



On Speech Acts: An Analysis of Acting President Yemi Osinbajo's Democracy Day Speech

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Abstract

This research work studied the concept of speech acts vis-a-vis the speech of Acting President Yemi Osinbajo on Democracy Day in 2017. The work adopted the linguistic framework of pragmatics, using the theoretical proposition of Speech Acts theory as propounded by J.L. Austin and modified by John Searle's classification. It has been established through studies of political speeches that speakers perform various acts in the course of presenting or delivering their speeches. This study further examined specific illocutionary acts employed by Acting President in his speech. These specific illocutionary acts being crux of speech acts were brought out via the analysis of some selected portions of the speech. The study had far reaching academic implications for Linguistics and scholars of speeches all over the world.

Keywords: Speech acts; Pragmatics; Linguistics; Democracy day; Linguists; Acting president.

1. Introduction

It must be stated here that communication plays significant roles in any human society. Without communication, human existence may be difficult if not impossible. Mey (2001), opines that "People talk with the intention to communicate something to somebody; this is the foundation of all linguistic behavior as communication" Communication is central to humans. In the words of Stanton (2004) "We don't communicate in a vacuum: the art of communication always takes place within a situation or context". Indeed, Language and communication cannot be separated. Language is developed as a social concept, no wonder Mey (2001) avers that "Language users do not decide, on the spur of the moment, which medium to choose in order to get their ideas or feelings across; they use the artificial signs that natural language provides them with" He goes further to say that "the context determines both what one can say and what one cannot say: only the pragmatics of the situation can give meaning to one's words"

It has become a norm for Nigerians to expect the President to address the nation on 29th May of every year as a mark of democratic government. It started in 1999, immediately after the swearing-in of a democratically elected President in Nigeria. For the past 16 years, it had been Mr. President that addressed the nation but in 2017 the nation had an acting President who was saddled with the sole responsibility of performing this act.

The Acting President's May 29th, 2017 Democracy Day Speech Speaks volume of the political intentions of the administration of President Muhammadu Buhari to take the nation back to her glorious past and restore the chattered socio-economic aspects of the nation. In recent Nigerian history, even since the amalgamation of the Northern and Southern Protectorates and Colony of Lagos, Nigerians have never been addressed by an acting President on a Democracy Day. This was a unique and unprecedented opportunity.

The Democracy day speech Presented by Acting President Yemi Osinbajo highlighted that any given political speech has some communicative functions which are carried out through the kind of speech acts performed by the speaker. It must be noted here that the speech was delivered by Acting President and it was not on behalf of the President. His intentions are not just the utterances or sentences used but what he says, how he says it and the effects. It must be stated, at this juncture, that analyzing Political speeches is not a new trend in the academic world but a speech from an acting President will fill an academic gap among linguists and more importantly among the academics.

2. Language of Politics

Primarily, Language is a means by which humans communicate with one another through the use of a set of vocal symbols. Spolsky (1999), opines that language is a central feature of human identity and a powerful symbol of national and ethnic identity. Language becomes a tool in the hand of an individual the moment he or she acquires it and makes him or her function very well in the society. It raises the fundamental fact in the making of a nation, the importance of language cannot be less emphasized in all political activities ranging from campaign, electioneering, Speeches, meetings where promises are made for the electorates.

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Politics is basically all about struggling to gain and control power. It must be resounded that Language and Politics are inseparable because they are interwoven. Politicians perform a number of activities such as campaign, manifesto, rally, election, inauguration and governance through the use of language.

Abuya (2012), avers that “the essence of power in the governance and affairs of people can never be subject of attraction and they are as important as well as the language used by them” In the same vein, Beard (2000) gives a rather insightful view that “Political Campaigns, Speeches, written texts, broadcast are meant to inform and instruct voters about issues that are considered to be of great importance”. From these views, it is clear that politicians make speeches as one of the political activities through the instrumentality of Language.

3. A Review of Relevant Literature

Numerous scholarly works have been carried out on speeches of political leaders in Nigeria, Africa and beyond. These academic exercises vary from Stylistics, Syntax, Pragmatics, Discourse Analysis, Critical Discourse Analysis, Speech Acts Analysis, Appraisal Analysis and a host of others to Linguistic Analysis.

Within the scope of political discourse on speeches of political leaders, Enyi (2016) in her article, works on President Muhammadu Buhari’s speech, looks at a comparative appraisal of two speeches. Using speech act theory as this study does, but this work centers on the speech of Acting President Osinbajo to Nigerians. She examines speeches of president Buhari in 1984 and 2015. She posits that “Language is the key factor in political behavior concerning controlling people’s idea and mobilizing them for support and fellowship. She concludes that the use of language and the context usage matter which are reflected in both the military institution and the civilian circle where “Language is made to perform more of the informative function than coercive” (63). The work of Ayeomoni and Akinkulore (2012) also contributes to academic exercise using the speech acts theory to carry out a pragmatic analysis of Victory and Inaugural

Speeches of President Musa Yar’Adua. The work focuses on the locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary acts of the speeches and brings out the pragmatic moves in the speeches and how the President used much assertive to assert his power and authority in the country. They submit that “the identification of speech acts types go a long way in ascribing meanings to speeches” and that speech acts help us to explore the language use of political leaders. This paper differs because it focuses on the speech of Acting President Yemi Osinbajo.

Also, Akinwotu (2013), investigates the role of language in communication. By looking at acceptance of nominating speeches of Chief Obafemi Awolowo and Chief MKO Abiola. He argues that political discourse is a complex phenomenon among various human activities. He posits further that understanding political communication, involves largely a focus on meaning and reaching the illocutionary force of a speaker’s utterance. He submits that the acts carried out in the speeches have almost the same contextual linguistic features, but this, paper covers ‘the academic gap by investigating the speech of acting President.

Further still, Medubi and Amuda (2016), probe into the socio-pragmatic analysis of President Buhari’s use of I belong to Everybody And I Belong to Nobody. They point out how President Buhari used language to project his determination and commitment to transform Nigeria. They submit that President Buhari’s wish for co-operation and support from all Nigerians in the interest of the nation goes beyond party affiliation rather for national development and unity. One obvious gap is that they studied inaugural speech while this paper looks at democracy day speech.

Yet, in his work, Kumuyi (2016), employs speech act theory to analysis the declaration speech of President Goodluck Jonathan but focuses on campaign speech as a distinct variety of

Political speech. The paper argues that language of politics especially political speeches could be better understood through the Speech Act Theory. He avers that “communication though occurs for purposes which are brought to fore through analysis of the utterances”. He submits 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” (32).

Emmanuel and Atolagbe (2011), on their own contribution to speech analysis, used speech act theory to unravel former President Olusegun Obasanjo’s speech, on a discourse analysis. The work emphasizes the fact that “an act is communicated as soon as the speaker’s intention is recognized by the hearer” for effective communication in socio-political relevance. They submit that the farewell speech used the instrument of expressives, assertives and commissives to communicate to Nigerians to support the administration of Yar’Adua as Nigeria President. It obviously bears no resemblance with our study apart from the fact that it shares a common ground of pragmatics and speech act theory.

4. Theoretical Framework

Yule (1996), argues that pragmatics is the study of what speakers mean, or “speaker meaning” and he submits that pragmatics is the study of invisible meaning or how we recognize what is meant even when it is not actually said. Hence, we apply the Linguistic framework of speech Acts Theory as propounded by John Langston Austin (1962). This theory falls into three groups, which are locutionary act; an act of saying something, the act of producing an utterance. Illocutionary act is the core of any theory of speech acts; the social acts performed by the speaker. The perlocutionary act is the effect upon the feelings, thoughts or actions of the listeners or behavior of the addressee. He categorized illocutionary acts into five classes: - verdictives, exercitives, commissives, behabitives and expositives. But theorists after Austin worked and improved on his theory, hence Searle (1969), modification of the illocutionary forces of utterances as follows:

1. Assertives: these are statements of fact, they describe a state of affairs in the world which could be true or false. They commit a speaker to truth of the expressed proposition; e.g. stating, reporting, suggesting.

2. Directives: these are attempts by the speaker to get the hearer to act in such a way to fulfill what is represented by the content of the proposition; e.g. commanding, requesting, pleading, inviting.
3. Commissives: are statements that commit the speaker to certain future actions. The speaker becomes committed to act in a way requested by the propositional content. Examples are promising, vowing, warning, challenging
4. Expressives: these statements indicate sincerity of the speech of the speech act. It is the expression of some psychological state, e.g. thanking, apologizing, congratulating.
5. Declaratives: are statements that bring out performance about the correspondence between the propositional content and reality. These statements say something and make it so. Examples are accepting, resigning, pronouncing someone guilty.

It is on this premise that the theory of Speech Acts is applied to the data selected from certain portions of the speech. It must be stated here that people perform various acts or actions when sentences or utterances are uttered these acts are named speech acts.

5. Methodology

For this research work, data for this study were extracted from the Democracy Day speech of Acting President Yemi Osinbajo. The Speech was downloaded from the internet and analyzed to show the speech acts. The extracted portions from the speech cover the first five sentences and the last five sentences of it. Thus, totaling 10 sentences in all. The data were limited to 10 sentences in order to be thorough in our analysis of the speech. The extracted sentences were labeled data I to X. All these sentences are analyzed using the three speech acts (locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary).

Hereafter, the speech acts types noticed in our data analysis are shown on the frequency table and the total number of sentences to get the percentage.

6. Analysis of Data

6.1. Data

Locution: Dear Nigerians, I bring you good wishes from President Muhammadu Buhari, GCFR, who we all well know is away from the country on medical vacation.

Illocutionary:

Direct: assertive (stating)

Indirect: expressive (wishing)

Expected Perlocutionary act: reflection

6.2. Data

Locution: Today marks the second anniversary our assumption of office

Illocutionary:

Direct: assertive (stating)

Indirect: expressive (congratulating)

Expected Perlocutionary act: celebration

6.3. Data

Locution: We must thank the Almighty God not only for preserving our lives to celebrate this second anniversary, but for giving us hope, strength and confidence as we faced the challenges of the past two years.

Illocutionary:

Direct: assertive (praising)

Indirect: expressive (acknowledging)

Expected Perlocutionary act: reflection

6.4. Data

Locution: Our administration outlined three specific areas for our immediate intervention on assumption of office: these were security, corruption and the economy.

Illocutionary:

Direct: assertive (stating)

Indirect: commissive (promising)

Expected Perlocutionary act: assurance

6.5. Data

Locution: In the Northeast our country, the terrorist group Boko Haram openly challenged the sovereignty and continued existence of the state, killing, maiming and abducting, causing the displacement of the largest number of our citizens in recent history.

Illocutionary:

Direct: assertive (stating)

Indirect: directive (appealing)

Expected Perlocutionary act: hopefulness

6.6. Data

Locution: And we have a responsibility to live in peace and harmony with one another to seek peaceful and constitutional means of expressing our wishes and desires, and to resist all who might seek to sow confusion and hatred for their own selfish interests.

Illocutionary:

Direct: assertive (stating)

Indirect: directive (advising)

Expected Perlocutionary act: appeal

6.7. Data

Locution: Before I end this speech, let me ask for your continued prayers for the restoration to full health and strength and the safe return of our President.

Illocutionary:

Direct: directive (requesting)

Indirect: expressive (wishing)

Expected Perlocutionary act: Prayer

6.8. Data

Locution: I congratulate all of you on today's commemoration of this important day in the democratic calendar of our country.

Illocutionary:

Direct: assertive (stating)

Indirect: expressive (congratulating)

Expected Perlocutionary act: celebration

6.9. Data

Locution: Nigeria is on a journey of greatness and together we shall arrive at the destination of our dreams.

Illocutionary:

Direct: directive (wishing)

Indirect: expressive (requesting)

Expected Perlocutionary act: hopefulness

6.10. Data

Locution: May God bless you all and bless the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

Illocutionary:

Direct: assertive (saying)

Indirect: directive (prayerful)

Expected Perlocutionary act: cheerfulness

Frequency Distribution Table of Speech Acts in Acting President Yemi Osinbajo's Speech

Speech Acts Direct and Indirect	Frequencies	Percentage
Assertive	7	70%
Directive	5	50%
Commissive	1	10%
Expressive	7	70%
Declarative	0	0%

7. Discussion and Interpretation of Analysis

This study has obviously shown that language is a key factor in getting political ideologies, thoughts, aspirations and manifestoes of political parties to the electorates. In this light, the language use by Acting President Yemi Osinbajo is examined through the analysis of his speech to the nation on the 29th May, 2017. The table and the analysis show that Acting President Yemi Osinbajo used sentences that were purely assertive which take 70%. Needed to be said here is the fact that he used sentences that state the affairs in the nation, stating facts and making assertions and stating the political positions of the government and the commitment of their government to make a great and progressive nation. While 50% of the Acting president's sentences were directive, this was due to his intention to get Nigerians to do something towards achieving the collective national goals. The Acting President is requesting and advising Nigerians to show more commitment. As the Acting President, he as well gave order and command the military to do more in securing the lives and properties of Nigerians.

10% of the sentences were commissive, it shows that Acting President Yemi Osinbajo showed the commitment of his speech to what the government wants to do in the future. The acting President displayed through his speech acts promises and vowing and assuring Nigerian of better and united Nation. While, 70% of the selected sentence fall into the expressive acts. This is due to the circumstances that brought the administration into power.

The Acting President expressed the feeling and thinking of the government and wishing Nigerians a better and prosperous nation. He as well congratulated and praised everyone for their trust and belief in one united and indivisible nation. 0% of the sentences was for declarative act. The reason for this 0% is not far-fetched, the Acting President was acting for this president who was on medical leave in the United Kingdom. Being Acting President, he could not make pronouncement or declaration on behalf of the Commander-in-chief of the Armed forces of Federal Republic of Nigeria.

8. Conclusion

This study has demonstrated through the analysis of Acting President Yemi Osinbajo's speech the usefulness of the speech acts in attributing different inherent meanings in the use of language by Political office holders. It is obvious from the data analysis for this study that some acts are performed (direct and indirect) in the course of delivering his speech.

Furthermore, the study reveals through the speech acts performed by the Acting President, the democratic attribute of stating facts about the state of affairs in the nation saying the position of the government for a better great and united nation. The analysis finally reveals Acting President Yemi Osinbajo's choice and use of language which portray him as a true and democratic political leader, a loyal vice-president who is capable of piloting the affairs of the nation.

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