

## A Critical Stylistic Study of Peter Obi’s Campaign Speech Delivered at Chatham House

Samuel Adebayo Omotunde  
Department of English and Literary Studies  
Ekiti State University, Ado-Ekiti, Nigeria

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**ABSTRACT:** *This paper is a critical stylistic analysis of Peter Obi’s presidential campaign speech that he delivered at Chatham House in the United Kingdom on January 26, 2023. Critical stylistics provides the reader or listener with ten analytical tools to make use of in carrying out critical analysis of texts for the main purpose of identifying the meanings and ideologies inherent in such texts. The aim of this work then is to investigate some of the meanings and ideologies which Peter Obi passes on to his listeners through lexical choice as well as sentence pattern and construction using three of the ten tools put forward by Jeffries (2010) for investigating the various meanings in texts. The three tools selected are: naming and describing, prioritising and equating and contrasting. Findings reveal that though all the excerpts bring out different meanings that are relevant to the text, however, the ideology behind them that serves as the foundation for all the interpretations is that of positive self presentation and negative “Other” presentation.*

**KEYWORDS:** critical stylistics, peter obi, Chatham house, prioritising, positive self-presentation, negative “other” presentation.

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### INTRODUCTION

Language is one important natural gift to man. It is hard to imagine how meaningful the existence of humankind will be without language. This is because its value, usefulness, and impact is felt in all areas of human endeavour such as education, business, entertainment, religion, politics, etc. Ike-Nwafor (2015. P.2) writes that “politics is a struggle for power in order to put certain political, economic and social ideas into practice. In this process, language plays a critical role since every political action is prepared, accompanied, influenced and played by language.” In the contemporary world, it appears as if one of the most acceptable means of gaining political power is through democracy of which election is an integral part.

Reflecting on the relationship between language and democracy, Eyisi, Omazu and Akaegbobi (n.d, p. 98) declare that “the relationship between democracy and language as well as language and free society may not be immediately clear to a casual observer. But the truth is that language is related to both democracy and free society that it can contribute greatly in building a free and democratic society.” The argument of the scholars is that it is through language that the differing views of the people living in a country are aggregated and passed on to those in power. When talking of the relationship between language and democracy, it is equally important to bring to the fore the fact that it is through the instrumentality of language that politicians, through campaigns and political rallies, make their intentions known to the electorates. It is equally through language that political leaders at all levels advise, inform, warn, exhort, persuade and manipulate the minds of the electorates. No wonder that many scholars have variously asserted that the relationship between language and politics is undebatable. Ike-Nwafor (2015, p. 25) reveals that “the support that citizens have for the politician will be determined by what they say and how they say it for success to be achieved whether in candidates or programmes of politics.”

The above means that it is not only the message alone that determines the level of support that electorates will give to politicians, but also how, that is, the different strategies through which such messages are passed across. Still on the relationship between language and politics, Opeibi (2004 p. 22) avers that:

No matter how good a candidate’s manifesto is, no matter how superior political thoughts and ideologies of a political party may be, they can only be expressed and further translated into social actions for social change and social continuity through the facilities provided by language.

The 2023 presidential election held in February in Nigeria provided another unique opportunity for notable Nigerian politicians aiming to occupy the presidential seat to use the instrumentality of language to convince Nigerians on why they should vote for them. With the continuous rise in unemployment rate, banditry and insurgency, corruption at all levels of government, rising cost of living which goes with falling standard of living and a host of other social vices on the rise, Nigerian electorates more than ever before have become disillusioned with the Buhari – led administration at the federal level. Hence, in preparation for his exit at the expiration of his eight year tenure on May 29, 2023, different politicians across different political parties duly registered by the country’s electoral umpire started giving campaign speeches in order to sensitise and conscientise Nigerians on why they are the ideal persons to take over from President Muhammadu Buhari. Of all the many presidential candidates that contested the 2023 presidential election, perhaps,

Publication of the European Centre for Research Training and Development–UK three were notable among them: Senator Bola Ahmed Tinubu of All Progressive Congress (APC), Alhaji Atiku Abubakar of People’s Democratic Party (PDP) and Peter Obi of Labour Party (LP). While Senator Bola Ahmed Tinubu was a staunch member of the ruling party and a die-hard supporter of the incumbent president as well as the national leader of the party, Alhaji Atiku Abubakar was once a two-term vice president of the Federal Republic of Nigeria during the 16 year rule of People’s Democratic Party (1999–2015). Hence, of the three candidates mentioned above, Peter Obi of Labour Party appears to be the only one without any direct connection or affiliation to the governance of the country at the Federal level since the inception of the country’s current democratic dispensation which started in 1999. Thus, apart from the normal campaign speeches delivered by the candidates in different states of the federation in the build up to the February 25, 2023 presidential elections, two of the presidential candidates went to Chatham House in the United Kingdom to deliver speeches on their agenda and plans for Nigeria if eventually they become the president of the country.

While Senator Bola Ahmed Tinubu of All Progressive Congress delivered his own speech at Chatham House in the United Kingdom on Monday, 5th of December, 2022, Peter Obi of Labour Party delivered his own speech there on the 16th of January, 2023. It is this speech of Peter Obi of Labour Party that forms the data for this study.

It is important to note that fundamental aim of the research is to investigate through critical stylistics how Peter Obi uses lexical choice and information structure to pass across different ideologies and identities which are meant to condemn some people and extol himself and what his party stands for.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Critical stylistics as a theoretical framework was put forward by Jeffries in 2010 with the publication of a book titled *Critical Stylistics: The Power of English*. The theory is a combination of insights from existing linguistic theories such as critical linguistics, critical discourse analysis and functional linguistics. Citing Ibrahim (2017), Onoja (2023) writes that critical stylistics attempts to serve as a bridge connecting stylistics (with its emphasis on textual choices) and critical discourse analysis which is known as an analytical framework “that studies how ideology, identities and inequalities are produced, reproduced and maintained in text in social and political contexts.”

In the word of Jeffries (2014a, p. 417) “critical stylistics is a new field of stylistics related to critical discourse analysis as well as to stylistics itself. It has the aim of bringing the rigour and textual focus of stylistics to the analysis of non-literary texts with a view to identifying the ideological underpinnings of such texts.” The above reveals that critical stylistics is a fusion of two linguistic approaches, that is, CDA and stylistics. Stylistics is believed to be a reliable analytical tool for analysis of a text because it is “rigorous,

Publication of the European Centre for Research Training and Development–UK retrievable, and replicable” (Simpson, 2004, p. 2). CDA, too, is an approach that is very useful in analysing a text because it has the capacity to reveal the hidden meanings behind the lexical choice and sentence structure used in a text (which often may have an ideological undertone).

Critical stylistics is an analytical method that analyses a text far and above the surface meaning of lexical items and sentence structure. Jeffries (2010) believes that the approach reveals hidden issues of identity and ideology that may be present in texts. In the same vein, Jeffries and McIntyre (2014, p. 194) declare that critical stylistics framework “combines the text analysis of stylistics with the ideological awareness of CDA” using linguistic features. In summarising the strength of critical stylistics, Onoja (2023, p. 49) writes that “CS offers a more developed and rigorous theory than CDA using a set of tools. Accordingly, CS emerged as a method of exposing ideologies in texts and offers a fully developed textual grounded model that helps text producers to create a world view which Halliday refers to as the ideational function of texts.” What makes CS a powerful theory for analysing a text is the set of tools or linguistic features put forward by Jeffries (2010). These tools are: naming and describing, representing actions/events/states, equating and contrasting, exemplifying and enumerating, prioritising, implying and assuming, presenting others speech and thought, representing time, space and society, negating and hypothesising.

Jeffries (2010) writes that the linguistic tools provided above are not totally novel in that they have been referred to by previous scholars in the field of CDA such as Fairclough (1989), critical linguists such as Fowler (1991) as well as Simpson (1993); however, new ones like transitivity and modality have been added to the list (uomustansiriyah, edu.) It is significant to note that analysis only makes use of the ones that are peculiarly applicable to the data being analysed. For the purpose of the current study, the author makes use of three of the tools: naming and describing, equating and contrasting and prioritising.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Critical stylistics has no doubt been used in analysing different texts, but a diligent search through the internet and other sources reveal that no work has been done on the speech being analysed. However, this paper reviews works that make use of CS for its analysis. Onoja (2023) carries out a critical stylistic analysis of African feminism in Chika Unigwe’s *Night Dancer*. The author reveals that the critical stylistic tools of naming and describing, representing action/ state and events, equating and contrasting and others are used in varying degrees to reveal the nature of the characters towards the issue of African feminism in the play. Ponsak (2023) uses two CS tools of naming and negating to analyse a poem titled “portal” in Chris Abeni’s *Kalakuta Republic*. The author writes that the CS tool of naming and negating reveal the author’s ideology which is in conflict with that of the

Publication of the European Centre for Research Training and Development–UK government. Lastly, John (2018) applies the CS tools of transitivity and modality to bring out the issue of identity, ideological representation and socio-political hegemony in Cobhrams Asuquo’s Rap Song titled “Boosit”. The review above shows that the tools of CS can be applied to analyse poems, drama and even music. The current research endeavour contributes to scholarship by applying three CS tools to analyse a political speech delivered by a presidential aspirant in the Nigerian presidential election of 2023.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The data for this study titled “Policy and Institutional Reforms at the Heart of the 2023 Election in Nigeria” was a speech delivered by Peter Obi, the presidential candidate of Labour Party in the 2023 presidential election at Chatham House in the UK on January 16, 2023. It was downloaded from the internet. The speech is chosen for analysis because to the best of the researcher’s knowledge, no scholarly work currently exists on the speech. The data is analysed based on three of the ten analytical tools of CS put forward by Jeffries (2010). The tools are naming and describing, equating and contrasting and prioritising. Each of the tools that is selected is briefly explained and relevant excerpts are brought from the speech to illustrate it. This is followed by explanation of the excerpts given with reference to the CS tool under which it appears.

## **RESULTS AND FINDINGS**

### **Naming and describing**

This refers to how language is used to refer to the person or thing being referred to and which may have ideological implications. This is usually done and interpreted through the noun phrase that is used in a text. Within the noun phrase used, the nature of the evaluative adjective used becomes significant. As the data under analysis is a political speech delivered by Peter Obi, the presidential candidate of the Labour Party, for the purpose of intimating the public at the international level about what he will do if elected, the naming and description strategies in the speech centre around describing some situations in Nigeria and some class of people rather than mentioning particular individuals directly.

### **Excerpt I**

We have *alarming insecurity* that has led to loss of many lives and properties, *significant decline in food and economic output*, *immense trauma* that has compromised the mental health of communities. The economy is in crisis with *a troubling debt profile* worsened by oil theft... and *a lamentable power sector* that significantly constrains manufacturing and social life (emphasis ours).

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The CS tool of naming and description (especially the description aspect) makes it possible to interpret the message which the speech encoder is passing across in the excerpt above. People tend to measure the importance, growth and development of a nation through some parameters such as: improvement in security of lives and property, achieving food security for the nation, economic and infrastructural development, financial discipline and promotion of healthy living of its citizens. However, in the above, with reference to Nigeria, we have “alarming insecurity” (adjective + noun) to indicate how serious it is in scope, frequency and dimension. Probably, the encoder was referring to the insecurity issues of insurgency, kidnapping for ransom, ritual killing, armed robbery on Nigerian highways, etc. In describing the situation of Nigeria as at the time of his speech, Peter Obi said that “We have significant decline in food and economic output.” The description is made up of Adjective + Noun + Adjectival phrase. “Significant” which is the adjective means “noteworthy”, “glaring”, “conspicuous”, “apparent,” “obvious”, etc. The description above with reference to food production and economic output signifies that Nigeria is at the brink of famine and economic disaster. The next one is “immense trauma that has compromised the mental health of communities”. The description above is structurally made up of adjective + Noun + relative clause. “Trauma”, which is the noun means “a deeply distressing, disturbing, harrowing experience” which is premodified by immense (meaning extremely large or great). The meaning of the above is that the actions and inactions of the past and present leaders of the country as at the time of rendering his speech have led to traumatic experiences for many people.

For Nigerians at home, the traumatic experience might have been caused by rising cost of living, abject poverty in the land, insulting display of wealth by members of the political class, unemployment, hunger, hopelessness, etc. Apart from the above, in describing the economy of Nigeria, the speech encoder talks of “a troubling debt profile,” and “a lamentable power sector,” that significantly constrains manufacturing and social life. The debt profile of a nation has a lot to do with its economic development and the standard of living of its people; so when the speaker says that the debt profile of Nigeria is “troubling” (predicative adjective) meaning causing distress or anxiety) then it means that Nigeria is economically weak and dependent on external borrowing. The power sector which is the backbone of a nation’s industrial development is attributively described as “lamentable.” The description is structurally made up of Det + Adj + N + Relative clause. “Lamentable” means “very bad”, “deplorable.” The meaning of the above is that if the power sector is described as “lamentable,” then the nation cannot develop. Since CS deals with the issue of identity and ideology, the various descriptions about Nigeria as revealed above in critical areas identify the past leaders and the current ones as at the time of delivering the speech as irresponsible, lacking in focus and visionless. In other words, the descriptions above have represented Nigerian leaders negatively.

### **Excerpt 2**

Nigeria today is at *a critical juncture* and the people led by the youths brutalized by *bad leadership* are awake and leading the movement. (emphasis ours)

In the above, two descriptions are germane to our analysis.

- i. “Nigeria is at a critical juncture...  
The underlined is a NP serving as the object of a preposition. The structure of the description is Det + Adj + Noun. The adjective “critical” connotes “serious”, “grave” and “adverse” which generally has negative meanings.
- ii. “... and the youths brutalized by bad leadership are awake and leading the movement. The underlined is equally a noun phrase functioning as the object of the preposition “by”. It is structurally made up of Adjective + Noun in which the speaker uses “bad” to describe the leadership of the country. The adjective “bad” in the above is ideologically based: it reveals the speech encoder’s negative stance about the leadership of the country.

### **Excerpt 3**

Senator Yusuf Datti Baba-Ahmed, my running mate, and I are committed to a new politics that starts with the ethics of servant – leaders and anchored on the marriage of clean-hearts and skillful hands.

The first thing of interest to talk about when it comes to the CS tool of naming in the above excerpt is the way in which the speaker names and describes his running mate. The speech encoder names his running mate in full, that is, he uses his social title “Senator” which shows that he is not a novice in Nigerian politics because in Nigeria, for somebody to be called a Senator, he/she must have represented his/her senatorial district in the National Assembly. Hence, the use of “Senator” is to show that the person is an experienced politician. The mentioning of “Yusuf” is not coincidental, it is to indicate that Labour Party under which they are contesting is religiously sensitive and neutral about the situation of Nigeria which is part of ideology. The speech encoder’s name is Peter Obi (which indicates that he is a Christian); so, when he uses “Yusuf” as part of the name used in introducing his running mate, he is saying that the party is not like All Progressive Congress which fields Muslim-Muslim ticket thereby promoting the ideology of supremacy of one religion over the other.

The second naming and description of interest in the excerpt starts from “... committed to a new politics that starts with the ethics... and skilful hand.” The description is the object of the preposition “to” and postmodified by a relative clause. “A new politics” is structurally made up of Det + Adj + Noun which is “politics” elaborated by the relative clause that follows: “that starts with the ethics of servant – leaders and anchored on the marriage of clean hearts and skilful hands.” Within the relative clause, there is another NP

Publication of the European Centre for Research Training and Development–UK (servant-leaders) which is the object of the preposition “of”. The phrase “servant-leaders” portrays the ideology of egalitarianism. “The marriage of clean-hearts” and “skilful hands” which are equally NPs functioning as the object of the preposition “of” are ideologically loaded. Both NPs portray the ideology of “we” versus “them”. The “them” refers to the leadership of the country which has caused “alarming insecurity”, “significant decline in food...” “... immense trauma... etc. The “we” however, represents the speech encoder and his running mate.

### **Prioritising**

This has to do with how ideological effects can be achieved or created by changing the position of the focal information in the sentence through syntactic possibilities for prioritising which may take the form of exploiting information structure, transformation and subordination (uomustansiriyah, edu.). Prioritising simply means how information is brought to prominence in texts. The excerpts below illustrate instances of prioritisation in the speech under analysis.

### **Excerpt 4**

The good news is that demography is driving the change we are seeing in Africa with election after election in the last year in Africa, in which the establishment parties are being upturned by new or small parties. It is for this change that my vision of policy change and institutional development is rooted in the push for a broadened scope of social mobility and freedom for Nigerians, particularly our children and youths.

### **Excerpt 5**

In addition to reducing cost of governance and streamlining government operation for efficiency and effectiveness, we will ensure that reforms are pursued in a way that protects the livelihood of our hardworking and efficient civil servants.

### **Excerpt 6**

Even after exploiting ethnic and religious cleavages and sentiments to ascend to political power, the very people on whose sentiments they grabbed power often become the primary victim of such political fraud that has rendered Nigeria a failing state with a worsening leadership crisis.

Swan (1980, P. 138) writes that “if we want to give special importance to the part of a sentence, we can put it into a separate clause. There are two common ways of doing this. One is to use the structure *it is / was... that*; the other is to use: *what... is / was...* Linguists refer to such sentences as cleft sentences.

In excerpt 4, the speech encoder is referring to political changes that are sweeping across Africa in which victories of established parties in general elections are being overturned



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due to the influence of youths. The speaker uses cleft sentence “if... that” to prioritise the change he is expecting which will determine his policy direction. He says “it is for this change that my vision...” He prioritises the change to indicate that it is an ideological one.

The technique of prioritising adopted in excerpt 5 is transformation, that is, passive construction. The type of passive used in the underlined is the short one, that is, with the “by agent” not used. It is meant to give assurance that the speaker is committed to the proposition expressed in the statement. That is, in the above excerpt, the person or group of persons who will carry out the transformation is/are already known, hence, no need to use the “by agent.” In excerpt 6, the technique of prioritisation used is adverbial fronting. That is, the underlined part is an adverbial phrase that is fronted to focus the attention of his audience on how the unmentioned “they” get to power which is by playing ethnic and religious cards. The prioritisation through adverbial fronting is ideological in the sense that it is a way of condemning the “other” unmentioned political party.

### **Equating and Contrasting**

The above CS tool is meant to identify where ideas are similar in a text or where two ideas are expressed in an opposite or contrasted manner in order for the differences between the two ideas to be sharply brought into focus for certain reasons. Hussein and Qadir (2021) write that this CS tools are not found in single words, but have some syntactic patterns they follow or triggers that make it possible for readers or listeners to recognise them. However, for the purpose of this work, it is only the contrasting area that we will make use of. The following are the excerpts selected for analysing the tool.

#### **Excerpt 7**

How did we (Nigeria) plunge into such economic decline that we have overtaken India as home to the biggest pool of the absolute poor in the world? While the poverty rate in India is about 16%, that of Nigeria is about 63% with about 133 million Nigerians classified as multidimensionally poor.

#### **Excerpt 8**

We believe that what remains is to change the leadership class from predators to creators of value.

#### **Excerpt 9**

We will turn our youth bulge to a demographic dividend, rather than today’s harvest of time bomb of violence and insecurity from the uneducated, unemployed and marginalised.

In excerpt 7 above, in an attempt to show the poverty index of Nigeria, the speaker contrasts Nigeria with India which educated people know to be the country with the highest number of poor people in the world and he came out with a damning revelation that Nigeria now

Publication of the European Centre for Research Training and Development–UK hosts the largest number of the extremely poor people in the world. In order to concretise the number of people suffering from acute poverty, the encoder uses percentages and figures to back up the contrast. The ideology here is still that of “we” versus “them”. The major aim of using this contrast is to really make people, especially Nigerians and other listeners throughout the world know the socio-economic situation of Nigeria and in the process cast blames on the leaders. By this contrast, the speaker has been able to show the inadequacy and the incompetence of the crop of leaders managing the country; in other words, it is a strategy of demarketing the leaders ruling the country and in the process reveal to his audience the need to test another leader.

The speech encoder, in excerpt 8, simply believes that there are two contrasting categories of rulers in the Nigerian society-predators and creators of value. Peter Obi is simply passing across the message that he and the political class he represents are creators of value and the existing crop of leaders, based on the negative revelations he has made about the country as revealed in excerpt 1, 2 and 6 above are predators. The contrast then is simply ideological; that is, the ideology of positive self representation and negative other representation. The contrast in excerpt 9 is meant to draw the attention of the listeners to the plight of the youth under the existing crop of leaders. He hints at the fact that the youths in the country are time bomb that can promote violence and insecurity. The speech encoder appears to justify the actions of the youths who promote violence and insecurity by implying that it is because they are uneducated, unemployed and marginalised. The clear position of the speech encoder is that under his administration, if elected, the youths will be educated, gainfully employed and not marginalised in the scheme of things. Once again, the contrast is ideological, that of positive self representation and negative other representation. The negative “other” in this case are the leaders of the country probably from the time of independence up to the time of delivering his speech.

## **DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION**

The analysis has revealed that CS tools have the ability to probe into different shades of meaning in texts together with their ideological implications depending on the researcher’s ability to select and properly apply the appropriate tools to his/her data. This agrees with the position of Jerrifies (2014a, p. 408) that “texts make meaning in fundamentally the same way whether they are poems, novels, newspapers or political manifestoes.” For example, by using the critical stylistic tool of naming and describing especially with reference to excerpts 1 and 2, readers or listeners are made to be immediately aware (through lexical and phrasal selection) of the unfavourable situation of the country in critical areas thereby negatively representing the existing leadership in the country without necessarily mentioning names.

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With reference to excerpt 3, the speech encoder makes use of the CS tool of naming and describing to positively represent himself and his running mate. He does this by first using the social deitic “Senator” followed by his full name and the appositive noun phrase, “my running mate” all which have ideological implication. Closely following is the use of “servant-leaders” and “clean-hearts and skillful hands” to describe their special qualities which separate them from the existing leadership in the country. The second CS tool used in this study, prioritising, deals with how information is foregrounded or brought into prominence in texts which reflects in excerpts 4 – 6.

In excerpt 4, the prioritising technique of cleft sentence is used to give prominence to the kind of change the speaker wishes to carry out in Nigeria. In excerpt 5, through passive construction technique of prioritisation, the speaker passes across the message of assurance, hope and commitment to protect the livelihood of civil servants whom he describe as “hard working” and “efficient.” Adverbial fronting is the prioritisation strategy used in excerpt 6 to negatively represent the existing political leadership by saying that many of them use ethnic and religious sentiments to ascend to political position and not necessarily because they have the required credentials, intelligence, capability, stamina and charisma to occupy the posts.

Through the CS tool of contrasting, excerpts 7 and 8 indicate that the existing leadership in the country is economically inept, visionless and lacks focus and imagination which make the country’s poverty rate to be 63% compared to India which is 16% and equally make the leadership to be predators instead of creators of value. The last excerpt used in illustrating this tool is used to contrast how the youths are perceived and treated under the current leadership in the country with how they will be perceived and treated if eventually he wins the election. This is an ideology of “other” presentation and self- presentation. On the whole, it is clear that people, especially politicians, intentionally deploy certain linguistic choices to pass across different meanings some of which may be ideological in nature and that the different CS tools put forward by Jeffries (2010) are adequate to reveal the ideologies which may be hidden behind the linguistic choices made by speech encoders.

### **Implication to Research and Practice**

The paper has shed light on the power of critical stylistics to reveal various strands of meaning in texts. As revealed under literature review, this work shows that the theory can be effectively applied to analyse any text- speeches, prose, poetry, drama, etc.

### **CONCLUSION**

Through critical stylistics, the current research has revealed that politicians use the medium of campaign speeches to pass on different positive messages about themselves, especially

Publication of the European Centre for Research Training and Development–UK with reference to their ability to govern very well while directly or indirectly discrediting their opponents. This simply means that politicians rely on the power of language to get themselves to the pinnacle of their career while also using the same medium to dethrone those occupying exalted political positions. The three selected tools of CS used in this study have aptly demonstrated that the underlying aim of any political speech is that of positive self-representation and negative “Other” representation.

### **Future Research**

The current research makes use of the campaign speech of Peter Obi for analysis using three CS tools. Future research could carry out a comparative study of Peter Obi’s campaign speech and that of President Bola Ahmed Tinubu which he delivered at Chatham House on the 5<sup>th</sup> of December, 2023.

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