CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF BISHOP MATTHEW HASSAN KUKAH'S 2022 EASTER MESSAGE: IMPLICATIONS FOR NATIONAL COHESION

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ABSTRACT: *Critical discourse analysis explores the impact of language on social practices and how society is, in turn, shaped by language. It examines how the social indices of identity, inequality, injustice, ideology, power, dominance and resistance interface with text and discourse to achieve social stability. This paper analyzes Bishop Matthew Hassan Kukah's 2022 Easter message from the standpoint of critical discourse analysis and examines the implications of the social structures articulated in the text to national cohesion. From this study, it is found that language is a constituent of society and that by studying the forms of language, one reveals the social processes and the specific ideologies embedded in them.*

KEYWORDS: Critical, Identity, Inequality, Ideology, Power, Opaque.

INTRODUCTION

What is critical discourse analysis? Critical Discourse Analysis (henceforth CDA) is an interdisciplinary field of study combining linguistics and sociology. It studies the relationship between linguistic structures and social structures. CDA views language as a form of social practice (Fairclough, 2001). It examines how the ways in which we communicate are constrained by the structures and forces of those social institutions within which we live and function. (Fairclough, 1989, p. vi). It attempts to explain the interrelatedness between discourse structures and social practices, conflicting ideologies and power relations.

The term 'critical' implies showing connections and causes which are hidden or opaque. It is important to expose the hidden things, since they are not evident for the individuals involved, and, because of this, they cannot be fought against. The term also implies "intervention, for example providing resources for those who may be disadvantaged through change" (Fairclough, 1992, p. 9).

Discourse, on the other hand, is a broad term with a wide range of meanings, ranging from linguistics, to sociology, philosophy and other disciplines. Norman Fairclough, one of the foremost proponents of CDA, argues that discourse covers interaction that goes beyond the text: "I shall use the term discourse to refer to the whole process of social interaction of which a text is just a part" (Fairclough, 1989, p. 24). This implies that discourse is text within context, it covers discussions that go beyond the text and relates it to the context within which a text functions.

Fairclough (1993) in his definition describes CDA as discourse analysis which aims to systematically explore often opaque (indirect) relationships of causality and determination between (a) discursive practice, events and texts, and (b) wider social and cultural structures, relations and processes; to investigate how such practices, events and texts arise out of and are ideologically shaped by relations of power and struggles over power; and to explore how the opacity of these relationships between discourse and society is itself a factor securing power and hegemony. Fairclough argues that "ideologies reside in texts" that, it is not possible to 'read off' ideologies from texts" and that "texts are open to diverse interpretations (Fairclough: 1995).

Fairclough's notion of discourse transforms into an analytical method, including the "linguistic description of the language text, interpretation of the relationship between the discursive processes and the text, and explanation of the relationship between the discursive processes and the social processes" (Fairclough, 1989, p. 97).

 Scholars working in the tradition of CDA generally agree that social structures and linguistic structures overlap and that societal power relations are established and reinforced through language use.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Critical discourse analysis emerged from 'critical linguistics' developed at the University of East Anglia by Roger Fowler and fellow scholars in the 1970s, and the terms are now often interchangeable (Fowler, 1979). CDA was first developed by the Lancaster School of Linguists of which Norman Fairclough was the most prominent figure.

CDA shares concerns and methods with some disciplines which deal with social groups and structures such as anthropology, sociology, ethnography and ethnomethodology. It is also interested in some disciplines which study human cognition and behavior like cognitive and social psychology (Bloor & Bloor, 2007).

Furthermore, this paper attempts to deconstruct covert ideology which is 'hidden' in the text, stemming from the theoretical conceptualization of Batstone, who claims that "critical discourse analysis seeks to reveal how texts are constructed so that particular (and potentially indoctrinating) perspectives can be expressed delicately and covertly; because they are covert, they are elusive of direct challenge" (Batstone, 1995, pp. 198-199).

The concern of critical discourse analysts is fundamental to analyze opaque as well as transparent structural relationships of dominance, discrimination, power and control as manifested in language (Wodak, 2009). Analyzing structural relationships of dominance, discrimination, power and control as manifested in language can be seen as a means for deconstructing the implicit ideologies embedded in a text.

What the followers of CDA try to achieve has been summarized by Batstone (1995) Critical Discourse Analysts seek to reveal how texts are constructed so that particular (and Potentially indoctrinating) perspectives can be expressed delicately and covertly; because they are covert, they are elusive of direct challenge, facilitating what Kress calls the "retreat into mystification and impersonality" (Batstone, 1995, pp. 198-199).

CDA is a type of discourse analytical research that primarily studies the way social abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced and resisted by text and talk in social and political context (Van Dijk, 2001). In this sense, it differs from discourse analysis in that it highlights issues of power asymmetries, manipulation, exploitation, and structural inequities in domains such as education, media, and politics (Blommaert & Bucean, 2000). CDA is not simply interested in analyzing language as a linguistic entity, rather, it is interested in explaining how language reflects social practice.

Van Dijk (1995) argues that CDA is problem or issue oriented, rather than paradigm-oriented and it highlights the underlying ideologies that play a role in the reproduction or resistance against dominance and inequality. Thus, in examining language as a social practice, CDA finds itself primarily investigating issues of dominance, discrimination, legitimacy, resistance, inequality, power and control.

Bloor and Bloor (2007) outlines the following overriding practical objectives of CDA which is:

1. To analyze discourse practices that reflect or construct social problems;

2. To investigate how ideologies can become frozen in language and find ways to break the ice;

3. To increase awareness of how to apply these objectives to specific cases of injustice, prejudice and misuse of power.

There are different approaches to critical discourse analysis. They include: Fairclough's Three-dimensional Model, Ruth Wodak's Discourse Historical Approach and Teun van Djik's Socio-cognitive Model. For the purpose of this study, we shall focus on Fairclough's approach which appears to be the most developed approach.

Fairclough's approach assumes a dialectical relationship between particular discursive practices and the social practices. Fairclough argues that discourse is a form of social practice because it reflects in the ways human beings act and react towards each other. For him, events in the world we live in are all forms of representation and that there is a dialectical relationship between discourse and social structure in which social structure determines and creates social processes.

Fairclough outlines three levels of discourse which include, firstly, social conditions of production and interpretation, i.e. the social factors, which contributed or lead to the origination of a text, and, at the same time, how the same factors affect interpretation. Secondly, the process of production and interpretation, i.e. in what way the text was produced and how this affects interpretation. Thirdly, "the text, being the product of the first two stages, commented on above" (Fairclough, 1989, pp. 24-26).

CDA recognises two directions of this relationship, that is, how language shapes society and how language is in turn shaped by society. In particular, it explores the tension between these two sides of language use, the socially shaped and socially constitutive (Fairclough, 1993, p. 134).

Our conceptual basis is adopted from Norman Fairclough's ideas on discourse and power and discourse and hegemony. We attempt to link social practice and linguistic practice, as well as micro and macro analysis of discourse (Fairclough, 1989, p. 97). At the same time, the analytical part of this paper analyzes the possible interrelatedness of textual properties and power relations, which is also underpinned in Fairclough's conceptual work.

Language is a constituent of society on various levels. A division proposed by Fairclough (1993, pp. 134-136) "is that of social identity, social relations and systems of knowledge and belief". All of these levels are affected, only with a variation as far as the strength is concerned. The issue of interpretation of these levels in the context of discourse models and social cognition will be addressed in the latter part of this work.

Critical reactions to CDA center on issues of interpretation and context. In a series of review articles, Widdowson (1995, 1996) criticized the CDA for obscuring important differences between concepts, disciplines, and methodologies.

First, he noted the vagueness of many of the concepts (what exactly is meant by the discourse, text structures, practices, and mode?) And models (how many functions and levels, and how to prove it?). This ambiguity cannot be helped by the rhetorical use of concepts from social theory.

Secondly, Widdowson argues that, in actual analysis, and despite its theoretical claims to the contrary, the CDA interprets discourse under the guise of critical analysis. CDA does not analyze how a text can be read in many ways, or under what social environment the text was produced and consumed.

CDA has been criticized for being simultaneously too broad to distinctly identify manipulations within the rhetoric, yet it is also not powerful enough to appropriately find all that researchers set out to establish (Roffee, 2014, pp. 113 - 130).

Despite these criticisms, CDA offers a new prospect for interdisciplinary studies. The opportunity which CDA offers the linguist to probe into societal issues accounts for is wide acceptance and patronage.

ANALYSIS

The data for this study is a newspaper article written by a prominent clergy in Nigeria in the heat of political maladministration, social injustice and religious extremism in Nigeria in particular and the world in general.

Fairclough (1989) proposes three stages of CDA, which are in accord with the three above mentioned levels of discourse:

1. Description is the stage which is concerned with the formal properties of the text. Fairclough organized these linguistic features under four main categories which are vocabulary, grammar, cohesion, and text structure (Fairclough, 1992)

2. Interpretation is concerned with the relationship between text and interaction – with seeing the text as a product of a process of production, and as a resource in the process of interpretation…

3. Explanation is concerned with the relationship between interaction and social context – with the social determination of the processes of production and interpretation, and their social effects.

Consequently, Fairclough's model does not only concern itself with the whatness of text description but also the howness and whyness of a text interpretation and explanation.

DESCRIPTION OF TEXT

(1) Hello brothers and sisters in Christ, men and women of goodwill everywhere, I send you hearty greetings and felicitations as we celebrate the risen Christ. Easter is here again. For all Christians, Easter is a metaphor for our lives as individuals, families, communities or nations. Easter is a metaphor for how shame, scandal, powerlessness, weakness, and opprobrium suddenly transform into glory, honor, pre-eminence, laudation and applause. It is a fulfillment of what the Master himself had foretold when He said, 'Unless a grain of wheat falls on the ground and dies, it remains only a single grain, but if it dies, it bears much fruit' (Jn. 12: 24)

The above is the opening lines of Bishop Kukah's Easter message. Kukah describes the significance of the death of Jesus Christ to Christians, which serves as the foundation of the Christian faith, but this too is nonsense to non Christians. This argument is sustained in the first and second paragraph.

In the third and fourth paragraph, Kukah expresses a feeling of despair as there is nothing to be said that has not been said, yet the situation remains the same. The only hope for him is a trust in divinity when all hopes are lost.

In paragraph five and six, Kukah expresses the conflict between religious leaders and politicians who have usurped the role of religious leaders even though this has been clearly specified by the constitution.

Ethnic and religious division have become a stereotype with so many fraudsters masking as religious leaders:

(2) *Today, the values of Interfaith dialogue have come under severe strain and pressure with extremists from both sides of our faiths denigrating the idea of dialogue with their counterparts of other faiths. Ignorance and miseducation have combined with prejudice to create the falsehood that somehow, one religion is superior to the others. With so many ill equipped fraudsters posing as religious leaders, there is an obsession with defaming the others and widening our differences (Paragraph 8).*

The above statement supports interfaith dialogue which will foster cooperation and mutual coexistence among different religions groups.

Leaders of the two major religious groups in the world Pope Francis and the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar Mosque, Egypt, Shaikh Mohammed Al-Tayeb have begun the peace initiative, when both of them met and signed the Document on Human Fraternity in 2019.

Kukah proposed a way out of the quagmire occasioned by religion:

(3) The way out is for the state to enforce the secular status of the Nigerian state so as to give citizens the necessary freedoms from the shackles of semi-feudal confusion over the status of religion and the state in a plural Democracy. We must be ready to embrace modernity and work out how to preserve our religions and cultures without turning religion into a tool for tyranny, exclusion, and oppression.

Kukah portrays the lackadaisical attitude of the government towards tackling insecurity and said that the government is more interested in the rehabilitation of repentant terrorists than in tackling terrorism headlong as security of lives and property is the primary responsibility of any responsible government. The level of insecurity in the country is alarming and the different institutions within the country are in disarray, the health institution, educational institution, infrastructure, to mention a few.

Kukah sees the 2023 elections as a legitimate means to change the narrative by electing leaders who will make a difference on the grounds that the elections are free and fair. Unfortunately the outcomes of these elections are being challenged in different courts of competent jurisdiction.

The penultimate paragraph is devoted to a prayer for the war in Ukraine. In the last paragraph Kukah says he will not relent in the crusade for justice, equity until the dignity of human life is restored.

The vocabulary of the text in the beginning of the essay reflects the register of Christian religion, with words like Christ, Easter, crucifixion, resurrection and faith. The vocabulary also reflects the identity of the writer who himself is a Roman Catholic priest. The vocabulary of the text gradually shifts from religious register to politics with words like constitution, democracy, election, legitimacy.

At the level of grammar, there is a preponderance of long sentences, which is a reflection of the emotional tone of the speaker, revealing the precarious state of affairs in the country. A variety of declarative, interrogative and imperative sentences are employed in the text.

Cohesive devices such as pronouns and conjunctions are employed in the text. For instance, the phrase "Our dear country" in paragraph 3 is a cataphoric reference to Nigeria. "One" used in paragraph 4 is a substitution for the speaker or even the audience.

Similarly, the demonstrative pronoun "this" as used in the last sentence of paragraph 9 refers to the new trend of atheism and secularism arising from the division and religious intolerance among Christians and Muslims.

Furthermore, "so" as used in the penultimate sentence in paragraph 15 of the texts serves as a conjunctive element linking the parallel sentence structures preceding it.

All these linguistic devices are characteristic features of the text and therefore constitute the linguistic features of the text under investigation.

INTERPRETATION OF TEXT

Bishop Kukah in the preliminary stages of his speech outlines the power struggle between religious leaders and political leaders which he says has existed since the beginning of world history.

> *(4) The conflict between Caesar and God is inbuilt in faith and is part of world history. Many religious leaders measure their power by how close they are to Caesar, yet Caesar's embrace is often full of thorns (Paragraph 6).*

By Caesar, Kukah makes metaphysical reference to political leaders who seem to have usurped the position of religious leaders.

Power as a social phenomenon is exploited in this text to propagate the message of maladministration in the part of the Nigeria government and assert the role which religious leaders must play to save a nation on the edge of a precipice.

Furthermore, the impetus with which Fulani herdsmen carry out their dastardly attacks, killing, maiming and abducting their victims have multiplied since the emergence of President Mohammadu Buhari in 2015. This brings to mind the Nigerian factor where persons from the particular ethnic group of the leader take laws into their own hands simply because the serving president or even governor is from their ethnic group.

This brings to the fore the influence of power which, for the Nigerian population, has ethnic colourations. This has become a trend which must be addressed if we must have a sane society.

The daily horrors which Nigerians experience in the hands of the unscrupulous terrorists have changed the psyche of citizens to the extent that citizens have "now accepted such dastardly acts as part of life". This is the extent to which the Nigerian state has degenerated.

The deplorable state of infrastructure, the ailing economy, dilapidated educational and health infrastructure are the proofs of failure on the part of the government that is grossly deficient and incapable of piloting the affairs of a country like Nigeria.

Citizens must exercise their civic right and vote out any government that cannot guarantee the security of lives and property of its citizens.

The data under investigation is Bishop Kukah's long essay which x-rays the anomalies rocking the Nigeria state. Insecurity in the form of armed robbery, terrorism, kidnapping, killing and maiming of citizens have continued unabated. Many have fled their homes and communities and settled in IDP camps, yet the government has shown great insensitivity to the plight of the victims of this terror. Many communities have been deserted. Political, ethnic and religious sentiments are prioritized above human lives lost in their hundreds and thousands on regular bases. Government has also failed in the area of health, education, economy and infrastructure.

The ideological differences between Christians and Muslim serve as the underlying cause of the conflict which has snowballed into full-scale violence against the conflicting religious groups. The sanctity of human life has been sacrificed on the altar of religious and ethnic sentiments and there is a constant move of one group to dominate the other and a counter move of resistance; while each struggle to assert their identity. All these contribute to the conflict in the society under investigation. Injustice has pervaded the entire system due to ethnic and regional sentiments. This gives rise to inequality.

EXPLANATION OF TEXT

Critical discourse analysis examines social variables of power, injustice, inequality, ideology, dominance and resistance in language. The themes highlighted in Bishop Kukah's speech are varied, ranging from insecurity to ethnicity, religious conflict, and banditry, among others.

The insecurity that pervades the nook and cranny of our country is primarily stimulated by the desire of one religion to dominate another. The desire of one religious group to impose their ideological convictions on others is a clear example of dominance in human relationship, which is reflected in the language used in the different religious books to assert the superiority of one religion over another, and this negates the very principles of our collective existence.

> (5) *The crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus are central to the Christian faith and yet, as St Paul said, 'We preach Christ crucified, a scandal to the Jews and nonsense to the Gentiles' (1 Cor. 1: 23) (Paragraph 2).*

 The use of the term 'nonsense' in the text. The way the different religions groups perceive each other is the reason for the conflict that has persisted amongst varying religions across ages.

One very prominent theme in Kukah's speech is religious conflict between Christian religion and Islam. Kukah argues that religious extremism and religious intolerance between the two

major religions in Nigeria, "fueled by ignorance and miseducation has further widened our differences". Hence conscious and deliberate effort is required to stem the tide of insecurity in Nigeria in particular and the world in general.

Kukah notes that at the international level, deliberate efforts have been made to unite the two conflicting religions with Pope Francis and the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar Mosque, Sheikh Mahammed Al-Tayed signing the Document on Human Fraternity. Sequel to this, the United Nations General Assembly declared February 4th World day of Fraternity. Hence these two religious groups have to tolerate each other to have a peaceful society.

Ideologies usually control the thoughts of a social group which then represent the basic social characteristics of a group based on their identities, goals, norms, values, positions and resources (Van Dijk, 1995). Kukah calls for ideological reorientation of religious bigots who must understand the presence of other religions and learn to coexist with other religious groups in the society. He warns against religious extremism which is one major cause of global conflict.

Kukah suggests that the way out of this religious intolerance, which is the major cause of religious conflict, is for the government to enforce the secular status of the Nigeria state in a plural democracy.

Kukah maintains that the Federal Government has not shown serious commitment in the fight against terrorism in the country, instead, they have paid more attention to the rehabilitation of the so-called repentant terrorists.

Fairclough argues that language activity which occurs in social contexts is part of social processes and practices and not merely an expression or reflection of them (2001). In this respect, social structures constitute the core concerns of critical discourse studies.

Kukah's tone in this message demonstrates the level of degeneration of the security situation in the country, so much so that the sanctity of human life is no longer guaranteed. Bandits are causing havoc on a daily basis in different communities, killing human beings and raising down communities, and the government can no longer guarantee the safety of lives and properties of its citizens, prompting the Federal House of Representatives to call for the resignation of Mr President at some points.

Besides the precarious security situation in the country the various institutions such as the health institutions, educational institutions, religious institutions, political institutions, and infrastructure, are all in a deplorable state "only corruption is alive and well".

Kukah sees the upcoming 2023 election as the legitimate medium which Nigerians have to end the current misery by electing a credible leader who will fix our broken nation and rid Nigerians of the looming danger of hunger and destitution. But this is only possible if the electoral body becomes unbiased.

The Permanent Voters Card (PVC) is considered as the legitimate power which electorates possess to bring about a change in the narrative. Kukah recognises this legitimate right of citizens to elect credible individuals who will address the security challenges bedeviling the country without regard to ethnic or religious sentiments.

Bishop Kakah said he will not relent in his task of moral revolution until human dignity is respected and restored in Nigeria, in particular and the world in general. Thus, the goal of Kukah's message is to bring about positive change and a better society.

CONCLUSION

Critical Discourse Analysis unpacks linguistic impacts on social structures of identity, ideological differences, injustice, inequality, dominance and resistance and how these social structures impact discourse. In the data under investigation, issues of identity, ideological orientation, injustice, inequality, dominance and resistance are prevalent.

The conflict between Christians and Muslims in Nigeria and elsewhere arises from ideological differences. The author admits that the unwillingness on the part of adherence of the two religious groups to engage in interfaith dialogue has resulted in the unending religious conflict leading to loss of lives and destruction of properties. This religious conflict has further driven many into atheism.

Any individual or group that wishes to forge an enduring relationship with another individual or group and ensure peaceful coexistence must be willing to acknowledge their ideological, ethnic or religious differences and demonstrate mutual respect for one another.

To address this challenge, we must put religion on the background and make it a personal affair. Nigeria is a secular state that allows her citizens freedom of religion. Rather than trying to force our religious inclinations on others against the principles of fundamental human rights, citizens must learn to consider their religion as a private affair and not a medium of enslaving or dominating their neighbors. This way we will make our society better for all to live in irrespective of our ideological or religious differences.

Now the electioneering period is over, yet the insecurity, inequality and injustice which characterize the polity have persisted leading to disillusionment on the part of the citizenry. Cost of living in the country has multiplied and the situation seems to have degenerated. Insecurity has continued to fester and marginalization appears to be on the increase.

Government must take decisive actions to reverse this trend and restore the people's confidence by implementing policies and programmes that will change the fortunes of Nigerians and ensure the rule of law in justice delivery. In addition, the government should mandate security agencies to employ drastic measures to tackle insecurity in the country. They should seek the support of the international community to arrest the security situation which is obviously overwhelming.

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