



A Speech Act Analysis of Nigerian President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan's Declaration Speech



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ABSTRACT

The study focuses on a pragmatic study of the political speech delivered during the declaration of President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan as a presidential aspirant under the umbrella of People's Democratic Party. A campaign speech was chosen to bring to fore meanings intended by Goodluck Jonathan through the Speech Act Theory of Searle(1969). Our findings and analysis revealed that the selected sentences of the speech comprised the following speech act types: assertive-92%, expressive-50%, declarative-33%, commissive-8% and directive-17%. The study has once again revealed that language of politics especially political speeches could be better understood through the speech act analysis of President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan Declaration Speech of September 18, 2010.

Keywords: Speech act, President, Politics, Language, Discourse.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Language is the most important asset available to human beings. Shaffer and Kipp(2007) opine that 'language is a small number of individually meaningless symbols(sounds, letters, gestures) that can be combined according to agreed-on rules to produce an infinite number of messages' while Akindede and Adegbite(1999) defines language as 'a human phenomenon that has form which can be described in terms of the units of sound(phonemes), words, morphemes, phrases, sentences and paragraph or discourse'. An interesting truth about language is that it distinguishes human beings from animals. Though, one could not run from the fact that animals do communicate but they do not employ language in this process. No wonder, Dada(2011) submits that 'language has been portrayed as a human phenomenon used for the purpose of communication'. In essence, language—whether artificial or natural—is the major means by which human beings communicate.

In any speech community, the roles of language(s) are diverse. Thus, communication through language occurs for purposes. These purposes can be brought to fore through examination or analysis of the utterance or discourse. There is no doubt man is a political animal. Hence, politics has become part and parcel of human

life. Therefore, the study investigates the speech act features of a political speech in reference to President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan in Nigeria with a view of evolving the speech act pattern.

2. LANGUAGE AND POLITICS

Language is a powerful tool in the hands of politicians. As such, language and politics are interrelated. The relationship between language and politics has drawn attention of research scholars especially linguists. No wonder, [Ayeomoni \(2011\)](#) argues that:

Language and politics are interconnected as the quest for power is characterised by ingenious use of language. Besides, those that were involved in politics at different levels right from classical times had always resorted to dexterous use of language to achieve their aims. Since then, the language of politics has not ceased to be rhetorical. This ingenious use of language establishes a strong connection between politics and language and this interplay has made quite a large number of schools interested in the study of politics and language

The importance of language in politics can never be overemphasized. It is on this note that [Akinkurolere and Olowu\(2011\)](#) aver that 'language has become a political issue, since it has powerful influence on the people'. A study on language of politics throws more light on the kind of language technique that is employed by politician in the process of politicking. No wonder, [Beard\(2000\)](#) observes this fact and submits that 'Language of politics helps us to understand how language is used by those who wish to gain power, those who wish to exercise power and those who wish to keep power'. Therefore, it becomes obvious that speech making is one of the major ways of gaining power and control over the people. Political speeches are written texts that have been carefully structured to suit political intentions. Such speeches are highly essential in politicking from time to time, but more importantly during campaign period. Hence, the study hopes to present, through the Speech Act Theory, meanings embedded in the Declaration Speech of President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan in Nigeria.

2.1. Significance of Study

It is expected that the speech act analysis of President Goodluck Jonathan will immensely contribute to the understanding of speech acts and demonstrate language in action. It hopes to present a platform for a clear and significant understanding of political speeches in Nigeria especially during campaign periods. Hence, the study identifies campaign speech as a distinct variety of political speeches.

3. THEORETICAL ORIENTATION

The linguistic approach for this study is pragmatics. Pragmatics is one of the major fields in linguistics that could bring to fore meanings embedded in language use. No wonder, [Thomas\(1995\)](#) referred to pragmatics as 'meaning in use' and 'meaning in content'. The Speech Acts Theory serves as the linguistic framework for the study. The theory was developed by [Austin\(1962\)](#) and later improved by [Searle \(1969\)](#). The choice of Speech Acts theory is to demonstrate the application of the theory to the analysis of political speeches.

Yule(1996) defines a speech act as an 'action performed by the use of an utterance to communicate while Mey (2001) posits that speech acts are verbal actions happening in the world. By these definitions, it is crystal clear that an act employed in any communicative use of language is a speech act. Speech Act Theory is premised on the argument that when language is used certain acts are being performed.

Speech acts can be classified into three types: a locutionary act which is the statement uttered, in other words, it could also be referred to as any meaningful expression in language; illocutionary act is the social acts performed in the course of making utterances or statement; and a perlocutionary act is the effect that an utterance has on the listener or hearer. Searle (1976) cited in Dada(2011) presents the main five types of illocutionary act type as follows:

- i. Representatives (Assertives): acts which commit the speaker in varying degrees to the truth of the expressed proposition.
- ii. Directives: acts which attempt with varying degrees of force to get the addressee to do something.
- iii. Commissives: acts which commit the speaker to some future course of action.
- iv. Expressives: acts which express the psychological state of the speaker with respect to the proposition. Expressive acts simply express the feelings/inner state of the speaker.
- v. Declaratives: acts which effects immediate change in the institutional state of affairs.

The declarative act must, however, meet the felicity condition to be effective. The felicity conditions refer to contextual conditions necessary for the success of a speech act (Akinkurolere 2011). Though, it does not apply to all verbs but certain verbs such as arrest, baptize, sentence, etc. require that the speaker is qualified to make such statements. Declarative speech act meant to have been performed when felicity conditions are not met becomes void and of no effect.

4. METHODOLOGY

The Declaration Speech of former President GoodluckEbele Jonathan is chosen as a typical campaign speech in Nigeria. Moreso, the former President acted as President after the demise of Late President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua. The speech was delivered on the occasion of official declaration of his candidacy for PDP presidential primaries on 18th of September, 2010. The speech will be analysed through the linguistic framework of Speech Acts Theory. Also, for the purpose of thoroughness and brevity, twelve sentences were extracted from the speech. These selected sentences comprised the first six and last six sentences as it is expected that the introduction and conclusion of any speech are usually embedded with meanings that are significant for the political intentions of the speakers. The sentences are labeled Data I to XII. Each sentence will be analysed based on the pragmatic functions of locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary acts of the speeches. Hence, the frequencies and percentages tables are drawn to reflect the overall relative frequency percentage.

4.1. Analysis of Data

Data I

Locution: Forty months ago, my predecessors in office and I embarked on a join ticket in the governance of our great country, Nigeria.

Illocutionary:

- i) Direct: assertive(stating)
- ii) Indirect: declarative(confirming)

Perlocutionary Act: reflection

Data II

Locution: Sadly he passed away on 5th May 2010. *Illocutionary:*

- i) Direct: assertive(saying)
- ii) Indirect: expressive(savouring the past action)

Perlocutionary Act: sorrowful

Data III

Locution: With the death of President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua, the mantle of leadership of our great nation.

Illocutionary:

- i) Direct: assertive(stating)
- ii) Indirect: declarative(confirming)

Perlocutionary Act: reflection

Data IV

Locution: However, the days leading to my presidency were trying times for our nation. *Illocutionary:*

- i) Direct: assertive(saying)
- ii) Indirect: expressive(lamenting)

Perlocutionary Act: stocktaking

Data V

Locution: We confronted those moments and their challenges to national security with patriotism and care.

Illocutionary:

- i) Direct: assertive(stating)
- ii) Indirect: declarative(confirming)

Perlocutionary Act: reflective

Data VI

Locution: I appreciate the role played by the National Assembly, Governors, Society groups, the mass media, and other patriotic Nigerians.

Illocutionary:

- i) Direct: assertive (saying)
- ii) Indirect: expressive(appreciating)

Perlocutionary Act: nationalism

Data VII

Locution: I cannot end this speech without thanking you all for attending this occasion.

Illocutionary:

- i) Direct: assertive(saying)
- ii) Indirect: expressive(appreciating)

Perlocutionary Act: excitement

Data VIII

Locution: Your huge attendance is a load testimony of your support for us.*Illocutionary:*

- i) Direct: assertive(stating)
- ii) Indirect: declarative(confirming)

Perlocutionary Act: cheers

Data IX

Locution: For this I am very grateful.*Illocutionary:*

- i) Direct: assertive(saying)
- ii) Indirect: expressive(appreciating)

Perlocutionary Act: approval

Data X

Locution: I pray that Almighty God abides with you and sees you safely back to your respective destinations.

Illocutionary:

- i) Direct: assertive(stating)
- ii) Indirect: directive(requesting)

Perlocutionary Act: patriotism

Data XI

Locution: When you return, tell all those at home that as we celebrate our fifty years anniversary as a nation, Good luck has come to transform Nigeria and I will never let you down.

Illocutionary:

- i) Direct: directive(requesting)
- ii) Indirect: commissive (promising)

Perlocutionary Act: hopefulness

Data XII

Locution: Thank you.

Illocutionary:

- i) Direct: assertive(saying)
- ii) Indirect: expressive(greeting)

Perlocutionary Act: approval

Table of Analysis

Speech Act Types	Frequencies	Percentages
Assertives	11	92%
Expressives	6	56%
Declarative	4	33%
Commissives	1	8%
Directive	2	17%
Total No of Acts	24	

4.2. Interpretation and Discussion of Analysis

The above drawn table represents the overall relative frequencies and percentages (ORFPs) of the Declaration Speech of former President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan. The frequencies depict the occurrence of each speech act type while the percentage is calculated by placing the frequency over the total number of sentences and thereafter multiplied by One Hundred. Thus we have

Total occurrence of speech act type x100

Total number of sentences 1

From the table, it was observed that Goodluck Jonathan used sentences that were mainly assertive with 92%. This implied that 92% of the sentences were meant to commit him to the truth of the variously expressed propositions. The analysis showed the manner in which the assertive acts were performed such as 'saying' or 'stating' one thing or the other.

50% of the sentences were expressive, certain factors were responsible for this, Goodluck Jonathan needed to express his psychological state having lost his predecessor to the cold hands death. In fact, the whole nation suffered both emotional and psychological trauma throughout the period of Late President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua's illness and death, coupled with consequent events that eventually led to the Swearing-in of Goodluck Ebele Jonathan as President. The use of expressive acts enabled him to share certain feelings with the people which made them to reflect on previous events and provided a background for the political intention of Goodluck Jonathan which was to clamour for the support of the people towards his candidacy as the President in 2011.

33% of the sentences were declarative. The felicity condition of Goodluck Jonathan as a presidential aspirant coupled with his position as the incumbent President and Commander-in-Chief of the Federal Republic of Nigeria provided him the opportunity to perform certain declarative acts. It is noteworthy that Goodluck Jonathan made less use of declarative acts in the selected sentences despite the fact that he was in power as at then.

The commissive acts constituted 8% while directive acts were at 17% of the sentences. The reason for this is not far-fetched, the former President was in power and occupied a position of authority. At the same time, he was not apt to give instructions and orders since he was also presenting himself for consideration and acceptance by the people. The approval that he got was determined by not what he said but how he said it.

From the table of analysis, the speech acts that manifested in the selected sentences demonstrated a typical campaign speech of a person seeking re-election. At that stage, Goodluck Jonathan Declaration Speech can be categorized as a proto-type of language as being used by those who wish to keep power.

5. CONCLUSION

The speech act analysis of former President Goodluck Jonathan Declaration Speech has helped in the process of understanding how language is being used by those who wish to gain power, those who wish to exercise power and those wish to keep power (Beard 2000). More so, it was a period Nigeria was celebrating her 50th Independence Anniversary.

In conclusion, It can be categorically stated that the language of Campaign Speech is solely assertive and expressive for such candidate needs to 'say', 'appeal', 'promise', 'implore' the people in order to get their support and votes. Thus, the speech acts of a political campaign speech are of immense benefits to linguists in matters of communicating, and even comprehending appropriately, language of politics.

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