

# A Pragma-stylistic Analysis of President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan Inaugural Speech

Eromosele John Abuya<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of General Studies, Rufus Giwa Polytechnic, Nigeria

Correspondence: Eromosele John Abuya, Department of General Studies, Rufus Giwa Polytechnic, Owo, Ondo State, Nigeria. E-mail: abuyaej@yahoo.com

Received: May 17, 2012 Accepted: August 28, 2012 Online Published: September 6, 2012

doi:10.5539/elt.v5n11p8 URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5539/elt.v5n11p8>

## Abstract

The study was an examination through the pragma-stylistic approach to meaning of the linguistic acts that manifest in the Inaugural Speech of Goodluck Ebele Jonathan as the democratically elected president in May 2011 General Elections in Nigeria. Hence, the study focused on speech acts type of locution, illocutionary and perlocutionary in the speech. It is therefore part of the objectives of the study to find out which of the speech acts are more prominent based on the Speech Act theory of Austin (1962) and Searle (1969). The first Twenty (20) Sentences were extracted from the speech text, from which forty (40) speech acts were derived. The findings revealed thus; assertive – 55%, directive – 10%, verdictive – 15%, commissive – 75% and declarative – 45%. These results showed that President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan relied more on sentences that performed commissive acts than other speech acts in his Inaugural Speech. This demonstrated that politicians are apt to show appreciation to people after victory at the polls. Hence, the speech act analysis assists in the interpretation of the messages in the selected speech.

**Keywords:** language, politics, speech, democracy

## 1. Introduction

The role of language in the politics cannot be over emphasised. Language and politics have become intertwined to an extent that language is an indispensable tool in politics. Agbogun (2011) observes this and opines that ‘that is the reason why language is used in dealing with issue within the political terrain; such language now becomes political language. Also Schaffner (2004) submits that:

*In linguistic literature, political language has been used either to denote the use of language in the context of politics, that is, a specific language use with the purpose of achieving a politically motivated function, or it has been used to denote the political vocabulary; words and phrases that refer to extra-linguistic phenomenon in the domain of politics.*

The use of language in politics is for unique purposes and functions. The numerous functions performed by language in the field of politics have drawn the attention of several scholars in recent time. Perhaps, this is the reason Beard (2002) avers that ‘looking at the language of politics as an occupation is important because it helps us to understand how language is used by those who wish to gain power, those who wish to exercise power and those who wish to keep power’. The essence of power in the governance and affairs of people can never be swept under the carpet; this makes the people in control of power to be subject of attraction and they are as important as well as the language used by them.

Taiwo (2009) observes that ‘the study of language of politics has been carried out within the framework of political rhetoric, linguistic-stylistic, pragmatics, discourse analysis and critical discourse analysis’. This submission shows that language of politics is fast becoming a field that attracts linguists’ attention. The language of politics provides the opportunity for politicians to explore the resources available through language to manipulate words to suit their intentions. Hence, language could be regarded as the vehicle of politics.

The use of language in politics could also be regarded as political discourse, Graber (1981) observes that political discourse crops up ‘when political actors in and out of government communicate about political matter for political purposes’. The success of a political discourse will be determined by how effective politicians utilize the channel opened up by language. No wonder, Opeibi (2009) emphasizes the fact thus:

*No matter how good a candidate's manifesto is; no matter how superior political thoughts and ideologies of a political party may be, these can only be expressed and further translated into social actions for social change and social continuity through the facilities provided by language.*

Therefore, no matter what is achieved in politics, whether to convince, persuade, entertain, promise, enlighten or inform the people, language serves as the link to people's hearts in politicking. It is based on this that Akinkulore (2011) submits that 'the support that citizens have for the politicians will be determined by what they say and how they say it for success to be achieved in candidacy, programmes or policies'.

## 2. Objectives of the Study

The study was primarily meant to identify and analyse the various speech acts that manifest in the Inaugural Speech of President Goodluck Jonathan. The study further attempted to demonstrate how the identified features project the messages of the president in the speech using the framework of Speech Acts theory. Hence, the analysis was meant in general terms to show how the language of the speech is organised to communicate the political intentions of President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan.

## 3. Research Questions

The study is based on the following research questions:

- (i) What are the speech act types that manifest in the selected the political speech?
- (ii) Are the identified speech acts significant for meaning in the political speech?

## 4. Theoretical Framework

Pragma-Stylistic approach to meaning is a linguistic approach that bothers on the intended meaning of the speaker, together with distinctive style of the speaker. It is believed that individual mode of expression is distinct and therefore, comprises features that characterise it from others. Pragmatic analysis of language according to Leech (1981) seeks to investigate that aspect of meaning which is derived, not from the formal properties of words and constructions (as in the case of semantics) but from the way in which utterances are used and how they relate to the context in which they are uttered. This definition regards pragmatics as a theory of appropriateness.

Babajide (1990) defines stylistics in its simplest form as 'the study of style'. He goes further to acknowledge the definition of Davy and Crystal (1983) that 'style is the effectiveness of a mode of expression'. Hence we can submit that while pragmatics is the theory of appropriateness, stylistics is the theory of effectiveness. The Pragma -Stylistic approach to the study of the Inaugural Speech of President Goodluck Jonathan is to explore meaning for appropriateness and effectiveness through the linguistic framework of Speech Acts theory.

It is noteworthy that certain scholarly works have been done in the field of pragmatics and stylistics. Awonuga (2005) is on a stylistic study of Olusegun Obasanjo's speech -"Sustenance of Democracy" while Adetunji (2006) approaches the stylistic study of Olusegun Obasanjo speeches by examining the deixis the speeches. Also, Ayodabo (2003) conducts a pragma-stylistic research on the form and functions of hedges in a presidential media chat programme hosted on Nigerian Television Authority.

Ayeomoni (2005) posits that 'The Speech Acts theory and indeed the whole of pragmatic theory is essentially concerned with how interlocutors (speakers and listeners) understand one another in spite of the possibility of their saying what they do not mean, and meaning what they do not say'. The Speech Acts theory is also known as 'How to do Things with Words Theory'. According to Austin (1962), the theory falls into three classes: locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary acts.

A locutionary act is defined by Austin (1962) as 'the utterance of certain noises, the utterances of certain words and construction, and the utterances are with certain 'meaning' in the favourite philosophical sense and a certain 'reference' a driver. In other words, the illocutionary act is the statement made or uttered. The illocutionary act which is regarded by Dada (2004) as the core of the Speech Acts theory refers to the social act performed by the speaker while the perlocutionary act is the effect of the speaker's utterance on the hearer, this could be intended or unintended.

Cutting (2002) presents Searle's classification of illocutionary act as follows:

- a. Declaratives: These are words and expressions that change the world by the very utterance such as I bet, I declare, I resign.
- b. Representatives(Assertive) : These are acts in which the words state what the speaker believes to be the case such as 'describing' 'claiming', 'hypothesizing' insisting' and 'predicting'.

- c. **Commissive:** This includes acts in which the words commit the speakers to future action such as ‘promising’, ‘offering’ ‘threatening’, refusing’, ‘vowing’ and ‘volunteering’.
- d. **Directives:** This category covers acts in which the words are aimed at making the hearer do something such as ‘commanding’ ‘requesting’, ‘inviting’, ‘forbidding’, suggesting’ and so on.
- e. **Expressive:** This last group includes acts in which the words state what the speaker feels such as ‘apologising’ ‘praising’, ‘congratulating’ ‘deploring’ and ‘regretting’.

## 5. Research Methodology

The Inaugural Speech of President Goodluck Jonathan was delivered immediately he was sworn in as a democratically elected president. The speech was downloaded from the internet and analysed based on Speech Acts theory of Austin (1962) and Searle (1969). Twenty sentences were extracted for the purpose of our analysis. The sentences are the first twenty sentences and they are labelled 1- 20, this is to guide the focus of the researcher in unravelling immediate reaction of President Goodluck Jonathan to his victory. The extracted portions are carefully analysed. Hence, the table that comprises frequencies and percentages is drawn for clear and easy interpretation. Our discussion is based on the percentage of speech acts which is calculated on the number of sentences thus:

$$\frac{\text{Total number of speech acts}}{\text{Total number of sentences}} \times 100$$

### 5.1 The Speech Act Analysis

#### Data 1

**Locution:** My Dear compatriots, I stand in humble gratitude to you, this day, having just sworn to the oath of office as President, Commander- in Chief of the Armed forces of our great nation

**Illocutionary:**

- i. Direct: assertive (stating)
- ii. Indirect: commissive (appreciating)

**Expected Perlocutionary Effect:** cheers

#### Data 2

**Locution:** I thank you all fellow citizen for trust and confidence which you have demonstrated through the power of your vote.

**Illocutionary:**

- i. Direct: commissive (appreciating)
- ii. Indirect: declarative (confirming)

**Expected Perlocutionary Effect:** excitement

#### Data 3

**Locution:** I want to assure you, that I will do my utmost at all times, to continue to deserve your trust

**Illocutionary:**

- i. Direct: commissive (promising)
- ii. Indirect: directive (requesting )

**Expected Perlocutionary Effect:** hopefulness

#### Data 4

**Locution:** I will like to specially acknowledge the presence in our midst today, of heads of state and government, who have come to share this joyous movement with us.

**Illocutionary:**

- i. Direct: declarative (confirming)

ii. Indirect: commisive ( appreciating )

**Expected Perlocutionary Effect:** cheers

*Data 5*

**Locution:** Your Excellencies, I thank you for your solidarity

**Illocutionary:**

i. Direct: assertive (stating)

ii. Indirect: commisive (appreciating)

**Expected Perlocutionary Effect:** applause

*Data 6*

**Locution:** I also wish to expresses my gratitude, to the respective of Heads of State and Government who are here with us

**Illocutionary:**

i. Direct: assertive (stating)

ii. Indirect: commisive (appreciating)

**Expected Perlocutionary Effect:** applause

*Data 7*

**Locution:** My appreciation also goes to the Chairperson of the African Union and other world leaders, our development partners, and all our distinguished guests.

**Illocutionary:**

i. Direct: commisive (appreciating)

ii. Indirect: declarative (confirming)

**Expected Perlocutionary Effect:** cheers

*Data 8*

**Locution:** I want to specially thank all Nigerians for staying the course in our collective commitment to build a democratic nation.

**Illocutionary:**

i. Direct: commisive (appreciation)

ii. Indirect: declarative (confirming)

**Expected Perlocutionary Effect:** cheers

*Data 9*

**Locution:** To members of PDP family and members of other political parties, who have demonstrated faith in our democratic enterprise, I salute you.

**Illocutionary:**

i. Direct: assertive (stating)

ii. Indirect: commisive (appreciating)

**Expected Perlocutionary Effect:** cheers

*Data 10*

**Locution:** At this Juncture, let me acknowledge and salute my friend and brother, Vice President Namadi Sambo; and my dear wife, patience, who has been a strong pillar of support.

**Illocutionary:**

- i. Direct: commissive (appreciating)
- ii. Indirect: declarative (confirming)

**Expected Perlocutionary Effect:** cheers

*Data 11*

**Locution:** I thank her for galvanizing and mobilising Nigerian women for the cause of democracy.

**Illocutionary:**

- i. Direct: commissive (appreciating)
- ii. Indirect: declarative (confirming)

**Expected Perlocutionary Effect:** applause

*Data 12*

**Locution:** In the same vein, I owe a debt of gratitude to my mother and late father.

**Illocutionary:**

- i. Direct: assertive (stating)
- ii. Indirect: commissive (appreciating)

**Expected Perlocutionary Effect:** cheers

*Data 13*

**Locution:** I cannot thank them enough

**Illocutionary:**

- i. Direct: assertive (stating)
- ii. Indirect: Commissive (appreciating)

**Expected Perlocutionary Effect:** Cheers

*Data 14*

**Locution:** I cannot but pay tribute to our late President, Alhaji Umaru Musa Yar'Adua, with whom we won the president election four years ago, when I contested as his running mate.

**Illocutionary:**

- i. Direct: assertive (stating)
- ii. Indirect: commissive (appreciating)

**Expected Perlocutionary Effect:** sympathy

*Data 15*

**Locution:** May God bless his soul

**Illocutionary:**

- i. Direct: assertive (stating)
- ii. Indirect: verdictive (prayerful)

**Expected Perlocutionary Effect:** reflective

*Data 16*

**Locution:** I also wish to pay tribute to our founding fathers, whose enduring sacrifices and abiding faith in the unity and greatness of our country, laid the foundation for the nation

**Illocutionary:**

- i. Direct: commisive (appreciating)
- ii. Indirect: declarative (confirming)

**Expected Perlocutionary Effect:** reflective

*Data 17*

**Locution:** We take enormous pride in their contributions

**Illocutionary:**

- i. Direct: assertive (saying)
- ii. Indirect: declarative (confirming)

**Expected Perlocutionary Effect:** reflective

*Data 18*

**Locution:** The pivotal task of this generation, is to lift our fatherland to the summit of greatness

**Illocutionary:**

- i. Direct: assertive (saying)
- ii. Indirect: directive (requesting)

**Expected Perlocutionary Effect:** hopefulness

*Data 19*

**Locution:** Your Excellencies, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, earlier this year, over seventy – there million eligible Nigerians endured all manner of inconvenience just to secure their voters card, in order to exercise the right to choose those that will govern them

**Illocutionary:**

- i. Direct: verdictive (assessing)
- ii. indirect: declarative (confirming)

**Expected Perlocutionary Effect:** reflective

*Data 20*

**Locution:** At the polls, we saw the most dramatic expressions of hunger for democracy.

**Illocutionary:**

- i. Direct: assertive (saying)
- ii. Indirect: verdictive (assessing)

**Expected Perlocutionary Effect:** reflective

Table 1. Table of Data

Speech Acts (Direct And Indirect)	Frequencies	Percentages
Assertive	11	58%
Directive	2	10%
Verdictive	3	15%
Commisive	15	75%
Declarative	9	45%
Total No of Acts	40	

### 5.2 Interpretation of the Analysis

A powerful tool in the hands of political is language, most of their achievements depend on how they utilise the resources available to them through language. The speech acts identified in the course of our analysis are meant to interpret the intended meaning of the President. We discovered the manifestation of four out of five categories of Searle (1969) speech acts with the verdictive category from Austin (1962). The President had used mainly sentences that were commissive in his speech with a total percentage of 75%, while 55% of the sentences were assertive, declarative (45%), verdictive (15%) and directive (10%).

We discovered from our analysis that the sentences with commissive act were used mainly to show appreciation to different group of people that voted and supported the president during his campaign and election. Hence, after the swearing-in of the president, he was apt to commence the use of commissives and assertives. This showed his heart felt gratitude to the people by thanking them. He placed premium on the people as the major factor in any democratic process. More so, Democracy is defined as the government of the people, by the people and for the people. The commissive acts revealed so much about his personalty and style. He sparsely used sentences that were directive and verdictive in the Inaugural Speech. The directives and verdictives were employed for the purpose of requesting and assessing and not in strong term of commanding.

The perculiar style of President Goodluck Jonathan is noteworthy for the high percentage of the commissive acts in his speech; He started his administration on a good note by acknowledging the efforts of the people. The reason for this is not far- fetched especially in political setting, initial speeches are usually meant to appreciate, acknowledge, solicit support, praise, promise, and most importantly build bridges on various rivers that run during the period of campaign and election. It is believed that ‘to who much is given much is also expected’. Hence, there is the need for reassurance that the President will not disappoint the people as their political leader which the President achieves through the use of commissive acts in his Inaugural Speech. The commissive acts take the lead with 75%, this must have made the people to be highly hopeful in the administration of President Goodluck Jonathan.

### 6. Conclusion

The aim of the study has been primarily to identify the speech acts that manifest in the Inaugural Speech of President Goodluck Jonathan and demonstrate how the identified speech acts type project meanings. We discovered from the study that in the process of performing a particular speech act, other acts are being performed through our identification of direct and indirect illocutionary acts in the speech. The analysis of the speech acts has dug deep into meanings in the speech and has enabled the understanding of various communicative functions performed in the process of making a speech, especially, political speech. More interestingly, the interpretation of the acts has brought to fore the meaning in the Inaugural Speech thereby making understanding of the speech clear and simple. The study of President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan Inaugural Speech has also justified the fact that the governed (people) are given prominence in any democratic rule. The identified speech acts in the speech portrayed the president as a democratic leader.

Through the analysis of the President’s speech, readers are better equipped in the application of Speech Acts theory to speeches. Hence, further study on pragma–stylistics is recommended in strong terms for all forms of political discourses, especially, through the linguistic framework of Speech Acts theory.

### References

- Adetunji, A. (2006). Inclusion and exclusion in political discourse: Deixis in olusegun obasanjo’s speeches. *Journal of Language and Linguistics*, 5(2).
- Agbogun A. A. (2011) A linguistic-stylistic analysis of post-appeal court victory speeches of selected state governors in Nigeria. An Unpublished M.A Thesis of Department of English, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile Ife, 9.
- Akinkurolere, S. O. (2011) A speech act analysis of selected political speeches of president umaru musa yar’adua’. An Unpublished M.A.Thesis of Department of English, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile Ife, 14.
- Austin, J. L (1962). *How to Do Things with Words*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Awonuga, C. O. (2005). A stylistic study of sustenance of democracy by olusegun Obasanjo. *Journal of Social Science*, 11(2), 111-119.
- Ayemoni, M. O. (2005). Pragma-stylistic analysis of major general J.T aguiyi – ironsi’s maiden speech. *Awka Journal of Linguistics and Languages*, 1, 1-9. Department of Linguistics, Nnamdi Azikiwe University

Awka.

- Ayodabo, J. O. (1997). A pragma-stylistic study of M.K.O. Abiola's historic speech of June 24, 1993'. In A. Lawal (Ed), *Stylistics in Theory and Practice* (pp. 134-149). Ilorin: Paragon Books.
- Babajide, A. O. (2000). Of style and stylistics. In A. O. Babajide (Ed), *Studies in English Language* (pp. 123-136). Ibadan: Inc. Publisher.
- Beard, A. (2000). *The Language of Politics*. London: Routledge.
- Cutting, J. (2002). *Pragmatics and Discourse* (pp. 1-20). London: Routledge.
- Dada, S. A. (2004). Introduction to pragmatics. In T. Bamisaye (Ed), *An Integrated Study in Language and Society* (pp. 141-166). Lagos: Majab publishers.
- Graber, D. A. (1981). Political language'. In D. Nimmo, & K. Sanders (Eds), *Handbook of Political Communication* (pp. 195-224). Beverly Hills, Sage.
- Leech, G. N. (1981). *Semantics* (2nd ed) (p. 290). Harmondsworth: Middlessex Penguin Books.
- Opeibi, B. O. (2009). *Discourse, Politics and the 1993 Presidential Election Campaigns in Nigeria* (p. 9). Lagos: Nouvele Communications Limited.
- Schaffner, C. (2004). Political discourse analysis from the points of view of translation Studies. *Journal of Language and Politics*, 3(1), 117-150.
- Searle, J. R. (1969). *Speech Acts*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Taiwo, R. (2009). Legitimization and coercion in political discourse: A case study of Olusegun Obasanjo address to the PDP elders and stakeholders forum. *Journal of Political Discourse Analysis*, 2(2), 192. U.S.A. Nova Science Publisher.