

**EXPERIENTIAL MEANING AND EXISTENTIAL
IMPLICATIONS IN GOODLUCK JONATHAN'S 2011
INAUGURAL SPEECH: A CRITICAL DISCOURSE
ANALYSIS**

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Abstract

Language is a social semiotic – a meaning-making resource for constructing experiences, enacting relationships and generating texts for recording such functions. It offers its users a variety of ways of expressing meanings by making choices from the plethora of alternative potential options in the linguistic system. The implication is that linguistic choices are not neutral but are motivated by the kinds of experiences and social reality being conveyed in any given situational context of human existence, of which political discourse is a typical example. This limitless meaning potential of language makes it amenable to manipulation by the political elites in naturalizing ideologies and manufacturing consent of the electorate. Focussing on former President Goodluck Jonathan's 2011 inaugural speech, and anchoring on Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar

particularly the system of Transitivity, the paper critically examines how experiential meaning is constructed in different identified clause/process types paying particular attention to ideological implications and encoded human existential concerns. Analysis reveal that Relational clauses were predominantly employed to define identities, assert moral values and naturalize attributes of leadership authority while Material clauses conveyed development and collective action often masking power asymmetries. These clauses mirror existential issues in political discourse where political actors make choices to achieve spurious goals and construct human existence that seem to obfuscate the realities on ground. The study concludes that critical awareness of these subtle manipulations of language by text producers will enable text consumers to more critically interpret textual representations that border on human existential concerns in order to resist, contest and subvert personal or group ideologies presented as commonsense discourses with a view to mitigating social power abuse for harmonious coexistence.

Key words: Language, Experiential, Inaugural, Ideology, human Existence, Critical Discourse Analysis.

Introduction

Language is not a neutral medium of communication but an existential act deeply entwined with the human condition, power relations and the struggle for meaning. As a social semiotic system, language is shaped by the purposes it serves in human interaction (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2014) yet it is also the primary means through which individuals assert their presence, interpret their realities and exercise agency within structures of domination and resistance. Language offers users a network of choices that reflect not only grammatical systems but also existential stances, providing resources through which speakers encode lived experience, enact social relationships and organize meaning in a world where power

relations and ideology are ever present. Within Systemic Functional Linguistic (SFL, henceforth) framework, these choices are realized through the metafunctions of language: ideational, interpersonal and textual. Of particular interest to this study is the ideational metafunction, specifically its experiential aspect which focuses on how reality is construed through processes, participants and circumstances encoded in the Transitivity system (Eggins, 2004; Thompson, 2014). These configurations are not just technical features but they are sites of meaning negotiation where power is embedded in the ways speaker's choose to represent events, agency and responsibility. In other words, how we speak about the world reflects not only what we believe but also, how we position ourselves within networks of power and meaning.

This paper applies the SFL framework to analyze the experiential meanings in the 2011 inaugural speech of former President Goodluck Jonathan. Inaugural speeches are rich sites of existential and political performance where leaders do not merely describe a nation's condition but actively shape its imagined future. They are rhetorical instruments through which speakers claim legitimacy, reconfigure national identity and align the collective will with a particular vision. As such, they are discursive acts of power used to stabilize authority, respond to uncertainty and construct an ideological reality (Chilton, 2004; Fairclough, 2001).

Guided by Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA, henceforth) which is concerned with the ideological nature of language and its role in sustaining power relations (Van Dijk, 1998, Wodak and Meyer, 2016) this paper investigates the linguistic choices made in the Transitivity system by Goodluck Jonathan in his inaugural speech. It explores how political reality is linguistically constructed and how such constructions serve ideological purposes. This analysis highlights the speaker's negotiation of agency and legitimacy, revealing how

language becomes both a site of personal expression and a mechanism of political control where meaning, power and responsibility intersect.

Statement of the Problem

Existing scholarship on Nigerian presidential inaugural speeches have examined various dimensions such as ideological positioning, pronoun usage and rhetorical structure (Ezeifeka, 2013; Nnamdi-Eruchalu, 2017; Akinmameji, 2020; Awoyemi and Ajayi, 2023). While these studies offer valuable insights into political language, many are anchored on thematic analysis or limited linguistic features, overlooking how specific grammatical choices reflect power relations and subject positioning. In particular, Goodluck Jonathan's 2011 inaugural speech has not been analyzed from the perspective of Transitivity, a component of Halliday's Systemic Functional Theory (SFT) that concerns how language is manipulated to construe human experiences. This gap is significant because language in political contexts does more than communicate policies. It functions as a mechanism for constructing reality, negotiating identity and legitimizing power. Political speeches, particularly, presidential inaugurals constitute a site of struggle where leaders perform ideological work and construct versions of existence that obfuscate the reality on ground. This study is germane in that it examines how Goodluck Jonathan's Transitivity choices construct the Nigerian experience and reflect his ideological stance with regard existential issues in Nigeria. it also stimulates critical awareness among the Nigerian audience with regard to the interpretation and comprehension of textual representations that border on human existential concerns in order to resist, contest and subvert personal or group ideologies presented as commonsense discourses

Research Objectives

This study aims to

1. Identify the Transitivity choices made in Goodluck Jonathan's 2011 inaugural speech to construe experiential meaning.
2. Interpret how these identified Transitivity choices construct political realities and encode ideological positions.
3. Explain how the most prevalent processes of the Transitivity system in Jonathan's 2011 inaugural speech were employed to frame human existential concerns.

Research Questions

1. What Transitivity choices were made by Goodluck Jonathan in his 2011 inaugural speech to construe experiential meaning?
2. How were these experiential meanings used to construct political realities and encode ideological positions?
3. How were the most prevalent processes of the Transitivity system in Jonathan's 2011 inaugural speech employed to frame human existential concerns?

Significance of the Study

This study is significant in that it exposes how political actors strategically deploy language to normalize personal and political ideologies which may obscure power relations and hinder national development. By foregrounding the role of language in the construction of sociopolitical reality, the study empowers the Nigerian populace to critically engage with political discourse, recognize ideological manipulation and assert their agency in democratic governance.

By highlighting how political language serves not only to represent reality but to shape the lived experiences and perceived roles of both the speaker and the audience, the study contributes to the understanding of how power is discursively enacted, negotiated and

sustained in the national space. Additionally, the study offers valuable insights into how CDA and systemic functional grammar can be integrated and applied to the analysis of political texts.

Conceptual Review

Text and Discourse

The concepts of text and discourse are foundational to linguistic and discourse studies, though they are often used interchangeably. While closely related, they denote different aspects of language use. In SFL, text is defined as a semantic unit – a meaningful stretch of language that is functionally complete within a given context. Halliday and Hassan, (1976) emphasizes that a text is not simply a collection of sentences but a unified whole characterized by cohesion and coherence realized through linguistic choices. Halliday and Matthiessen (2014) further explain that a text represents the instantiation of the language system, shaped by the speaker or writer's communicative goals and by the context of situation. Discourse on the other hand, refers more broadly to language as social practice. It encompasses not only the linguistic realization of ideas but also the ways in which these linguistic forms reflect and reproduce social structures, ideologies and power relations (Fairclough, 1992; Van Dijk, 1998). In this sense, discourse includes both the process of text production and the social practices surrounding them. Fairclough (1992) distinguishes text as concrete linguistic product and discourse as the process that integrates language, ideology and social practice. Wodak and Meyer (2016) similarly argue that discourse is socially situated communicative act that both shapes and is shaped by institutional and historical contexts. Thus, while texts are observable outcomes of communication, discourse provides the lens through which these texts are interpreted in relation to sociocultural and ideological frameworks.

Texts are dynamic and multifunctional, serving as windows into the beliefs, values and power structures of the societies from which they emerge. Political texts in particular, function as arena for ideological contestation and power negotiation. In such contexts, language becomes a strategic rhetorical instrument for persuasion, manipulation and the legitimization of authority. Political actors seek to influence public perception and normalize their ideological stances through their linguistic choices. The concepts of text and discourse form the basis of critical linguistic investigations, particularly within CDA, which seeks to reveal the implicit power dynamics encoded in language.

Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is an approach to discourse that examines how language reflects, reinforces or challenges power relations, social inequality and ideological dominance. It is grounded in the view that linguistic choices are not neutral but ideologically motivated, shaped by speaker's social positions and group affiliations (Wodak, 2004). Van Dijk (2003) posits that CDA investigates how discourse enacts, legitimates or resists social power abuse in political and institutional contexts. Central to CDA is the concept of ideology, understood as representations or perspectives that sustain unequal power structures. Fairclough (1992) defines ideology as meanings shaped by and within power relations while Wodak (1996) sees it as discursive constructions that reproduce social dominance. These ideologies often operate implicitly, becoming naturalized as commonsense in which case, they assume hegemonic dimensions. (Fairclough, 1989; Widowson, 2000). CDA aims to reveal these hidden ideologies and their role in sustaining hegemony through discourse (Simpson, (1993). It positions itself as a form of social action in favour of marginalized groups, exposing and challenging oppressive structures (Wodak, 1989; Ezeifeka, 2018) embedded in language to prevent normalization and hegemonic entrenchment.

Human Existence in Political Discourse

Human existence, in its broadest sense, refers to the lived realities, choices and struggles that define the human condition. Philosophers like Heidegger(1962) emphasize that human beings are meaning-making agents who constantly interpret their existence within a social and historical context. This existential orientation manifests in language, our primary tool for expressing being, agency and purpose. In political discourse, human existence is pragmatically constructed through language that reflects collective aspirations, challenges and ideologies. Political actors often invoke existential themes such as suffering, hope, sacrifice and national identity to align themselves with the people's lived realities. These representations are not neutral; they are strategic and ideological, serving to legitimize power and manufacture consent (Fairclough, 2001).

Through experiential meaning, language encodes actions, events, participants and circumstances (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2014). Thus, examining experiential meaning in political speeches like Goodluck Jonathan's 2011 inaugural speech reveals how existential concerns are linguistically shaped to construct a narrative of leadership grounded in collective struggle and national renewal.

Empirical Study

Presidential inaugural speeches have attracted considerable scholarly attention from different perspectives. Some of them are reviewed below.

Ezeifeka (2013) examined experiential meaning in the inaugural speeches of two past Nigerian leaders Shehu Shagari (1979) and Olusegun Obasanjo (1999) employing CDA and systemic functional theory. S found the language to be deliberately vague and noncommittal, enabling the speakers to evade direct responsibility. She recommended that future leaders adopt more accountable

linguistic choices. While this study shares similarities with the present one in its focus on experiential meaning, it adopts Wodak's discourse historical approach unlike the current study.

Nnamdi-Eruchalu (2017) analyzed Muhammadu Buhari's inaugural speeches in 1984 and 2015, focusing on pronoun usage. The study revealed how Buhari's pronoun choices constructed his dual identities as a military ruler and later, a civilian president thereby shaping discourse representations of authority and persuasion. Though similar in methodological orientation (CDA) it diverges from the present one in focus and the linguistic features examined.

Akinmameji (2020) conducted a CDA of Obasanjo's 1999 and 2003 inaugural speeches using Fairclough's three dimensional and systemic functional linguistics. The Findings indicate that Obasanjo's speech reflected power consciousness, self aggrandizement and inclusive governance through devices such as pronouns, idioms and assertions. While aligned in its critical approach, this study differs in its data and focus on recurrent themes in Obasanjo's rhetoric.

Awoyemi and Ayayi (2023) undertook generic structural analysis of presidential inaugural speeches 1999 – 2015, applying Halliday and Hassan's generic Structure Potential Theory. They identified ten discourse elements arranged in a fixed sequence noting that while some elements were optional such as Acknowledgement of God (AoG) others appear consistently. Although this study also centers on inaugural speeches, its methodological and theoretical frameworks differ significantly.

From the foregoing, it is clear that extensive work has been done on Nigerian presidential inaugural speeches. However, this study is unique in that it analyzes the 2011 inaugural speech of President Goodluck Jonathan through the lexicogrammatical realizations of

Halliday's experiential metafunction by investigating how Jonathan encodes personal and national experiences in language and explores the ideological implications embedded in his linguistic choices within the Transitivity system. Furthermore, the study adopts an existential discourse perspective to interrogate how the speech constructs power relations by positioning the speaker as an agent of national transformation and the audience as co-existential subjects within a shared sociopolitical reality. In this way, analysis seeks to uncover how linguistic choices in the transitivity system reflect the Nigerian reality and the ideological position of the administration as well as how they are applied in framing existential concerns within the Nigerian political space. To the best of the researcher's knowledge, no prior study has analyzed Jonathan's 2011 inaugural speech from this perspective.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopts M. A. K Halliday's Systemic Functional Theory (SFT) a social theory of language developed by M.A.K Halliday that views language as a resource for meaning-making rather than merely a system of forms or cognitive rules. Unlike traditional, structural and transformational generative grammars, SFT emphasizes the functional and contextual use of language presenting grammar as a system network from which language users make choices to create meaning. Language, according to Halliday and Matthiessen operates across three strata – semantics (meaning) lexicogrammar (wording) and phonology (sounding) and is structured around three metafunctions, namely, ideational, interpersonal and textual. The ideational metafunction reflects how language construes human experience. It is further divided into experiential and logical components. The experiential metafunction, which is the concern of this study, is realized in wording through the Transitivity system. Transitivity is concerned with how people represent the world through processes, participants and circumstances in the clause.

These representations are not arbitrary. They reveal the speaker's worldview and ideological stance. Six process types are recognized by SFT in the Transitivity system:

1. Material Process: actions and events such as kill, work with roles such as

Actor – Process – Goal – (Circumstance)

2. Mental Process: processes of sensing e.g. see, believe and wish involving roles such as

Senser – Process – Phenomenon - (Circumstance).

3. Relational Process: processes of being and classification e.g be, seem and have with roles **Carrier** and **Attribute for Attributive Relational Process** and **Identified/Token** and **Identifier/Value** for **Identifying Relational Process**.

4. Verbal Process: processes of saying with roles like **Sayer – Process – Receiver – Verbiage**

5. Behavioural Process: This is the process of psychological and physiological actions such as sneeze, snore, breathe and laugh with **Behavior** and **Behaviour** as roles.

6. Existential Process: encoding existence. They are usually introduced by the Dummy '**There**' or '**It**' with Existent as the only participant.

Linguistic choices are acts of self-positioning, a way, through which political leaders disclose their ideology, assume or evade responsibility and construct collective narratives of nationhood. This view aligns with the existential idea that language is a manifestation of lived experience, entangled with freedom, choice and accountability. Thus, by examining Jonathan's inaugural speech through Transitivity analysis, the study explores how experiential meanings encode his ideological and existential posture and how these linguistic representations shape the sociopolitical consciousness of the Nigerian public.

Methodology

The study adopts a qualitative research design suitable for examining textual data. The inaugural speech of former President Goodluck Jonathan, sourced online was critically examined. Twelve Material clauses, twelve Relational clauses, four Mental clauses, two Verbal clauses and one Existential clause making a total of thirty one clauses were purposively selected for analysis. The analysis was done using the Transitivity system, the lexicogrammatical system that realizes the experiential metafunction in Halliday’s Systemic Functional Grammar. The analysis explored the transitivity choices of the speaker and how they reflect his ideological positioning in relation existential concerns. Special attention was given to how power dynamics are encoded; how the speaker assumes and deflects responsibility, constructs national identity and evokes national experience to legitimize authority.

Analysis of Data

Table 1: Material Clauses

In the days ahead, those of us that you have elected to serve must show that we are men and women with the patriotism and passion, to match the hopes and aspirations of you, the great people of this country
We must grow the economy . . . for our people
The leadership and the followership must strive to convert our vast human and natural resources into the force that leads to a greater Nigeria
We must form technical and financial partnerships with global businesses and organization.
We are ready to take off on the path of sustained growth and economic development. We will push programs and policies that will benefit both local and foreign businesses
Over the next four years, attention will be focused on rebuilding our infrastructure

We will create greater access to quality education and improved health care delivery
In the interest of justice, equity and national unity, we shall actively promote the development of the region.
. The bane of corruption shall be met by the overwhelming force of our collective determination, to rid our nation of this scourge
. The Nigeria of our dreams must be built on hard work and not on short cuts.
12. I will continue to fight, for your future, because I am one of you.

Material clauses represent ‘doing’ and ‘happening’ that is, actions and events that unfold in the physical world. The main participant roles of this process are: Actor (the participant that performs or initiates the process) Goal (the participant that is affected by or receives the outcome of the process) Scope (a less common participant role that reflects the domain of operation of the process or the process turned into a participant) indirect participants including Recipient (participant who receives something) Client (participant to whom a service is rendered) Beneficiary (participant who benefits from the process). For example, clause number 1 is analyzed thus

In the days ahead, those of us that you have elected to serve must show that we are men and women with the patriotism and passion, to match the hopes and aspirations of you, the great people of this country

In the days ahead	those of us that you have elected to serve	must show	that we are men and women with the patriotism and passion to match the hopes and aspirations ...
Circumstance(Time)	Actor	Process Material	Goal

The clause is analyzed as a Material process with ‘those of us that you have elected to serve’ as the Actor; ‘must show’ as Process and the embedded Relational clause ‘that we are ...’ as Goal. Material clauses often serve to construct reality, promise change or demonstrate agency.

Table 1 shows selected material clauses from Goodluck Jonathan’s 2011 inaugural speech. Through his transitivity choices, the speaker rebrands power as service and claims legitimacy through electoral mandate (those of us that you have elected). He acknowledges the existence of citizens only at the point of voting. Economic development is portrayed as a moral duty towards the people as reflected in the clause ‘we must grow the economy ... for our people’, while subtly retaining the decision-making power in the hands of the elites. Thus, the people are framed as passive beneficiaries. Their lived economic realities such as poverty and disillusionment are backgrounded while abstract growth is foregrounded as the clause ‘we are ready to take off on the path of sustained growth and economic development’. The clause ‘... must strive to convert our vast human and natural resources into the force that leads to a greater Nigeria’ constructs citizens as resources that are only existentially valuable when ‘converted’ into productive force. The worth of the citizens is thus equated with economic utility while their well-being is deemphasized. Global partnership is made to appear normal while the consequent potential exploitation thereof, which may favour the political class but is detrimental to the citizens is subtly hidden as portrayed in the clauses ‘we must form technical and financial partnerships with global businesses and organization’ and ‘we will push programs and policies that will benefit both local and foreign businesses’. The clause ‘... attention will be focused on rebuilding our infrastructure’ uses a passive construction to mask agency and evade accountability. Human needs (infrastructure) are referenced indirectly but people are absent from the process. The use of the

modal 'will' in the clause 'we will create greater access to quality education and improved health care delivery' frames education and healthcare as benevolent gifts from the government rather than human rights. The use of the clause 'in the interest of justice, equity and national unity, we shall actively promote the development of the region' is an attempt to replace redress and marginalization with development. The sufferings of marginalized regions such as Niger Delta are not directly acknowledged. Development, thus becomes rhetorical rather than relational. The clause '...overwhelming force of our collective determination to rid our nation of this scourge' is used to diffuse agency and distribute the responsibility of curbing corruption thus mobilizing citizens as instruments rather than subjects with needs. The clause 'the Nigeria of our dreams must be built on hard work and not on short cuts' constructs a meritocratic ideal while masking structural inequality. Thus, human identity is validated only through labour. The speaker uses the clause 'I will continue to fight for your future because I am one of you', as a populist move aimed at individualizing leadership and constructing a symbolic equality with the masses yet subtly maintaining the status quo. The clause affirms collective suffering and hope but positions the leader as the sole savior.

Across all clauses, the speaker uses Material clauses to project state action or authority, construct citizens as moral, productive and passive subjects, reinforce neoliberal development ideologies and reframe existential needs such as justice, inclusion and welfare as outcomes of leadership generosity. While language use appears inclusive, it obscures unequal power dynamics, obscures the real life struggles and existential crises of Nigerians and shifts focus from structural reform to behavioural expectations.

Table 2: Relational Clauses

1.	Such determination derives from the typical Nigerian spirit of resilience in the face of the greatest of odds
2.	I am mindful that I represent the shared aspiration of all our people to forge a united Nigeria
3.	The success of the 2011 elections and the widespread acclaim which the exercise received was due to the uncommon patriotism and diligence exhibited by many Nigerians
4.	It is the supreme task of this generation to give hope to the hopeless, strength to the weak and protection to the defenseless.
5.	Fellow citizens, the leadership we have pledged is decidedly transformative.
6.	A robust private sector is vital to providing jobs for our rapidly expanding population.
7.	To drive our overall economic vision, the power sector reform is at the heart of our industrialization strategy
8.	The fight against corruption is a war in which we must all enlist,
9.	Nigeria, as a responsible member of the international community, will remain committed to the maintenance of global peace and security.
10.	I am confident that we have every reason to look to the future with hope
11.	I believe that peace is a necessary condition for development.
12.	My dear countrymen and women, being a Nigerian is a blessing

Relational clauses serve as ideological instruments in political texts enabling speakers to define, classify and attribute values or meanings to social roles, entities and identities. In SFL terms, they encode ‘being’ and ‘having’. Relational clauses can be attributive or Identifying, each with distinct participant roles. Relational Attributive clauses assign qualities or characteristics to a participant. Participant roles for this process type are Carrier (the participant receiving the attribute) and Attribute (the quality or characteristic assigned). Relational Identifying clauses equate or define one entity with another. Its participant roles are Identified/Token (the entity being defined) and Identifier/Value (the defining element). For example, clause number 13 is analyzed thus

Such determination derives from the typical Nigerian spirit of resilience in the face of the greatest of odds

Such determination	derives from	the typical Nigerian spirit of resilience in the face the greatest of odds
Carrier	Process: Relational	Attribute

The process ‘derives’ in clause 13 is analyzed as a Relational Attributive process establishing a relationship between ‘determination’ (Carrier) and its attributed source, ‘the typical Nigerian spirit of resilience’ (Attribute). This construction attributes national resilience to an internal quality, thus naturalizing endurance as part of the Nigerian patriotic identity and glorifying suffering as a means of national validation. Thus, systemic injustice responsible for the suffering in Nigeria is obscured. Again, clause number 14 is analyzed thus

I am mindful that I represent the shared aspiration of all our people to forge a united Nigeria

I am mindful	That	I	represent	The shared aspiration of our people to forge a united Nigeria
		Identified	Process: Relational	Identifier

The process, ‘represent’, functions as a Relational Identifying process. The speaker uses it to equate himself with the collective national aspiration of the Nigerian people framing himself as the embodiment of the people’s dreams. By doing so, he reinforces symbolic unity and subtly silences dissenting voices.

Table 2 above shows selected Relational Attributive and Identifying clauses from Jonathan's 2011 inaugural speech. The clause '... the widespread acclaim which the exercise received was due to the uncommon patriotism and diligence exhibited by many Nigerians' shifts agency from institutions to citizens masking state failures. The speaker claims the legitimacy through the people's electoral participation attributes political success to citizens' effort and by doing so, minimizes the role of the state in the outcome. Again, moral obligation is discursively framed as generational identity as in the clause, 'it is the task of this generation...' thus defining identity through duty. While this move frames service to the vulnerable as collective moral responsibility, it discursively places emotional labour at the center of civic identity and deemphasizes the responsibility of the government to tackle structural injustices that give rise to such vulnerabilities. 'Transformative' in '...the leadership we have pledged is decidedly transformative' cloaks power in positive change rhetoric and frames the leadership as benevolent and humane. Thus, governance appears purpose driven rather than coercive. The clause 'a robust private sector is vital to providing jobs for our rapidly expanding population' is used by the speaker to displace state responsibility and shift essential welfare services to the private sector. The rights of the citizens to these essential services from the government are thus, downplayed. The speaker links 'the power sector reform' to economic viability with no mention of the exclusionary effects that it will be fraught with or how to deal with them. Corruption is framed as a national enemy and citizens are mobilized to fight it, as in 'the fight against corruption is a war in which we must all enlist'. There is however no mention of how the citizens are to fight the war especially with regard to the systemic corruption that exists among those in the corridors of power. 'Nigeria, as a responsible member of the international community, will remain committed to the maintenance of global peace and

security’ projects Nigeria as a civilized and responsible nation positioning it as committed to the global moral framework. This move seeks to reinforce narratives of peace and security for international validation while obscuring the fact that the same virtues are rare commodities within the country. The clause ‘I am confident that we have every reason to look to the future with hope’ uses emotional optimism to stabilize political mood and silence criticism. Hope is offered as a substitute for action and the responsibility for effecting change is placed in perception (‘look to the future’) rather than policy. ‘I believe that peace is a necessary condition for development’ links stability to economic growth. This discursive strategy is common in liberal peace building discourse as it silences the root causes of conflict such as injustice and marginalization. Human suffering is acknowledged only in terms of how it disrupts development with no concrete policy to alleviate it. The clause ‘... being a Nigerian is a blessing’ frames the Nigerian national identity as inherently positive masking contradictions of inequality, exclusion and hardship. This promotes emotional nationalism and frames Nigerian identity as a thing of pride. Thus, critical self-reflection or dissenting views (for example, sections of the country seeking self-determination) are marginalized.

Overall, Relational clauses in the speech are used as ideological tools to construct national identity that legitimizes the speaker’s leadership, affirm the roles of the citizens in development and portray the country in positive light for international validation. However, the sufferings of the citizens seem to be cloaked in rhetorics and their lived realities are downplayed.

Table 3: Mental Clauses

. Your Excellencies, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, earlier this year, over seventy-three million eligible Nigerians endured all manner of inconvenience just
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to secure their voters cards, in order to exercise the right to choose those that will govern them.
. At the polls, we saw the most dramatic expressions of the hunger for democracy.
. I know your pain
. I want you to start to dream again.

Mental clauses represent processes of sensing, that is, processes that go on inside the mind or inner world of participants. They express meanings related to perception, cognition, desire and emotion. Mental clauses involve two core participants: Senser (usually, a conscious being who experiences or feels the mental process) and Phenomenon (the thing that is sensed, thought about or perceived). For example, clause 25 is analyzed thus:

Your Excellencies, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, earlier this year, over seventy-three million eligible Nigerians endured all manner of inconvenience just to secure their voters cards, in order to exercise the right to choose those that will govern them.

Your Excellencies, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen	earlier this year	over seventy-three million eligible Nigerians	Endured	all manner of inconvenience	just to secure their voters cards
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	Circum stance (Time)	Senser	Process : Mental	Phen omen on	Circumstanc e (Purpose)
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Clause 25 expresses subjective inner experience of suffering which aligns with the experiential domain of the Mental process, particularly, perception. The Senser, (Nigerians) are represented as having persisted through hardship to fulfill a valued democratic right. Their civic action was framed as an emotional and psychological journey capturing the mental strain involved in acquiring voter cards. The circumstance of purpose ‘to secure their voter cards ...’ and ‘to choose those that will govern them’ reflect desiderative mental processes representing a collective will. The clause frames political participation as a moral action and legitimizes leadership by grounding it in the people’s effort and pain.

Table 3 shows selected mental clauses from Jonathan’s 2011 inaugural speech. The clause ‘at the polls, we saw the most dramatic expressions of the hunger for democracy’ constructs democracy as a deeply emotional, almost collective spiritual desire using shared memory to forge national unity. It presents democracy as the only natural, ideal and valid political system and erases any possible alternative thus strengthening hegemonic democratic ideology. The speaker uses the clause ‘I know your pain’ to position himself as deeply empathetic and morally competent to lead. Using affective discourse, he constructed a symbolic proximity between himself and the people. However, empathy alone is insufficient for justice without any plans for structural change. The speaker uses visionary rhetoric to manufacture consent in the clause ‘I want you to start to dream again’. He turns leadership into inspiration and political goals into personal dreams, thus turning citizens into recipients of vision rather than co-creators. He mobilizes affect (hope) to legitimize policy and consolidate authority.

These clauses do more than express emotion. They structure how leadership, citizenship and national identity are felt, understood and acted upon. CDA reveals that emotional discourse functions not just as empathy but as soft mechanism of control, consent and ideological reproduction.

Table 4: Verbal Clauses

29. I thank you all, fellow citizens, for the trust and confidence, which you have demonstrated through the power of your vote.
30. I therefore call on the good people of Nigeria, to enlist as agents of this great transformation.

Verbal clauses represent processes of ‘saying’, ‘reporting’ or ‘communicating’. They are used to express the act of verbal interaction such as telling, asking, stating or suggesting. Verbal processes involve three main participant roles though not all are compulsory in every clause: Sayer (the participant who speaks or communicates something) Verbiage (content or the name of what is said) Receiver (optional participant who receives the message or is addressed) and Target (a rare participant who is affected or impacted by the speech act as in praise or insult). For example,

I thank you all, fellow citizens, for the trust and confidence, which you have demonstrated through the power of your vote.

I	Thank	you all, fellow citizens	for the confidence which you have demonstrated through the power of your votes
Sayer	Process : Verbal	Receiver	Circumstance (Purpose)

The verb ‘thank’ is a verbal process – a form of saying expressing gratitude. By using it, the speaker, not only foregrounds dialogue and interpersonal recognition, but also claims the legitimacy of his mandate acknowledging the people’s electoral power as foundation for his authority. He makes them feel that they own the regime by celebrating their participation rather than making concrete policies to meet their needs.

Table 4 shows verbal clauses selected from Jonathan’s 2011 inaugural speech. The clause ‘I therefore call on the good people of Nigeria, to enlist as agents of this great transformation’ is a directive that positions the citizens as active agents in transformation but within a vision defined by the leader. The mobilizing tone of the clause masks power asymmetry. Participation is encouraged but only within the ideological boundaries set by the leader.

Verbal clauses are not just neutral acts of communication but powerful tools through which power is constructed, legitimized and reinforced. The speaker assumes the role of the benevolent and authoritative ‘Sayer’ who both recognizes the people’s power and directs future action. This discursively frames leadership as responsive and participatory while subtly reproducing a top-down communication hierarchy where the leader’s voice sets the national agenda.

Table 5: Existential Clauses

1. In our economic strategy, there will be appropriate policy support to the real sector of the economy

Existential clauses serve to assert the presence or the existence of something – that something ‘exists’ or ‘happens’. These clauses typically begin with the word ‘there’ functioning as a grammatical placeholder for the Subject, hence, it is referred to as Dummy.

Existential clauses involve only one participant, ‘Existent’ (the thing or entity whose existence is asserted) though they may have Circumstances. For example, clause number 31 is analyzed thus:

In our economic strategy, there will be appropriate policy support to the real sector of the economy

In our economic strategy	There	will be	appropriate policy support to the real sector of the economy
Circumstance (place)	Dummy	Process Existential	Existent

Here the clause affirms the future presence of ‘policy support’ implying concern for citizens’ material wellbeing. Existential processes are ideologically potent, particularly when they construct abstract promises without specifying actors or agents. The clause uses grammatical vagueness ‘there will be...’ to project inevitability while withholding responsibility. The lack of a defined Actor strategically masks accountability creating a hopeful projection of future action while evading present responsibility. Ideologically, it legitimizes government’s intentions and project commitment to economic growth particularly for the ‘real sector’ which affects human survival. However, by embedding the promise within an abstract strategy and omitting responsibility, it functions as a strategic rhetorical tool raising the hopes of the citizens while minimizing accountability of the leader. Thus, the clause speaks to citizen’s economic wellbeing but appears symbolic rather than actionable.

Conclusion

The analysis of Material, Relational, Mental, Verbal and Existential clauses in President Goodluck Jonathan’s 2011 inaugural speech

reveals how language functions ideologically to legitimize power, construct national identity and embed governance within human experience. Specifically, Relational clauses and Material clauses were the most prevalent clause types used by Jonathan in his 2011 inaugural speech. Analysis reveal that Relational clauses were predominantly employed to define identities, assert moral values and naturalize attributes of leadership authority while Material clauses conveyed development and collective action often masking power asymmetries. Mental clauses foreground emotional engagement portraying the leader as empathetic, having emotional connection and mutual aspiration with the citizens. Verbal clauses are used to perform acts of gratitude and mobilization creating an illusion of participatory governance while subtly reinforcing the top-down communicative structure where the leader speaks and the people act. Existential clauses subtly assert political intentions and national priorities using abstract agentless constructions. This discursively evades direct responsibility while still appealing to hope and economic survival. These clauses mirror existential issues in political discourse where political actors make choices to achieve spurious goals and construct human existence in ways that seem to falsify the lived experiences of the people in order to reinforce personal or group ideologies. Through CDA, it becomes evident that such projections often mask structural inequalities and shirking of responsibility that is characteristic of the Nigerian political arena.

This study recommends that political leaders should cease using language as a rhetorical instrument but rather aim to tackle existential issues in Nigeria realistically. This will enhance justice, equity and inclusion which will ultimately lead to unity, progress and peaceful co-existence despite the linguistic, ethnic and religious diversity in the country.

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