

Discursive Legitimation Strategies in Atiku's 2019 Acceptance Speech

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Abstract

Strategic (de)legitimation of a political adversary's manifesto is a potent campaign instrument. Using Van Leeuwen's (2007) legitimation model and purposeful sampling method of Atiku's acceptance speech as PDP's 2019 flagbearer, this study examines Atiku's use of legitimation strategies to avoid negative voting patterns. The findings revealed that the distribution of the effect-oriented instrumental rationalisation pattern were predominant while the personal authorisation patterns featured less in the speech. The study also observed that the distribution patterns followed criteria of instrumental-rational, ideological, and affective micro-behavioural voting inclinations of voters in elections.

Keywords: effect-oriented instrumental; moralisation; authorisation; rationalisation; mythopoesis; personal authorisation; affective micro-behavioural; ideological.

Introduction

Politicians are intentionally involved in the Machiavellian game of trying to surreptitiously outwit, control, and maintain hegemony. One way they express and actualise these ideological and political behavioural influences on the electorate is through the legitimation strategies employed in political campaign discourse. The legitimation discourses have had several approaches, like the Cap (2010) proximation cognitive model, the Slocum-Bradley (2008) moral legitimation model, and finally, the Van Leeuwen (2007) socio-semantic model of legitimation. The current study takes the perspective of Van Leeuwen in examining how political campaigns are used as resources to earn political credibility in certain respects. The 2019 presidential election contest in Nigeria was filled with political intrigues and power plays between the candidates of the various parties and the electorate. They sought favourable political behavioural responses from their targeted electorates through their campaign speeches and electioneering slogans. The battle for the presidency was narrowed down to two major political parties: the ruling party (APC) and the principal opposition party (PDP). Atiku, the PDP presidential candidate, has consistently been in the race for president since 1993 and is expected to bring his political experience and skills to bear in crafting a suitable legitimation scheme that will earn him the presidency, thus the reason for the selection of the subject of study. Weber (1978) opined that every system of authority seeks to cultivate belief in its legitimacy, achieved in and through language. In line with this school of thought, politicians, in the social practice of electioneering, actualise political legitimation using language. The article gives a new perspective on political legitimation discourse analysis by focusing on how (de) legitimation in campaign discourse works as micro-behavioural political patterns against negative voting (Gerzia & Federico, 2021). This would show how politicians use discursive legitimation along with the

micro-behavioural tendencies of how voters judge the credibility of political candidates based on instrumental-rational, ideological, and affective factors.

Literature Review

Previous studies on the 2019 presidential elections are categorised into non-linguistic and linguistic perspectives. The non-linguistic aspects span legal studies on the 2019 election (Imoson et al., 2019), political hate speech phenomena (Ezeibe, 2020), ethnicity of voting patterns (Oboh, 2017), and social media influence on election performance (Cheeseman et al., 2020; Fagbola & Thakur, 2019; Emama & Maledo, 2018), while the linguistic aspects of the 2019 election discourse, of which the present study is situated, include Obiora et al. (2021) CDA approach that focuses on linguistic forms of political hate speech. The study reveals the linguistic realisation of accusations, judgements, mockery, and degradation.

Focusing on pragmatic acts of (de) legitimisation by politicians in the 2019 election, Waheed and Dalha (2019) draw from Mey's pragmatic act and White's appraisal theory to account for the influence of social media in political legitimation. The study reveals that social media political discourse plays a massive role in influencing political votes. This study introduces Van Leeuwen's model of legitimation, which is very different from Mey's pragmatic act model and White's appraisal model. It will also try to find the connection between discursive legitimation and avoiding negative voting as a political strategy.

The use of Van Leeuwen's legitimation model for analysis in this study stands out from previous studies on 2019 political discourses that utilised more of Mey's pragmatic acts and White's appraisal model. The current study also differs from similar 2019 political campaign studies. It explicitly examines the nexus between discursive legitimation patterns in political discourses and the strategy of avoiding negative voting.

Literature Review

Previous studies of discursive legitimation primarily focused on how to justify political policies and decisions, how the media reported on political crises, how to make specific sociopolitical identities and social orders more desirable, how to defend diplomatic positions, how the media legitimised political interests, and so on; however, they had not covered discursive legitimation strategies in Atiku's acceptance speech to run as the PDP's 2019 presidential flag bearer. This informs the gap that this study intends to fill by examining how political legitimation strategies are patterned and adapted to prevent negative voting from the electorate along three micro-behavioural components: instrumental-rational, ideological inclination, and affective dispositions.

For instance, Reyes (2011) examined the political and ideological leanings featured in President Bush's and President Obama's political speeches justifying the US military intervention in Iraq. The study deployed Reyes's (2011) expanded version of Van Leeuwen's (2008) legitimation framework that accounted for more legitimation resources such as emotion, a hypothetical future, altruism, virtues of expertise, and rationality. Consequently, the study revealed that political leaders used several legitimation strategies to justify their actions and get the audience's approval or acceptance of them.

Said (2017) investigated the legitimation features in the Egyptian president's public policy speech on the justification of economic and political decisions such as subsidy cuts and maritime border agreements with Saudi Arabia. The authors analysed Van Dijk's socio-cognitive CDA model and Van Leeuwen's (2008) legitimation model. The study's findings revealed that the president used more rationalisation and moral evaluation legitimation patterns to justify decisions on electricity cuts and authorisation and rationalisation and moral evaluation to justify decisions on border protection. The study also revealed that the ideologies underlying each legitimation strategy's use include religious, cultural, and nationalistic ideologies and values of Egyptian society.

Sadaghi, Hassani, and Jalali (2014) focused on the media reportage perspective of legitimation to uncover how the ideological dispositions of a Western newspaper, Voice of America (VOA), and a Middle Eastern media outlet (Fars News), legitimised the Egyptian revolution along certain economic and religious interest divides. Using Van Leeuwen's (2008) framework, the study shows that VOA (de)legitimation focused more on regime change and economic interest, while that of Fars news focused more on Islamic movements and Egyptian revolutions.

In the same vein, Nordin & Christopher (2016) examined the linguistic and legitimation structures used by the Kurdish Globe newspaper (KG) in (de) legitimising the events of the US force's withdrawal from Iraq. The study adopted Van Leeuwen's legitimation model to analyse the data. The data analysis revealed the newspaper's use of authorisation, rationalisation, and moral evaluation as legitimation strategies. It was also observed that the legitimation patterns were lexicogrammatically realised through material, verbal, relational, mental, and existential processes.

Cheng (2021) focused on diplomatic relations between the Chinese and US governments in case of US-China trade friction. Van Leeuwen (2008) and Reyes (2011) legitimation frameworks were nominated for the study. The findings reveal that the legitimation strategies of the Chinese diplomatic response to US trade friction build on some Chinese ideological and cultural values like Confucianism, the culture of face, and collectivism. In expanding the applications of Leeuwen's legitimation framework to identity construction, Abdi and Basarati (2018) examined President Obama's attempts to discursively legitimise a politically preferred social order through identity reconstruction of the media-distorted identity of the American Muslim community in his Baltimore Islamic Centre speech. The findings of the study revealed that the identity patterns legitimised are Americanism and peace-loving Muslim identity.

Reviewing the literature on political legitimation from the past shows that it has been used in different social situations, such as justifying policies and political decisions, how the media reports on political crises, building identities, and diplomatic relations, but not as a political tool to avoid negative voting in the Nigerian presidential election campaigns for 2019. Van Leeuwen's (2008) framework of legitimation analysis was chosen to find out (1) the discursive legitimation strategies loaded in Atiku's 2019 nomination acceptance speech. (2) how they are linguistically realised; and (3) how the discursive legitimation strategies were used to avoid negative voting responses.

Operationalizing Van Leeuwen's Legitimation Model

Van Leeuwen's (2008) framework proposes four (4) categories of legitimation: authorisation, moralisation, rationalisation, and mythopoesis. The concepts of these categories are explained below:

Authorisation: Leeuwen (2008) argues that one of the legitimation strategies through which authority systems acquire or construct credibility among the public is through the use of the authorisation strategy of legitimation to provide an answer to the "why we should do it or do it this way question". The authorisation strategy actualises the legitimation function by appealing to sources of authority derived from general norms or customs of behaviour (traditional authority), laws and constitutions (impersonal authority), the statute or position of a person (personal authority), the enormity of influence one has on others (role model authority), the professional skill and experience of others (expert authority), and convention or compliance to standard or acceptable ways of doing things (conformity authority). Linguistically, role model, conformity, and tradition authorisation subcategories are indexed by material processes, while verbal processes feature expert, personal, and impersonal subcategories.

Moralisation: This legitimation strategy is discursively enacted by referencing the speaker's value or belief system. It alludes to certain positive or negative attributes of a person to enhance or benignly enhance their public credibility on moral grounds. This category of legitimation can be further subcategorised into evaluation, naturalisation, abstraction, and analogies. Van Leeuwen (2008) opines that the evaluation subcategory of moralisation alludes to one's value or belief system in legitimation. Van Leeuwen (2008, p. 108) identifies it as a "designative and attributive legitimation". This type of legitimation is linguistically realised in evaluative adjectives or mental processes. Van Leeuwen (2008, p. 108) reveals that the naturalisation moralisation subcategory of moralisation legitimation appeals to the construal of change in the natural order of things from a spatio-temporal perspective, while the "abstraction" subcategory moralises an action or proposed plan by conflating certain social activity with certain abstract positive human qualities or moralised activity. For instance, when we conflate immigrants with problems or the activity of going to school with the moral activity of independence, we tend to demoralise immigration activity and moralise going to school. In the analogy subcategory of moralisation, legitimation is achieved by comparing one's proposed plan to other known positive or negative social activities to moralise or demoralise it, respectively. For instance, comparing teaching activity with military drilling activity seeks to moralise the disciplinary values of the military in teaching values.

Rationalisation Strategy: This strategy enacts legitimation that appeals to mental construal consisting of "existing shared knowledge" between the speaker and the audience for actualising cognitive approval or credibility (Van Leeuwen, 2008, p. 108). Rationalisation legitimation is subcategorised into instrumental rationalisation and theoretical rationalisation. The instrumental rationalisation is further subcategorised into goal-oriented, means- or use-oriented, and effect-oriented instrumental rationalisations. Goal-oriented instrumental rationalisation enacts legitimation by constructing purpose in people whose actions are driven by unconscious or conscious motives or goals. The means- or use-oriented subcategory constructs purpose in actions as one that can be accomplished through and by certain

means. In contrast, the effect-oriented subcategory actualises legitimation by constructing purpose in actions with a certain negative or positive outcome, consequence, or result on the people.

Theoretical rationalisation accomplishes legitimation through the descriptive assertion of the actual state of things. Theoretical rationalisation can take different forms: definition, explanation, and experiential. The definition strategy of theoretical rationalisation actualises legitimation by defining an activity in terms of another moralised activity; for instance, in the parenthesised statement "transition is a necessary stage in the young child's experience", childhood experience is defined in the light of a transition process" (Leewen, 2008,p.109). The explanation form of theoretical rationalisation refers to certain habits or behaviours of the referenced categories of actors. It provides answers to the "why must they do it this way?" question by providing the inferential answer that doing things this way is appropriate to the nature of the actors (Leewen 2008,p. 109). An explanation-theoretical is realised in the parenthesised statement: Protest becomes violence when protesters are maltreated". Another form of theoretical rationalisation is the experiential subcategory, which expresses legitimation through proverbs, moral maxims, and wise sayings. The scientific theoretical rationalisation realises legitimation by alluding to systemic bodies of knowledge used in institutionalised practices.

Mythopoesis legitimation is a narrative form of expressing legitimation through cautionary and moral tales that connotes or points to social actors' reward for positive actions and punishment for negative social actions (Leewen 2008,p. 109).

Method of Data Collection

The study used purposive sampling to select Atiku Abubakar's acceptance speech as the PDP's 2019 presidential bearer. The selection is based on the criterion of the rich political experience of Atiku Abubakar. This enables the researcher to unpack the candidate's experience-based, skilful deployment of political legitimation strategies to ward off negative voting. The descriptive content analysis approach also informs data selection because it helps reveal communication content patterns and involves an interpretative and naturalistic approach (Crawford et al., 2005). For easy analysis, the data is separated into excerpts 1–18 and sourced from the Vanguard Nigerian Newspapers of June 2018.

Data Analysis

Excerpt 1: On October 6, 2018, I sought and obtained the mandate of the Peoples Democratic Party to fly their flag as a candidate for the office of president of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

The speaker legitimises democratic processes of seeking elective positions by constructing purpose in person "1" as one whose action is driven towards achieving the goal orientation that is captured in the purpose phrase "to fly their flag as a candidate for the office of president of the Federal Republic of Nigeria".

Excerpt 2: Today, I am formally presenting myself to you, the Nigerian electorate, as the presidential candidate of not just the PDP but of the hopes and aspirations of all Nigerians.

The candidate adopts the legitimation strategy of effect-oriented instrumental rationalisation that constructs purpose in political action by presenting himself for an elective position as one with altruistic benefit or a positive effect on not just the PDP but also the hopes and aspirations of all Nigerians.

Excerpt 3: The sad fact today, as you know, is that too many of our people are not working and are living in poverty and insecurity.

The (de)legitimation strategy in excerpt three above is explanation-oriented theoretical rationalisation because the speaker attempts to describe the natural order of things or the economic and social well-being of Nigerians as they are in the current administration.

Excerpt 4: The very fabric of our society is breaking down. We have never been so divided as a nation.

The speaker enacts a (de)legitimation strategy of explanation-oriented theoretical rationalisation that describes the natural order concerning Nigerians' characteristics of unity and disunity.

Excerpt 5: The most critical question in this election is are you better off than you were four years ago? Are you richer or poorer? That is why our primary focus is to get Nigeria working again.

In excerpt 5, two legitimation strategies are enacted: analogy moralisation and goal-oriented instrumental rationalisation. The former is realised in the expression, "The most important question in this election is: **Are you better off than you were four years ago? Are you richer or poorer?**" while the latter features in the expression ", That is why our primary focus is to get Nigeria working again". The former expression indicates that the speaker tries to demoralise the governance effect of his opponent by calling the electorate to compare the present socioeconomic situation with the prior ones superintended by his party. In contrast, the latter depicts the speaker's intent to construct purpose around a person in "our primary focus" whose goal or motivation is to get Nigeria working again.

Excerpt 6: However, I am not here to tell you how I will get Nigeria working again. Instead I would like to tell you how we will get Nigeria working again together.

The speaker mentioned the adverbial element twice in excerpt 6 to enact the legitimation strategy of means-oriented instrumental rationalisation that constructs the purpose of getting Nigeria working again as one that can be actualised using the collective efforts of all Nigerians rather than individual efforts. This legitimation strategy associates the speaker with the political ideologies of democratic leadership and collectivism.

Excerpt 7: I am strongly of the view that I am just one Nigerian, and one Nigerian cannot be as wise as all Nigerians. That is why I will offer inclusive leadership. Atiku Abubakar is 100% for 100% of Nigerians, 100% of the time.

The phrase "strongly of the view" is a mental process indicative of the deployment of the legitimation strategy of moralisation or appeal to a value system. More so, the phrase "one Nigerian cannot be as wise as all Nigerians" indexes a legitimation

strategy of analogy or comparison moralisation that allows the speaker to positively moralise teamwork or collectivist ideology of governance and demoralise individualist ideology in governance through the comparison phrase "one Nigerian cannot be as wise as all Nigerians". I will offer an inclusive leadership clause index evaluation moralisation strategy through the evaluative adjective "inclusive". The adjective reveals the style of leadership that the speaker intends to bring to office if elected. The "for" preposition of the statement "Atiku Abubakar is 100% for 100% of Nigerians, 100% of the time" indicates legitimation realised through benefit- or effect-oriented instrumental rationalisation. This category of instrumental rationalisation enables the speaker to construct the purpose of political action as one with an altruistic benefit, positive effect, or outcome for all Nigerians.

Excerpt 8: Too often, Nigerians have been promised better governance by those seeking their votes. Such individuals have preyed on the legitimate desires of our people for their conditions to be improved, and they make all sorts of promises. However, it is one thing to promise and another thing to deliver. I am not one for making grandiose promises. Rather than promises, I believe in policies.

In excerpt 8, the author employs the delegitimation strategy of effect-oriented instrumental rationalisation, which constructs purpose in the negative outcome of the political actions of many failed politicians' promises to the Nigerian electorate. The negative outcome for Nigerians is captured in the expression, "Such individuals have preyed on the legitimate desires of our people for their conditions to be improved, that they make all sorts of promises". The speaker also enacts the legitimation strategy of evaluation moralisation by referring to his political value system of not making grandiose promises and his political belief system of making policies instead of promises.

Excerpt 9: A promise is an indication to take action in the future; a policy is a plan to achieve future goals. I believe in setting goals and developing realistic plans and policies to achieve those goals. To me, leadership is having the discipline to commit to one's goals until they are a reality.

The mental process verb "believe" in excerpt 9 indicates the enactment of the evaluation moralisation legitimation that refers to the speaker's value or belief system of "setting goals and coming up with realistic plans and policies". The expression "To me, leadership is having the discipline to commit to one's goals until they are a reality" features the legitimation strategy of definition-oriented theoretical rationalisation because it links the leadership category of activity to the activity of being disciplined and committed to achieving goals.

Excerpt 10: I have succeeded in running my private enterprises, which now employ 50,000 Nigerians, because I believe in policies, and I have the discipline to stay with them until they become a reality.

Excerpt 10 enacts an expert authorisation legitimation strategy by referring to his past business credentials of successfully running a private enterprise that employs 50,000 Nigerians, consequently projecting the idea that such success can be replicated in his political leadership if given the opportunity. He also enacts evaluation moralisation

legitimation in the "I believe in policies-mental process clause" to depict his political, business, and value systems that keep him thriving.

Excerpt 11: It is my desire to run for the office of the president of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, not because I have a bag full of promises, but because I am prepared to lead.

Expert authorisation legitimation strategy is enacted in excerpt 11 in the "because I am prepared to lead" adverbial clause of reason. The speaker legitimises the practice of running for president with expert authority that comes from his past preparatory experience in politics.

Excerpt 12: Over the last 18 months, I have worked with the best experts Nigeria has to offer to come up with policies and plans that, when implemented, will get Nigeria going in the right direction again.

The speaker legitimises the credibility of his political policies by alluding to expert authorisation in the expression, "I have worked with the best experts Nigeria has to offer to come up with policies and plans". The credibility and proficiency of his consultants were realised in the scalar dimension of quality reflected in the superlative adjective form "best".

Excerpt 13: I am not talking about what I can do. I am talking about what I have done before.

The verbal process of "talking" reflects the enactment of personal authority as a means of political legitimation that rests on the idea that the voters should vote for me because I can say what I have done before politically.

Excerpt 14: When I was Vice President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria from 1999 to 2007, I chaired the national economic council that gave Nigeria her highest and most consistent GDP growth of over 6% per annum. Even though crude oil prices at that time were much lower than they are today, under the dynamic leadership of President Obasanjo, we paid off Nigeria's entire foreign debt (target). We also introduced the GSM revolution, which saw Nigeria go from 100,000 phone lines to over 100 million today. We achieved these and much more because we had a plan called the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy.

In excerpt 14, the speaker evoked a legitimation strategy of expert authorisation by stating his past political credentials and achievements when he was the Vice President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

Excerpt 15: This is my plan (activity) to (purpose link preposition) get Nigeria working again (purpose itself). A plan that will give Nigerian workers a living wage (benefits/effects of political action). A plan that will give Nigeria's youth a world-class education (benefits/effects of political action). A plan that will empower Nigerian women, reduce maternal mortality and increase their financial stability (benefits/effects of political action). A plan will cater to the elderly so that our people are not afraid of growing old (benefits/effects of political action). A plan that will invest in our failing infrastructure

(benefits/effects of political action), but above all, this is a plan that will help create jobs because in my many travels across our great nation (benefits/effects of political action), the one thing I constantly hear, is that our people need jobs.

The speaker adopted a legitimisation strategy of use or goal-oriented instrumental rationalisation that constructs purpose in person as one (my-possessive pronoun) whose political plan is to achieve the political goal of getting Nigeria to work again. The goal is captured in the "to get Nigeria working again" phrase. The phrases "**will give** Nigerian workers a living wage; **will give** Nigeria's youth a world-class education; **will empower** Nigerian women, reduce maternal mortality, and increase their financial stability; **will cater for** the elderly; **will invest in** our failing infrastructure; **will help create** jobs because in my many travels across our great nation", enact a legitimisation strategy of effect-oriented instrumental rationalisation because in the lexical verbs give, empower, cater for, invest in, and help create, the speaker constructs purpose in action as one that will have specific positive effects, benefits, or outcomes on the Nigerian electorates.

Excerpt 16: If elected president, I (political person) will proactively attract investments and support the 50 million small and medium-scale enterprises across Nigeria (political goal/motive) to double the size of our GDP to 900 billion dollars by 2025. These investments will create a minimum of 2.5 million jobs annually(effect of political action) and lift at least 50 million people from poverty in the first two years (effect of political action). My team and I will also help create jobs(effect of political action) by innovating flagship programmes such as the national open apprenticeship programme (Means/use of achieving political end/goal) through which we shall enhance the capacity of master-craftsmen and women to train one-million new apprentices every year (Means/use of achieving political end/goal). Our national innovation fund and SME venture capital fund initiatives will provide stable and sustainable long-term support to aspiring entrepreneurs (effect of political action).

The first-person pronoun "I" indicates the construction of a political person. At the same time, the preposition "in" of the underlined phrase depicts the motive, goal, or aim of the political person of Atiku. This means that the speaker deployed the goal-oriented instrumental rationalisation legitimisation strategy that allows him to construct a purpose for a political person with the political motive or goal of attracting investments and supporting enterprises across Nigeria. The second legitimisation strategy that the speaker adopts in excerpt 16 is effect-oriented instrumental rationalisation, which allows the speaker to construct a purpose in political action as one that will benefit or have a certain positive effect or outcome on the electorate in terms of job creation, poverty alleviation, and the provision of stable and sustainable entrepreneurial support. The third legitimisation strategy enacted by the speaker is that of means-to-end or use-oriented instrumental rationalisation. This strategy enables the speaker to construct the purpose of seeking political office in the political actions of attracting investments, lifting people out of poverty, job creation, and entrepreneurship support that can be actualised "by" and "through" means of innovating flagship programmes and enhancing the capacity of master craftsmen.

Discussion and Conclusion

The data analyses revealed that Atiku Abubakar, as the 2019 PDP's presidential party flag bearer, featured more of a rationalisation strategy than other strategies of legitimation to make a case for his political credibility. Secondly, he used the instrumental category of rationalisation more often (11 times) than the theoretical category (3 times). Thirdly, in utilising instrumental rationalisation legitimation strategy, the effect-oriented subcategory featured more (5 times) than goal-oriented and means-oriented, featured four times and two times, respectively, because Atiku legitimises the positive outcome, result or effect his proposed action will have on the electorate when elected. In the case where authorisation strategies were used, the expert subcategory featured more than personal and impersonal subcategories because the speaker enacted legitimation of his political personality and proposed plans by alluding to his past professional experience and that of his political consultants. In order to realise legitimation through constructing a political value system that agrees with the voters, Atiku deployed an evaluation subcategory of moralisation to foreground acceptable or positive political value systems.

Atiku's goal was to gain political legitimacy through discursive constructions of purpose around his political person and actions. He did this by talking about the political benefits his election would have for the general public, his targeted political goal, how he would reach his set political goal, his experience in politics and business, and his good qualities. This was how the legitimation discourse feature was used in the campaign. These distributions of legitimation strategic patterns agree with Diego and Federico's (2021:4) view that politicians strive to "avoid negative voting by appealing mostly to the voters' instrumental-rational behavioural tendencies to retrospectively evaluate and rationalise the past performance and value system of the politician". More so, political ideology, or value congruity or proximity, was also at the core of Atiku's use of evaluation moralisation strategy because he draws inspiration from Diego and Federico's (2021) opinion that politicians should be sensitive to the value systems of voters to sway their vote through the legitimation of a value system that matches their preferred value systems. The study concludes that political legitimation strategies serve as one of the linguistic resources through which politicians or authority systems actualise political acceptability in democratic elections.

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