

A Critical Discourse Analysis of National Identity Construction in Tinubu's 2025 Democracy Day Speech

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Article History	Abstract
Original Research Article	<i>Using a qualitative research design in the domain of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), this study examines how President Bola Ahmed Tinubu creates national identity through language and rhetoric in the 2025 Democracy Day Speech. Drawing on Fairclough's three-dimensional model, this study draws on the text, interpretive processes, and socio-political context to identify linguistic and rhetorical devices, examine entrenched ideological assumptions, and assess the role of citizens in the construction of nation. The analysis indicates that Tinubu builds an integrative, long-term, and inclusive national identity through the intersection of language, ideology, and power in the use of inclusive pronouns, positive lexical choices, historical reference, modal verbs, metaphors, and contrastive structures, which positions the president as a moral, visionary, and powerful leader and citizens as active participants in governance, solidifying national unity and pride in the face of struggles that connect to contemporary governance and economic reform in the multiethnic, multi-religious, and socio-politically complex context of Nigeria. This study adds to the literature of comparative analyses of Tinubu's speeches, media coverage, and the broader discursive construction of Nigerian national identity and the construction of political discourse and identity.</i> Keywords: Political discourse, ideology, power relations, Nigeria, nation-building
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Copyright © 2025 The Author(s): This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC) which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium for non-commercial use provided the original author and source are credited. Citation: Martins Segun JAYEOBA, Ph.D, Lucas Rotimi ADARAMODU, Adeola Oyeyemi OPEOLUWA. (2025). A Critical Discourse Analysis of National Identity Construction in Tinubu's 2025 Democracy Day Speech. UKR Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences (UKRJAHS), Volume 1(9), 183-188.	

Background to the Study

National identity is not a natural, static, or pre-determined phenomenon, but rather a social construct that is reconstituted through language, symbols, and narratives over time (Wodak, 2015), and more specifically, political leaders play a significant role in constructing national identity through public speeches because they frame how citizens are supposed to imagine their nation and their common fate (Chilton, 2017), and the imperative of building national identity is even more pronounced in a multi-ethnic society such as Nigeria where cultural, linguistic, and religious diversity shape social relations (Taiwo, 2022). Hence, Democracy Day speeches are not only a medium of communication but ideological instruments for uniting citizens, legitimising leadership, and strengthening community (Opeibi, 2020). The annual Democracy Day speeches are, therefore, discursive events

that reinforce the democratic past and vision of national development, and the presidents of the country use them to articulate national priorities and values (Adegoju & Akinrinlola, 2021), with their rhetorical choices, tonal patterns, and historical references reflecting deeper assumptions about what it means to be Nigerian and the identities that the leaders seek to cultivate in their citizens (Ayeomoni & Akinkulore, 2019), thereby exercising strategic influence over the way national unity and patriotism are imagined and internalised.

Speeches have been analysed to illustrate how presidents employ rhetoric to manufacture national identity to serve national purpose (Gee & Handford, 2004), generate solidarity among people with disparate values and beliefs (Makau et al., 2020; O'Neil & Nkomo-Boyea, 1991), and justify policy direction. Since discourse is a social practice

that is significant for influencing and being influenced by socio-political practices (Fairclough, 2013), CDA can be a useful analytical tool to interpret discourses because discourse constitutes social reality, articulates ideological positions, and maintains power relations. Hence, this study explores the linguistic and ideological strategies employed by President Bola Ahmed Tinubu in his 2025 Democracy Day Speech to construct national identity, thus contributing to the body of knowledge on how language shapes contemporary democratic identity formation and adding to the corpus of knowledge on political discourse in Nigeria within larger socio-political contexts and using CDA principles.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative approach and adopts a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) framework for analysing how President Bola Ahmed Tinubu discursively constructs national identity in his 2025 Democracy Day Speech. It achieves this by identifying the rhetorical and linguistic devices that structure national identity, how the speech situates citizens in relation to the nation, and the ideological assumptions underlying these linguistic choices. The qualitative approach was suitable for this study because it enables the interpretation of the text, the processes of interpretation, and the socio-political context of the discourse to go beyond the surface of the text. The main data for this study are taken from the 2025 Democracy Day Speech by President Bola Ahmed Tinubu, which was selected because of its relevance in the socio-political context of Nigeria and its relevance to narratives of national unity, reform, and collective responsibility. The study employs a CDA framework based on Fairclough's three-dimensional model of text, the processes of interpretation, and the sociopolitical context of the discourse to provide a detailed and contextually sensitive analysis of how language is used in contemporary Nigerian political communication to construct national identity, exercise power, and persuade.

Review of Earlier Studies

Political discourse is language used to govern, legitimise, and persuade in political settings (Chilton, 2017), and presidential speeches are powerful examples of political discourse because they are widely disseminated, authoritative, and symbolic (Opeibi, 2020). Democracy Day speeches are ceremonial in the sense that they highlight political achievements, national cohesion, and national memory (Adegoju and Akinrinlola, 2021). Through lexical choices, metaphorical constructions, and intertextual allusions to history, presidents define what it is to be Nigerian and what the country's citizens should aspire to.

A methodological lens for analysing how discourse both reflects and perpetuates societal power dynamics is provided by critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 2013). According to CDA, language is a social practice in which societal structures both influence and are influenced by speech. Researchers can identify implicit presumptions and ideological meanings in political speeches by using CDA. As a result, it is appropriate for examining how Tinubu's Democracy Day speech shapes national identity in the contemporary sociopolitical environment of Nigeria. Adegoju and Akinrinlola's (2021) study of Nigerian presidential Democracy Day speeches reveals that leaders use historical references and inclusive pronouns to promote national unity and legitimize government. Their work serves as an example of how political speeches foster collective identity by depicting the public as collaborators in governance.

Opeibi (2020) describes how metaphors of journey, struggle, and renewal encourage optimism and fortitude in identity construction in Nigerian presidential speeches, while also serving as ideological devices to present national issues as shared obligations (Taiwo, 2022). However, the study also noted that these identity constructions are often aspirational rather than reflective of actual social realities. Political discourse in Europe also exhibits similar approaches to shaping identity narratives, including shared memory, collective values, and national objectives (Wodak, 2015), as well as emotional and spatial metaphors (Chilton, 2017) used by political figures to rouse public opinion.

In a study of inaugural speeches from African presidents, (Owolabi & Babatunde 2023) found that leaders intentionally use shared values, national sacrifice, and collective memory to legitimise their power. This suggests that presidential speeches can be ideological tools that shape the public perception of leadership. Similarly, Okeke (2022) conducted a discourse analysis of political campaign speeches in Nigeria and concluded that terms such as "we" and "our" are often used to create a symbolic unity between the people and the political elite, even when the actual practice of governance is not always reflective of this rhetorical identity, as pointed out in their study.

Moreover, in another study, Nartey (2021) analysed Ghanaian presidential speeches and concluded that nation-building and renewal metaphors are necessary to build resilience and optimism in national identity narratives, which is consistent with more general African political communication patterns in which leaders frame the country as undergoing a process of collective change. In an international analysis of identity construction in Iranian presidential speeches, Abadi & Ahmad (2020) found that moral positioning, patriotism, religious values, and

collective struggle are common ways in which national identity is constructed. This highlights the fact that national context-specific socio-political ideologies often find expression in identity discourses. These studies suggest that political speeches are an important site for articulating solidarity, a common national future, and a shared identity. However, there is a lack of scholarly interest in President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's Democracy Day speeches, particularly the 2025 speech delivered during significant national economic reforms and governance discussions, which underscores the need for this study. Accordingly, the current study uses Critical Discourse Analysis as the analytical framework to analyse how national identity is discursively constructed in the 2025 Democracy Day Speech and how citizens are discursively positioned in the vision of Nigeria advanced in the speech.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored in the frameworks of Fairclough (1995) and van Dijk (2008), which provide analytical tools for examining how language constructs and represents social identities, power relations, and ideological positions. CDA asserts that discourse does not merely represent social reality; it actively maintains systems of dominance and power (Fairclough, 1995). In political communication, CDA enables researchers to examine how leaders situate citizens in ideological frameworks, construct national identity, and legitimise authority (van Dijk, 2008). National identity is considered a social construct that is constantly negotiated through narratives, symbols, and discourse (Anderson, 2006; Smith, 2010). Political speeches, especially on symbolic days such as Democracy Day, are instrumental in articulating collective hopes, values, and membership (Banda, 2019). In a multiethnic society like Nigeria, where historical, cultural, and political heterogeneity is pronounced, CDA can reveal the subtle discursive strategies used by leaders to foster national unity, construct ideological norms, and influence citizens' feelings of national attachment (Okeke, 2022). Using CDA to analyse the 2025 Democracy Day Speech of President Bola Ahmed Tinubu enables the analysis of the rhetorical strategies, narrative frames, and linguistic features that construct and sustain national identity.

Data Presentation and Analysis

President Tinubu employs a variety of linguistic resources to construct a cohesive sense of Nigerian national identity:

Pronouns and Collective Representation

Inclusive pronouns such as "we" and "our" are common in Tinubu's speeches, creating a sense of national belonging and responsibility:

"I felt a sense of collective accomplishment when I realised how far we had come as a nation" (Para. 3).

"Our nation is not perfect, but it is strong. Our democracy is not invincible, but it is alive" (Para. 41).

Using the pronoun "we" and "our" multiple times situates the audience as engaged members of the national project and as stakeholders in democratic progress, reinforcing the idea that the government and people are co-creators of the nation and promoting the legitimacy of the president by making his authority seem more participatory and less distant than it might otherwise be.

Lexical Choices and Positive Valuation

Tinubu employs a number of positively connoted adjectives and nouns to valorise Nigeria and its people, creating an aspirational national identity:

"resilient and beloved people" (Para. 3)

"grand edifice built from the sweat and toil of our democratic yearning" (Para. 2)

"the Nigerian Dream" (Para. 48)

These lexical choices highlight national pride, perseverance, and the moral worthiness of Nigerians; positive adjectives and metaphors paint a picture of Nigeria as resilient, morally upright, and able to progress, an ideological choice that frames the identity of citizens in terms of success and perseverance. Establishing the president as the visionary and benevolent guide also subtly reinforces power relations by aligning his policies and rhetoric with national prosperity.

Historical Referencing and Exemplification

The speech emphasises history to establish continuity and legitimacy in national identity:

"Let me pay tribute to former President Muhammadu Buhari for reaching back into history..." (Para. 7)

Listing heroes: "Chief Anthony Enahoro, Commodore Dan Suleiman, Chief Abraham Adesanya, Ayo Adebajo..." (Para. 11)

Through enumeration and exemplification, the speech situates modern Nigeria within a narrative of collective sacrifice toward democracy. This presents national identity as the product of a shared historical struggle. It also legitimises the current government as continuing that "just" democratic journey. Ideologically, it reinforces democracy as both a moral and national value, making loyalty to democratic principles appear as an act of

patriotism. In terms of power relations, Tinubu positions himself as a custodian of history and democracy, subtly claiming moral authority and political legitimacy.

Modal Verbs and Commitment Statements

Here, modal verbs signal ideological positioning and commitment to democratic values, using the modal verbs to assert agency and project an ideological vision of the president as a custodian of national destiny:

"I hereby affirm...my resolve to do all that I can to safeguard and build our democracy" (Para. 5)

"We must stay the course, reject cynicism, and believe Nigeria can and will rise again" (Para. 48)

Modal verbs as seen in the examples above, create discursive authority in the use of "must," "will," and "can," which conveys obligation, necessity, and certainty (ideologically). It presents the president as the one with the ability to guide collective action while positioning citizens as participants in achieving national goals.

Metaphor and Figurative Language

Metaphors are employed to dramatise national progress and challenges:

"democracy has risen from the ashes and destitution of military rule" (Para. 3) – evokes rebirth and resilience.

"the failed effort to create a one-party state placed progressive political forces on a trajectory..." (Para. 22) – conveys struggle and progress as a purposeful journey.

Metaphors in these examples convey struggle and progress as a purposeful journey. This metaphoric framing of national rebirth, resilience, and progress ideologically defines Nigeria as a nation overcoming adversity, envisioning a continuity and destiny for the nation, and inscribing power relations (the president as the agent of historical providence whose leadership is in alignment with the moral arc of the nation) without force.

Contrastive Structures

Tinubu often uses contrastive structures to amplify national identity as resilient and morally superior:

"Every time we debate instead of battle, discuss instead of fight, and argue instead of destroy, we preserve the institutions of democracy" (Para. 8)

"Our nation is not perfect, but it is strong. Our democracy is not invincible, but it is alive" (Para. 41)

These contrasts reiterate democratic values as constitutive of Nigerian identity. Tinubu's contrastive structures ideologically frame democracy and national identity as morally superior to violence, authoritarianism, and chaos, thereby constructing a normative discourse in which

rational deliberation, civic tolerance, and institutional respect constitute the "right" way to act as a citizen or leader and therefore align with liberal democratic ideology.

Discursive Practice

The National Assembly is one of the most symbolic venues because it represents constitutional authority and democracy. Delivering this 2025 Democracy Day Speech there meant that Tinubu reached out to lawmakers, political elites, and citizens more broadly through broadcast media (high visibility), as well as political commentary in various outlets and public debate around the speech (broad circulation) while framing them all together not just as audience but also active co-constructors of national identity (active role), who remember past struggles (remembering historical struggles), celebrate democratic endurance, or accomplishments (celebrating democratic endurance or achievements), urge Nigerians to see themselves as participants in a larger project rather than mere subjects. This encourages people to think about being part of the nation-building process instead of simply governed subjects. It thereby symbolically narrows the gap between government and citizens while positioning national identity itself as a collective, participatory effort based on shared responsibility and sacrifice that supports a common vision for its democratic future.

Social Practice

Nigeria is a multi-ethnic and multi-religious country still grappling with issues of political distrust, economic restructuring, and security. In this context, Tinubu's discourse builds national identity through historical continuity (Para. 15), connecting current governance to past struggles against military repression (Para. 16), and placing the nation within a narrative of resilience and progress (Para. 18), which can be seen in his statement that "We must welcome and accept the diversity and number of political parties just as we welcome and embrace the diversity of our population" (Para. 25). In this way, the speech also emphasises democratic legitimacy, positioning the president and his government as embodiments of constitutional values and guarantors of the democratic order. In addition, Tinubu frames national identity through collective aspiration (Para. 20), by tying it to economic gains, social advancement and policies that touch the people directly. In this way, the speech reinforces a vision of Nigeria as democratic, resilient, inclusive, and forward-looking, while positioning Tinubu as both a symbolic and practical architect of the nation's continuous development.

Findings and Discussion

President Tinubu uses a range of linguistic and discursive strategies to build a narrative of Nigerian national identity, including the frequent use of inclusive pronouns such as “we” and “our” to imply a shared sense of belonging and responsibility, as in “I felt a sense of national pride and collective accomplishment when I realized how far we have come” (Para. 3) and “Our country is not flawless, but it is sturdy; our democracy is not unassailable, but it is vital” (Para. 41). This is in line with Chilton (2004) and Wodak (2015) who find that political leaders often use collective pronouns to create a narrative of shared belonging and co-participation in nation-building, which softens hierarchies, presents the leader as a participatory leader and reinforces legitimacy.

Tinubu also makes use of positive lexical choices and evaluative language, celebrating Nigeria and Nigerians as “resilient and beloved people” (Para. 3) and using metaphors like “grand edifice built from the sweat and toil of our democratic yearning” (Para. 2) to create an aspirational national identity that emphasises pride, endurance, and moral worthiness, which is consistent with the strategies identified by Fairclough (2010) in his analysis of political speeches linking national identity to shared virtues. In this way, power is subtly reproduced: the president is cast as a visionary leader in sync with national interests. In this, historical referencing and exemplification are key, as Tinubu invokes democratic heroes and past battles with military repression: “Chief Anthony Enahoro, Commodore Dan Suleiman, Chief Abraham Adesanya, Ayo Adebajo...” (Para. 11), to position current governance within a historical context, which van Dijk (2008) notes is a strategy that reinforces current authority and ties contemporary action to collective moral values. Ideologically, this reframes democracy as a moral and national value, while power relations are inscribed symbolically, depicting the president as the keeper of history and the guarantor of democratic legitimacy.

Modal verbs and commitment statements, such as “I hereby affirm...my resolve to do all that I can to safeguard and build our democracy” (Para. 5), signal both agency and ideological commitment, as these forms convey obligation, certainty, and a duty-driven leadership ethos that encourages citizens to adopt a vision of progress. Fairclough (2010) and KhosraviNik (2010) also reported similar findings, noting that modal verbs in political discourse are used to assert authority and shape audience behaviour. Metaphors and figurative language that dramatise national progress and challenges, such as “democracy has risen from the ashes and destitution of military rule” (Para. 3) and “the failed effort to create a

one-party state placed progressive political forces on a trajectory” (Para. 22), ideologically frame Nigeria as resilient and historically guided, embedding a vision of continuity and destiny, and symbolically positioning Tinubu as an agent aligned with the moral arc of the nation (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003).

Tinubu’s assertion that, “When we debate instead of battle, discuss instead of fight, argue instead of destroy, we sustain the institutions of democracy” (Para. 8) strategically contrasts destructive actions with constructive civic engagement. By juxtaposing destructive versus constructive behaviors, Tinubu normalises ethical political conduct, thereby reflecting liberal democratic ideology and situating himself as a moral and civic authority, consistent with findings by Wodak (2015) on the ideological function of contrasts in political discourse. Lastly, the speech indexes the social and discursive practices that position Nigeria as a multi-ethnic, multi-religious nation facing political distrust, economic reform, and security challenges. Tinubu connects national identity to historical continuity, democratic legitimacy, collective aspiration, and economic progress. He frames the citizenry as co-constructors of the nation while positioning himself as both symbolic and practical leader, a finding consistent with earlier studies of African political rhetoric (Adjepong, 2020; Oyetade, 2018). The analysis shows that Tinubu discursively constructs an inclusive, democratic, resilient, and aspirational national identity while also consolidating his political authority and moral legitimacy, and the linguistic strategies (pronouns, positive valuation, historical exemplification, modal verbs, metaphors, and contrastive structures) highlight the interplay of ideology and power in contemporary Nigerian political discourse.

Conclusion

As this study demonstrates, the 2025 Democracy Day Speech by President Bola Ahmed Tinubu constructs Nigerian national identity by employing various linguistic and discursive strategies. For example, the use of inclusive pronouns, positive lexical choices, historical referencing, modal verbs, metaphors, and contrastive structures that not only create a sense of unity, resilience, democratic legitimacy, and collective aspiration, but also position citizens as active participants in the process of nation-building while portraying the president as a moral, visionary, and authoritative figure imbued with ideological meanings of inclusivity, progress, and ethical governance. In the specific context of Nigeria, a multi-ethnic, multi-religious, and socio-politically complex nation, this speech situates contemporary governance and economic reforms within the historical struggles against military repression, creating continuity and national pride, while positioning President Tinubu as a moral, visionary, and authoritative

figure. It is suggested therefore, that future research could include comparative studies of multiple Democracy Day speeches by President Tinubu and analysis of media representation and public reception of such speeches. This would further elucidate the relationship between language, ideology, and power in contemporary Nigerian political communication.

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