

## “Nigeria Shall Exist”: Legitimation Strategies in President Bola Tinubu’s Inaugural Speech

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### Abstract

*Political systems aim to establish belief in their legitimacy and, as a core principle, devise diverse strategies to validate people’s acceptance. Extant works on inaugural speeches have identified discourse strategies, ideologies, and grammatical resources, leaving a gap in legitimation strategies. This study adopts van Leeuwen’s (2007: 2008) framework of legitimation to analyse President Bola Tinubu’s 2023 Inaugural Speech, focusing on how he constructs legitimacy and democratic validation. Through a qualitative content analysis, the study identifies authorisation, moralisation, and rationalisation as legitimation strategies deployed to reinforce acceptability. Personal and collective pronouns, metaphors, and imagery are used to assert authority. Through the use of imperatives, declaratives, and references, Tinubu aligns his presidency with Nigeria’s shared democratic principles. This study contends that inaugural speeches serve as strategic tools for consolidating leadership authority and shaping public perception. This study concludes that linguistic choices in inaugural speeches can be deployed as critical instruments to reinforce leadership acceptance.*

**Keywords:** *legitimation strategies, inaugural speech, discourse strategies, Nigeria’s election, Bola Ahmed Tinubu*

### Introduction

Leaders have a significant impact on how meaning is constructed and understood within a group or organisation (Clifton, 2017). The way leaders organise and facilitate discussions, as well as how they present information and narrative, can shape the interpretation and perception of ideas, events, and issues among the citizenry. This reflects that there exists “a symbiotic relationship between language and democratic governance all over the world (Opeibi, 2008, p. 106). They play a crucial role in guiding the direction of conversations and influencing the shared understanding and interpretation of concepts and information within the group. As Fairclough (1992) asserts, discourse serves as a potent tool for both maintaining and contesting existing power structures, enabling leaders to assert dominance and perpetuate particular narratives. Leaders strategically employ language to convey specific messages, ideologies, and values to the public. Chilton and Schäffner (2011, 305) argue that “political realities are constructed in and through discourse,” suggesting that realities, such as beliefs, opinions, ideologies, and perceptions, are shaped, formed, and communicated through language. This perspective emphasises the role of language and discourse in shaping political understanding and constructions. Just as leaders within organisations shape the discourse to assert power and

promote particular narratives, presidents utilise their inaugural speeches to establish their authority, set the agenda for their term, and frame their vision for the nation. The relationship between leaders, discourse, and the construction of meaning is particularly evident in the context of inaugural speeches.

Presidents-elect use their inaugural speeches as newly elected leaders to address their nations for the first time in their official capacity (Manzano and Orquijo, 2020). These speeches are not mere formalities; they are strategic acts of communication that encapsulate the leader's vision, values, and intended policies. Through their linguistic choices, leaders signal the boundaries of acceptable discourse and frame the parameters within which ideas and information are to be interpreted (Phillips & Hardy, 2002). Critical discourse analysis emphasises that leaders' language not only reflects but also constructs reality (van Dijk, 1997). Their framing of issues, the selection of salient points, and the emphasis placed on certain aspects over others contribute to the shaping of meaning, thereby influencing the collective sense-making process of group members. Leaders' role in steering conversations and influencing the shared understanding of concepts is pivotal in organisational dynamics. The concept of "discourse as practice" (Gee, 1996) underscores how leaders' linguistic choices and strategies serve to enact power and legitimise certain perspectives. By setting the agenda and defining the terms of discussion, leaders subtly position themselves as authoritative figures, while potentially marginalising alternative viewpoints (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999). Through this process, leaders contribute to the construction of a dominant ideology that supports their aims and sustains their influence and power.

Legitimation, as a discourse strategy, has been examined in various Nigerian contexts, including media discourse (Igwebuiké & Chimuanya, 2021), terrorist discourse (Osisanwo, 2024a; Osisanwo, 2024b; Isiaka, 2024), and political activism (Igwebuiké & Akoh, 2022). However, little attention has been given to its application in Nigerian presidential inaugural speeches. Existing studies on presidential inaugural speeches in Nigeria have primarily focused on pragmatic acts (Ayeomoni & Akinkuolere, 2012; Osisanwo, 2017; Aremu, 2017; Adeagbo, 2023), generic structure potential (Awoyemi & Ajayi, 2023), and ideology and lexicogrammatical choices (Ezeifeke, 2013). This present study examines President Bola Tinubu's inaugural speech, not as a mere ceremonial address but as a strategic act of political communication. It investigates how Tinubu strategically employs legitimation strategies to shape national perception and reinforce his leadership. Guided by this perspective, the research seeks to answer the following questions: (1) How does Bola Tinubu linguistically deploy

legitimation strategies to construct legitimacy and authority in his inaugural speech? (2) What are the implications of these linguistic choices for national unity and public acceptance?

### **Bola Ahmed Tinubu's Political Trajectory**

Bola Tinubu ventured into politics in the early 1990s and was elected as a Senator for Lagos West during the short-lived Third Republic. Following the annulment of the June 12, 1993, presidential election, he became a key pro-democracy activist, opposing military rule. In 1999, he was elected Governor of Lagos State, where he served two terms (1999–2007). He played a key role in the formation of the All Progressives Congress (APC), which brought Muhammadu Buhari to power in 2015. In 2023, he was elected the President of Nigeria, delivering his inaugural speech on May 29, 2023, which is the focus of this study. In an election conducted on February 25, 2023, he was declared the winner by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) on March 1, 2023 (*Punch*, 2023). He delivered his inaugural speech (which is the focus of this study) on May 29, 2023, during his swearing-in ceremony as Nigeria's elected president.

### **Conceptualising Nigerian Inaugural Speech as a Genre**

The tradition of delivering an inaugural speech can be traced back to George Washington's address in 1789, which subsequently set a precedent for future American presidents. This practice has evolved into a ritualised genre characterised by distinct communicative functions and structures (Osisanwo & Alugbin, 2019). Given that Nigeria's democratic practices have their roots in the British political system, newly elected Nigerian presidents have also adopted this tradition. Inaugural speeches have gained recognition as a genre and serve as a measure of the president-elect's legitimacy (Liu, 2012). Nnamdi Azikiwe holds the distinction of being the first Nigerian president to deliver an inaugural speech, wherein he emphasised the restoration of African identity and the reclamation of freedom through mental emancipation, political autonomy, economic liberation, and cultural preservation (Azikiwe, 1961; Obotetukudo, 2010). His vision was underpinned by pan-Africanism and nationalism, reflecting the anti-colonial struggle that characterised the fight for independence. Subsequent Nigerian presidents have continued this practice. Notably, while the Nigerian constitution does not mandate the delivery of an inaugural speech, it has become an esteemed tradition, observed every four years by incoming presidents before assuming office.

Awoyemi and Ajayi (2023) conducted a study that focuses on analysing the typical structure present in Nigerian presidential inauguration speeches from 1999 to 2015. Utilising Halliday

and Hasan's Generic Structure Potential Theory, the researchers analysed a range of Nigerian presidential inauguration speeches, leading to the identification of ten distinct discourse elements. Their argument revolves around the assertion that inaugural speeches adhere to a consistent and well-defined sequence. The presence of this underlying structural coherence in the analysed inauguration speeches suggests a shared genre, implying the existence of established conventions and patterns within Nigerian presidential inauguration speeches during the specified timeframe. Aremu's research (2017) takes a broader perspective, exploring metaphorical mappings within the inaugural speeches of Nigerian executive presidents from 1979 to 2015. Drawing upon conceptual metaphor theory by Lakoff and Johnson, critical metaphor theory by Charteris-Black, and an adapted model of Mey's pragmeme, the findings reveal the strategic use of metaphorical mappings to convey pragmatics, linking concepts with other domains to express gratitude, make appeals, issue commands, give warnings, and offer promises. The study underscores the significance of cultural context and shared audience comprehension in interpreting inaugural speeches. It suggests that, while metaphors play a role in these speeches, familiarity with the cultural context is crucial for understanding the implications of the communication. Maritz and Van Rooy's (2021) study also provides insights into communication strategy in political communications, with a focus on how former South African President, Jacob Zuma, used metaphors to structure his self-defence in narrative construction.

The reviews above suggest that Nigerian presidential inaugural speeches form a distinctive genre with specific communicative functions, rhetorical strategies, and structural conventions. Despite the existing research on Nigerian presidential inaugural speeches, there is merit in examining how linguistic choices are employed in inaugural speeches to project and solidify political legitimacy. This study specifically examines how Bola Tinubu linguistically deploys legitimation strategies to construct authority in his inaugural speech, addressing the question of how his linguistic choices reinforce his leadership and acceptance. Analysing both the language and content of the inaugural speech provides insights into how political leaders establish authority and convey values in the face of challenging circumstances.

### **Literature review**

Political speeches have been extensively studied across various genres, including campaign speeches (Ayodabo & Ayinuola, 2025), acceptance speeches (Akinwotu, 2013), concession speeches (Osisanwo & Alugbin, 2019; Osisanwo & Chinaguh, 2020), and farewell addresses

(Adedun & Atolagbe, 2011). Other works have examined political debates, national addresses, and collections of political speeches (Odebunmi & Oni). Specific studies on Nigerian presidential inaugural speeches have explored pragmatic features and strategies (Osisanwo, 2017; Aremu, 2017; Adeagbo, 2023), generic structure potential (Awoyemi & Ajayi, 2023), intertextuality (Ellah, 2022), and rhetorical strategies (Akinseye, 2023).

Osisanwo (2017) examines how former President Muhammadu Buhari's inaugural speech was strategically crafted to achieve multiple communicative goals, such as expressing intent, acknowledging responsibilities, appreciating the electorate, setting national direction, and explicating governance priorities. The study establishes inaugural speeches as a distinct communicative event that bridges the gap between political leaders and society. Similarly, Adeagbo (2023) investigates Buhari's 2015 inaugural speech, reinforcing the notion that language is a crucial instrument for democratic engagement and governance. These studies emphasise the functional and performative aspects of inaugural addresses, illustrating how political leaders use language to shape national discourse. Awoyemi and Ajayi (2023) conduct a generic structure analysis of Nigerian inaugural speeches from 1999 to 2015. Their study identifies recurring structural patterns, demonstrating that these speeches adhere to a consistent and recognisable genre. The analysis underscores how Nigerian presidents deploy predictable rhetorical structures to introduce their governance vision, affirm legitimacy, and engage with the public. The findings position inaugural speeches as a ritualised form of political communication.

Akinseye (2023) analyses President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's inaugural speech, employing van Dijk's ideological stance and Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics to explore discursive strategies, ideological functions, and power dynamics. The study highlights themes of unity and polarisation, lexical techniques for rhetorical impact, and the use of modal verbs and personal pronouns to convey commitment, responsibility, and connection with the audience. Ellah (2022) examines Muhammadu Buhari's 2015 Inaugural Speech as a discourse that incorporates various elements, including political, religious, literary, and historical discourses, within the communication, arguing that presupposition, negation and reference are patterns of intertextuality used as a tool of ideological construct in the speech. Fowobaje *et al.* (2022) provide a comprehensive analysis of the ascension or inaugural speeches of military heads of state and civilian presidents from 1960 to 2019 using text-mining techniques. Their comparative analysis used frequency term analysis to reveal that civilian presidents expressed more positive emotions and were more favourable in terms of sentiment scores in their

speeches than military presidents, even though there were similarities in topic distribution among the ascension/inaugural speeches of different leaders.

While these studies offer valuable insights into the pragmatic, rhetorical, and structural features of Nigerian inaugural speeches, they do not sufficiently explore the role of legitimization strategies in reinforcing political authority and leadership acceptance. The application of the legitimization framework to examine presidential inaugural speeches is a worthy addition, particularly in examining how linguistic strategies construct legitimacy. This study addresses this gap by focusing on the linguistic legitimization strategies in President Bola Tinubu's 2023 inaugural speech.

### **Theoretical exploration of legitimization in linguistic studies**

Legitimation, as a concept, has been examined from diverse disciplines. The study of political legitimacy is not only an endeavour in the field of discourse analysis. A political analyst assesses it in terms of the acceptability of a leader; a philosopher evaluates it based on alignment with societal rules and mores; and a lawyer appraises it in the context of legal conformity and adherence to governing regulations. Despite the varying perspectives that have enriched the concept of legitimization, (critical) discourse analysis offers a robust framework to engage the concept, taking into account the various contexts within which legitimacy is enacted. Legitimation framework recognises the potential of legitimacy to be eroded, challenged, negotiated, enacted, and re-enacted because "acts of legitimization are always discursive" (van Dijk, 1997, 1998; van Leeuwen, 2007, 2008). van Dijk (1998) further asserts that legitimization as a social practice holds significant implications for understanding how power, ideology, and language intersect in shaping and maintaining social structures since legitimization involves producing power dynamics, social hierarchies, and dominant ideologies. The linguistic perception of legitimization has to do with the analysis of language use for justification of certain belief systems within a society, as linguistic legitimization is a means to reinforce, sustain, and maintain power.

The interaction between leaders' discourse and the broader socio-political context cannot be overlooked. Critical Discourse Analysis acknowledges that language is embedded in social structures and reflects the power dynamics at play (Wodak & Meyer, 2009). Thus, leaders' communication practices are not isolated acts but are intertwined with the prevailing societal norms, values, and ideologies. This interaction shapes how their discourse resonates within the group and how it reinforces or challenges established hierarchies and narratives. van Leeuwen's

(2007) framework on legitimation offers a comprehensive understanding of how discourse is used to establish and reinforce legitimacy in various contexts. His theory defines legitimation as the process of justifying a decision and providing reasons to support a specific course of action. In the discourse of legitimation, various strategies are employed to establish and reinforce the perceived legitimacy of certain actions, decisions, or policies. The framework consists of four distinct categories, each contributing to the process of (de)legitimation (van Leeuwen's, 2007; 2008, 105).

- i. Authorisation involves referencing established sources of authority to validate and legitimise these actions. Personal authority, expert authority, role model authority, impersonal authority, tradition authority, and conformity authority are categories of authorisation.
- ii. Moral evaluation emphasises aligning concepts or things with accepted moral standards and portraying them as just and virtuous. This involves categories such as evaluation, abstraction, and analogies.
- iii. Rationalisation comes into play by providing logical and reasoned explanations for the pursued course of action, demonstrating its practicality and effectiveness. It is sub-categorised into instrumental and theoretical. Instrumental rationalisation refers to justification based on practicality and efficiency, while theoretical rationalisation, on the other hand, involves justification through abstract principles or expert opinions
- iv. Mythopoesis employs the power of storytelling and narratives to craft compelling and persuasive accounts that evoke emotions and resonate with the audience's values, thereby enhancing the perceived legitimacy of the subject in question. Moral and cautionary tales are sub-categories of mythopoesis.

Table 1: Categories of Legitimation

<b>Category</b>	<b>Sub-categories</b>	<b>Description</b>
<b>Authorisation</b>	Personal Expert Role Model Impersonal Tradition Conformity	Referring to established sources of authority to validate and legitimise actions.

<b>Moral Evaluation</b>	Evaluation Abstraction Analogies	Aligning actions with accepted moral standards and portraying them as just and virtuous.
<b>Rationalisation</b>	Instrumental Theoretical	Providing logical and reasoned explanations for actions, demonstrating practicality and effectiveness
<b>Mythopoesis</b>	Moral Tales Cautionary Tales	Using storytelling and narratives to craft compelling and persuasive accounts that evoke emotions

(Adapted from van Leeuwen, 2007; 2008: 105)

### **The data: 2023 Presidential Inaugural Speech**

The study relies on the 2023 Presidential Inaugural Speech delivered by the 17th President of Nigeria, Bola Tinubu, on 29th May, 2023, equal to his victory at the election conducted on 25th February, 2023. Bola Tinubu was declared the winner of the 2023 presidential election by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), defeating 17 other candidates, among whom are Atiku Abubakar of the People’s Democratic Party and Peter Obi of the Labour Party. The 2023 presidential election was very significant in the country’s democratic journey. It was preceded by certain uncertainties. Okwelum (2023) claims that the election received an unusually high amount of unfavourable attention and criticism in comparison to any previous election in the country's history. The 2023 presidential inaugural speech is titled “The Nigerian Ideal.” The legitimisation strategies deployed in the speech were identified through content analysis.

### **Methodology**

The data for this study consists of President Bola Ahmed Tinubu’s 2023 Presidential Inaugural Speech, delivered on May 29, 2023, during his swearing-in ceremony. The speech was retrieved from the official Federal Government of Nigeria website (<https://statehouse.gov.ng/category/speeches>), which serves as a primary source for government communications. The selection of this speech is based on its significance as a political discourse event, marking the beginning of a new administration and setting the tone for governance and leadership legitimacy. A qualitative content analysis was conducted, focusing on van Leeuwen’s (2007, 2008) legitimisation framework. The speech was examined for key linguistic legitimisation strategies, including authorisation, moral evaluation, and

rationalisation. These categories were systematically identified based on explicit and implicit linguistic markers within the text.

### **Analysis**

The thematic focus of President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's inaugural speech is on national unity, resilience, and the "Nigerian Ideal" of shared humanity and progress. The speech highlights democracy, the rule of law, and inclusivity. The president's pledge to govern impartially and address social justice. Key priorities in the speech include economic reform, job creation, food security, and poverty reduction, alongside infrastructure development and agricultural modernisation. He also lists security as a top focus, highlighting plans to reform and equip security forces. Tinubu commits to monetary policy reform, regional stability, and foreign policy leadership. He calls for collective effort and urges Nigerians to unite in building a prosperous and peaceful nation. The analysis below examines the linguistic strategies of legitimisation employed by President Bola Ahmed Tinubu in his inaugural speech to legitimise his leadership and emergence. It presents the use of authorisation, personal authority, socio-spiritual authority, and metaphorical moral evaluation in the inaugural speech.

### **Authorisation strategy through the linguistic device of pronominalisation**

Personal authority is a significant facet of the authorisation legitimisation process, although it can also be rooted in the people or instruments of power (van Leeuwen, 2017). Personal authority legitimisation derives its effectiveness from the authoritative utterances made by the individual. Thus, the use of personal authority revolves around the personality of Bola Tinubu as an individual and a public figure who has been entrusted with specific responsibilities in the Nigerian political system.

#### **Text 1: FIRST INAUGURAL ADDRESS BY PRESIDENT BOLA AHMED TINUBU 29 MAY 2023**

Text 1 portrays legitimisation through personal authorisation by presenting Bola Tinubu as the President of Nigeria, who has assumed office and is delivering his first inaugural address, thereby presupposing the legitimacy of his presidency and implying the expectation of a second term. The title of the speech as being the "First Inaugural Address", presupposes the existence of a second inaugural address in the future. This suggests that Bola Tinubu assumes his presidency will continue beyond the first term and that there will be a second term, reinforcing his legitimacy as the sitting president. He invokes his official position and legitimises his right to deliver an inaugural speech as an exercise of this authority

**Text 2:** With full confidence in our ability, **I declare** that these things are within our proximate reach because my name is Bola Ahmed Tinubu, and **I am** the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

Bola Tinubu explicitly names himself and his title, which not only reinforces his credibility but also implies that his declaration carries weight because of who he is and the position he holds. Bola Tinubu deploys the use of pronouns in Text 2 to legitimise his ability to take on the responsibility that the power of the office has conferred on him. While emphasising shared goals and collective effort, the speaker takes personal ownership of the declaration, reinforcing that leadership is not a distant or abstract concept but involves real individuals with specific roles and responsibilities. The authoritative declaration through the personal pronoun “I” serves to legitimise his readiness and ability to make decisions that affect the country.

### **Legitimation through spiritual authority**

Spiritual authorisation emphasises the role of faith and the divine in legitimising and guiding the actions and leadership of President Bola Ahmed Tinubu. Legitimation through spiritual credibility often involves seeking validation or authority from a higher, spiritual source or entity, such as a deity or a divine power.

**Text 3:** "This nation's journey has been shaped by the prayers of millions, and the collective sacrifices of us all."

Referencing “prayers” in Text 3 suggests that spiritual guidance and divine intervention play a significant role in the assumption of office by Bola Tinubu. It emphasises the collective spiritual effort of a large portion of the electorate. This implies that the nation's journey is not solely a result of human effort but also divine intervention, guided and supported by the prayers of the people. The idea that the nation's history has been "shaped" by these prayers suggests that spiritual forces play a crucial role in the nation's destiny.

**Text 4:** This **handover** symbolises our trust in **God**, our enduring faith in representative governance and our belief in our ability to reshape this nation into the society it was always meant to be.

In text 4, socio-religious authorisation plays a significant role in establishing unquestionable legitimacy within religious circles. It reinforces the validation and approval of Tinubu's authority within the context of religion. By invoking God, it signifies that the authority and legitimacy of the government are grounded in divine approval. The lexical choice of "handover" as a symbol carries socio-religious significance. It implies that the act of transferring power is not merely a bureaucratic or legal process but a symbolic gesture with deep spiritual meaning. This reinforces the idea that the government's legitimacy is tied to its

alignment with religious and moral values. The text explicitly connects the political process, the “handover” to spiritual faith, noting that it is an indication of “trust in God.” By linking the peaceful transition of power to trust in God, the text implies that the nation’s political system is underpinned by divine approval and guidance. This not only legitimises the handover but also suggests that it is a divinely sanctioned event, reinforcing the spiritual legitimacy of the new leadership.

Socio-religious authorisation often stems from a perceived connection to spiritual authority or divine guidance. When a religious leader is seen as spiritually authorised, their decisions and actions are believed to align with the will of a higher power. This bolsters their legitimacy in religious circles because followers are more likely to trust and follow someone they believe is chosen or anointed by God or a divine source.

### **Moral evaluation strategy through metaphor**

Metaphors condense complicated thoughts into simpler, easier-to-understand forms. They offer a technique to translate complex ideas into understandable and tangible terms, making them simpler to understand and communicate within a group. Within the discourse, Tinubu deploys the use of metaphors as persuasive techniques to support particular viewpoints or beliefs. This gives a sense of familiarity and credibility by making analogies between a well-known notion and a novel one, increasing the acceptability and legitimacy of specific ideas. By capturing common experiences, attitudes, and ideas, metaphors are deployed to embody communal understanding. Individuals within a group can tie their experiences and perceptions to a shared frame of reference.

Legitimation through metaphorical moral evaluation encapsulates the idea of using metaphors to emphasise and evaluate actions or leadership in terms of their alignment with accepted moral standards and virtues, ultimately seeking to enhance their perceived legitimacy. Abstraction is one of the sub-categories used for moral evaluation. Metaphorical expressions are tools suitable for driving abstraction. It involves the process of moving from concrete, specific details to more general concepts or ideas. By likening moral concepts to more relatable scenarios, metaphors help individuals grasp the nuances of morality and engage in meaningful moral discourse.

#### **Text 5:**

Today, **Fate** and **Destiny** join together to place the **torch** of human progress in our very hands. We dare not let it slip"

"Fate" and "Destiny" are personified in Text 5 as if they are conscious beings with the ability to make decisions and take action. By personifying Fate and Destiny and suggesting that they are actively involved in the events, Text 5 conveys a sense of inevitability and divine intervention. It implies that Tinubu's assumption of leadership is not merely a result of human choice but is guided by higher forces, reinforcing the idea of a divine mandate. This also incorporates a spiritual dimension, legitimising divine intervention in the assumption of leadership by Tinubu. In familiar domains, a torch is used to provide light in the darkness, symbolising illumination and clarity.

**Text 6:**

We lift high this **torch** so that it might shine on every household and in every heart that calls itself Nigerian. We hold this beam aloft because it lights our path with compassion, brotherhood, and peace. May this great **light** never EXTINGUISH."

The use of "torch" in text 6 suggests that the speaker's leadership will bring enlightenment and understanding to a situation that may be clouded by challenges or uncertainties. These metaphors naturally evoke positive emotions such as hope, optimism, and inspiration. Light is a universal symbol of guidance and direction. Metaphorically, a torch or light source shows the way in the dark. In the context of leadership, these metaphors convey the idea that the speaker's leadership will provide a clear path and guidance for the nation, especially when there may be doubts, uncertainties, or challenges.

**Legitimation through validity and truth claims (Rationalisation)**

Rationalisation in the speech is used to provide logical and reasoned explanations for specific courses of action, demonstrating their practicality and effectiveness. This is reflected in various sectors such as security, economy, agriculture, infrastructure, fuel subsidy, and foreign policy, where Bola Tinubu promises to make interventions. Both subcategories of rationalisation work together to construct legitimacy to secure acceptance of Bola Tinubu's authority. Instrumental rationalisation emphasises the validity of Tinubu's election victory by presenting it as a legitimate democratic outcome that aligns with the principles of electoral integrity while theoretical rationalisation points to the necessity of governance decisions to ensure support.

Table 2: Subcategories of Rationalisation

Category	Subtype	Intention
Instrumental	Goal and means	Election validity
Theoretical	Truth claims - explanation	Governmental reforms

**Text 7:** The outcome reflected the will of the people. However, my victory does not render me any more Nigerian than my opponents. Nor does it render them any less patriotic.

**Text 8:** "To effectively tackle this menace, we shall reform both our security DOCTRINE and its ARCHITECTURE."

In Text 7, Tinubu justifies his presidency as a result of democratic choice, emphasising the practicality and effectiveness of the democratic process. By stating that his victory doesn't make him "any more Nigerian" than his opponents, he emphasises equality under the law and the legitimacy of dissent within the democratic process. This rationalisation is intended to legitimise his position as president by presenting it as a natural and just outcome based on the will of the Nigerian citizens, reinforcing the idea that he is a leader chosen by the people and for the people. Rationalisation is employed to approve of the election's legitimacy, emphasising that it aligns with the principles of democracy and the rule of law. Tinubu rationalises the legitimacy of the election outcome by asserting that it accurately represents the will of the people. This is a logical explanation that justifies the election's legitimacy by emphasising the democratic principle of the people's choice. The text also argues that the victory does not diminish the opponents' patriotism or elevate the speaker's own Nigerian identity. This rationalisation aims to emphasise the fairness and inclusivity of the election process to present the idea that the election was conducted in a just and democratic manner.

Rationalisation is used to justify the need for security reforms in Text 8, citing the importance of adapting security strategies to address emerging threats. Tinubu presents the proposed changes as a practical and effective solution to the security challenges. This suggests that the government is taking necessary steps to protect its citizens.

**Text 9:** "The South must not only seek good for itself but must understand that its interests are served when good comes to the North. The North must see the South likewise."

The modal verb "must" conveys a strong sense of moral imperative and obligation. It emphasises that certain actions or attitudes are not merely desirable but are morally necessary. "Must" sets a normative standard for behaviour and expectations. It implies that seeking the common good and understanding the interdependence of regions is the expected and morally right course of action. It establishes a norm for what is considered appropriate behaviour. Overall, the use of "must" in this context serves as a moral call to action, urging both regions to prioritise the common good and mutual understanding, which contributes to the moral evaluation of what is right and normal in the context of national unity and cooperation.

**Text 10:**

As citizens, we declare as one unified people devoted to one unified national cause, that as long as this world exists, NIGERIA SHALL EXIST.

There is the use of declarative language in "we declare" and "NIGERIA SHALL EXIST," which contributes to the authoritative tone of the statement. President Bola Tinubu assumes the mandate bestowed on him by the people to make the proclamation. The continued existence and unity of Nigeria are foregrounded through the phrase in upper case to assert Nigeria's cohesion as a central theme in the speech. Text 10 presents a logical assertion for the existence of Nigeria. The reference to the existence of Nigeria "as long as this world exists" introduces a temporal dimension, conveying a sense of enduring permanence. This temporal framing contributes to the legitimation by presenting the idea of Nigeria's existence as timeless and unwavering. The use of "we" as a collective plural pronoun implies a unified voice representing all citizens. While this creates a sense of unity, it also superimposes a singular collective identity, potentially overlooking diverse perspectives within the citizenry, who may not be pleased with the outcome of the election. This presents a possibility that promoting a singular perspective could overlook dissenting views.

**Establishing authority through reference to shared history and values**

This strategy is used to validate leadership by connecting to the collective experiences, traditions, and beliefs of the nation. This form of legitimation emphasises continuity with the past and alignment with the cultural or national values. This makes the present actions or leadership seem natural and aligned with the nation's identity.

**Text 11:**

"Over six decades ago, our founding fathers gave bravely of themselves to place Nigeria on the map as an independent nation. We must never allow the labour

of those who came before us to wither in vain but to blossom and bring forth a better reality."

The text references Nigeria's historical struggles and achievements, particularly the endurance of hardships and the establishment of democracy. By highlighting the nation's journey and the efforts of its founding fathers, Tinubu aligns his leadership with the legacy of those who fought for Nigeria's independence and democratic governance. By referencing the sacrifices of Nigeria's founding fathers and the long journey towards independence, Tinubu situates his presidency within a broader historical narrative. He links his administration to the enduring legacy of Nigeria's past leaders, thus framing his leadership as a continuation of their vision and efforts. This historical connection serves to legitimise his authority by suggesting that his presidency is part of the ongoing project of nation-building initiated by respected historical figures.

#### **Text 12:**

"Whether from the winding creeks of the Niger Delta, the vastness of the northern savannah, the boardrooms of Lagos, the bustling capital of Abuja, or the busy markets of Onitsha, you are all my people."

Tinubu's rhetoric emphasises unity and inclusion, explicitly stating that his administration will govern for all Nigerians, regardless of their region, ethnicity, or political views. The text acknowledges the country's diversity while affirming that all citizens are equal under his leadership. It emphasises national unity and the idea of a "Nigerian ideal" that transcends ethnic, regional, and political differences. By calling for a unified effort toward the nation's development, he seeks to legitimise his leadership as one that is inclusive and focused on the common good.

#### **Conclusion**

This paper has examined the legitimisation strategies in President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's 2023 Inaugural Speech to identify how the speech reinforces leadership and governance legitimacy. Tinubu deploys pronominalisation, self-referencing, and socio-spiritual authority to assert his legitimacy as Nigeria's elected leader. He draws on spiritual authorisation and moral imperatives to establish his legitimacy as a leader chosen by the people and guided by divine intervention. Metaphor is also used to shape perceptions of his leadership and national progress. Through instrumental rationalisation, he frames his election victory as an outcome of democratic choice and presents it as a logical and valid result that aligns with electoral integrity. Through the use of reference, Tinubu draws on Nigeria's historical struggles and shared national values to legitimise his presidency. He invokes the sacrifices of Nigeria's early leaders

and projects his image as a leader for all Nigerians through regional inclusivity. These strategies are used to garner support, trust, and acceptance from various segments of the population and emphasise the moral and practical foundations of his leadership.

This study explored legitimation in political discourse with the orientation that the concept goes beyond the question of legality, as the notion also depends on certain cultural and political factors (Amossy, 2022). Legitimacy, in addition to encompassing an evaluation of the leader's entitlement to rule the people, inherently encompasses a critical appraisal of the leader's competence in comprehending the challenges that the people face. The inaugural speech is one of the yardsticks to measure this ability in a leader. The findings show that language is important in shaping political legitimacy and governance narratives in Nigeria. This study argues that legitimacy is not absolute and is susceptible to limitations and challenges that require additional forms of democratic validation. This is one of the functions that inaugural speeches perform.

Beyond the identification of subcategories of authorisation: personal, expert, role model, impersonal, tradition and conformity, this study notes that spiritual authorisation is also present in Nigeria's discourse situation. This suggests that, given Nigeria's deeply religious society, where Christianity and Islam influence public and political life, leaders frequently reference God, prayers, and divine approval to strengthen their legitimacy. President Bola Tinubu's inaugural speech, he aligns his leadership with spiritual validation, stating that Nigeria's journey has been shaped by prayers and collective sacrifices. This shows how political rhetoric in Nigeria not only draws from democratic processes and institutional structures but also from religious beliefs and moral convictions.

Linguistic choices and discourse strategies in the 2023 Presidential Inaugural Speech have profound implications for the interpretation of ideas and events. By emphasising certain themes and omitting others, President Bola Tinubu directs attention and shapes public opinion on key issues. The selection of language to evoke emotions, aspirations, and shared values serves to create a sense of unity and purpose among the citizenry. Most importantly, the use of persuasive language establishes the president's legitimacy and fosters a sense of national identity. This study agrees with Rojo and van Dijk (1997, 528) that legitimation discourse seeks to establish the ruler's actions as legally, morally and ethically justifiable.

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