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Linguistic Choices and Process Types in Governor Inuwa Yahaya's Inaugural Speech

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Abstract

Inaugural speeches are strategic communicative events through which newly elected leaders articulate visions, assign responsibilities, and legitimise authority. Previous studies on transitivity (Halliday, 1994; Fairclough, 1995; Chilton, 2004; Wang, 2010; Sharififar & Rahimi, 2015) have concentrated on presidential addresses, especially in Western and national-level contexts. Thus, this paper shifts attention to the gubernatorial level, using Nigerian inaugural speech as its empirical site. This paper adopts Halliday's Ideational Metafunction to conduct a transitivity analysis of Governor Inuwa Yahaya's Inaugural Speech. Using a qualitative descriptive design, the paper explores the deep social significance via transitivity analysis of the ideational function. The findings revealed that the governor uses material processes most frequently to construe actions and concrete changes. In lamenting about the poor economic situation of the state, material process is strongly involved. The relational processes are used to assign identity, while mental and verbal processes take the second, third and fourth respectively. Existential and behavioral processes have zero occurrences in the text because the governor prioritises presenting actions, defining identity and intentional governance rather than describing psychological states. This paper offers insights for leaders on how transitivity choices construct effective leadership identity and governance orientation in gubernatorial level political communication.

Keywords: governance, inaugural speech, political discourse, systemic functional linguistics, transitivity



1. Introduction

The role of language in politics cannot be over emphasized. Language and politics have become intertwined to such an extent that language is an indispensable tool in politics. This because it serves as a medium through which ideology is shaped; social reality is constructed; and public perception is influenced. It is on that basis that Agbogun (2011) opines that language is used in dealing with issues within the political terrain; such language now becomes political language. Schaffner (2004) also submits that:

In linguistic and literature, political language

has been used either to denote the use of language

in the context of politics, that is, a specific language

use with the purpose of achieving a politically

motivated function, or it has been used to denote

the political vocabulary; words and phrases that

refer to extra-linguistic phenomenon in the domain

of politics (p. 43).

The use of language in politics is done for unique purposes and functions. The numerous functions performed by language in the field of politics have drawn the attention of several scholars in recent time. To this end, Beard (2002) avers that looking at the language of politics as an occupation is important because it helps us to understand how language is used by those who wish to gain power, those who wish to exercise power and those who wish to keep power. The essence of power in the governance and affairs of people can never be swept under the carpet; this makes the people in control of power to be subject of attraction and they are as important as the language they use.

A speech is a force or power that is used to accomplish different ends or goals in different circumstances. It is equally important to understand the purposes or goals of the communicator and the circumstances under which communication takes place (Medhurst, 2010). The goal of a given speech can be determined through its communicative function, which is rendered through the speech acts performed (Trosborg, 2000). Thus, Yule (2002) states that speech acts constitute verbal actions accomplished with utterances.

Inaugural speeches, like other types of political speeches, present an important opportunity for politicians to address the public. It is a form of discourse through which leaders legitimise power, construct political identity, and establish ideological



positioning at the time of assuming office. Unlike acceptance, campaign and protest speeches, which may be delivered at party meetings, conventions, campaign rallies and press conferences, a political inaugural speech is a public speech usually delivered after an electoral victory at the swearing-in ceremony of an elected political office holder. Chilton (2004) sees inaugural speech as a ceremonial address that marks the beginning of a presidency and functions to unify the audience (Campbell and Jamieson, 1990).

Inaugural speech is often delivered in an atmosphere of celebration and is usually geared towards motivating, mobilising, educating, informing and entertaining the audience. Such occasions are records of programme outlines and promises made by a newly elected political office holder on assumption of office. It usually affords a speaker the opportunity to appreciate his/her supporters and the entire public for their support while presenting his/her programmes and stating how to realise them. Governor Yahaya is the first APC governor in the history of Gombe state. His Inaugural speech was delivered on 29th May, 2019. It is expected that the speech will differ from those of the previous PDP governors in theme and language use.

This study is motivated by the dearth of scholarly works on political inaugural speeches. Most of the existing ones (Ayeomon and Adetunji, 2004, 2007) focus on linguistic and non-linguistic features. Halliday (1994) appears to be the

first scholar to apply the SFG on a text. He explores the 'Inheritors' written by William Golding from the perspective of transitivity, which becomes the first instance of the application of Systematic Functional Grammar to analyse literary works. This framework was further developed by Eggins (2004), Bloor (2004), and Thompson (2014), all of whom show the relevance of SFG in revealing how meaning is constructed in texts.

A growing body of works have employed Systemic Functional Grammar to analyse political speeches. Notable among these scholars are Wang (2012), Fang (2014), Kong (2016), Jing (2018), Liu (2020, and Ola et al. (1994), whose studies examine the pragmatic and functional dimensions of language use in political discourse. Their analyses predominantly focus on speeches delivered by presidents and heads of government, with comparatively limited attention paid to the speeches of other political office holders, such as state governors and local government leaders. Similarly, Guowen (2017) extends functional linguistic analysis by examining six English versions of the Chinese poem "Qingming" through the lens of interpersonal metafunction theory, with primary emphasis on character representation and interpersonal meaning. While these studies underscore the analytical strength of Systemic Functional Linguistics, they also reveal a noticeable gap in research on sub-national political



discourse, particularly gubernatorial speeches.

2. The common characteristics of these studies lie in the fact that they only concentrate on one aspect of their metafunctions and they hardly have any theoretical innovations. However, very few scholars have studied a piece of political speech specifically from ideational function. Thus, the current paper adopts Halliday's (1994) ideational metafunction of systemic functional grammar approach to investigate and analyse the distribution of transitivity process types obtainable in the 2019 inaugural address of Governor Muhammad Inuwa Yahaya of Gombe state. The data are made up of the written transcript of the governor's speech downloaded from internet. The text contains 119 clauses and Halliday's selection method is applied to select the samples among the clauses. The paper identifies and describes stylistic features such as the transitivity processes that characterise the selected speech and their semantic import or effect.
- Review of Literature**

Three e Metafunctions

The term metafunction originates in systemic functional linguistics and is considered to be a property of all

languages. According to Halliday (1994), language mainly serves three primary functions which are termed as metafunctions. (a) Language is used to convey new information, to communicate content that is unknown to the hearer. This function is known as the ideational function. (b) The interpersonal function embodies all uses of language to express social and personal relations. This includes the various ways speakers enter a speech situation and perform a speech act. (c) The textual function refers to the fact that language has mechanism to make any stretch of spoken or written discourse into a coherent and unified text and make a living passage different from a random list of sentences. According to Halliday, a clause is a simultaneous realisation of ideational, interpersonal and textual meanings. This paper focuses on the ideational metafunction for the transitivity analysis of governor Muhammad Inuwa Yahya's inaugural speech.

Ideational Metafunction

The ideational metafunction considers the clause as a representation of reality. This means that the speaker or writer embodies in language his experience of the phenomena related to the real world. This includes his experience of the internal world of his own consciousness, his reactions, cognitions and perceptions and his linguistic acts of speaking and understanding. The ideational function can be classified into two sub-functions: the experiential and



the logical. The experiential function is largely concerned with contents or ideas. It is concerned with how language construes experience; that is, how speakers represent what is happening in the world and in consciousness (Halliday, 2014). It is realised at the clause level through the transitivity system, which includes: process types, participants and circumstances. The logical function is concerned with the relationship between ideas, dealing with how experiences are logically related to one another. It explains how clauses are combined, linked, and expanded to form larger units of meaning.

The Concept of Transitivity

Halliday & Hasan (2014) define transitivity as the system by which language encodes processes, the participants involved in those processes, and the circumstances under which the processes occur. Thus, it can be inferred that transitivity is the grammatical system through which experience is construed in the clause by means of process types, participant roles, and circumstantial elements. In Halliday's framework, transitivity is not about whether a verb takes an object (as in traditional grammar), but about how experience is structured and interpreted through different process types (material, mental, relational, verbal, behavioural, and existential), together with their associated participants and circumstantial elements. In short, transitivity answers the question about how

does language represent what is happening, who is involved, and in what circumstances?

In addition, transitivity is a semantic concept that examines how meanings are represented in the clause. By this definition, transitivity is a process-oriented system used to encode and decode the experience and knowledge of human beings through lexico-grammar (Halliday, 1994). Clauses are therefore analysed for their potentials to represent both inner and outer world of human beings. Filho (2004) cited in Kondowe that "transitivity expresses what is happening, what is being done, what is felt and what state it is." Turl (1975: 83) affirms that transitivity specifies different types of processes that are recognized in language and structured by what they expressed.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework adopted in this study is M.A.K. Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar, which was originally articulated mostly by J.R. Firth (1973). Halliday and Mathiassen (1973) state that functional grammar is sub-divided into three metafunctions which are the ideational, the interpersonal and the textual. These correspond to field, tenor and mode. Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) is termed systemic because it postulates that individuals have a wide range of choices available to them to produce linguistic utterances and texts. These utterances are, however, influenced by the social and cultural context in



which they are exchanged, and that the processes of using language is semiotic: a process of making meanings by choosing. The theory is termed functional also because language performs limitless practical functions in a variety of situations. These functions may be generalized into a set of highly coded and abstract functions which are inherent in every language.

3. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative descriptive design, which is appropriate because the focus of the paper is on meaning, interpretation and explanation of language use. This design allows the author to examine how language is used to project leadership and governance in Governor Inuwa Yahaya's Inaugural speech. The data for this study is a single written speech delivered by Governor Inuwa Yahaya at his swearing-in as the new governor of Gombe state. The speech was obtained from the internet. The paper employs textual analysis as the method of data collection. Thus, the method of data analysis is interpretative. The speech was segmented into clauses in line with Halliday's notion of clause being the highest unit of linguistic analysis. Each clause was analysed and examined to identify the type of actions or ideas being expressed, paying a particular attention to how the governor represents actions, conditions, awareness, and authority through language. The chosen extracts from the speech are

discussed in relation to their meaning and political functions.

4. Data Presentation and Analysis

Ideational metafiction is realised through transitivity which is further realised through six processes. They can be sub-classified into three major ones: material, mental and relational and three minor ones: verbal, behavioral and existential.

Material Process: This process can be said to involve "doing" words. Halliday (1994) defines material processes as processes of doing and happening, through which language construes concrete actions, events, and changes in the physical or social world. They typically involve an actor (the doer of the action) and may extend to a goal (the entity affected by the action). This notion was later extended by Halliday and Hasan (2014), describing material processes as clauses that represent outer experience; that is, actions and events that are observable and tangible, distinguishing them from mental or relational processes. However, Eggins (2004) explains that material processes encode actions that bring about change, emphasizing that they are central to texts concerned with activity, agency, and outcomes. Therefore, material processes express the notion that some entity "does" something to some other entity. However, material processes are not necessarily concrete, physical event. Consider



the following examples of material process:

Table 1:

ACTOR	PROCESS	GOAL
We	shall formulate	policies
Our administration	will tackle	the perennial shortage of water
<u>We</u>	<u>shall seize</u>	<u>the opportunity</u>

Mental Process: A mental process (ME) accounts for the process of sensing. They are clauses that construe inner experience by representing perception, cognition, emotion, and desire, allowing speakers to encode attitudes, beliefs, and subjective evaluation (Egins, 2004; Thompson, 2014). Moreover, Downing and Locke (2006) view mental processes as clauses that encode psychological states and cognitive activities, highlighting their role in expressing belief, intention, and emotional stance. There are

clear differences between something that goes on in the external world and something that goes on in the internal world of the mind. There are many verbs which refer to these mental processes, of thinking, imagining, liking, wanting, seeing, and so on. Halliday (1994) further offers three subcategories of the mental process: perception (hearing), affection (liking, hating) and cognition (thinking, understanding). Consider the following examples of mental process:

Table 2:

Senser	Process: mental	Phenomenon
I	will like to assure	everyone not to accept them.
Gombe state	wants	your commitment.
We	know	of all the atrocities committed.
<u>Our people</u>	<u>have learnt</u>	<u>their lessons.</u>

Verbal Process: The verbal process (VE) is the process of “saying” which covers any kind of symbolic exchange of meaning. Halliday (1994)

discusses verbal processes as one of the main process types in the ideational metafunction, highlighting their role in representing discourse



acts. Eggins (2004) emphasizes that verbal processes allow speakers to report, question, or narrate communication acts, functioning as a key mechanism for enacting interpersonal meaning. This is further expanded by Matthiessen, Teruya, & Halliday (2010) who note that verbal processes can encode direct or indirect speech, enabling the speaker to position themselves

relative to the proposition expressed. This process is intermediate between mental and material processes. The central verbal process, nevertheless, is easily recognized in that it is related to the transfer of message through language. One participant in any verbal process is referred to as the Sayer -- the person who speaks though sometimes need not be explicitly mentioned.

Table 3:

<u>Sayer</u>	<u>Process: verbal</u>	<u>Receiver</u>
We	must speak	our mind.
We	are unmindful of our promises to	the good people of Gombe State

Relational Process: Rational process (RE) are processes of “being”. Examples are *She is our lecturer; Musa is wise*. Halliday (1994) categorizes relational processes into intensive (is X), possessive (has X), and circumstantial types. They are central when expressing experience by defining relationships between participants. As the term ‘relational’ suggests, this is not being in the sense of existing. There is a related

category of existential clauses. In relational clause, there are two parts to the being: something is being said to be something else. In other words, a relationship is being set up between two separate entities. In this process, we have Carrier/Identifier, then process as relational and Attribute Identifier. Consider the following sentences in table three below:

Table 4:

<u>Carrier/Identifier</u>	<u>Process: relational</u>	<u>Attribute/Identifier</u>
Together we	shall move	our state to the next level.
We	shall harness	our resources for our people.
We	did not give up	our belief in Allah.



4.1 Discussion of Findings

From the analysis of the data above, material process, which construe actions, events, and concrete activities, constitute the most dominant process type in the speech, accounting for 60% of the total clauses. The governor uses this process predominantly to present actions and change. This is evident in clauses such as *"We shall overhaul the education sector," "We shall constitute a high-powered committee,"* and *"Government would review the security architecture."* Here, governor Yahaya makes this choice to project actions and depict himself as the actor and intervener in this critical time. According to Halliday (1994) material processes construe actions and events. This also corresponds with Fairclough's (2001) observations that political leaders depend on material processes to show commitment and legitimacy.

Relational processes are the second most frequent process type found in the speech. They allow the governor to show a shared identity. Consider these clauses: *"Gombe State is truly endowed," "Our healthcare delivery system is in a pitiable condition,"* and *"The civil service is the veritable machinery for implementation."* Here, the governor expresses shared attributes, lamenting the poor state of things in the state. Relational processes allow him to define social realities. This supports Fairclough's (2015) argument that political discourse often relies on relational

clauses to frame problems before proffering solutions.

Mental processes occur less frequently, accounting for 15%. They were used by governor Yahaya to show awareness of the situation and the condition Gombe State is in. The clauses: *"We are aware of the dwindling revenue," "We are not unmindful of our promises,"* and *"I am sure you are also aware"* construe cognition and awareness, positioning the Governor as Senser. Chilton (2004) and Fairclough (2001) observe that mental processes in political speeches function to create solidarity and shared consciousness rather than introspection.

Verbal processes are the least process types used in the speech (6%). They were used minimally to call for collaboration and urge actions diplomatically. The use of these phrases: *"I urge," "I assure," "I call on,"* and *"I hereby direct"* realise acts of saying that are both performative and authoritative. Experientially, these clauses construe symbolic action, with the Governor as 'Sayer' and directives as 'Verbiage'. This usage aligns with Halliday's (1994) view that verbal processes in institutional discourse often enact power relations.

Behavioural process occurs only once. However, existential processes are completely absent. Their absence here is both deliberate and ideological. Existential clauses assert existence without agency, which



could weaken perception and control. Thus, their avoidance by the governor constructs leadership as rational, and solution-driven.

The analysis reveals that the governor's choice of language clearly supports his political goal of presenting himself as a leader ready to act. The speech places strong emphasis on material processes that project action, responsibility, and commitment. This shows that such patterns are not limited to local, national or Western leaders alone. Rather, this study shows how a Nigerian governor adapts this style to respond to local realities and governance challenges. The speech presents leadership as practical and sincere by clearly describing the condition of the state, showing awareness of the people's concerns, and issuing firm but calm calls for cooperation. In short, governor Yahaya's inaugural speech goes beyond ceremony and presents governance as a serious task that requires honesty, shared understanding, and decisive action.

5. Conclusion

The analysis shows that the inaugural speech is carefully worded to present leadership as action and responsibility. As the dominant type in the speech, material processes convey statements that focus on what the government will do, which helps to portray him as active and ready to address the state's problems. Where descriptions are

used, they clearly explain the condition of Gombe State and justify the need for change. Expressions of awareness and assurance were made through mental processes, which help to build trust and a sense of shared concern with the people. In contrast, direct calls and instructions were made through verbal processes, which it strengthen authority without sounding aggressive. In short, the speech presents governance as purposeful, realistic, and people-centred, reflecting a clear intention to move the state forward through practical actions rather than empty promises.

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