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## Contextual Use of English in Nigerian Motivational Discourse: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Selected Speeches

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### Abstract

*This study examines the contextual use of English in Nigerian secular motivational discourse through a Critical Discourse Analysis of selected speeches by Fela Durotoye and Sam Adeyemi. It investigates how linguistic and rhetorical resources are deployed to construct leadership, responsibility, and social change within Nigeria's socio-cultural setting. Drawing on Fairclough's three-dimensional model, the analysis focuses on metaphor, pronoun use, imperatives, narrative structuring, and evaluative language across six speeches delivered between 2015 and 2023. The findings show that motivational discourse in Nigeria relies on patterned linguistic choices that frame empowerment largely in terms of personal agency, discipline, and preparedness, while minimising structural explanations of social problems. Durotoye's discourse foregrounds civic responsibility and collective effort, whereas Adeyemi's speeches emphasise moral obligation and purposeful self-development. The study demonstrates that Nigerian motivational speaking is an ideologically active genre in which English is adapted to local realities to promote specific views of leadership, citizenship, and national progress, thereby extending discourse-analytic research beyond political and religious texts to contemporary secular persuasion.*

**Keywords:** Critical Discourse Analysis; Leadership discourse; Motivational discourse; Nigerian English; Persuasion

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### 1. Introduction

English, as a global lingua franca, functions not only as a medium of communication but also as a strategic resource for persuasion and social influence. Its role in public discourse is evident in motivational

speaking, where speakers deploy carefully selected linguistic and rhetorical choices to inspire, mobilise, and reshape audience attitudes. In recent years, motivational speaking has expanded beyond traditional oratory into books, seminars, digital media, and

public forums, making it a significant genre of contemporary discourse.

Motivational discourse is characteristically persuasive, drawing on rhetorical devices such as metaphor, narrative, repetition, and emotional appeal to stimulate commitment and action. Globally recognised figures have demonstrated how credibility and emotional engagement can be combined to foster resilience and self-belief among audiences. This global development has stimulated scholarly interest in the linguistic and rhetorical mechanisms through which motivation is communicated.

In Nigeria, motivational speaking has gained prominence as a response to socio-economic challenges, leadership deficits, and youth disenchantment. Speakers such as Fela Durotoye and Sam Adeyemi have emerged as influential voices, addressing themes of leadership, personal growth, national development, and social responsibility. Their speeches reveal deliberate adaptation of English to local realities, values, and expectations, allowing them to connect with diverse Nigerian audiences. While Adeyemi often blends motivational discourse with leadership and moral instruction, Durotoye foregrounds civic responsibility, national renewal, and youth engagement.

Despite the visibility and influence of these speakers, academic attention to the linguistic features of Nigerian secular motivational discourse

remains limited. Existing Nigerian studies have largely examined religious preaching or political rhetoric (Adegbija, 1999; Odebunmi, 2006), leaving secular motivational speaking underexplored. Where motivational discourse has been studied, emphasis has often been placed on psychological or sociological outcomes rather than on language use itself. Consequently, little is known about how Nigerian motivational speakers employ English to construct meaning, evoke emotion, and promote ideals of empowerment and transformation within specific socio-cultural contexts.

This study addresses this gap by analysing selected motivational speeches of Fela Durotoye and Sam Adeyemi, focusing on their rhetorical and linguistic strategies. It examines how metaphors, storytelling, and emotional appeals are used, how language reflects Nigerian socio-political realities, and how strategic linguistic choices shape audience perceptions and aspirations. By foregrounding language as a central analytical concern, the study aims to contribute to scholarship on discourse, rhetoric, and communication, and to extend research on motivational speaking within the Nigerian context. It therefore investigates the role of language in shaping motivational discourse, with implications for communication studies, linguistics, and leadership development.



### ***1.1 Profile of the Motivational Speakers***

Fela Durotoye is a renowned Nigerian leadership expert, motivational speaker, business consultant, and social entrepreneur. He was born on 12 May 1971 in Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria. He studied Computer Science and Economics at the Obafemi Awolowo University before pursuing professional training in leadership and management. He is the founder of the Gemstone Nation Builders Foundation, an organisation dedicated to raising responsible and transformational leaders. Through his speeches, books, and leadership programmes, Fela Durotoye inspires Nigerians, especially young people, to embrace integrity, excellence, patriotism, and purposeful living. He is widely recognised as one of Africa's leading motivational speakers and leadership advocates.

Sam Adeyemi is a Nigerian motivational speaker, leadership coach, author, and pastor known for his impactful teachings on leadership and personal development. He was born on 3 February 1967 in Kogi State, Nigeria. He holds a degree in Civil Engineering from the Kwara State Polytechnic and later obtained advanced training in leadership and strategic management. He is the founder of Success Power International and the Senior Pastor of Daystar Christian Centre. Through his books, seminars, television broadcasts, and leadership programmes, Sam Adeyemi has

mentored thousands of individuals across Africa and beyond, encouraging them to develop their potential, lead with vision, and contribute positively to society.

## **2. Literature Review**

Motivational speaking has attracted scholarly attention as a form of persuasive public discourse that seeks to influence beliefs, attitudes, and behaviour through strategic language use. Early rhetorical studies trace motivational discourse to classical persuasion, particularly Aristotle's emphasis on ethos, pathos, and logos as fundamental means of influencing audiences (Aristotle, trans. 2007). These principles remain relevant in contemporary motivational speaking, where speakers establish credibility, appeal to emotions, and present ideas as reasonable and achievable.

Subsequent discourse-oriented studies argue that motivation is not only psychological but also linguistically constructed. Fairclough (1995) maintains that discourse is a form of social action through which speakers shape social reality. In this sense, motivational speeches function as sites where speakers construct optimism, resilience, and agency through carefully selected linguistic forms. Charteris-Black (2011) observes that persuasive speakers often rely on metaphor to reframe challenges as opportunities, arguing that metaphor allows speakers to recast experience in ways that foster commitment and sustained action.

Studies on motivational discourse in Western contexts show that narrative plays a central role in persuasion. Labov (1972) explains that personal stories allow speakers to project authenticity and align themselves with audience experience. In motivational speeches, such narratives often follow a struggle-success pattern, presenting the speaker as evidence that transformation is possible. As Bamberg (2004) argues, narratives are powerful because they position both speaker and audience within shared moral and social frameworks.

In African and Nigerian discourse studies, research has focused more extensively on political and religious communication than on secular motivational speaking. Scholars such as Odebunmi (2006) and Taiwo (2007) demonstrate how Nigerian speakers adapt English to local socio-cultural realities, blending global linguistic resources with indigenous values and concerns. These studies show that Nigerian English discourse is highly context-sensitive, often reflecting collective aspirations, moral responsibilities, and social struggles.

Research on Nigerian religious discourse reveals that persuasive language frequently combines moral instruction with emotional appeal. Adebija (1999) notes that religious speakers often use repetition, inclusive pronouns, and evaluative language to create solidarity and authority. While these findings are useful, secular motivational discourse differs in orientation, as it

foregrounds personal agency, leadership development, and national responsibility without direct reliance on religious authority.

Few studies have examined Nigerian secular motivational speakers from a linguistic perspective. Olawale (2017) and Okoro (2018) touch on motivational elements in public speaking but do not provide sustained analysis of language structure or rhetorical patterning. This creates a gap in understanding how figures such as Fela Durotoye and Sam Adeyemi use English to frame empowerment, leadership, and transformation within Nigeria's socio-economic context.

This study responds to that gap by analysing the linguistic and rhetorical strategies in selected motivational speeches of Durotoye and Adeyemi. It focuses on how metaphor, storytelling, and emotional appeal are deployed to construct persuasive messages that resonate with Nigerian audiences. By foregrounding language, the study contributes to discourse studies and applied linguistics, extending existing work on persuasion beyond political and religious domains.

### 3. Theoretical Framework

The study is anchored in Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which views language as a socially situated practice rather than a neutral medium of communication. According to Fairclough (1995), discourse both shapes and is shaped

by social structures, making it a suitable framework for examining motivational speaking, where language is explicitly used to influence thought and action.

The analysis adopts Fairclough's three-dimensional model, which examines discourse at the levels of text, discursive practice, and social practice. At the textual level, attention is given to lexical choices, metaphors, modality, pronouns, and narrative patterns in the speeches. These features are examined for how they construct authority, optimism, responsibility, and collective identity. As Halliday (1994) argues, linguistic choices are functional and reflect the meanings speakers seek to foreground.

At the level of discursive practice, the study considers how motivational speeches are produced and consumed within the genre of motivational speaking. This includes speaker self-presentation, audience engagement strategies, and recurring rhetorical patterns. Wodak (2001) notes that genre conventions play a significant role in shaping how discourse is interpreted and legitimised.

At the level of social practice, the study links linguistic patterns to broader Nigerian realities such as youth unemployment, leadership challenges, and national aspiration. Van Dijk (2008) emphasises that discourse is a key site for the reproduction of ideology, as speakers promote particular ways of seeing the world through language.

In motivational discourse, such ideologies often centre on self-reliance, leadership responsibility, and collective progress.

By integrating CDA with rhetorical perspectives on persuasion, the framework allows for a systematic examination of motivational discourse as both linguistic form and social action. This approach ensures that the speeches of Durotoye and Adeyemi are analysed not merely as inspirational texts, but as structured discourse through which specific social meanings and values are promoted.

#### **4. Methodology**

This study adopts a qualitative discourse-analytic design to examine the contextual use of English in Nigerian motivational discourse. The data consist of six purposively selected motivational speeches delivered by Fela Durotoye and Sam Adeyemi between 2015 and 2023. The speeches were selected based on thematic relevance to leadership, personal development, and national transformation, as well as their popularity and public accessibility.

The speeches analysed include Fela Durotoye's "You Are the Leader Nigeria Needs" (2017), "Building Capacity Before Opportunity" (2019), and "The Responsibility of a New Generation" (2022), alongside Sam Adeyemi's "Discovering Purpose" (2016), "Leading from Within" (2018), and "Raising Leaders of Influence" (2021). These speeches were delivered at leadership

conferences, youth empowerment forums, and national development programmes, targeting predominantly Nigerian audiences. The video and audio recordings of the six speeches were obtained from publicly accessible sources, including the speakers' official YouTube channels and recordings hosted by their affiliated organisations, the Gemstone Nation Builders Foundation and Success Power International/Daystar Christian Centre, respectively.

The study is anchored on Critical Discourse Analysis, drawing on Fairclough's three-dimensional model. At the textual level, analysis focuses on lexical choices, metaphor, pronoun use, modality, imperatives, and narrative structures. At the level of discursive practice, attention is given to genre conventions of motivational speaking, speaker self-positioning, and audience engagement strategies. At the social practice level, the linguistic patterns are interpreted in relation to Nigerian socio-economic realities, particularly youth aspiration, leadership deficit, and narratives of national renewal.

All speeches were transcribed verbatim from the audio and video recordings. The data were analysed comparatively to identify recurring and divergent linguistic patterns across the two speakers. This systematic procedure ensures analytical rigour, transparency, and replicability, while allowing context-sensitive interpretation of Nigerian motivational discourse.

## 5. Data Analysis and Discussion

This section analyses the motivational discourse of Fela Durotoye and Sam Adeyemi with attention to how English is contextually shaped to construct leadership, responsibility, and social change within the Nigerian setting. Following Fairclough's three-dimensional model, the discussion is organised into the textual, discursive practice, and social practice levels, each examined in turn below.

### 5.1 Textual Level

A dominant feature across the speeches is the strategic use of metaphor to organise abstract ideas such as leadership, success, and national development. Durotoye consistently relies on journey and construction metaphors, which foreground continuity, effort, and agency. In one address, he asserts: "Leadership is not a position you occupy; it is a journey you commit to every single day." The lexical contrast between position and journey rejects static authority and replaces it with sustained action. This metaphor frames leadership as earned rather than granted, implicitly aligning with meritocratic ideals that resonate strongly with Nigerian youth audiences facing limited institutional access.

Similarly, Durotoye's frequent use of building metaphors reinforces gradual progress and collective labour. Statements such as "Nations are built by prepared people, not by prayers alone" juxtapose spirituality with action. While not dismissing

religious belief, the utterance reorders priority by placing preparation before faith. This linguistic move subtly negotiates Nigeria's religious environment while advancing a civic ideology grounded in competence and responsibility.

Adeyemi's metaphorical patterns differ in orientation but are equally systematic. His discourse draws heavily on purpose and design metaphors, often invoking creation and destiny. For example, he states: "You were not created to survive life; you were designed to lead it." The paired verbs created and designed suggest intentionality and obligation. Leadership here is framed not as choice but as fulfilment of purpose. This construction places moral pressure on the audience, making personal stagnation appear as deviation from an assigned path.

Pronoun use further reveals how persuasion is managed. Durotoye's heavy reliance on inclusive pronouns constructs collective accountability. Utterances such as "We cannot keep blaming the system when we refuse to upgrade ourselves" distribute responsibility across speaker and audience. The pronoun "we" dissolves distance and creates shared culpability. This strategy also mitigates resistance, as criticism is framed as collective self-reflection rather than external judgement.

Adeyemi, by contrast, alternates sharply between inclusive and direct address. Consider the sequence: "We

rise as a nation when you rise as a person. Nobody fixes society without fixing himself first." The initial "we" establishes a common ground, while the shift to "you" personalises obligation. This movement between collective and individual address allows Adeyemi to connect national progress directly to private moral discipline.

Imperative structures are pervasive and function as overt motivational triggers. Commands such as "Take responsibility for your life," "Stop outsourcing your destiny," and "Build capacity before demanding opportunity" recur across speeches. These imperatives are not softened by modal verbs, which increases their force. Although framed as encouragement, they position the speaker as an authority figure prescribing acceptable conduct. The audience is guided toward specific behavioural norms presented as self-evident solutions.

Narrative is another critical resource. Both speakers employ short autobiographical or experiential narratives to legitimise their authority. Durotoye recounts failure as a formative experience: "I failed early, but failure did not finish me; it trained me." The parallel clause structure reverses the evaluative weight of failure, transforming it into a developmental tool. This pattern reinforces resilience as a moral virtue rather than a circumstantial outcome.

Adeyemi's narratives often invoke delayed success: "There were years

nothing moved, but I kept showing up because consistency is louder than talent.” The comparison between consistency and talent challenges dominant success myths and appeals to audiences navigating prolonged uncertainty. Such narratives are effective because they mirror common Nigerian experiences of delayed reward.

### ***5.2 Discursive Practice Level***

At the level of discursive practice, both speakers draw on the recognisable conventions of the motivational-speaking genre. The speeches follow a recurrent structure: identification of a social or personal problem, attribution of responsibility to the individual, and projection of a desirable future. This sequencing recurs across all six speeches and enables audiences to anticipate and align with the trajectory of the message, a hallmark of genre-conventional persuasive discourse.

Genre conventions are also visible in how authority is constructed. Rather than invoking institutional titles, the speakers rely on confident assertion, moral certainty, and repetition of core themes, a self-positioning strategy typical of the motivational-speaking genre, where credibility rests on personal testimony rather than professional credentialism. The autobiographical narratives discussed above, for instance Durotoye's account of early failure and Adeyemi's account of delayed success, function within this genre as the primary device through which

speakers substantiate authority in the absence of institutional office; their recurrence across both speakers' corpora confirms narrative as a defining structural convention of the genre rather than an incidental stylistic choice.

Audience engagement is likewise achieved through genre-specific address patterns. Durotoye's imperatives (“Take responsibility for your life,” “Stop outsourcing your destiny”) and Adeyemi's alternation between inclusive and direct address (“We rise as a nation when you rise as a person”) position the audience as active participants in the discourse rather than passive listeners, consistent with the participatory ethos expected of the genre. This is a discursive practice distinct from, say, formal political oratory, in which audience address is typically more institutionally mediated.

### ***5.3 Social Practice Level***

At the level of social practice, these linguistic patterns connect to the broader Nigerian realities identified in the Introduction and Theoretical Framework: youth unemployment, leadership deficits, and the search for national renewal. By repeatedly foregrounding personal responsibility, self-discipline, and leadership readiness, the discourse frames these structural challenges as solvable largely through individual transformation. While empowering at the symbolic level, this orientation also limits structural critique by relocating systemic issues into the

moral domain of personal effort. The absence of explicit references to political or institutional accountability is itself significant, as silence functions discursively to normalise individualised solutions over collective or policy-level remedies.

The analysis as a whole shows that the motivational discourse of Durotoye and Adeyemi is strategically crafted and ideologically loaded across all three levels of Fairclough's model. Through metaphor, pronoun manipulation, imperatives, and narrative framing at the textual level, genre-conventional structuring and audience address at the discursive level, and the relocation of structural problems into individual responsibility at the social level, English is adapted to resonate with Nigerian realities while promoting particular views of leadership, success, and citizenship. The speeches do not merely inspire; they shape how audiences are encouraged to interpret responsibility, failure, and national progress.

## 6. Conclusion

This study set out to examine how English is contextually deployed in Nigerian secular motivational discourse, using Fairclough's three-dimensional model to analyse six speeches by Fela Durotoye and Sam Adeyemi. The analysis has shown that motivational speaking in Nigeria is not spontaneous inspirational talk but a deliberate and patterned use of

language for persuasion, identity construction, and social orientation. At the textual level, metaphor, pronoun choice, imperative structure, and narrative combine to frame leadership as either continuous civic labour, in Durotoye's case, or the fulfilment of personal destiny, in Adeyemi's. At the discursive level, both speakers draw on recognisable genre conventions, including problem-responsibility-future sequencing, testimony-based authority, and direct audience address, that are characteristic of motivational speaking as a genre. At the social level, these choices relocate structural problems such as youth unemployment and leadership deficit into the domain of individual effort, offering symbolic empowerment while leaving little room for institutional critique.

By extending Critical Discourse Analysis to secular motivational speaking, a genre previously overshadowed in Nigerian scholarship by political and religious discourse, this study contributes a linguistically grounded account of how English is adapted to construct leadership, responsibility, and national progress in a distinctly Nigerian idiom. The study is limited by its focus on two speakers and six speeches, and by its reliance on publicly accessible recordings rather than a larger representative corpus; the findings should therefore be read as indicative rather than generalisable across the wider genre. Future research may extend this analysis to multilingual motivational



discourse, digital motivational platforms, or audience reception studies, to further illuminate how motivational language shapes belief, action, and social orientation in evolving Nigerian contexts.

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### **Bio Data**

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