

A Contextual Analysis of Inaugural Speeches of Sierra Leonean And Gambian Presidents

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Abstract

This paper is an exploration and contextual analysis of political discourse. It examines the power of language in political speeches and how power and influence are expressed in language within the appropriate context. The theoretical framework used in the analysis of the data is pragmatic context. It analyses ten utterances randomly selected from the inaugural speeches of the Sierra Leonean President, Julius Maada and the Gambian President, Adama Barrow. The work discovers that political utterances are made in context of the people's expectations, desires and hope for a better government. With this in view, the utterances hinge on the psychological state of the governed. They are aimed at elating their desires and the psychological satisfaction that their choice of personnel in government will live up to expectations. The paper concludes that both speeches are filled with persuasive and enticing words which promise a reformation in governance, improved condition of living and sustainable development as idealized in the minds of the governed. These utterances bring psychological relief and satisfaction which may be sustained in fulfilment of the promises or dashed.

Keywords: Inaugural speeches, Political discourse and Pragmatic context

Introduction

Language serves many purposes. Central to its use is communication. Language, therefore, is a tool of communication made up of units which are strung together in chains which stimulate meaning in both the sender and the receiver. That is why Carter (1982) observes that language is a complex interaction of different linguistic levels. It is often studied in context, with reference to its interpersonal message, its styles and varieties. It is also studied systematically for its social, moral and political importance.

Language is a veritable tool in any human society. It is a medium of interaction, transmission of culture, instruction, entertainment and exertion of power and influence. Observably, language is pivotal in political sphere. It is a medium in which leadership and power are structured. Thus, language and power are inseparable, for there to be power in a political scene; the knowledge of persuasive language use comes in play. The language used in political scenes often carries underlying meaning beyond the sentences or propositions made. Language becomes a vehicle in which things are done.

Statement of the Research Problem

Political discourse from pragmatic perspective have been studied by many scholars such as Waya and Nneji (2013), David and Peter (2016), Aremu (2017), Gunn and Ekoru (2018), Ojukwu (2019) and Gunn and Ishaya (2020). These scholars have also studied political discourse or language of politics using different theoretical framework such as Speech acts theory, Relevance theory and other related frameworks. Language of politics is a persuasive discourse and a social practice in which power relations are established and sustained. Van Dijk (1989) explains in his statement that:

Power involves control, mainly by members of one group over other groups. Such control may pertain to action and cognition, that is, a powerful group may limit the freedom of action of others, but also influence their minds. Besides the elementary recourse to force to directly control action (as in police violence against demonstrators) often, effective power is mostly, cognitive, and enacted by persuasion, dissimulation, or manipulation,

among other strategic ways to change the minds of others in one's own interest (p. 254)

As observed above, social and political attitudes are influenced and controlled by the way language is structured and manipulated. This is in line with Fairclough's (1995) view that power is not enacted or sustained through coercive means, but also through indirect means such as the use of language. In the African sphere, political tussles are usually carried out through language use. This can appear as defamatory of other opponents' character, a promise of a better nation, a pledge of service, assurance of transparency, appeal to ethnicity and declaration of manifestoes. These are ways in which language is manipulated in order to gain the favour of the targeted audience. Often, the targeted audience becomes pliable to the side which is effective in the use of language.

Worthy of note from the above is the neglect of pragmatic context in unraveling hidden meaning in the speeches of the two selected Presidents of Sierra Leone and Gambia. This study therefore, investigates the contextual meaning of inaugural speeches of Sierra Leonean and Gambian presidents.

Review of Related Literature

A number of research works have been done in the analysis of political speeches and pragmatics. According to Ayodele (2006) in Ojukwu (2019) political speeches are rhetorics enunciated by those in political acclaimed positions through various media such as print and visual media which are aimed at influencing people by skillfully using language in a special way that influences or incites people. Political discourse is a power discourse intended to gain control over people. It is the capacity to affect people, things, situations and decisions. Political speeches have features which are aimed at compelling people to act in certain ways.

Wangatiah, David and Peter (2016) carry out a pragmatic analysis using Relevance Theory on selected political speeches and how the speeches affect national integration in Kenya. They observe that politicians make a deliberate attempt to influence the emotions of their listeners by establishing a shared background knowledge. They often employ allegorical anecdotes,

metaphors and past events to create a pseudo-world in which they relate with the listeners as people of same background and experience. They conclude that political speeches in Kenya encourage national disintegration and political manipulation.

Ojukwu (2019) undertakes a survey analysis on selected speeches of Nelson Mandela. She does this by employing Grice's Co-operative Principle and Speech Act Theory. She observes that Mandela's speeches are felicitous conforming to sincerity, preparatory, executive and fulfilment conditions. She noted that Mandela's speeches are assertive, directive and commissive which in a whole meet up with the anticipatory effects of Nelson Mandela. The speeches so reviewed conform to maxims proposed by Grice. They are relevant, brief, informative, truthful, connected and organized.

Aremu (2017) carries out a pragmatic analysis of metaphors in political speeches. She discovers that inaugural speeches of Nigerian presidents between 1977 and 2015 are replete with metaphors. Political leaders are characterized as fathers, builders, servants, managers, etc. the mappings are derived from shared socio-cultural beliefs which were employed to carry out transactive communication such as promising, appealing, condemning, thanking and commanding.

Waya and Nneji (2013) go ahead to critically examine the inaugural speeches of Goodluck Jonathan using Speech Act Theory. They observe that Jonathan's speeches are replete with assertive acts. In the work, assertive acts rank high in use, having 70% above other illocutionary acts as categorized by Searle. The study holds that President Jonathan's speeches were aimed at establishing hope for good governance and stable growth. His speeches reveal his personality, cultural and socio-background and how they culminate into shaping his world view about life and leadership.

In like manner, Gunn and Ishaya (2020) explore the language use in selected political speeches of President Goodluck Jonathan. The study adopted J. L. Austin's (1962) Speech Acts Theory. The study revealed the artful manipulation and mobilization of linguistic devices to generate

meanings that are both stated and implied within the context of their presentation. The study concluded that many of the utterances of Goodluck Jonathan bear unstated meanings which are only understood through pragmatic knowledge. The above reviewed works are akin to this present study as this present study deals on utterances. However, the place of divergence in this present study is the pragmatic tool employed which is pragmatic context.

Methodology

The data for this research work are drawn from the inaugural speeches made by President Julius Bio and Adama Barrow of the Sierra Leone and Gambia in 2017 and 2018 respectively. The utterances analyzed are selected randomly. Five utterances are selected from each of the speeches. In a whole, the research analyses ten utterances from the two texts using pragmatic context as its approach. The focus is on political context and shared knowledge between the speakers and the subjects. The basis of which these texts were chosen is that the inaugural speeches of new governments are filled with promises. The words are carefully strung to elicit support and hope. It is on this premise the texts become relevant for a pragmatic analysis.

Theoretical Approach: Pragmatic Context

Pragmatics looks at meaning with reference to the context in which an utterance or statement is made. Pragmatics deals with language in use. It is the study of the relationship which exists between linguistic and non-linguistic items and the interpretation of meaning with reference to context. It is a key feature of analyzing language and responses that follow utterances.

Leech and Short (1987) hold that pragmatic is concerned with meaning which is not derived from the formal properties of words and the internal structure, but from the way in which utterances are used and how they relate to the context in which they are made. This implies that meaning is constructed from not just linguistic items but also from non-linguistic items. Siddiqui (2018) observes that pragmatics deals not only with sentential meaning but goes to underscore the hidden meaning of speakers, determining what is unsaid. He adds that through pragmatics, one can analyze the intended meaning encoded in language

and how the intended meaning is decoded by listeners. Political speeches are enriched with meaning beyond what is stated. It often performs actions in the minds of listeners.

According to Yule (1996) pragmatics is concerned with the study of meaning as communicated by a speaker and interpreted by a listener. This investigates how more get communicated than what is said in relation to the context. Context becomes bedrock of pragmatics analysis. Mey (2001) affirms that pragmatic analysis deals with meaning in social context. Context of an utterance determines what message gets communicated and the meaning and the effect it has on the hearer. Pragmatic context includes speaker and the message that is communicated; the participants and worldview which they share; the deductions and implications of what is said and the effects culminated as a result of the context (Osisanwo 2003). Aboh and Uduk (2017) aver that context plays an indispensable role in the full explication of what a speaker implies and what a hearer infers.

In political discourses, context plays a vital role in the negotiation of power relations and how the hearers infer meaning and the implementation of the inferred meaning on the discourse participants. Van Dijk (2008) observes that context allows for reformation of the foundation of pragmatics and defines it as a discipline that accounts for situational appropriateness of language use. The situational appropriateness is determined by the effective use of context models. Context models explain how language users modify their discourse to suit the social and communicative environment and the way the nature of appropriateness is maintained in a discourse.

Context is relevant to pragmatics in the communication of meaning and intentions. As it takes into consideration the participants, their social identities, roles and relationship which exist among discourse participants. It looks at the resultant effect of a speaker's intention on his subjects. Austin (1962) avers that words are not used in vacuum, but used to do many things either for social acts or speech acts. This is often interfaced with shared knowledge and beliefs which surface in discourse as presuppositions.

In political discourse, context is the key to effectiveness of political speeches. The nature of any political event determines how the discourse will be constructed. In an inaugural event, the

speech is constructed to meet certain demands and expectations the hearers have. Therefore, context is relevant for appropriate use of language.

Data Presentation

Text A1

Twenty years ago, I organized the first democratic elections in nearly thirty years and peacefully handed over political power to the elected Sierra Leone's People's Party Government. Today, I am here as the recipient of that democratic advancement.

Text A2

I want to reaffirm my commitment that I am President for all Sierra Leoneans. I therefore faithfully pledge to diligently work for, to protect and defend all Sierra Leoneans irrespective of political, tribal, religious, gender, sectional, regional and socio-economic background.

Text A3

My new direction in administration has prioritized free quality education as the flagship policy programme of my government... The greatest strategy to create a ladder of opportunity for all Sierra Leoneans to climb and achieve their greatest potentials.

Text A4

In just two weeks of my new administration, my government was able to pay public sector salaries in April on time... my government is therefore committed to build and consolidate the small gains that we have made to change and transform Sierra Leone.

Text A5

During my campaigns and since my election, I have said time and time again that this is not going to be the 'business as usual politics'.... My new government is launching three peaceful democratic wars. First, a war on indiscipline, war on corruption and a war on poverty.

Text B1

This is a victory for democracy. It is the victory belonging to all Gambians.

Text B2

We are now confronted with many challenges. We have inherited economy that has declined... businesses were shut down, offices and schools were closed. Foreign missions scaled down their staff.....over 126,000 became internally displaced... the country became ungovernable. The country would have remained in such a situation if the new government did not succeed in finding a solution to the impasse.

Text B3

The government under my presidency will strive to ensure survival, protection and development of all children. The aim is to improve their wellbeing and reduce mortality.

Text B4

As part of the reform to be undertaken to improve on job creation, e-government will be utilized to ensure that the personnel management office and labour department would store data on those seeking employment and the

jobs available.... the government will undertake a major drive to promote employment in all sectors.

Text B5

The government intends to enforce constructional provisions that are entrenched to protect the fundamental rights of the citizens. Orders have already been given for all those detained without trial to be released.

Data Analysis

Text A1 above shows credibility of the speaker's leadership and the dividends in which the office holders intend to deliver to the people. Within the political context, the speaker is out to convince his subjects about his credibility and the effectiveness of his administration in order to galvanize popular support and acceptance. By recounting of his political achievements twenty years ago, *I organized the first democratic elections in nearly thirty years and peacefully handed over political power...* he paints in the minds of the listeners competence and commitment; arousing in the minds of the hearers that the new government promises progressive development. By bringing his past achievement to limelight, he negotiates through his speech that his led administration will deliver sustainable development.

In Text A2 the President retorts *I am President for all Sierra Leoneans*. This statement, within its political context carries an undertone. The undertone here implies leadership that will not be biased or work in favouritism or nepotism. In the African society, in which most communities are heterogeneous in culture and ethnic group, it is a common place for leadership to give importance to his ethnic or religious group. By affirming that he is a president to all Sierra Leoneans, he drives the idea of national integration and unity. This gives the marginalized groups hope that a new dawn has come for them. This is made in line with the people's expectations in order to gain popular support and compliance among people with different social, ethnic and religious backgrounds.

In Text A3, the excerpt is filled with promises of good governance and strategic steps towards rebuilding the nation and the people. In this text, the message is focused on the people. The speaker engages this strategy as a means to build

satisfaction among the people. It is expected in any democratic society that the elected leaders live up to their campaign promises. In a bid to reveal the credibility of his intention, he reveals his steps towards achieving his goals. By bringing up the idea of free education which will create a ladder of opportunities for all Sierra Leoneans to have their potentials fulfilled. This is highly contextual. Everyone dreams to become something great and outstanding if given the opportunity. As a political leader armed with words, he promises his subjects of giving the single key of equality which is education. In a typical political scene, political leaders try to appeal to the listeners' emotions and desires, evoking mental pictures of desires and dreams with a promise to actualize their desires. The leader looks at the psychological state of the listeners and speaks in line with the context of their mind. With this, the listeners become emotional elated and the leader attains his goal.

In Text A4, managerial prowess is presented to the people. He confirms this by recounting the prompt payment of salaries within two weeks of his new administration. This is place against the background of past administration. It is common among political leaders to cash in on the perceived deficiency of previous administration. This statement carries implications in the minds of the listeners. This speech is a power negotiation and the quest to win over the popular support even from oppositions. The speaker presents proofs of timely compliance to the people's desires and needs.

Text A5 carries a pragmatic force which is most appealing to pragmaticians. The speaker opines: *this is not going to be business as usual*. This makes reference to shared knowledge of past failed democratic leaderships which saw leadership as a personal business for personal benefits. The statement presupposes that the past administration sought after personal gratification and interest instead of the people's own. By this

statement, the speaker implies that his administration promises to be a swift deviation from the past experience of failed governance which was characterized by vices, unaccountability and dashed hopes. By so doing, the speaker presents to the electorate a different view of governance against the previous knowledge of what governance has given in past administrations.

Similarly, in Text B1, the speaker states that the victory for democracy is a victory belonging to all Gambians. Within the context of this statement, democracy is the rule of popular support for the benefits of all people. This speaker implies that the Gambians have successfully brought true democracy to themselves by installing him as the president. Also, the statement "this is victory for democracy" suggests 'undemocratic victory' which could have surfaced but not for the scrupulous moves of Gambians in successfully giving themselves true freedom and representative governance. The President sees himself as the desire of the Gambians.

In Text B2, the speaker asserts, *We have inherited economy that has declined... businesses were shut down... foreign missions scaled down their staff ... internally displaced people...* However, his government stepped in to bring solution to the impasse. This statement suggests failure of the past administration of which his new government has stepped in to salvage. In African society, it is common in political sphere for a past government to leave dilapidated sectors and economy to the succeeding government. These have often kept the new government and the people in despair and frustration. For this presidency, as his strategy for wielding power and support, he avers that situation has been salvaged. Putting his listeners in the state of relief through words though the evidence of good governance are not yet visible to the electorate.

In Text B3, the President promises protection of individual life. This is one of the pressing needs of Gambians. The country has experienced various forms of insecurities and insurgencies, leading to many displaced persons in some communities. On the premise of this current state, the President commits to address the insecurity and insurgency issues plaguing the society. The inaugural event is a political context

where elected leaders point at the needs of people with a promise to address the issues as soon as possible. This is a power control strategy in which the leader uses words to paint positive pictures in the minds of the people. The picture so painted commands acceptance, support and loyalty among the governed.

Prominent among African countries is the issue of unemployment and fairness in employment procedures. This issue is of utmost importance to the youths. In Text B4, the President anchors on this issue, as it directly concerns the youths. The youths have a vital role to play in the success of any government. For a government to be successful, the needs of the youths must be properly addressed. The speech promises employment to the unemployed. The statement brings hope to a great percentage of unemployed youths. With this utterance, the minds of the youths are conditioned psychologically to expect an improvement on their social status. The statement made in this context wins over the youths to side of the new government. This gives the new government a political influence on the loyalty of the youths.

Text B5, hinges on fundamental human rights to give freedom to those unconstitutionally detained. The President in the text promotes the rule of law. By his giving orders to let go of anyone who is unconstitutionally detained shows his insistence on the right of humans and the protection of all Gambians. This statement puts the President in good light in the eyes of the people. It gives the Gambians confidence that the rule of law will be upheld in the new administration. This effective use of language creates calmness, assurance and excitement among the people. The effect of this contextual use of language culminates in the listeners' ardent followership and support.

5.1 Discussion of Findings

The research discovers that the electorate's expectations from political leaders are the contexts in which leaders make constructive speeches in order to gain loyalty, control and support from their subjects. Effective use of language becomes pivotal to leadership, it goes a long way in conditioning the minds of the governed in favour of the government. From the

foregone data analysis, it is evident that inaugural speeches are responses born out of the needs and expectations of the people with regards to effective leadership in many facets of the society.

In the inaugural speeches of the Sierra Leonean and Gambian presidents, there are common features which border on good governance. These include pledge to credibility, sustainable development, employment, security, welfare and discharge of justice. These facets are the areas which the governed long for improved condition. These desired demands have informed transition in government or an outright ousting of failed leadership by the electorates. Based on these, political leaders who emerge as winners of poll hinge their speeches on the expectations of the electorates, giving them a pseudo satisfaction at the beginning; this satisfaction could be sustained or dashed in the course of leadership's administration. The speeches carry psychological effects which soothe the mind with hope of good governance and a sense of fulfilment. The question often raised at the end of a governing tenure is, were the enunciated promises matched with actions geared towards general improved living conditions in the society? This question, often, is not answered in the affirmative. The inaugural speeches, however, are observed to be very effective in galvanizing support, loyalty and raising hope in the minds of the governed. Hence, the speeches become a tool of power and control.

5.2 Conclusion

Political discourse thrives in the context in which they are made. Language of politics is persuasive, enticing and promising. It is intended to cause a change in psychological state of listeners. It aims at promoting interest in participation. Observably in the work, expectations form the context in which political discourses are made. In a political society, there are many expectations citizens expect from the government. These expectations become the bases which political utterances are made. The speeches are filled with promises of better conditions of living, facilities and general growth. Politicians often employ words which promise societal and individual development, employment, economic boom, security and incorrupt justice system.

The fulfilment of the promises often is a probability. However, through words and affirmative utterances, political leaders are able to instill in their subjects the sense of a positive change thereby influencing their thoughts and social behaviour. The analysis of the work shows that political expectations and desires of the society form the pragmatic context in which political discourses are made. Inaugural speeches, just like any political discourse, employ fascinating promises as measures of power negotiation among the people in order to gain popular support, loyalty and acceptance.

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