

Pragmatic Acts in President Muhammadu Buhari's Independence Day Speech of October 1, 2017

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Abstract. Independence Day speeches are delivered in Nigeria on October 1st annually by the President and Commander-in-chief of the Armed Forces to commemorate the day of democratic freedom from the Great Britain and freedom from all internal and external forces. President Buhari's Independence Day speech of 2017 is of pragmatic importance because it raised plethora of issues as Nigerians read meaning based on personal judgments and opinions. Nevertheless, the speech encapsulates different pragmatic functions and it is the aim of this paper to unravel them all employing the Pragmatic Acts Theory of Mey (2001) from a descriptive quantitative perspective. The analysis of the speech revealed a preponderance of sixty-two (62) acts serving four pragmatic goals: thanking, acknowledging and remarking achieved the goal of appreciating and admitting which had a preponderance of 29%; stating, proposing and assuring achieved the goal of revealing intentions/results of his administration with a preponderance of 46.7%; reminding, instructing/calling, advising, charging, criticizing and hoping is to give directives/instructions with 19.4%. Finally, identifying and describing achieved

the goal of giving details on key issues with a preponderance 12.9%. These acts were further marked by some pragmatic tools such as Shared Situation Knowledge (SSK), Psychological Act, and Relevance. This paper concludes on the note that President Buhari allayed the fears and outcries of Nigerians as he focused on key issues that both on revamping the security and power sectors.

Keywords: independence day speech, pragmatic acts, president Buhari, language and politics.

1. Introduction

The role of language in the political scene cannot be over flogged because language plays a significant role in politics as politicians shroud their ideologies and score political points through the effective manipulation of the resources of language-English; which is specific to Nigeria's political environment. Politics is a game of wits- it is concerned with the power to make decisions, control people's decisions and resources and even behaviours. According to Edom (1965) as cited in Osisanwo (2017),

“language is the key to the heart of the people, if you lose it, you lose the people, if you keep it safe, it unlocks the people’s heart”. Speech making is the medium through which political office holders keep in touch with the masses. These speeches; most often than not, aim at convincing logically or emotionally the masses and it usually involves a mixture of these two elements.

Nigeria is no different in the political realm as speeches are presented on peak days such as Independence Day on October 1st, Democracy Day on May 29th, Workers’ Day on May 1st, New Year Day on January 1st, and off-peak days especially on emergency situations. Most of these speeches; such as speeches on Democracy Day, Workers’ Day, Independence Day and New Year Day, are presented annually.

Independence Day is significant to Nigeria as it is a day in which the country marks her freedom from the British government. It is celebrated annually on October 1st. Independence is a condition in which a country is granted the liberty to exercise self-government over its territorial jurisdiction and without external and internal interference. It is a state of complete sovereignty. Nigeria became an independent nation on October 1st, 1960 with Jaja Wachuku receiving the instrument of independence which is also called the Freedom Charter from the representative of the Queen of England, Princess Alexandra of Kent. Jaja Wachuku later became the first speaker of the House of Representatives. The speech of 2017 is the third in a row delivered by President Muhammadu Buhari right from the inception of his administration in 2015 as the fifth democratically elected President of Nigeria having contested and won the general elections under the All Progressives Congress (APC).

2. Literature Review

Most linguists of Nigerian extraction have carried out pragmatic analysis of speeches and even of literary texts and non-literary texts. Osisanwo (2017) conducted a pragmatic acts reading of the inaugural speech of President Muhammadu Buhari; Adeniji and Osunbade (2014) undertook an analysis of tradition-motivated discourse in Ahmed Yerima’s Ajagunmale analyzing its pragmatic functions, Adeniji and Osunbade (2014) also explored the pragmatic acts in characters’ utterances in Ahmed Yerima’s Mojabe; pragmatic acts in court-rulings: a case of Nigeria’s supreme court’s judgment on Obi versus Nba was also studied by Ogunsiji and Olaosun (2012); Okpanachi (2009) explored the adversarial discourse in President Obasanjo’s labour speeches. Kamalu and Agangan (2011) undertook a critical discourse analysis of President Goodluck’s declaration of interest speech for party’s presidential primaries. Okoro (2017) undertook a speech act analysis of formal declaration of interest for presidency and inaugural speeches of President Muhammadu Buhari; Akinwotu (2015) undertook a speech act analysis of acceptance of nomination speeches of Chief M.K.O Abiola. A chain that links these speeches together is the adoption of the Speech Act Analysis and Pragmatic Acts Theory in their analysis of data. Notwithstanding; this paper attempts to explore the Independence Day speech of October 1st, 2017 as delivered by President Buhari using the Pragmatic Acts theory of Mey (2001) as the literature reviewed so far reveals a lacuna in this aspect.

2.1 Theoretical Framework: The Pragmatic Acts Theory of Mey (2001)

The study of texts from the pragmatic angle can be carried out using several approaches. The most common approach; however, is the Speech Act Theory which involves the classification of the illocutionary force of utterances into two groups as postulated by Austin (1962) and Searle (1969). The former classified the force into verdictives, exercitives, commissives, behavitives, and expositives; the latter who was a student of Austin modified the Austinian features into expressive, commissive, declarative, directive and assertive.

However; in the year 2001, there was a deviation from the categorization of illocutionary force of utterances as it was abstract and the context was not taken into consideration in its analysis. It was this limitation of the Speech Act theory that propelled Mey to propose what he calls a "Theory of action" (214) which takes into consideration the individual involved in the pragmatic process and the context of situation which is the direct opposite of the speech act theory which focuses solely on the language user and his intentions. Context is; therefore, relevant for critical understanding of text as true meanings can only be gotten when it is not studied in abstraction. According to Mey (2001, 221), the pragmatic act theory focuses on "the environment in which both speaker and hearer find their affordances, such that the entire situation is brought to bear on what can be said in the situation, as well as what is actually being said". This view is regarded as the *pragmeme* which according to Odebumi (2008) is the only force behind the production of utterances. According to Mey (2001), a *pract* is the "concrete instantiation of a *pragmeme*" which is determined by participants understanding of the situation and the effect such *pract* will have in a particular context.

3. Research Methodology

This paper judgmentally selected the Independence Day speech of President Buhari and it was downloaded from the internet and analyzed quantitatively and descriptively using the Pragmatic Acts Theory of Mey (2001). The said speech has a total of one thousand, six hundred and sixty-four (1664) words excluding the title of the speech as it was written in the downloaded manuscript. After the descriptive analysis, the data was then analyzed quantitatively using the simple percentage below as a statistical formula in order to calculate and arrive at their percentage frequency:

$$\frac{\text{Individual frequency of practs} \times 100}{\text{Overall frequency of practs}} = 1$$

Thereafter, results were then presented on a pie chart.

4. Analysis and Discussion

Sixty-two (62) *practs* and fourteen (14) pragmatic functions were observed after a careful analysis of the speech. These pragmatic functions are: remarking (03), reminding (02), stating (19), criticizing (03), proposing (04), describing (07), instructing/calling (03), advising (02), charging (01), thanking (07), assuring (04), acknowledging (05), identifying (01) and hoping (01). These sixty-two *practs* achieved four basic purposes: to appreciate/admit, to reveal intentions/to reveal the successes of his administration, to give instruction/directives, and to give details on key issues. They were also marked by pragmatic tools such as shared situational knowledge (SSK), Psychological act, inference, relevance and reference.

Table 1: Synopsis of the pragmatic acts, and goals and their individual frequency percentage

Pragmatic Goal	Overall Frequency (O.F)	O.F (%)	Practs	Individual Frequency
To appreciate/admit	13	21%	Thanking	07
			Acknowledging	03
			Remarking	03
To reveal intentions/successes	29	46.7%	Stating	19
			Proposing	04
			Assuring	06
To give instruction/directives	12	19.4%	Reminding	02
			Instructing/calling	03
			Advising	02
			Charging	01
			Criticizing	03
			Hoping	01
To give details	08	12.9%	Identifying	01
			Describing	07
TOTAL	62	100%		62

5. Discussion of Results

From the analysis of data, sixty-two (62) practs having fourteen pragmatic functions of remarking, reminding, stating, criticizing, proposing, describing, instructing/calling, advising, charging, thanking, assuring, acknowledging, identifying and hoping were discovered. These pragmatic functions were; however, marked with certain pragmatic tools such as shared situation knowledge (SSK), Inference (INFER), relevance (REL). In this session, each pragmatic goal with its distinguishing pract will be discussed.

To appreciate/admit

This pragmatic goal was achieved by President Buhari using the three pragmatic functions of thanking, remarking and acknowledging. These pragmatic functions had a frequency occurrence of thirteen and it amounted to 21% of the entire speech.

Thanking: This pragmatic function had a frequency of seven in the overall speech. Africans; especially, Nigerians believe so much in appreciating efforts when one accomplishes a particular task. This is due to the fact that when one is extolled, there is every tendency that he will do more in the future when saddled with another

responsibility. Osisanwo (2017:297) quoting a Vietnamese proverb succinctly proves this fact when he asserts that “if one receives a plum one must return a peach”. President Buhari appreciates the efforts of some in the body polity of Nigeria and even outside the shores of the country for their continued effort at providing lasting peace. Extract 1: Government is grateful to the responsible leadership of those communities....

PMB commends the leadership style of leaders in the Niger- Delta communities. He also commends the efforts of the “gallant Armed Forces for triumphing over the terrorist group- Boko Haram”. He goes further to appreciate the international community and neighbouring African countries for their collective efforts at defeating terrorism.

Worth mentioning also is the commendation given to some Governors for their support to agriculture especially in the collaboration of some states in the production of rice. For example: Lake rice which is a blend of the first two letters of Lagos and Kebbi.

Extract 2:

I wish to commend the efforts of the governors of Kebbi, Lagos, Ebonyi, and Jigawa states for their support to the rice and fertilizer revolutions. Equally commendable

are the Governors of Benue, Ogun, Kaduna and Plateau states for the presidential initiative for palm oil, rubber, cashew, cassava, potatoes and other crops.

Furthermore, PMB extolled the National Assembly for refocussing on its oversight committees and finally he thanks and wishes all a happy celebration.

Acknowledging: This pragmatic function has a frequency of three and it closely followed the pragmatic function of thanking. By using this, PMB admits to the fact that his administration is continually working around the clock to curb/solve some of the bedeviling issues facing the country of which corruption is the top priority.

Extract 3:

We are fully aware that fighting corruption was never going to be a straight-forward task.

PMB acknowledges that the fight against corruption would be a herculean task because “corrupt elements use weapons such as judicial obstruction and political diversion to fight back”. Nevertheless, he asserts that the fight must go on as some measures are in place. He further asserts that to fully deal with corruption, all Nigerians must say no to corruption in all its forms. He employed the pragmatic tool of VCE to acknowledge this fact when he emphatically voiced that ‘CHANGE will then be real’ as everyone is involved in this fight. To further buttress this point, it was during PMB’s administration that the slogan ‘If you see something, say something’ came up. It was the slogan of the anti-graft law and whistle-blowing policy.

Remarking: This pragmatic function relives on the importance of October 1st in the history of Nigeria.

Extract 4:

October 1st remains a special day for all Nigerians as this marks the day when we attained one of the most precious of human desires-freedom. Over the years, the country

has gone through trials and tribulations but October 1st is always a day for celebration. It a day of thanksgiving, reflection and re-dedication.

PMB sees this day as a day of celebration despite the nation’s ordeal and perilous times. There is a use of pragmatic tool of SSK wherein he does not recount the history of Nigeria’s freedom because Nigerians are familiar with this historical fact. The use of the psychological act (a play on emotions) is also sacrosanct as Nigerians on hearing these words becomes emotional and reminisce on the past and what can be done to salvage the present situation.

To Reveal Intentions/successes

This was achieved by the effective use of practs such as stating, proposing, and assuring. It is important to stress the fact that this goal had the highest overall frequency percentage with 46.7% of the overall speech. Independence Day in Nigeria is usually a day of celebrating our most important gift as a nation- freedom. PMB employs this platform to underscore the different achievements of his administration since 2015 and to bring to light some proposed projects. He also employed the welfarist ideology (a situation in which the government assumes her primary responsibility by providing amenities such as basic health, education and financial wellbeing for all her citizens) when he quoted figures to drive home these facts.

Stating: This pract has the highest frequency occurrence in this speech as it had a preponderance of nineteen. PMB employs this pract to bring to limelight feats achieved since May 2015. As a political being, he employs the use of this pract to inform Nigerians that his administration is up to their toes

Extract 5:

The APC Government's campaign rallying cry to restore security, re-balance the economy and fight corruption was not all rhetoric.

Prior to 2015 and during the presidential campaign rallies, the APC's mantra had always being 'CHANGE', it is this mantra that PMB is re-emphasizing on- that his party has not reneged on their earlier promises of restoring peace and security in troubled parts of the country especially the north east and north central geo-political zones; re-balancing the economy. It is all these that makes him state the agenda of the APC for the umpteenth time. This extract also has the deployment of the psychological act to address the dwindling support the party is garnering in recent times as citizens are losing faith in him and in the APC. He; therefore, employs this act to re-energize the zeal and passion they once had for him and the APC.

Extract 6:

Furthermore, a new presidential initiative is starting with each state of the Federation creating a minimum of 10,000 jobs for unemployed youths, again with the aid of CBN's development finance initiatives.

Teeming unemployment is a major setback in Nigeria as graduates leave the school system yearly without hopes for the future. PMB, therefore, understands the importance of a job and his administration is working towards the creation of more jobs so as to tackle this menace. One particular aspect of job creation is the N-Power scheme of his administration which is meant for the unemployed whether literate or illiterate. Other aspects which emphasizes the stating pract in this speech is the proactive steps taken in the diversification of the economy, the revamping of the Mambilla power project which has been in a state of limbo for years amongst others.

Proposing: This pract has a preponderance of four (4). PMB's desire to keep the pace

ad sticking to the APC's change manta is hinged on this pract. He proposes some projects his administration will work towards/presently working assiduously on so as to regain the confidence of the people which has changed overtime.

Extract 7:

As we enter the second half of our term of office, we intend to accelerate progress and intensify our resolve to fix the country's challenges and problems.

Assuring: It is an indisputable fact that Nigerians needs to be assured and pacified constantly by the government. However, for it to be effective, Nigerians need to see these changes physically and not on paper. It is therefore, imperative for the government of the day to assure the people that the votes deposited on them is not vain as they are working around the clock to put things in order.

Extract 8:

But we are not letting up Government is working around the clock to ensure release of the remaining Chibok girls, as well as, other persons in Boko Haram captivity.

The kidnap of the Chibok school girls in 2015 from the hostels was a major blow to the country security-wise. Efforts have been on top gear to release the remaining set of girls from their captors. PMB, therefore, sees the need to assure the people that in no distant time, the remaining girls would be released. This pract also employs the pragmatic tool of SSK as both parties can relate to the fact that the school girls were actually kidnapped from their hostels and therefore, no need narrating the circumstances surrounding the kidnap as it is evergreen in the minds of Nigerians.

Give Directives/Instructions

In achieving this pragmatic goal, PMB employed practs such as reminding, instructing/calling, advising, charging, criticizing, and hoping. This pragmatic goal

had a percentage frequency of 19.4% and a preponderance of twelve (12) occurrences in the overall IDS. PMP utilizing this goal, charged Nigerians to change their immediate environment as change begins with them; he also gave directives to warring communities to embrace peace by following due process in their agitations. This goal is subdivided into two groups- giving directives, and calling to action.

Giving Directives (Reminding, Advising, Hoping Criticizing)

The practs under this goal is meant for giving directives to Nigerians especially those at loggerheads in different communities. The first in this category is reminding. PMB uses this to bridge the gap between presidency ‘government’ and the people. He utilizes this pract also to remind the people some of the achievements of his administration for the past two years in office and also to remind them that they took power from a political party at the Centre at all the levels of government and that this is a new phenomenon in Nigeria. This pract has the pragmatic tool of SSK as Nigerians still remember vividly the events of the 2015 general elections and what the metonym ‘Centre’ represents- the People’s Democratic Party (PDP).

Extract 9:

In the past two years, Nigeria has recorded appreciable gains in political freedom. A political party at the Centre losing elections of State Governor, National Assembly seat and even State Assemblies to the opposition parties is new to Nigeria.

Worth mentioning also is the pract, Criticizing. This has occurred thrice in the overall speech and he does this to criticize the different groups in Nigeria who are agitating for restructuring; that they should follow the constitutional process instead of allowing some irresponsible elements in their midst thereby disrupting the peace these communities once had.

Extract 10:

Recent calls on restructuring, quite proper in a legitimate debate, has let in highly irresponsible groups to call for dismemberment of the country.

Other practs which give directives are advising and hoping with each having 1:2. PMB employs advising to direct those who are calling for the dismemberment of the country to use dialogue and constitutional processes rather than violence as they are the proper channels for such cases.

Extract 11:

At all events, proper dialogue, and any desired constitutional changes should take place in a rational manner, at the National and State Assemblies.

The pragmatic act of hoping was exercised by PMB with the confidence he had in the judiciary’s anti-graft committee headed by Justice Salami. The anti-graft law is PMB’s system of fighting all corrupt elements and recovering of stolen funds.

Extract 12:

Justice Salami has just been appointed to chair the judiciary’s anti-graft committee. Government expects a lot from this committee.

Calling to Action (Instructing/Calling/Charging)

PMB employs these acts to instill patriotism, optimism, and loyalty in Nigerians as the issue of change is a collective responsibility. He also uses this pract because he wants Nigerians to disassociate themselves from all forms of corrupt practices- bribery in all its shady forms.

Extract 13:

I call on all Nigerians to combat corruption at every turn. By not asking for and refusing to accept a bribe, by reporting unethical practices or by blowing a whistle, together we can beat corruption.

This extract is a call to duty, he does this by charging the people to be incorruptible by shunning corrupt practices and by blowing a

whistle. This Whistleblowing policy in Nigeria is a policy of the President Buhari's administration in which whistle blowers are entitled to anything between 2.5% to 5.0% of the recovered loot which is either a stolen or concealed public fund or assets.

Extract 14:

Those who were there should tell those who were not there the consequences of such folly.

In the extract above, PMB advises and admonishes those persons born during the Nigerian Civil War; especially the aged, to educate their people on the dangers of war and the unleashing of mayhem. He does this because of the agitations in Nigeria especially that of the Independent People of Biafra (IPOB) spearheaded by Nnamdi Kanu and that the elders, from their wealth of experience, should call the youths to order and advise them positively to extend the olive branch.

To Give Details on Key Issues

In other to achieve this goal, PMB employed the two pragmatic acts of identifying and describing.

Describing

PMB employed this practice pragmatically create a picture in the minds of Nigerians by vividly giving details on key issues in different areas of the country. The IDS has a preponderance of seven instances. Description involves the use of adjectives to effectively qualify and paint a colourful picture of events/facts.

Extract 15:

As a young Army officer, I took part from the beginning to the end in our tragic Civil War costing about 2million lives, resulting in fearful destruction and untold suffering. Those who are agitating for a reOrun were not born by 1967 and have no idea of the horrendous consequences of the civil conflict which we went through.

Extract 16:

The Federal government's agricultural Anchor Borrowers Programme, which I launched in November, 2015 has been an outstanding success with: 43.92 billion released through the CBN and thirteen participating institutions; 200,000 small holder farmers from twenty-nine states of the federation benefitting; 233,000 hectares of farmland cultivating eight commodities, namely rice, wheat, maize, cotton, soya-beans, poultry, cassava and groundnuts, in addition to fish farming.

The above extract employs the Psychological act as it appeals to the emotions of Nigerians by creating a picture that PMB is working assiduously to put the nation on track. PMB achieved this effect with his doling out of figures to qualify these successes in the agricultural sector.

Other instances include the extract below:

Extract 17:

Furthermore, in order to stabilize the polity, the FG gave additional support to states in the form of: state excess crude account loans, budget support facility, stabilization fund release to state and local government as follows: ₦200 billion in 2015, ₦441 billion in 2016, ₦1 trillion in 2017. Altogether, totaling ₦1.642 trillion. This was done to enable states to pay outstanding salaries, pensions and small business suppliers who had been all but crippled over the years.

Identifying

This is another practice for giving details and it occurred just once in the overall speech. PMB identifies a worrisome problem bedeviling Nigeria- power- that has crippled economic growth of small scale businesses.

Extract 18:

Power remains a huge problem.

He; however, goes further to state that his administration is tackling this menace head-on and that by 2020, the production of power will reach 10,000 megawatts hopefully. This extract employs SSK,

Psychological act and REL. power problem in Nigeria is a shared situation knowledge as everyone faces this problem, it is relevant in this situation because it has become a source of concern to Nigerians as small business activities have been crippled by this singular factor. Nigerians will breathe a sigh of relief as there seems to be hope- the effect of the psychological act.

6. Conclusion

This paper investigated the Independence Day Speech of President Muhammadu Buhari delivered on October 1st, 2017. The analysis of the data revealed that PMB employed different pragmatic acts in order to achieve his pragmatic goal/intention. These pragmatic acts; revealed by a critical study of the data in question, totaled sixty-two (62) which performed fourteen (14) pragmatic functions: thanking, acknowledging, remarking, instructing/calling, describing, assuring, criticizing, stating, proposing, reminding, advising, charging, hoping and identifying. These pragmatic functions/practs served four goals- to appreciate/admit, reveal intentions/results of his administration, to give details on key issues and to give directives/instructions. In addition to these, the practs were also observed to have certain pragmatic tools which were evident in this speech. They include shared situation knowledge (SSK), Relevance (REL) and the Psychological Act with each contributing significantly to the overall meaning of the speech. On the whole, this speech served the purpose for which it was intended as can be seen from the four goals.

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