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**POLITICAL COMMUNICATION AND THE USE OF DEIXIS:  
A STUDY OF PRESIDENT MUHAMMADU BUHARI'S 61<sup>ST</sup> INDEPENDENCE DAY  
SPEECH IN NIGERIA**

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**Abstract**

This study aims at examining, qualitatively and quantitatively, the use of deictic features in President Buhari's 1st of October 2021 speech on the occasion of Nigeria's 61st Independence Day Anniversary. To demonstrate how the President utilizes deictic resources in his speech for national peace, economic development, and unity. The study uses a pragmatic tool: deixis to analyse the President's speech. The data were analysed qualitatively. The speech is retrieved from the official website of the Online Vanguard Newspapers. Thereafter, deictic features were identified and classified according to their types. The study reveals that President Buhari employed a total of **248** deictic features: personal deixis (68 %), 51 spatial deixis (20 %), 11 temporal deixis (4 %), 6 social deixis (2 %), and 11 discourse deixis (4%) therefore, personal deixis is the most used category of deixis in president Buhari's speech to Nigerians. The study concludes that President Buhari's use of personal deixis depicts his oneness and desire to involve Nigerians in his decision making process.

**Keywords:** Deixis, Political communication, Independence day and President Muhammadu Buhari.

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**INTRODUCTION**

The primary function of any language is for communication purposes. Man is distinct from animals since man communicates through language (Ayeomoni and Akinkuolere, 2012). Taiwo (2009) observes that language is the conveyer belt of power. It moves people to vote, debate, or revolt, and it is therefore, a central explanation of political stability or polarization.

Language is essential to politicians. Language serves as the most vital tool in the hands of man. Thus, language is essential in the implementation of a successful democratic rule in any country. In other words, the use of language aids the government of the people to formulate policies in a democratic setting.

More so, most activities performed by politicians are done through the avenue created by language. This includes campaigns, manifesto, rally, election,

inauguration, governance e.t.c. Political speech is becoming a popular concept especially in the area of linguistic and communication research. The concept of political speech could be said to have originated from the rhetorical works of Greek philosophers like Sophists, Socrates, Plato and Aristotle (Wilson, 1990).

Furthermore, the office of the president is the highest in any country, yet the position needs constant touch or link with the people, one of the ways of achieving this is through speechmaking. Any democratic government places premium on the people as democracy is popular for being the government of the people, by the people and for the people. Therefore, speech can be seen as a means of establishing and maintaining social relationships, expressing feelings, and selling ideas, policies and programmes in any society and ultimately, to foster peace and unity which is the

concern of this paper through deictic resources.

In Nigeria, Independence anniversary speeches are made annually to commemorate Nigeria's self-rule from British colonial rule. These speeches are made by the Commander-in-Chief of Armed Forces of Nigeria in person of the President to address the people to give in retrospect how well the country has gone. Therefore, it is the point of delivering the Independence Anniversary Speeches that politicians reaffirm their commitment to serve by reiterating the programmes of their party and electioneering campaign promises. No wonder, Denton and Hahn (1986) in Agbogun (2011) posit that the presidency or governorship office has been recognized as a rhetorical institution whose speeches are enlivened by the power to persuade and convince the nation or society on the one hand; and provide avenues for familiarizing the audience with the organization and recognisability of the presidency or governorship office on the other hand, as they encapsulate the nation or state. This present study adopted qualitative research design to analyse President Muhammadu Buhari's October 1st 2021 speech on the occasion of Nigeria's 61st Independence Day Anniversary to demonstrate how the President utilizes deictic resources in his speech for national peace and unity. Two research questions guided this study;

- i. What are the types of deixis used by President Muhammadu Buhari?
- ii. What is the prevalence of the deictic resources employed?

### **Concept of Deixis in Political Communication**

According to West (2013) cited in Chefor and Zhiying (2020), the word deixis is derived from the Greek word '*dektikos*' which means "pointing out" or "indicating". Deixis, deictic, and indexical are used interchangeably to represent a phenomenon

in which the discourse is anchored to a speech situation (Maienborn, 2012). Deixis refers to language elements whose interpretation depends not only on the semantic value but also on the speech situation (Renkema, 2004). Yang (2011) defines "deixis" as the "linguistic forms that denote the speaker/writer and the addressee, their position, and the time of the situation" (p. 128).

Deixis is used to trace entities to temporal, spatial, social, and discourse contexts (Hamdaoui, 2015). Deixis is considered as referring expressions such as *I, you, there, now, tomorrow* or modifiers that accompany referring expressions such as *that* and *this*. Deictic expressions are located on a scale of two extremes; near to the speaker or away from the speaker (Gjergji, 2015). The interpretation of deictic expressions varies from one context to another and it depends on the context in which these expressions occur. The speaker and the audience should share the same context to be able to interpret the deictic expressions (Hamdaoui, 2015). Gelabert (2004) identifies two main types of deixis, namely extra-linguistic and linguistic deixis. The type of deixis examined in this study is linguistic deixis which, according to Cruse (2016) could be divided into three main categories, which are personal, spatial and temporal; and two minor categories, which are social and discourse deixis. This categorization helps in analysing political speeches. That is why Wilson (1990) asserts that the major aim of analysing political communication is to shed light on the devices employed by politicians to create a specific view of the world. This means politicians have recognized the role of language in achieving specific goals. Because language is vital for politics and that political activity does not exist without the use of language (Chilton, 2004).

### Theoretical Framework

This study used the theoretical conception of deixis within the framework of pragmatics. Pragmatics is a branch of linguistics that has to do with the meaning of utterances in a specific context at the time of utterance. According to Levinson (1983), the scientific study of the relationship between the structure of a semiotic system existing, especially between language and its contextual usage in conjunction with semantics; while forming part of the general theory of meaning is referred to as pragmatics. Aboh and Uduk (2017) state that pragmatics “Is primarily concerned with the relationship between language and its context of use, it studies the way language is used in human communication as a reflection of the conditions of society” (p 74). This implies that it is the context in which a language is used that the meaning is understood. Hence, this study is an application of a pragmatic tool, deixis, to President Buhari’s Nigeria’s 61<sup>st</sup> Independence Day Anniversary speech with the aim of identifying types of deixis used by President Muhammadu Buhari and also to identify the prevalence of the deictic resources employed.

### Methodology

In this study, qualitative and quantitative research methods are employed to effectively examine the use of deictic resources in the message delivered by President Muhammadu Buhari of Nigeria on the occasion of Nigeria’s 61<sup>st</sup>

Independence Day Anniversary, 2021. The speech was downloaded from [www.vanguardngr.com](http://www.vanguardngr.com) online Vanguard Newspaper immediately after the speech was presented. It is already in the public domain. The researcher studied the speech manually and identified the deictic expressions the president’s message.

### Results and Findings

The findings show that the structure of the speech presupposes the structural arrangements of the speech in terms of paragraphing and sentences that make up the speech. Paragraphing: At the paragraph level, President Muhammadu Buhari’s Independence Day speech had one hundred and one (101) paragraphs altogether where he made use of numeric numbering. Some of the paragraphs were also further sub-alphabetised with letters such as a, b, c, d, e. The objectives of the study enabled us to answer the research questions below.

**Research question I:** What are the types of deixis used by President Muhammadu Buhari?

The study revealed that, in his speech to Nigerians, President Buhari’s employed different types of deictic resources, including 169 personal dixies (68.1 %), 51 spatial deixis (20.6%), 11 temporal deixis (4.4 %), 6 social deixis (2.4%), and 11 discourse deixis (4.4%), this corroborates Cruse’s (2016) identification of linguistic deixis. Table I below shows the deictic resources employed by the President.

**Table I: Types of Deixis Used by President Muhammadu Buhari**

S/N	Deixis	Frequency of usage	Percentage
1.	Personal	169	68.1%
2.	Spatial /place	51	20.6%
3.	Temporal /Time	11	4.4%
5.	Social	6	2.4%
6.	Discourse	11	4.4%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>248</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Fieldwork 2021

Table I above indicates the five deictic resources employed by President Muhammadu Buhari. In terms of frequency of usage of these deictic resources, the study also revealed that personal deixis were the most used category of deixis in President Buhari's independence speech and

suggested that this reflects the President's power and dominance over his audience, but also his desire to involve this audience in his decisions, as a sign of his sensitivity towards them. This is insignia of national peace and unity in Nigeria.

**Table II: The prevalence of the Deictic Resources Employed**

S/N	Personal Deixis	Frequency of usage	Percentage
1.	I	27	15.9%
2.	We	57	33.7%
3.	Us	18	10.6%
4.	You	1	0.6%
5.	Our	66	39.0%
6.	<b>Total</b>	<b>169</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Fieldwork 2021

Table II above indicates the preponderance use of the person deixis. Five personal deictic features were identified in President Buhari's speech; 'I, We, Us, You and Our'. The use of 'Our' is predominant among the five person deixis identified in this study in Mr. President Speech. Personal deixis has a total of 169 deictic elements, including 66 'Our' (39.0%), followed by the use of 'We' 57 (33.7%), 'I' 27(15.9%), 'Us' 18 (10.6%) and 'You' 1 (0.6%).

By using 'our' in this sense, President Buhari makes an attempt to include himself in the affairs of Nigerian polity. So all are required to take attitudes and show a collective response towards the economy which doesn't work well. This use of 'our' enables the President to carry his citizens along for any action which goes wrong or bad in the future. Furthermore, Buhari uses the first person pronoun 'we' to take on a collective identity. When Buhari deals with unpleasant event, he tends to use an identity in which all Nigerian are included as well as him. This means that he tries to be at a distance from such events which might place him in a negative light. The use of these personal deictic elements; 'our' and 'we' is gear towards economic development of the nation Nigeria.

### Discussion of Findings

Based on the quantitative analysis, it can be noticed that the speech is quite long in terms of physical appearance and it contains a considerable number of deictic resources. It has a total of **248** deictic features, including **169** personal deixis (68.1%); the breakdown of personal deixis is as follows, number of occurrence of the use of 'Our' is 66 (39.0%), followed by the use of 'We' 57 (33.7%), 'I' 27(15.9%), 'Us' 18 (10.6%) and 'You' 1 (0.6%) and this amounted to the 68.1% of the total personal deictic features, followed by spatial deixis **51** (20.6%), **11** temporal deixis (4.4%), **6** social deixis (2.4%), and **11** discourse deixis (4.4%).

In terms of frequency of usage, the analysis reveals a prevalence use of personal deixis by President Buhari and this answers question II (What is the prevalence of the deictic resources employed?) which could be assumed to be related to the President's desire to reflect power and dominance over his audience. It could also be attributed to his desire to involve his audience; Nigerians, in his decisions and to let them share his responsibilities, thereby showing his sensitivity towards them. Concerning the use of spatial deixis, President Buhari

knows the importance of language, hence, he employed spatial deictic elements that indicate closeness to his audience, this is in tandem with Chilton (2004) who says that politics and political activities does not exist without the use of language. He tried to bring everything and every entity closer to his audience to encourage them to get the same vision as his own. Temporal and discourse were used equally from the analysis while Social deixis were the least utilized category of deixis in President Buhari's speech to Nigerians. It ranked last in terms of frequency of usage.

### Conclusion

This study has revealed the deictic resources employed by President Buhari's 61st Independence Anniversary speech, held on 1st of October 2021. Specifically, the study identified the different types of deictic resources used in the speech and the frequencies of occurrence of these deictic resources. The President used Personal deictic elements to reflect his power and dominance over his audience, it is also the President's desire to involve his audience in his decisions making process. This shows the President's sensitivity towards Nigerians is an insignia of national peace, economic development, and unity. It is recommended that further research in this field of study should be carried out in order to compare the deictic resources used by President Buhari's speech to Nigerians and the deictic resources he uses in his addresses to other social and political gatherings in Nigeria or to the diplomatic world.

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