

Comparative Analysis of Lexical Features in Inaugural Speeches of President Olusegun Obasanjo and President Muhammadu Buhari

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Prof Luka Barnabas Jauro¹, Dr Mohammed Bello², Mohammed Abdullahi Swa³

¹Department of English, Faculty of Arts, Modibbo Adama University, Yola, Adamawa State, Nigeria,

²Department of English, Faculty of Arts, Modibbo Adama University, Yola, Adamawa State, Nigeria,

³Department of Language and Communication Education, School of General Studies Education (SGSE), Federal College of Education (Tech), Gombe, Gombe State, Nigeria

Correspondence: Mohammed Abdullahi Swa, elswawwy2424@gmail.com

Abstract

This study entitled, ‘Comparative Analysis of Lexical Feature in Inaugural Speeches of President Olusegun Obasanjo and President Muhammadu Buhari’, examined the usage of a lexical feature in inaugural speeches of President Olusegun Aremu Obasanjo on the 29th May, 1999 and 29th May, 2003 and President Muhammadu Buhari on the 29th May, 2015 and 29th May, 2019 respectively. Specifically, the study focused on a lexical feature: lexical density. Two inaugural speeches each by the two former Presidents making four inaugural speeches formed the corpus of the work. The paper was anchored on David Recador’s Comparative Analysis Theory (CAT), which was used to form the basis for this research. Purposive sampling technique was used to select the corpus of the study. The study adopted descriptive research design for the fact that it involves the procedure in which data are normally collected, organized, described and analyzed as they are (in natural setting) without distorting them. The design involved quantitative approach analyses. A manual method was used in generating and analyzing the data. Results showed that the ratio of content words to function words in terms of lexical density was not adequately used in some instances of the speeches which presumably resulted in low assimilation of the messages by the audiences. One of the findings showed that there is a significant increase in the number of lexicons used in each of their respective second speeches. Secondly, there was a significant increase in the number of words in the second inaugural speeches of both President Obasanjo and President Buhari. This cannot be unconnected with an effort to console and convince the audiences of their possible weaknesses in their respective first tenures. One of the recommendations proffered by the study include: Engage English for Special purposes (ESP) practitioners to help in producing balanced speeches.

Keywords: Analysis, Features, Inaugural, Lexical, Speech

INTRODUCTION

The world over, various forms of developments and activities that take place across various human and non-human endeavours are translated and understood through communication as confirmed by Jegede (2020), “where activities occur, there is a language activity involved.” According to Fatimayin (2018), communication is the process of creating and ascribing meaning. Communication is in various forms and language is one of them. All creatures on earth communicate and every set of creatures communicates with peculiarity. Human beings use language to communicate. Crystal, (2008) opined that communication refers to the transmission and reception of information (a ‘message’) between a source and a receiver using a signaling system. Communication is sharing our feelings, ideas and opinions with others. This can be intellectual, personal, spoken or written in nature. Communication is effective when a communicator is competent enough to communicate proficiently, simply, clearly, sincerely and dynamically. Communication is the understanding which occurs between humans through linguistic and non - linguistic means like gestures, mimicry and voice all of which consist of some basic components (Hadumod, 1998).

Language is the exclusive means of communication among human beings and is used to differentiate human beings from animals, so also is speech, which can be used to differentiate the capacity of one individual from another one. Speech is a major yard stick for determining human capability in language usage. The way an individual presents his speech determines to some extent his capacity. Speech is typically time-bound, spontaneous, face-to-face, socially interactive, loosely structured, immediately revisable and prosodically rich, (Ranger, 2007). This brought about the idea that some leaders are being considered as great leaders because of their power of speeches. They include: Sir, Abubakar Tafawa Balewa (The Golden Voice of Africa), Alhaji Bello Maitama (The Danmasanin Kano), Ghanian Kwame Nkurma, Nelson Mandela of South Africa, America’s Martin Lutha King, J. F Kennedy Barack Obama to mention but a few.

Lexical features are very fundamental in language communication, particularly speech because they are the bricks that form phrases, clauses and sentences in day to day communications. Malsha, Manoj and Chulananda (2023) referred to lexical features as the characteristics, properties, and patterns of words within a language. This encompasses vocabulary, word frequency, word length, part of speech, morphemes, and semantic meaning. In linguistics and writing analysis, these features are essential for determining the tone, complexity, and overall quality of a text. According to Christianto, (2020) in Julianniasa and Nurlayli, (2023), lexical feature is a language characteristic that distinguishes one particular linguistic feature of a certain phenomenon. Lexical features mean the specific properties, meanings, and structural characteristics of words in a language. This is to say that lexicons are the bricks for laying or building everyday discourse among human beings.

Speech involves conveying a particular message to a particular audience at a given time in such a way that the said audience gets the message clearly. It is so familiar a feature of daily life that we rarely pause to define (Sapir, 1921) and seems as natural to man as walking, and only less so than breathing. It is however much more than that because speech is an end product of language usage. Put simply, it is an oral usage of language for communication. Speech harmonizes the four basic language skills all together to produce a message. It may come in form of spoken or written text and all are invariably the outcome of writing as opined by Mohammed, (2021) which is the highest level of language acquisition skill after listening, speaking and reading skills. Writing can therefore be seen as a method of representing language in visual or tactile forms (David, 2019). He goes further to say that speech is seen as a medium of transmission for language that is the spoken or phonic substance of language as opposed to writing.

Speeches by leaders are always being made during various activities and events as well as when needs are

being unfolded. They include electioneering campaigns and rallies, nationwide broadcasts, response to public protests, introducing new policies, diplomatic speeches, inaugural speeches and so on. Various contexts and situations require equally different speeches. The speeches are used as weapons to achieve some different purposes. Analyses of various speeches made by these world leaders are being observed the world over, in order to determine and bring out the linguistic beauties and features implored to send across messages to the audiences. What a speech maker may have in the mind may be perceived differently from the audience depending on the language usage. Analysing inaugural speeches by presidents attracts Linguists. This is justified by the submission of Lodhi, Rashid, Waheed, Irum & Zunaira, (2018) who said "The study of president's inaugural speeches gets the attention of politicians, historians and the interest of linguists". In this regard, no linguistic vacuum should be left in any part of the world. In this part of the world, Nigeria is a giant country in Africa in many respects which include: economy, population, agriculture, industrialization, education, health, the media and above all politics because it is the most populous African country.

The history of inaugural speeches by world leaders dates back to the beginning of leadership among the human race. (Alimole, 2005) in (Balarabe, 2018) defines inaugural speech as the first public speech to mark the formal commencement of the business of the organization would be considered an inaugural address. In general, however, the first ceremonial public address of a newly-elected head of state to mark the beginning of his or her tenure of office is the most common form of inaugural speeches. Though Monarchs, democrats, military and religious leaders, the world over, deliver inaugural speeches on assuming the mantle of power or leadership. Besides, they continue to deliver speeches to their subjects on occasions (Balarabe, 2018). Inaugural speech is very fundamental in modern leadership. These speeches are held with great esteem and are continuously referred to by the citizens as a yardstick to x-ray the government's commitment to the nation and its citizens. An inaugural speech is the first speech someone gives when starting an important new job, for instance, the President's inaugural address to the nation. They usher in new governments and new agenda of the new government are sometimes mentioned in the speeches.

Every speech is intended to address a particular purpose or issue at stake. Most inaugural speeches are milestones and therefore tend to be seen as a yard stick for determining prospects or otherwise of the speech maker by audiences. Akinkurolere, (2015) points out that inaugural speeches are precisely the first speeches presented by people occupying leadership positions. In Nigeria, such speeches serve as a major means of winning people's hearts after a major selection, election, or appointment is announced or confirmed. Especially, to people that were not initially in support of such candidates either by signifying express disapproval or by not casting their votes. More so, leaders know the level of acceptance from the result of votes cast for and against them after election. The presentation of inaugural speeches further serves as a diplomatic means of selling new leadership to the people or subjects. So, in essence, a Presidential Speech on an inaugural day reveals not only the potentialities in the president but also builds hope among citizens of the society and by extension can be used as a reference or yard stick to measure fulfilled promises or otherwise. Inaugural speech, in inaugural events, therefore, remains a peak of the event that all and sundry await to hear after oath-taking. This shows how significant inaugural speeches are in the political system of a country that is considered to be practicing democracy like Nigeria.

Several inaugural speeches were individually or in pares analysed by many scholars, but little or no effort was made to bring the four inaugural speeches, two each by elected presidents from two strong opposition parties in Nigerian political context, using descriptive design and mixed mode of quantitative and qualitative analytical approaches. This is therefore a gap to be filled by this paper.

Objectives of the Study

The aim of this paper is to make comparative analysis of a lexical feature in inaugural speeches of President Olusegun Obasanjo and President Muhammadu Buhari. To achieve this, the following specific objectives were set out to:

1. Determine the lexical density of content words in each pair of the four inaugural speeches of President Obasanjo and President Buhari.
2. Determine the lexical density of function words in each pair of the four inaugural speeches of President Obasanjo and President Buhari.

Research Questions

In order to realize these objectives the following research questions were posed

1. What is the lexical density of content words in each pair of the four inaugural speeches of President Obasanjo and President Buhari?
2. What is the lexical density of function words in each pair of the four inaugural speeches of President Obasanjo and President Buhari?

LITERATURE REVIEW

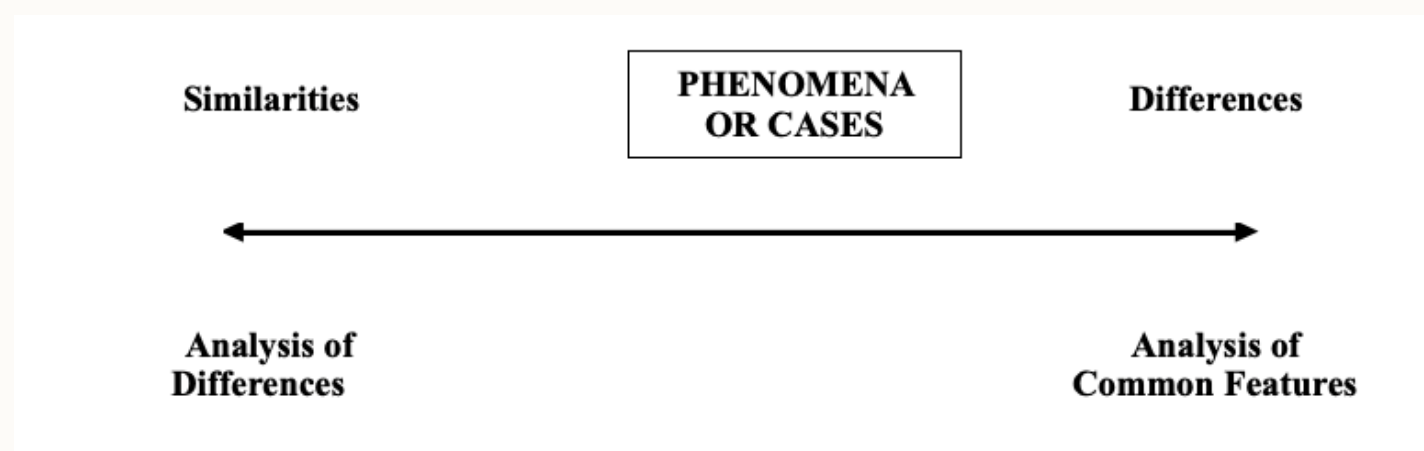
Communication occurs in diverse ways and manners and purposes. In essence, Language does not occur in vacuum, but in context. These factors all together determine the lexicons to be used by a speaker, especially a politician during an inaugural speech. The concept of lexical density is developed, and further refined by Halliday (1985). Lexical density is a condition of the words' proportion in the text which shows the ratio of content words and grammatical items (function words). Vinh, (2013) in (Yaumil, 2018) explains that lexical density is the number of lexical items as proportion of the number of running words. Those words include content words (nouns, verbs, adjectives, and some of adverbs), and grammatical function words (determiners, pronouns, prepositions, conjunctions, numerals, auxiliary verbs). According to Nasia and Gintin (2014), Lexical Density shows the complexity of words within text. Therefore, literally, lexical density is to measure how informative a text is. A text with a high proportion of lexical density contains more information than a text with a low lexical density. However, even though lexical density in a text contains more information, when it is high in a text causes difficulty in understanding the text (Vinh, et al, 2013 in Yaumil, 2018). That is because lexical density has a greater impact on the memory process. Thus, texts with a lower density are more easily to be comprehended, on contrary the texts with high lexical density are difficult to be comprehended even if it contains high information. (Yaumil, 2018), concludes that lexical density is a measure of the amount of content information in a text and it is calculated by dividing the number of content words in a clause complex by the number of clauses in the complex. Lexical density, defined as the ratio of content words to the total word count, serves as a critical measure of a text's information richness (Zhu et al., 2024). In their opinion, Peyman, Azim, Ali & Hooshang, (2025) lexical density is a pivotal indicator of readability and comprehension challenges, particularly in academic and educational contexts. It means that the lexical density measures the density of information in any passage of text, according to how tightly the lexical items (content word) have been packed into the grammatical structure. This is a measure of how much information is provided in a particular piece of writing. Lexical words are perhaps more commonly known as content words or information words. This is confirmed by Liu, (2023) who said that "lexical density" is used to describe the degree of lexical items or content words (things, activity words, descriptors, and modifiers) to the total number of words in a text or discourse.

From the foregone assertions in general, content words (nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs) typically make

up around 40-60% of a text. This range can vary depending on the type of text, its purpose, and the target audiences. To be specific, Khamahani (2015) in (Yaumil, 2018) says that if the amount of lexical density surpasses 50%, it indicates a high lexical density. The higher the lexical density contained in a passage, the more complicated the passage.

This study used Comparative Analysis Theory (CAT) which is the process of comparing items to one another and distinguishing their similarities and differences. Comparative analysis was essentially a theory emanating from the Economics field of study. It later spread to other disciplines outside economics including Linguistics. The founder of comparative analysis was David Ricardo who was an 18th-century English economist renowned for his contributions to economic theory. He developed the comparative advantage theory, labour theory of value, and the theory of rents, which have founded other schools of thought and form the basis of current economic policies and decisions. Theories of Comparative Analysis provide detailed examination of comparative analysis, the problem of predicting how a system will react to perturbations in its parameters, and why (Daniel, 2024). When a business wants to analyze an idea, problem, theory or question, conducting a comparative analysis allows it to better understand the issue and form strategies in response. A comparative analysis details how data or processes compare to one another and explains how they relate. This provides context for the analysis so the differences and similarities in the relationships between data sets are clear. For example, an auto manufacturer may compare the safety features of two or more models to determine how they affect sales or which features require improvement. This type of analysis might provide in-depth data on each feature and provide historical data to make comparisons about how each feature performs.

In Linguistics, comparative analysis, in its wider perspective, is a set of techniques developed over a period of time that permits us to recover linguistic constructs of earlier, usually unattested, stages in a family of related speeches in languages. The recovered ancestral elements may be phonological, morphological, syntactic, lexical, semantic, etc., and may be units in the system (phonemes, morphemes, words, etc.), or they may possibly be rules, constraints, conditions, or the like, depending on the model of grammar adopted (Susanna, 2021). She went further to say that comparative method is the "gold standard" by which mainstream linguists judge whether two speeches are related; relation is deemed certain only if a reconstruction of the common ancestor (or at least a partial reconstruction) is feasible. In view of this therefore, this study is making a comparative analysis of a specific corpus out of the wider field of linguistics.



Similarity vs Difference of the Cases Compared Model. Culled from Vartiainen: On the Principles of Comparative Evaluation, 2013

Figure 1: Model of Comparative Analysis Theory.

METHODOLOGY

The scope of this paper is lexical features, specifically lexical density. The speeches under review in this study are inaugural speeches of President Olusegun Aremu Obasanjo on the 29th May, 1999 and 29th May, 2003 and President Muhammadu Buhari on the 29th May, 2015 and 29th May, 2019 respectively. The four inaugural speeches in focus were coded OIS 1 (Obasanjo Inaugural Speech 1), OIS 2 (Obasanjo Inaugural Speech 2), BIS 1 (Buhari Inaugural Speech 1) and BIS 2 (Buhari Inaugural Speech 2).

Research design is a step by step procedure which is adopted by a researcher before data collection and analysis process commence so as to achieve the research objective in a valid way (Bostley, 2019). Generally, research design refers to the overall strategy that one chooses to integrate the different components of the study in a coherent and logical way, thereby, ensuring you will effectively address the research problem; it constitutes the blueprint for the collection, measurement, and analysis of data, (Chaudhary, 2006). Specifically, the study intends to use descriptive research design. Uzoagulu, (2011) in Mohammed, (2021) is of the view that a descriptive research or design involves the procedure in which data are normally collected, organized, described and analyzed as they are (in natural setting) without interfering with them. Similarly, research design can be considered as the structure of research; it is the “Glue” that holds all of the elements in a research project together (Inaam, 2016). There are two types of approaches to descriptive research: Quantitative and Qualitative. Quantitative research is a descriptive research method that attempts to collect quantifiable information to be used for statistical analysis of the population sample. It is a popular market research tool that allows to collect and describe the nature of the demographic segment while qualitative research involves measurements or numbers but instead just monitoring characteristics. In this case the researcher observes the respondents from a distance. Since the respondents are in a comfortable environment (Manjunatha, 2019). This paper adopted the descriptive research design and used a quantitative approach in both in the analyses of this work. The descriptive quantitative design is suitable for this study because it allows description of the features of language as used in a given context as against how they are supposed to be used.

Results and Analyses

What is the lexical density of content words in each pair of the four inaugural speeches of President Obasanjo and President Buhari?

Table 1: shows the lexical density of content words in the four inaugural speeches.

Presidential Speech identity by Code	Total Number of Words	Content Words	%	Usage
OIS 1	2852	1295	45.4%	Needed Lexical Density
OIS 2	4159	1917	46.1%	Needed Lexical Density
BIS 1	1915	906	47.3%	Needed Lexical Density
BIS 2	3128	1523	48.7%	Needed Lexical Density

Source: The Researcher, 2025

Table 1 above shows that there were a total number of 2852 words, 4159 words, 1915 words and 3128 words for OIS 1, OIS 2, BIS 1 and BIS 2 respectively. From the analysis in the table, it can be observed that out of the total number of words in OIS 1, 1295 were content words representing 45.4%; in OIS 2,

there were 1917 content words representing 46.1%; in BIS 1 there were 906 content words representing 47% and in BIS 2 there were 1523 content words representing 47%. In view of this each of the inaugural speeches attained the expected density required.

What is the lexical density of function words in each pair of the four inaugural speeches of President Obasanjo and President Buhari?

Table 2: shows the lexical density of function words in the four inaugural speeches.

Presidential Speech identity by Code	Total Number of Words	Number	%	Usage
OIS 1	2852	1557	54.6%	High Functional Density
OIS 2	4159	2242	53.9%	High Functional Density
BIS 1	1915	1009	52.7%	High Functional Density
BIS 2	3128	1605	51.3%	High Functional Density

Source: The Researcher, 2025

Table 2 above shows that from the totals number of 2852 words, 4159 words, 1915 words and 3128 words for OIS 1, OIS 2, BIS 1 and BIS 2 respectively, function words greater part of the speeches whereby in OIS 1, 1557 words were function words representing 54.6%; in OIS 2, there were 2242 function words representing 53.9%; in BIS 1 there were 1009 function words representing 52.7% and in BIS 2 there were 1605 function words representing 51.3%. Going by each of these inaugural speeches the expected functional density was attained.

DISCUSSIONS

A text is considered to have a lower lexical density if it contains more grammatical than lexical elements. On the other hand, a text is considered to have a high lexical density if it contains more lexical than linguistic things. The analyses presented in Table 1 and Table 2 have justified the above claims. This was because each of the inaugural speeches contains lower content word density and higher grammatical (functional words) density. The ratio between the content words and function words in each of the four inaugural speeches summarily stands at average of 45:55.

Secondly, it can be observed that there was an increase in the number of words in each of the second inaugural speeches. This cannot be unconnected with the need for more explanation to justify and defend the possible blunders committed in their respective first tenures. This finding suggests that common people or listeners/readers themselves with lower levels of proficiency use the words that are used the most, like nouns and verbs, more often. There is a propensity for perusers who are less able to use the jargon. Reader proficiency is affected by lexical density, and overall reader's or listener's understanding of the message is affected by lexical variation. To produce balanced speeches there is the need for the engagement of English for Special Purposes (ESP) practitioners.

CONCLUSION

This paper made a comparative analysis of lexical features, specifically the content and function words used in inaugural speeches of former Presidents Olusegun Obasanjo and Muhammadu Buhari. The paper was anchored on David Richardo's comparative theory. Four inaugural speeches of the two Presidents

were brought together. The lexical density of content words and function words were compared. Categories of the words were presented in both ratio and percentage form in each of the speeches. Analyses were made in a quantitative approach. Results and analyses were presented alongside discussions of findings which wrapped up the paper.

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