

**POSITIVE IMPOLITENESS STRATEGY IN POLITICAL DISCOURSE: A
TEXTUAL ANALYSIS OF 2011-2015 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION
CAMPAIGN SPEECHES IN SELECTED NIGERIAN NEWSPAPERS**

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Abstract

The work investigates improper language use as a source of political and social instability in Nigeria. It tries to establish a connection between positive impoliteness strategy and insecurity in Nigeria and the debilitating consequences of such on virtually all strata of national development. Data were collected using purposive sampling technique from selected Nigerian newspapers that captured the campaign speeches of political actors from the two major political parties in Nigeria, the People Democratic Party (PDP) and the All Progressive Congress (APC) prior to the 2015 presidential election. The collected data were textually analyzed using Jonathan Culpeper framework on impoliteness strategies and John Austin's Speech act theory. It was found that a strong link between positive impoliteness strategy and electoral violence in Nigeria. This positive impoliteness linguistic strategy, realized in name calling, disassociating from the other, exclude the others from an activity and others were deployed by our politicians, in a bid to discredit their opponent before the electorates, while presenting themselves as the best option for the masses. These speeches were ostensibly provocative, capable of triggering violent reactions from the opposition party, as evidenced in the wanton destruction of lives and properties during that period. The researchers recommend that in order to sustain the national integration and peaceful co-existence, our political actors, and every user of the English language in Nigeria must strive to use language appropriately and politely.

Keywords: Language, politics, impoliteness, discourse, speech, newspaper

INTRODUCTION

Language and communication are inseparable tools, as language is the means by which we communicate our thoughts. Language is used in political campaigns by the politicians to convey their political ideas, manifestoes to the masses. Their use of language could either be polite or impolite. Impoliteness is a communicative strategy designed to attack face and thereby causing social conflict and disharmony. In other words, rather than promoting peace which is the objective of politeness in speech, impolite utterances are intentionally made to damage the hearer's face and thereby

cause social conflicts. By 'Face', it means the value, public self - image one earns for himself or herself and wants others to recognize. Having said this, The research aims at discovering the use of positive impoliteness strategy in the political campaign speeches of political actors from the two major political parties in Nigeria; the People Democratic Party (PDP), and the All Progressive People's Congress(APC), spearheaded by President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan and Gen. Muhammadu Buhari respectfully, in the build-up to the 2015 presidential election(2011-2015).This work seeks to analyze selected Nigerian Newspapers media textual data to discover how various politicians deployed the positive impoliteness strategy to damage the positive face of the presidential candidate of the opposition party. The following research questions guided the study: 1) What lexical and grammatical features encode positive impoliteness strategy in the selected speeches? 2) How does these threaten the face needs of those affected? 3) What are the illocutionary acts performed in the selected speeches? 4) What are the perlocutionary effects of these utterances on the listeners? and 5) How have these affected peaceful cohesion in Nigeria?

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

There are key concepts that are essential to the discussions in this study. They include: Language and politics, political discourse, politeness and Impoliteness

Language and Politics

The bond between language and politics is derived from the association of language and communication. Man is a political being whose entire life is permeated by politics and his blessing of speech provides apt enablement. Politics itself is viewed as the struggle for power between those who seek to assert and maintain their power and those who seek to resist it. Politics is concerned with power, the power to make decisions, to control resources, to control other people's behaviour, and often to control their values. For Fairclough (1989) power "is to do with powerful participants controlling and constraining the contribution of non- powerful participants". Power is also equated with influence and control (Dijk, 2002).

Language plays a crucial role in politics as every political action is prepared, accompanied, controlled and influenced by it (Schaffner, 1996). No doubt that politics has become a linguistic issue while language has become a political issue. It is generally accepted that the strategy that one group of people takes to make the other group of people do what it intends to be done is known as a linguistic strategy. Political campaigns, speeches, parliamentary debates and political interviews, written texts, broadcasts are meant to inform, persuade, and instruct voters about issues that are of considerable importance. From these submissions, speech making is one of the political activities of politicians which are made possible through the channel opened up by language.

Political Discourse

Political discourse is a collection of speech acts, as well as public law, tradition and experience, which is determined and expressed in the form of verbal formations, content, subject and the addressee of which belongs to the sphere of politics. Dijk (2002) corroborates the above view by stating that the first observation that needs to

be made about political discourse is that it is not a genre, but a class of genre defined by a social domain, namely that of politics.

Also, Al-Faki (2013) describes political discourse as an umbrella term for various political talks made at different political forums such as political campaign rallies, party manifestoes, inaugural speeches, bills among others. In other terms, political discourse can be defined as a manipulative linguistic strategy, which serves concrete (ideological) goals. Consequently, political discourse is not just a communication, it brings together its clear goals. The purpose of political discourse is the conquest and deduction of power; and its participants are politicians and society.

Politeness

Linguistic politeness can be defined as the ways in which language is employed in conversation to show consideration for the feelings and desires of one's interlocutors, to create and uphold interpersonal relationships (so-called politic behavior), and to comply with the rules for what society or one's culture considers appropriate behavior. Leech (1983) defines politeness as "those forms of behaviour which are aimed at the establishment and maintenance of comity, that is, the ability of participants to engage in interaction in a comfortable and harmonious atmosphere." The purpose of politeness is the maintenance of harmonious and a smooth social relation, devoid of conflict.

On his own part, Yule gives the definition of politeness as an interaction that shows awareness of another person's face. A person may have a positive face, that is, a need to be accepted or liked, or a negative face; a need to be independent and unimposed on (Yule, 2010). Based on this, speakers have to acknowledge and show an awareness of the face, the public self-image, of the people that they address. It is fitting, therefore to refer to linguistic politeness as language usage that ensures smooth communication between participants by showing consideration for each other's feelings.

The Concept of Impoliteness

Different scholars have defined impoliteness from different point of view. The first scholar to mention when talking about impoliteness is Culpeper. He defines impoliteness as 'communicative strategies designed to attack face and thereby causing social conflict and disharmony'. In other words, any use of language or behaviour that is geared towards attacking the face of the addressee is viewed as grossly impolite. Such use of language can cause social conflict and disharmony.

K. Tracy and S. Tracy(2008) view impoliteness or face attacks as communicative acts perceived by members of a social community(and often intended by speakers) to be purposefully offensive. This definition is also in line with Goffman (1967) who relates such face-threat to situations where the offending person acts maliciously and spitefully with the intention of causing open insult. From this, it shows that impoliteness is viewed when a speaker speaks purposely and intentionally to spite the hearer thereby causing offence.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The campaign speeches are communicative acts intended to perform a particular action, hence the researcher adopts John Austin (1962) Speech Acts Theory, further expanded by John Searle (1969). The Brown and Levinson (1978) politeness theory will also be used to examine how the utterances violate the principle of politeness, and finally Jonathan Culpeper (1996) framework on impoliteness to depict how these utterances threaten the positive face of opposition party.

Speech Act Theory

The Speech Acts theory is also described as “How to Do Things with Words Theory” since it has its roots in the work of Austin (1962) and Searle (1969). According to J. Austin (1962), in every utterance, a person performs an act such as stating a fact, stating an opinion, confirming or denying something, making a prediction or a request, asking a question, issuing an order, giving a permission, giving a piece of advice, making an offer, making a promise, thanking somebody or condoling somebody. All these are speech acts. A speech act refers to the use of language in context to perform an action. It involves the speaker, the force of his speech and the effect it has on the hearer, which determines what the speech act has been able to achieve. According to Austin (1962), speech acts is divided into the locutionary acts, that is the act of saying something, the illocutionary act, that is the function of words which is uttered by the speaker and the effect of those words on the listener, which is the perlocutionary acts.

Brown and Levinson’s (1987) Politeness Theory

The most popular politeness theory is the one propounded by Brown and Levinson. The theory is heavily influenced by Goffman’s (1967) notion of face. Goffman (1967) sees face as a constituent of social interaction. Face, according to Goffman (1967, p.5), is “the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact”

Here, Goffman was suggesting that face is not a permanent image imposed on people. Face is, rather, formed during a particular communicative event. Accordingly, in any communicative event, face emerges as a result of face work. The action an individual takes to make whatever he is doing consistent with face is referred to as face work (Goffman, 1967). In other words, in an interaction, face must be in harmony with face works. Brown and Levinson, improving upon Goffman’s concept of face, proposed their politeness theory, in which face theory was divided into negative face and positive face. A person’s negative face is the individual’s need to be independent, his/her basic claim to territories and his/her freedom from imposition. A person’s positive face however, is his/her need to be accepted and liked by others and the need to be treated as a member of the same group. An individual’s face wants may be threatened through acts such as orders, threats, warnings, requests, advice, suggestions, offers, promises, compliments and expressions of strong emotion, envy, admiration and all forms of utterances in which one feels “put down” in some way. In such instances, the speaker infringes on the addressees’ personal preserves and independence. Acts that threaten positive face wants include expressions of disapproval, criticism, contempt, ridicule, complaints, accusations, insults, challenges, reprimands, disagreement, mention of taboo topics, a blatant non-cooperation and the use of address/familiar terms in initial

encounter, all of which infringe on the hearer's need to be accepted, liked or to be connected. Therefore, central to the study of politeness is the issue of face.

2.1.1 Framework of Impoliteness

The most notable model of impoliteness was introduced by Jonathan Culpeper in (1996). As maintained by his model, impoliteness is intended to produce disharmony between interlocutors in social interactions (Walaszewska and Piskorska, 2012).

Culpeper (1996) outlines five impoliteness super-strategies which are parallel opposites of Brown & Levinson's politeness super-strategies. The five-super strategies formulated by Culpeper include Bald –on record, Positive, Negative, and Sarcasm impoliteness strategies. However, for the purpose of this research work, we will focus on the positive impoliteness strategy.

Positive Impoliteness

This strategy is used to damage the addressee's positive face wants (Culpeper, 356). It is realized in the form of exclude the other from an activity, disassociate from the other, use inappropriate identity markers, use taboo words- swear, or use abusive or profane language, call the other names-use derogatory nominations and others.

(Culpeper, 1996)

METHODOLOGY

Sample texts from newspaper reports were selected for the study. The selected texts are extracted from the campaign speeches made by Nigerian politicians with affiliation to the two dominating political parties in Nigeria (APC and PDP) from 2011 to 2015 presidential election. They are speeches of influential personalities, opinion molders, whose opinions are always relied upon by their followers. Purposive sampling technique was adopted in the selection of sample texts. This is because only the texts that contain the linguistic items that convey positive impoliteness strategy are selected. The data were sampled from different print newspapers in Nigeria. The names of the newspapers which cut across broadcast, online and print media include: Vanguard newspaper, Punch newspaper, Premium Times newspaper, and the Sahara Reporters newspaper.

The reason for this option of sampling technique is borne out of the need to ensure that the target population is reached and covered because major political, religious, ethnic and social groups often express their views through a particular print or online medium that align with their philosophies or views. Secondly this technique was chosen to have fair share of data from different sources so as to make reliable generalization at the end of the research. The linguistic data will be examined using John Austin's Speech Act Theory and Brown and Levinson's politeness theory. Also, Jonathan Culpeper (1996) framework on impoliteness will also be used to ascertain the use of positive impoliteness strategy in the selected data. Analysis follows the tri-dimensional framework of discourse analysis suggested by Fairclough (1995) which include the levels of description of the formal properties of text, followed by the semantic interpretation and the meaning potentials of such textual items and finally pragmatic explanation of the socio-cultural implications of such linguistic choices.

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

The following texts for data analysis were drawn from both online and print newspapers in Nigeria. The names of personalities associated with the utterances, the newspaper and date of publication are indicated alongside the textual data. The sample texts are presented in accordance with the stated research questions.

Text 1: 2015: Dokubo vows to fight opposition, bullet for bullet on Vanguard News May 22, 2013

“... The enemies are at the doorstep waiting to pounce. Having Niger Delta Development Commission, NDDC, ministerial and ambassadorial positions are not enough, we want to control our resources”.

The above statement was made by Asari Dokubo, a major political figure of the Ijaw ethnic group in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria, and a strong member of the PDP. By using the noun “enemies” to refer to the opposition party, Dokubo portrays them as antagonistic force against the progress of the Niger Delta and hence, should be strongly resisted by his people. It reveals the height of disunity, mutual suspicion and hatred existing between the two regions or political parties.

Text 2: Muhammadu Buhari is “Brain-Dead.” - Patience Jonathan. Premium Times, Thursday, October 8, 2015

“Wetin him they find again? Him dey drag with him pikin mate, old man wey no get brain, him brain don die pata pata.”-What is Buhari looking for? Old man that does know his age with no brain, your brain is dead.

In this text, Patience Jonathan, the erstwhile first lady of Nigeria used face threatening words rendered in metaphor that threatens the positive face of the hearer. The above expressions depict Gen. Buhari as someone who is physically and mentally deteriorated to rule over the affairs of Nigeria.

Text 3: “You should not be bothered with ‘cockroaches of politics’ ...”

The above impolite speech was made by the then Governor of Katsina state, Ibrahim Shema during one of his political rallies in his state. The grammatical expression “cockroaches of politics” is used symbolically to imply that PDP is a corrupt party, whose shady deal has destroyed the very fabric of politics that is the Nigerian economy.

Text 4: Don’t vote bloodletting (Punch Newspaper, January 22, 2015).

The former APC National publicity Secretary, Lai Mohammed gave the above directive, urging the masses not to re-elect the ruling party, PDP. The PDP administration witnessed spontaneous Boko-Haram attacks which claimed the lives of innocent citizens. His statement was quite critical, accusing the top officials of the ruling party of being behind the reckless killing through their collaboration and sponsorship. The above statement is aimed at discouraging the masses from re-electing the ruling party.

Text 5: My problem with Jonathan, PDP, by Bisi Akande-Gbenga Olarinoye www.vanguard.com 18 August, 2013

”Jonathan is a kindergarten president. What the country needs is a thinking leader not a kindergarten president with no solution to the myriads of problems plaguing the nation.”

The above statement was credited to the former APC National Chairman, Bisi Akande. Calling the sitting president a kindergarten president is quite impolite and shows disrespectful to the apex political office in the country. He portrays him as a president who is not mentally equipped to confront the numerous challenges bedeviling the nation.

Text 6: Ayo Fayose prophecy of death for Buhari (Sahara Reporters, January 29,2015).6. Nigerians be warned! I have set before thee life and death...”

The use of the above linguistic term by the former Governor of Ekiti State to metaphorically compare the two presidential candidates of APC and PDP, Gen. Muhammadu Buhari and President Goodluck Jonathan respectively shows the height of our political leaders’ use of impolite expressions. By association someone who is still alive with death, his statement means that Gen.Buhari will soon die and so leave the nation in the state of disarray, so, he should not be voted in.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The two research questions posed in this work have been adequately addressed even in the data presentation in the last section. The first question seeks to discover the lexical and grammatical features used in the textual data to encode positive impoliteness strategy, while the second is concerned with how these threaten the positive face of the opposition party. These two questions relate to each other in the sense that the political players deployed lexical items that tarnishes the positive face of their opposition party, which is their desire to be seen before the masses as qualified for the presidential seat. It makes them loose their credibility before the electorates.

One of the remarkable grammatical features that encode this positive impoliteness strategy in the above presented data is the copious use of metaphor to discredit the presidential candidate of the opposition party. Examples of these metaphorical ridded statements include “enemies,” “brain –dead,” “Don’t vote blood-letting”, kindergarten president”, and “I have set before thee life and death. Asari Dokubo ,who is from the Niger Delta, by calling the opposition party “enemies” used the rhetoric of exclusion to dissuade the ethnic groups in the Niger Delta from voting for Buhari from the North. It showcased the Northerners as people who are antagonistic to the Southerners and so should not be voted into power. All these words are lexical and grammatical items threatens the positive face of the presidential candidate from the two political parties by discrediting them before the electorates and answer the Research Question 2.

Further to answering research question 2, the wife of the ex-president, Patience Jonathan referring Gen.Buhari as “brain dead”, and the former Governor of Katsina state calling the members of the People’s Democratic Party (PDP) “cockroaches of politics” reveal the height of the use of positive impoliteness strategy by our politicians, in a bid to tarnish the image of their opponent and win the political support of the masses. Also Text 4 exemplifies an extreme case of the use of positive impolite expressions directed at the present head of state. By forecasting someone’s death in office in reference to his inability to rule the country because of his age should have

alternative ways of expression. This was intended to discredit General Buhari's before the eyes of the right thinking members of the society.

A close look at the above mentioned lexical items and grammatical expressions, we can see that the illocutionary act used in Text 1, 2 and 5 is assertive. The speakers expressed their opinions about their political opponents in a strong, convinced and confident manner. On the other hand, Text 3 and 4 are both assertive and directive. The ex-Governor of Ekiti State, Ibrahim Shema advised his supporters not to be bothered with the cockroaches of politics, also as the former APC publicity secretary, Lai Mohammed, directed his supporter not to vote for bloodletting. All referring to the People's Democratic Party (PDP). This answers the research question 3.

All these expressions that encode positive impoliteness strategy is intended to achieve one particular aim, and that is to discredit the opposition party before the electorate and cause them loose the support of the masses and this answers research question 4.

Finally, in answering research question 5, that is how these positive impolite expressions affected peaceful cohesion in Nigeria, the 2015 presidential pre-election, crises attested to the fact that these provocative utterances emboldened supporters of various parties who felt their political interests have been jeopardized, to bear up arms against the other as evidenced in the wanton destruction of lives and properties. The political situation in Nigeria then was quite tensed up that it would have resulted into another civil war if not for the quick intervention of the United Nations who mandated the two presidential candidates to sign a peace deal.

CONCLUSION

In this paper, attempt has been made to show that language and communication play important roles in ensuring national security. Also, the paper recognizes too that improper use of language can bring about insecurity as has been witnessed in the past. It therefore recommends that citizens of Nigeria should always have it in their consciousness that for peace and tranquility to reign they should watch what they say, how and when to say them.

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