SPEECH ACTS ANALYSIS OF PRESIDENT OBASANJO'S ENDORSEMENT LETTER OF MR. PETER OBI'S PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDACY

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Abstract
Every form of human communication is driven by intentions and the need to unearth such intentions which usually lie beyond the statement is the duty of pragmatic linguistic research. This paper examines the 1st January 2023 endorsement/open letter of President Olusegun Obasanjo to all Nigerians wherein, in the midst of a keenly contested presidential election in Nigeria, Obasanjo in that letter, openly made a choice of Mr. Peter Obi, the presidential candidate of the Labour Party against other contestants from other political parties. The research sought to find out the rationale behind the linguistic choices made in the letter. With particular interest in Searle's typology, Speech Act Theory was employed in the research. Quantitative research alongside the descriptive survey methodology was adopted for the analysis of data. The research question of whether indirectness in Speech Act can also carry illocutionary force was raised and answered and it constitutes the research gap this work filled. Findings reveal a preponderance of the Representative Acts in the Direct Speech Acts which is a testament that Obasanjo, the writer, is committed to the truth of proposition and a preponderance of the Directives in the Indirect Speech Acts which means that his message in the letter is indirectly prompting his audience to take actions and legitimately change the existing government of the ruling party through the power of the ballots.

Keywords: Pragmatics, Speech Acts, Politics and Endorsement letter

Introduction

A unique attribute of humans that differentiate them from other creatures is ability to use language to communicate. Language is therefore vital for building interpersonal relationships, exchange of ideas and for passing of information. Martinet (1970 p.37) defines it as "a formidable instrument of communication... by which human experience is analysed..." As a vital tool for human existence and activities, language as a system of communication does not exist in a vacuum but operates in contexts: context of culture and context of situation. It is these contexts which determine the variations in language that is technically called register. It therefore follows that politics as register equally has its own peculiarities in language use.

Politics, according to Bayram (2010) has to do with the struggle for power in order to put certain political, economic and social ideas into practice. In an ideal democratic situation, for a politician to win any political office, s/he must master the art of rhetoric (language) which is the ability to communicate effectively and convincingly. Chilton (1998, p.691) in Okoro (2017) subscribes to this view when he asserts that politics is "the art of governance and power" while language is "the universal capacity of humans in all societies to communicate". Politics is concerned with power to make decisions, control resources, and control other people's behaviour and, at times, to control their values. In this process, language plays a crucial role, for every political action is prepared, accompanied, influenced and played by language. Language, for Okoro (2017) therefore, plays an important role in politics because its main function in different political situations is to enable politicians to form structurally stable social relationships.

Olusegun Obasanjo is a prominent Nigerian politician. He is a statesman who, as a former president of Nigeria, ruled in two different dispensations- military and civilian- and historically the first man to achieve that feat. As a civilian president, he ruled for two terms before handing over. This profile undoubtedly has placed him at a vantage position on many issues of national interest. As usually seen, since leaving office as a civilian president

in 2007, Obasanjo's style of passing information on any burning national issue, especially as it has to do with either a sitting president or with those seeking the office, is through open letters.

Nigeria has progressively been on the downward slope in all major indices of national growth and development since the commencement of the present administration under General Muhamadu Buhari. The citizens are experiencing untoward suffering and hardship and are in dire need of a quick and an immediate remedy. The year 2023 is an election year in Nigeria and Nigerians are eagerly expectant of a drastic change. Statistics of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) point towards the direction that this year's voter registration is among the highest- an indication that the people are yearning for an opportunity to change the present leadership of the country through the ballots.

In the midst of these yearnings and preparations for the elections, candidates of various political parties are touring the nooks and crannies of the country selling themselves via their manifestos. In doing this, they equally visit prominent Nigerian leaders of which Obasanjo is one of such. Indeed, all the contestants have visited President Obasanjo. After assessing the major contestants, he has finally demonstrated his choice in adopting Mr. Peter Obi, the candidate he considers best and in doing so he accompanied it with his usual open letter wherein he examined some burning national issues and offered advice especially to the youth on how to vote as to change the trajectory of the country and reposition it on the part of progress.

In the light of Speech Act Theory, this research is therefore examining Obasanjo's endorsement letter as published in the Punch Newspaper of 1st January, 2023. The aim is to identify the speech acts contained in the letter and the messages they intend to convey. The research question of whether indirectness in speech act can also carry illocutionary force was therefore raised and answered in this research which constitutes the research gap this work filled. As a linguistic investigation of a political text, it is an interdisciplinary work anchored on a data that is novel and current

and has not been investigated by many scholars. More importantly, it bothers on burning issue of national concern. Such therefore is the relevance of this research.

Language and Politics

There is no gainsaying the fact that politics is one of the realities in our social world. Since language is the creator of the social world, it therefore becomes inevitable for language and politics to be intrinsically linked. Language is indeed central to politics. Schaffner (2004, p.17) asserts that "politics cannot be conducted without language". Chilton (2004, p. 89) captures the centrality of language to politics in the following words: "the doing of politics is predominantly constituted in language." Chilton's remark unequivocally impresses upon us the fact that politics is only politics through language.

Bader & Abdel-Karim (2010, p.26) captures this same sense when he opines that the whole essence of politics is to gain power, exercise power and keep power and language is the major vehicle for achieving these goals. Adegoju (2003, p.4) adds his voice to the centrality of language to politics when he says that "the intricate bond between language and politics is such that it becomes difficult to conceive politics without its medium — language". Similarly, Ayeomoni et al (2012, p. 465) reinforces the interconnectedness of language and politics when he remarks that language is the means by which politics or political discourse and ideas are widely disseminated. While most of the opinions above on the role of language in politics seem to echo the centrality of language to politics, he considers the relationship between politics and language in a somewhat different way when he says "the relationship between Politics and language is bi-directional". This view is similar to the view of Opeibi (2008) who says that the relationship between language and politics is symbiotic.

Irrespective of the way one views the relationship between language and politics, however, the undeniable truth is that an intrinsic relationship and complementarities exist between the two. Scholars have engaged in the study of the relationship between

language and politics from different academic perspectives. However, scholars from two disciplines are quite prominent in the study of the two fields — linguists and political scientist. While each of the disciplines focuses on different issues, they have some meeting points. Politics is concerned with power: the power to make decisions, to control resources, to control other people's behaviours and to control their values. As Ayoade (1982, p.72) puts it, "language is the conveyor belt of power. It moves people to vote, debate or revolt. It is, therefore, central to the explanation of political stability or polarization."

The issues of language and politics can be said to have deepened interdisciplinarity in scholarship in recent times. For instance, while linguists will generally be interested in the linguistic choices made by actors in political contexts to create political meanings and appeal to the electorate, political scientists tend to examine the issues articulated through language by politicians or political parties and linguists focus on the different aspects of the language and politics.

Speech Act Theory

The theoretical thrust of this research paper is Speech Act Theory. Propounded in 1962 in his book *How to do Things with Words* the Oxford philosopher J. L. Austin introduced the theory which was later further developed in 1969 with some few additions and criticisms by an American Scholar J. R. Searle who was Austin's student. In linguistics, a speech act is an utterance defined in terms of a speaker's intention and the effect it has on a listener. Speech acts are verbal actions happening in the world.

Speech Act analysis provides a pragmatic interpretation of natural communication by assigning illocutionary meaning to utterances within particular contexts. This is in consideration of the postulation made by Austin (1962, p. 405) that "speech is a set of actions". Speech Acts is defined as "the expression of psychological states and expressions of engagement in social interactions" (Austin, 1962, p.147). Akinwotu (2013, p.45) writes that "Speech Act theory … is concerned with specific acts

performed in making utterances. The Speech Act theory has its root in Philosophy. It was later on adapted into Pragmatics and recently into Discourse Analysis. The speech Act theory investigates how the sentences used in utterances are used to perform certain acts like requests, invitations, predictions, etc.

In a typical speech act analysis, what a speaker knows or thinks does not count unless what he or she says or does can be interpreted socially. Van Dijk (2004, p. 216) asserts that the interpretation of acts requires knowledge of the context in which the acts are produced and the rules guiding communication within that context. A speech act analysis also entails world knowledge — knowledge about what can possibly occur in the real world; our knowledge shapes our analysis of speech acts. To brilliantly carry out a speech act analysis of any given utterance, the structure of the sentence that makes up the utterance should be ascertained. Also, the context in which the utterance is produced should be known in order to determine if the utterance satisfies the rules that guide communication in that particular context. Speech acts usually occur in sequences produced by one or more speakers. Thus, the analysis of speech acts entails the analysis of texts which may be spoken or written. A typical pragmatic analysis accounts for speech acts as performed in sentences.

One important thing to know when analysing speech acts is the fact' that in speech act analysis, speech is equal to action; when someone says something, he or she does something. Every utterance made by humans performs a special function within the context in which it is produced. Odebunmi (2006, p. 87) corroborates this position by writing "Austin's pragmatics was predicated upon the conception that we perform certain actions when we speak, that is, language is not only used in saying things, but in performing actions." Speech act analysis exposes the relationship that reality and language use shares. Since pragmatics analyses interpersonal communication, it follows that it also analyses the effect of language use on interlocutors.

Constative and Performative Acts

Speech act is an utterance spoken in a particular context; it is realized by certain categories of verbs which are used to carry out actions in the form of speech. To clearly distinguish the kind of acts that people perform with the use of verbs in the utterances they make, Austin (1962), who is the proponent of the Speech Act theory, introduces terms "Constatives" and "Performatives" to distinguish speech acts that describe reality and can thus be (dis)proved, and speech acts that can be termed as actions. He calls the former "constatives" the latter "performatives". Performatives are different from Constatives in the sense that (performatives) can be said to be equal to actions; they are used achieve interactional goals between interlocutors. Speakers "do" something with words when they produce performatives.

Thomas (1995 p.32) identifies four types of performatives: metalinguistic performatives, collabprative performatives, group performatives and ritual performatives. According to Ayoola et al (Ed) (2021, p. 372): [t]he metalinguistic performatives are self-referential and self-verifying. They are used to refer to what the speaker is doing. They contain their own truth condition and so not falsifiable. The collaborative performatives require the listener to accept what is stated in the speaker's utterance. The Group performatives are carried out by more than one person e.g. a panel, a committee. Though usually performed by a group, a single member of the group is chosen to say it. The Ritual performatives are performatives in which felicity conditions must be fulfilled for them to be successful; otherwise, they will be deemed to be infelicitous.

Categorization of Speech Act

Speech Acts, since its emergence has been variously typified. However, for the purpose of this research, we shall restrict ourselves to only the few that we shall discuss here.

All utterances, according to Austin (1962, p. 407), simultaneously perform three kinds of acts, namely, **locutions, illocutions** and

perlocutions. These are the acts performed whenever language is used. They are further explicated below:

(a). Locutionary Acts: This is the literal meaning of the sentence, that is, the relationship that words in a sentence have with one another. Austin (1962, p. 413) refers to locutionary acts as sentences that express "sense and reference." Locutionary act is the pure linguistic meaning of a sentence; they are acts of speakers using words that conform to the rules of grammar of a particular language.

(b). Illocutionary Acts: These are acts done in speaking, especially acts that indicate the purpose of using a performative sentence. It is the speaker's intention of making the utterance — make a request, express concern, give a command, express a wish, etc. It is important to state that illocutionary act is very basic and central to speech act theory.

Improving on Austin's typology which shall not be discussed in this research for want of space, Searle (1969) further identifies five types of illocutionary acts thus:

(i). Representatives: Also known as Assertives, these acts indicate that the speaker is committed to the truth of the act. These acts state what the speaker believes to be true. Representatives are statements of facts, assertions and descriptions.

(ii) **Commissives:** These are acts that demonstrate a speaker's commitment to future actions. They are performed with verbs like pledge, vow, threats, offers, promise, swear, etc.

(iii) **Declaratives:** These are used to cause changes in situations where they are made. Akinwotu (2013, p. 45) sheds more light on this by writing that declaratives are "speech acts whose successful performance brings about the correspondence between the propositional content and reality for example naming a baby/ship, resigning, dismissing, accepting, et cetera.

(iv.) **Expressives:** These are used to express emotions and attitude. They indicate the mood/state of mind of the speaker about what is stated in the utterance. It is visible in the use of words like thank, apologise, congratulate, etc.

(v) **Directives:** These are used by speakers to make their listeners perform an action; the perlocutionary effect of this kind of speech act is seen in the action of the listener. Directives are identifiable in utterances that contain the use of verbs like order, request, suggest, warn, etc.

(c) Perlocutionary Acts: These are the visible effects of illocutionary acts on the listener, whether intended or unintended. It is consequence of the utterance on other participants in the discourse.

Beyond the above classification, Speech Acts are further classified into **Direct and Indirect Speech Acts** based on the grammatical function of the utterances that are used to produce them. Yule (1996) asserts that direct speech acts are straightforward; they connote the literal meaning of an utterance and show a simple relationship between grammatical form and function. But when there is no distinct relationship between grammatical form and function, then the speech act is most likely an Indirect Speech Act.

This work has a direct relationship with the Speech Act theory in that the research question of whether indirectness in speech act can also carry illocutionary force was raised and addressed in this research which constitutes the research gap this work filled.

Methodology:

The quantitative research methodology was adopted for the analysis of data alongside the descriptive survey method. The sample for this study is Obasanjo's open letter of endorsement of Mr Peter Obi, the presidential candidate of the Labour Party for the 2023 Nigeria's presidential election. Not the entire speech but twenty (20) sentences, one from each paragraph were randomly sampled and analyzed and the choices of those statements were predicated on the possibility of the illocutionary force they carry.

Each locutionary act was examined in the light of the illocutionary act of expressive, verdictive, commissive, directive, declarative and assertive. Also, the perlocutionary effects these speeches tend to have on the electorates were equally presented.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Sentence 1: Happy New Year! May all our national calamities disappear this year.

Sentence 2: I am constrained to write this letter to all Nigerians especially young Nigerians, friends of Nigeria globally as well as our development partners because of the gravity, responsibility and implications of the collective decision Nigerians, both young and old, will be making within the next two months.

Sentence 3: The last seven and a half years have no doubt been eventful and stressful years for many Nigerians.

Sentence 4: We have moved from frying pan to fire and from mountain top to the valley.

Sentence 5: Our leaders have done their best, but their best had turned out to be not the best for Nigeria and Nigerians at home and abroad; for most Nigerians, it was hell on earth.

Sentence 6: Those of us who are alive should thank God for His mercies, brace ourselves for the remaining few months of this administration and pray and work very hard for an immediate better future — future of liberation, restoration and great hope and expectation.

Sentence 7: We have had campaigners going -up and down the country feeding us with what they mean and what they do not mean, what they understand and what they do not fully understand, what is possible and what is not possible, what is realistic and what is unrealistic, what is true and what is untrue.

Sentence 8: I believe that we need not be confused nor be gullible.

Sentence 9: Let us be cautious not to be fooled again.

Sentence 10: Without prejudice but with greatest respect to each individual with utmost regard for the best for Nigeria and all Nigerians and from my personal experience, all the major contestants claim to be my mentees.

Sentence 11: I will not deny such positions since I have worked with all of them directly and indirectly in government.

Sentence 12: I have come to realise a number of factors in character, attributes and attitude that are necessary in the job of directing the affairs of Nigeria successfully and at a time like this.

Sentence 13: From interaction and experience, and as mentees as most of them claim, I will, without prejudice, fear or ill-will, make bold to say that there are four major factors to watch out for in a leader you will consider to hoist on yourself and on the rest of Nigerians in the coming election and they are what I call TVCP: Track record of ability and performance; Vision that is authentic, honest and realistic; Character and attributes of a lady and a gentleman who are children of God and obedient to God; and Physical and mental capability with soundness of mind as it is a very taxing and tasking assignment at the best of times and more so it is at the most difficult time that we are.

Sentence 14: Mind you, I reiterate that no human being is an angel let alone a Messiah, but there are elements of these attributes and on comparative basis and by measure of what we know of, and what some of us have experienced from the front-runners, we must assess judiciously and choose wisely.

Sentence 15: If anybody claims he or she has anything to the contrary, it will be up to him or her to prove to us.

Sentence 16: I pray not to be proved right again in the bad sense but rather to be proved right in the positive and glorious sense of Nigeria becoming what God had created it to be — a land of plenty and prosperity united for common purpose of inclusive society, common security, shared prosperity, equity, egalitarianism, justice, and equal stake in the Project Nigeria with leadership role of Nigeria for the black race and fair share of global division of labour.

Sentence 17: Those who are preaching division, segregation, separation, and want to use diversity for their own self and selfish interest are enemies of the nation no matter what else they may disguisedly profess or proclaim.

Sentence 18: I will at this juncture want to commend the politicians as they have generally been reasonably civil in their campaigns without making politics as a call to war against opponents.

Sentence 19: We need selfless, courageous, honest, patriotic, in short, outstanding leadership with character and fear of God beyond what we have had in recent past.

Sentence 20: None of the contestants is a saint but when one compares their character, antecedent, their understanding, knowledge, discipline and vitality that they can bring to bear and the great efforts required to stay focused on the job particularly looking at where the country is today and with the experience on the job that I personally had, Peter Obi as a mentee has an edge.

Sentences/ Locution	**Illocutionary Acts**	**Class of Acts**	**Perlocution**	**Explanation**
1.	Direct Indirect	Expressive Directive	Accept wish	Establishing rapport
2.	Direct Indirect	Representative Directive	Understand rationale	Building up sentiments
3.	Direct Indirect	Representative Directive	Consider action	Requesting a change
4.	Direct Indirect	Representative Directive	Consider action	Advocating necessary actions
5.	Dire ct Indirect	Representative Directive	Request action	Appealing to sentiment for change
6.	Direct Indirect	Directive Directive	Take action	Advocating a drastic actions to effect the needed change
7.	Direct Indirect	Representative Directive	Call for action	Need for scrutiny of campaign promises
8.	Direct Indirect	Commissive Representative	Be at alert	Brace up for action
9	Direct Indirect	Directive Directive	Be cautious	Call for caution
10	Direct Indirect	Representative Representative	Hear opinion	Stating the obvious pretence of some politicians
11	Direct Indirect	Commissive Representative	Accept stated fact	Asserting his extent of knowledge of the politicians
12	Direct Indirect	Representative Directive	Agree with the assertion	Persuasion for action necessary for

				change
13	Direct Indirect	Representative Directive	Accept opinion	Establishing sentiments that will guarantee choices
14	Direct Indirect	Representative Directive	Call for action	Assessing the candidates before making choices
15	Direct Indirect	Directive Commissive	Throwing a challenge	Challenging the politicians to prove their sincerity
16	Direct Indirect	Directive Representative	Expressing Optimism	Stating the obvious need for a changed leadership style
17	Direct Indirect	Representative Directive	Call for caution	Condemning divisive postures and tendencies of some politicians
18	Direct Indirect	Expressive Directive	Express Appreciation	Commendation for preaching peace
19	Direct Indirect	Representative Directive	Make a Request	Calling for responsible and responsive leadership
20	Direct Indirect	Representative Directive	Make a Request	Urging electorate to make informed choices

Statistical Analysis of Data (C)

	SPEECH ACT		
LOCUTION	**DIRECT**	**INDIRECT**	**REMARKS**
Locution 1	Expressive	Directive	
Locution 2	Representative	Directive	
Locution 3	Representative	Directive	
Locution 4	Representative	Directive	
Locution 5	Representative	Directive	
Locution 6	Directive	Directive	
Locution7	Representative	Directive	
Locution8	Commissive	Representative	
Locution9	Directive	Directive	

Locution10	Representative	Representative	
Locution 11	Commissive	Directive	
Locution 12	Representative	Directive	
Locution 13	Representative	Directive	
Locution 14	Representative	Directive	
Locution 15	Directive	Commissive	
Locution 16	Directive	Representative	
Locution 17	Representative	Directive	
Locution 18	Expressive	Directive	
Locution 19	Representative	Directive	
Locution 20	Representative	Directive	

Frequency & Percentage for Direct & Indirect Speech Acts

	DIRECT		INDIRECT	
SPEECH ACT	**FREQUENCY**	**PERCENTAGE**	**FREQUENCY**	**PERCENTAGE**
Commissives	2	10%	1	5%
Declaratives	0	00%	0	00%
Directives	4	20%	16	80%
Expressives	2	10%	0	00%
Representatives	12	60%	3	15%
TOTAL	**20**	**100%**	**15**	**100%**

Discussion of Findings

A look at the analysis of the data reveals that both the Direct and Indirect Speech Acts have their peculiarities in the research. These peculiarities form part of the conclusions of the research. For the direct speech act, there is a preponderance of the Representative Acts, this is followed by equal percentage of Commissives and Directives; then a lower percentage of Expressives and zero Declaratives.

By interpretation, it could be inferred that most of the statements President Obasanjo made in that letter are considered by him to be true hence the use of Representatives which indicates that the writer is committed to the truth of the act. That Commissives and Directives are of equal percentage is equally very significant. It could be interpreted to mean that he is committed to the future actions of working so hard to change the present leadership in the country and through directives, he equally

charges the readers or addressees who who are the young people he was writing, to be as much committed as him. It could further be interpreted to mean that a combination of equal efforts of his and those of the addressees would bring about the desired change. There is zero Declaratives because the situation has not changed; the desired new leadership has not come.

For the Indirect Speech Acts, Directives is the most preponderant taking 80% of the entire act. Representatives took 10% while the Expressives and the Commissives are equal with each taking 5%. As in the Direct, the declaratives are still none existent in the letter.

By way of interpretation, the statistics suggest that the writer President Obasanjo was indirectly causing everyone especially the young people whom he addressed directly to take action. Such actions centre basically on doing what would bring about possible change in the polity and governance in general in Nigeria. He kept urging all to do it even as he himself is equally committed to doing same as reflected in the direct speech acts.

Summary and Conclusion

In a critical time like this in the Nigerian context, messages from leaders are worth studying. For Obasanjo as a former president to write an open letter wherein he endorsed a particular presidential candidate ahead of the 2023 election means there is something he has seen in such a person. It is that which has necessitated his writing that this research investigated. The investigations reveal that Obasanjo tactically and not directly called and is still calling on the people especially the young people to rise to the occasion and change the baton of the nation's leadership and hand over same to the person he considers more competent for the job.

Using the Speech act theory, this research was able to prove this point with the discovery that, probably as a statesman, Obasanjo chose to reveal his intention through the indirect way as shown in the preponderance of directives in the indirect speech act. By way of conclusion, this paper holds that what Obasanjo did in that letter is linguistically artistic because as an elder and a major stakeholder in the country, his speech means a lot. Therefore, speaking directly of a choice of a particular candidate in a country

polarized along ethnic lines Nigeria is capable of engendering civil unrest. Therefore, he decidedto indirectly pass his message and allow the public to decipher it.

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