

POLITICS AND POLITICIANS FOR SALE:  
AN EXAMINATION OF ADVERTISING ENGLISH IN  
NIGERIA'S POLITICAL TRANSITION PROGRAMME<sup>1</sup>

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Introduction<sup>2</sup>

Advertisements or ads are certainly not short of definitions, although the language of advertising seems to have received little attention from linguists in the past. Many descriptions take a utilitarian view of advertising and as Bell's (1991) does, as functioning 'to persuade, challenge, seize audience's attention, tell an anecdote ...' or what shows distinctiveness in products (Harris — Seldon 1962: 236).

There are, of course, definitions of ads that have examined their effects on people and the society in general, i.e. definitions that are psycho-sociological in perspective. For example, Hogarth (1965) simply dismisses ads as forms of emotional blackmail and exploitation while O'Donnell and Todd (1980: 104) assert that they appeal to our greed and fear. Vestergaard and Schroder (1985) see ads as society's mirror, or the psychological temperature of a society. Such is the impact of ads that Collum (1989: 32) describes ads as "the strongest, most concentrated, and most conscious form of meaning-making to which Americans are exposed". It is not surprising, therefore, that Lund (1947: 83) rightly points out that an adman's tasks are many: attracting attention, arousing interest, stimulating desire, creating conviction, and getting action. These utilitarian definitions should, how-

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ever, not be seen as relegating linguistic or pseudo-linguistic descriptions to the background, for as Leech (1966: 66) has argued, advertising is a "sub-literary" genre. Besides, he adds (1966: 25) that its functional scope is very wide and, perhaps, vague, shading into 'neighboring areas as public announcements, public relations and public polemics'.

The identification of the various types of advertising is also an indirect way of defining ads. For example, a criterion based on technique may be used to classify ads into hard sell (based on direct approach) and soft sell (based on indirect exhortation), or to distinguish informative from competitive/persuasive advertising. Besides, Bell (1991) observes that in press advertising we may distinguish display advertising from classifieds. A definition based on the profit-motif or the nature of income may encourage the distinction between commercial and non-commercial advertising as Vestergaard and Schroder (1985) have pointed out. Indeed, the existence of non-commercial ads is thrown into greater relief by Cook's (1992: 5) observation that some discourses perceived as ads do not sell anything but merely "plead or warn or seek support" as in the case of ads urging citizens to support a particular government policy. Cook's categorisation of ads by medium, product (service), technique and consumer is, in this respect, very instructive.

### 1. Previous research

The fact that until recently, (about the last fifteen years) advertising language had received little research attention compelled Garfinkel to complain about the paucity of such research in 1978. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that he could review only two major previous works — Leech (1966) and Langendoen

(1970) — in the introductory chapter of his study of the problem of truth and the internal structure of advertising as discourse from a sociolinguistic point of view. Besides, Leech's early study confined itself to an examination of the type of language advertisers of consumer products use in Britain, thus leaving out an equally important description of ads as discourse.

Some other studies include those of O'Barr (1979) and Bolinger (1980) both of which examine the persuasive import in advertising language, and Geis (1982) which goes beyond a mere linguistic characterisation of the features of the language of ads and examines how some frequently-used linguistic devices, e.g. "strong sounding but logically weak or empirically indeterminate language" used in interesting and problematic ways, contribute to the consumers' understanding of the language of television advertising in the US. Geis identifies two facts crucial to the understanding of advertising: the fact that advertisers want to make the strongest possible claim for their products (a motivation for very strong claims) and the fact they are sometimes required to defend such claims (a motivation for devising courses of action to protect themselves from such — some sort of self-censorship).

Vestergaard and Schroder's (1985) work is equally significant, as it shows how a number of sociological issues like sex, social class, perception (psychological mirror), ideology etc., act as intervening variables in our understanding of the strategies used in advertising language and how society makes meaning out of advertising

messages. The sociological significance is further developed in Bell's (1991) identification of three important styles of presentation of media language: as audience design, initiative and referee's design, i.e. with the consumer or the society as the audience. Cook's (1992) work is significant because it analyses an ad as a piece of cohesive discourse when a number of interactive linguistic and socio-cultural variables are at work. He argues that in spite of its 'frenetic brevity' and the frequent change of conventions etc., it still retains a great impact on society.

While the contributions of these recent studies remain as interesting as they are significant, the main problem they have is, to my mind, what I can describe as their tunnel vision approach. Most of them describe only the language of commercial product advertising, but fail to pay equal attention to commercial (non-product) or purely non-commercial advertising which they feel is somewhere in the periphery. The need to examine this equally important sphere of advertising is what the present study sets out to do. Thus, the corpora of advertising language becomes extended and conclusions can be more validly drawn.

### 2. The socio-political context for the present study

Politically, Nigeria has had a western-type democratic system which gave rise to the first elections that ushered in a parliamentary government to the country in the 1950's, so that by 1960, when the country became independent, she had a democratically elected Prime Minister. However, a look at the thirty-three years of political independence shows that democratic governance has hardly been the order of the day as the military dictators have ruled the country for about twenty-three out of the thirty-three years. One implication of the long years of military rule is that the country has no rich democratic political culture, part of which would have been linguistic.

The military junta, which the recently-retired General Babangida headed, introduced what has now been described as the rather unending Political Transition Programme<sup>3</sup> into the country. At the heart of the programme lies a number of elections to democratic institutions like the State and Local Governments, State and Federal Legislative Assemblies, and The Presidency. In order to facilitate the electoral process, the junta established, by decree, two political parties — The Social Democratic Party, SDP, (which she describes as a little to the left) and The National Republican Convention, NRC, (a little to the right). The fact that the military established the two political parties, funded them, and wrote their manifestoes and constitutions provided weapons for critics<sup>4</sup> who claim that the difference between the two parties could at best be described as that between two shillings, sixpence and half a crown. If, however, the single authorship of party programmes

<sup>3</sup> The political transition programme has been described as unending because of the way its author (the military) constantly tinkered with it. Thrice did they promise to hand over power to a democratically elected government and they never kept the promise, so that many came to view the junta as not having credibility.

<sup>4</sup> These include an editorial in *The Nigerian Guardian* in 1993 and also criticisms from Chief Bola Ige (former civilian governor of Oyo State) in a newspaper interview in August 1993.



had not created any distinction between them, the use of language in electioneering campaigns perhaps did, as I will try to show later.

### 3. The present study

This study aims at examining the language of advertising in the Nigerian Political Transition Programme. By "language", I specifically refer to the use of English, which is Nigeria's official language and lingua franca. However, some advertisements use indigenous Nigerian languages, especially the decamillionaire languages, i.e. Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba which are the restricted or regional lingua francas, but the majority of such ads are confined to radio and television. Perhaps future research will address such advertisements across languages and media. By "programme", I refer to the principal actors in the programme, i.e. the parties and their presidential candidates in the person of Alhaji Moshood Kashimawo Olawale Abiola (referred to in most ads as MKO) and Alhaji Bashir Othman Tofa (referred to as Tofa in the ads) and their running mates.<sup>5</sup>

The use of ads for the promotion of candidates' image in Nigeria is fairly novel. As Ebisemiju and Adedayo (1993 :8) observe:

*Before now electoral campaigns were based on rallies, posters, and ability of information specialists to generate favourable publicity for candidates. But in recent years, publicity has been supplanted by advertising. Suddenly advertising became the necessary queen in the chess game perfected by politicians to win votes.*

This makes more compelling the need to examine advertising language in Nigerian politics. While the ads in the campaign used different outlets, e.g. billboards, posters, radio, television and newspapers etc., the present study is mainly an examination of press advertising. The reason for confining the analysis to the print media is basically economic, i.e. not wanting to handle too many outlets at a time.

It is worthwhile to point out, at this juncture, that this study is confined to how Nigerian politicians use ads to project their image to voters. In this respect, while the language of political advertising is perceived as subsumed in overall political discourse, it is unique within it. Many studies of political discourse have been undertaken in different places and languages in the past, e.g. studies of Nazi propaganda in Germany like those of Bosmajian (1966), Grünert (1974) and Dieckmann (1975); the examination of the rhetoric of politics in the USA; studies of political discourse in France like those of Dubois (1969), Courtine (1981) etc., but studies of the use of advertising formats, similar to those found in product advertising, have not had similar attention, in spite of the fact that they are unique in their own right. If the basic assumption of studies of political discourse, e.g. that one political party is distinct from another on the basis of its language, as

<sup>5</sup> The running mates were Alhaji Baba Gana Kingibe for the SDP and Dr. Sylvester Ugoh for the NRC.

used by its political subjects like party chieftains and unto which the masses of the people adhere, is to be comprehensively validated, then micro studies such as those of political advertisements are needed to complement those of the macro-level political discourse.

The data for the present study was collected over a period of fifteen months, between 1991 and 1992, during campaigns for state and federal legislatures and the presidency. Premium is however placed on the materials collected during the presidential campaigns as they are more comprehensive in both quantity and spread. In all, sixty-nine different ads were collected from different Nigerian newspapers<sup>6</sup>. Besides, the appropriate or enabling 1989 Decree, Section 28(2) which provided guidelines for language use during campaigns entitled Political Campaigns, Prohibition of Certain Conducts (with contents somewhat similar to the British Code of Advertising Practice 1970 — see Reekie 1974) was also examined, i.e.:

*Abusive, intemperate, slanderous or base language designed or likely to provoke emotions or reactions shall not be employed or used in political campaigns.*

The Decree prescribes different penalties for people and organisations who violate its provisions. As the study will show later, violations of the provisions are not uncommon, but it is significant that no one has been prosecuted or found guilty of violating them. It also throws into sharper focus part of the definition of ads. Indeed, one may be tempted to ask, what would ads be like, without the nuances that work on our emotions? Perhaps there is the need to distinguish the language of propaganda (Postal 1974: 210) from that of persuasion (McGuire 1973) in order to appreciate this point.

### 4. Political campaign advertising as discourse

The present study is, among other things, aimed at examining the language of political advertising in the Nigerian Press with a view to showing the similarity or not to those of commercial (product) advertising (many of which had been analysed in the recent past, — see Leech 1966, Geis 1982, and Cook 1992 among others), analysing some of the linguistic features unique to this form of advertising, examining the different strategies that the ads depend on as discourse and seeing the divergence between the set goals of political advertising, as in the enabling Decree, and the practice. Since the approach of discourse analysis will be relied on, the ads will be examined according to the following different structural properties: first, the opening - headlines, subheadlines, attention getters etc., second, the body copy and third, the ending - signature line, slogans, written jingles etc.

#### 4.1. The opening

As pointed out in 4. above, the opening is the section where headlines and sub-headlines are analysed. The ads in question employ a number of opening strate-

<sup>6</sup> They are *The Guardian, Tribune, National Concord, Daily Times, The New Nigerian, Daily Sketch, The Vanguard, Punch, and Champion*. It also included their Sunday editions.



gies, the most obvious of which is the exploitation of graphological devices. Headlines employ very bold prints, especially the MKO ads. These extra-bold headlines, functioning as attention getters, are in two forms in the MKO ads: first, they introduce the candidate's pet slogan HOPE 93, and second, they introduce the main issues (topics) addressed, e.g.

*Farewell To Poverty*  
*Religious Intolerance*  
*Burden of Schooling*  
*Merit, Knowledge, Organisation*  
*A Breadbasket is a Terrible Thing to Waste*

One striking difference between MKO (Direct)<sup>7</sup> and Tofa (Direct)<sup>8</sup> ads is that while the former relied mainly on graphological devices for attracting attention, the latter fails to use this same device most of the time<sup>9</sup>, relying more on pictures and photographs, as will soon be demonstrated.

If the very bold prints functioned as main attention getters for MKO, the bold prints (subheadlines) functioned as minor attention getters or primary reinforcement for the very bold ones. Therefore, the subheadlines expand the semantic scope of the headlines. For example, in the MKO *Farewell Series* each subheadline addresses at least one major socio-economic problem, e.g. *tackling our foreign debt, improving social amenities, strengthening the Naira* etc. (See Plate 1).

The openings also provided ample opportunities for the use of pictures and photographs as attention getters. However, while MKO (Direct) ads use his large photograph to add his persona to the direct address format in the ads, Tofa relied on pictures depicting various socio-economic states like poor transportation, inefficient telecommunication etc. in similar contexts. MKO relied on pictures in his non-direct ad formats, except when he had to introduce his running mate or the leadership of his party, i.e. *The Progressives are here!*. Tofa's indirect ads also made use of photographs in similar circumstances. In general terms, photographs and pictures were used by the politicians to give a personal touch to the ads messages, and give secondary reinforcement to the issues highlighted in headlines and subheadlines through image concretisation, a strategy similar to that of product identification in consumer (product) ads.

An equally significant strategy used at the stage is that of speaker identification (see Garfinkel 1978: 139 ff). This may be direct as in the examples of:

*Nigerians in UK say:*  
*Nigerian Professionals Resident in the US support...*  
*The Progressives are here*  
*Why I want to serve*

<sup>7</sup> The ads were directly sponsored by the candidate, Chief MKO Abiola, unlike the solidarity ads from his friends and well-wishers.

<sup>8</sup> It distinguishes ads directly sponsored by Alhaji Tofa from those of his supporters.

<sup>9</sup> The exceptions are *My Vision* and *My Mission*

or may be indirect as in the example:

*Merit, Knowledge, Organisation*

where the first letter of each word is an initial of the candidate's name, thus resulting in the formation of MKO as an acronym. It may also be indirect in the sense of another character handling the announcement as in:

*Hear the Man who wants to rule Nigeria*  
*Quotable Quotes of Alhaji Bashir Othman Tofa*  
*Tough Tofa Breaks Political Record ...*  
*Our Rays of Hope are Here*

Sometimes, speaker identification is deftly done through the use of pictures. An SDP ad shows many people demonstrating for improved conditions of living. Many of the demonstrators carry placards depicting the numerous socio-economic problems and calling for positive action in addressing them. The messages thus become a charter of demands from the people and one can clearly claim that the people have spoken. It also goes to confirm that there are usually many layers of addressers (speakers) in ads.

The openings also help in setting the dramatic mood in some of the ads. For example, an SDP ad (Plate 2) uses a question and answer dialogic mode. Most of the MKO Farewell ads eventually use a monologic device while the one with a memo format can be described as using an indirect monologue (written). Tofa's *My Mission* and *My Vision* ads also exploit the same monologic technique. Besides, some ads employ a modified cinematographic technique, possibly as a result of the influence of television advertising. It is exemplified in the ad which shows a child supposedly thinking aloud by saying:

*If I survive at all, what kind of future will I have?*

and then a voice over responds saying

*All is not lost ... Dear child. There is a party ...*

A syntactic analysis shows that at this opening stage, the discourse is characterised by simplicity as shown in the preference for minor and short sentences in the headlines. Examples include: Complex NP heads like *Religious Intolerance, Leadership*.

By Example, *Vacancy for One, Burden of Schooling* etc. and VPs with zero subject NPs like *Improving X, Tackling Y, Hear X* etc. Sometimes multiple nouns or multiple adjectives are used, e.g. *Merit, Knowledge, Organisation; Tested, Confident, Trusted* etc. There are also examples of short interrogatives and conditionals with structures like *Where are we going?, Which Party is X?, If X, what Y?* etc. Just as there is NP or VP truncation at the sentence level, clipping also occurs at the word level especially with dates, e.g. 1993 is usually written as '93. Some ads employ



appositives or Prep P as NP post modifiers, e.g. *NRC, the real winners, X, The Nigeria of my Vision* etc.

At the semantic level, it is fairly obvious that headlines can prepare the reader for the loaded language which is of frequent use in ads. In Plate 3, we see the use of the word *party* in an unusual comparison with *convention*, giving the impression that the other political party (The National Republican Convention) is not a party, since it has no word *party* in its name formation. The further description of the NRC as *arrangee*<sup>10</sup> in contradistinction to *party* can only be fully understood within the socio-cultural peculiarities of Nigeria (the basis of the shared knowledge between the participants, i.e. SDP and reading audience or public).

An equally interesting but peculiar use of words is in the use of the phrase *Tough Tofa* to describe a candidate. The impression is given that only a candidate who is tough (which Tofa is, because the name Tofa is near-homophonous - in Nigerian pronunciation - or rhymes with *tough*) can handle Nigeria's multi-dimensional socio-economic problems. Tofa's name, therefore, becomes a metaphor for performance, and it is little surprising, therefore, that the other party (SDP) had to respond, in another ad, by describing her candidate as *tougher than tough* (or is it Tofa?).

Another SDP advert uses a mixture of graphology, colour and pun to demonstrate meaning ambiguity. In the expression *Burden of Schooling*, the preposition of and the suffix -ing are presented in light shading unlike the other words that have full black shading or colouration (see Plate 4). Therefore, two possible interpretations occur: *Burden of Schooling* or *Burden School*. The latter, of course, rhymes with *Boarding School* since in Nigerian pronunciation the velar nasal in such suffixes is pronounced in the same way as in i.e. the velar nasal. Thus, a boarding school becomes a metaphor for financial burden for parents or the prohibitive cost of sending children to school (which the SDP intends to remove by introducing free education). Consequently, it is obvious that participants' shared knowledge of Nigerians socio-economic problems is needed, in addition to linguistic cues, to decode the meaning of such utterances.

#### 4.2. The body copy

The body copy is usually the analysts delight because of its comprehensiveness in the provision of data for the examination of ads as discourse (fusion of text and context). Consequently, the present study examines ads under this subhead in four main subdivisions: communication content, syntactic strategies, semantic strategies and formal discourse strategies.

##### 4.2.1. Communication Content and Argumentation

The body content provides the opportunity for the use of ads as an instrument for measuring the ideological temperature of the politically volatile Nigerian en-

<sup>10</sup> Todd and Hancock (1986: 306) describe *arrangee* as someone who arranges illegal money exchanges.

vironment. This is why most of the ads have identified many of the socio-economic problems, e.g. the poor state of public transportation, the inability of the country to provide enough food to feed her citizens, the rather epileptic performance of public utilities like water and power, the decay and atrophy in the educational sector, endemic corruption in both the public service and the private sector, religious polarisation, ethnic chauvinism etc. The presence of these numerous problems and the long years of military dictatorship are the twin problems which promote political apathy, as the populace no longer knows who to trust. This has forced the politicians to use a number of confidence-bridging lexical items like *hope, trust, confidence* etc. in the ads.

In addressing the problems highlighted above, ads have devised three major methods of presentation:

- (a) identifying a problem directly and seeking support,
- (b) attempting a comparative analysis of previous records or performance as the basis of seeking support and
- (c) issuing warnings.

In the first category, MKO ads seem to have an edge over those of Tofa because more socio-economic problems were identified in the former than in the latter. In both cases, the structure of argumentation takes two forms as outlined below.

- (i) Identifying a particular socio-economic problem; identifying the personal attributes which a candidate needs to solve it; and seeking support for the candidate who will solve it.

MKO's ad *Burden of Schooling*, exemplifies this approach. The problem identified is the high cost of schooling (with a photograph showing school children taking chairs and desks from home for use in school). Next follows the presentation of the personal attributes of MKO, i.e. *courage, experience* and *honesty* of purpose. Finally the ad identifies him as the man to be voted for and urges support in that direction.

- (ii) Identifying a particular socio-economic problem; explaining briefly the nature of the problem; outlining a set of policies or actions to solve it; and seeking support for the candidate who will solve it.

This is the structure commonly found in the MKO Farewell ads which Table 1 typifies.

Both parties use the comparative analysis approach, and maximally depend on statistics in doing so. The NRC claims that she had the majority of total votes cast in all the previous elections (Local and State Government) and can, therefore, be described as the real *winner* of the elections. It ends by urging people not to waste their votes by voting for the party that was emerging as an opposition (lesser total votes), (see Plate 5). It pays, the NRC reasoned, to vote for the real *winners*.



The SDP naturally reacted with fury, (see Plate 2) presenting statistical figures showing that she won the majority number of seats in the previous elections and can, therefore, be rightly called the *winning party*. We are thus confronted with interpreting *majority* as meaning the total number of votes cast for a party in the election (proportional representation) or the total number of seats won in the election. The addressee is no doubt left confused as to who should use the title *winner* or *winning* thus demonstrating how statistics can be used to contribute to the vagueness of meaning or deception in ads. Another comparative method which some ads, particularly those of the NRC, employ is the presentation of what is perceived as the record of the other party alongside theirs so as to demonstrate the superiority or the higher quality of theirs. For example, a Tofa ad claims *while others are flying to few state capitals, Tofa has travelled over 15,000 kilometers by road, visiting each state capital ...* Other Tofa/NRC ads have also portrayed the other party as lacking in organisation. As Ebisemiju and Adedayo (op cit) observe:

*Reminiscent of the last gubernatorial campaign, the NRC started its print campaign evolving an offensive strategy ... the NRC's creative strategy is strained, as it tries to whip up tribal and religious sentiments where fundamental issues beg to be addressed.*

Sometimes, as part of the comparative approach an ad may present the socio-economic conditions in the developed communities as the basis of demonstrating the degree of Nigeria's underdevelopment. Such ads end by urging the addressee to vote for a particular candidate if he wants his society to be as developed as those described (a presentation of the ideal model).

The third major presentation technique lies in the way ads are structured to warn. Ads that warn usually present something negative about a product which they enjoin addressees to steer clear of or not to buy. In our corpus, many of the ads that warn voters have the structure presented below.

Introductory quotation  
Comments on the quotation  
Warning  
Exhortation

The introductory quotation is usually from two sources: first the candidate or a prominent member of the opposing party, second, an independent source. Such quotations function to lend credence to the weight of argumentation which follows, i.e. evidence of authority. NRC/Tofa ads use this device with a lot of dexterity. They begin by showing clips or quotations considered unfavourable to the Nigerian polity emanating from SDP sources, e.g. *SDP govt'll throw out SAP — Abiola*<sup>11</sup> or what is a supposedly independent, but apt observation, e.g. *Honesty and sincerity have such resistless charms that disarms our fiercest foes — Stilingflet*. This is then

<sup>11</sup> Quoted from a newspaper The Vanguard, May 4, 1993

followed by direct negative comments or subtle ones like jokes about the opposing party or candidate as in some examples below.

*They obviously still believe in tribal politics. We don't.  
Can this man be trusted? Read his lips.  
What better testimony do you need to show ...  
The above extracts from ... speak for themselves  
Now we all know better  
With such a religious fanatic like ... be prepared for ... war*

At the end comes the direct warning imploring voters to steer clear of such candidates through the use of imperatives like *reject, beware* etc. It is significant to note that most of the warning type of ads were released during the dying days of the campaign because the parties became more desperate as the election day drew near.

#### 4.2.2. Syntactic Strategies

It has been pointed out earlier that the present study does not intend to duplicate most of the earlier findings of Leech (1966). However, a few very important characteristics of the Nigerian ads in question will be discussed briefly to demonstrate both the universality and limitations of earlier findings. In general terms, the Nigerian ads can be described as an admixture of short and long sentences, with the latter dominating. The preference for long sentences in the copy is probably occasioned by the need to explain a number of socio-economic problems and the candidate's solutions to an audience made up of literate and semi-literate newspaper readers. Besides, there is a general avoidance of passive forms, while the preference for the present tense form of the verb is obvious. However, unlike in most commercial consumer ads, the use of disjunctive syntax is not very common.

Many of the clauses can be described as simple, although compound and complex structures can be found in some cases, e.g. Tofa's *My Vision* and *My Mission* ads where in the former there is a main clause *I dream...* which has seven subordinate adverbial clauses of place (introduced by *where*).

Sentences are generally written out in full but some have elliptic structures. For example, subject NP deletion or truncation is common in the MKO *Farewell To Poverty (Strengthening the Naira)* ad leaving VPs like:

*Eliminate speculation in foreign exchange  
Promote off-shore banking ...  
Create special incentives.*

It is significant to point out that the elliptic structures are in the sentences that do not employ the use of the modal in MKO ads. Besides, many of the long sentences use ellipsis to make them open-ended so as to allow for the imagination of the addressee.



The strategies for the use of short and/or simple sentences vary. They may be used at the beginning of the copy to attract or retain attention as in:

*The die is cast.*  
*Fraternal Greetings*  
*Tomorrow is the D-day.*

or in the middle of the copy to show a sudden build-up of the discourse to a climax of expectation before solutions are offered (racy colloquialisms) as in:

*Qualified. Desperate. Confused.*

It may be at the end of the copy for emphasis or distinctiveness, e.g.

*We don't.*

Minor sentences are usually characterised by non-finite verb forms, e.g.

*The party that promises freedom, prosperity and justice.*  
*A day of historical reckoning.*

While sentences and clauses may be described as generally simple, the NP is usually not, as it is characterised by heads that have pre- and post-defining forms. It is therefore not surprising to see nouns that have attributive value described by multiple adjectives, e.g. *wide experience, honest, sincere, transparently honest candidate, sincere and courageous man* etc. with some of the words fairly emotive and evocative.

Sometimes comparative forms are used without what Geis (1982: 87) calls the felicity condition<sup>12</sup>, e.g.

*the better party*  
*a clearer leadership direction*  
*the better choice*

There is also the peculiar use of demonstratives, sometimes in absolute deixis, e.g.

*This is the ... This is why...*  
*That's where the solution lies.*  
*That's the man to vote.*

while pronouns, particularly "we", may be used both endophorically (normally) or even exophorically.

The VP is characterised by a preference for present forms. A number of imperatives are used to demonstrate the seriousness of the speaker, call for urgent action and involve the audience. These include: *make, take, review, lead, build* etc.

<sup>12</sup> Geis argues that in order to be felicitous, a comparative must compare genuinely with comparable things.

The speakers also depend on the use of the modal auxiliary. Leech (1966) found a preference for *will* and *shall* in consumer ads, but this corpus shows that of *shall* and *will* with the former in greater use. Four MKO Farewell ads show that *shall* was used fourteen times while *will* was used six times. The higher preference for *shall* (used many times in the jussive sense) is meant to show a clear and unwavering commitment on the part of the candidates to solve the social problems.

The copy provides evidence for peculiar usages. These are in punctuation, spellings, determiner deletions, verb forms, number etc., and they can be seen either as grammatical infelicities showing that proof-reading was poorly done or deliberate devices meant to shock, but considered apt for the racy or breathless style of the discourse. Examples include:

*...shall halt the project; and re-channel...*  
*...convert our debt stock to equity; Greater fiscal discipline...*  
*...struggling to breath*  
*Movement from place to place has ...*  
*1000 hamlet/ numerous burden/ increase the number of telephone line*  
*compentence and discipline/ stereneously/ imagination/ maginalisation.*

Closely related to this may be some Nigerianisms, e.g.

*Vote Massively for X,*  
*Convention na Arrangee.*

#### 4.2.3. Lexico-semantic strategies and features

A striking feature at this level is the use of certain lexical items to convey ordinary and/or special meanings. This begins with the words of universal meaning which are commonplace and function to make the audience have a sense of belonging to a particular party or candidate and the strategies mapped out for dealing with problems. A sense of belonging, it is hoped, will beget trust and, therefore, support for the candidate. Examples include: *all, everyone, we, everybody, every Nigerian.*

Imperatives calling for positive action interpreted as support or negative action interpreted as rejection of candidates or programmes are used. Examples can be found in the following:

*Don't sit on the fence*  
*Join in installing X as President*  
*X, do not divide us.*  
*Reject X / Beware of X*

Abusive words or words with negative connotation are occasionally used, e.g.

*Abiola, a self-confessed opportunist is ...*  
*(SDP is a party of) the opposition, NRC are winners*

The truth value of some of these expressions remain suspect and that will be addressed later.



Words of unclear, ambiguous and multiple meanings are also used. Examples include the distinction made between *party* and *convention*, *democracy* and *arrangee*, *Tofa generation* (where what defines the concept is outside the text) etc. Even when meanings are not suspect, synonyms may be deliberately used in the same context as a result of extralinguistic influences, as in the case of ads that use *God* and *Allah* interchangeably. The strategy here is not wanting to offend the sensibilities of Christians who use God or excluding the support of Muslims who prefer the use of Allah. Muslim Religion, therefore, functions as an extralinguistic variable which affects lexical choice.

It is a little surprising to note that while ads address Nigerians, the majority of whom are barely educated, the advertisers still insist on using special registers and words that are not of everyday use. This is difficult to explain and one can only speculate that the ads are either wishing to impress in a Nigerian fashion<sup>13</sup> or they operate outside the linguistic frequencies of the ordinary man they set out to woo. Examples include:

(a) Special Registers

*debt stock, equity, fiscal measures, low capacity utilization, promissory note, infrastructure, transparency, metro system/mass transit, contraptions etc.*

(b) Rare words

*parlous state of the economy, frugal, creed of governance, scourges, self-financing and self-liquidating, deplorable devastation, optimum dedication, unflinching etc.*

These expressions tend to make the ads formal and bookish. Maybe this is why the politicians had to use other media outlets to rectify the problem<sup>14</sup>.

Ads sometimes use pictures to contribute to meaning. The seriousness on MKO's face in the photograph occupying about half of the page (the copy write-up in the other half) can be interpreted as a sense of commitment to tackling the nations problems. The child thinking aloud in both SDP and NRC ads shows that a Nigerian child deserves a tomorrow far better than his today. However, pictures are sometimes used paradoxically as in the MKO ad *Religious Intolerance* which has a picture depicting a Christian and Muslim in a warm embrace, i.e. the opposite of intolerance. Both picture and written message now give a new meaning which can be summed up as:

Variable 1 (V1) — Intervening Variable (IV) — Result (V2)

<sup>13</sup> Bookish style is a feature of Nigerian English. Besides, Nigerians have in the past eulogised politicians who use what is locally known as big English, i.e. grandiloquent expressions and coinages, e.g. a particular politician was often described as a *man of timber and calibre* because of his frequent use of *caterpillar and bulldozer English*, among other things.

<sup>14</sup> Politicians resorted to the use of Pidgin to resolve the problem. However, it was confined to the outlet of radio and television.

Religious intolerance — MKO/SDP politics — Religious tolerance  
(where V1 passes through IV to emerge as V2).

The ads exploit sign language or the use of symbols. This is obvious since political parties are often identified by symbols: the SDP having a horse and the NRC an eagle<sup>15</sup>. Such a semiotic device or index (Pierce 1931) helps to show a causal relationship. However, apart from the positive relationship between symbols and party names, the ads further strive to use symbols to deflate the image of opponents. An NRC ad laments:

It's no use kicking a dead horse.

The SDP responded portraying the NRC eagle as a vulture or vampire that has landed to feed fat on public resources and disappear (*fly off*). Besides such symbols can be veritable sources of controversy, e.g. there was a row over the dress worn by MKO on election day which the NRC claimed had the SDP logo, a horse, on it (a contravention of electoral regulations). The SDP therefore challenged NRC to confirm what they perceived as the party's symbol on MKO's dress — *is it a horse, a stallion, a mare or even a unicorn?* Such a multiplicity of images and meanings thrives in the world of political ads or loaded language. Other examples include the use of a tick (✓) where an ad has the headline *MKO na correct*, and the use of the Nigerian flag by a candidate who superimposed his picture on it to demonstrate the link between him and the office being sought.

The ads provide many examples of the figurative use of language. There is parallelism through the repetition of formal syntactic patterns as in one-word sentences in consecutive order for emphasis, heightening the emotional tone, building the discourse to a climax and the example of the repetition of structures beginning with *This ...*

The use of alliteration as in *seat, struggle, survival* (in one sentence) or *dedication, deplorable, devastation* is commonplace and much more than assonance. The exploitation of puns, metaphors also abounds as in the *Burden School for Boarding School* discussed earlier, or *The country is tough, don't make it tougher!* where *tougher* is meant to be a 'parody' of *Tofa*, the candidate.

The ads make use of rhetorical questions, especially in the portrayal of the hopes and aspirations of the Nigerian child. In a particular instance, a Tofa ad urges the audience to provide answers to such questions by saying *Voters must answer this*. The ad, however, goes ahead to answer the question.

Sometimes popular social slogans are deftly used.

For example, an ad uses the slogan of a consumer product<sup>16</sup>, although without the full discourse bricolage<sup>17</sup>, as in *...the difference is clear*.

Such usage is meant to exploit popular social attachment to the said consumer product as a way making its own message more widespread. Another subtle attempt

<sup>15</sup> Both symbols are from the Nigerian coat of arms where the eagle stands for strength and the charger for dignity.

<sup>16</sup> It is from 7UP, a soft drink, ad.

<sup>17</sup> This is used after Cook (1992)



at bricolage is the introduction of poetic devices like the short verses in an SDP ad (See Plate 6).

A few examples of what has been described as media multilingualism (Harman, 1984, 1986), (Bell, 1991) or ad language mixing (Bhatia, 1987) are also found. This is in the use of Nigerian Pidgin as in:

*MKO na correct  
NRC, we don win o  
Patapata we go win again o, winner.  
Convention na Arrangee*

It is clear from the analysis above that there is a general semantic vagueness introduced via a number of linguistic or sub-linguistic devices. The use of words with evaluative, ambiguous or multiple meanings, unqualified comparatives etc., make meaning fuzzy and the truth value of statements problematic. Such truth value is difficult to pin down in many propositions. Many assertions readily break the Gricean evidence principle, e.g.

*With NRC in the majority in the House ... we ... are the winners*

The lack of irrefutable back-up evidence makes the SDP react by calling herself the winning party, and battle for the use of statistics began. Similarly, one asks if a statement like:

*... shall stop the ill-implementation of public projects*

entails or implies that

- (a) public projects are not implemented well, or
- (b) that we will now implement these projects well.

If the expectation is (b) and we expect further confirmation or clarification, the discourse disappoints us because the following sentence or proposition simply addresses another issue, i.e. budgetary re-direction. In the proposition:

*Continue to vote for SDP*

can it be validly claimed that people have been voting for SDP before then? Does the proposition

*Do not vote for the opposition, vote for the winner, NRC.*

presuppose that NRC is already a winner and so cannot be the party in opposition in the House? The only conclusion is that ads have a preference for such propositions because they know that the facts inherent in them (if any) are difficult to deny or question, unlike in plain assertions. This helps to make language of political advertising loaded, vague and capable of deception.

#### 4.2.4. Discourse Strategies

Geis (1982: 15) observes that four aspects of the speech context are crucial to the understanding of speech behaviour. These are: physical (the place where conversants are and what is present there), epistemic (background knowledge shared by them), linguistic (what has been said prior to the speech) and social (the social occasion). An understanding of ads as discourse, Cook (1992) argues, should therefore be a combination of text and context.

In the present study, the participant context is basically twofold: addresser and addressee. However, as Hymes (1974) and Cook (1992 :177 ff) point out, different categories of addressers can be identified in ads. In this corpus, there is a sender or initiator who is usually the political party and/or the presidential candidate or what Courtine (1987: 844) describes as the subject of political discourse, i.e.

*...the one who utters a discourse ...the point of condensation between language and ideology, the place where the systems of political competence articulate themselves in the linguistic competence.*

Then comes the layer of copywriters in ad agencies and a third group of speakers or characters who act as voice-overs, directive voices (that can be many in the case of a placard-carrying crowd), singers in jingles etc. At the receiving end lies the target addressee who is the Nigerian voter and, of course, numerous non-voting or card-carrying party supporters made up of children and young adults under eighteen years of age.

The discourse structure can, in general terms, be described as unidirectional communication or what Widdowson (1978) calls non-reciprocal discourse. Some examples are in the form of direct addresses using different formats like a letter or memo which is signed at the end by the person who initiates the communication, e.g.

*Why I want to serve* (letter signed by MKO)  
*All Eligible Voters* (memo signed by three people)  
*Congratulatory Message for Tofa* (signed by the writer)

In an indirect address format, the ad is not signed (unlike those above) but is marked by apostrophe to show that they are quotations from the sender. The MKO Farewell ads typifies this form.

Another unidirectional monologic structure is that commonly found in rhetoric and characterised by rhetorical questions as the discourse progresses. Many of the ads employ this structure. Besides, the dialogic structure which makes the discourse dramatic can be found in some ads, e.g. *the SDP Question and Answer* ad and *NRC Now that You Know the Real Winners*.

In 4.2.1, the structure of argumentation was addressed. For purposes of emphasis, the structure (monologic or dialogic unidirectional) is reworked below.

- (a) Introduction of Topic: via headlines, attention getters etc.
- (b) Explication: providing information through statistics, authority, direct knowl-



edge or experience of problems on the one hand and an avowed commitment to solve them through certain methods on the other hand.

(c) Conclusion: using the expressive function of language to impress on the addressee to accept or reject a candidate or an idea and the use of slogans and jingles to consolidate the same objective.

In the presentation of the messages, most ads favour a formal public style, but there are also occasional public colloquial (simple personal) styles. Although Joos (1967) argues that social context (social class, age, equality, occasion, profession) affects style, this study analyzes style along Bell's (1991) categorisation. The ads generally favour the referee design with movements towards the unseen masses of the people and the Nigerian professionals who are expected to interpret the statistics and understand the socio-economic and technological registers in the ads. In this sense, the ads have unwittingly reduced their audience to a narrow band of the educated and/or elite class, who advertisers believe are the opinion moulders in society.

In order to maximise the opportunity provided by the choice of style, the ads depend on the technique of persuasion, although they occasionally break with it in some outbursts of anger, abuse, cajolery and subtle coercion. Most ads seem to have maximally exploited McGuire's (1969, 1973) persuasive format, i.e. presentation by headlines; attention by headlines, subheadlines, pictures and photographs; comprehension by explanations; yielding by subtle exhortations and final comments; retention by slogans and acting direct exhortation.

Most ads with their Nigerian setting focus on the Nigerian situation, as reflected in the analysis of the ideology/political-economy through indices like housing, education, privatisation, transportation etc. The context makes the participants assume different roles, e.g. as an authority on the subject, a concerned citizen as in ads pledging support for candidates and as an experienced commentator as in the ad showing depressed kids. Sometimes role-play is almost in an iron-cast format as in an NRC ad

*PROJECT: Refurbishing CLIENT: Nigeria*  
*ARCHITECTS: NRCBUILDERS: NRC*

Legislators & you It is important that ads as discourse be perceived to be cohesive. As Vestergaard and Schroder (1985) observe, an ad may be coherent and not cohesive given the fact the former is achieved through linguistic strategies and the latter through the overall unity of the discourse. The ads in this corpus may be described as coherent and cohesive, a feat achieved through some of the strategies discussed in 4.2 as well as the following:

#### (a) Subordination and co-ordination of clauses

At the sentence level, this is through the use of pro-forms like *we, him, ours*, some of which, as pointed out earlier, have double exaphora. The use of demonstratives like *this, that, these*, also performs a similar role, while at the discourse

level, it is achieved through the use of conjunctive adjuncts like *so also, further(more), especially (so), now* etc.

#### (b) Use of repetition

Linking words like *and* or *but* achieve this directly. Besides names, and dates may be repeated, e.g. *SDP, The NRC, MKO, Tofa, Tofa generation, Hope 93* etc. In the ad *My Vision* three out of the four sentences begin with *I dream* while the word *vision* is repeated a few times.

#### (c) Use of Ellipsis

Ellipsis is used in the corpus for economy, to establish a personal conversational tone between the addresser and addressee so that familiarity and rapport are created. As Cook (1992: 172) observes, ...lack of ellipsis implies formality, social distance or a lack of shared knowledge. This is true of this corpus except, of course, it may be argued that ellipsis did not directly achieve shared knowledge which ads achieve more through the exploitation of cultural and ethnographic devices.

#### (d) Ordering and/or pairing of information.

The MKO Farewell ads exemplify this through their step-by-step information management and release as a chain beginning with problem identification, followed by explication and ending with exhortation. This careful ordering of information takes the addressee along and allows shared knowledge to filter through<sup>18</sup> as the discourse progresses.

#### 4.3. The ending

The ending is made up principally of the signature line and the slogans and, to a lesser extent, the written jingles<sup>19</sup>. All the three are taken as belonging to the ending of the discourse similar to what Kinneavy (1971) calls the conclusion or coda.

The ending is characterised by bold prints similar to those found in the opening with such graphological devices playing two roles: getting the final attention and retaining it. Consequently, most endings function to restate both the name of the party and that of the candidates. Equally significant is the insertion of the party symbol or logo at the end, as it now serves as the final link between the party and the candidate and also a reminder to the addressee.

The end provides ads the opportunity to display slogans. Such slogans are usually made up of multiple nouns or NPs with qualified noun heads. Comparative forms of the adjective, with *better* as the most popular choice, qualify many of

<sup>18</sup> One interesting example is the placard which reads *Better Life for Rural People* in contradistinction to Babagindas wife *Better Life For Rural Women*. The choice of *people* and not *women* allows the candidate to distance himself from an earlier programme which had been strongly criticised while still offering something meaningful to rural dwellers.

<sup>19</sup> Only one ad had a written jingle.



the nouns. The slogans, whether nouns, NPs, Prep Ps, can at best be described as minor sentences. Some of the slogans also undergo syntactic change, e.g. *Trust, Confidence, Hope* nominals in MKO's ads later changed to *Tested, Trusted, Confident*, i.e. adjectivals or *SDP: Progress*, changed into ...*the better choice for progress* and later to *the better party for change and progress*. These changes are indicative of the tone of the campaign and how candidates and parties become more desperate as the campaign became more messy. The NRC also changed from ...*for a better tomorrow* to .. *for a clearer leadership direction*, and later to *the only hope NOW for a better tomorrow*. Other slogans that did not undergo change include: *Hope 93, Nigeria: Tofa, Nigeria's Symbol of Hope and Challenge 93*. It is interesting to note that the structuring of some of the ads is a product of the fierce competition. The SDPs use of *the better party, ...progress* and *Hope 93*, triggered an NRC response of *the only hope NOW for a better tomorrow* to demonstrate that hope and better life need not be confined to the SDP camp alone. The *Tofa : Nigeria* slogan is an imitation of an earlier slogan by an SDP aspirant who, exploiting a pan-Nigeria notion, had *Nigeria: Sei Baba* or *Nigeria: Say Baba*. All these slogans which are socio-culturally relevant depend on shared knowledge to be meaningful. The same applies to endings like:

Continue to vote X

a balanced ticket (based on ethno-religious differences)

the only party in Nigeria (based on lexical differences)

The endings also show a summary of the message in the body copy in the form of repeated direct exhortation, e.g.

Vote MKO Abiola for President

Vote (Alhaji) Bashir Othman Tofa: President

Vote Tofa and Ugoh for the Presidency.

Most of the ads place premium on the use of MKO's initials and Tofa's surname<sup>20</sup>.

Ads use jingles to achieve a prosodic effect. However, since press ads are not normally the place for jingles only one example is found (Plate 5) and it is also in Pidgin possibly because of the catchment area of its audience, literate and non-literate alike. The jingle is characterised by repetition, rhymes, echo effect etc. to enhance its musicality and prosodic effect.

## 5. Conclusion

This study has shown that while studies in the past have abandoned political advertising to the realm of rhetorics and oratory, the genre of discourse can be assessed with the same instruments that have been applied in the analysis of consumer or commercial (product) advertising. It has demonstrated that in advertising

<sup>20</sup> The electoral decree was not specific as to which of the two forms should be used. Each candidate therefore chose whichever he considered the most popular of his names or initials.

our notion of product could be expanded to include people whose political image can be packaged and marketed like those of commercial products with which we are more familiar.

The study has further demonstrated that the notion of deception in advertising is perhaps more prominent in political than product ads because of the desperation on the part of politicians who want to get themselves accepted. Furthermore, it has shown that cross-referencing is more pronounced in the ads (especially reaction ads) than in consumer ads. In this respect, there seems to be no ethical bounds as to how far ads should go in the use of deceptive and sometimes abusive language. It appears that while the advertisers are conscious of the enabling decree on campaign ethics in theory, the practice of the trade seems to pay little attention to it. It has again thrown into relief the problem of political language and truth values, a problem more marked in the domain of totalitarian language as Faye (1972) has shown.

This study has confirmed that while two political parties may derive from the same financial and ideological-sponsorship source, i.e. the state as in the case of Nigeria, their marketing strategies need not be the same and are oftentimes not the same. Besides, it has shown that Nigerian politicians sometimes fail to take into consideration the socio-economic characteristics (particularly the literacy level) of their audience. Consequently, many of the ads are too formal, unlike the relative informality in consumer advertising. The resort to media multilingualism as a solution is not clearly articulated in the corpus.

Finally, the study has shown that the study of ads as discourse is a far more rewarding analytical approach than one which merely addresses the overt linguistic characteristics of ads.

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## P L A T E S

1. Farewell To Poverty: Tackling our Foreign Debt
2. Q & A (SDP): Which Party is REALLY the Winner
3. We are a Party, They are a Convention
4. Burden of Schooling
5. NRC: Clearly the real winners
6. SDP (child ad).





# FAREWELL TO POVERTY

## Tackling our Foreign Debt

"Today, repayment and servicing of foreign debts is a major factor in the perilous state of the economy..."


We shall reduce the debt stock to reasonable level by creating an enabling environment for foreign investors to convert our debt stock to equity; Greater fiscal discipline on the part of government will be used as an instrument to press for debt relief and cancellation...

Efforts will be made to curb reckless borrowing except in respect of self-financing, self-liquidating key projects such as steel development, petrochemicals and liquefied natural gas..."

M.K.O. ABIOLA  
*Farewell to poverty*  
1993

**M.K.O. ABIOLA**  
for PRESIDENT

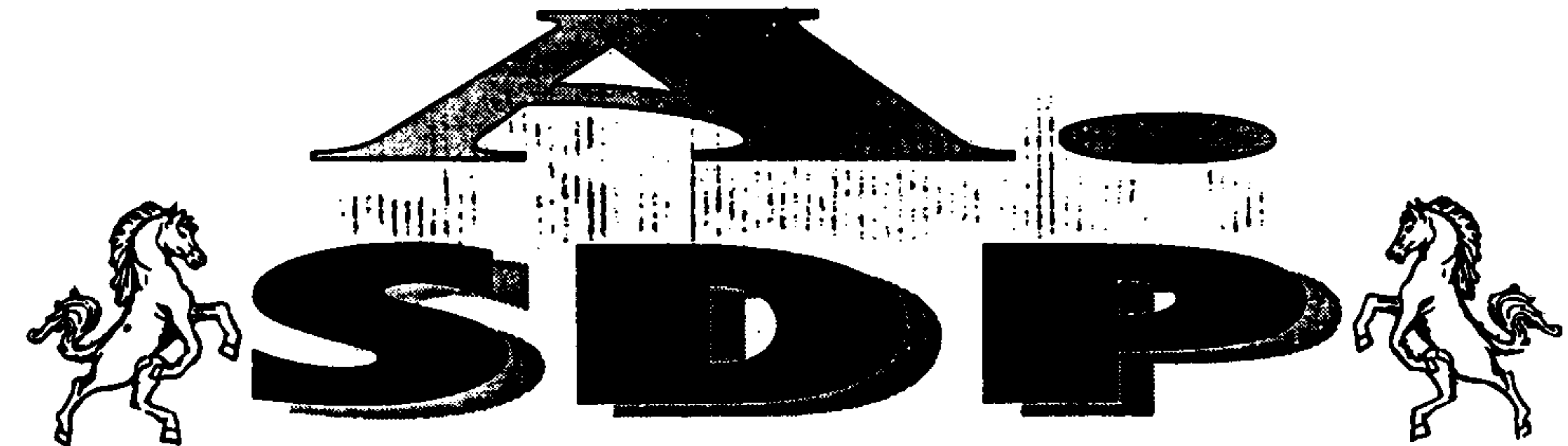
Nigeria's symbol of hope



SDP - PROGRESS

TRUST • CONFIDENCE • HOPE

**Q.**  
Which Party is really the winner?



Take a look. The record is clear.

ELECTION	SDP	NRC
* Councillors	3765	3360
* Members of the States Houses of Assembly	626	541
* Governors	14 (One By-Election)	15
* Control of Local Government Chairmen	315	274
* Control of States Houses of Assembly	18 (One Tie)	11
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>4738</b>	<b>4201</b>



Now compare the records.  
These are **FACTS**. Not lies.  
After two years of action and achievements, the difference is clear.

**SDP is the winning Party.**

Continue to vote for **SDP** the better Party for change and progress.



**SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC PARTY.**

**WE ARE A PARTY.**

**They are a Convention.**

**PARTIES ARE  
DEMOCRATIC.**

*Convention na Arrangee.*

**VOTE FOR THE  
ONLY PARTY  
IN NIGERIA.**



**VOTE**

**SDP**

*the better choice... for Progress*

# Burden of Schooling



Every Nigerian child deserves  
quality education

Education should not be seen to be the exclusive preserve of the privileged. For a country striving to attain technological advancement, education without tears is paramount.

M.K.O. Abiola has the experience, courage and the honesty of purpose to carry Nigerians along in a bold move to solve our many problems. That's the man to vote!



*Vote*

**M.K.O.**

**ABIOLA for PRESIDENT**

Nigeria's symbol of hope

**TRUST • CONFIDENCE • HOPE**



SDP - PROGRESS



# NRC

## Clearly the REAL winners.

The National Republican Convention – NRC is clearly the winning party. In every election held so far since 1990,

NRC has always polled a majority of the total votes cast making it the more popular party, the party of choice, the

choice of Nigerians. That's why we are the REAL winners.

### FACTS

	DESCRIPTION	NRC	SDP	DIFFERENCE	REMARKS
1.	Membership at Inception	5.4m	4.9m	500,000	NRC winner
2.	1990 Councillorship elections	NRC led opposition with over 500,000 votes			NRC winner
3.	Gubernatorial elections Total votes nationwide	11,747,071	9,377,455	2,368,616	NRC winner
4.	States Won	16 States	12 States (2 by Default)	2 States	NRC winner
5.	Incumbent Governors' votes	7,808,872	4,963,209	2,845,663	NRC winner

NRC are indeed the REAL winners. And for as long as politics remains a game of numbers, NRC will continue to win.

Therefore don't waste your vote. Don't vote the opposition. Vote for the winners. Vote NRC.

VOTE

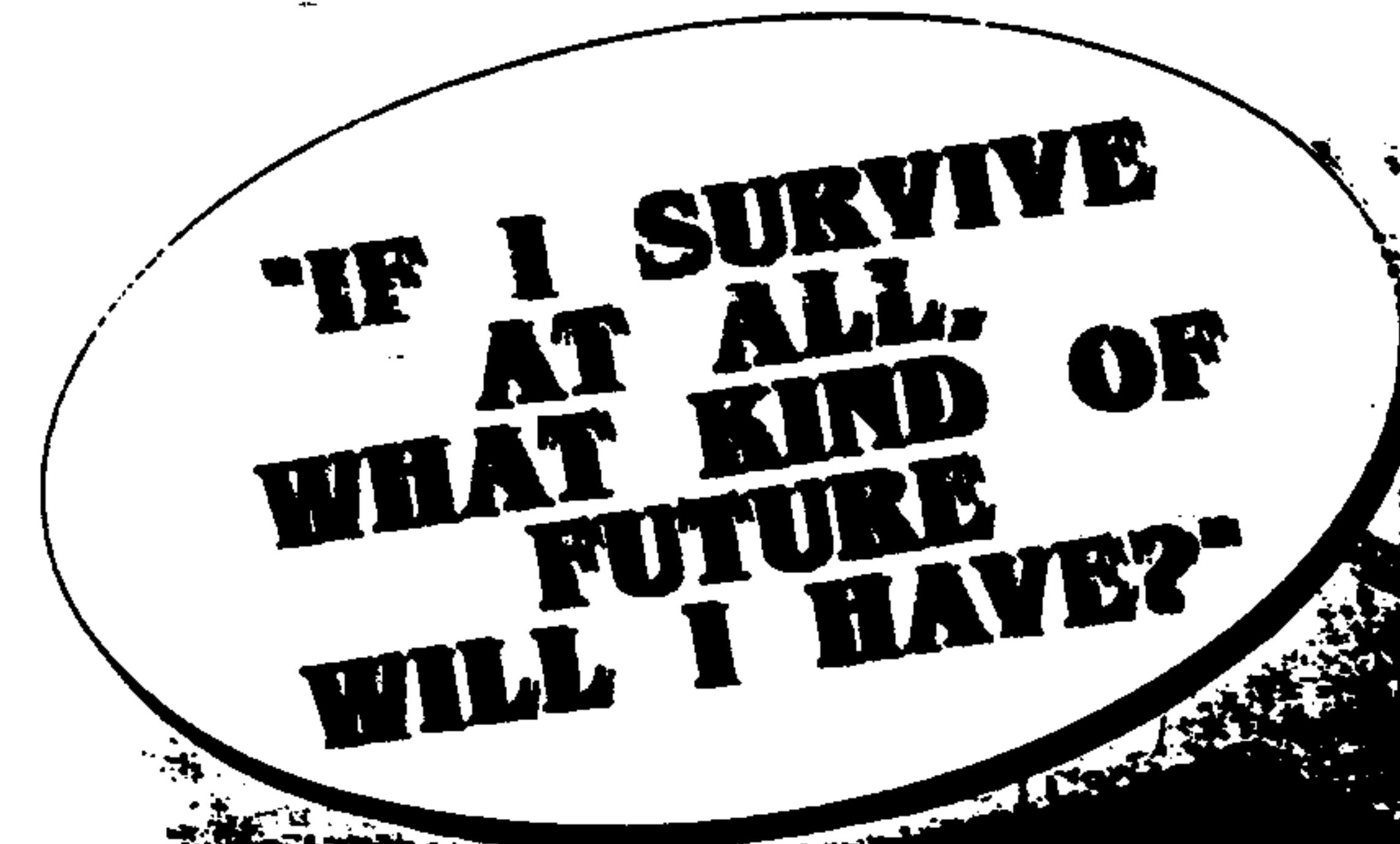


# NRC

The only hope now for a better tomorrow

Now that you know the real winners Join in the victory song

Winner —o—o—o winner  
 Winner —o—o—o winner  
 NRC we don win o— winner  
 Certainly we must win again o— winner



All is not lost ... Dear child. There is a Party in Nigeria ... The SDP. it is our hope for change and progress.

You will have all that you desire...  
 Plenty and affordable food and clean water  
 Free medical care  
 Free and Qualitative education  
 Gainful employment  
 Decent housing... and more



That is why those of us who love you will continue to vote for SDP, the better party for change and progress.

Continue to vote for **SDP** ... the better Party for change and progress.