

## Processes and Circumstances in President Muhammadu Buhari's Address to Nigerian Children on 27 May, 2016

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### **Abstract**

*This paper focuses on processes and circumstances in the 2016 special address of President Muhammadu Buhari (PMB) to Nigerian children on the World Children's Day which was first established in 1954 as Universal Children's Day by the United Nations and celebrated in Nigeria on May 27 every year. PMB and indeed the All Progress Congress (APC) were to celebrate a year anniversary of taking over power from another party, the People Democratic Party (PDP) that had ruled Nigeria for sixteen years of uninterrupted control of her economic and political affairs. PMB's speech on the day was expected to be an appraisal of efforts and activities of the government in the past one year to alleviate the seemingly difficult conditions of the children. An online search yielded PMB's speech consisting of 529 words of 40 lines and 15 paragraphs. Two concepts, process and circumstance, in Halliday's Transitivity analysis of the Experiential function of the Ideational metafunction were applied to the speech. This was in the bid to determine the set of options whereby PMB encodes his experience of the Nigerian child and finds out the accompanying system of meanings as circumstantial elements. The findings revealed that PMB's address chose the major processes particularly the Mental over the other two and ignored the minor ones. Out of the nine basic circumstances, five were employed, bringing out both the merits and shortcomings of the address. It is recommended that linguists and particularly, discourse analysts, should probe the hidden workings of political office holders through their speeches in order to confront them with such and demand societal expectations.*

**Keywords:** Circumstance, language function, meaning, political speech, process

### **Introduction**

This article focuses on the address of President Muhammadu Buhari (PMB) of the Federal Republic of Nigeria on the 27 May, 2016 to Nigeria children who are regarded as a very important sector of the nation's population. On the 20<sup>th</sup> November 1959, the UN General Assembly adopted the 'Declaration of the Rights of the Child' and on the same date in 1989, the UN General Assembly adopted the 'Convention on the Rights of the Child'. The essence of this day is 'to advocate, promote and celebrate children's rights, translating into dialogues and actions that will build a better world for children' (<https://www.un.org/en/observances/world-childrens-day>).

Most often, political office holders address the followers (and children as the addressees of our data), saying what these followers expect to hear from them. However, the addressees do not have access to the inner places of the politicians to understand whether they are sincere or not in their utterances since political verbal interactions, intentions, meanings and interpretations (Dik 12) are in some way or another coded. By this, politicians are able to make the masses happy only in talk when, indeed, the speech is devoid of required verbal content to illustrate their sincerity and commitment to what they say. This article employs concepts in Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) as a tool to penetrate the hidden behaviour of political leaders. An analysis of PMB's speech on the occasion of a children's day celebration is a form of discourse analysis - a multidisciplinary approach with backgrounds in various fields, including linguistics. Language represents just one of the ways in which human beings perform a behavioural act (Morley 7). Language use is thus a verbal behaviour whether spoken or written. Thus, in analysis, it is referred to as 'text' although many analysts prefer the term 'discourse' in matters of spoken language such as conversation. This restricts 'text' to the written form of language. Language, in SFL, is regarded as a social activity which always takes place in a context – situation or culture.

Numerous researchers have endeavoured to theorise discourse methodical structures available in texts and, more explicitly, in news media discourse such as political speeches, and their bearing on society. Process has been viewed in SFL to express (i) what is going on in the whole clause, and (ii) that part of the proposition that is encoded in the verbal group (Bloor & Bloor 110–111). Processes are typically realised in verbs while circumstances are realized on the adverbs to address concerns about why, where, how, etc., of the processes in a given text, especially at the clause level.

By the preoccupations of the processes and circumstances, language seems to have evolved for three major purposes namely (i) to talk about what is happening, what will happen and what has happened; (ii) to interact and /or to express a point of view; and (iii) to turn the output of the previous two functions into coherent whole (Butt, *et al.* 5). The analysis of the president's speech in this study is situated within (i) above. The provisions of SFL are capable of exposing tangible intentions of politicians and lay bare those intentions that are only imaginary as this article demonstrates.

### **Methodological Framework**

This is a qualitative study. It adopts a field methodology with specific focus on media monitoring. Occasions and events in Nigeria, that are national and politically-related, irrespective of location or region, age or sex of participants, demand the attention of the President of the Federal Republic. One of such, essential for governance, is the recognition of children to whom 27<sup>th</sup> May each year has been set aside to appraise issues concerning their stratum in the society. This was first

established by the United Nations in 1964. The year 2016 children's day was the first one after the inauguration of President Muhammadu Buhari (PMB) as the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. An online search (<https://dailypost.ng/2016/05/26/full-text-of-president-buharis-childrens-day-message/>) of the speech of the president generated 529 words arranged in forty lines which are divided into fifteen paragraphs. Systemic Functional theory is thus employed to analyse the speech of the president to determine the processes and circumstances that facilitate meanings directed at the Nigerian child.

### **Theoretical Framework: Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL)**

SFL, as a theory, derives from the discipline of Linguistics. It is a language based theory which is employed to investigate the phenomena of language. SFL offers a way of approaching language from an analytical perspective. The focus is the interplay of social systems and human beings, emphasizing the construction of meaning within the society. The concept of functionalism is brought into language in a special and detailed way through SF theoretical discourse. It was developed by Michael Alexander Kirkwood Halliday (M.A.K. Halliday) and his teeming followers (Morley, 2000). There are three broad and principal functions of language that are central to the way grammar works in the language system. These three functions express experiential (ideational), interpersonal and textual meanings and are called metafunctions. The metafunctions of the language are also realised in the clause. The ideational functions through the process of TRANSITIVITY system to determine the meaning potential of the clause. It focuses on the content of discourse (Alaei & Ahangari 204). The interpersonal functions through the system of MOOD to determine the meaning potential of the clause. The textual function presupposes that language should be operationally relevant. It should have a texture. The textual function is realised through the system of THEME.

The clause, as a whole, expresses all functions through the total set of its structural and lexical resources (Kress 1981). The ideational metafunction deals with how reality is represented in language (24), and asks questions such as “who, (does) what, whom, how, why, where, and when?”. Halliday devised a system to analyse texts in the gamut of this category: *transitivity*. It includes processes, participants, and circumstances. Adepoju (2017) explains that experiential function thus involves participant or participating entity (doer or performer), process (actions, events and states); attribute (features and qualities); and circumstance (relationships of location, time, manner, etc.) (18) as shown below.

Table 1: Transitivity Analysis in Systemic Functional Linguistics

Clause	We	Use	language	as a means of organising people
Transitivity Analysis	Participant: Actor (Pronoun)	Process: Material (Verbal element)	Participant: Goal (Noun)	Circumstance: Cause-Purpose (Adverb)

Following is a table showing the participants and processes in explicating our experience of the world in and around us as provided by Halliday (1985) and the teeming followers who have been applying and developing the linguistic theory. It is a summary of doers, performers, receivers, beneficiaries and what, as language, is employed to lubricate our interpersonal relationships.

Table 2: Processes, Types, Participants and Meanings in Systemic Functional Linguistics (Adapted from Lise Fontaine, 2013, p. 318)

Participant	Process	Meaning	Participant
Actor	Material	doing, happening	Goal, Beneficiary, Scope
Senser, Cognizant	Mental	sensing, seeing, thinking, wanting, feeling	Phenomenon
Carrier, Attributor/ Assigner, Identifier	Relational (Attributive) (Identifying)	being, attributing, identifying	Attribute Identified
Behaver	Behavioural	behaving	
Sayer	Verbal	saying	Receiver, Verbiage
Existent	<i>Existential</i>	existing	

Following the table explicating the process types above, in order to be able to analyse our text adequately and appropriately, another table is presented below summarising the nine basic categories of circumstances and the twenty-two sub-categories. Circumstances in Natural Language Use (NLU) (Dik 1) makes it possible for users to make themselves understood more and this influences another's stock of information in relation to the context of linguistic utterances.

Table 3: The nine basic types of circumstantial elements in Systemic Functional Linguistics (Fontaine, 2013 p. 330; Halliday and Matthiessen, 2004 p. 262)

No	Type	Sub-type	Question answered
1.	Extent	Distance	How far?
		Duration	How long?
		Frequency	How frequently?
2.	Location	Place	Where?
		Time	When?
3.	<i>Manner</i>	Means	By what means?
		Quality	How?
		Comparison	Like what?
		Degree	How much?
4.	Cause	Reason	Why?
		Purpose	For what purpose?
		Behalf	On whose behalf?
5.	Contingency	Condition	Under what condition?
		Default	Under what negative condition?
		Concession	With what concession?
6.	Accompaniment	Comitative	Who/who with?
		Additive	Who/who else?
7.	Role	Guise	What as?
		Product	What into?

8.	Matter	Matter	What about?
9.	Angle	Source	According to whom?
		Viewpoint	From whose viewpoint/ perspective?

The table above simply illustrates the aspect of speech or writing that is different from participants but which is general across process types. Circumstance, then, can be seen as ‘the resource for augmenting the configuration processes’ (Huen 16) in which circumstantial elements give information relatedly to answering the questions raised in the table, painting a vivid picture of events, happenings, feelings, sensing, etc. Circumstances add extra information to the text.

### Data Presentation

Below is the speech of the president of Nigeria, Retired Army General, President Muhammadu Buhari, on the occasion of the celebration of Children’s Day in 2016.

### PROCESSES AND CIRCUMSTANCES IN PMB’S ADDRESS TO NIGERIAN CHILDREN ON 27 MAY, 2016

Keys to the data are as follow.

Underline: Processes

**Bold**: Circumstances

I **heartily greet** and felicitate with all Nigerian children **on the occasion of this year’s Children’s Day celebration.**

I seize the opportunity **of this year’s celebration** which comes just two days //before the first anniversary of the present administration, to reassure our children and youth that we remain fully committed to fulfilling our promise of a better Nigeria for all of our people.

**On this happy occasion for our children**, I reaffirm my belief that it is the right of every Nigerian child to have access to quality and affordable education, as well as healthcare and other basic necessities **for a good life, //in a peaceful and secure environment.**

The good health and well-being of Nigerian children remain a top priority on our agenda **for national development** and we have demonstrated our strong commitment in this regard **with the allocation of N12.6 billion //in the 2016 budget //for vaccines and programmes //to prevent childhood killer diseases such as polio, measles and yellow fever.**

Other measures in the 2016 budget, such as the school feeding programme **for children at a cost of N93.1 billion**, will ensure that more children goto school and enjoy the fun of learning and growing together **with their peers.**

**Despite the current economic and funding challenges facing our dear nation, my administration will continue to do all within its powers **to achieve better living conditions and greater access to quality healthcare and education for all our youth.****

It is a thing of joy that **on this year's Children's Day**, we can also celebrate the safe return of one of the Chibok girls, Amina Ali Nkeki and many other abducted women and children who have been freed **from the clutches of Boko Haram //by our gallant troops.**

I assure all Nigerians and friends of the country, **once again**, that my administration will not rest on its oars **until the ungodly terrorist sect is totally eliminated from our country.**

**As peace gradually returns to the insurgency-ravaged North-Eastern States**, the Federal Government will continue to work diligently **//to ensure the rapid and full reintegration and rehabilitation of all internally displaced persons, //including orphaned children in the region.**

We will also sustain and strengthen ongoing actions **to protect children //more effectively //from violence, child-labour, child-trafficking, forced marriages and other related offences.**

In return, I urge you all to imbibe and exhibit **in greater measure**, the virtues of hard work, diligence, discipline, honesty, prudence, selflessness and patriotism which are essential for the actualisation of our vision of a truly great nation.

The world now looks up to our dear nation, Nigeria, **as an exemplary model of democratic ideals//after the smooth transition that brought our Administration to power.**

You, our children and youth, have a very significant role to play **in ensuring that our democratic institutions of governance are continuously nurtured, improved and strengthened// to underpin national development and prosperity.**

Remain assured that **under my leadership**, the Federal Government will continue to do its best to prepare and equip you //to show the world that //with its brilliant, resourceful and resilient people, Nigeria is a country of incredible potential and opportunity.

I wish you all a Happy Children's Day celebration.

Muhammadu Buhari  
President  
Federal Republic of Nigeria  
May 27, 2016

(<https://dailypost.ng>)

**(529 WORDS, 40 LINES, 15 PARAGRAPHS)**

**4.1 Analysis of Data**

Below are sample analysis of the data. Processes and circumstances are strands in transitivity analysis. Halliday (1981) describes transitivity as the grammar of experience (Adepoju, 2018). This is done to relay the experiential meaning in the world within and around the speaker, PMB.

Table 4: I heartily greet and felicitate with all Nigerian children on the occasion of this year’s Children’s Day celebration

I	heartily	greet and felicitate	with all Nigerian children	on the occasion of this year’s Children’s Day celebration
Participant: Actor	Circumstance: Manner	Process: Mental	Circumstance: Accompaniment	Circumstance: Time

Table 5: I wish you all a Happy Children’s Day celebration

I	Wish	you all	a Happy Children’s Day celebration	
Participant: Senser	Process: Mental	Participant: Phenomenon	Participant: Phenomenon	

Table 6: As peace gradually returns to the insurgency-ravaged North-Eastern States, the Federal Government will continue to work diligently/ to ensure the rapid and full reintegration and rehabilitation of all internally displaced persons, including orphaned children in the region.

As peace gradually returns to the insurgency-ravaged North-Eastern States	the Federal Government	will continue to work	diligently	to ensure the rapid and full reintegration and rehabilitation of all internally displaced persons, including orphaned children in the region.
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Circumstance: Reason	Participant: Actor	Process: Material	Circumstance: Manner	Circumstance: Reason
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Table 7: I urge you all to imbibe and exhibit in greater measure, the virtues of hard work, diligence, discipline, honesty, prudence, selflessness and patriotism

I	urge	you all	to imbibe and exhibit	in greater measure,	the virtues of hard work ...
Participant : Actor	Process : Material	Participant : Goal	Participant: Beneficiary (nominalised )	Circumstance : Manner-Degree	Participant : Recipient

Table 8: A summary of Process Types in PMB’s Speech

PROCESS	TYPE	MEANING POTENTIAL	REAL OR IMAGINARY
greet, felicitate	material	doing, happening	imaginary
seize, reassure, remain, committed, //comes	mental // material	feeling, thinking// doing	imaginary//real
reaffirm// is	mental// relational	wanting// being	imaginary//real
remain, have demonstrated	mental// material	feeling	Imaginary

go (to school)// will ensure, enjoy (the fun of learning)	material//mental	happening//feeling	real//imaginary
will continue to do	material	sensing	imaginary
is// can also celebrate// have been freed	relational// mental// material	being//wanting// happening	imaginary//imaginary//real
assure, will not rest	mental	feeling//sensing	imaginary
will also sustain, strengthen	mental//material	wanting//feeling	Imaginary
urge	material	sensing	Imaginary
looks	mental	seeing	Imaginary
have	relational	being	Imaginary
remain assured, will continue to do	mental // material	wanting//feeling	imaginary
wish	mental	feeling	Imaginary

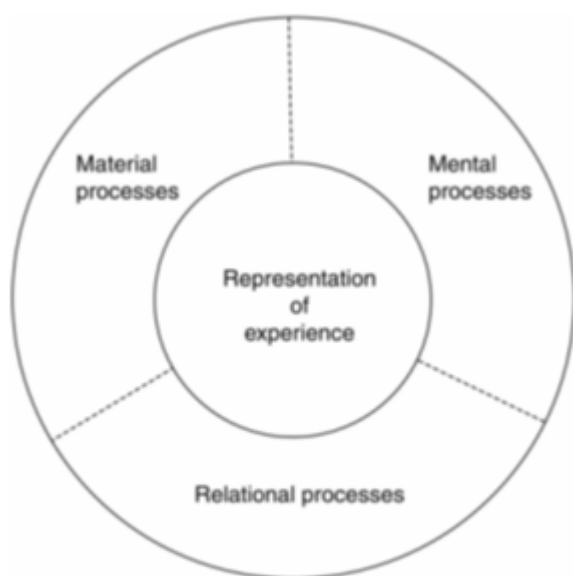
28 processes: material 11, mental 14, relational 3, verbal 0, behavioural 0, existential 0

## 4.2 Discussion

Process and circumstance analyses of PMB address to children on May 27 are only two of four possible transitivity analysis of the ideational metafunction. Two others are arrays of participants (performer and receiver) comprising actor, goal, recipient, beneficiary, client, senser, phenomenon, carrier, attribute, etc.

Through various processes (28) that manifested in the address, PMB employs language to encode our experience, playing a crucial role in the involvement of the children and other listeners in the environment. PMB not only made the address represent experience but determine experience, real-world-events or even imaginary ones (Bloor and Bloor 109).

Out of the six processes in SFL, PMB employs the three major ones – material, mental, relational – in the address. The three minor processes – verbal, behavioural, existential – are not used.



Three main processes in the representation of experience employed by PMB (adapted from Lise Fontaine, 2013; Halliday, 1994)

The use of the major processes while ignoring the minor ones (so to say) especially the choice of mental process (14) far above all others is significant for meaning-making in our analysis of the speech. The implication of non-use of Behavioural process (0) in the speech suggests the absence of representation of outer manifestations of the inner workings of PMB. The use would have been the acting out of processes of consciousness and physiological state (Halliday, 1994, p.107) of the speaker. As a type of external activity, if employed, PMB would have

revealed the result of a thing he experienced internally as president.

Verbal process (0) was not used in the speech. Thus, what is missing is the symbolic relationships constructed in PMB's human consciousness which he would have enacted in the form of language while addressing the children.

From the analysis, PMB employed a good number of circumstances 'to encode the background against which the process takes place' (Thompson 109). Such use of circumstances describes the process in some way relatedly to where, how or why it is taking place. Halliday and Matthiessen (262) categorise circumstance into nine and twenty-two sub-categories. Out of these, PMB used five basic categories and nine sub-categories. In the first place, in response to the processes, circumstantial

Extent in relation to duration (until the ungodly terrorist sect is totally eliminated from our country) and frequency (once again) are used. By this, the children would understand ‘how long’ and ‘how frequently’ of certain processes. Secondly, Location circumstance in place (to school; in a peaceful and secure environment) and time (On this happy occasion for our children; after the smooth transition that brought our administration to power) are employed. Listeners got to know where and when of the processes. Third, Manner circumstance in forms of means (by our gallant troops), quality (heartily, diligently) and degree (fully, in greater measure) are employed. This is in the bid to answer the questions ‘by what means?’, ‘how?’ and ‘how much?’ Fourth, Contingency circumstance is used as concession (Despite the current economic and funding challenges facing our dear nation) and condition (As peace gradually returns to the insurgency-ravaged North-Eastern States) to reveal what the government intends to concede and under what condition. Finally, there is the use of Cause circumstance in the forms of reason (to protect children more effectively from violence, child-labour, child-trafficking, forced marriages and other related offences), purpose (to prevent childhood killer diseases such as polio, measles and yellow fever; to achieve better living conditions and greater access to quality healthcare and education for all our youth) and behalf (under my leadership). Through these, listeners/ hearers understand ‘why?’, ‘for what purpose?’ and ‘on whose behalf?’ of the processes employed in the speech.

While the concern of the children and the young adults in Nigeria is not expectation involved between the process and the circumstances, the additional meaning in the attendant circumstance engendering government’s doings and happenings may be necessary, although optional.

### **4.3 Findings**

The finding of this work is not a product of bias or premeditated outcome. So, it is not personal. Findings, through the application of SFL, reveal that the address of PMB to the youth and children of Nigeria on that particular occasion is dominated by mental processes. However, Nigerian people would expect an address that is material process laden. Adepoju (2018) reiterates the position of SFL as proposed by Halliday and Matthiessen that

Material processes are usually physical and visible. These are processes of doing. They are the representations of life through the processes of doing and happening. They are the representation of physical actions in the real world. Such processes are concrete and tangible actions. Here, some entities do something or perform some actions (224).

Contrary to the above, the address somehow presents a kind of meaning outside the reality on ground in Nigeria in 2016. The address presents lots of mental processes.

Mental processes probe the consciousness of people and how individuals perceive the environment. They are the processes of perception, cognition and affection. The perception of the experience of reality is captured through mental processes. The processes express what we

think, feel or perceive, rather than what we are doing. In perception, we may see or look; in reaction, we like or fear; and in cognition, we know, believe or understand (245).

Comparing the processes of material and mental as has been explicated above, the President from whom tangible actions are expected, who is expected to do, engage in real, physical and concrete involvements merely exhibit perception, cognition and affection. This probably may be imaginary. The president, 'wish', 'look' and 'believe' and perhaps, understands. Rather than have process of doing and happening, the president gave an address full of seeing, feeling, and thinking. These do not translate to solutions to the problems of the children. Without being judgmental, the time and situation in the country affect youngsters who anticipate more from the 'saviour'.

Circumstances lie at the other end of the continuum. It subtly refers to the context of utterance. Circumstance occurs freely in all types of process, and with essentially the same significance wherever they occur. In the 'circumstantial' type, the relationship between the two terms is one of time, place, manner, cause, accompaniment, role, matter or angle. These are also manifested as circumstantial elements in the English clause (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004 240). They are (i) typically expressed not as nominal groups but as either adverbial groups or prepositional phrases (ii) Circumstances associated with or attendant on the process as far as meaning is concerned (iii) They do not have the potential of becoming Subjects, of taking over the modal responsibility for the clause as exchange.

Finally, PMB's address 'is interpreted as a system of meanings, accompanied by forms through which the meanings can be realised to answer the question, "how are these meanings expressed?"' (Adepoju, 2018). The forms (structures) of the address then are a means to an end but not an end in themselves (Adepoju, 2018; Mehmood, *et al.* 78).

### **Suggestions for further Studies**

One surprising finding of the study is that if scholars, researchers and linguists could confront rulers, leaders and politicians with revelations from their speeches and addresses, they will be aware that their scale of explicitness (Dik 12) and their level of sincerity are not hidden from the followers. This, it is believed, will serve as a rein on their actions and inactions. Concepts in SFL such as components of transitivity and cohesion are applicable in the analysis of every genre of discourse. It is recommended that political speeches in Nigeria should be subjected not only to experiential analysis but interpersonal and textual analyses to determine the level of the relationship between the rulers and the ruled and to find out the process of the organisation of political speeches in the form of thematising their priority and focus.

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