

**"NIGERIANS CAN BE VERY IMPATIENT": THE CONUNDRUM OF
POLITICAL RESTRUCTURING IN PRESIDENT BUHARI'S 2018
NEW-YEAR SPEECH - A CRITICAL APPRAISAL**

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Abstract

This paper investigates the discursive strategies implemented by President Muhammadu Buhari, the President of Nigeria, in his 2018 New-Year national broadcast, with a view to deconstructing the ideological underpinnings of textual representations in the goodwill speech. Studies that strictly focused on the analysis of the President's inaugural speech are numerous, but scholarly investigation into his speech on political restructuring is rare. The study, therefore, adopts van Dijk's Socio-cognitive Approach of Critical Discourse Analysis as theoretical framework, focusing on his model of "Ideological Square". President Buhari's 2018 New-Year speech constitutes our data for this study. Our findings, thus, revealed how Buhari's discourse configurations are intended to tacitly project, reproduce and maintain his ideological disposition—the inviolability of the centrist federation. He deployed preponderantly the other-inclusive pronominal "We" (33%) and "Our" (32%) approximately as in-group ideological impositions in the speech that serves a political necessity, giving Nigerians a sense of political inclusiveness in his own government. He emphasised the necessity of continuing patience among Nigerians by using hyperbolic constructions such as attributive adjectives and adverbs of degree as discourse mechanism of projecting his concealed ideological orientations. Contrary to his campaign manifesto, Buhari employed discursive tactics that depicted him as a patriot of centrist federalism. This paper, therefore, concludes that the President's tacit discursive constructs to subtly dissuade the ubiquitous campaign for political restructuring clearly signalled that Nigeria is still under a de facto military regime.

Key words: Muhammadu Buhari, New-Year Speech, Political Restructuring, CDA

Introduction

There is rarely any worthwhile activity that human beings engage in without the import of language in today's world. Since today's world is characterised by a flood of information, we do not only use language, purely, as an instrument of communication; it also performs some specific social functions for us, particularly in socioeconomic activities and political affairs. In politics, for instance, language can serve multiple purposes such as being deployed to inspire members of one's political group, enact power relations, maintain ideological affiliations and continuity, build and extend political

support or retain the loyalty of party faithful for partisan reasons. Conversely, politicians also tend to use language as a weapon to delegitimise, deemphasise or discredit ideological orientations from perceived political opponents. This is in line with Beard's argument that "looking at the language of political rhetorics as an occupation is important because it helps to understand how language is used by those who wish to gain power, those who wish to exercise power, and those who wish to keep power" (2).

One of the ways by which elected public officers exercise their 'executive' powers, in a democratic engagement, is to employ discourse constructs that legitimise their own ideological frames on key national issues. In Nigeria, for example, one of the most divisive issues that have intensely charged the political atmosphere, recently, is the discourse of political restructuring.

Scholars have argued consistently that, in democratic politics, language is the conveyor of ideological orientations because the facilities of language can be deployed to enact inequalities in power relations, maintain dominance, and impose opinions as forms of sociocultural practices and political representations (van Dijk, *ideology* 23; van Dijk, *Critical Discourse Analysis*, 352; Fairclough, 3; Blackledge, 616-617; Michira 4).

This paper is, therefore, set out to critically identify and analyse the discourse configurations of President Buhari's 2018 New-Year speech, with a view to unpicking his ideological leaning towards political restructuring in Nigeria. The paper investigates and reveals why certain textual representations in President Buhari's speech are initiated, maintained and reproduced in order to legitimise and reemphasise his own underlying ideological beliefs (van Dijk *Ideology* 166-167).

President Muhammadu Buhari

President Muhammadu Buhari is the fourth democratically-elected president of Nigeria of the Fourth Republic (1999-till date). His ascension marked a political watershed in Nigeria because it was the first time a sitting president would be defeated, and peacefully hand over power to an opposition in Nigeria's political scene. He was sworn-in as the 5th Executive President of Nigeria on May 29th, 2015, after defeating the former President, Dr. GoodluckEbele Jonathan, in a fiercely-contested presidential election. President Buhari is the third civilian president that emerged from the northern region in Nigeria, after Alhaji Shehu Shagari (1979-1983), whose tenure was ousted by a military junta on 13th December, 1983, and late Alhaji Umar Musa Yar'Adua (2007-2010). Alhaji Yar'Adua died in office during protracted kidney-related ailment. Since Nigeria comprises six geo-political zones, it is on record that President Buhari's emergence as the third president of Nigeria, who hails from the northern region, confirms the north's hegemony on Nigeria's political landscape.

As the President of Nigeria, President Buhari's cautious approach to taking critical public decisions, particularly the delay in appointing his cabinet members on assumption of office, culminated in Nigerians nicknaming him: *Baba, go-slow*, meaning "the father of slow pace". His 2018 New-Year speech is chosen as a model of political discourse engagement, that reconstructs and represents his ideological response to the pervasive clamour for political restructuring by Nigerians.

New-Year Speech

A New Year Day is the first day of a new calendar year, usually observed as a public holiday in some countries. It is part of democratic practices for sitting presidents of such countries to deliver a nationwide address to the citizens on such a special day. A New-Year speech is known as a 'state-of-the-nation' address in which a sitting president is expected to welcome the citizens into the new year, and detail how the country has fared under the administration and the government's future development plans to provide better services to the nation so as to improve the living standards of the citizens in line with the ruling party's campaign manifesto. In so doing, the president normatively solicits the continuing support of the citizens, a *sine qua non* for the government to deliver on its pre-election campaign promises and pledges. This is evident in the 2018 New-Year speech of President Buhari.

President Buhari's 2018 New-Year speech consisted of 42 paragraphs, with 1973 words. The theme of the speech focused on addressing issues of national concerns such as huge physical infrastructure deficit, perennial fuel scarcity during festive seasons, unemployment, *political restructuring*, electioneering matters, security concerns, and Niger-Delta militancy. It is worthy of note that despite the growing clamour for restructuring of Nigeria's political architecture in recent times, President Buhari devoted only three (3) sparsely-constructed paragraphs of the speech, representing 7% of the entire speech, to addressing the national debate.

The Conundrum of Political Restructuring: the Nigerian Experience

Restructuring involves the 're-arrangement' or 're-organisation' of a structure which *hitherto* operated as one whole unit. The prefix: "re-" attached to the base word presupposes that there is an extant 'structure' in which there exists a central point and component units. Today, Nigeria is a pluralist state, with people from diverse ethno-nationalities and cultural sensibilities, who have been merged within the same geographic space, operating as one federation. Historically, this marriage of political convenience consummated by the imperial British in 1914 has failed to produce equitable socio-economic developments across the nation, a situation that has led to a rising number of

Nigerians, political leaders, social activists and civil societies, calling for political restructuring of Nigeria's current 'unitary federal structure'.

The national debate on *restructuring* had been growing in importance in the years preceding 2017; but it gained heightened momentum in 2017 following the Biafra secessionist movement and the issuance of quit notice to Igbos, living and transacting business in the north, by the Arewa Youth Group. Subsequently, the activities of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) were tagged "acts of terrorism" by a Federal High Court in Abuja in 2017, and the Group's movement was, subsequently, quelled by the Federal Government of Nigeria, placing a total ban on all activities related to the group. The last nail on the coffin was the Federal Government's introduction of military operations namely: "Operation Python Dance" and "Operation Crocodile" that decimated the secessionist movement. Consequently, political leaders and concerned Nigerians are calling for restructuring as a way of addressing growing agitations, particularly in order to achieve equitable socioeconomic developments across the country. The issue of political restructuring, however, has been a highly contentious national discourse in Nigeria's political scenery, with different competing interests speaking for or against it, resulting in a conundrum.

The conundrum of political restructuring in Nigeria lies in the fact that the advocates of restructuring are people, living in the regions that serve as the nation's "cash-cow", i.e., the source of the nation's stupendous wealth. These "cash cow" regions today are ridden with rising unemployment, environmental devastation, extreme poverty and underdevelopment. Conversely, the antagonists of political restructuring are the political power brokers in Nigeria. These power brokers would argue that political restructuring is never the plausible solution to Nigeria's inequitable socioeconomic order. They often claim that restructuring Nigeria, on the one hand, would make the 'centre' weak, and on the other hand, allow political leaders, including governors and their godfathers, at the regional levels to be corrupt and expropriate public funds for self-aggrandisement, leaving them to question the motivations, and distrust the intentions of those clamouring for political restructuring. As much as he proposes restructuring, el-Rufai argues that "certain leaders who espouse restructuring now [are] for purposes of political and media attention, noting that they did nothing to advance such goals when they were in power" (5).

Apart from el-Rufai, another political bigwig in Nigeria that supports the call for 'restructuring' is Asiwaju Bola Ahmed Tinubu – the national leader of All Progressives Congress (APC) – the ruling party. As a keynote speaker at the 2017 Annual dinner of the King's College Old Boys Association, Tinubu maintains, in his speech entitled: *A New Nigeria or a Better One: The Fitting Tools of a Greater Repair*, that "it would be better

to *restructure* things to attain the correct balance between our collective purpose on the one hand and our separate grass-root realities on the other.

We must listen to what is being said so that we can determine what is really meant." Other prominent Nigerians calling for a return to the 1960 and 1963 Constitutions, which emphasise regional structure include Chief Edwin Clark and Chief Mike Emakpere (South-South Region); Alhaji Tanko Yakassai and Atiku Abubakar (Northern Region); Chief Chekwas Okorie and Chief Chukwuemeka Ezedife (South-Eastern Region); Asiwaju Bola Tinubu and Chief Dipo Jemileyin (South-Western Region), to mention just a few. Besides, President Buhari in his 2017 Independence Day speech admitted, unequivocally, that restructuring is "quite proper in a legitimate debate". Perhaps, such statement is intended to spur minimal enthusiasm.

It should be stressed that *restructuring* does not imply separatist movement or national disintegration. It rather suggests the devolution of political power to federating units such that strengthens the regional states for them to explore, develop and utilise their own mineral resources in order to raise revenues for themselves at a competitive advantage, and provide security apparatus to safeguard the lives of their residents. Thus, the autonomous regions will enjoy economic benefits accrued from their states' natural resources, and remit specified royalties to the federation treasury account. In view of this, Dickson and Asua argue that "resource producing areas ought to have control over resources located in their areas, with minimal intervention from the Federal Government, as it is the practice in the United States" (5). Essentially, political restructuring allows innovative and creative ideas, and promotes the beauty of unity in diversity.

Since political restructuring is one of the fiercely contested national discourse in Nigeria, President Muhammadu Buhari – an opposition candidate in the 2014 presidential race – promised Nigerians through his pre-election campaign manifesto entitled: *My Manifesto and Vision for Nigeria* - that his intention is to "initiate action to amend the Nigerian Constitution with a view to devolving powers, duties, and responsibilities to states in order to entrench true federalism and the federal spirit" (1) in an attempt to present himself to the electorate as a reformer of existing democratic institutions in Nigeria. In this study, therefore, we carry out a critical discourse analysis of Buhari's 2018 New Year's Day speech, paying close attention to his ideologically-motivated response to political restructuring in Nigeria.

Existing Studies

A number of scholarly investigations have been carried out on President Buhari's speeches since his assumption of office, as the fifth democratically-elected President of Nigeria. Ademilokun examined *Aspects of Attitudinal Meanings in President Buhari's*

Inauguration Speech: An Appraisal Analysis by focusing attention on different kinds of attitudinal meanings expressed by Buhari in his speech. Besides, Koutchadé carried out a *Discourse Analysis of General Buhari's Acceptance Speech* using a Systemic Functional Linguistic Paradigm to deconstruct the speech. In addition, Sharndama undertook *A Critical Discourse Analysis of President Buhari's Inaugural Speech*, using Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Analytical Model, as a theoretical framework, just to mention a few. Having reviewed these literatures, *inter alia*, on President Buhari's speeches, it is worthy of note that there has not been an investigation into Buhari's New-Year speech, which foregrounds the salience and appropriateness of the title of this paper.

Theoretical and Methodological Frameworks

Critical Discourse Analysis:

Critical Discourse Analysis (henceforth, CDA) provides the theoretical underpinnings for the analysis of the present study. The CDA theory is selected on the basis that it connects discourse constructs to ideological framings. Besides, one of the salient tasks of critical discourse analysts is to reveal the underlying discourse strategies employed by politicians, including elected public office holders, to legitimise, maintain and project their political ideologies in a democratic engagement.

Discourse is simply defined as "a piece of language in use to achieve some specific goals" (Opeibi 6). Such intended goals may be social, economic, spiritual or political, among others. Thus, discourse analysis focuses, essentially, on the functional essence and communicative meanings of language in use by its users. *Discourse* (spoken or written) can be analysed using analytical tools provided by language facilities. Scholars have so far expanded and extended the studies of 'discourse analysis' to other fields of academic engagements such as sociology, anthropology, education, law, philosophy, mass media, psychology, politics, etc., which has resulted in an extended analytical framework known as Critical Discourse Analysis. This is why scholars agree that CDA is a multidisciplinary approach to discourse analysis, because it also draws from and integrates fundamental concepts and approaches from the humanities and social theory (Fairclough, *CDA* 9; Wodak, 528; Titscher *et al.* 146; Blackledge, 617-618).

In discourse analysis, the term *critical* does not necessarily imply an analysis that focuses on the 'negative' communicative intents of language use(rs), but rather tends to unpick certain assumptions grounded in ideological stance when analysing texts from political discourses. The key focus of critical analysts is to draw the attention and rouse the consciousness of the 'victims' or those who have limited power by reason of their socio-economic ranking to the subtlety of manipulative and controlling discourse texts initiated by those holding positions of authority in given socio-political contexts. Besides, Fairclough argues that CDA "implies showing connections and causes that are hidden; it

also implies intervention" (9). In other words, CDA tends to normatively describe, evaluate and explain discursive manifestations that represent various values, "fundamental for just or decent societies" (Fairclough, *CDA* 9).

One of the interesting postulations of CDA is to deconstruct concealed power relations and ideological dominance sublimely projected through discourse in socio-political contexts (van Dijk, *Ideology* 269). In terms of socio-political contexts, the major preoccupations of critical discourse analysts are to explore, analyse and interpret the discursive engagements of political leaders, including governors, prime ministers and presidents, during social engagements intended to mobilise and persuade the citizens to support a certain cause for partisan reasons. This is in line with the scholarly assertion that discourse, as a form of social practice and processes, has the underlying power to influence the lives of its users (Fairclough, *Analysing Discourse* 3; Woods, 100; Wodak, *Politics as Usual* 528; Opeibi, 6). This study, therefore, adopts van Dijk's critical discourse analysis, as the analytical tool, focusing on his conceptual postulation of "Ideological Square".

Van Dijk propounded the concept of Ideological Square, which can be adopted to analyse specific forms of text and talk that include "political speeches, interviews, programmes, or propaganda typically focused on the preferred topics of 'our' group or party, on what we have done well, and associate political opponents with negative topics such as war, violence, drugs, lack of freedom, and so on" (*Politics, Ideology and Discourse*, 734). Van Dijk developed CDA as a discourse analysis tool for revealing how discourse structures (i.e. spoken or written texts) are configured to sublimely project, legitimise and maintain ideological dominance, power abuse or social inequality in socio-political contexts (van Dijk, *Ideology* 163). Besides, Fairclough succinctly describes "discourses as ways of representing" (25) Self/own group or others. The major thrust of van Dijk's concept of 'Ideological Square' focuses on analysing the discourse elements utilised by discourse participants in the positive representation of 'Us', but negative portrayal of 'Them'. In other words, the summary of the discursive strategies involves inflating *Our* positive attitudes and *Their* negative attitudes, but deflating *Our* negative attitudes and *Their* positive attitudes. Moreover, it involves the subtlety of discursive categorisation of in-group and out-group polarisation through the use of the pronoun pairs: 'Us' vs. 'Them'. Using the conceptual framework of Ideological Square, we are going to analyse President Buhari's 2018 New-Year nationwide broadcast with a view to explicating his ideologically-based response to the growing call for national restructuring.

Methodology

Studies that strictly focused on the analysis of the President's inaugural speech are numerous, but no scholarly investigation has been undertaken on his 2018 New-Year

national broadcast, particularly his speech on national restructuring. Thus, the analysis of Buhari's New-Year speech on political restructuring is justified. President Buhari's 2018 New-Year speech to Nigerians constitutes our data for this study. Our data were sourced from the website of Channels Television www.channelstv.com/2018/01/01/president-buhari-new-year-address on January 28th, 2018. The choice of President Buhari's 2018 New-Year speech is two-pronged: on the one hand, it is the most recent nationwide speech broadcast by President Buhari in which he expresses his government's inherent ideological disposition towards political restructuring, and on the other hand, as a president who came to power with admirable credential, built around the mantra of Change Nigeria, his political view is the most articulated and influential, providing fundamental insights into the policy direction of the Nigerian government. In so doing, this paper carries out a critical evaluation of President Buhari's 2018 New-Year speech, as a political discourse engagement, with a pointed focus on his ideological disposition towards political restructuring. It is worthy of note that the study adopts, purely, a qualitative approach in its data analysis.

Data Analysis

Before proceeding with the critical analysis of the speech, it is pertinent to provide a background that precipitated the speech. The 2018 New-Year speech was delivered at a critical time - a time in which certain group of Nigerians are dissatisfied with and disgruntled over the vagaries of socioeconomic conditions and a sense of political exclusion, a situation that has culminated in the ubiquitous demand for political restructuring. The prepared speech was then delivered as a response of the Federal Government of Nigeria to the growing clamour. Thus, President Buhari, on the one hand, chose his discourse constructs carefully in order to avoid raising inadvertent suspicions about his view, and on the other hand, deployed persuasive tactics to endear such "group of opposition" to align with the government's ideological reasoning. In our data analysis, we first extracted and categorised the discourse fragments to be analysed from the speech in line with van Dijk's (*Politics, Ideology and Discourse* 735-739) ideological concepts before providing corresponding explanations below each of the highlighted texts.

Actor Description

Actor Description involves the utilisation of some discursive constructs to describe or characterise actors or advocates of a particular ideological cause in a certain way. Such descriptions typically feature negative description of Outgroup members, i.e. Our 'enemies', while in-group members, i.e. Our supporters, are described positively in all discourse situations. This is evident in Buhari's 2018 New-Year speech as pointed out below:

a. "We Nigerians can be very impatient and want to improve *our* conditions faster than may be possible considering our resources and capacities. (...) We must

give a long period of trial and improvement before the system we have adopted is anywhere near fit for purpose..."

In the above excerpt, President Buhari describes, pejoratively, Nigerians, i.e. "we", who are consistently clamouring for political restructuring, as 'impatient folks'. Such negative portrayal of the protagonists of political restructuring is informed by President Buhari's underlying political belief that these protagonists are sponsored by a network of his political enemies. The political enemies are politicians, who would rather take rash decisions, than informed decisions in matters of national concerns. Since President Buhari is known as "the father of slow pace" as stated above, the employment of the plural pronominal such as "we" and "our," in the discourse fragment does not necessarily imply self-inclusion. In other words, Buhari could not have been referring, explicitly, to himself as an 'impatient folk', but rather, indirectly, the network of his political enemies. Talk of patience, in this discourse context, it is intended to create and retain a sense of expectations in Nigerians – expectations that *may* be met after "a long period of trial and improvement" of the *centrist* federal system of government.

Populism

Populism involves the employment of a popular claim or pithy statement to substantiate one's ideological view in order to win greater supports and, sometimes, enact understanding from the audience. One of the ways of enacting a populist strategy is to draw from an irrefutable source such as quoting a law, an anecdote, proverb, allusion, among others. It is worthy of note that the use of populist claim is quite common in Nigeria's political discourse as a means of foregrounding one's political ideology or scoring political points. An example of populism in the speech is:

b. "No human law or edifice is perfect"

He deploys the strategy of populism in the speech as a familiar claim to maintain his ideological leaning. He utilises the pithy statement: "No human law or edifice is perfect" that best typifies his political ideology. The pithy clause was purposely selected to foreground his insistence that Nigeria's *centrist* federal structure suffers, characteristically, from imperfections like other man-made laws or inventions. He seems to claim, indirectly, that a parliamentary structure would also suffer from imperfections. The underlying proposition is the implicit persuasion that Nigerians should permit the continuance of the *centrist* federal system because perfection is far from any "human law or edifice", a discursive strategy that legitimises Buhari's political agenda of promoting *centrist* federal system of government—a move that negates his pre-election campaign promise to Nigerians. Besides, the populist construct is intended to bolster the perceived legitimacy of his own ideological claim on such a deeply divided issue. Such populist

appeal seems to reinforce the persuasive tactics needed to convince Nigerians to retain the centrist federal system of government, rather than pursue restructuring.

Comparison

Comparison occurs in discourse situations when language users compare experiences or recount circumstances that legitimise and project their own ideological orientations. This discourse strategy is often deployed to enact positive representation of 'Self', but emphasise negative attributes of 'others'. There is an example of *comparison* utilised by Buhari as found below:

c. "In older democracies, these systems took centuries to evolve, so we cannot expect a copied system to fit neatly our purposes"

In the above excerpt, President Buhari tacitly compares Nigeria's 'nascent' democracy to "older democracies", implying that Nigeria's democratic system of government is a "copied system" that would take "centuries to evolve". Besides, the implicit persuasion in the excerpt is that Nigeria's 'young democracy' should draw a lesson from "older democracies", whose prolonged patience paid off eventually. By making an explicit reference to "older democracies", Buhari seemingly argues that patience is what Nigerians need at this point, suggesting implicitly that an attempt to 'restructure' Nigeria is a proposition in desperation and haste. President Buhari, thus, employs the analogy to emphasise the necessity of continuing patience among Nigerians, explicitly suggesting that patience is of essence in matters of socio-economic developments in the life of a nation. Communicating through a deft comparison of "older democracies" and "a copied system" is intended to drive home the intended messages more powerfully.

Such *comparison* is intended to favour in-group members, i.e., "Us", as people with vast knowledge and experiences about how democratic systems of government work in other climes. According to van Dijk, this sort of comparison confers a feeling of superiority on in-group members "in which 'We' [appear] more intelligent, more efficient, hard working or more democratic than 'They' are" (76).

Disclaimers

Disclaimers are discourse strategies often used by speakers as face-saving mechanism in public discourse, according to van Dijk, "by mentioning Our positive characteristics, but then focusing exclusively on "Their negative attributes" (736). Van Dijk (ibid) argues that there are many types of *disclaimers*, which include 'apparent empathy', 'apparent concession', 'apparent denial', among others. In Buhari's 2018 New-Year speech, we identify the following types:

d. "We tried the parliamentary system; [but] we jettisoned it. Now there are shrill cries for a return to the parliamentary structure." [*apparent disapproval*]

e. "However, there is a strong case for a closer look at the cost of government and for the public services long used to
extravagance, waste and corruption to change for the better." [*apparent concession*]

Apparent Disapproval is another discourse strategy deployed by Buhari in his reaction to political restructuring in Nigeria. The discourse construction is intended to show that Nigerians, *ab initio*, had abandoned the parliamentary system of government, and should not consider bringing back the "jettisoned" system of government. Such statement of disapproval is intended to legitimise his firm opposition to political restructuring of Nigeria's current unitary federal system. Besides, there is an implied sense of continuing advocacy for the present federal structure in the declarative clause: "we tried the parliamentary system; we jettisoned it".

There is also an 'underlying' concession in the excerpt (e), suggesting that "extravagance, waste [of public funds] and corruption" still manifest in the centrist federal structure headed by him. Note that before his ascendancy to the presidency in 2015, he campaigned on the mantra of "Change" Nigeria. Three years after assuming power, he still argues that "there is a strong case for a closer look at the cost of government and for the public services long used to extravagance, waste and corruption to *change* for the better", in order to speak to public concerns: *fight endemic corruption in government*. Such proposition tends to legitimise what Wei observes about politicians who "Making promises, even those that may never be fulfilled, is among the most often used means to gain popularity" (129). This paper, therefore, argues that political leaders should match their campaign rhetorics with actions.

Distancing

Distancing occurs when speakers tend to use discourse constructs that isolate themselves or members of their own group from the negative properties of the 'Others'. In such an instance, speakers use personal pronouns to separate themselves as represented in their discourse constructs. This is evident in Buhari's speech as typified below:

f. "My firm view is that our problems are more to do with *process* than *structure*."

Self-distancing is another discourse strategy utilised by Buhari in the above excerpt. He seems to present his own opinion through the use of self-referential expression: "my firm view" on the contentious narratives of political restructuring as representing himself, not the generality of Nigerians. The underlying proposition is that he wants the clause to simply be read as an expression of personal opinion. Thus, the expression: "my firm view" is certainly very suggestive: *you take it or leave it*. He, therefore, seems to attribute the blame for Nigeria's inequitable socioeconomic development to the bureaucratic *procedure* of public service, rather than admit that the present overly-centralised federal 'structure' is faulty. Since Mr. Buhari is the current Nigerian president, there is more to this expression than just a mere personal opinion. It is a sort of political persuasion to win over the advocates of political restructuring to accept government's view as inviolable. Nevertheless, the use of the first-person possessive form: "my" in the nominal phrase signals self-representation of opinions as contrary to a number of Nigerians, who may have *different* political views.

Negative Lexicalisation

Speakers typically deploy certain lexical choices and expressions to depict opposition members negatively. This is intended to discredit 'Their' personality or derogate 'Their' ideological properties in public discourse. This also manifests in Buhari's speech as demonstrated below:

g. "We Nigerians can be very impatient and want to improve our conditions faster than may be possible considering our resources and capacities."

h. "We tried the parliamentary system; we jettisoned it. Now there are shrill cries for a return to the parliamentary structure. (...) However, there is a strong case for a closer look at the cost of government and for the public services long used to extravagance, waste and corruption to change for the better."

It is worthy to note that it is part of political practice in Nigeria's political scene for politicians to use negative lexicalisation to represent contrary opinions for perceived political opponents, particularly 'Those' who seem not to support 'Our' political ideology. Buhari employs the declarative clause: "Nigerians can be *very impatient*" to represent negatively and publicly 'Those' Nigerians who are clamouring for restructuring. Note that the predicative adjectival phrase: *very impatient* in this discourse context is used to imply 'immaturity', 'desperation' and 'impetuosity', which signals unpopular ideology. Such negative representations are intended to limit the political influence of the enemies of 'Our' political ideologies. The function of these discourse constructs is intended not only to put down one's enemy, but also to humiliate one's opponent in public while demonstrating one's innocence or superiority (Wei, 132).

Another instance of negative lexicalisation is the employment of the verb: "jettisoned" in the expression: "We tried the parliamentary system; we jettisoned it." The term is a strong verb that, pejoratively, means the 'abandonment' or 'casting away' of something undesirable, which implicitly suggests that such "system" is not fit for reconsideration. The reason being that the reconsideration of an already "jettisoned system" is an affirmation of the proverbial saying: *a dog going back to its own vomit*. The implicit proposition is that the 'advocates' of political restructuring in Nigeria are behaving like a hungry dog that "returns" to its own vomit (i.e., the jettisoned parliamentary system of government) rather than permit the continuance of the centrist federal structure.

There is also an excerpt of discursive contrast intended to polarise 'Us' from 'Them' in the passivized clauses: "there are **shrill cries** for a return to the parliamentary structure. (...) However, there is a **strong case** for a closer look at the cost of government and for the public services long used to extravagance, waste and corruption to change", implying that the 'advocates' of political restructuring are merely making "shrill cries" for a *gratuitous* change, while 'We' are making "a strong case" for *necessary* Change. The nominal phrase: "shrill cries" implies insignificance, emptiness and unpopularity of ideas espoused by 'Them'. Fairclough notes that 'shrillness' means "a feminine voice quality associated with being overly emotional" (*Language and Power* 183). The nominal phrase that describes 'Us': "a strong case", however, suggests obligation, maturity and firmness.

Note that the passivization of the expression: "there is a strong case for a closer look at the cost of government and for the public services long used to extravagance, waste and corruption to change for the better" makes the claim ambiguous and vague to the audience. The way Buhari makes the 'agency' implicit weakens and obscures the level of commitments proposed through the statement. For instance, the expression: "there is a strong case for a closer look at the cost of government" does not explicitly state who will carry out the 'huge' task of eliminating waste and corruption in his government. Thus, this passive structure whose 'agents' remain implicit suggests that the actors are insignificant, but the task will be done. Similarly, the agent obfuscation through the passivized expression: "there are shrill cries for a return to the parliamentary structure" becomes necessary, politically, for Buhari in order to avoid making false political accusations, by referring to members of his cabinet who are advocates of political restructuring. One unique feature of this speech is the way in which Buhari has avoided making explicit reference to oppositions or enemies, but referring to them indirectly.

Hyperboles

Hyperboles are rhetorical devices used to achieve elevation or exaggeration of intended meanings in public discourse. Such hyperboles are sometimes implied through metaphors,

adjectives or adverbs of degree. For instance, the deployment of attributive adjectives and adverbs of degrees is predominant in Buhari's response to political restructuring in Nigeria:

- i. "Now there are **shrill** cries for a return to the parliamentary structure"
- j. "We Nigerians can be **very impatient** and want to improve our conditions **faster** than may be possible considering our resources and capacities."
- k. "In **older** democracies, these systems took centuries to evolve so we cannot expect a **copied** system to fit **neatly** our purposes."
- l. "We must give a **long** period of trial and improvement before the system we have adopted is **anywhere** near fit for purpose."

In excerpt (j), he uses the adjectival phrase: "very *impatient*" and adverb of comparison: "*faster* than may be possible" to highlight the impetuosity of Nigerians, excluding himself, towards geopolitical restructuring. Since the debate on geopolitical restructuring is a highly polarising issue in Nigeria, the choice of these hyperbolic constructs is intended, implicitly, to discredit the ideological beliefs of 'Those Nigerians' who are not at ease with the current federal structure, and control 'Their' sense of urgency regarding the devolution of powers. Additionally, the fragment: "*faster* than may be possible considering our resources and capacities" is implicitly intended to predict a dismal consequence if "Nigerians'" failure to be patient.

Furthermore, the use of the modality of compulsion: "must" in excerpt (l) above does not (re)emphasise only the necessity of patience, but also conveys Buhari's "firm" attitude against restructuring. The next statement exemplifies this: "*However*, there is a strong case for a closer look at the cost of government and for the public services long used to extravagance, waste and corruption to change for the better." Such statement of assurance is intended to serve as a replacement to the idea of political restructuring, agitated for by some "impatient Nigerians".

Pronominalisation

Personal pronominal references are grammatical categories that are normatively utilised by politicians in the positive depiction of 'Self' but negative representation of 'Others' during political discourse, particularly when delivering goodwill messages such as a New-Year speech by a president. This binary conceptualisation of positive 'Us' and Negative 'Them' manifests in Buhari's New-Year speech with much emphasis on positive self-presentation. This positive self-presentation is represented in the speech through the use of in-group self-inclusive pronouns such as "we", "our", that are complemented by in-group self-distancing in "I" and "my".

Table 1: Showing the relative frequency of personal pronominal in the speech and their categorization

	Examp les	Number of occurrenc e	Relative Frequencies	Category
First-person pronouns	'We'	24	30.3%	In-group (other- inclusive)
	'Our'	23	30.2%	
	'Us'	1	1.2%	
	'I'	16	20.5%	In-group (self-only)
	'My'	6	7.5%	
	'Me'	3	3.7%	
Second-person pronouns	'You'	5	6.3%	Outgroup (self- distancing)
	'Your'	1	1.2%	
Total		79	100%	

The table shows that there is a high frequency rate of first-person plural pronouns: 'we' (24 times, 30.3%) and 'our' (23 times, 30.2%) which equals to 60.5% in President Buhari's 2018 New-Year speech, suggesting that the speech serves a political purpose of associating Nigerians with in-group categorisation, i.e., people who share his own ideological representations. In other words, President Buhari's pronominal choice reveals the citizens' solidarity towards and affiliation with his own ideology, rather than distancing 'Nigerians'. Thus, President Buhari uses the other-inclusive pronominal repeatedly to emphasise the collective responsibility of the citizens towards achieving "our quest for change" in the discourse fragment:

- i. "This year promises to be pivotal in **our** quest for CHANGE. (...) **Our** government's watchword and policy thrust is CHANGE. **We** change **our** way of doing things or **we** will stagnate and be left behind in the race of lifting **our** people out of poverty and into prosperity (...)"

Since Nigeria is a nation characterised by underdevelopment indices, a situation occasioned by endemic corruption and systemic abuse of public offices, these other-inclusive pronominal references "we" and "our" in the excerpt imply that the 'project of Change Nigeria' will purely be undertaken and achieved collectively. This is a discursive strategy implemented by President Buhari to, on the one hand, show Nigerians that his party—the ruling APC—is ideologically distinct from the previous administrations of PDP's Transformative Agenda and, on the other hand, appeal to Nigerians to embrace his own government's ideological orientation of "Change" Nigeria. Note that the *Change* mantra on which the APC gained power is an indirect attack against the PDP administration of sixteen years in power. Besides, as a representative of the people, his choice of political plural pronominalisation demonstrates that the Nigerian Project of "Change" is a collective responsibility of Buhari, government officials and Nigerians.

It is worthy of note that there is no explicit reference to perceived political enemies in the speech, but there is an indirect negative portrayal of 'some' Nigerians. For instance, Buhari employed an indefinite pronoun in the expression: "*some of our compatriots chose this period to inflict severe hardship on us all*" to implicitly distinguish a 'portion', who are bad among Us. In other words, *We* are good, but there are *some* of our members, who are the enemies of our ideological goals. Thus, 'They' should be blamed for the "hardship" on *us all*, not 'Us' because 'They' are wolves in sheep's clothing in the sheepfold. The implicit proposition is that Buhari has assigned blame to "some" unspecified Nigerians, rather than his team members, as partly responsible for the perennial problem of fuel scarcity during festive seasons.

It is, therefore, argued in this study that politicians seem to utilise personal pronouns, as tools of reference, to discursively construct positive identity formation of 'self' and 'associates', particularly, such that emphasises the creation of a positive association between the speaker and the addressees in public discourse. Note that "our quest for change" in this context does not include political restructuring, as agitated for by Nigerians.

It is important to mention that when President Buhari intends to make a statement of obligation and commitment, he resorts to the employment of the first-person pronominal as found in the following imperative clauses:

- j. "**I** am determined to get to the root of this collective blackmail of all Nigerians."
- k. "**I** have kept a close watch on the ongoing debate about *restructuring*."
- l. "**My** firm view is that our problems are more to do with process than structure."
- m. "**I** assure you that government is ever receptive to ideas which will improve governance and contribute to the country's peace and stability"

He deliberately uses the deictic pronouns: "I" and "my" (i.e., referring specifically to himself) in this context. Such self-reference suggests that he is going to carry out these very important tasks by himself as a political 'head' of the people and the government.

Discussion of Findings

The analysis reveals that President Buhari's response to the conundrum of political restructuring in Nigeria emphasises his defiance to such complicated issue, a move that is inconsistent with his pre-election campaign promise to the electorate. Though President Buhari promised Nigerians during his pre-election campaign manifestoes that he will "initiate action to amend the Nigerian Constitution with a view to **devolving powers, duties, and responsibilities to states** in order to entrench true federalism and the federal spirit", the critical discourse analysis of his 2018 New-Year speech, however, corroborates what Wei (ibid) observes about politicians who "Making promises, even those that may never be fulfilled, is among the most often used means to gain popularity." Based on the critical assessment of the New-Year speech, this paper, thus suggests, that political authorities in Nigeria should endeavour to match their campaign promises with actions because according to the late reggae music icon, Bob Marley, in his popular song entitled: *Buffalo Soldier*, he says that "You can fool some people, sometimes, but you can't fool all the people all the times" (Michira14).

The findings confirm that language cannot be separated from politics because it does not merely serve the purpose of communication in political discourse; it also mirrors the 'minds' of its users. Language mirrors the minds in the sense that it can be deployed by its users to reflect social identities, project ideological values, legitimise extant political beliefs that, sometimes, may not be explicitly stated, but implied. Thus, Buhari's 2018 New-Year speech exemplifies how the speaker constructs positive social identities through self-exclusion strategies and the enactment of his ideological values towards restructuring of Nigeria's geo-political architecture. Since Nigeria is divided along ethnic, religious and political lines, all attempts—by past and present governments—to build a sustainable central government, with the present federal structure, have failed in all intents and forms. This paper, therefore, suggests that it is better to try a different approach—a new political model—for the sake of future generations.

Conclusion

In this paper, we identified and analysed salient discourse elements in President Buhari's 2018 New-Year speech, using van Dijk's concept of "Ideological Square" as the theoretical underpinning. The speech is revealing about the president's ideological approach to the conundrum of political restructuring in Nigeria. We, therefore, argue that the government's tacit strategy to delay or dissuade the campaign for political restructuring clearly sends a message, *ab initio*, that the nation is still under a *de facto*

military regime. The irreducible truth is that it is the power of citizens to effect political change in an ideal democratic nation. Thus, it is our conclusion that the strident "cries" for political restructuring in Nigeria, in as much as it is inspired by concerns towards achieving equitable and rapid socioeconomic developments across the nation in order to build the "Nigerian Project", will inevitably remain *ad infinitum*.

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