choice and rhetorical strategies in Nigerian presidential campaign discourse, highlighting how language constructs power relations and political identity. Jido and Ogungbe (2024) further show how political actors strategically deploy language in media rejoinders to influence public interpretation and maintain ideological control.

Additional studies have expanded CDA into diverse domains of Nigerian discourse. Adelabu, Olanihun, Daniel, Olawuwo, Okoji and Oladipupo (2024) analyse persuasive strategies in presidential speeches on economic crises, demonstrating how language is used to justify policy decisions and manage public expectations. Abdulkadir (2023) investigates political interviews, revealing how ideological positions are subtly embedded and negotiated through discourse. Ayokunle (2023) explores inter-textuality in political advertisements, emphasising how texts are invoked to reinforce persuasive messaging. Similarly, Onoja, Bebenimibo and Onoja (2022) extend CDA to digital spaces, showing how online audiences participate in the co-construction of political meaning, while Adedomi (2022) and Orungbeja and Ajilore (2022) highlight the role of discourse in shaping national narratives around insecurity and political leadership.

Despite these advances, existing studies have largely concentrated on presidential discourse, media representations and electoral communication, with comparatively limited attention to sub-national political actors such as state governors. This gap is significant, given that governance and political communication at the state level play a crucial role in shaping citizens' lived experiences and perceptions of democracy.

The discourse of Gov. Peter Ndubuisi Mbah provides a compelling site for addressing this gap. Since assuming office, Gov. Mbah's public communication has been characterised by a strong emphasis on development, transformation and people-oriented governance. Such discursive patterns align with what Fairclough (2003) describes as the "technologisation of discourse," where language is strategically crafted to achieve specific institutional and political objectives. Through recurrent lexical choices, rhetorical structuring and thematic emphasis, Gov. Mbah's discourse constructs a narrative of performance-based legitimacy and developmental governance.

Scholars have shown that linguistic features such as pronoun usage, modality, metaphor and evaluative language are central to the construction of political meaning and ideological positioning (van Leeuwen, 2008; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). For example, the use of inclusive pronouns functions to create solidarity and collective identity, aligning governmental authority with the populace (Wodak, 2009). Furthermore, the strategic enumeration of achievements and policy initiatives serves as a legitimising device, presenting governance as effective and results-driven.

Political discourse also involves the reframing of potentially contentious actions as necessary for collective progress. According to van Dijk (2006), political discourse reflects the ideological square, where speakers emphasise positive self-representation while mitigating negative aspects. In this regard, Gov. Mbah's discourse can be understood as a site of ideological negotiation, where political realities are reconstructed and presented as collective imperatives rather than individual ambitions.

Against this backdrop, this study undertakes a critical discourse analysis of selected speeches and public statements of Governor Peter Mbah. Drawing on the theoretical insights of Norman Fairclough (1995, 2003) and Teun A. van Dijk (1998, 2006), the study examines how linguistic and discursive strategies are deployed to construct power, legitimise authority and articulate ideological positions. By situating the analysis within the broader socio-political context of Nigeria, the study contributes to ongoing scholarly discussions on political discourse, governance and ideology. It also reinforces the relevance of CDA as an analytical framework for understanding the complex interplay between language, power and society in contemporary political contexts.

2. Literature Review

The study of political discourse within the framework of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) has attracted considerable scholarly attention due to its capacity to reveal the intricate relationships between language, power and ideology. Foundational works by Norman Fairclough (1995, 2003) and Teun A. van Dijk (1998, 2006) conceptualise discourse as a form of social practice through which dominance is enacted and reproduced. Fairclough's three-dimensional model emphasises the interconnection between textual analysis, discursive practice and social practice, while van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach foregrounds the role of ideology in shaping discourse structures. These theoretical orientations provide the analytical foundation for examining how political actors strategically deploy language to construct legitimacy and influence public perception.

In the Nigerian context, early studies such as Opeibi (2004) and Adegoju (2015) established the relevance of CDA in analysing political communication, particularly in electoral campaigns and governance discourse. These studies demonstrate that political language in Nigeria is inherently persuasive and ideologically loaded, mostly reflecting broader socio-political dynamics. However, recent scholarship (2020–2026) has expanded the scope of CDA to address emerging dimensions of political discourse, including digital communication, media interactions and evolving rhetorical strategies.

One prominent theme in recent studies is the role of discourse in constructing and negotiating political ideology. Adedayo and Asonibare (2026), for instance, examine fake news in Nigeria's 2023 general elections, revealing how discursive strategies are employed to manipulate public opinion and reinforce ideological divides. Their findings highlight the increasing complexity of political discourse in the digital age, where misinformation becomes a powerful tool for shaping political realities. Similarly, Muhammad (2025) analyses presidential Independence Day speeches, demonstrating how political rhetoric evolves over time to reframe governance

challenges as reform-oriented successes. This aligns with CDA's emphasis on the dynamic and context-dependent nature of discourse.

Another significant strand of research focuses on linguistic strategies used in political persuasion and legitimisation. Ogunlana and Oamen (2024) identify the use of metaphor, pronoun choice and rhetorical structuring as key mechanisms through which political actors construct power relations and identity. Their study shows that inclusive pronouns such as "we" and "our" are frequently used to create solidarity and align leaders with the electorate. In a similar vein, Adelabu et al. (2024) analyse presidential speeches on economic challenges, demonstrating how evaluative language and persuasive devices are deployed to justify policy decisions and manage public expectations. These findings corroborate earlier assertions by Halliday and Matthiessen (2014) and van Leeuwen (2008) regarding the functional role of linguistic choices in meaning-making and social representation.

Media discourse and political communication have also received considerable attention in recent CDA studies. Jido and Ogungbe (2024) investigate rejoinders to political press releases, revealing how language is strategically used to counter criticism and maintain ideological control. Abdulkadir (2023) extends this analysis to political interviews, showing how discourse functions as a site of negotiation where ideological positions are delicately constructed and contested. These studies highlight the interactive nature of political discourse, where meaning is co-constructed between political actors and the media.

Furthermore, scholars have explored the role of inter-textuality and digital discourse in shaping political communication. Ayokunle (2023) highlights how political advertisements draw on existing texts and cultural references to enhance persuasive appeal and ideological resonance. Meanwhile, Onoja, Bebenimibo and Onoja (2022) examine online audience comments on social media platforms, demonstrating how citizens actively participate in the production and circulation of political discourse. This shift toward digital engagement reflects the evolving landscape of political communication in Nigeria, where discourse is no longer confined to formal institutional settings.

In addition, studies by Adedomi (2022) and Orungbeja and Ajilore (2022) emphasise the role of discourse in constructing national narratives around critical issues such as insecurity and leadership. These works reveal how political and religious figures utilise language to frame

social problems, assign responsibility and propose solutions that thereby influencing public perception and policy discourse. Such analyses reinforce CDA's central claim that discourse is both constitutive and constituting of social reality.

Despite these significant contributions, a notable gap persists in the literature. Most existing studies have focused on presidential discourse, national politics and media representations, with limited attention to sub-national political actors such as state governors. This is a critical omission, given that governance at the state level directly impacts citizens' everyday experiences and shapes localised political realities. The discourse of Gov. Peter Ndubuisi Mbah, therefore, presents an important opportunity to extend CDA research into this relatively underexplored domain.

This study builds on existing scholarship by examining the linguistic and discursive strategies employed in Gov. Mbah's public communication. By focusing on sub-national political discourse, the study not only fills an existing gap in Nigerian CDA research but also contributes to a more understanding of how language operates as a tool of power, governance and ideological construction in contemporary political contexts.

3. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design grounded in Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to examine how language is used to construct power, legitimacy, and ideology in the public communication of Peter Ndubuisi Mbah. The choice of CDA is informed by its capacity to uncover implicit meanings and ideological structures embedded in discourse (Norman Fairclough, 1995, 2003; Teun A. van Dijk, 1998, 2006). The study employs textual and interpretive analysis within Fairclough's three-dimensional framework:

1. Textual Analysis (lexical choices, grammar, cohesion)
2. Discursive Practice (production and consumption of texts)
3. Social Practice (broader socio-political context)

This is complemented by van Dijk's ideological square, which explains how discourse emphasises positive self-representation and negative other-representation.

The data consist of purposively selected speeches and public statements delivered by Governor Mbah between 2023 and 2025. These speeches include: inaugural speech, policy speeches, media interviews, public addresses on development and governance. Selection criteria include: relevance to governance and policy, presence of persuasive and ideological language, and public accessibility and circulation.

The analysis follows a coding framework adapted from CDA principles:

| Category | Code | Description |
|---------------------|------|--|
| Pronouns | PRON | Use of “we,” “our,” “they” for identity construction |
| Lexicalisation | LEX | Word choices reflecting ideology (e.g., “transformation”) |
| Modality | MOD | Expressions of certainty/obligation (e.g., “will,” “must”) |
| Legitimation | LEG | Justifying actions through achievements or authority |
| Ideological Framing | IDEO | Representation of reality to support political goals |
| Rhetorical Strategy | RHET | Persuasion devices (repetition, enumeration) |

4. Data analysis and discussion

Excerpt 1: Inclusive identity construction

We are building a new Enugu where our people will enjoy the dividends of democracy.

CDA Coding

- i. PRON: “We,” “our people”
- ii. LEX: “new Enugu,” “dividends of democracy”
- iii. IDEO: Collective progress narrative

Analysis

The use of inclusive pronouns constructs a shared identity between the government and citizens, reinforcing solidarity. This aligns with Wodak’s (2009) assertion that pronouns function as tools of inclusion and exclusion in political discourse. The phrase *new Enugu* signals transformation, while *dividends of democracy* frame governance as beneficial and people-centered. Ideologically, this positions the speaker as a representative of collective aspirations.

Excerpt 2: Performance-based legitimation

In just one year, we have delivered roads, improved schools, and strengthened security across the state.

CDA coding

- i. LEG: Enumeration of achievements
- ii. RHET: Listing (roads, schools, security)
- iii. MOD: Implicit certainty (*have delivered*)

Analysis

This excerpt demonstrates a legitimisation strategy through performance. The enumeration of achievements functions rhetorically to present governance as effective and results-driven. According to van Leeuwen (2008), such strategies justify authority by appealing to utility and outcomes. The certainty expressed through *have delivered* eliminates doubt and reinforces credibility.

Excerpt 3: Ideological framing and reframing

This decision is not about politics; it is about securing a better future for our people.

CDA coding

- i. IDEO: Reframing political action as public good
- ii. PRON: *our people*
- iii. RHET: Contrastive structure (*not... but...*)

Analysis

The contrastive structure functions to reframe a potentially controversial political action as a moral and developmental necessity. This aligns with van Dijk’s (2006) ideological square, where positive self-representation is emphasised while negative interpretations are downplayed. The discourse masks political interests and repositions them as collective benefits.

Excerpt 4: Modality and authority construction

We must ensure that every community feels the impact of governance.

CDA coding

- i. MOD: *must* (obligation)
- ii. PRON: *we*
- iii. IDEO: Responsibility framing

Analysis

The modal verb, *must* expresses obligation and authority, signaling commitment and urgency. This reflects Halliday and Matthiessen’s (2014) view of modality as a resource for expressing speaker position. The statement constructs governance as a moral duty, reinforcing the speaker’s authoritative position.

5. Discussion of findings

The analysis reveals that Gov. Mbah’s discourse is characterised by the following:

a. Strategic use of inclusive language

The strategic use of inclusive language involves the deliberate deployment of collective pronouns such as *we*, *our*, and *us* to construct a sense of shared identity between the speaker and the audience. By framing policies,

achievements and challenges as collective experiences, the speaker symbolically aligns themselves with citizens. The speaker is also reducing perceived social and political distance. This linguistic strategy fosters a sense of unity, belonging and mutual responsibility by positioning leadership not as distant authority but as part of a common collective.

At the discursive level, inclusive pronouns function as tools of alignment and solidarity. They enable the speaker to appropriate both successes and responsibilities as jointly owned (*we have achieved, our progress, we will overcome*), which can strengthen public identification with government actions and decisions. This shared framing helps to naturalise authority, as leadership becomes embedded within the collective rather than imposed from above.

However, the use of *we* is often strategically ambiguous. It can shift between referring to the government, the broader population, or even a specific group, depending on the rhetorical context. This flexibility allows the speaker to claim credit inclusively while diffusing responsibility when necessary. In this sense, inclusive language does not merely promote unity; it also serves persuasive and ideological functions by managing representation, reinforcing legitimacy and shaping how audiences interpret power relations.

The frequent use of *we* and *our* constructs an imagined community in which leader and citizens are portrayed as partners in progress. The employment of generic pronouns enhances trust, cooperation and acceptance of political authority.

b. Performance-based legitimation

Performance-based legitimation refers to the deliberate emphasis on achievements, outputs and measurable successes as a means of justifying authority and reinforcing credibility. Here, legitimacy is constructed not simply through positional power or rhetoric, but through a sustained narrative of *what has been done*. Political actors foreground concrete accomplishments such as improvements in infrastructure, economic growth, policy implementation, or social interventions. These political actors do this in order to demonstrate effectiveness and competence in governance.

At the discursive level, this strategy is realised through the use of evaluative and persuasive language that amplifies success. Expressions such as *remarkable progress, transformational projects, or historic milestones* are often employed to frame achievements in a positive light. Quantification also plays a crucial role: statistics, percentages, and timelines are invoked to give an impression of objectivity and verifiability. These quantifications strengthen the credibility of the claims being made. These linguistic resources work together to construct an image of efficiency, productivity and results-oriented leadership.

Performance-based legitimation frequently involves implicit comparison. Achievements are framed in contrast to previous administrations, alternative political actors, or past conditions and thereby reinforcing a narrative of improvement and progress. This comparative positioning not only elevates the speaker's performance but also subtly delegitimises others by highlighting perceived inadequacies or failures.

Importantly, this strategy is selective in nature. While successes are prominently highlighted and repeated, shortcomings, delays, or failures tend to be minimised, omitted, or reframed. Through this selective representation, a coherent and persuasive account of governance is constructed one that aligns with broader ideological goals of positive self-presentation and public approval. Ultimately, performance-based legitimation serves to sustain authority by linking leadership directly to demonstrable outcomes and perceived effectiveness.

c. Ideological reframing

Ideological reframing involves the discursive reconstruction of political decisions so that they appear as inevitable, rational and in the collective interest, rather than as choices shaped by personal ambition or partisan agenda. Through this strategy, actions that might otherwise be contested are presented as necessary responses to prevailing circumstances thereby reducing the space for opposition and critique.

At the linguistic level, this is achieved through modalities of necessity and obligation (e.g., *we must, it is necessary, there is no alternative*). These modalities frame decisions as compelled rather than optional. Political actors also draw on technocratic and neutral-sounding language to depersonalise their choices by presenting them as outcomes of expert analysis, data, or objective realities. By doing so, agency is often backgrounded and decisions are positioned as logical extensions of broader structural conditions rather than deliberate political acts.

Moreover, ideological reframing frequently relies on moral and collective justifications. Policies are linked to national interest, public welfare, or long-term stability, which helps to align them with widely shared values. In this way, even unpopular measures such as austerity policies or regulatory changes can be legitimised as sacrifices required for a greater good. This moral framing encourages citizens to interpret decisions through a lens of necessity and responsibility rather than political contestation.

This strategy also involves selective representation. Alternative viewpoints, competing interpretations, or potential negative consequences are often minimised or excluded, while supportive narratives are foregrounded. As a result, a particular version of reality is constructed one in which the decision appears not only justified but unavoidable.

Generally, ideological reframing functions as a powerful legitimization strategy by transforming political choices into objective necessities. This ideological reframing shapes public perception and reinforcing the authority of those in power.

d. Strong modal expressions

Strong modal expressions refer to the deliberate use of high-value modal verbs such as *must*, *will*, *shall* and *cannot* to project authority, certainty and firm commitment. These linguistic forms signal a high degree of obligation or inevitability, allowing speakers to present their statements as decisive and non-negotiable. In this way, modality becomes a key resource for constructing a commanding and confident leadership voice.

At the discursive level, modals like *must* encode necessity and obligation. Modals often framing actions as required rather than optional (*we must act now, this policy must be implemented*). Similarly, *will* conveys certainty and determination by projecting future actions as guaranteed outcomes (*we will deliver, this initiative will transform the system*). Such expressions reduce ambiguity and limit interpretive flexibility by guiding the audience toward a preferred understanding of events and intentions.

These modal choices also contribute to the enactment of power relations. By asserting what *must* be done, the speaker positions themselves as an authority capable of defining priorities and directing collective action. At the same time, strong modality can function persuasively by instilling confidence in leadership as certainty and decisiveness are often associated with competence and control.

However, this strategy also suppresses alternative viewpoints by presenting decisions as already settled or inevitable. The use of strong modals can close down dialogue, making policies appear beyond contestation and discouraging dissent. In this sense, strong modal expressions do not merely reflect commitment; they actively shape the boundaries of political debate.

The use of *must*, *will*, and similar forms reinforces authority and credibility by portraying leadership as decisive, purposeful and firmly in control of both present actions and future outcomes.

e. Development-oriented lexicalisation

Development-oriented lexicalisation refers to the patterned use of words and expressions that evoke progress, growth and improvement. The development-oriented lexicalisation is used to constructing a forward-looking ideological position. Lexical items such as *transformation*, *development*, *innovation*, *growth* and *future* are repeatedly deployed to frame governance as a continuous process of advancement. Through this recurrence, language itself becomes a vehicle for normalising the idea that political authority is aligned with progress and positive change.

At the textual level, these lexical choices function as evaluative markers that pre-structure how policies and actions are interpreted. By embedding decisions within a semantic field of progress, even routine administrative actions are elevated and reinterpreted as part of a broader developmental agenda. This creates a coherent narrative in which the present is consistently linked to an improved future by reinforcing optimism and public expectation.

Discursively, development-oriented lexicalisation also works through repetition and inter-textuality. The consistent circulation of these terms across speeches, policy documents and media representations help to stabilise their meanings and embed them within public consciousness. Over time, such vocabulary becomes ideologically loaded, carrying implicit assumptions that equate leadership with modernisation, efficiency and national advancement.

Furthermore, this strategy often involves temporal framing. The past may be implicitly or explicitly constructed as a period of stagnation or underperformance, while the present administration is positioned as the turning point toward a better future. In this way, development-oriented language does not only highlights progress but also legitimises authority by suggesting that current leadership is uniquely capable of delivering transformation.

However, like other discursive strategies, this lexicalisation is selective. It foregrounds positive trajectories while potentially obscuring structural challenges, inequalities, or policy limitations. By focusing attention on inspirational goals and projected outcomes, it can shift public evaluation away from immediate shortcomings toward long-term promises.

Development-oriented lexicalisation serves as a powerful ideological tool that reinforces legitimacy by aligning political action with widely valued notions of progress, hope and a better future.

6. Summary

The findings demonstrate that the political discourse of Gov. Peter Ndubuisi Mbah is not merely communicative but deeply ideological, functioning as a tool for the following: constructing political legitimacy, reinforcing authority and shaping public perceptions.

By integrating Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional model and Teun A. van Dijk's ideological framework, the study reveals how language operates as a mechanism of power within Nigerian political discourse.

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