

**THE RESILIENCE, THE HARDWORK, FOR A NEW NIGERIA SHOULD NOT WANE:
SPEECH ACT ANALYSIS OF HIS EXCELLENCY, PETER OBI'S FIRST SPEECH AFTER THE
2023 NIGERIA'S PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION**

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Abstract

Millions of Nigerians wore gloomy faces, while many contemplated taking to the streets with the declaration of the APC presidential candidate as the winner of the Nigerian Presidential poll. At the heat of the moment, His Excellency Peter Obi addressed the obedient movement to remain calm and allow justice take its course in the recovering of the mandate. This study on Peter Obi's first speech after Nigeria's 2023 presidential election is hinged on Austin (1975), speech act theory and Leech (1983), politeness maxims to ascertain how Peter Obi used language to manipulate the emotions of the obedient movement and dissuade them from taking to violence, assess the speech acts he employed to inform, appreciate or condemn the actors involved in the election process and examine the politeness maxims Obi adopted in his speech to elicit hope for a better Nigeria was also x-rayed. A descriptive analysis on texts from his thirteen paragraph speech, expose dominant use of commissives, behavitives and exploitation of politeness principles. The paper therefore, recommends that people should always be mindful of their language use in order not to escalate already charged situation. Speech makers should also tailor their speeches to have conciliatory texture, so as to avert conflict.

Introduction

Human beings as social entities communicate with each other and carry out social relationships through language. Language performs a lot of functions in a community that its usage determines the co-existence of a group.

Nwulu and Njemanze (2013), expand the horizon of language as not simply a vehicle of communication, but, a strong tool used to impart positive orientation and thought processes. They further emphasize that language has the ability to induce reaction, propagate action and influence decision. Language as an integral part of the people's social life has an important role to play in educating people, and shaping their attitudes and values.

Holmes (2013), accedes that language is not used to convey only referential information but also expresses information about social relationships. This phatic function of language as an instrument of communication could be used to compel individuals to wage war, provoke, trigger, denounce thoughts, motives and acts, disperse, blackmail, insult, kill, utter lies, say or testify falsely, hate, harass, and produce aggression (Ademola, 2009). It may also be used to entertain, appeal, teach, encourage, comfort, amuse, admire, create, enlighten, develop cordial relationships, settle disputes, and reconcile with individuals or communities; to restore peace or to resolve tensions between religious, political, communal, economic, racial, or tribal groups.

Through language and communication, we are able to understand, anticipate, or predict people's feelings and reactions. This according to Onyeama (2021), implies that language facilitates the expression of feelings, sentiments, thoughts, ideas, beliefs, and expectations about persons, objects, locations, activities, facts, and situations. As a result, words can be used to convey knowledge about peaceful or conflict scenarios.

This assertion is true of the speech under analysis by H. E. Peter Obi, the Labour Party (LP) presidential candidate, who on March 2, 2023 addressed aggrieved Nigerians and the obedient movement who are of the opinion that their votes during the presidential polls of 25th February 2023 was manipulated and their democratic rights trampled upon, going by the result announced by the Independent National Electoral Commission Chairman, Prof. Mamood Yakubu, on the need to remain calm and allow the judiciary to restore the mandate through due process. The study adopts an eclectic approach using J. L. Austin's (1975) speech act theory and G. Leech (1983) politeness maxims for the analysis.

Objective

This study sets out to:

- ascertain how Peter Obi used language to coordinate emotions of the obedient movement and dissuade them from taking to violence
- assess the speech acts he employed to inform, appreciate and condemn the actors involved in the election process
- examine the politeness maxims Obi adopted in his speech to elicit hope for a better Nigeria

Conceptual Framework

Democracy

Democracy according to Peterside (2021), is a universal concept that embodies fundamental principles and doctrines that make it unique as a form of government which relies on the idea of the supremacy of the people. This implies that the people have the right to choose or decide who will govern them periodically. He is also of the opinion that the absence of the rule of law, fundamental human right, liberty and accountability is an aberration to the practice of democracy. Peterside (2021), concludes that democracy in Nigeria contrary to acceptable standard is a combination of civil rule, militarism, and ethnic jingoism.

Democracy in Nigeria has witnessed instability and interruptions since after independence due to interventions from the military that has overthrown the government for about three republics. Two out of the four democratically elected presidents of Nigeria; Olusegun Obasanjo and Muhammadu Buhari, of Nigeria's fourth republic headed those military dictatorship era. Erunke (2012), upholds that sustainable democracy which makes room for continual democratic projects over a long period of time would only be possible without external interference of any sort.

Hoffman & Wallace (2022), assert that Nigeria is not practising true democracy due to its entrenched corrupt political class, dwindling electoral participation, shrinking civil liberties, and weak democratic institutions. For the Nigerian political class, democracy is a means to facilitate access to power and create avenue for them to loot the nation's treasury. Erunke (2012), supports that democratic ethos have practically been mismanaged by agents of state through the instrumentalities of coercion and brutal force to the extent that people are now alien to the very values and dictates of the principles of democracy. He maintains that democracy will become sustainable only in the presence of free, fair and credible elections. Election according to source is the most fundamental element of modern day democracy.

Election

Erunke (2012), citing Alikpi (2004), opines that election is the barometer to measure the political maturity, health, legitimacy and stability of a democratic governance. It is generally held to be the most important indicator of the presence or absence of democratic governance. Furthermore, the source elucidates, that it is the source through which the electorates choose their representative into the different organs of government. Ighodalo (2020), views election as a crucial aspect of the democratic framework for governing modern political societies, instrument for political societies, political choices, mobilisation and accountability.

For election to be meaningful in a democratic system, Iyayi (2005), suggests that it should involve the participation of the people in the act of electing their leaders and their participation in governance. Election according to source should not just be limited to election day activities, though primary, but should also involve activities before, during and after election which should centre on the liberation of the political process in the country and the independence of adjudicating bodies of the election. He emphasises that credible elections are necessary to nip the tide of political decay in Nigeria and renew the country's credibility. Also, it will put the right people in government, and manage conflict effectively.

Onigiobi, Obadiora & Oriowo (2020), expose that re-occurring issues over the years reveal that citizens may not have the knowledge of electioneering responsibilities and engagement or may have little knowledge of electioneering responsibility and that of engagement. This knowledge according to source entails awareness of their civic responsibilities which include registration, collection of permanent voters card, voting and engaging as Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) adhoc staff.

The source mention some possibilities that affect citizens electioneering engagement in Nigeria to include but not limited to

- lack of confidence in political leaders, who usually leave their promise unfulfilled after been elected
- violence embedded electoral process and malpractice
- lack of INEC machinery for intensive supervision of electoral process
- election rigging such as falsification of election results, infant voting in some quarters, illegal thumb printing of ballot papers and many more

The introduction of the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) by INEC for the 2023 elections re-awakened the interest and confidence of many Nigerians in the electoral process, and their belief for a functional democracy. Nigerians believe that the BVAS would reduce cases of malpractice or manual manipulation of figures as it is configured to transmit results electronically into the INEC portal.

In the history of our country Nigeria, the February 25, 2023 presidential election witnessed unprecedented turn out of eligible voters willing to perform their civic responsibility, proving that Nigerians know their electioneering responsibilities, but had been all the while discouraged by the electoral system towards fulfilling it.

Theoretical Framework

The relevance of language use to this study makes this eclectic approach from J. L. Austin (1975) speech act and Leech (1983) politeness maxims imperative for analyzing Peter Obi's speech that quelled crises after the 2023 presidential election. Austin in his study *'How to do things with words'*, is of the view that an individual does not just say something, but is doing something with his words which he describes as performatives. These performatives are classified under five categories:

- verdictives – exemplified by giving of a verdict, estimate, grade or appraisal
- exercitives – the exercising of powers, right or influence as in appointing, ordering, warning, or advising
- commissives – typified by promising or undertaking, and committing one to do something
- behavitives – this has to do with apologizing, congratulating, blessing, cursing or challenging
- expositives – refers to how one makes utterances fit into an argument or exposition (Wardhaugh 2010 p.303)

Leech (1983) Politeness Maxims

Leech (1983) proposes seven politeness maxims which aim at minimizing cost and maximizing benefit to hearer.

- i. Tact maxim states that interlocutors should minimize the expression of belief which imply cost (inconvenience) to other and maximize the expression of belief which imply benefit to other. The speaker can weaken (soften) an imposition by making it easier for the hearer to refuse it.
- ii. Generosity maxim states that interactants should minimize the expression of benefits to self, maximize the expression of cost to self
- iii. Approbation maxim: minimize the expression of beliefs which express dispraise/ disapproval of other, maximize the expression of beliefs which express approval of other. It is preferred to praise other than one self
- iv. Modesty maxim stipulates that speakers should always minimize the expression of praise of self, maximize the expression of dispraise of self
- v. Agreement maxim: minimize the expression of disagreement between self and other; maximize the expression of agreement between self and other
- vi. Sympathy maxim stipulates that discourse partners should minimize antipathy between self and other, maximize sympathy between self and other
- vii. Consideration maxim or pollyana principle stipulates that speakers should maximize the hearers comfort or pleasure, minimize the hearers discomfort or displeasure

Data Analysis

Excerpts from Peter Obi's thirteen paragraph first speech made on March 2, 2023 after Nigeria's presidential election on 25th February 2023 and declaration of Bola Tinubu as president elect by Prof. Mamood Yakubu, Chairman, Independent National Electoral Commission, was subjected to a descriptive, qualitative analysis using Austin (1975), speech act theory and Leech (1983), politeness principles.

Excerpt 1

Again, my dear people, let me correct an impression because I'm seeing some people saying in the media that I released one news or the other. I have never, directly or indirectly, spoken or released any message since after voting on the 25th. My last comment to the media was immediately after voting on the 25th, I've never done so until now. So, whatever you see in the media please disregard. It's not coming from me directly or indirectly.

This expositives clears the doubt over the news making rounds in the media. Obi uses discourse deixis such as 'again, my dear people, so, because' to buttress his emphasis. 'Again' refers exophorically to a shared contextual belief. 'I' in the above utterance is speaker exclusive, he uses it to assert the truth of the proposition. Obi exploits the pollyana principle, he maximizes his hearers comfort by assuring them that the negative utterances from the social media did not emanate from him

Excerpt 2

This is my first time of speaking to the media, I thank all of you for your understanding. For me, it is a very simple thing to speak to Nigerians who on the 25th of February trooped out en masses as committed citizens to participate in what all of us have called an existential election, for a supposedly free, fair, credible presidential and national assembly election. We give thanks to God.

Obi uses the behavitives to appreciate Nigerians on their effort in the just concluded election and adopts the verdictives to evaluate the processes of the election. 'Supposedly free, fair, credible', by implicature exposes imposition, malpractice and fraudulence in this existential election. '25th of February', refers endophorically to an existential presidential and national assembly election. 'Us and We' is speaker and hearer inclusive. He exploits the approbation by praising Nigerians for their commitment notwithstanding the way the election turned out.

Excerpt 3

For me, the number one thing is gratitude. Gratitude to God Almighty, that continues to protect and bless our dear country Nigeria. Number two is gratitude to Nigerians that participated in the election, answering the call as true citizens in our dear country. Number three is gratitude to those of you Nigerians, especially the youth that believed and worked tirelessly for a new Nigeria, I thank all of them for the hard work. Gratitude to the Obidients, Youths, those who believe that a new Nigeria is possible, I say to them that a new Nigeria is possible, and we will work for that new Nigeria.

Peter Obi uses the behavitives to appreciate progressive actors and makes use of the existential presupposition in doing so. The actors include God Almighty, Nigerians, the youths and the obidients'. This is an exploitation of approbation maxim. The belief of Nigerians in the ability of the Supreme God who has been protecting and blessing Nigeria amidst bad governance is activated, this is re-assuring. He adopts the commissives to reassure the actors and also commits himself towards the actualisation of that new Nigeria. The phrase 'new Nigeria' implies change in governance which will favour the masses, especially the youths. Maximizing his hearer comfort is an exploitation of the pollyana principle.

Excerpt 4

The resilience, the hard work, for a new Nigeria should not wane. Datti and I remain committed to that new Nigeria. I know how they will be feeling now because of the way the elections have come and gone. The commitment of Nigerians, even in the face of unwarranted attacks, is a testimony that a new Nigeria is indeed possible. I look at people like lady Jennifer who was stabbed but insisted on voting, and that gives me courage to believe that a new Nigeria is indeed possible – and there are so many other Nigerians.

He adopts the exercitives as a leader to advice and encourage Nigerians and his followers not to relent in the actualisation of a better Nigeria. He uses the commissives to undertake the responsibility of championing this course alongside his vice Datti. This is an exploitation of the sympathy maxim. He adopts the verdictives to appraise and applaud the commitment of Nigerians towards this course of changing the status quo. He makes use of the existential presupposition to appreciate Nigerians and entities like Lady Jennifer for remaining undaunted even in the face of attacks and intimidations, this utterance exploits the approbation maxim. 'I know how they will be feeling now' expresses emotional affiliation to the pains of many Nigerians whose democratic rights was trampled upon and an exploitation of sympathy maxim.

Excerpt 5

The election that we just witnessed has been conducted and results announced as programmed. It is a clear violation of the electoral rules and guidelines as we were promised. This election did not meet the standard expected of a free, transparent, credible fair election. It will go down as one of the most controversial elections ever conducted in Nigeria.

Obi adopts the verdictives to appraise and fault the 2023 election processes which is contrary to the guidelines laid down by INEC. 'The election' and 'this election' refers cataphorically to the most controversial election ever conducted in Nigeria. It also exposes a shared knowledge between the speaker and his listeners. 'It'

refers anaphorically to 'the election' and 'this election'. Obi exploits the agreement maxim. He aligns with Nigerians who are embittered because their vote was disregarded.

Excerpt 6

The good and hardworking people of Nigeria have again been robbed by our supposed leaders whom they trusted. However, very humbly, I must appeal to all Nigerians to remain peaceful, law-abiding, and conduct themselves in the most responsible manner. Please be assured that Datti and I, and indeed all of us, this is not the end but beginning of the journey for the birth of a new Nigeria. Datti Baba-Ahmed and I remain undaunted and committed to the project of a new Nigeria that will be built on honesty, transparency, fairness, justice, equity.

Obi uses the verdictives and exercitives to express his resolve towards ensuring the restoration of Nigerians dashed hope. He encourages and advocates for the support of all and sundry in this fight for freedom. 'the good and hard working people of Nigeria have again been robbed by our supposed leaders whom they trust' refers exophorically to INEC Chairman and officials as well as the APC government, led by President Muhammadu Buhari who promised to present the most credible election process in the history of the nation. The commissives present in this utterance assures a better Nigeria. There is an exploitation of both the sympathy and pollyana principle.

Excerpt 7

All the above starts with a process. The process through which people come into office is far more fundamental, more important than what they do thereafter. It is my belief that if you must answer 'His Excellency', the process through which you arrive to office must be excellent.

The exercitives is adopted to review the processes that bring people to office. 'All the above' refers exophorically to a new Nigeria that will be built on honesty, transparency, fairness, justice and equity. 'It is my belief that if you must answer his excellency, the process through which you arrive office must be excellent' by implicature exposes the faulty foundation of the old Nigeria through rigging. He exploits the generosity maxim by working assiduously to achieve credibility in governance.

Excerpt 8

We must now require that we do the right things. It has to generate the confidence and moral authority to lead. As you know, the destruction of a society begins and gradually progresses when we act rascally, with the deliberate manipulation of the rule of law and the suppression of the will of the people. During my campaign we have been saying that we will govern by the rule of law because we know what not doing that will bring about.

Obi uses the exercitives to instil right values. 'Must' shows obligation and the time deixis 'now' exposes the urgency doing the right thing demands. 'It' refers anaphorically to 'doing the right thing'. 'We' includes Datti. He exploits the agreement maxim, he presents the achievement of this new Nigeria as a collective one.

Excerpt 9

I assure the good people of Nigeria that we will explore all legal and peaceful options to recall our mandate.

The commissives and expositives are employed to re-activate the confidence of Nigerians that a better Nigeria is still possible. 'We' is hearer exclusive, while 'our' is hearer inclusive. 'I' is speaker exclusive and emphatic. It exposes Obi's resolve to employ every resource available to actualize the recovery of the mandate. This is heart-warming, and an exploitation of pollyana principle.

Excerpt 10

We won the election, and we will prove it to Nigerians
'We won the election' is an expositives, while 'and we will prove it' is a behavitives and exercitives. He is set to challenge the process that declared Tinubu President elect. He exercises his civil right as both a

contestant in the election and concerned citizen of Nigeria. 'We' is hearer inclusive. Obi exploits the agreement and pollyana principle.

Excerpt 11

Please do not despair. We have elections coming up on the 11th. I enjoin you to go out, campaign, come out and vote in that election. We still have so many massive support out there that we need for our sub-national and state assemblies. Please, come out and be part of that election. I assure you that I will be part of it. I assure you that I am totally committed to a better future in this country, and nothing will stop that. Datti's commitment, my commitment, is total.

Obi uses the exercitives to plead with Nigerians and encourage them to be also committed towards electing credible candidates in the governorship and state assembly polls coming up. He exercises his power as a leader to mobilise them. 'I assure you' repeated twice in this utterance explains his exemplary leadership style and makes the utterance fit into the proposition. He exploits the sympathy maxim. The lexeme 'please' repeated twice expresses politeness.

Excerpt 12

Be rest assured that your support will not be in vain and you will not find us wanting. We must build a better Nigeria where Nigerian youths will be happy, glad to call their own country.

The use of the exercitives is to re-assure the electorates that their effort will not be in vain. Also, the confidence they reposed in him and Datti will pay off well in restoring the dignity of Nigeria and Nigerians. 'Us and we' is Datti and Obi exclusive. The implicature of 'we must build a better Nigeria where Nigerian youths will be happy' is that the youths are angry and embittered. They are not proud to be Nigerians. Restoring the hope of a better country for them is a welcomed news. This is an exploitation of the pollyana principle.

Excerpt 13

Thank you and may God almighty continue to bless the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Obi ended his speech with behavitives. He appreciates his audience, obidients and Nigerians. He also, expresses goodwill for the country. This is an exploitation of pollyana and approbation maxim.

Conclusion / Summary

This study examines Peter Obi's language use in his first speech after the presidential election. Language as an integral part of human communication is used by Obi to perform certain activities in calming the tensed atmosphere that enveloped the Nigerian nation with the declaration of Ahmed Tinubu as the president elect. The study using Austin (1975) speech acts termed performatives and Leech (1983) politeness maxims observes that Obi exploited the politeness principles in his utterances. He made expositions, advises, sympathises, appreciates, praise, agrees with Nigerians; obediends / youths who complained that the election was a violation of electoral rules and guidelines and also commits himself and his vice, Datti Baba-Ahmed to the responsibility of reclaiming the mandate of Nigerians during the polls. These recognitions and assurance to restore the dignity of the youths made it possible for him to arrest the tensed atmosphere.

Recommendations

The study, therefore, recommends that interlocutors should always be mindful of their language use in order not to escalate already charged situation. Also speech makers should also construct their speeches to have conciliatory texture, in order to avert conflict.

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