Comparative Metafunction Analysis of Peter Obi and Bola Ahmed Tinubu's 2023 Online Presidential Campaigns

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Abstract
This study explores the linguistic construction of political ideology and identity in the 2023 Nigerian presidential campaign advertisements of Peter Obi and Bola Ahmed Tinubu. Employing Halliday and Matthiessen's (2014) Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) as the primary analytical framework, the study investigates the interpersonal, experiential, and textual metafunctions of selected campaign adverts. Findings reveal that Obi's advertisements strategically deploy declarative moods, relational processes, and topical themes to position himself as a reformist and empathetic leader, inviting cognitive and ideological alignment from the electorate. Tinubu's adverts, in contrast, emphasize material processes and imperative moods, constructing an identity rooted in action, pragmatism, and developmental leadership. The comparative metafunctional analysis underscores how both candidates' linguistic choices reflect distinct political ideologies and campaign strategies. The study concludes that campaign advertisements in Nigeria's political landscape serve as complex linguistic and semiotic instruments for constructing and projecting candidate identity, political ideology, and voter persuasion strategies

Keywords: Campaign, Metafunction Analysis, Mood and Modality, Transitivity, Theme, Political Ideology, Identity Construction, Nigerian Elections

Introduction
Political advertisement is one of the major tools of reaching the electorate by the political actors during an election period. Political advertisement comprises different modes of communication that are laced with diverse messages meant to attract people's attention towards political candidates or parties. This includes posters, billboards, handbills, radio and television jingles, as well as online or digital messages such as social media memes. Many of these are multimodal, having both textual and graphic elements (Omole and Ogoala 2024). Previously, the phenomenon of persuading voters via the traditional means of radio, television, and newspaper advertisement was very prominent in Nigeria (Ojekwe, 2016; Egbulefu and Emeka, 2023). However, many scholars of communication and media studies (Ibrahim 2023, Adeyemi 2023, Bassey, Kente, and Akpede 2024) have asserted that an unprecedented surge in online political campaigning marked the 2023 Nigerian presidential election. This is because the world of communication has been revolutionized by digital technology (Bassey, Kente, and Akpede 2024). In this digital age, candidates increasingly rely on multimedia campaign advertisements to shape public discourse, mobilize support, and construct persuasive narratives. According to Egbulefu and Emeka (2023)," the use of digital media advertising in promoting political candidates in Nigeria by political

strategists and stakeholders is becoming more prevalent than it once were". No wonder, the political advertisement is catching the attention of scholars from diverse fields because of the need to inquire into the nature as well as the effectiveness of the advertisements via digital space.

The political atmosphere in Nigeria during the 2023 general election differs from what it used to be. It was highly dynamic and charged, largely by the influence of the emergence of the Labour Party and the Obidient Movement, led by Peter Obi. The Obidient Movement, characterized by its youthful and grassroots-driven support, brought a new wave of enthusiasm and engagement to Nigeria's political landscape. This movement challenged the traditional dominance of the two major parties, the All Progressives Congress (APC) and the People's Democratic Party (PDP), by rallying around good governance, transparency, and economic reform. The election period was marked by vigorous campaigns, vibrant debates, and heightened political awareness among the electorate, reflecting a significant shift in Nigeria's political dynamics. During the 2023 election campaign, the digital space was filled with campaign posters and adverts of various political groups.

This study, therefore, presents a comparative metafunction analysis of selected online campaign advertisements by Bola Tinubu and Peter Obi, two leading candidates in the 2023 election. Grounded in Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG), the research examines how each candidate's campaign ads employ the three metafunctions—ideational, interpersonal, and textual—to construct meaning, negotiate identities, and influence the electorate. By analyzing five advertisements from each candidate, the study aims to reveal how linguistic and semiotic resources are mobilized to present contrasting political personas, visions, and identity, thereby offering insights into the role of language and design in contemporary political persuasion.

Literature review
Scholars have applied various theoretical frameworks to uncover the intricate relationship between language, ideology, and political identity construction in campaign communication. While some existing studies (such as Chiluwa, 2010, Opeibi, 2009, Omole and Ogoala, 2025) have focused on multimodality, rhetorical and persuasive strategies of political advertisements and political discourse, generally, fewer have conducted metafunction analysis of political advertisements in Nigeria.

Omole and Ogoala (2025) examined the multimodal features of selected political campaign posters of Bola Ahmed Tinubu, the presidential candidate of the All Progressives Congress (APC) in the 2023 General Elections conducted in Nigeria. The study adopts the social semiotic theory of Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) to analyze data. The study concluded that Tinubu's campaign posters effectively shaped the perception and voting behavior of a segment of the Nigerian electorate, emphasizing the communicative power of multimodal resources in political persuasion.

Similarly, Ayoola and Babatunde's (2021) study comparatively investigates the types of propositions made in Nuhu Ribadu's and Goodluck Jonathan's political advertisements through SFG's systems of mood and modality. The findings reveal that Nuhu Ribadu's adverts are dominated by the imperative mood, followed by declarative and interrogative, while Goodluck Jonathan's adverts are full of the declarative mood. The study concludes that different uses of mood and modality can create varying levels of interpersonal meaning, attitude and commitment as well as ideological views in political advertisements. This closely mirrors the focus of the current study on SFG, showing how mood and modality project ideology, commitment, and relational stance.

These studies are both relevant to the present research because they foreground the role of language and semiotics in political advertising and voter persuasion. Omole and Ogoala (2025) reveal how non-verbal, visual elements combine with text in campaign materials, while Ayoola and Babatunde (2021) underscore the ideological and interpersonal implications of linguistic mood and modality choices. Both studies affirm that political language is not neutral but rather a carefully constructed system for advancing political identities and ideologies. However, the current study applies the complete metafunctional framework of Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) to analyze the campaign advertisements of two major presidential candidates from the same electoral cycle: Peter Obi of the Labour Party and Bola Ahmed Tinubu of the All Progressives Congress (APC) during the 2023 Nigerian presidential elections.

Theoretical Framework
The theoretical framework for this analysis is Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG). SFG is a method of grammar that was developed by M. A.K. Halliday. "The term "systemic" refers to the view of language as a network of system, or interrelated sets of options for making meaning" (Halliday, 1994). The term "function" indicates that the approach is concerned with meaning, as opposed to formal grammar, which emphasizes language as a set of rules.
 According to Eggins (2004), "SFG, provides a model of language as a functional semantic resource; that is, a model that emphasizes the social functions of language and describes grammar in terms of hierarchically organized structures and in terms of systems of mutually exclusive choices available to the language user under specified conditions". SFG presents a view in terms of both structure (grammar) and words (lexis). The term lexicogrammar refers to the combination of the two approaches. SFG concerns the three metafunctions: Textual (clause as message), Interpersonal (clause as exchange) and ideational or experiential (clause as representation). Textual metafunction is represented by the systems of theme; Interpersonal metafunction is by the systems of mood while the ideational/experiential metafunction is represented by the systems of transitivity.
The transitivity system is a fundamental component of the clause that realizes the experiential metafunction, which focuses on how language construes reality by representing human experience. Eggins (2004:213) explains that where we look at the experiential metafunction, we are looking at the grammar of the clause as representation. Clause as representation is represented by transitivity, which relates to process, participant, and circumstance. From a traditional point of view, every clause in English must have a verb, while in SFG every clause must have a process. Experiential meaning is expressed through the system of transitivity or process type, with the choice of process implicating associated participant roles and configurations. (Eggins 2004:206). Deterding and Poedjosoedermo (2001:112) argue that "processes are usually expressed linguistically by a verb or verb phrase", while Halliday and Mathiessen (2004:177) argue that "process is typically realized by verbal group, participant is realized by nominal group, and circumstance realized by adverbial group or prepositional phrase". Matthiessen (1995) explains that transitivity provides the linguistic resources for construing "a quantum of change in the flow of events" by organizing this experience into three main components: processes, participants, and circumstances. Halliday and Matthiessen (2004) further identify six distinct process types within this system: material, mental, relational, verbal, behavioral, and existential. By analyzing which process types dominate a text, researchers can infer the worldview and ideological positions encoded in that discourse. For instance, political advertisements heavily reliant on material processes suggest an action-oriented campaign, while

those favouring relational and mental processes project identity construction and ideological framing.

The mood system realizes the interpersonal metafunction, which encodes the speaker's attitude, judgment, and interactional role with the audience. According to Halliday and Matthiessen (2014), the mood system distinguishes between declarative, interrogative, and imperative clauses, each enacting a different speech function: statements, questions, and commands, respectively. Mood choices establish the tenor of discourse, whether the speaker positions themselves as informing, questioning, or directing the listener. Modality complements this system by expressing degrees of certainty, obligation, or inclination (Halliday, 1994). It classifies utterances as high, medium, or low, reflecting the speaker's commitment to the proposition or obligation placed on the listener. Political discourse often uses high-modality statements to project confidence and certainty, while imperatives rally audiences toward collective action.

The theme system contributes to the textual metafunction, which concerns the organization of information in a clause, determining how meaning is sequenced and highlighted. Halliday (1994) defines the theme as the starting point of a clause, while the remainder constitutes the rheme. Themes can be categorized into three types: Topical themes, which introduce the main idea or topic of the clause. Interpersonal themes, which include elements like mood markers and vocatives that establish interaction. Textual themes, which involve connectors and continuity markers, linking clauses to prior discourse. The choice and arrangement of themes reflect the text's coherence and flow, while thematic structures reveal the speaker's focus and rhetorical strategy.

Methodology

A total of ten online campaign advertisements were selected, with five (5) advertisements each from Tinubu's and Obi's online campaign materials. The selection was purposive to ensure a balanced representation of each candidate's campaign discourse. The choice of five (5) advertisements per candidate ensures that the study maintains depth in qualitative analysis while allowing for comparative insights across multiple texts. Given that online campaign advertisements were one of the dominant modes of political communication in the 2023 election, selecting materials from official sources, verified social media accounts and reputable news platforms enhances the credibility and authenticity of the data. Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) by Halliday and Matthiessen (2014) serves as the theoretical framework for analyzing the syntactic structures and contextual meanings embedded in campaign advertisements. The study focuses on the three metafunctions. Experiential (Ideational) Metafunction – How the advertisements represent political actions, identities, and campaign promises. Advertisements encompass both textual and visual messages. The approach taken in this study is devoted specifically to the textual part of the advertising message, leaving the analysis of the visual aspects for semiotic research.

The data are divided into two groups- 5 APC/Tinubu adverts and 5 LP/Obi adverts- for analysis. The textual messages of each of the one hundred advertisement texts (50 for each political party) selected for the analysis are broken down into clauses for lexicogrammatical analysis and each clause is analysed interpersonally (through the system of mood and modality), textually (through the grammatical systems of Theme and rheme) and experientially (through the system of transitivity). Both quantitative and qualitative methods are adopted in analysing the data. The quantitative analysis is concerned with the calculation of frequency and the percentage of each process type, participant, circumstance, mood type, and theme in each group of adverts. This serves

as the basis for the qualitative interpretation of the data. With this, the comparison of the Lexicogrammatical features of the political advertisements of the two political parties is made, taking into cognizance the socio-political situations that inform the need to place such advertisements.

Lexicogrammatical analysis
Peter Obi Campaign Adverts (10 Clauses)
Process Types

Process Type	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Material	4	40.0
Relational	3	30.0
Mental	1	10.0
Existential	1	10.0
Verbal	0	0
Behavioural	0	0
Total	9	100

The table above presents the frequency of the process types in the selected Peter Obi adverts. The material process takes the highest percentage (50%). These are action-oriented clauses, representing concrete actions. The dominance of material process in the adverts indicates that the adverts are geared towards representing actions, political events, and socio-economic situation and happenings in the country as well as the actions to be taken to improve the situation. Peter Obi uses most of the material processes to either directly or indirectly incite the electorate to rise against the happenings in all facets of the country- education, politics, infrastructure, economic, and social welfare by voting for him

Examples:
>   *"Vote Peter Obi for President, Federal Republic of Nigeria."*
>   *"Support Peter Obi for president."*

These clauses are imperatives targeting voters with calls to action. The actor of the clauses is often elliptical (understood to be "you"), and the process (vote, support) emphasizes agency and involvement.
The relative processes account for 30% of the processes in the advertisements. These represent states of being, identity, or attribution.

Examples:
>   *"Peter Obi 2023, leadership for a well-functioning Nigeria."*

This clause identifies Obi with positive governance while intensive identifying relational clauses showing ideological positioning. As a candidate of an opposition party, Peter Obi wants to identify what is and what is not in the country to get voters persuaded for change. So, some of the relational processes are used to identify and describe Peter Obi's perception of the state of the country in terms of socio-economic and political ills in the country.

>   *"It is possible, our pact with Nigerians."*

These clauses present values and vision, associating Obi with functional governance, transformation, and possibility.

The mental process accounts for 10% of the dataset. These represent cognition, emotion, or perception. While the existential process takes 10%. These introduce the existence of something.

Example:

> *"God does not dwell in a broom or umbrella."*

The clause implies a rejection of party symbols (APC and PDP) and expresses religious and moral grounding.

Mood Types and Modality

Mood Type	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Declarative	8	80.0%
Imperative	2	20.0%

Declarative Mood (80%) indicates an assertive, informational tone, appealing to reason and logical conviction. This implies that the adverts are meant to give information about Peter Obi and his ability to govern the country well at that critical time.   E.g., "Your PVC is your mandate…" = high certainty, mobilizing voter empowerment. Imperative Mood (20%) is found in the Short, action-oriented slogans such as the example below: "Vote Peter Obi", "Support Peter Obi" directly engage citizens.

Modality Table (only Declaratives)

Modality Type	Frequency	% of Declaratives
High	4	50.0%
Medium	3	37.5%
Low	1	12.5%
Total	8	100.0%

High Modality (50%) implies confident projections, e.g., *"He dwells…"*, *"God does not dwell…"* Medium Modality (37.5%) gives hopeful and suggestive proposals e.g., *"It is possible…"* Low Modality (12.5%) is found in elliptical, less committed structures, e.g., *"Peter Obi for President…"*

Theme Type

Theme Type	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Topical	10	76.9%
Textual	1	7.7%
Interpersonal	2	15.4%
Total	13	100%

Topical Themes (76.9%) dominate the structure, reflecting the candidate's focus on projecting participants like Obi, God, the voter, leadership, and societal issues. This indicates an emphasis on subject-focused, message-driven communication, where the topic is foregrounded to maintain

clarity and relevance for the electorate. Textual Themes (7.7%) occur sparsely, illustrated in clauses like: "Where two or three are gathered…", where "Where" signals logical or cohesive ties to prior discourse. The limited use suggests that the ads are designed as standalone persuasive statements rather than parts of a continuous narrative.

Interpersonal Themes (15.4%) are present in imperative constructions such as: "Vote wisely," "Choose Peter Obi", directly addressing and engaging the audience. This reveals the interpersonal function of the ads — guiding and urging the audience to take political action.

Tinubu Campaign Adverts (14 Clauses)
Process Types)

Process Type	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Material	8	57.1%
Relational	2	14.3%
Mental	1	7.1%
Verbal	2	14.3%
Behavioural	1	7.1%
Existential	0	0.0%
Total	14	100.0%

From the frequency and percentage table of the process types in the Tinubu's Advertisements presented above, the Material process takes the highest percentage (57.1%). The dominance of material process in the adverts indicates that the Tinubu's main concern in the adverts is principally with representing actions and events such as various developments that will take place if he is elected as the president.

Examples:
> *"I will recruit 50 million youths into the army…"*
> *"…and feed them Agbado and cassava."*
> *"Vote Tinubu for President."*
> *"Allocate 35% of government positions for women."*

These clauses suggest a strong action-oriented agenda, promising concrete deliverables (recruitment, food provision, appointments), reinforcing Tinubu's "doer" persona.

The Relational Process (14.3%) is the next to the material process in frequency and it is used to express identity or evaluation. The relational processes (attributive and identifying) serve to describe or/and define entities. They are used in data set to provide information about the proposed agenda of Bola Tinubu by stating the vision of his government:

- **Examples:**
  > *"Action plan for a better Nigeria."*
  > *"Hope 2023, vote Bola Tinubu as President of Nigeria."* (implied attribution of hope to Tinubu)

These reflect the evaluative positioning of Tinubu as the hope and the symbol of transformation, attempting to link his person to national prosperity.

The Verbal Process is 14.3% and these are clauses of saying or reporting ideas.

- **Examples:**
  "What to know about Tinubu's manifesto…"

The listed bullet points imply indirect verbal projection of his commitments. Here, verbal processes are used to announce policy direction and build a narrative of transparency and planning. The Mental Process takes 7.1% and it is concerned with thinking, knowing, or feeling. They are used to describe the mental activities that will be transformed to concrete action:

Example:
"Yes, we can." (a shared mental resolve—collective belief)

This clause encourages collective belief in capacity and success. The Behavioural Process (7.1%), which represents physiological or psychological behaviour close to mental or material processes.

Example:
"Better Nigeria?" (Rhetorical question can be seen as behavioral in its performative, evaluative sense—provoking reflection)

These clauses imply judgment, desire, or observation, inviting the public to emotionally process Nigeria's current state.

Mood Types and Modality

Mood Type	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Declarative	7	58.3%
Imperative	2	16.7%
Interrogative	2	16.7%
Elliptical Nominal	1	8.3%
Total	12	100.0%

Declarative Mood (58.3%): Used to assert plans or policies (*"I will recruit…"*), indicating strong self-projection and confidence in execution. Besides, the speaker uses the declarative mood to give propositions about his role and involvement in the unfolding action. The Imperative Mood is next in percentage (16.7%). *"Vote Tinubu…"*, classic campaign call to action. These are few of the clauses chosen by the speaker to convey proposals (i.e. offer of persuasive advice) to the masses. The Interrogative Mood (16.7%) is used to engage the masses.
E.g. *"Better Nigeria?"*, *"What to know…"* These are rhetorical and persuasive proposals aimed at engaging the readers to reflect.

Modality Type	Frequency	% of Declaratives
High	4	57.1%
Medium	2	28.6%
Low	1	14.3%
Total	7	100.0%

The high Modality (57.1%) as *"I will recruit"* highlights certainty, and Tinubu's commitment to policy points. Medium & Low Modality are found in nominal clauses and they reflect general vision of Tinubu for governance in Nigeria (*"Renewed hope…"*, *"Coalition…"*).

Tinubu's adverts are more policy-forward and structured to reflect strategic commitment and appeal through emphatic declarations and a call-and-response style.

Theme Types

Theme Type	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Topical	12	75.0%
Textual	0	0.0%
Interpersonal	4	25.0%

From the table above, Topical Themes (75.0%) dominate Tinubu's campaign advertisements. Each clause introduces a clear subject, such as *"I," "Coalition," "Vote Tinubu,"* or thematic slogans like *"Hope 2023."* This shows a strong emphasis on participant-driven messages where the topic is frontloaded to immediately focus the reader on the key actors and actions. It reflects a strategy of reinforcing identity and directive action through repeated naming and subject emphasis. The Interpersonal Themes (25.0%) appear in the form of imperatives (e.g., *"Vote wisely," "Support the vision,"* etc.) and rhetorical questions. They aim to directly engage and influence the voter by invoking duty, urgency, or emotional response. These are typical of persuasive discourse. The relatively high proportion of interpersonal elements points to a commanding, action-oriented tone in Tinubu's rhetorical style. Textual Themes (0.0%) are absent, which implies that the clauses largely function as standalone persuasive statements with minimal logical or cohesive connectors (e.g., "but," "so," "and then"). This suggests a deliberate use of slogan-style delivery, characteristic of campaign posters and jingles, which favour punchy, memorable, and context-independent messages over extended argumentation.

Discussion
This study applied a Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) metafunctional analysis to the political campaign adverts of two Nigerian presidential candidates, Peter Obi and Bola Ahmed Tinubu, in the 2023 elections. The research revealed significant insights into their political ideologies, identity construction, and campaign strategies by examining their advertisements through the lenses of experiential, interpersonal, and textual metafunctions.

Experiential Metafunction: Ideology and Representation
The experiential metafunction analysis demonstrated a clear difference in how each candidate represents reality through language. Peter Obi's adverts predominantly employed relational and existential processes, emphasizing states of being, moral identity, and the aspiration for national reform. Clauses like "*Leadership for a well-functioning Nigeria*" and *"God does not dwell in a broom or umbrella*" signaled a reflective and value-driven leadership ideology. This suggests that Obi's political philosophy was rooted in ethical reformism and civic engagement, seeking to position himself as a moral leader capable of renewing Nigeria through conscious, people-centered governance.
On the other hand, Tinubu's adverts were heavily dominated by material processes, directly linked to action and transformation of the physical world. Promises like *"I will recruit 50 million youths into the Army and feed them Agbado and cassava*" and "*Allocating 35% of government positions for women"* positioned Tinubu as a practical, action-oriented leader. His adverts also revealed a transactional approach to governance, rooted in delivering measurable results and national stability, echoing his identity as an experienced political strategist and legacy builder. They both

manipulate the various processes to realise the field in a less specialized way, but persuasive and informative way to some extent. The foregrounding of relational and material processes underlines the long-term goal of the advertisements, which is to persuade people and influence their voting patterns.

Interpersonal Metafunction: Mood, Modality, and Power Relations

The interpersonal metafunction analysis highlighted each candidate's strategic negotiation of power and their relationship with voters. Peter Obi's language was heavily declarative, using statements of fact and reflective assertions rather than directives. The modulation of modality in his adverts, leaning toward medium and high certainty, projected a balanced optimism and trust in the electorate's reasoning. He positioned himself as a transparent, relatable leader, promoting shared responsibility in the democratic process.

In contrast, Tinubu's adverts reflected assertiveness and directiveness through high-modality declaratives and imperative-like slogans. Rhetorical structures such as *"Better Nigeria? Yes, we can!"* and explicit promises reinforced his identity as an authoritative figure who guarantees action, evoking confidence through certainty rather than negotiation. This language strategy suggests a political ideology anchored in performance, reliability, and administrative dominance.

Textual Metafunction: Organization and Identity Framing

The textual metafunction analysis revealed Obi's preference for structured, coherent discourse, marked by the presence of textual themes that guided the logical flow of his adverts. This organization mirrored his political ideology of systemic reform and intellectual engagement, highlighting his emphasis on rational discourse over emotional persuasion.

Tinubu's adverts, however, featured a higher reliance on topical themes and emotionally charged catchphrases such as *"Renewed Hope"* and "*Action Plan for a Better Nigeria."* This strategy, less concerned with logical sequencing and more with brand recall and slogan effectiveness, reinforced his identity as a charismatic and populist leader, relying on emotional appeal, name recognition, and political continuity.

Conclusion

The study is a metafunction analysis of 2023 Nigerian presidential campaign advertisements of Peter Obi and Bola Ahmed Tinubu. From the discussions of the findings of the study, ultimately, the study concludes that campaign advertisements in Nigeria's political landscape serve as complex semiotic instruments for constructing and projecting candidate identity, political ideology, and voter persuasion strategies. The analysis underscores how language shapes not only electoral narratives but also the broader public consciousness about leadership, governance, and national development.

By integrating a full metafunctional analysis — spanning interpersonal, experiential, and textual meanings — this research contributes to the understanding of how political communication reflects and constructs ideological positions and power relations in the context of an evolving democracy like Nigeria.

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