Political Discourse, Emotional Intelligence and Linguistic Accommodation in Nigeria

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Abstract

This study examines political debates, interviews, campaign speeches and public statements involving five Nigerian presidential aspirants: Goodluck Ebele Jonathan, Muhammadu Buhari, Bola Ahmed Tinubu, Atiku Abubakar and Peter Obi. Drawing on Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT), it analyses 50 purposively selected speech extracts through five interpretive dimensions associated with emotional intelligence: self-awareness, self-regulation, social skills, empathy and motivation. The analysis treats these dimensions not as psychological traits that can be directly diagnosed from speech, but as interpretive categories through which audiences may evaluate the interactional work performed by public language. The distribution of extracts across the five categories shows: self-awareness (8), self-regulation (12), social skills (14), empathy (6) and motivation (10) while the illustrative extracts include self-presentation, personal attacks, claims about opponents, appeals to shared identity and narratives of perseverance. These patterns show how political utterances can invite evaluations of a speaker's composure, relational orientation and capacity to mobilise an audience. The study also identifies a methodological limitation in applying CAT: convergence and divergence require a relevant interactional or social reference point and cannot be inferred simply from whether an utterance is polite or hostile. The paper therefore proposes a cautious, discourse-based account of emotional-intelligence-related meanings in political communication, while recognising that speech analysis alone cannot establish a politician's underlying emotional-intelligence level.

Keywords: political discourse; emotional intelligence; Communication Accommodation Theory; linguistic pragmatics; Nigeria

1. Introduction

Political communication is not only a vehicle for presenting policies; it is also a site in which speakers construct public identities, position themselves in relation to opponents and invite audiences to make judgments about their character. In campaign speeches, interviews and debates, a politician's choice of words, response to criticism, treatment of interlocutors and framing of collective problems can influence how that politician is perceived. These practices make political discourse a productive site for examining the relationship between linguistic behaviour and the interpersonal meanings associated with emotional intelligence (EI hereafter).

EI has been discussed in relation to the recognition and management of emotion, interpersonal relationships, empathy and leadership (Mayer and Salovey 1993; Mayer, Salovey and Caruso 2004; Goleman 1995, 1998a). In leadership contexts, these capacities are commonly associated with managing conflict, communicating effectively and responding to other people's needs (Landry 2019; Valarmathi, Kiruthiga and Vinotha 2015). Yet a distinction is necessary between emotional intelligence as a psychological construct and the public display of behaviour that audiences may interpret as emotionally intelligent or unintelligent. Political discourse is strategic: candidates may rehearse, edit or adapt their words to suit a communicative purpose. A speech can, therefore, provide evidence of how a candidate presents a self or treats an opponent, but it cannot, on its own, establish the speaker's stable psychological disposition.

This distinction matters in Nigerian electoral politics, where public debate and campaigning often involve competing claims to competence, credibility, national belonging and the capacity to lead. Political actors may use self-disclosure, criticism, humour, accusations, appeals to shared hardship or promises of collective improvement to influence how they are evaluated. Such choices can be studied linguistically without assuming that a particular rhetorical style offers a transparent measure of the speaker's inner emotional state.

Adebomi (2025), for instance, focusing on the speeches of Bola Tinubu and Oby Ezekwesili, demonstrates that political discourse is strategically constructed through linguistic choices to project power, build ideological identity, navigate socio-political constraints, and self-express. Although the current study is not focused on stance, modality and self-expression, it argues that the lexical choices a political actor makes in delivering speeches can influence how they are perceived across the five components of emotional intelligence. The study uses qualitative close reading rather than focus on the grammatical choices of modal verbs to support the position that linguistic (and, by extension, emotional) tools are not neutral but are tailored to the speakers' distinct socio-political positioning in the Nigerian political landscape.

Research on the linguistic marking of emotional intensity have shown that formal choices can affect how hearers interpret affective force (Lacheret-Dujour et al., 2023). These studies do not equate linguistic evidence with stable psychological traits; rather, they give a careful account of how public utterances invite diverse evaluations. Rabiul et al. (2025), for instance, demonstrate that a leader's

motivating language builds psychological safety by generating vital psychological resources (relational and emotional energy), which can help buffer the resource-draining effects of customer incivility.

Research on EI has developed several models of its components, while research on political discourse has examined the linguistic construction of political identities and the management of relations between speakers and audiences. The present study brings these concerns together by examining how utterances in Nigerian political discourse may be interpreted through five EI-related dimensions: self-awareness, self-regulation, social skills, empathy and motivation. It uses Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT hereafter) as a sensitising framework for considering how speakers orient to audiences, opponents and the expectations of a communicative event.

The study is guided by three objectives: (1) to examine linguistic choices in selected public utterances by five Nigerian presidential aspirants; (2) to identify how these choices invite interpretations associated with the five EI-related dimensions; and (3) to consider the extent to which CAT helps explain the relational and identity work performed by those utterances. The study is thus an explicitly linguistic and interpretive account of public displays associated with EI, a critical discussion of the limits of CAT in political speech.

2. Conceptual and theoretical framework

2.1 Emotional intelligence as an interpretive construct

Salovey and Mayer's account of EI concerns the monitoring of one's own and others' feelings, discrimination between emotions and the use of emotional information to guide thought and action (as discussed in Colman 2008). Mayer, Roberts and Barsade (2008) similarly situate EI in the reasoning about emotion and the use of emotional knowledge. Goleman's popular model identifies self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy and social skills as central competencies (Goleman 1995, 1998b). Other accounts group or label these competencies differently, illustrating that EI is not a single, uncontested construct (Whetten and Cameron 2002).

For the present analysis, the five dimensions are used as interpretive categories rather than as a validated psychological scale. Self-awareness concerns the way a speaker represents personal limits, feelings, values or actions. Self-regulation concerns the public management of potentially disruptive responses, including the framing of disagreement and criticism. Social skills concern the management of relationships through communication, affiliation, listening, facework and audience engagement. Empathy concerns how a speaker acknowledges or represents the experiences and feelings of others. Motivation concerns the articulation of goals, perseverance and appeals intended to mobilise an audience. This distinction is consistent with work showing that linguistic form can cue the interpretation of affective intensity without providing a transparent measure of a speaker's enduring emotional capacities (Lacheret-Dujour et al., 2023).

These categories overlap in practice. A single utterance may, for example, present a speaker as personally resilient while also encouraging an audience to persevere. A criticism of an opponent may be designed to motivate supporters, even as its wording invites an interpretation of low relational sensitivity. Accordingly, the categories should not be treated as mutually exclusive psychological measurements. They are used here to organise the analysis of what public utterances do and how they may be evaluated.

2.2 Communication Accommodation Theory

Communication Accommodation Theory explains how speakers adjust, maintain or differentiate their communicative behaviour in relation to other participants and to social identities. Early formulations discuss convergence and divergence as ways in which speakers may orient to approval, communicative efficiency and identity management (Giles and Powesland 1975; Beebe and Giles 1984; Gallois and Giles 2015). Convergence refers broadly to movement toward another participant's communicative style or expectations, whereas divergence can mark or reinforce social difference. Accommodation may be partial: speakers can align with an interlocutor on one dimension while differentiating themselves on another (Bilous and Krauss 1988).

In political speech, the relevant other may be an interviewer, an opponent, a party constituency or a projected electorate. Accommodation therefore cannot be identified merely by labelling a courteous statement as convergent or an aggressive one as divergent. An analysis needs to specify the reference point against which a choice is understood as an adjustment, maintenance or differentiation. In the present study, CAT is used cautiously to ask how utterances orient to anticipated audience expectations, respond to a prior statement, or establish distance from an opponent. Where the available extract does not supply enough interactional context to identify such a relationship, the analysis describes the observable linguistic action without assigning a definitive accommodation label.

This qualification is important because

political statements are frequently edited, repeated or delivered to audiences that are not represented in the extract. This paper does not claim to measure accommodation quantitatively. Instead, it uses CAT to frame the relational work of selected utterances and to identify where further contextual evidence would be needed.

3. Method

The study adopts a qualitative, descriptive discourse-analytic design. The dataset comprises 50 purposively selected extracts from debates, interviews, campaign speeches and public statements associated with five Nigerian presidential aspirants: Goodluck Ebele Jonathan, Muhammadu Buhari, Bola Ahmed Tinubu, Atiku Abubakar and Peter Obi. These materials were collected through media monitoring from newspapers, YouTube videos and other internet sources, with a focus on electioneering and utterances concerning or responding to political opponents. Ten extracts were selected for each aspirant. For the illustrative analysis, the study presents four extracts per aspirant in principle, although the displayed examples are organised by EI-related category rather than by candidate.

The analysis assigns each extract to one primary category: self-awareness, self-regulation, social skills, empathy or motivation. Extracts are then interpreted as offering relatively stronger or weaker public evidence of the relevant communicative dimension. The analysis considers lexical choices, evaluative labels, claims about self and others, forms of address, rhetorical repetition, appeals to shared identity and the handling of disagreement as implied in the politicians' public linguistic performances, and the interpretations they invite. Where necessary, the date, venue, or surrounding interaction are provided for the analysed extract. This is in recognition of the essence of context in meaning construction. It must, however, be emphasized that the data are not used in this study to infer the stable personality traits of the candidates, or to rank their emotional intelligence. This is simply an excursion into how politicians' linguistic choices construct interpersonal meanings and public identities associated with emotional intelligence. Because the data are public political statements, the paper does not report direct recruitment of human participants. Nevertheless, attention is paid to source attribution, accurate transcription and appropriate contextualisation.

4. Results and discussion

Our analysis of the 50 extracts against the five analytical categories of EI yielded the following distribution: eight for self-awareness, twelve for self-regulation, fourteen for social skills, six for empathy and ten for motivation. These figures describe the distribution of selected examples across categories; they do not show the prevalence of EI in the five politicians or in Nigerian political discourse generally. The analysis below discusses selected illustrative extracts and interprets their linguistic and interactional functions.

Table 1. Distribution of Extracts along EI Components

Analytical category	Number of extracts	Percentage of 50
Self-awareness	8	16%
Self-regulation	12	24%
Social skills	14	28%
Empathy	6	12%
Motivation	10	20%
Total	50	100%

4.1 Self-awareness: Self-presentation and the management of accountability

Eight extracts were assigned to self-awareness based on the speakers' self-presentation and management of accountability. Three examples are used to illustrate these below:

Example	Extract	Source
1	"For me, since I started this political journey, my achievements and records have all been miraculous.… I can go on and on to tell you so many things that have happened in this journey that one can say is a miracle. And I am looking forward to the next miracle next year to complete the miraculous journey of my political life."	Peter Obi, responding to Atiku's statement that it would take a "miracle" for him (Peter Obi) to win the 2023 presidential election without a traditional grassroots structure (Channels' Television *Politics Today*, July, 2022).
2	"In presenting myself for service, I make no pretense that I have a magic wand that will solve all of Nigeria's problems or that I am the most intelligent Nigerian."	Goodluck Ebele Jonathan on September 15, 2010, in a landmark post on his official Facebook page to formally announce his candidacy for the 2011 Nigerian presidential election.
3	"I cannot change the past. But I can change the present and the future. I am a former military ruler and a converted democrat."	Muhammadu Buhari at the Chatham House think tank in London on February 26, 2015, addressing widespread public and international concern over his human rights record as a military ruler

These extracts construct different versions of a political self. Example 1 uses the repeated lexical item "miracle" to frame the speaker's political trajectory as exceptional and to project confidence about the future. This repetition may be interpreted as strategic self-presentation; however, it does not independently demonstrate accurate awareness of one's emotions. However, from a CAT-perspective, 'my achievements and records have all been miraculous" in response to "it would take a "miracle" for Peter Obi to win the 2023 presidential election without a traditional grassroots structure" tilts towards convergence as the responder tactically aligns with the speaker rather than launch a counter attack.

Example 2 uses the disclaimer "I make no pretense" and the metaphor "a magic wand" to acknowledge limits while presenting the speaker as realistic rather than omnipotent. Given the background of having ascended to the office of President at the demise of the earlier president whom he deputized, this subtle and cautious presentation is politically-calculated to create the impression of a servant-leader as against a power-monger. This disposition may align with an audience expectation that a candidate acknowledge the scale of national problems and, as such, may be considered convergent.

While the above extracts perform public accountability and identity work, Example 3 specifically acknowledges a contested past before shifting to the contrast between "the past" and "the present and the future." The conjunction "but" marks a turn from admission to prospective agency. Faced with strong evidence of his human rights record as a military ruler between 1983 and 1985, particularly the promulgation of Decree 4 (which suppressed free speech), and high disregard for judicial due process; the speaker combines concession with an attempt to reframe his biography.

4.2 Self-regulation: Attack, repetition and controlled self-assertion

Twelve extracts were assigned to self -regulation on the basis of perceived attack on opponents and (un)controlled self assertion. Several examples in this category rely on direct accusation, derogatory naming, or adversarial evaluation as in the examples below:

Example	Extract	Source
4	"My people, you cannot entrust your future or that of our nation to Mr. Sell Everything Atiku or Mr. Stingy Obi."	Bola Ahmed Tinubu on January 7, 2023, during his campaign rally at Democracy Park in Akure, Ondo State, ahead of the 2023 Nigerian general election
5	"President Buhari has stolen your jobs. He has stolen your rights. Don't let him steal your votes."	Atiku Abubakar, the presidential candidate of the People's Democratic Party (PDP), during an interactive session with youth groups, social media influencers, and bloggers in Abuja in January 2019, ahead of the general elections.
6	"He doesn't want to do the brave and hard work required to build a better nation, instead, he would rather sell your birthright to the highest bidder and run off with the proceeds."	Bola Ahmed Tinubu criticizing Atiku Abubakar ahead of the 2023 general elections on January 7, 2023 at APC Presidential Campaign Rally in Akure, Ondo State.
7	"It is nobody's turn for the position. Nobody is more qualified for the nation's presidency than me. I am a proud Igbo man who believes in the oneness of Nigeria."	Peter Obi during a campaign rally in Abeokuta, Ogun State, as a direct counterresponse to Bola Ahmed Tinubu's famous *"Emi Lokan"* ("It is my turn") speech.

Example 4 replaces opponents' names with the evaluative labels "Sell Everything" and "Stingy." These labels compress a political argument into memorable character judgements. The speaker makes a calculated attempt to present himself as the ideal candidate while blatantly presenting his opponents as extremist – "Sell Everything" and "Stingy". Bola Ahmed Tinubu uses these words to persuade his listeners' that neither Atiku Abubakar, whom he had inadvertently accused of financial impropriety, nor Peter Obi, whom he adjudged miserly, was good enough for the office of President.

In Example 5, repetition of "stolen" and the imperative "Don't let him steal your votes" creates a lexical chain linking alleged past harms with a possible future electoral threat. Atiku, like the speaker in Example 4, chooses these derogatory terms to appeal to the consciousness of the youth, many of whom have suffered untold hardship under the incumbent. The harsh economic realities were, therefore, interpreted as the incumbent having

"stolen" their jobs and rights, with plans to "steal" their votes. Example 6, from Bola Ahmed Tinubu, extends this adversarial framing through the metaphor of selling a "birthright" and escaping with the proceeds. Such choices, obviously, while having the tendency to intensify alignment with supporters, may construct opponents as morally untrustworthy, hence their treatment under self-regulation. The extract reinforces the "Sell Everything" name tag given to the same opponent in Example 4.

Example 7, however, offers a different strategy. The repeated negative construction "nobody's turn" rejects entitlement based on rotation or succession, after which the speaker asserts personal qualification and invokes an inclusive national identity. This is self-assertive and politically strategic. While we acknowledge that the wording of this example alone does not establish emotional control as an internal capacity, we appreciate the speaker's approach to rhetorical management of conflict. Contrary to the derogatory labelling and accusation observed in Examples 4, 5 and 6, he embraces self-presentation through claims of qualification and national unity.

4.3 Social skills: Audience alignment and relational positioning

Fourteen extracts were assigned to social skills, mostly demonstrating audience alignment or relational positioning. The examples below illustrate how politicians construct relations hips with their audiences and opponents, akin to demonstrating their social skills.

Example	Extract	Source
8	"We can't allow this gangsterism to continue, Nigerians should take back their country. Seventy percent of those who are in politics today should not have any reason to be there. I have said it, politics in Nigeria is a case where lunatics have taken over the asylum."	Peter Obi on June 19, 2022, while speaking at the Men of Valour Conference in Abuja; addressing the level of systemic financial corruption and bad leadership in the country
9	"Nigeria under Buhari is now the world headquarters for extreme poverty. If we are to change that, we must empower women and youths."	Atiku Abubakar on his verified Twitter (now X) handle, on October 17, 2018
10	"APC promised security. Is there security now? APC promised to create jobs. Are there jobs now? APC also promised to revive the economy. Is the economy better now? Today, you are poorer; there is hunger everywhere, and insecurity everywhere. … these people have destroyed everything. Don't let them take us backward; don't vote for APC."	Atiku Abubakar on February 6, 2019, during a PDP presidential campaign rally held in Damaturu, Yobe State
11	"Whenever I hear of no structure, my answer to it is simple; the 100 million Nigerians that live in poverty will be the structure. The 35 million Nigerians who don't know where their next meal will come from will be the structure."	Peter Obi on June 11, 2022, responding to the claims by the two dominant political parties that his party lacked the nationwide political "structure" required to win a Nigerian election

Example 8 combines the collective imperative "Nigerians should take back their country" with the metaphors "gangsterism" and "lunatics have taken over the asylum." The utterance positions the speaker, Peter Obi, and his audience on one side of a moral boundary while discrediting a broad group of political actors. The name-calling and derogatory analogy between the leaders and gangsters, on the one hand, and lunatics, on the other, warrants the analysis under social skills. This can be likened to Example 9 where Atiku Abubakar uses the superlative formulation "world headquarters for extreme poverty," a strong evaluative claim, to intensify the criticism of the incumbent administration.

In Example 10, Atiku Abubakar uses a sequence of rhetorical questions followed by a shift to declarative accusation and an electoral imperative to persuade his audience that the incumbent government has not lived up to its campaign promises. The repeated question structure invites the audience to supply an answer before the speaker states a negative evaluation. Example 11, alternatively, responds to the criticism that a candidate lacks political "structure" by redefining the term through a numerical appeal to Nigerians living in poverty. The repeated phrase "will be the structure" was used by Peter Obi to recast a perceived organisational weakness as a claim to popular legitimacy. This move avoids a direct

personal insult and builds an imagined relationship between the candidate and citizens who experience economic hardship. We, therefore, analyse the contrast as different forms of audience alignment and opponent positioning rather than assume that an utterance directly measures the speaker's social competence.

These examples reveal that antagonistic language is not automatically evidence of low social skills, just as inclusive language is not necessarily proof of high social skills. Political criticism may actually be strategically appropriate in a given context. The analysis has, therefore, considered the target, genre, preceding turn, evidential support and likely audience of each statement before making an evaluative judgement.

4.4 Empathy: Representing hardship and evaluating opponents

Six extracts were assigned to empathy, reflecting the speakers' representation of hardship on behalf of the audience or evaluation of other participants. Three examples are presented below:

Example	Extract	Source
12	"If not for me that led the war front, Buhari wouldn't have emerged. He contested first, second and third times, but lost. He even said on television that he won't contest again."	Bola Ahmed Tinubu while addressing the delegates of the All Progressives Congress (APC) at the Presidential Lodge in Abeokuta, Ogun State on June 2, 2022; recounting his pivotal political contributions to show why he deserved the nomination
13	"You cannot be talking of 2023 without first halting the rate of retrogression and degeneration witnessed under the APC government. If in less than four years of APC, the North-East cannot be talking of economic development, security or stability and the government cannot guarantee lives and property in the North-West, while the North Central has become a killing field, what will be left of the south of Nigeria if the APC is allowed to continue in office?"	Atiku Abubakar on January 14, 2019 in an official press statement: a direct rebuttal to the All Progressives Congress (APC) Women and Youth Presidential Campaign Organisation.
14	"Mr Stingy refused to use the state's money to help its people. He sacrificed your welfare and wellbeing so that he can boast that he saved money. But what good is saving money if you refuse to save your own people?"	Bola Ahmed Tinubu with r eference to Peter Obi on January 31, 2023, during an APC Presidential Campaign Rally held at the Ekwueme Square in Awka, Anambra State

Example 12 foregrounds the speaker's role in the incumbent's emergence and recounts the incumbent's earlier electoral defeats. Bola Ahmed Tinubu constructs a hierarchy of his political contribution and achievement here, having played a strategic role in the alliance which saw to the defeat of the earlier PDP-led government and the emergence of Muhammadu Buhari who had lost elections thrice. Tinubu foregrounds his contribution to justify his claim to the presidential seat. This is analysed under empathy considering the interactional context and the expectations governing the exchange.

In Example 13, Atiku Abubakar uses "retrogression," "degeneration" and "a killing field" to frame the incumbent administration's record as a crisis affecting different regions. Such language can be read as an attempt to evoke concern for citizens, even as it attacks the government. This illustrates why empathy cannot be inferred solely from whether a statement is favourable or unfavourable to an opponent: the represented object of concern may be the electorate rather than the political target. Considering the opposing viewpoints, the extract is analysed under empathy. In Example 14, Bola Ahmed Tinubu once again uses the label "Mr Stingy" to describe Peter Obi and contrasts saving money with saving people. The rhetorical question turns fiscal restraint into a moral issue and frames the opponent as indifferent to public welfare. Like the previous example, we try to distinguish the interpersonal face-threat directed at the "Mr Stingy" opponent here from the implied empathy toward the broader public since these orientations can coexist in one utterance. Consequently, the six extracts show how political speakers allocate sympathy, blame and moral attention, but they do not establish the speakers' general capacity to understand other people's emotions.

Example 15 builds a narrative of perseverance through repeated descriptions of material hardship, each followed by the refrain "but I never lost hope" or "I never despaired." In this extract, Goodluck Ebele Jonathan uses the repeated contrast to create a temporal movement from deprivation to achievement, and invites the audience to interpret his life as evidence of resilience. This is interpreted as indirectly motivate the audience to aspire to greatness despite whatever current challenges they face. Example 16 shifts the focus from the speaker to the electorate, urging them to investigate the histories and stewardship of political candidates. Here, Peter Obi uses two rhetorical questions to frame voter scrutiny as a civic responsibility.

In Example 17, Goodluck Ebele Jonathan uses parallel antitheses - "ideas, not … calumny" and "love, not hate" - to establish a positive campaign identity. The choice of these words creates the impression of an issue-centered campaign, different from people-centered extracts analysed earlier. The repeated "I have come" creates a ceremonial, mission-oriented rhythm, while "we share a common destiny" invokes collective affiliation.

Example 18 links electoral choice to the prevention of a return to military rule. Coming from an ex-military Head of State, "there won't be any need for the military regime" implies that the electorate's preference lies with civilian government, and the speaker, as a "converted democrat" (Example 3) appreciates this fact The examples, therefore, illustrate two related but distinct discursive functions: projecting personal resilience and mobilising an audience around a shared future. They support an analysis of motivational rhetoric, in which speakers project determination and inspire action.

Our distribution above places the largest number of extracts in the social-skills category (14; 28%) and the smallest in empathy (6; 12%). These proportions do not necessarily indicate how frequently the politicians possess or lack a psychological trait; they simply represent the interpretations that can be read into the speeches. Likewise, they are not to be treated as an objective ranking of the five individuals.

Across the examples, several recurring linguistic practices are visible: evaluative naming of opponents; repetition that intensifies accusation or commitment; rhetorical questions that recruit audience participation; disclaimers and concessions that manage a candidate's public image; narratives of personal perseverance; and appeals to collective identity. These practices are relevant to EI because they invite audience inferences about composure, sensitivity, relational orientation and motivation. Their meanings, however, depend on context, genre, political strategy and the interests of the audience being addressed.

CAT offers a useful but limited account of these data. The examples show speakers aligning with projected public concerns, rejecting opponents' characterisations, and establishing social distance through lexical choices. Yet CAT's technical terms are tactically reserved for cases where an interactional baseline can be demonstrated. For instance, we do not interpret a speaker's insult as proof of divergence by itself; neither do we treat a conciliatory statement as proof of convergence. Alternatively, there is an attempt to pair each extract with the prior turn, audience design or communicative norm against which accommodation is claimed. In the absence of such evidence, concepts such as stance, evaluation, facework, identity construction and audience alignment are used to describe the linguistic work more precisely. This contextual emphasis shows the value of examining lexical patterning in political texts alongside the social and temporal contexts in which those texts circulate as in Tay (2021).

The focus is, therefore, not to diagnose the actual EI of Nigerian politicians. It is to show how public language provides resources through which speakers perform leadership identities and through which audiences may infer emotional dispositions. This distinction thus combines discourse analysis with audience reception research or validated psychological measures.

5. Conclusion

This study examined 50 purposively selected extracts from political debates, interviews, campaign speeches and public statements involving five Nigerian presidential aspirants. Organised through five EI-related dimensions, the analysis identified discursive practices including self-presentational disclaimers, derogatory labels, repeated accusations, rhetorical questions, appeals to shared identity and narratives of perseverance. These choices construct public versions of the speaker and opponent, organise relationships with projected audiences and invite interpretations associated with composure, empathy, social orientation and motivation.

The findings were not be read as direct measurements of the politicians' emotional intelligence since, though linguistic evidence can support an account of public self-presentation and interactional positioning, stable psychological traits often require evidence beyond selected speech extracts. Consequently, it was noted that the same

utterance could perform more than one function: a statement can attack an opponent while invoking concern for citizens, or project personal resilience while motivating an audience. These overlaps caution against treating the five categories of EI analysed as mutually exclusive.

The study also demonstrates the need for more explicit operationalisation when CAT is applied to political discourse. Claims about convergence and divergence are only possible when the relevant interlocutor, prior turn, audience expectation or social norm can be identified. The study has thus shown that linguistic analysis can illuminate how emotional-intelligence-related meanings are constructed and evaluated in public political communication without confusing discourse performance with psychological diagnosis.

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