RESEARCH ARTICLE

PRESIDENTIAL INAUGURAL SPEECHES AS VITAL INSTRUMENT FOR SETTING AGENDA IN NIGERIA: AN APPRAISAL OF PRESIDENT MUHAMMAD BUHARI'S INAUGURAL SPEECH

[1]Ibrahim Sani and [2,*]Dr. Muhammad Aminu Mode

[1]Department of English and French, Umaru Musa Yar'adua University, Katsina Katsina State – Nigeria
[2]Department of Modern European Languages and Linguistics, Usmanu anfodiyo University Sokoto, Sokoto - Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Presidential inaugural speeches have witnessed a rapid proliferation of research in the 21st century in the field of political discourse. This paper focuses on how presidential inaugural speech is used as a vital vehicle for setting social agenda as well as prioritize policies both local and international as a roadmap to a new democratically elected government. The paper uses Agenda setting Theory to highlight how issues gain prominence in media coverages. CDA is also harnessed to portray the connection of language and power in political discourse. Thus, the paper examines Muhammadu Buhari's inaugural speech as the unit of its analysis. The findings of the paper demonstrate that inaugural speeches provide means for politicians to project their government policies as well as their main priorities. On the other hand, the presidential speeches also form a vital instrument the media harness for setting agenda at a given political dispensation.

INTRODUCTION

Presidential inaugural speeches have drawn considerable attention of research in various fields of research such as political discourse, communication and pragmatics. Researchers harness presidential speeches as vital instrument for analyzing social, economic and political issues in different parts of the world. In fact, a sizeable number of studies have focused on various aspects of presidential speeches. For instance, considerable studies have focused on various aspects of presidential speeches. For instance, Schaefer, (1997) looked into the persuasive devices in presidential inaugural speeches in his paper entitled "Persuading the Persuaders". He opines that presidential speeches and national public addresses are crucial part of presidential leadership strategies that are geared towards having the support of the followers. Pinna, (2006), explores discourse prosody of some intensifiers in GW Bush's presidential speech. The author provided application for the analysis of some linguistic elements in corpus linguistics for the study of English. In another perspective, Eshbaugh-Soha, (2008) examines the impact of presidential speeches on the

*Corresponding author: Dr. Muhammad Aminu Mode
Department of Modern European Languages and Linguistics, Usmanu anfodiyo University Sokoto, Sokoto – Nigeria.

Bureaucracy. The author claims that scholars have long held the view that presidents use various tools such as presidential speech to control the Federal bureaucracy. In another study, Loseke, (2009) explores emotions as discourse. He argues that emotional appeal is critical for persuasive communication in mass media. He further demonstrates how presidential speech accomplishes its purpose in winning the followers confidence by mere appeal to their emotions. The perception of the people is vital to some extent in having the support of the people. In another study, Eshaugh Soha, (2010) explores the politics of presidential speeches. The author claims that the presidential speeches are purposely used to inform the public of presidential policy preferences and allow them to meet public expectations. Wang, (2010) examines Barrack Obama's speech using CDA as his framework of analysis political speeches and how he uses the speeches to persuade the public to support and accept his policies.

Agenda Setting Theory

With the proliferation of different forms of media contents in our societies, the media is seen as a front liner for shaping public opinion. The Agenda-setting Theory has been used to account for the media influence on what the general public pays attention to and how they understand public issues that

are beyond their personal experience. The theory is mainly concerned about what issues media choose to make salient thereby influencing readers to see or think about those issues in a particular way. In addition, the theory describes the agenda-setting role of the media as the process whereby news media lead the public in assigning relative importance to various issues in a society. The Agenda-setting theory was proposed by Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw in 1972. The idea stemmed from their earlier prominent study on the role of the media in 1968. The theory provides an explanation for the existing relationship between the rate at which media give coverage to a particular issue and the level of prominence that people attach to the issue. Thus, media build prominence of issues by selecting certain issues while setting public agenda (McCombs and Shaw, 1972). Basically, Agenda-setting has multiple components that encompass a wide range of public issues. Rogers and Dearing (1988) identified three major areas as: the public agenda, which is mainly concerned with personal issues about members of the public which the public consider important; media agenda issues that are usually discussed in the media channels, such as newspapers, radio and television; and policy agenda, which are issues that policy makers such as legislators consider significant. As they are interrelated, these agenda are exhaustive in their ability to capture public issues of the moment.

These components of agenda-setting are interrelated in the sense that the media set the agenda in the form of media content that influences the public agenda which in turn influence the policy agenda. Therefore, the Agenda-setting Theory is considered as media agenda (McCombs and Shaw, 1972;Littlejohn, 1999; Miller, 2002). This implies that the media influence depends on certain factors such as the nature of issues presented and the characteristics of the audience (Miller, 2002). In framing political cartoons, the media put into play these factors in order to maximize mass readership from the public thereby shaping their thinking and perceptions and also prompting them to react according to the desired direction which tracks the influence of the media on the public agenda.
A renowned public opinion writer contends that public opinion is shaped and organized by the press (Lippmann, 1922). He also observes that rumors are easily crystallized into public opinion. Furthermore, he demonstrates how mass media exerted influence on public opinion and identifies the press as 'map-maker'. Based on Lipmann's analysis of the nature of mass media influence, Cohen further refines the nature of mass media's influence on setting media agenda by describing the function of the Agenda-setting Theory of mass media. He further states in the following statements that highlight the relationship between agenda setting and the influence of media on the public and how the media affect people's perceptions of current societal issues at any given moment. This is to say then that the press is significantly more than a purveyor of information and opinion. It may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about. And it follows from this that the world looks different to different people, depending not only on their personal interest, but also on the map that is drawn for them by the writers, editors and publishers of the papers they read (Cohen 1963, p.13). Therefore, Agenda-setting Theory accounts for how the press

shifts its focus from one aspect to another of a particular news event or issue in order to build the salience of that event on the media agenda of the time. The media is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about by presenting ideas in topical form to the public at any given time to enlighten it on vital policy-making and implementation of issues that are very crucial for the betterment of the citizens and society's development in general. The media determine what events are important by exerting their influence on information processing and the audience (Miller, 2002) and establish relationships between people and events that affect their lives. For example, the media set agenda using some strategies such as the type of coverage given to an issue and how the issue is strategically positioned in terms of allotted space (such as on the front page) and time frame to make it more prominent to the public.

In their study on media agenda-setting, McCombs, Shaw and Weaver (1997) have differentiated between what they term 'first level agenda-setting' and 'second level agenda-setting'. The latter is concerned with the role of calling the public's attention to particular issues, whereas the second level deals with how media influence the way people think about those issues via continuous and frequent presentations of such issues, specifically through framing. Framing, in this context, refers to the way media project interpretative adjustments on media contents in order to attract the attention of audience towards contemporary issues and events which people consider noteworthy. Thus, framing primarily relies on appropriate language use while composing media messages. It is a strategy whereby writers demonstrate their points of view using specific linguistic elements such as lexical choice, tense choice as well as the use of third person self-reference, conforming to the conventions of media discourse. Therefore, media framing strategy enhances agenda-setting. Due to its ephemeral nature, the focus of second level agenda-setting is on how the media incorporate various options and strategies in the course of presenting and disseminating information to the public, exuding their presence or impact on how people receive such media messages.

More importantly, these two basic assumptions about this theory are based on the fact that (i) the media and the press together set agenda not only to reflect the reality, but also shape and filter it and;(ii) the media select certain issues and make them important by giving them wider recurrent coverage so that the public sees these issues in a particular way. These two assumptions comprise the 'what' and 'how' strategies of media agenda-setting. The theory helps readers to see how the media has become a pertinent way to critically describe these social ironies. However, the study does not look into the media effects perspectives of the theory which can only really be studied through some form of audience studies and this goes beyond the scope of this study. Never the less, the theory is still relevant to the study because it demonstrates how the media uses cartoons to build prominence or newsworthiness of issues by selecting certain issues over others at a particular period of time to place more emphasis on these issues through a recurrent coverage of the cartoons. For instance, several cartoons can be depicted using different visual and verbal modes to portray an important issue. This makes cartoon a

suitable vehicle for setting agenda more than the editorial that cannot be recurrently repeated in the same way with cartoons due to the ephemeral nature of news. The strength of Agenda-setting Theory thus lies in its consistency, accuracy, simplicity and truthfulness in mediating knowledge and information to the public (Miller, 2002), and in its benefits to media transmissions. For instance, it is used in political advertising, business news, political campaigns and debates, among others. Furthermore, it has predictive power in the sense that it can be used for making predictions about people's exposure to the media. The theory has explanatory capability because it explains why people give priority to certain issues over others in the media. In fact, the public relies on the media in order to know what issues are noteworthy and also to keep abreast with current issues in a society. However, some scholars state that the weakness of this theory is its vagueness in establishing dependent variables on what the public is precisely thinking about (Edelstein, 1993; Kosicki, 1993). Another problem associated with the theory is that of attention worthiness in the sense that many issues may have to compete for attention and whichever issue reaches the top of the agenda dominates the others. People may also not be as ideal as the theory assumes in the sense that they may not be well informed in public affairs. In addition, for those who have made up their minds, the desired effect is weakened. Nevertheless, it is seen as a theory that meets the criteria for a valid theory (Littlejohn, 1999).

Given that AST is a theory of media effects, which can be really studied through some form of audience research, the researcher places less emphasis on the theory; instead, the influence of the theory in building prominence of issues via the cartoons through recurrent coverage has been explained. Cartoons as media content have a vital role in media agenda setting because they express messages that are made prominent through a careful selection of events that correspond with real public issues. In this regard people may not read editorials but they will see cartoons. Describing the power of cartoons, over editorials, Wigston (2002) opines that as a visual image, cartoons can instantly make a point that would be difficult to articulate in written texts and often leave a lasting impression on readers. Therefore, the Agenda-setting Theory is useful for describing what themes and topics are more salient in the Nigerian political cartoons,especially in the satirical representation of politicians, parties and events through the selection of objects and attributes that help in constructing important issues in the Nigerian socio-political context.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This qualitative study draws on the textual analysis of President Muhammadu Buhari's inaugural speech, which was delivered at Eagle Square, Abuja, the Nigeria's Federal Capital Territory on the 29th May, 2015. The speech has gained wide coverage by the media and serves as the textual data of this study. This day has remarkable history in the recent Nigerian politics. This is the reason why it is regarded as democracy day and public holiday is declared annually to mark the occasion of the Nigeria's complete transition and return to democracy after a long period of military rule since its independence in 1960. The inaugural speech is the unit of analysis to unveil the

policies of the new government both at the local and international levels using Agenda Setting Theory that underpins the framework of analysis of the paper.

DISCUSSION

The data for this paper as earlier mentioned, is the presidential inaugural speech delivered by President Buhari on May 29th, 2015. The speech was delivered immediately after he was sworn in as a president. The speech was obtained from Daily Trust, one of the leading newspapers from the northern part of Nigeria, published on the 29th day of May, 2015. Muhammadu Buhari, a retired General from Nigerian Army became the Military Head of State in January 1984 in a coup that was staged on 31st December, 1983. He was sworn in as the fourth civilian president in the Nigeria's nascent democracy that came into being in 1999. The textual analysis of the speech uses the agenda setting framework to determine the salient policies the new government will likely implement to realize its dream and meets its objectives as well as delivers its promises to the electorates, the citizens of Nigeria, who against all odds stood firmly by the side of President Muhammadu Buhari before and after the elections as testified by the President himself in the speech, " I would like to thank the millions of our supporters who believed in us even when the course seemed hopeless. I salute their resolve in waiting long hours in rain and hot sunshine to register and cast their votes and stay all night if necessary to p

The speech was uniquely constructed to resonate with the Nigerian people especially at this current and highly characterized political turmoil, security challenges and economic depression that seem unending and create the strong sense of despondency in the minds and souls of Nigerians. Given the form of the speech, it almost consists of twenty two paragraphs. And one thing astonishing about the paragraphing of the speech is that every paragraph contains almost the same number of sentences as the other. Most of the paragraphs contain three to four sentences each. This sequential ordering of sentences that express fully the desired meaning indicates thorough meditation and good organization of thoughts and ideas. The salient or major issues that form the agenda of the new government as contained in the speech are broadly divided into two categories: local and foreign agenda. The local agenda comprise domestic policies meant for providing good leadership and adequate measures towards promoting stable economic and political development. The foreign agenda, however, has to do with the nation's foreign policy, which guides its relationship with other countries of the world especially the African countries in whose eyes Nigeria is seen as a giant leader of Africa. The foreign policy is introduced in the speech in the beginning of paragraph five which stresses the Nigerian leadership role in Africa where he says "Our neigbours in the Sub-region and our African brethren should be rest assured that Nigeria under our administration will be ready to play any leadership role that Africa expects of it". At the international scene, the president expresses willingness of his administration to actively participate in the current global war against terrorism and all its ramifications, where he states in the preceding paragraph , "I also wish to assure the wider international community of our readiness to cooperate and help

to combat threats of cross-border terrorism, sea piracy, refugees and boat people, financial crime, cyber crime, climate change, the spread of communicable diseases and other challenges of the 21st century". Going by this speech, the Nigeria's foreign agenda centers revolve mainly around two issues: the leadership role in Africa and strong commitment to the war against terrorism. The local agenda on the other hand comprises the policies of the new administration meant to address crucial issues and challenges facing the nation which include security challenges especially Boko Haram scourge, pervasive corruption, fuel and power shortages, commitment to democratic system, national unity, tackling unemployment and provision of basic infrastructure. These issues resonate with the public and are of paramount importance not only to the development of the nation, but also its survival. In paragraph five, the President commends the neighboring countries for their support and cooperation towards combating Boko Haram insurgency tormenting the countries, where he says" Here I would like to thank the governments and people of Cameroun, Chad and Niger for committing their armed forces to fight Boko Haram in Nigeria". Also, stating the underlying principles of his local policies, the President outlines the focus of his administration that is committed towards facing the serious challenges facing the nation as backbone of his domestic policies, where he states "At home we face enormous challenges. Insecurity, pervasive corruption, the hitherto unending and seemingly impossible fuel and power shortages are the immediate concerns. We are going to tackle them head on".

Similarly, paragraph ten strengthens his commitment to the democratic system as one of his priorities. The president states "There is now a national consensus that our chosen route to national development is democracy. To achieve our objectives we must consciously work the democratic system. The Federal Executive under my watch will not seek to encroach on the duties and functions of the Legislative and Judicial arms of government. The law enforcing authorities will be charged to operate within the Constitution". In the same paragraph, the President mentions one of his policies that is reformation of public service, where he states, "We shall rebuild and reform the public service to become more effective and more serviceable. We shall charge them to apply themselves with integrity to stabilize the system". Fighting corruption, which has almost eaten the fabrics of governance in Nigeria, the President takes it as a policy and feels duty bound to wage war on corruption in order to run a transparent government. This is contained in paragraph thirteen "While the Federal Government cannot interfere in the details of its operations, it will ensure that gross corruption at the local level is checked. As far as the constitution allows me I will try to ensure that there is responsible and accountable governance at all levels of government in the country". National unity is among the President's agenda. He states in paragraph fifteen: "My appeal for unity is predicated on the seriousness of the legacy we are getting into". Provision of basic infrastructure is also one of the President Muhammadu Buhari's agenda as contained in the speech in the same paragraph fifteen: "For the longer term we have to improve the standards of our education. We have to look at the whole field of medicare. We have to upgrade our dilapidated physical infrastructure". The President unravels the

insecurity where Boko Haram insurgency is seen as immediate. He also mentions the hostage of Chibok girls, the incidence that has attracted global wide attention and concern. He states "The government will do all it can to rescue them alive. Boko Haram is a typical example of small fires causing large fires. He also expresses his view of Boko Haram in the preceding paragraph, "Boko Haram is a mindless, godless group who are as far away from Islam as one can think of". He also mentions other security challenges facing the nation where he states, "Boko Haram is not only the security issue bedeviling our country. The spate of kidnappings, armed robberies, herdsmen/farmers clashes, cattle rustlings all help to add the general air of insecurity in our land". Another security issue is that of Niger Delta Amnesty programme, which was implemented by the former administration of the late Umaru Musa Yar'aduwa. He addresses this issue in paragraph nineteen, where he says, "The Amnesty programme in the Niger Delta is due to end in December, but the government intends to invest heavily in the projects, and programmes currently in place".

On the issue of power supply, the President expresses his dismay over relatively low power generation and distribution. He states "It is a national shame that an economy of 180 million generates only 4,000MW, and distributes even less". He further states in the same paragraph that, "We will not allow this to go on. Careful studies are under way during this transition to identify the quickest, safest and most cost-effective way to bring light and relief to Nigerians". Unemployment is another serious economic challenge facing the country and it is one of the President's agenda and promises to fight unemployment during his presidential campaign. He states this in paragraph twenty that, "Unemployment, notably youth unemployment features strongly in our Party's Manifesto. We intend to attack the problem frontally through revival of agriculture, solid minerals mining as well as credits to small and medium size businesses to kick-start these enterprises". Given the thrust of agenda setting in depicting issues to attract public interest, media position the agenda by stressing specific topics that are relevant to people at a particular time. For instance, in an election period, the people need orientation pertaining to candidates and other election related issues. Perhaps, this might be the reason why presidential inaugural speeches are given wide coverage in both print media like newspapers and magazines and non-print media, such as radio and television. The public are so keen and anxious to listen to or read the inaugural speech in order to know the focus, principles and policies of the newly inaugurated government.

Conclusion

Due to the ephemeral nature of news events, media consider relevance while depicting issues and events. Media focus attention to current and sensitive issues and give them wider coverage to make the issues and events prominent and worthwhile to the public. In order to retain the relevance of issues, media use different styles in depicting the issues overtime. The main idea of agenda-setting is centered on depicting relevant issues at the right time. Thus, the inaugural speech has revealed crucial issues and identified key policies

that govern the administration. The foreign policy is strongly hinged on the leadership role of Nigeria in the whole African continent as well as its commitment and willingness to fight terrorism at both local and international or global levels. The local policies are borne out of serious challenges that are facing the country's survival as a nation and its development among the comity of nations. These local issues that form the local agenda dominate the policies of the new administration, which include security challenges, unemployment, fuel and power shortages and fighting corruption among many. Given the issues raised in the speech, the inaugural speech forms a vital instrument for setting public agenda in the new democratic dispensations. The growing tide of research on presidential speeches especially in the domains of research in various fields such as communication, media, political discourse literature and pragmatics, further research should explore the effects of presidential speeches towards galvanizing the public support in the formulation of sound policies aimed at enhancing national development. Furthermore, communicative stylistics and literary devices that are employed in presidential speeches should be explored.

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Appendix

Inaugural speech by His Excellency, President Muhammadu Buhari following his swearing in as President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria on 29th May, 2015

I am immensely grateful to God Who Has preserved us to witness this day and this occasion. Today marks a triumph for Nigeria and an occasion to celebrate her freedom and cherish her democracy. Nigerians have shown their commitment to democracy and are determined to entrench its culture. Oru journey has not been easy but thans to the determination of our people and strong support from friends abroad we have today a truly democratically elected government in place.

I would like to thank President Goodluck Jonathan for his display of statesmanship in setting a precedent for us that has now made our people proud to be Nigerians wherever they are. With the support and cooperation he has made it possible for us to show the world that despite the perceived tension in the land we can be a united people capable of doing what is right for our nation. Together we co-operated to surprise the world that had come to expect only the worst from Nigeria. I hope this act of graciously accepting defeat by the outgoing President will become the standard of political conduct in the country.

I would like to thank the millions of our supporters who believed in us even when the cause seemed hopeless. I salute their resolve in waiting long hours in rain and hot

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