

**PERSONAL PRONOUNS IN POLITICAL DISCOURSES IN NIGERIA:
A CRITIQUE OF GOVERNOR UMO ENO'S SPEECH AT THE
LAUNCH OF A.R.I.S.E AGENDA**

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Abstract

The study investigates Governor Umo Eno's pronominal preferences in his speech at the launch of his economic blueprint, christened ARISE Agenda. Since language, which remains the vehicle through which political speeches are carried out, the study examines the patterns and speech mannerism as employed by the Governor in his presentation. Critical discourse analysis forms the theoretical framework in the study. While quantitative analysis indicates the frequency of the pronouns, qualitative critical discourse analysis aided the interpretation of the pronouns in order to draw attention to the meanings behind their preferences. The researchers posit that Governor Umo Eno had skilfully employed pronouns in his speech at the occasion to communicate his commitment to leadership as spelt out in the blueprint. It is observed in the study that the Governor has not only cultivated inclusivity and optimism in the minds of the people, but has also clearly spelt out the roadmap and guiding principles of the administration, thereby attracting the masses to his side. It is suggested that political speech makers should consciously employ relevant language skills and grammatical items in communicating intended information so as to achieve desired goals

Keywords: Personal Pronouns, Language, A.R.I.S.E. Agenda, Critical discourse analysis, Political speeches, Leadership.

1.0 Introduction

Language relies on verbal or nonverbal codes to transfer information and convey meaning systematically using symbols and sounds. It is a vital element in human relationship as it is a means of communication among the members of a society. Language, therefore, serves as a system or tool of communication by facilitating the exchange of messages or information between persons or groups. Fairclough (2003), buttressing the secular relevance of language, asserts that language is an irreducible part of social life, dialectally interconnected with other elements of social life. According to Sapir (1970 cited in Udofot, 1998), Language could be seen as a purely human and non-instinctive method of communicating ideas, emotions and desires by means of a system of voluntarily produced symbols. It is also, a tool of significant experience, aiding in the manipulation of minds and actions. Hence, political leaders explore this all-important role of language in human affairs and communicate their intentions to the people, demand needed response, build and sustain a socially stable relationship with the governed.

When language is adopted in communicating to an audience, the listeners are given an insight into the intention of the speaker. Governor Umo Eno of Akwa Ibom State, through this medium, brought to the fore his blueprint, which, according to him, "Situates itself in history as an instrument that sets to consolidate on the economic gain of previous administrations while expanding the frontiers of the state economy in the post COVID era that we presently are" (Eno, 2023).

The dire need for more assurances through communication by leaders became a great necessity with the impact of Corona Virus Disease of 2019 (Covid-19) which fast grew into a pandemic proportion, affecting almost all countries around the world. Its negative impacts were extensive including forcing governments to face difficult trade-offs; in addition to health, economic and social challenges it raised (Gelmini et al, 2021).

As nations and their subnationals were grappling with measures to contain the pandemic, Akwa Ibom State was not left off. Indeed, the previous administration and the administration of Governor Umo Eno rose to the occasion, by crafting and deploying relevant messages and systems to communicate with Akwa Ibom people.

In his avowed commitment to interfacing with the people on governmental policies and programmes, the Governor developed a blueprint- A.R.I.S.E. Agenda. This intends to keep the people abreast of vital plans and measures that government has designed to implement. It is this ARISE document which inaugural speech that the present study is considering for a critique.

1.1 The aspirations of the Economic Blueprint: A-R-I-S-E Agenda

The ARISE Agenda of Governor Umo Eno aptly serves as the flagship economic and development agenda that guides the development efforts of his administration (Eno, 2023).

The word 'A-R-I-S-E' is an acronym derived from a select combination of five-group aspirations and areas of interest, as depicted in Table 1 below:

Table 1: Full meaning of the abbreviated word- ARISE

A	▪ Agricultural Revolution, Tourism, Sports/Social Development and Environmental Management
R	▪ Rural Development, Women and Youth Empowerment
I	▪ Infrastructural Maintenance/Advancement and ICT Development
S	▪ Security Management, Sound Educational and Health Sector Management
E	▪ Economic, Industrial and Social Advancement

The variables and areas of interest encapsulated in the blueprint are further adumbrates as policy directions for implementation accordingly.

2.0 The Pronoun

A pronoun is used in place of a noun, most often, to avoid unnecessary and awkward repetitions. As a grammatical item, it is used as a substitute for a noun or noun group. "Such nouns occur (or are understood) as their antecedents in the sentences or passages where they are used" (Egbe, 2000, p. 88). Pronouns belong to the closed system items. According to Nnamdi-Eruchalu (2017), they are sub categorised into personal, demonstratives, possessive, reflexive, interrogative, indefinite, relative, but of all these, personal pronouns are hugely exploited in political discourse. Why are they so called? "They are personal pronouns because they are used by the speaker (or writer) for referring to one or other of the three kinds of entities (persons and things all technically known as persons) normally involved in actual communicative uses of language" (Arema, 2004, p.15).

As noted by Nnamdi-Eruchalu (2017), the English language maintains three grammatical persons:

- (I.) First person: The speaker or writer or the speaker or writer and others. The pronouns are *I* and *we* (subjective case), *me* and *us* (objective case) and *my* and *our* (possessive case).

- (ii.) Second person: The person the speaker or writer is addressing. The pronouns are *you* (subjective and objective case) and *your* (possessive case).
- (iii.) Third person: The person or thing the speaker or writer talked about. The pronouns include *he, she, it and they* (subjective case); *him, her, it and them* (objective case), and *her, his, its, and their* (possessive case).

The author further observes that *I, we, you and they* (as well as their objective and possessive cases) are used extensively in political discourse because they present multiple identities. Political office holders deploy them in varying degrees, depending on which of their senses they want to construct.

3.0 Theoretical Framework

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) adopted for this research is an approach to language study firmly established as a field within the humanities and social sciences. Its concerns, as observed in Breeze (2011), range from the highly politicised: "To explain existing conventions as the outcome of power relations and power struggle" (Fairclough, 1989, p. 2), to the almost anodyne "To answer questions about the relationships between language and society" (Rogers, 2005, p. 365), depending on the stance of the individual researcher. Hence, as a specific approach in language study, the CDA focuses on the inter-relatedness of language, power and ideology, that is, the relationship between language (text, discourse) and power (political struggle, inequality, dominance). It "Focuses on the strategies of manipulation, legitimisation, the manufacture of consent and other discursive ways to influence the minds (and indirectly the actions) of people in the interest of the powerful" (van Dijk, 1995, p. 18).

The Critical discourse analysis is, therefore, relevant because the texts and talks people produce in various speech events are constructed to serve their interests, and particularly, those of the dominant members of society as evident in political discourses.

3.1 Empirical Studies

A study of first person personal pronouns in political speeches with a focus on *I* vs. *We* was conducted by Stănculete (2019) where the author presented a case study that focused, comparatively, on the extent to which Romania's Prime Minister Adrian Năstase and UK's Prime Minister Tony Blair reveal their intentions and thoughts in their investment speeches, by the use of the personal pronouns *I* and *we*. The number of occurrences of each of the two first person pronouns and the way in which they are used were considered in the analysis that was both quantitative and qualitative. The overall aim of the comparative approach was to highlight how democracy is seen in the cases scrutinised, based on the activation by the speakers of the principle of cooperation in oral communication.

Nnamdi-Eruchalu (2017) in embarking on a critical discourse analysis of President Muhammadu Buhari's inaugural speeches with a focus on pronouns noted that politics and rhetoric are interwoven, and that the latter is highly esteemed as an instrument of persuasion or manipulation in the former. The author opined that personal pronouns provide an easy access to these activities in mind control because they readily provide multiple identities. The study argued that Muhammadu Buhari in both the maiden speech as a Military Head of State in 1984, and inaugural speech as a President with executive powers in 2015 tactfully deployed personal pronouns to present different identities and project different ideologies, and that the backgrounds from which he spoke impacted on his pronominal choices. That study, therefore, set to provide an insight into the influences of the ideological stances from which the President spoke on the choice of language. Employing critical discourse analysis as the theoretical framework, it is revealed that by strategically selecting personal pronouns, Buhari constructed the identities that reflected the military and civilian backgrounds from which he spoke. It also, created the in-groups and out-groups he desired in order to project the authoritarianism and persuasion of military and democratic regimes, respectively.

In a study of the concession speech by President Goodluck Jonathan carried out by Okoye and Mmadike (2016), the authors held that when language is used to communicate to an audience, the listeners are given an insight into the intention of the speaker. It adopted the speech act theory in the classification of the illocutionary acts which are contained in the speech. The simple percentage was used in computing the frequency of the various illocutionary acts. The researchers' findings showed a preponderance of the representative speech act and the absence of the directive.

Anyanwu (2020) undertook a stylistic analysis of President Buhari's addresses of Nigerians in the face of Covid-19 pandemic by investigating two speeches of President Muhammadu Buhari during the coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic. This was to ascertain how he had employed language, the linguistic elements used and the stylistic and pragmatic imports. Using the theoretical framework of stylistics, the researcher found out that Buhari tactfully used words to address Nigerians on Covid-19 and stressed the proposed measures to contain the spread of the virus. To achieve the pragmatic effect of his speeches, he used lexical devices such as transitional makers, repetition, alliteration, assonance, and pronouns to project the theme/subject matter of the language discourse. It was found out that the speaker used coordination to denote relationship of grammatical units, show contrast and as a re-statement of what he said earlier. The speaker repeatedly used coordination in his speeches and this is commendable since in language, identical items may be conjoined in an indefinite number of times. The analysis revealed that the president was committed in combating the coronavirus pandemic that was ravaging his nation.

Al-Khayyat (2020) embarked on a discourse analysis of the use of pronouns in Covid-19 selected presidential speeches as a model to training EFL postgraduate students. The study also had within its scope the influence of the pandemic on political speeches. The author pointed out that although investigating the role of pronouns in formulating specific socio-political ideologies is not new, the influence of the Covid-19 on the leaders, politicians and presidents contributes in creating controversial speeches which are similar in the timing of their issuance, their goals, and their objectivity in introducing the unprecedented crisis of Covid-19. Discourse analysis was adopted for the study to analyse two political speeches which were chosen arbitrarily. The data were the American president, Trump's speech, and the French president, Macron's speech. According to the author, many linguistic strategies were employed in the two speeches, but the concentration of the study was on the pronouns, especially the personal pronouns: *I*, *We*, and *You*. The study was not a comparative study as much as it was a way to reveal to what extent the two presidents used the personal pronouns to display the ability or inability to take responsibility for fighting Covid-19 along with spreading a specific ideology adopted by each president.

This current study's preoccupation with critical discourse analysis of Governor Umo Eno's speech at the inauguration of the ARISE Agenda bridges the gap of non-research in the area with the hope that political speech makers would always consciously employ relevant language skills and grammatical items to achieve desired goals, which mainly is to get the people on their side in order to make governance much easy, especially for politicians.

4.0 Methodology

The datum for this study is the inaugural speech made by Governor Umo Eno on July 24, 2023. The analyses were done quantitatively to show the frequency of the pronouns and qualitatively using critical discourse analysis to interpret the pronouns so as to draw attention to the meanings behind their preferences.

5.0 Results, Data Analysis and Discussion

The number of occurrences of pronouns (subject case and selected possessive case) in the two speeches used for this study is as follows:

Table 1: Frequency of pronouns in the ARISE Agenda speech of Governor Umo Eno

ARISE Agenda Inaugural Speech on:	I	My	You	He	She	We	My	Our	Total
July 24, 2023	5	5	9	-	-	34	5	18	72

Table 1 shows that the pronoun *I* featured five (5) times in the speech. You was used nine (9) times. He and she do not feature in the speech. The Governor made use of the pronoun *we* thirty-four (34) times in his ARISE Agenda inaugural speech. *My* is found five (5) times in the speech, while *our* featured eighteen (18) times. The total number of pronouns considered in the 24th July speech of Governor Umo Eno stands at seventy-two (72).

5.1 The Use of First Person Singulars *I* and *My*

Extracts from the speech of Governor Umo Eno on the inauguration of the ARISE Agenda with the first person pronoun *I* (subjective case) and *my* (possessive case) are:

3. **I** had made a firm promise and commitment to operate a government where all strands of thought from Akwa ibomites across party lines, and other policy experts drawn from all corners of our dear nation and in the Diaspora would be sought and canvassed.

6. **I** am deeply heartened and grateful for you kind prayers and all the great and inspiring things you have said about us, since we came on board.

24. In conclusion, **I** am hopeful that through the break-out groups that would follow after this opening ceremonies, you will avail us of more inputs so at the end of this event, we will present a more detailed document of governance that will lift our State to further layers of growth and development,...

26. Akwa Ibom is on the ascendance, we owe our people nothing more than good governance and that's what **I** promised you my dear people, in the course of **my** electioneering campaign and that's what we are determined to do,...

27. ... and **I** expect the incoming Honourable Commissioners to interpret and run with the vision that the ARISE Agenda represents.

Discussion 1

The use of the first person subject pronoun *I* and its possessive case *my* serves as a declaration that holds the Governor fully responsible for the welfare of his people. The pronoun *I* is usually not used as a substitute for the speaker's name; it is the way for him to refer to himself. Bramley (2001) notes that *I*, for instance, presents multiple selves. It makes reference to the person speaking and also points to his/her public (professional or institutional) and private discourse identities in politics. It is also used to indicate commitment and establish authority. *I* and its variant enable politicians to assert themselves as people with political clout to make decisions and assertions on behalf of the people. "Politicians jump between the various identities; whether they choose to be private or public depends on the context and the effect the politician is looking for" (Nakagwee, 2001 p. 7). And as further observed by Fetzer (2002),

presenting private aspect of themselves paints a picture of sincerity and helps to build the credibility of the public identity. Governor Umo Eno, therefore, employs *I* and *my* in his speeches to buttress his position as a leader committed to the welfare of the led.

5.2 The use of the First Person Plurals *We* and *Our*

Extracts from the Governor's speech featuring *we* (subjective case) and *our* (possessive case) are:

1. ...and all the policy experts who have agreed to lend their expertise to help distil and deepen the layers of our Economic Blueprint called ARISE Agenda, which **we** are gathered here, to formally launch.
2. **We** have invited you all, for this policy talk-shop appropriately tagged "Akwa Ibom Dialogue", so **we** can come and reason together across party and ideological lines and move the needle of development of **our** dear State further.
4. The ARISE Agenda is a detailed and well-articulated governance document, which **we** have painstakingly assembled. **We** could have gone ahead with its implementation without exposing it for further analysis, but **we** felt **our** dear people should have a buy-in and take ownership in its articulation and eventual implementation.
6. I am deeply heartened and grateful for you kind prayers and all the great and inspiring things you have said about us, since **we** came on board. Akwa Ibom State belongs to us all; **we** have no other State to go to, except this great State. **We** must de-emphasize politics of destruction, **we** must eschew hatred, **we** must deepen the cords of **our** unity and **we** must invest in the sustainable growth and development of this great State.
7. The ARISE Agenda is an acronym which stands for five bold aspirations: Agricultural Revolution, Rural Development, Infrastructural Maintenance and Advancement, Security Management, Educational and Health Sector. This is further broken down into 17 Focal Sectors, detailing what **we** expect to achieve in each of the sectors, in the short to medium and long terms.
8. ...**We** will continue to provide economically viable roads as a means to stimulate the economy of our rural dwellers. **We** will place deep accent on cottage hospitals, provide more ambulance services and also continue to maintain the standards of the secondary health care facilities, such as general hospitals which my worthy predecessor invested heavily in.
9. **We** will ignite agricultural revolution in this State, with integrated farms, investment in oil palm plantations; **we** will construct model primary and secondary schools in each of the three senatorial districts, protect our environment through renewable

energy. **We** will equip **our** people with the necessary skills to be competitive and plans are in top gear to set up the Ibom Leadership Entrepreneurial Development Centre (Ibom LED). **We** will create a Ministry that will focus on **our** internal security and **we** will invest deeply in tourism industry, which today, thanks to Ibom Air, has made **our** State, a destination of choice for Nigerians and other foreigners.

10 In the past two months, **we** have engaged and played host to several potential investors across sectors, who are desirous of investing in **our** State.

11. Please permit me at this point, to go deeper into with what **we** expect to see in each of the Seventeen Focal Sectors.

12. In Agriculture, **we** will develop full value chains for the major economic crops in the State, using farm settlement schemes and integrated farm systems.

13. In Healthcare, **we** will revitalise our Primary Healthcare centers, provide new primary healthcare centres, where non exist, ensure the existence of effective health insurance scheme; and establish a Medical City along the Ibom Specialist Hospital-Four Point by Sheraton corridor.

14. In Education, **we** shall build model schools; remodel dilapidated school structures, prioritise training and the retraining of teachers. Promote improved learning standards, and privatise vocational and technical education.

15. **We** will improve the access of our people to critical infrastructure such as clean and potable water, electricity and good road network.

16. **We** will deploy a host of women empowerment initiatives; and will encourage and assist women in business start-ups and entrepreneurial ventures.

17. **We** will provide massive skills acquisition initiatives to empower youths; revive and promote inter-school sporting activities where new talents in sports will be discovered.

18. In Information Technology (ICT), **we** will encourage automated processes, and entrench e-governance by gradually migrating from a manual mode of operations to a digital mode in the public service and ensure the effective operations of AKWAGIS for ease of doing business in the state

19. **We** will provide improved environmental management practices; develop the blue economy, and encourage recycling of waste material to create wealth from waste. **We** will provide

affordable housing units across the State

20. **We** will implement an integrated transport system in the State, as well as the establishment of industrial layouts and clusters in the State; encourage the production of Made-In-Akwa Ibom brand of products.

21. **We** will provide critical infrastructure and basic services in the rural areas.

22. **We** will rebuild dilapidated tourist sites and put our state in the forefront of tourism in the nation.

23. **We** will work to ensure the improvement of electricity and promote excellence in Public Service delivery among others.

24. In conclusion, I am hopeful that through the break -out groups that would follow after this opening ceremonies, you will avail us of more inputs so at the end of this event, **we** will present a more detailed document of governance that will lift **our** State to further layers of growth and development, especially through Micro, Small, and Medium-Sized Enterprises (MSMEs) which according International Finance Corporation contribute more than half of every nation's Gross Domestic Product (GDP.)

25. ...As a deeply transparent government, **we** hope to publish the conclusions in the final Roadmap to be released, based on your expected contributions.

26. Akwa Ibom is on the ascendance, **we** owe **our** people nothing more than good governance and that's what I promised you my dear people, in the course of my electioneering campaign and that's what **we** are determined to do, and I expect the incoming Honourable Commissioners to interpret and run with the vision that the ARISE Agenda represents.

27. Thank you for helping put the building blocks of our economic Blueprint that **we** are hopeful, will lead to **our** shared prosperity, growth and development. God bless.

Discussion 2

The use of the first person subject plural *we* and its possessive case *our* convey a sense of collective identity or group membership, making the speaker the mouthpiece of the audience. In other words, it enables speakers to identify with "*us*" (the in-group), while distancing themselves from "*them*" (the out-group) (Nnamdi-Eruchalu, 2017). As Hakansson (2012) puts it, the discourse functions of *we* in political speeches can be divided into two main categories which are inclusive and exclusive. The *inclusive we* refers to the speaker and

the second person pronoun *you* while the *exclusive we* refers to the speaker and the third person pronoun and puts the second person *you* or the direct audience into another side.

Again, according to Van-Dijk (1997, pp. 33-34), "the use of political plural *we* (or its possessive *our*) has many implications for the political position, alliances, solidarity, and other sociopolitical position of the speaker, depending on the relevant in-group being constructed in the present context". On the whole, *we* and its variant are used to promote togetherness of purpose and evoke the spirit of commonness in decision making and task execution. Governor Umo Eno, therefore, employs these pronouns to close ranks, bridging the gap between leadership and fellowship while giving everyone a sense of involvement.

6.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

This study investigated Governor Umo Eno's pronominal choices in his speech during the ARISE Agenda formal launch. The results showed that the Governor employed various pronouns in his speeches. Mostly featuring in the speeches are first person pronouns, especially, the first person plural pronouns, which are used very frequently, thus: *I* (subjective case) and *my* (possessive case); and *we* (subjective case) and *our* (possessive case), respectively. The pronouns *I* and *my* are used to show a great sense of commitment and responsibility, possession/ownership of the government which denotes power relationship. *You* creates a desirable sense of connection between the speaker and the listener. It also suggests the recognition of the presence of others, sometimes, including the speaker, who must all be catered for in terms of welfare packages.

The highest occurring pronouns, *we* and *our*, are used to connect with the audience, and convey a sense of collective identity or group membership, making the speaker the mouthpiece of the audience, and so, promoting togetherness and commonness in decision making and task execution. Hence, deploying relevant language skills in speech making aids the transmission of desired information as seen in Governor Umo Eno's ability to direct the state on various measures and yardsticks that would drive his administration in the overall interest of the people.

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