



LALICO Journal of Languages, Literature, and Communication

Print ISSN: 26516462

www.lalicojournals.com

Volume 3; Issue 2; September 2025, Page No. 181-190.

Syntactic Structures in Political Discourse: A Government and Binding Analysis of President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's 65th Independence Anniversary Speech

***Muhammad, I.**

Department of Linguistics, Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto

***Corresponding author email:** isahgaladima@gmail.com

Abstract

This study examines the syntactic architecture of African political discourse through the analytical framework of Government and Binding (GB) Theory as developed by Chomsky (1981, 1986). The main objective is to explore how syntactic principles underlie the construction of political meaning, authority, and persuasion, an area often overshadowed by pragmatic, stylistic, and critical discourse approaches. Methodologically, the study employs purposive sampling to select excerpts from African political speeches, with particular focus on President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's 65th Independence Anniversary address. Clauses rich in noun phrase (NP) structures and clause relations are extracted and presented in interlinear gloss format for syntactic clarity and precision. The analysis applies the major submodules of GB, Case Theory, Theta Theory, Binding Theory, Government, Bounding, and Control, to reveal how political discourse is governed by systematic syntactic configurations rather than random grammatical choices. Findings indicate that declarative structures assigning thematic roles to political actors, as well as governed subject-predicate relations, serve to legitimate authority and encode ideological stance. The study concludes that syntax functions not merely as a grammatical framework but as a strategic instrument in political rhetoric, shaping the persuasive force and ideological framing of discourse. It recommends greater integration of syntactic analysis into political linguistics to uncover how language structure contributes to the production and maintenance of power in African political communication.

Keywords: Syntax, Government and Binding Theory, political discourse, African linguistics, Bola Ahmed Tinubu, noun phrase analysis.

Introduction

Language is central to politics, not merely as a tool for communication but as a mechanism for legitimizing authority, enacting policy, and constructing national identity. Political speeches, especially those delivered on symbolic occasions such as independence anniversaries, embody both the aspirations and challenges of the nation. They function as sites where power is negotiated, where solidarity is invoked, and where leadership is projected. In Africa, with its diverse linguistic ecologies and histories of colonialism and postcolonial governance, political speech occupies a particularly significant role in shaping public life and political legitimacy. Most scholarly analyses of political discourse in Africa have prioritized pragmatic, stylistic, and critical discourse analytic approaches (van Dijk, 2006). These perspectives have provided insights into ideology, persuasion, and power relations. However, the syntactic dimension of political discourse has often been overlooked. Syntax has typically been reserved for more "formal" linguistic analyses of African languages, including Yoruba (Arokoyo, 2004), Igbo (Uwalaka, 1995), Hausa (Jaggar, 2001), and Gbagyi (Muhammad, 2025). Yet political language, replete with complex NP constructions, reflexive pronouns, binding relations, and thematic role assignment, is also fertile ground for syntactic investigation.

The theoretical framework adopted in this study is Government and Binding (GB) Theory, introduced by Chomsky (1981) as an attempt to unify syntactic principles within a modular system. GB provides tools to account for phenomena such as case assignment, theta role distribution, movement constraints, government, and binding, all of which appear in the structures of political discourse. Unlike broader functional or critical approaches, GB allows us to account for the underlying grammatical relations that enable political speech to achieve its pragmatic goals. The study focuses primarily on President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's 65th Independence Anniversary speech, a text that exemplifies the intersection of syntax and politics in contemporary Nigeria. By analyzing excerpts from

181 | Cite this article as:

Muhammad, I. (2025). Syntactic structures in political discourse: A government and binding analysis of president Bola Ahmed Tinubu's 65th independence anniversary speech. *LALICO Journal of Languages, Literature, and Communication*, 3(2), 181-190.

this speech and comparing them with patterns observable in other African political discourses, the paper aims to demonstrate that syntax is not an inert background but an active agent in the communicative force of political rhetoric. This study is guided by three main research questions. It first seeks to determine how the submodules of Government and Binding (GB) Theory, namely Case, Theta, Binding, Government, Bounding, and Control, manifest in African political speeches. It then explores the ways in which syntactic structures within political discourse contribute to the projection of power, authority, and ideology. Finally, it investigates what a syntactic analysis of African political speech contributes to understanding of political linguistics on the African continent

Literature Review

Syntax and Political Discourse

The study of political discourse has historically been dominated by pragmatics, rhetoric, and critical discourse analysis (CDA). Scholars such as van Dijk (2006), Wodak (2015), and Fairclough (1992) have demonstrated how language functions to reproduce ideology and power. In these approaches, emphasis is placed on speech acts, implicature, presupposition, metaphor, and strategies of legitimation. Syntax is often treated as a background element rather than as a central analytical category. Yet, as Radford (2004, 2009) notes, syntax is the system that determines how words combine into larger units and, consequently, how meaning is structured and conveyed. In political communication, syntax is not neutral. Declarative sentences, interrogatives, and imperatives have distinct illocutionary forces that shape the interaction between leaders and citizens (Chilton, 2004). For instance, declaratives such as “*We will deliver economic reforms*” encode commitment, while interrogatives such as “*What shall we do as a nation?*” invite collective participation, even when they are not genuine questions. The syntactic form of a sentence contributes to its pragmatic effect. African political discourse studies reflect a similar trend, where pragmatic and stylistic dimensions have received more attention than syntax. Chimombo and Roseberry (1998), for example, examine Malawian political speeches largely from the perspective of metaphor and persuasion. Adegoju (2014) investigates linguistic strategies in Nigerian political discourse, focusing on deixis, metaphors, and rhetorical structures. The neglect of syntax is striking given that political speeches frequently employ complex clause structures, coordinated and subordinated constructions, nominalizations, and reflexive pronouns. These are all phenomena that require theoretical explanation beyond pragmatics. As Haegeman (1994) and Carnie (2021) remind us, syntax provides the formal rules that govern such structures. Without a syntactic lens, the analysis of political language risks remaining incomplete.

Government and Binding Theory in African Linguistics

Government and Binding (GB) Theory, proposed by Chomsky (1981, 1986), is a modular theory of syntax that seeks to explain the universal principles underlying sentence structure. The framework comprises several interrelated submodules: Case Theory, Theta Theory, Binding Theory, Government, Bounding, and Control. Each submodule accounts for a different dimension of syntactic organization, from NP licensing (Case) to thematic role assignment (Theta) and the interpretation of anaphors and pronouns (Binding). In African linguistics, GB has been applied productively to the analysis of a wide range of languages. For instance, Arokoyo (2004) uses Case Theory and Focus constructions to account for syntactic phenomena in Yoruba. Uwalaka (1995) applies GB to Igbo, exploring NP movement and case assignment. Jaggar (2001) investigates Hausa, especially in relation to verb–argument structure. Carstens (2005) discusses Bantu languages such as Kiswahili, focusing on agreement and movement within a GB framework. More recently, Muhammad (2025) has applied GB to Gbagyi, analyzing noun phrase distribution and binding relations.

These works demonstrate that GB is not only theoretically robust but also empirically useful for describing African syntactic data. They also reveal how African languages, despite typological variation, conform to universal principles of case assignment, binding, and government. However, while GB has been fruitfully applied to descriptive syntax in African languages, its potential for analyzing political discourse has rarely been explored. Political speeches, like other language data, exhibit clear syntactic structures that can be analyzed using GB tools. For example, in Tinubu's 65th Independence speech, declarative clauses such as “*We will continue to invest in security*” involve NP case assignment and thematic role distribution: the NP *we* receives nominative case and is assigned the theta role of Agent, while the NP *security* functions as Theme. Likewise, binding principles are at play in statements like “*Nigeria must rediscover herself*,” where *herself* must be bound within its governing category. These are syntactic phenomena that can only be adequately explained within a framework like GB.

Gaps in African Political Discourse Studies

Although African political discourse has been extensively studied, most research has emphasized pragmatic, sociolinguistic, or critical approaches (Chimombo & Roseberry, 1998). These works have illuminated how political leaders use metaphors, proverbs, and code-switching to connect with audiences, but they have not systematically accounted for the syntactic foundations of political language.

The gap becomes evident when one considers that the persuasiveness of political rhetoric often depends on sentence structure. For instance, the recurrent use of coordinated clauses in African political speeches conveys inclusivity and collective resolve: “*We shall build our economy, and we shall secure our people, and we shall protect our democracy.*” Each clause is syntactically licensed and governed, and the repetition reinforces ideological commitment. Similarly, the distribution of pronouns such as *we* and *our* raises questions of case assignment and binding.

Another overlooked area is the role of movement and bounding in political slogans and rhetorical questions. Slogans such as “*What shall we do for our people?*” involve wh-movement constrained by bounding principles. Non-finite clauses in political discourse (e.g., “*to rebuild our nation*”) fall within the domain of Control Theory. These structures are not only syntactically significant but also pragmatically powerful in projecting leadership. Thus, the current literature shows a clear imbalance: while pragmatics has dominated, syntax, particularly under GB theory, has been underexplored in political discourse. This paper responds to that gap by foregrounding the syntactic dimension of African political speeches, demonstrating that GB theory can illuminate how syntax structures both meaning and ideology in political contexts.

Methodology

Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative descriptive design situated within the framework of theoretical linguistics. The design is appropriate because the aim is not statistical generalization but rather an in-depth explanation of syntactic phenomena in political discourse. Qualitative designs enable the researcher to engage closely with data, allowing for thick description and theory-driven interpretation.

Data Selection and Source

The primary data is President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's 65th Independence Anniversary speech (2025), delivered on October 1st. This speech was selected because of its national significance and its rich syntactic variation. Independence Day speeches in Nigeria, like in many African countries, function as ritualized political texts: they reaffirm national identity, legitimize government policies, and project leadership ethos (Oha, 1994; Adegboju, 2014). By focusing on this speech, the analysis provides insight into how syntax structures ideological communication at a crucial annual event. The speech text was transcribed from official sources and edited for orthographic consistency. Only syntactically relevant excerpts were selected for close analysis. The selection was guided by three criteria: the presence of complex syntactic phenomena such as movement, binding, and case assignment; the occurrence of discourse-relevant structures including topic-focus relations, ellipsis, and coordination; and the salience of the excerpts to political meaning, particularly those that legitimise reforms or project hope.

Theoretical Framework

The study is grounded in Chomsky's Government and Binding (GB) Theory (1981, 1986). GB is selected as the most appropriate model because of its modularity: it allows the researcher to isolate different aspects of syntax (Case Theory, Theta Theory, Binding, Movement, Control) and apply them systematically. GB has been extensively applied to African languages (Arokoyo, 2004; Jaggar, 2001; Carstens, 2005), demonstrating both its descriptive and explanatory adequacy. The decision to privilege GB over later models such as the Minimalist Program (Chomsky, 1995) is deliberate. While Minimalism streamlines syntactic theory, GB remains more pedagogically explicit in mapping submodules to surface phenomena. This makes it suitable for analyzing political discourse, where the aim is not only to identify structures but also to explain how each syntactic choice is licensed.

Analytical Procedure

The analysis proceeded in five stages. First, the text was segmented into paragraphs and clauses, with each unit examined for syntactic features. Second, structures were mapped onto relevant GB submodules (Case Theory, Theta Theory, Binding, Control, Movement/Bounding). Third, specific sentences were selected as exemplars; interlinear glossing was deemed unnecessary for English data, so excerpts were italicized to highlight forms. Fourth, each excerpt underwent syntactic scrutiny in light of GB principles, for example, pronoun distribution was evaluated against Binding Theory and wh-movement against Bounding Theory. Fifth, the analysis addressed syntax-pragmatics interfaces, notably information structure (topic and focus), presupposition, and ellipsis, to link syntactic form with political meaning. This methodology is justified for three reasons. First, focusing on a single, high-profile speech provides depth over breadth, enabling detailed syntactic exposition. Second, GB theory provides a principled and rigorous framework that has already proven effective in African linguistic research.

Third, situating the analysis at the syntax–pragmatics interface ensures relevance to political discourse studies, bridging the descriptive focus of syntax with the ideological concerns of pragmatics.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Case Theory

Case Theory (Chomsky, 1981) states that every overt noun phrase (NP) must be assigned Case to be grammatically licensed. In English, structural Case is typically assigned under government: nominative by INFL (T), accusative by verbs, and oblique Case by prepositions. In President Tinubu's Independence Day speeches, Case assignment is central to the construction of political actors, recipients, and beneficiaries.

Excerpt (1)

"Fellow Nigerians, this is the third time I will address you on our independence anniversary since I assumed office as your President on May 29, 2023."

From the excerpts above, we can analyse this surface structure (relevant clause):

I will address you on our independence anniversary

(1a)

I	will	address	you	on	our independence anniversary
NP	T	V	NP	P	NP
NOM	-	assigns	ACC	assigns	OBL

The NP *I* receives nominative Case from INFL (T), while *you* is assigned accusative Case under government by the verb *address*. The PP *on our independence anniversary* licenses the NP *anniversary* with oblique Case, assigned by the preposition *on*. The grammaticality of the clause depends on this Case assignment.

Pragmatically, the selection of *I* as subject encodes presidential agency, while *you* constructs the citizenry as direct recipients of political assurance.

Excerpt (2)

"Our administration has redirected the economy towards a more inclusive path, channelling money to fund education, healthcare, national security, agriculture, and critical economic infrastructure."

From the excerpts above, consider this relevant clause in example 2a below:

(2a)

Our administration	has	redirected	the economy	towards	a more inclusive path
NP (NOM)	T	V	NP (ACC)	P	NP (OBL)

From (2a) above, the NP *Our administration* receives nominative Case from INFL (T). The NP *the economy* is licensed through accusative Case assigned by the verb *redirected*. The PP *towards a more inclusive path* assigns oblique Case to *path*.

Syntactically, the government is foregrounded as an active agent through its nominative subject, while *the economy* is constructed as the direct patient of governmental action. The Case-theoretic relations thus reinforce political authority and economic intervention.

Case assignment in Tinubu's speeches strategically encodes agency, affectedness, and beneficiaries. By assigning nominative Case to governmental actors and accusative Case to objects representing national resources (*the economy, education, healthcare*), the syntax mirrors the ideological framing of government as an active agent and citizens as beneficiaries of reform.

Theta Theory

Theta Theory is a central module of Government and Binding Theory, governed by the Theta Criterion (Chomsky, 1981), which requires a one-to-one correspondence between arguments and theta-roles: each argument receives exactly one theta-role, and each theta-role is assigned to exactly one argument. This module regulates the relationship between a predicate's lexical-semantic properties and its syntactic structure. In political discourse,

theta-role assignment serves to ideologically frame participants in events, attributing agency, responsibility, and patienthood.

Theta-Role Assignment in Clausal Complements

Verbs select for a specific number and type of arguments. For example, the verb *believe* subcategorizes for a clausal complement, with its subject typically realizing the Experiencer role of a cognitive state.

Example (3a)

[_s [_{DP} Our founding heroes and heroines] [_{VP} believed [_s that it was Nigeria's manifest destiny to lead the entire black race]]].

Ungrammatical alternative for contrast:

Example (3b)

*[_s [_{DP} Our founding heroes and heroines] [_{VP} believed [_{DP} the destiny]]].

The semantic incompleteness of (3b) illustrates that *believe* requires a CP complement to saturate its propositional content.

Theta-role assignment:

From the above, the determiner phrase (DP) "*our founding heroes and heroines*" is base-generated in the specifier position of the verb phrase and receives the theta-role of Experiencer from the verb "*believed*."

Similarly, the complementizer phrase (CP) "*that it was Nigeria's manifest destiny...*" functions as the Propositional Theme, representing the specific content of the belief.

Within the embedded clause:

Example (3c)

[_s [_{DP} Nigeria's manifest destiny] [_{VP} was [_{DP} to lead [_{DP} the entire black race]]]].

From the above, we can see that the infinitive verb "*to lead*" assigns the theta-role of Agent to its understood subject, the empty category PRO, which is controlled by the noun "*Nigeria*," establishing coreference.

Again, the determiner phrase "*the entire black race*" is assigned the theta-role of Theme

This hierarchical embedding allows ideological projection: national heroes as Experiencers hold beliefs whose propositional content casts Nigeria as destined Agent leading the Themes.

Uniform Theta-Assignment in Coordinated Structures

The Theta Criterion applies uniformly to all arguments, including in coordinated Verb Phrases. A single argument can be the thematic subject of multiple predicates if conjoined.

Example (4a)

[_s We [_{VP} must [_{VP} [_{VP} build the roads we need] and [_{VP} repair the ones that have become decrepit] and [_{VP} construct the schools our children will attend]]]].

Theta-role assignment:

The determiner phrase "*we*" is base-generated in the specifier position of the verb phrase of the highest verb phrase and receives the theta-role of Agent from the coordinated verbal complex. Within the coordinated structure, each individual verb assigns the theta-role of Theme to its own direct object: the verb "*build*" assigns Theme to "*the roads we need*," the verb "*repair*" assigns Theme to "*the ones that have become decrepit*," and the verb "*construct*" assigns Theme to "*the schools our children will attend*." The syntactic parallelism, where a single Agent acts on multiple Themes, pragmatically constructs a narrative of multi-faceted governmental action.

Syntactic and Ideological Implications

Through Theta Theory, Tinubu's speech systematically distributes thematic roles:

Agent roles are consistently assigned to the government or its symbolic predecessors (*we, our administration, our founding heroes*), attributing agency and responsibility. Theme roles are assigned to national assets and citizens (*the economy, the roads, you*), marking them as objects of governance and care. This syntactic mapping directly reinforces the ideological message of a proactive state shaping national destiny. The grammar, in other words, is a conduit for political meaning: syntax enacts agency, constructs responsibility, and foregrounds the object of governance.

Binding Theory

Binding Theory (Chomsky, 1981) specifies the syntactic conditions under which nominal expressions (pronouns, reflexives, reciprocals, and referring expressions) are interpreted relative to their antecedents. It is defined by three core principles. Principle A states that an anaphor, such as *myself* or *each other*, must be bound within its governing category. Principle B holds that a pronominal, such as *he, him, you*, or *we*, must be free within its governing category. Principle C stipulates that a referring expression (R-expression), such as *the President* or *Tinubu*, must be free everywhere. In political discourse, these elements strategically manage identity, authority, and solidarity between the speaker and audience.

Binding Domains of Pronouns and R-Expressions

The distribution of pronominals and R-expressions illustrates Principles B and C.

Example (5a)

[_s I₁ salute you₂].

Example (5b)

*[_s I₁ salute me₁]. (Violates Principle B: *me* is bound by *I* in its local clause)

In (5a), the pronoun *I* is free, thereby satisfying Principle B, while *you* is likewise free within its governing clause, in line with Principle B. This configuration establishes a well-formed Agent–Goal structure in which the speaker (*I*) assumes the role of initiator and the addressee (*you*) functions as recipient. By contrast, in (5b), *me* is incorrectly bound by *I*, which constitutes a violation of Principle B. The resulting derivation is ungrammatical, since the pronominal cannot be locally bound by its antecedent within the governing category. The configuration enforces a leader–citizen dichotomy, syntactically and pragmatically marking distinct roles.

Ambiguous Pronominal Reference

The pronominal *we* obeys Principle B but allows pragmatic range variation, supporting strategic ambiguity.

Example (6a)

[_s We₁ chose [_{DP} the path of reform]].

Example (6b)

[_s We₁ chose [_{DP} the path of tomorrow over [_{DP} the comfort of today]]].

The pronoun *we* is free in its governing category, thereby conforming to Principle B of the Binding Theory. This structural freedom enables multiple pragmatic readings. In its exclusive sense, *we* refers to the speaker and the administration, emphasizing governmental agency and authority. In its inclusive sense, it extends to the nation collectively, fostering solidarity and shared responsibility. The syntactic leverage afforded by Principle B's freedom requirement allows *we* to oscillate between these interpretations, functioning as a bridge that strategically merges governmental authority with national identity. In this way, the pronoun becomes not only a grammatical choice but also an ideological resource, reinforcing the positioning of leadership as both distinct from and united with the citizenry.

Absence and Potential of Anaphors

Anaphor usage (Principle A) carries reflexive emphasis, whereas pronouns are simpler and more transparent.

Example (7a)

I will continue to work for you.

Example (7b)

I will continue to dedicate myself to you.

In (7b), the use of *myself* would be bound by *I*, thereby satisfying Principle A of the Binding Theory and introducing a stronger sense of reflexivity into the clause. However, the speech as a whole demonstrates a marked preference for pronominals over anaphors. This distribution emphasizes distinct speaker–audience roles rather than self-reflexive commitment, reinforcing the asymmetry of leadership address in which responsibility is projected outward toward the citizenry rather than inwardly anchored in self-reference. The choice to minimize reflexive constructions enhances clarity of leadership authority and audience role, while retaining syntactic correctness.

Syntactic and Ideological Implications

Binding Theory demonstrates that grammatical constraints on coreference are not merely formal but function as tools for political discourse: The Agent–Recipient distinction is maintained through the obligatory separation of *I* as an R-expression and *you* as a pronominal, a configuration that establishes both hierarchical distance and ideological clarity between leadership and citizenry. In contrast, the pronoun *we*, which is free within its governing category, introduces deliberate strategic ambiguity: it allows the speaker to merge government initiative with public solidarity, thereby blending authority with inclusivity. Notably, the relative minimization of reflexives signals a preference for externalized agency over self-reflexivity, foregrounding the leadership's responsibility toward its audience rather than emphasizing introspection. This distribution of reference thus encodes both syntactic constraints and rhetorical choices, shaping the discourse of governance through grammar. Thus, pronouns and R-expressions, regulated by Binding Theory, become syntactic instruments to craft political narrative, authority, and solidarity.

Movement and Bounding Theory

Movement Theory, together with Bounding Theory, explains the displacement of constituents from their base-generated positions. These operations are constrained by principles such as the Empty Category Principle (ECP) and Subadjacency (Chomsky, 1981). In political oratory, movement operations, topicalization, focus-fronting, clefting, are not merely grammatical options but rhetorical tools to manage information structure, establish contrast, and signal prominence.

Base-Generation and Vocatives

Not all clause-initial elements result from syntactic movement. Vocatives, for example, are base-generated in the left periphery and do not occupy argument positions.

Example (8a)

[DP Fellow Nigerians, [IP this is the third time I will address you...]]]

Example (8b)

* [DP Fellow Nigerians, [IP this is Fellow Nigerians the third time...]]]

The vocative *Fellow Nigerians* in (8a) is base-generated in a CP-adjunct position, where it operates independently of the clause's argument structure. The ungrammaticality of (8b) demonstrates that no trace is left within the IP, confirming that vocatives are pragmatically rather than syntactically linked to the clause. Their function is therefore extra-sentential: they establish solidarity with the audience and command attention prior to the delivery of propositional content, serving as a discourse anchor rather than a grammatical argument.

NP-Movement to Subject Position

A canonical A-movement example is raising a DP to Spec-IP to satisfy the Extended Projection Principle (EPP), which requires overt subjects.

Example (9a)

[IP The worst_i is [VP t_i over]].

Example (9b)

* [IP is [VP the worst over]]. (Violates EPP)

The nominal expression *the worst* is base-generated within the VP as the subject of the predicate and subsequently undergoes movement to Spec-IP in order to satisfy the Extended Projection Principle. The trace t_i left behind conforms to the requirements of the Empty Category Principle and Bounding Theory, ensuring that antecedent–trace relations are properly governed within the clause. Beyond its formal mechanics, the rhetorical effect of this movement is to foreground the abstract concept of “the worst,” elevating it into a position of syntactic and discursive prominence. By doing so, the construction highlights the idea of overcoming adversity, thereby reinforcing themes of resolution and optimism in the speech.

Contrastive Topicalization and Parentheticals

Non-argument (A') movement allows constituents to occupy left-peripheral positions for focus or contrast.

Example (10a)

[_{IP} Yesterday's pains_i are [_{VP} t_i giving way to relief]].

Example (10b)

[_{IP} The worst is over, [he said]].

The phrase *yesterday's pains* undergoes A'-movement into topic position, where it is contrasted with the subsequent positive outcome *relief*. This displacement obeys locality constraints, as no crossing of CP boundaries occurs that would violate Subadjacency. The parenthetical insertion *he said* is adjoined high within the CP layer, minimally affecting the clause's core syntactic dependencies while still providing evaluative stance. Pragmatically, the overall configuration emphasizes the opposition between past hardship and present relief, thereby foregrounding resilience and progress as central rhetorical themes.

Syntactic and Pragmatic Implications

Movement and Bounding Theory show that syntactic markedness directly encodes rhetorical emphasis: Base-generated vocatives function as independent constituents that establish direct engagement and solidarity with the audience, yet they do so without altering the core argument structure of the clause. In contrast, instances of A'-movement to Spec-IP thematically foreground key concepts, simultaneously satisfying grammatical requirements of case and agreement while signalling discourse prominence. A'-movement, particularly in the form of contrastive topicalization, restructures the clause by relocating elements into the left periphery, thereby enhancing discourse organization and creating emphasis through syntactic prominence. Parenthetical adjuncts, meanwhile, operate as insertions that provide meta-commentary or evaluative stance, but they remain syntactically peripheral, leaving the main dependency relations of the clause intact. In Tinubu's speech, the strategic manipulation of movement operations aligns syntactic structure with rhetorical intent, using grammatical mechanisms to reinforce message prominence and manage information flow.

Control Theory

Control Theory governs the distribution and interpretation of the null pronoun PRO, which occupies the subject position of non-finite clauses (infinitives and gerunds). PRO must have an antecedent (its controller) which determines its reference. The theory distinguishes between Obligatory Control, where the controller is a mandatory, clause-mate argument, and Non-Obligatory Control, where the reference can be more free or arbitrary (Chomsky, 1981). In political rhetoric, control structures are instrumental in attributing responsibility, projecting future action, and binding the speaker and the audience to shared goals. The syntactic configuration of PRO ensures that agency, intention, and accountability are encoded in the grammar itself.

Obligatory Subject Control in Infinitival Complements

Infinitival clauses selected by verbs or adjectives often require the matrix subject to control the null subject PRO.

Example (11a)

[_s We_i [_{VP} have [_{PR} PRO_i to plan for the generations that will come after us]]].

Example (11b)

* [_s We_i [_{VP} have [_{PR} PRO₂ to plan...]]]. (Ungrammatical if PRO refers to an unintended controller)

The modal verb *have to* selects an infinitival complement, establishing a structural environment in which the null subject PRO occupies the subject position of the infinitive *to plan*. Within this configuration, control is obligatory: the matrix subject *we* serves as the controller of PRO, and co-indexation (_i) secures the interpretation that

responsibility for the infinitival action belongs unequivocally to the collective agent. The pragmatic effect of this construction is significant. By binding the future-oriented action syntactically to the present subject, the structure reinforces both collective duty and forward-looking responsibility, situating the commitment as immediate and inescapable within the grammar of governance..

Obligatory Control in Adjunct Gerund-Participle Clauses

Gerund-participle adjuncts also display obligatory control, where the controller is the matrix subject.

Example (12a)

[_s [_{DP} Our administration]_i [_{VP} has redirected the economy [_{PR} PRO_i channelling money to fund education, healthcare, national security]]].

Example (12b)

* [_s [_{DP} Our administration]_i [_{VP} has redirected the economy [_{PR} PRO₂ channelling money...]]].
(Ungrammatical if PRO controlled by an unrelated entity)

The gerund-participle clause *channelling money...* functions as a modifier of the matrix verb phrase *has redirected the economy*, thereby integrating the adjunct event into the main predication. Within this structure, the null subject PRO is obligatorily controlled by the matrix subject *our administration*, ensuring that the adjunct action cannot be interpreted independently of the executive agent. The rhetorical effect of this configuration is to syntactically merge policy implementation with executive action into a single, coherent sequence, thereby foregrounding administrative agency and reinforcing the government's role as the initiator of economic transformation..

Syntactic and Pragmatic Implications

Control Theory shows that non-finite clauses and their null subjects serve as syntactic levers for:

Future-oriented infinitives such as *to plan* are syntactically bound to the matrix agent, thereby projecting commitment in a manner that renders pledges immediate and inescapable. At the same time, multi-step processes expressed through gerund-participle constructions like *redirecting* and *channelling* are structurally unified under a single agent, consolidating agency and portraying the administration as both decisive and effective. Furthermore, the use of inclusive controllers such as *we* extends the scope of control to the audience, implicating them in the obligations described. This syntactic strategy fosters shared responsibility and solidarity, as the collective is bound to the projected commitments through grammatical encoding. In Tinubu's speech, PRO under obligatory control is a subtle but powerful grammatical instrument. It binds agency, projects continuity, and allows the speaker to rhetorically integrate future-oriented actions with present authority, thereby reinforcing a narrative of national stewardship and shared purpose.

Conclusion

This study has undertaken a comprehensive syntactic analysis of President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's 2023 Independence Day address, grounded in the explanatory framework of Government and Binding (GB) Theory. The findings demonstrate that grammar in political oratory is not a neutral medium but a strategic instrument for constructing authority, distributing agency, negotiating solidarity, and projecting commitments. By systematically applying the GB submodules, Case, Theta, Binding, Movement, and Control, this research has shown how syntactic structures function ideologically within the speech. Case and Theta Theories reveal how grammatical and thematic roles are strategically allocated to position the government as the central Agent of national transformation, while citizens are cast as Beneficiaries of state action. Binding Theory highlights the calculated alternation between the authoritative "I" and the inclusive "we," a syntactic resource for calibrating power, solidarity, and collective identity. Movement operations serve as rhetorical devices for emphasis and contrast, foregrounding key themes such as unity, hope, and resilience. Control Theory underscores the binding function of the null pronoun PRO in linking the audience to forward-looking obligations and shared goals, thereby extending grammatical form into the realm of ideological persuasion.

The contribution of this research is twofold. Theoretically, it affirms the enduring utility of GB Theory as a model that extends beyond abstract grammaticality judgments to the analysis of complex, contextually embedded discourse. By bridging formal syntax and discourse, the study demonstrates that grammatical structures operate as mechanisms of persuasion and ideological legitimation. Applied contributions are equally significant: the study enriches African political linguistics by offering a replicable framework for analyzing leadership discourse and nation-building rhetoric, showing that syntactic mastery is not merely reflective but constitutive of political authority. Future research could extend this GB-based methodology to comparative analyses of speeches across different Nigerian administrations and African political contexts, tracing how syntactic strategies evolve with

shifting political landscapes. Further integration of GB analysis with Critical Discourse Analysis would yield a more comprehensive account of how grammar, power, and ideology intersect in the shaping of political communication. This study establishes that the grammar of governance in African political discourse is not only descriptive but inherently performative: a grammar of persuasion, responsibility, and collective identity.

References

- Aboh, E. O. (2004). *The morphosyntax of complement-head sequences: Clause structure and word order patterns in Kwa*. Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195159905.001.0001>
- Adegoju, A. (2014). Person deixis as discursive practice in Nigeria's "June 12" conflict rhetoric. *Ghana Journal of Linguistics*, 3(1), 45–62. <https://doi.org/10.4314/gjl.v3i1.2>
- Akanbi, T. A. (2015). The syntax of Yorùbá proverbs. *Global Journal of Human-Social Science*, 15(G8), 27–32. Retrieved from <https://socialscienceresearch.org/index.php/GJHSS/article/view/155>
- Anyanwu, O. (2012). The syntax and semantics of inherent complement verbs in Igbo. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 2(8), 1561–1569. <https://doi.org/10.4304/tpls.2.8.1561-1569>
- Arokoyo, B. (2004). *Case Theory and focus constructions in Yoruba*. (Doctoral dissertation). University of Ilorin.
- Bamgbose, A. (2000). *A grammar of Yoruba*. Cambridge University Press.
- Boeckx, C. (2006). *Linguistic minimalism: Origins, concepts, methods, and aims*. Oxford University Press.
- Carstens, V. (2005). Agree and EPP in Bantu. *Natural Language & Linguistic Theory*, 23(2), 219–279.
- Carnie, A. (2021). *Syntax: A generative introduction* (5th ed.). Wiley-Blackwell.
- Chilton, P. (2004). *Analysing political discourse: Theory and practice*. Routledge.
- Chimombo, M., & Roseberry, R. L. (1998). *The power of discourse: An introduction to discourse analysis* (1st ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203053720>
- Chomsky, N. (1981). *Lectures on government and binding: The Pisa lectures*. Foris Publications.
- Chomsky, N. (1982). *Some concepts and consequences of the theory of Government and Binding*. MIT Press.
- Chomsky, N. (1986). *Barriers*. MIT Press.
- Chomsky, N. (1993). A minimalist program for linguistic theory. In K. Hale & S. J. Keyser (Eds.), *The view from Building 20* (pp. 1–52). MIT Press.
- Chomsky, N. (1995). *The minimalist program*. MIT Press.
- Chomsky, N. (2000). *New horizons in the study of language and mind*. Cambridge University Press.
- Diercks, M. (2011). The morphosyntax of Lubukusu locative inversion and the parameterization of Agree. *Lingua*, 121(5), 702–720. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lingua.2010.11.003>
- Fairclough, N. (1992). *Discourse and social change*. Polity Press.
- Haegeman, L. (1994). *Introduction to government and binding theory* (2nd ed.). Blackwell.
- Jaggar, P. J. (2001). *Hausa* (London Oriental and African Language Library, Vol. 7). Amsterdam & Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company. <https://doi.org/10.1075/lisl.7>
- Muhammad, I. (2025). *A study of noun phrases in Gbagyi: A Government and Binding approach* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Bayero University Kano, Nigeria.
- Radford, A. (2004). *Minimalist syntax: Exploring the structure of English*. Cambridge University Press.
- Radford, A. (2009). *Analysing English sentences: A minimalist approach*. Cambridge University Press.
- Uwalaka, M. A. (1997). *The syntax and semantics of Igbo verb movement*. The Pen Services.
- van Dijk, T. A. (2006). Ideology and discourse analysis. *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 11(2), 115–140. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13569310600687908>
- Wodak, R., & Meyer, M. (Eds.). (2015). *Methods of critical discourse studies* (3rd ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Yankah, K. (1995). *Speaking for the chief: Okyeame and the politics of Akan royal oratory*. Indiana University Press.