

SPEECH ACT FORCE IN GOODLUCK JONATHAN'S 2015 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION CAMPAIGN

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Abstract

Language is an intriguing and interesting enterprise from every point of view as it relates to human activities. It is one of the unique attributes that differentiates human beings from other creatures. Language is the most prominent tool of communication and is one of the valid means through which humans express their thought, feelings, ideas and emotions to one another and also get a feedback from them whether positive or negative. Politicians all over the world are aware that language most importantly the language of propaganda is a powerful tool before, during and after Election. They therefore take advantage of it during elections to achieve their desired aims. The choice of words by political aspirants is geared towards winning the heart of the electorates to their favour. This article analyzed two of Goodluck Jonathan's speech in the

2015 Presidential Election Campaign and the role language played in influencing the electorates' decision during the election campaigns using JL Austin Speech Act Theory such as Locution, Illocution and Perlocution Speech Act. The theory analyzed the role that utterances play in relation to the behavior or attitude of both the speaker and hearers in a given speech context and the effect the speech produces on the hearers thereafter. From the analyzed speech, it was reviewed that peoples believes and ideologies can be influenced based on what they hear over time.

Keywords: Speech Act Theory, President Goodluck Jonathan, Election Campaign, Language of Propaganda, Nigeria.

Introduction

Nigeria is a nation with 36 States and the Federal Capital Territory in her structure and operates a democratic system of government. Every four years Nigeria conducts elections primarily for the purpose of allowing the citizens the freedom to vote and choose candidates of their choice, who will represent their interest in government. The main political offices contested during the general elections are in three phases namely the National and State Assembly Elections, Governorship Elections and the Presidential Election etc. These elections are conducted across the country through the Independent National Commission (INEC). The role of the commission is to set up and conduct the elections in the

country. The stages that precede the outcome of elections in Nigeria is explained below:

There are several stages mapped out by INEC during election periods and these stages are necessary for a credible election. The pre-election stage, primary stage, nomination stage ,campaign stage, production of ballot papers and other polling material stage, voting stage, collation stage and result declaration stage. All of these stages are required for a proper and accountable election.

Since the return to democracy in 1999, Nigeria Politicians use diverse and extreme measures to approach election matters in a bid to win thereby making elections in Nigeria highly contentious. It is a battle of the fittest as the winner clings and controls the affairs of the nation for the next four years. The implication is that elections and politics in Nigeria have become one that requires application of desperate tactics in other to clinch or retain power. The desire to gain the power to govern has become a free for all fight using all possible means including the power of language. Politicians are aware of how powerful words are most importantly the language of propaganda and use them to their advantage during election campaign to influence the decisions of the electorates to vote for them.

Definition of Language

Crystal and Davy (1987) define language as “the systematic and conventional use of sounds, signs or written symbols in a society, for communication and human expression”.

Furthermore, they are of the opinion that a good language is that which is suitable and adaptive in a given communicative situation (communicative competence). Bloch and Trager, (1942) defined language as a system of arbitrary vocal symbols by means of which a social group cooperates. This definition is in line with Gimson (1980) who defined language as a system of conventional signals used for communication by a whole community. From the above definitions, it can be deduce that language is a unique symbols used by a particular set of people or groups to communicate both in verbal and written form). The aim of language therefore is to unify the speaker, the message and the audience for the intended purpose .On the other hand, Adedimeji (2005) states that language mainly serves to “inform, deform, reform and transform man and his society all of which are in line with the goals of politics.” Language has a lot of influences on the whole array of human affairs both in politics, education and other fields of life. It can therefore be said that most of the actions and inactions exhibited by people are related by what they hear over time.

One can clearly understand why language has become one of the tools used by politicians to exert influence on their audience both during and after election period as seen in their attempt to communicate some of their policies. For Anifowose (1999), politics has become a struggle to determine who gets what, when and how and has given rise to conflicts being placed at the very heart of political activities in terms of input of demands which are processed within a political system.

Since 1999, the return to democratic system of government has given rise to the activities of political parties, who nominate candidates to contest elections every four years in the country. The electioneering process gives room for prior campaigns where the candidates have the opportunities to present their manifestos and get familiar with people. All these are carried out using language and political undertone. The language of politics according to Abati (2001) explains that it relies on deception and persuasion. This suggests that the goal of political language is either to deceive or persuade in any given context. He adds that in attempt to exert the influence on the people (their audience), politicians take advantage of the social context to manipulate and even deceive people through their use of language. This could be referred to as linguistic manipulation; that is conscious use of language in misguided way to control others also known as propaganda. Different styles and techniques are adopted by politicians during election campaigns in attempt to pull the majority of the electorates on their sides. Such as Rhetoric and persuasion, exaggeration, propaganda among others are examples of the techniques used by politicians to influence electorates voting decision to their favour. This is achieved using the force of language as expressed with speech act force.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework upon which this work is based is the Speech Act Theory. Speech Act Theory is a subfield of pragmatics, the area of study concerned with the ways in which words are used not only to present information but also to carry

out actions. Pragmatics deals with how language is used within a discourse to contribute meaning. Speech act theory was propounded by Oxford Philosopher J.L. Austin in “How to Do Things with Words” and further expanded by American Philosopher J.R Searle. Speech Act is verbal actions with the intention of accomplishing something. It is an action performed by someone on the account of what is being said. Austin distinguishes three main aspects that pertain to every Speech Act.

Locutionary Act This is the Act of uttering speech sounds; the act of making a meaningful utterance.

Illocutionary Act This refers to the Act the speaker intends to accomplish by the speech or utterance that is the intention of the speaker in uttering the speech. Illocutionary act is further expanded into five parts for further appreciation of speech acts and they are as follows:

1. **Assertive:** This Illocutionary Act, states the realities or the true position of the way things are. For example “Owerri is in Imo State”
2. **Directive:** This is a type of Illocutionary force whereby a speaker tries to get the hearer to do something. Directives include performative verbs such as orders, commands, requests, pleads, begs, prays, insists, suggests etc.
3. **Commissive:** This Illocutionary force commits a speaker to do something in the future. The speaker willingly accepts to do something out of freewill in the near future

- and the utterance is embedded with such words as vow, pledge, promise, guarantee etc.
4. Expressive: This Illocutionary force tries to explain a speaker's attitude or emotion towards a particular situation. That is the speaker's view or opinion within a context. Expressive includes words such as think, apologize, congratulate, welcome etc.
 5. Declaratives: This is a type of Illocutionary force that changes the initial position of a thing by certain utterance made. For example "I now pronounce you husband and wife".

Perlocutionary Act This is the effect of the utterance (locution) on an interlocutor (listener)

From Austin's Speech Act Theory, it is fair to say that one's utterances can affect or change an already existing state of affairs. This is to say that words do not have meaning in isolation rather its meaning is well expressed within the context it is used as well as the speaker and audience for such conversation. Words have an effect on the interlocutor (listener) which triggers a performance of action or reaction and Austin's Speech Act Force shows the effect of this utterance on an interlocutor. In other words, it can be argued that any meaningful speech made by a speaker has an Illocutionary force (an intention), which brings about a Perlocutionary force that has an effect on the listener whether positive or negative.

At this point Goodluck Jonathan's speech will be analyze for better appreciation of this article.

Analysis

President Goodluck Jonathan

Goodluck Jonathan was born on November 20, 1957. He served as the president of Nigeria from 2010 to 2015 and was the incumbent president of Nigeria and the People Democratic Party (PDP) Presidential candidate during the period of the 2015 election. Two amongst the remarkable speech he made during his campaign will be analyze.

Extract 1

Locution

“My ambition is not worth the blood of any Nigeria.”

In this excerpt, Goodluck Jonathan uses language in attempt to persuade the audience (electorates) to vote for him. The force of language use lies in his ability to choose the words that could convince his audience (Perlocutionary force). He portrays that the lives of the electorates are more valuable than his personal interest. This claim is apparently a statement of commitment to non-violence even if the election does not end to his favour. The Illocutionary force can be said to be commissive in the sense that the GEJ willingly vows that he is ready to give up his presidential bid if it will cost lost of lives. The Perlocutionary effect of this expression on the listeners is that it will likely interpret to mean that this particular candidate can be trusted with the safety of all notwithstanding the outcome of the

election. This comes from the point that Nigeria general election has been marred with violence both during and after-election.

The statement “My ambition is not worth the blood of any Nigerian” by President GoodLuck Jonathan resonated all through the 2015 presidential election. It is a statement that evokes some feelings of emotions. This statement could be viewed as one coming sincerely from a man who apparently puts the unity of his country into consideration. It can also be argued that such expression can be seen and utilized as a propaganda tool for election campaigns.

Similarly, the implication of Jonathan’s statement is that it may possibly portray him as a patriotic Nigerian who is ready to uphold national unity and peace. It could also reveal him before his audience as a candidate who values human life above his personal aspirations as well as who is not desperate for power against the typicality of the Nigeria polity that is characterized with the quest for political power. His statement shows commitment and promise to peace and security.

The impact or Perlocutionary force of this statement could be that some electorates would vote for Jonathan having perhaps interpreted it to mean that Jonathan is a man, who has the peace of Nigeria as priority and voting him can help to establish peace within the country. The use of language of propaganda is also inherent in this excerpt as plain-folk technique is identified. Goodluck Jonathan tries to create trust and confidence by

presenting himself as one who shares in their woes and concerns. This shows the extent language can be used as a force of influence over human action and decisions.

Extract 2

Locution

I don't think Nigerians will make the mistake of voting for Buhari. Gen. Buhari, with due respect, is not the right option for Nigeria at this time. It is a gamble that is not worth taking. I may not be perfect as nobody is perfect. But I believe that come Saturday, the majority of Nigerian voters will choose me as the best candidate to lead the nation forward.

From the excerpt above, the Jonathan made adequate use of words that could appeal to the conscience of his audience and at the same time present himself as better candidate than his opponent. Such expressions as “With due respect” and “I may not be perfect as nobody is perfect” apparently are not just expressions to show the speaker’s humility but an attempt to appeal to the audience’s conscience. The Illocutionary force in Jonathan’s speech is expressive as he attempts to appeal to the electorates by his personal opinion that his is a better candidate than Buhari. The implication or outcome is possibly to persuade the audience to vote for his party at the election (Perlocutionary force).

The force of language plays out as Jonathan affirms his ability to rule the country as he appeals to the electorates' conscience to vote for him. For instance, Jonathan's supposition that he doesn't "think Nigerians will make the mistake of voting Buhari." is an indirect way of presenting himself as the better candidate. On the other hand, Jonathan tactically tries not to portray himself as "all perfect" before his audience. Attempting to present Buhari as not being competent to be president, Jonathan projects himself as the better candidate for the job and also cautiously tries not to present himself in an overrated manner.

Such careful linguistic presentation projects President Jonathan as a man who does not only have the competence but also recognizes human flaws. This, to an extent, also presents him as a man full of humility. Implicatively, Jonathan's linguistic choice could possibly appeal to the emotions of the electorates and perhaps influence their decision to vote for him. This propaganda technique seen in the speech above is card stacking this is aimed at persuading electorates to believe that Goodluck Jonathan is the better choice.

Summary and Conclusion

This article x-rayed Speech Act in two speech of Goodluck Jonathan during the presidential campaign of 2015. With the Speech Act Theory of J.L Austin, the article examined the force

of language and its possible impact on the language listener. The article examined the use of language in electioneering campaign and its possible impact on the electorates' voting decision. This was done by identifying the speech force embedded on two speech of Goodluck Jonathan who was the incumbent president and presidential candidate of the ruling party during the 2015 Election Campaign.

The article reviewed that language can have an impact on the audience's emotions, thoughts as well as on their choices and decisions through Austin's Locution, Illocution and Perlocution force. A speaker can possibly influence the thoughts, decisions, actions and ideology of the listener and indoctrinate them into certain actions through language force.

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Appendix i:**PRESIDENT GOODLUCK JONATHAN**

“My ambition is not worth the blood of any Nigerian”

Source: Channels Television.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XXblDKyI3dM&t=18s>

Appendix ii :**PRESIDENT GOODLUCK JONATHAN:**

“I don’t think Nigerians will make the mistake of voting for Buhari. Gen. Buhari, with due respect, is not the right option for Nigeria at this time. It is a gamble that is not worth taking. I may not be perfect as nobody is perfect. But I believe that come Saturday, the majority of Nigerian voters will choose me as the best candidate to lead the nation forward.”

Source: *The Cable News, Thursday, March 26, 2015.*