

LANGUAGE AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT: A CRITICAL
DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF OBASANJO'S LETTERS TO
JONATHAN AND BUHARI

BY

EVENTUS EDEM, Ph.D
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH,
AKWA IBOM STATE UNIVERSITY
OBIO AKPA CAMPUS
E-mail: dreventusedem@gmail.com
+234 802 3573 487

TO

ESSAYS IN LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE:
A Festschrift in Honour of
Prof. Enobong Uwemedimo Iwokedok
Department of English, University of Jos, Jos.
E-mail: ufonfestschrift@gmail.com

JANUARY, 2020

Abstract

Communication remains vital to sustenance of relationships and human existence. In fact, the oil that lubricates human interactions. Despite this significance, communication is a double-edged sword which can be used either positively or negatively. Boulton (1978, p.41) attests to the negative social intent of language from the perspective of its potential or complexity. She also observes that “language is often used, not to communicate but to deceive. This is often true of political and religious propaganda...” This paper examines language and National Development taking excerpts from former President Olusegun Obasanjo’s letters “Before it is too late to Goodluck Jonathan” and “it’s time to step down from the Horse to President Mohammadu Buhari”. Working within the framework of Ruth Wodak’s (1995) Critical Discourse Analysis, the paper seeks to explore the workings of power in the Nigerian political transition from one government to the other and attempts to unravel the concealed meaning in the utterances under study. Findings show that Obasanjo took great advantage of his closed professional and military relationship with the two Nigerian Leaders and probably because he had personal disagreements with them, used manipulative languages to achieve his agenda of mobilizing Nigerians against their second term bids in 2015 and 2019 respectively. The paper concludes that the Speaker who assumes the role of a National hero exhibits power and superiority over others, made use of some rhetorical devices and face threatening act (FTA) to convey his message to his audience but there is no national consensus by the elites on the best way to move the nation forward.

Keywords: National, Development, Political Language; Discourse Analysis.

Introduction

Man by its very nature is a political animal. Aduradola and Ojukwu (2013, p.3) suggests that man is both gregarious and solitary. A higher standard of living depends partly on philosophical contemplation which can be demonstrated or expressed through employment of social virtues exercised in the company or association of others.

Politics focuses on ‘who gets what’, ‘when and how’. It determines the process through which power and influence are used in the promotion of certain values and interests. The concept of politics according to Aduradola and Ojukwu (2013) revolves around three fundamental questions: who governs? For what ends? And by what means? These are played out through discussion, disagreement, lobbying, rioting, campaigning and voting.

According to this source, one of the things that is receiving considerable response in politics is 'Power'. Though power is an elusive concept, it is an ability to pursue and achieve goals effectively. It is the capacity in any human relationship to control behaviour and influence thought for the attainment of political goal.

The other factor or variable is the language of politics which is the focus of this paper. Despite this significance, communication is a double-edged sword which can be used whether positively or negatively. Boulton (1978, p.41) attests to the negative social intent of language from the perspective of its potential for complexity. She also observes that "language is often used, not to communicate but to deceive". This is often true when reference is made to political language and religious propaganda.

An important aspect of communication in this context is the participants – individual(s) and group(s) engaged in an interaction. Atolagbe (2004, p.180) elucidates on the process of such interaction by seeing communication as: a two way process, involving an encoder (i.e. a speaker/source) and a decoder (i.e. a listener/receiver) through whom language is used to pass across some messages (e.g. information, idea, expression of a need etc) and some response elicited, whether positive or negative such that roles are exchanged between communicants along the line and interaction takes place. The importance of the language medium for communicating political messages cannot be over-emphasized.

Language is therefore considered a powerful tool for everyday communication Baba and Elegba (2016). Speaking in the same vein, Edem (2005, p.204) describes language as a force to be reckoned with in persuasive communication and invariably in social mobilization especially in a democratic setting. Edem, (2019, p.58) agrees that the interdisciplinary, multifaceted and extraordinary role of language situates it as indispensable in human existence and relationship.

By implication, language is the vibrant part in all spheres of human endeavours. It is indeed essential to building relationships, expressing thoughts, ideas or a need and responses provided as feedback mechanism, which may invariably be positive or negative.

Aduradola and Ojukwu (2013, p.4) describes man's ability to use language to interact with his environment as one of the unique characteristics he possesses which by extension makes him distinctively higher than other animals.

Barber (1999, p.27) argues that language enables us to influence one another's behaviours and thereby makes human cooperation possible. It is a vehicle with which human feelings and wishes are expressed. It is also used for the exercise of an authority vested in an individual.

Interestingly, political language is used quite deliberately and intentionally either to praise or blame. It can be creative, constructive or destructive, perhaps, because it is a weapon with which one attacks or defends oneself from opponents.

Theoretical Framework

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) emerged from critical linguistics developed at the University of East Anglia in the 1970s and the terms are now interchangeable. Research in the field of sociolinguistics was paying little attention to social hierarchy and power. CDA was first developed by the Lancaster School of Linguists of which Norman Fairclough was the most prominent figure. This was closely followed by Ruth Wodak who also made a major contribution to this field of study. According to this source, there is assumed to be a sociocognitive interface between social structures and discourse structures. (cf Wikipedia.org.)

CDA does not limit its analysis to specific structures of text or talk, but systematically relates these structures to sociopolitical context. This approach has been used to examine political

speech. Acts to highlight the rhetoric behind these and any forms of speech that may be used to manipulate the impression given to the audience.

Ruth Wodak (1995) has developed a framework based on the systemic collection of sampled texts on a topic to better understand the interrelationship of discourses that exist within the field. This framework allows for the discussion and analysis of ideologies involved in a set of discourses. The macro level of analysis of ideologies involved in a set of discourses.

The macro level of analysis is helpful in understanding how macro structures of inequality persist through discursive processes across multiple sites and texts. (Wikipedia.org.). Put simply, the definition of discourse is a discussion about a topic either in writing or face to face. An example of discourse or Critical Discourse Analysis is like a professor meeting with a student to discuss a book. (<https://www.yourdictionary.com>).

In this case the major character, former President Olusegun through his letters paints a picture of a University professor illustrated above when he deliberates on any matter of topical interest such as leadership or nation building etc.

Against the backdrop of his rising profile nationally and internationally, an Octogenarian, Elder Statesman, former Military Head of State and two time democratically elected President, the Speaker (Obasanjo) in his letters deployed Ruth Wodak's (1995) Critical Discourse Analysis approach to a great advantage as he attempts to further widen the gulf that had existed between the elites and the less privileged instead of bridging the gap between the leadership and the followership.

Furthermore, after a careful study of the two letters to two Nigerian Presidents, the Speaker is presented not as a man from a hitherto humbled background who was raised by God's grace but one dressed in borrowed robes and taking undue advantage of the poor leadership problems Nigerians have been facing over the years which left them with no option than to

allow him to continue to decide the fate of more than two hundred million (200m) Nigerians, especially, when saddled with the choice of electing a new President for the country at the expiration of every four year tenure. The ugly picture of Nigeria's leadership travails and growing uncertainties in the land is best captured in Dammalam (2019), who echoed then Brig. Sami Abacha's Military take over speech thus,

You are all living witnesses to the great economic predicament and uncertainty, which an inept and corrupt leadership has imposed on our beloved nation for the past four years. I am referring to the harsh, intolerable conditions under which we are now living. Our economy has been hopelessly mismanaged. We have become a debtor and beggar nation.

And even Brig. Abacha appears to be at home with the precarious Nigerian situation when he said in the same military takeover speech,

Health services are in shambles as our hospitals are reduced to mere consulting clinics without drugs, water and equipment. Our educational system is deteriorating to an alarming rate. Unemployment (sic) has reached embarrassing and unacceptable proportions. In some states, workers are being owed salary arrears of eight to twelve months and in others there are threats of salary cuts.

Yet our leaders revel in squandermania, corruption and indiscipline to say anything has changed is to be charitable. Truth is Nigeria only got worse with each successive regime. (Cf Dammalam's blog, Faculty of Arts Staff AKSU Whatsupp Group Nov. 2019).

A Critical Discourse Analysis of the Speeches

The genre of discourse in Obasanjo's letter to then President Goodluck Jonathan is an example of an open, written, formal discourse. The 18 paged letter dated December 2, 2013 entitled "Before it is too late" had the name of Nigeria's former President, Olusegun Obasanjo written boldly on top of his famous letterhead.

Another feature of the letter that is curious to many observers is that the letter writer chose the salutation "Dear Mr. President, and the complimentary close 'Yours Sincerely' to be in his personal handwriting to demonstration of power and influence which settles the issue of language and power ideology of CDA. In other words, the writer's disdain for laid down conventions of adopting 'Yours Sincerely' for an official letter of that magnitude is to further highlight that we must adopt rapid changes to get Nigeria out of the woods.

The huge quantity of the document (18 paged letter) is awe inspiring especially as it was addressed to a sitting President who had a lot of other state matters and huddles to address. Again this is a pointer to political power, sagacity and superiority on one hand and an exhibition of social constructs and political dominance on the other. From the beginning of the letter, we noticed that the issues that came up for discussion were carefully itemized with the use of determiners which are cardinal numerals one...two...ten etc. the writer used simple compound and complex sentences without mixing each sentences with multiple sentences. This in a way brings about a suspicion of bravery or command owing to its syntactic and blunt semantic undertone.

The title of the Obasanjo letter under study is blunt and unambiguous with the catch phrase entitled "Before it is too late", which signals an illocutionary act. The Speaker apparently sharing the same background and experience about the Nigerian situation with his audience as exemplified in the famous Brig. Abacha rhymes or rhetoric's captured earlier in this paper, Obasanjo harped on these leadership problems facing the people which is not in doubt and decided to weld the big stick to put things right by setting an agenda for the Nation. By so

doing, the locutionary act “Before it is too late” of which the perlocutionary act is not enforced based on the sequence of discussion and the parameters of pre-sequence.

As Ekhareafó and Ambrose, (2015, p.293) observes, the contents of Jonathan’s reply on the issues of oil theft raised in the letter by Obasanjo, shows that the basis for each issue for which he countered made Obasanjo’s accusations lack felicity conditions drawing from the context and background knowledge of Nigeria’s socio-economic terrain. According to this source, Obasanjo’s stance has an undertone of political “Godfatherism” and power.

Obasanjo’s rather impolite speech on page 1 paragraph 1 of the letter further buttress this fact as he states unequivocally, thus, “...I am concerned about your legacy and your climb-down which you alone can best be the manager of whenever you so decide”. This beams ‘light’ of sarcasm. This statement is also a face threatening act. By conversational engagement or implicature, it shows in a nutshell that Obasanjo an acclaimed political godfather and supporter of then President Jonathan during his first term in office had withdrawn his support for his re-election in 2015, which was yet another face threatening act.

Obasanjo’s copious reference to God from page 1, second paragraph of page 2 and in most parts of the speech is a clear demonstration of power play and challenging times which makes his situation very dicey as only God can salvage.

“...the role God enabled me to play...” (Pg.1 p2).

“...you put me third after God” (Pg 1 pg 2 line 3).

“...God who put you there...” (Pg 2, p2, line 4)

“...Only instrument of God to adhere God’s (pg 2, p 1. Line 3)

There is also the use of a forceful or threatening statement which signifies face threatening Acts FTA in some of the extracts:

...But the buck must stop on your table whether you like it or not (Pg 3, line 1).

...And only a fool would believe that statement you made... (Pg 3, line 19-20)

By saying that “only a fool will believe what President Jonathan said”, is a sarcasm aimed at belittling the name, person and office of the President to a ‘liar’ who should not be believed by Nigerians and it raises a moral burden not only on Nigerians who are to take a major decision on the election of a new President in 2015 but also a clear dent on the country’s image before the international community. For instance, the quest for foreign investors to invest in Nigeria shall be in jeopardy because if the ‘messenger’ is not be-trusted then No transaction with such an individual should be taken seriously let alone trusted.

Obasanjo on page 4, cited an end note of Jonathan’s campaign manifesto for which he reminded him that he (Jonathan) was not interested in the said “third term” accusing him of involving in “game of denial” this is also a Face Threatening Act. He also accused the president of playing a “double game” in the 3rd paragraph of page 5. This is also a show of power and Face Threatening Act.

Obasanjo’s motivation which gave rise to the use of the first person personal pronoun ‘I’ and God has an undertone of egotism by implicature the use of ‘I’ instead of plural ‘we’ flouts the maxim of relevance because the Nigerian situation abhors a one man show where somebody can rightly say I single-handedly did this or that etc.

Obasanjo made reference to the brewing leadership crises in the ruling political party, Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) from page 2 to page 7. This issue does not flout maxim of relevance but it does the maxim of manner because he did not make clear the matter on ground clear. A case of linguistic irony is clear in the sense that Obasanjo started his letter on a serious note ostensibly to address serious national issues, like state of the nation and growing insurgency occasioned by Boko Haram insurgents in parts of the North East. While he made reference to Boko Haram insurgency on page 8, he ironically devoted almost seven pages discussing issues or tussles for political supremacy in his political party, PDP. This is an outright

diversion to his primary concern which ostensibly is a deep seated quest for power instead of finding genuine solutions to impending problems facing the nation such as corruption, poverty, insecurity and terrorism.

The felicity condition on his applauding national interest and decrying corruption and terrorism is kept at back burner, while we can safely say that his growing discontent within his party and the fallout with the then President Jonathan who eventually picked his party's Presidential ticket instead of his favoured candidate and then Governor of Jigawa State, Sule Lamido may have given him the impetus to write the 18 paged letter instead of genuine interest to tackle the country's problems.

Former President Obasanjo in paragraph 1, page 9 of the speech labeled Jonathan to be "possessed" to the exclusion of most of the rest of Nigeria's as an 'Ijaw man'. Also in paragraph 2, he also accused Jonathan of keeping over 1000 people on political watch list...training snipers and other armed personnel secretly and clandestinely acquiring weapons to match for political purposes like Abacha era "that was dreaded by most Nigerians. This was how he employed sarcasm which is a FTA. His further use of FTA was enveloped in his Yoruba proverb; "The man with whose head coconut is broken may not live to savour the taste of the succulent fruit". This by implicature is an open threat which by its proverbial nature flouts the maxim of quantity.

The Speaker's use of the word 'possessed' as referring to Jonathan was further made explicit in page 13 paragraph 1 where he impolitely referred to President Jonathan's aides as 'sychophants', wreckers and selfish. This is also indicative to the fact that power ideology and political play by key actors in his party PDP (the recent chaos and disorderliness), were of utmost concern to the Speaker as he made reference to how Jonathan and his government gave leadership of the South West to somebody he dismissed as a criminal. This person he

was referring to was Senator Buruji Kashamu and to him the man is a wanted criminal who had evaded arrest in United Kingdom.

In page 16, paragraph 2, Obasanjo's states thus; "God is never a supporter of evil and will surely save PDP and Nigeria, from the hands of destroyers". This simply shows that Jonathan and his government are evil. This is also face threatening Act FTA. On a contradictory note, Obasanjo ended his 18 paged letter on a friendly note thus; "Accept Dear Mr. President, the assurances of my highest consideration". This is obviously ironical of the many reference to the use of FTA in the letter under reference is anything to go by. Yet, it is a gentleman's way of saying to his addressee that inspite of perceived disagreements which should not be seen as personal but that he meant well both for the country's leadership and the nation.

Obasanjo in a 13 paged letter to President Mohammadu Buhari written in January, 2018 entitled *The Way: A Clarion Call for Nigeria Movement*, where he summed up his reasons that neither incumbent President Buhari nor his party the All Progressives Congress can take Nigeria out of the woods and called on the President not to seek re-election in 2019. There is evidence to show that the Speaker acquaints himself with the peculiar Nigerian situation, sustains the interest of the audience on the subject matter through a number of devices:

a. By using a plethora of rigorous, lively, descriptive words especially adverbials.

"The lice of poor performance in government-poverty, insecurity, poor economic management of internal political dynamics".

And adjectives such as:

"Widening inequality – are very much with us today, whoever is going to justice must be with clean hands Nigerians voted for him because at that time, it was a matter of any option but Jonathan".

Even the nouns are piled up to produce a certain breathless effect as shown below:

“With such lice of general and specific poor performance and crying poverty with us, our fingers will not be dry of blood” (Extract from Obasanjo’s Speech).

Here, the Speaker Obasanjo or OBJ for short, generates and maintains interest by using a direct approach, adopting a conversational tone and involving the listener in the process.

As Edem (2005 p.69) observes,

Clarity in a language use has a lot to do with exactness in the use of words, has a lot to do with exactness in the use of words, absence of vagueness and exactness in the choice of words. It has to do with simplicity of structure and with appropriateness of expression. These qualities undoubtedly enables the language meant for social mobilization to act as a vehicle conveying a message from speaker to listener without drawing undue attention to itself, but rather to the meaning conveyed.

b. Some of the features employed to achieve clarity and conciseness are shown below:

“lack of progress and hope for the future, lack of national cohesion and poor management of internal political dynamics today, widening inequality are very much with us ”

Clarity in this extract is ensured also by a number of characteristics discussed below:

i) Punctuation, spacing and listing the one long sentence cited below:

“The lice of poor performance in government, poverty, insecurity, poor economic management of internal political dynamics... ” is well displayed to ease reading out loud with appropriate pauses by means of listing – and ample punctuation semi-colon, after each item on the list.

ii) The use of parallel constructions within items on the list:

“While thanking Mr. Buhari for the efforts of his administration in rolling back the Boko Haram insurgency and his fight against corruption, he has ultimately failed in other areas where we had thought he would be efficient”. (Extracts from Obasanjo’s Speech, Jan. 2018).

iii) The use of parallel constructions in expressing ideas on the list as shown in examples below:

“Quality and equality, in the short, medium and long term for Nigeria, on basis of sustainability, stability, predictability, credibility, security, cooperation and prosperity and inequality”

These parallel constructions which produce a breathtaking effect further arouses the interest of the audience to join the coalition for a new Nigeria to champion the course of the common man, fight dictatorship or bad leadership which according to him are exemplified in the two leading political parties APC and PDP, appears to be quite clear enough. This flouts the maxim of quality because the concept which forms the context and the goal for the exercise (political transition) remain obscure. Interestingly or curiously still, the meaning of “I saw that action as the best option for Nigeria” is subject to different interpretations. Furthermore, Obasanjo buttress his facts thus, “As it has been revealed in the last 3 years or so that decision and the subsequent collective decision of Nigerians to vote for a change was the right decision for the nation. For me nothing personal, it was all alone in the best interest of Africa, Nigeria and indeed humanity”. (Obasanjo’s Extracts to Buhari Jan., 2018).

This also flouts the maxim of manner in the sense that Nigerians were moved by the change mantra and voted for change in 2015 but this does not seem to give Nigerians

solutions to their problems or the change they yearn for, else Obasanjo would not be coming again with another message of ‘hope’ for 2019.

These concepts referred to above have continued to delay explication partly because as Edem (2005, p.74) observes,

Words are by nature inexact in meaning but moreso because their use has become highly suspicious as a result of centuries of misuse by politicians, who assign their own private meanings to these concepts for deceptive purposes.

c. Tenor of Discourse

The speaker, a former Nigerian military dictator and civilian democratically elected President almost always maintains a positive disposition towards his audience by expression of his confidence in them, thereby inspiring their confidence in him as illustrated in the following extracts:

This coalition for Nigeria will be a movement that will drive Nigeria up and forward. It must have a pride of place for all Nigerians, particularly for our youth and women.

It is a coalition of hope for all Nigerians for speedy quality and equal development, for security, unity, prosperity and progress. It is a coalition to banish poverty, insecurity and despair. (Extract from Obasanjo to Buhari, Jan., 2018).

The Speaker also makes use of the pronoun ‘we’ and its possessive form ‘our’ in a variety of ways which enables him to assume the role of their spokesman and ‘kingmaker’ giving voice to their aspirations and frustrations. Hence, since he believes that he has won their confidence, he feels free to talk on a number of topical

issues. He too feels free to take sides with the people, the venerable masses without entertaining fear of rejection as exemplified thus:

This is no time for trading blames or embarking on futile arguments and neither should we accept untenable excuses for non-performance. Let us accept that the present administration has done what it can do to the best of its ability, aptitude and understanding. Let the administration and its political party platform agree with the rest of us that what they have done or capable of doing is not good enough for us.

The Speaker made use of pronoun 'us' twice and used 'our' once in the same paragraph. This gives an impression that he is patriotic and that he has the mandate of the people especially the down trodden to speak on their behalf.

Again, "let us accept that the present administration has done what it can do, let the administration and its political party... is not good enough for us". This is a forceful statement with huge political undertone and is also a face threatening Act which is a key component of a Critical Discourse Analysis CDA which we are considering in this paper.

Moreover, "what they have done or capable of doing is not good enough for us" the issue of lack of solutions to the country's problems by the Buhari Leadership does not flout the maxim of relevance but it does the maxim of manner because Obasanjo did not provide the road map for the Buhari regime in his letter. Instead, he embarked on blame games, the same way Buhari accused his predecessor Dr. Jonathan for all the failings he experienced since he assumed power democratically on May 29, 2015.

Linguistic irony is obvious in the sense that the same Buhari was three years back presented to Nigerians as a 'beautiful bride' when the key character Obasanjo wrote

“Before it is too late” letter to then President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan who doubled too as a candidate of his party PDP. The felicity condition on the Speaker’s nationalistic ideals and patriotism is devalued. As Nigerians may pick holes in the recent call for a national coalition as a product of “bitter political rivalry, malice, egotism, excessive show of power and signifying nothing”.

d. Emotional Appeal

This has a lot to do with the way in which a speaker for instance perceives the sensitivity of his audience and then prevails upon them to take a particular course of action as in this case, for the two leaders he withdrew support before they seek re-election to honourably step aside or jump from the horse or face massive revolt or rejection by the people at the ballot box.

Nigeria deserves and urgently needs better than what they have given. To ask them to give more will be unrealistic and will only sentence Nigeria to a prison term of four years if not destroy it beyond the possibility of an early recovery and substantial growth.

(Extracts of Obasanjo to Buhari, Jan., 2018).

Former President Obasanjo presents himself as statesman/patriot who wish the people well. Secondly, he also caught a picture of someone who is discipline, full of integrity, supports a government that comes with a promise of righting the wrongs of the past and withdraws same support almost immediately he is convinced that such an individual performs abysmally.

This is his justification for supporting Jonathan in 2011, withdrawing support in 2015, supporting Buhari to succeed as President in 2015 and withdrawing support for his re-election in 2019. Whether or not the people (the voters) are willing to embark on

this journey all the time leaves much to be desired. “Nigeria deserves better than what they have given. To ask them to give more will be unrealistic and will only sentence Nigeria to a prison term of four years”. (Extracts Obasanjo’s Speech to Buhari - January 2018).

The Speaker speaks as someone that has the mandate to speak on behalf of other Nigerians traumatized by the government of the day. This statement above is strongly worded. Obasanjo made use of sarcasm which is a FTA to Buhari when he described the four year tenure of his government to ‘a prison term’.

This connotes a horrifying experience, a place of confinement, nothing good is coming out of it etc. it is a harsh way of dismissing the government as a failure. This by implicature is an open threat which by its metaphoric nature flouts the maxim of quantity.

Likening the state of the nation to “lice-infested clothes, whose finger nails are stained with blood as it tries to kill the lice by pressing them in-between two finger nails”. According to him (Obasanjo), in order to make sure that our finger nails remain blood-free, we must do what it takes to rid our clothes of lice. This reference to a simple proverb of lice and blood stained finger nails paints a picture of doom and a nagging problem of most Nigerians which had continued to defy explication. This is a deployment of emotional and logical appeal for the people to accept the wakeup call, rise to greatness and take their destiny in their hands.

The entire proverbs of “lice and blood-stained finger nails” was further use of FTA. This by implicature is an open threat and speaks like doomsday prophets and by its proverbial nature flouts the maxim of quantity because what is said cannot be proven to be true but probably said to manipulate the audience, settle scores with the addressee or score cheap political points.

Again the speaker without consulting with key stakeholders in the polity made use of the commanding word ‘must’ repeatedly about four times in the last paragraph of his speech to Buhari. This apparently brings out the seal character in Obasanjo as a tough talking Military General whose orders to his ‘troupes’ ‘must’ be obeyed, which is at variance with democratic tenets. (See Edem, 2001 and 2005).

e. Catch Phrases

The Speaker uses catch phrases sparingly to arouse the specific sections of the audience so addressed or as an attention-getting device addressed to the poor masses or the media.

We cannot take this anymore! Today Nigeria needs all hands on deck. All hands of men and women of goodwill must be on deck. We need all hands to move our country forward. We need a coalition for Nigeria ...to salvage and redeem our country. You can count me with such a movement. (Extracts from Obasanjo’s speech – Jan. 2018).

This is a face threatening Act and a direct confrontation to Buhari that he is ready to lead or offer his services in the struggle to salvage Nigeria. As if that was not enough, he made allusion to the past, thus, in the concluding paragraphs,

Last time, we asked, prayed and worked for change and God granted our request. This time we must ask, pray and work for change with unity, security and progress. God will again grant us. Nothing should stop such a movement from fielding candidates for elections. (Extracts from Obasanjo’s speech – Jan. 2018).

Obasanjo concludes his letter to Buhari with the use of metaphoric extensions and open threats, FTA that the people who worked, fasted and prayed and got answers from God for regime change in 2015 is not asleep and same will be replicated in 2019 with another incumbent President, Mr. Buhari.

That the people yearned for change or voted for change in 2015 does not flout the maxim of relevance but the same cannot be said of the maxim of manner because Nigerians are yet to be convinced that another regime change will bring about drastic changes in the polity. By saying that “God will again grant us our request”, Obasanjo is taking advantage of the positive disposition of the people that ‘**Only God**’ decides the fate of men.

This flouts the maxim of relevance because everybody is equal before God and Obasanjo alone cannot claim to be God’s messenger. And in his last line, he prayed thus, “May God continue to lead, guide and protect us, Amen”. With the use of ‘Amen’ which has religious undertones meaning ‘agreement’, the Speaker assumes a note of finality that he is on the same page with his audience and can set an agenda for them as their messiah or spokesman at any point in time.

By comparing ‘failure of the people to join the coalition for Nigeria CN to a sin against God and humanity, the speaker assumes the role of a messiah but he fails to understand that Nigerians still have reservations about his ‘message’ and even the ‘messenger’. Wilson (2003 P. 119) opines that “communication or mobilization will do better when the message resembles the messenger”. Udoakah (1998 P. 41) shares similar sentiments when he said that “it is difficult to get a favourable response if the public does not know who the person trying to mobilize is, what he has been doing and how it benefits from what he does”

Commenting on Obasanjo’s letter to Buhari, Campbell (2019) observes that,

This letter is reminiscent of Obasanjo December 2013, eighteen page antique he sent to then President Goodluck Jonathan. However, there are interesting differences.

First Obasanjo's language is more respectful in his letter to Buhari than it was to Jonathan. Buhari is of the same generation as Obasanjo, and both were army Generals as well as Heads of State. Hence, Obasanjo may respect Buhari more than he does Jonathan, a civilian.

And to further buttress his point, the source adds,

Second, since he left office in 2007, he has assumed the mantle of an Elder statesman, in that role an open letter to a sitting President is appropriate.

Third, he may also be concerned about maintaining his relevance to the current political scene. Some Nigerians openly say that he is no longer relevant. While this is speculation, the three and not mutually exclusive and are all likely to be true to some extent.

(Campbell, July, 17, 2019).

General Comments/Conclusion

This paper focuses on the Critical Discourse Analysis of Obasanjo's letters to Jonathan and Buhari taking cognizance of the role language plays in national development. Making use of Ruth Wodak's (1995) CDA approach, the work gave credence to Obasanjo's love and passion for his country, Nigeria. Interestingly, while he was able to persuade, 'fool' or manipulate a section of Nigerians to buy or accept his ideologies and philosophies for the Nation but lack of a competent and an acceptable alternative plan may have hindered his acclaimed

messianic role as neither the ruling class nor the masses were easily swayed by mere rhetoric, face threatening acts, dropping of God's name and other rhetorical devices that characterized most of his letters.

I surmise that it is however, unclear what the practical consequence of Obasanjo's letters will be. But be that as it may, there is no national consensus among the elites on how to carryout fundamental reforms in the polity.

References

- Adurabola, R. and Ojukwu, C. (2013), Language of Political Campaigns and Politics in Nigeria. In Canadian Academy of Oriental and Accidental Culture. Vol. 9 (3) 104 – 116
- Baba, D. and Elegba, F. (2016). Language as a Manipulative tool in Nigeria Politics. A paper presented at the 32nd Annual National Conference of English Scholars Association of Nigeria (ESAN) held at Obafemi Awolowo University, Ife, 5th – 8th September, 2016.
- Barbar, C. (1999). The English Language: A historical introduction. United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press.
- Boulton, M. (1978). The Anatomy of Language: Saying what we Mean, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Campbell, J. (2019). Nigeria on the Brink: Obasanjo writes letter to Buhari on Nigeria's Insecurity Blog post by John Campbell. July 17, 2019.
- Critical Discourse Analysis - Wikipedia.org. assessed on 20th November, 2019
- <https://www.cla.purdue.edu>, assessed on 20th November, 2019.
- <https://www.quora.com> assessed on 22nd November, 2019.
- <https://www.yourdictionary.com> assessed on 22nd November, 2019.
- Dammalam, M. (2019), Nigeria's Obscene Pension Laws: Pampering the mighty and pampering the weak, In Maiwada Dammalam's blog, Faculty of Arts AKSU, whatsApp Group, 16th November, 2019.
- Edem, E. (2001). The Language of Military Rule. A Study of Nigeria's Military Rulers. An Unpublished MA. Thesis, Department of English, University of Uyo, Uyo.
- (2005). Language and Social Mobilization: The case of MAMSER Company Texts. An unpublished Ph.D Thesis, Department of English, University of Uyo, Uyo.
 - (2019) Propaganda in Politics: A Semantic Analysis. Of the Speeches of Some Nigerian Politicians African Educational Indices. Vol. 2 (1) 57 – 69.
- Ekhareafu, O. and Ambrose, C. (2015). Critical Discourse Analysis of Obasanjo's letter, 'Before it is too late' to Jonathan. International Journal of Arts and Humanities (IJAH); Vol. 4 (3), 291 – 298.
- Udoakah, N. (1998). Development Communication, Ibadan, Stirling – Herden Publishers (Nig.) 74p.
- Wilson, D. (2003). The Mass Media and the Participatory Democratic Process: Mobilizing Nigerians for Elections. The Nigerian Journal of Communications, 111 – 122.
- Wodak, R. (1995). Critical Linguistics and Critical Discourse Analysis. In Jef Verschuren Ostman and Jan. Blommaert (eds.), Handbook of Pragmatics-Manual, Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamin's Publishing Company, 204 – 210.