

## **A Linguistic-Stylistic Investigation of the Language of the Nigerian Political Elite.**

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### **Intention**

The study reviews and analyses the language of the Nigerian political elite while discussing the business of politics, with a view to finding out functional reasons for the features that characterize or permeate this language variety.

### **Definition**

The political elite, we have in mind in this paper, are Nigerians that are educated and saddled with the task or business of political leadership and those occupying various political positions like Presidency, Head of State, Governorship, Ministry, Ambassadorship, Advisory, and other political offices. It also embraces those that are involved in practical political practitioning and politicking either civil or military. Nigeria, since independence, has been under the tutelage of two different kinds of political regimes: the civil political administration and the military political regime. Each regime has always produced its own political leaders and elite. However, this study will not segregate or sectionalise the political elite. The study specifically concentrates or focuses on the elite that have made significant contributions or landmarks to the building and development of Nigerian political history, across various regimes and governments, which we have had so far in this country; military or civilian.

### **Scope of the study**

In view of the large number of people covered by our classification, vis-à-vis the size of the country, and considering the shortness and limitation of the space for this study, it thus becomes imperative to restrict the selection of the political elite to notable ones across different regimes and various geo-political zones or regions of the country. Such notables include Chief Obafemi Awolowo (South West), Chief Nnamdi Azikiwe (South East), S.G. Ikoku (South East), Chief Nwawor Orizu (South East), Mr Tunji Braithwaite (South West), Uncle Bola Ige (South West), Chief Ebenezer Babatope (South West), Tafawa Balewa (North East), Alhaji Shehu Shagari (North East), General Aguiyi Ironsi (South East), General Olusegun Obasanjo (South West), General Badamosi Babangida (North Central) and Major Kaduna Nzeogwu (South East).

## **Analytical approach**

To get to the linguistic features of this variety of language, there are various linguistic options or approaches that could be explored. The options include the Text linguistic approach, Discourse Analysis, General and Linguistic Stylistic approaches and so on. In this study however, the procedure of General stylistic analysis is adopted for the following reasons: in the first place, stylistics itself is described as a linguistic study of different styles (Chapman (1973), Ayeomoni (2002), Babajide (2002), Romano (2000), William (2002)), it is a product of social situation, implying that there is a common relationship between language use and sociopolitical situations. Stylistics in this wise, is taken as an integral part of sociolinguistics, in the sense that it studies humans in relation to their society. Furthermore, stylistics could also be described as an academic field, which studies certain aspects of language variation. It is in this respect that Crystal and Davy (1969) stress that stylistics aims at “analyzing language habits with a view to identifying, from the General mass of linguistic, features common to English as used on every conceivable occasion...” (Crystal & Davy: 10) So, the general stylistic method of analysis applied here, offers three major benefits to us in this study. Firstly, as analysts we will be aware of the structural pattern of language, permeating a text so as to be able to identify the prominent or foregrounding stylistic features of the text. It also enables analysts to be consciously aware of the kind of social variations, which the inherent linguistic features are identified with. Finally, of course, the approach also enables analysts to know the technique of putting these features down systematically in order to reveal the internal patterning of various texts. It is this phenomenon that has equally induced Crystal and Davy (1969) to argue that the central requirement of stylistics is to provide a single clear technique of description with which to cope with any piece of language. They opine that:

The central requirement of any linguistically oriented approach to the classification of stylistic effect is that it should provide a single, clear technique of description which will allow the student to cope with any piece of language he wants to study.(Crystal &Davy: 13 – 14).

Consequently, the stylistic approach is usually synchronically applied to the codes available in the English language currently, vis-à-vis this study. This technique of description is what Chapman (1973) and Crystal and Davy (1969) refer to as codes and linguistic levels of analysis respectively. According to Crystal and Davy (15), the levels of analysis could be: Phonetics/ Graphetics, Phonology/Graphology, Grammar/Lexis and Semantics.

## **Language and Politics**

It is widely conceived that language and politics are interconnected; language is for instance, considered the vehicular expression of politics. It is the means by which politics or political discourse and ideas are widely disseminated, Ali (1975) corroborates this when he opines that language “is the most important point of entry into habits of thought of a people. It embodies within itself cumulative association derived from the total experience of its people” (Ali: 48). In the same spirit, Harris avers, “in politics words have a powerful effect” (1975:58). Similarly, Harris (Ibid) views that Orwell sees political language as being designed to make lies sound truthful and murder respectable, while Harris in (53) claims that Disraeli is of the view that “with words we govern men.” He (Harris) adds, “language is the means by which political ideas are transmitted to the community,” while in (55), he views that Locke claims that the strength of language in politicking is enormous. And at another setting, Ranney (1975:130) submits that four hostile newspapers were the equivalent of 100,000 enemy troops on the field of battle underlining the extent to which political language is itself a weapon (Ranney: 130). He claims further that every political authority will lead to justify itself by an appeal to language in its symbolic or realistic sense. It is apparent from the various opinions stated above that language is the key factor in political behaviour concerning mobilizing people to support and acceptance; it is this relatedness of language and politics that justifies the need for this research so as to identify and highlight features inherent in the language of the political elite.

## **Methodology**

The public speeches of the underlisted politicians, in the course of their addressing political issues, are extracted as data for this study. The speeches so collected are studied and analysed along the following linguistic parameters:

(a)

Nature of the lexical choices and functions.

(b)

Forms or types of sentence prominent in the speeches and functions.

(c)

Rhetorical devices prominent in the speeches and functions.

(d)

Contextual semantic implications of the features. Then as each of the speeches is analysed, they are studied critically with a view to identifying the nature of the features of the linguistic parameters above. The identified features are then related to their contexts with the intention of drawing the concomitance or relatedness between the features and the intended messages.

### **Analysis**

The linguistic features that are manifested in these speeches are summarized as follows:

Sentence/Clause Typology.

1. Simple Declarative Sentences and Clauses: This feature is widely or largely manifested in these data.

Data I: Obasanjo's Broadcast of September 21, 1978 to signal the game of politics.

You are all aware that the Constituent Assembly has completed its task of fashioning out a new constitution for our country; you are also aware that I have formally expressed the gratitude of the nation and that of the Supreme Military Council to the entire members of the Assembly for the successful completion of their historic assignment...(Ojiako: 195).

In the speech above, all the sentences are in declarative form with all the obligatory sentence elements of (SPC) – Subject, Predicator and Complement. For instance, we have;

*S*            *P*                            *C*  
You / are all aware / that the Constituent Assembly had completed...

Besides, the declarative nature of the sentences, they are mainly of simple typological form. This feature is in tune with the simple and determining attitude of the politicians in getting what they want. So, they often make their messages clear, simple and unambiguous. In the same vein, if this speech is contrasted with the speech of Shehu Shagari, 1979 President – Elect, at a Lagos Press Conference, after the result of his election was announced, a similar feature is also obtained from this speech; the speech runs thus:



phrase Precipitate action in the speech, is a metaphor, so also, is the nominal phrase favoured baby. We have this feature here because more often than not, irrespective of the subject of the discussion, political elite often resort to using figurative language in some political contexts. So, the language of this political class is usually figurative and metaphoric when they want to force their ideas through and make them convincing and impressive. For instance, in this speech, the metaphoric nominal phrase – “precipitate action.” – means from the context of its usage, the declaration of Alhaji Shehu Shagari as the President. Then the nominal phrase – “favoured baby” – contextually implies partiality with the political implication that the election that has brought Alhaji Shehu Shagari in, as the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria was not free and fair. Illustrating this feature further is the Chief Obafemi Awolowo’s speech in Voice of Courage: He says:

Data (IV)

... our experience during the past 6 years has shown ... that though we are (ostensibly) free as a nation, yet as a people we remain, tightly shackled in the chains of ignorance, disease, want and native tyranny... (Awolowo: 110)

In the above speech, there is the use of metaphor in the phrase “shackled in the chains of ignorance, disease (and) want and native tyranny.” This metaphor according to Awonuga (1988) could be linked with Chief Awolowo’s attitude to colonialism, capitalism and socialism. In this connection, the metaphorical chains in the above quotation refer to colonialism and neocolonialism, which should be destroyed by all means. Similarly, Chief Ebenezer Babatope, a stalwart of the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN) in 13 years of Military Rule in Nigeria Ojiako (1986) says:- metaphorically that:

(Data V)

We wish to assert that this ordinary meaning is not only abnormal but also outrageous and irrational. (Ojiako: 210)

In the above statement, the noun phrase, “ordinary meaning” is metaphorical as it is used to stand for a view or position that is generally considered unacceptable to the speaker’s party and his people. Then Uncle Bola Ige, in his maiden speech in (1979) as the Governor of the defunct Oyo State, says in The essential Ige Tribute to Uncle Bola at 70 (2000) that:

(Data VI)

I promise, once again, that during my own time life will be made more meaningful. I will turn stone to bread; the poor will reap the fruits of their labour. I know that, you my fathers and mothers will pray for me and our state and your prayers shall be heard. (Ige: 3)

In the above speech, Uncle Bola Ige is highly metaphoric as most of the nominal items in the speech, and are metaphoric and symbolic. He uses for instance, the words: ('stone', 'bread', 'fruit of labour', 'fathers', and 'mothers' to represent hardship, prosperity, benefits and mentors respectively.) In the "Sunday Times," of October 29, 1972, Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe on "analysis of the political theory," a lecture delivered at Lagos University, he says:

It is difficult for human beings to profit from experience. They learn nothing and forget nothing. Four years before the Military hand over to Civilian rule, I am bound to speculate whether the prospective civilian rulers of Nigeria have learned lessons from the events of the last six years and have made up their minds to forget and forgive.

Azikiwe's use of language here is not only philosophical but also figurative, as we have in this speech, instances of the figurative language. For instance, there is paradox in: "they learn nothing and forget nothing". This is a clear case of juxtaposition of two opposite statements. Besides, there are instances of pun and alteration in the speech as showing in Data (VIII) below:

Data (VIII)  
... have made up their minds to forget  
and forgive.

Nnamdi Azikiwe as a politician is noted for always being figurative and philosophical in his political speeches. This perhaps is to sustain the attention of his audience and to unconsciously penetrate their minds.

### **Liberal Rhetoric Feature**

This feature is also obviously found in the speeches of the political elite in this country. A good example of this is provided by Tunji Braithwaite, a Lagos – based lawyer and one time Nigerian Advanced Party (NAP) chieftain in the Second Republic (1979). In one of his campaign

speeches, he resorts to the use of liberal rhetoric device or style for the purpose of convincing his listeners. He states in 13 years of Military Rule that:

Data (IX)

We are going to produce food in abundance  
not only for all Nigerians, but also to export abroad  
and earn foreign exchange... (Ojiako: 205)

This speech is flamboyant, exaggerated and appealing to the collective sense of the people. The use of phrases like “to produce food in abundance.” And to “earn foreign exchange,” attest to this. This liberal and exaggerative style is adopted in order to woo and lure the people into the folds of the speakers and to cajole them into accepting them and their designed programmes. In the same exaggerative and liberal tone, the former Acting Civilian President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, Dr. Nwafor Oritzu on 16th January, 1966 declared in his broadcast to the nation in 13 years of Military rule that:

Data (X)

... I have to-night been advised by the Council  
of Ministers that they had come to unanimous decision  
to voluntarily hand over administration of the country  
to the Armed Forces of the Republic with immediate  
effect. All ministers are assured of their personal  
safety by the new administration... it is my fervent  
hope that the new administration will ensure the peace  
and stability of the Federal Republic of Nigeria and  
that all citizens will give them full co-operation.  
(Ojiako: 6)

Dr. Ortizu’s speech above is mild exaggerative and appealing in Phrases like “have been advised, “unanimous decision,” “to voluntarily handover,” connote that he respects the popular opinion and interest of the people. Then, the call for “peace and stability,” equally shows his liberal postures and avowed interest in the promotion of oneness and the peace of the country. This has always been the stylistic trend of the language of the political elite whenever they have an interest and image to protect and programmes to canvas for or to “sell”. But after getting what they want (absolute power), they start singing another tune; they often get instantly absolved, lost and intoxicated with power to the extent that within a short time, they have forgotten the promises made at the onset of their governments. This of course, accounts for political instability in this country vis-à-vis reasons for coups and counter coups often witnessed in the country (see Ojiako 86: 82 for details).

## **Coercive Feature**

This feature is mainly found in the military political elite's speeches whenever they want to force the governed to keep the peace. In order to ensure calmness and total submission and subjugation. On such occasions, they roll out compelling decrees and orders. During this period, the language they use becomes coercive, harsh and compelling in tone. Though this feature to some extent, is found in some civilian political elite's language, it is however, more pronounced among the military political elite, for instance, Major Kaduna Nzeogwu during the revolution of January 1, 1965, declared unequivocally in Ademoyega (1981: 88) that:

### Data (XI)

This is not a time for long speech-making  
and so let me acquaint you with the proclamation in  
the Extra-ordinary orders of the day which the Supreme  
Council has promulgated...  
You are hereby warned that looting, arson,  
home-sexuality, rape, embezzlement, bribery or  
corruption, obstruction of the revolution, sabotage,  
subversion...(Ademoyega: 88).

And General Obasanjo (1975), reacting to Dimka's coup said:

### Data (XII)

... the Supreme Military Council has taken a  
firm decision that all those found to be guilty will be  
summarily dealt with in a military way.

... I therefore appeal to all sections of Nigeria not  
to take the law into their hands. (Ojiako: 144)

In the two speeches above, the tone of the language is harsh, forceful, coercive and compelling. For instance, the use of the words like 'promulgated', 'warned' 'firm decision', and 'summarily dealt with', directly denote forcefully and coerciveness. Then the use of phrases and words like: 'acquaint,' pragmatically denotes just to inform, an order that should not be queried. Then the use of verb – 'promulgated' and the nominal phrase: 'Extra-ordinary orders' simply means laws or orders enacted and meant to be obeyed without resistance.

The language of the political elite assumes this style when there is disorder or disruption to the political system. So, to restore order, peace and stability, they change the style of their language from the usual liberal, mild and appealing one to the fiercely harsh and coercive form in order to ensure compliance with the orders and to ensure obedience to the laws and decrees of the land.

### **Collective Pronominal Reference**

The extracts below (data XIII – XV), show a wide use of feature of collective pronominal reference: We, You, Us, Our and so on as follows: For instance, General Ibrahim Babangida in 1990, on aborted coups, during the graduation of students at Military Command College, Jaji, on 29th June, 1990, said:

**\*Data (XIII)**

Those who hatched the coup and implemented it were apparently not part of the civil war and do not seem to know the lessons of that war. Had they been part of the experience of the civil war, they would have known that they were inevitably plunging the military into another civil war and with it the society within which they sought to correct their effort.

On June 25, 1989, at the inauguration of the Armed Forces Constituent Assembly in Abuja, President I.B. Babangida opined that:

**\*Data (XIV)**

You all know as I do, the military remains the bastion upon which the survival of the Nigeria polity rests.... If we allow the military as an institution to be ruined or humiliated, then the consequences of Nigeria, would indeed be very grave.

The then Head of State, Lt. General Olusegun Obasanjo in his broadcast christened, The Dodan declaration in 1977, declared that:

**\*Data (XV)**

Our major pre-occupation is the stability of the country, and the mechanics of raising and improving the standards of living of everyone who lives. We cannot afford to build a nation in which a handful of people exclusively own and control the means of production and distribution to the perpetual

detriment of the majority... We must all rededicate ourselves to the task of reducing the Mental and material hardship brought on fellow Nigerians...

In data (XIII), the speech opens or begins with the deictic “those” and “Those” has no anaphoric referent, it then becomes difficult to know the identities of the people being addressed. This facelessness of the addresses is further reinforced and heightened by the use of pronominal like ‘they’, in the speech, as it does not equally give a clue to the sought identities. This indicates that all the pronominal references in the text, except ‘it’ have faceless or indefinite referents; that is, people of hidden identities.

The identities of the actors here are unknown or hidden because of the illegal and shameful act of coup plotting they were involved in. In Nigeria’s socio-political context, even in the military regime, coup plotting is frowned at and considered illegal and sinful; hence it is always hatched in secrecy with the perpetrators hiding their faces and identities. This then explains why the referents of the references are faceless and unidentified. This also confirms the illegality of the government run by the military. So, here, it is a case of a “thief” chasing a “thief”, “faceless government” pursuing “faceless government hijacker.” Equally in data (XIV), the speech as usual, opens with a second person pronominal reference ‘you’ to refer to the generality of the people being addressed. And considering the context in which the speech is made, it is directed to all Nigerians, including the speaker. He thus resorts to the use of, in the second clause, the first person pronominal item – ‘I’ in order to prove his intention of non exemptionality.

He further reinforces this idea of non – exemption of any mature Nigerian, with the introduction of the third person plural pronominal reference – ‘we’ in the second sentence. This reference ‘we’ now anaphorically refers to the two pronominals – ‘you’ and ‘I’ earlier used, which are the subjects or the addressees and the speaker, that is, the generality of the people called Nigerians. Besides, the use of these pronominal references ‘you’ and ‘we’ to stand for or refer to the generality of mature Nigerians without exemption simply suggests that the issue or the art of governance (politics or leadership) concerns and touches everybody without exemption and its problems should be seen as such as a general problem requiring everybody’s attention. We also have other cohesive ties in this data that are significant, these are the ties of substitution and ellipsis. For instance, in this data, we have the subordinating clause: ‘as I do’. This clause is a proform used as a substitute for the very ‘know’. This is done to avoid unnecessary repetition of the same word. Besides, the use of this lexical substitution in this speech, is to prove further, the fact that the military is the only substitute or alternative to bad civil governance in this country it

is corrective; it is thus seen as the last hope of the common Nigerians. So, the lexical substitution here reinforces the substitutional nature of the military to the civil rule especially in Nigeria, where maladministration is the order of the day.

Then in data (XV) there is also the frequent use of the first person pronominal reference in the form of “our”, “we”, “ourselves” and “us”. The speech, like the preceding ones, opens with a pronominal reference that has no definite anaphoric referent. Then the subsequent pronominal references in the speech are anaphorically related to the first one which opens the speech – ‘our’. This style then heightens the reader’s or the listener’s tension or suspense, as he wants to know the addressee. However, when the speech is placed within the socio-political background in which it is delivered, the tension is relaxed, because a lot of information or extra – linguistic facts emerge from the contextual (pragmatic) consideration of the speech. It is however known from the context of the speech that it is the Nigerian Head of State that is addressing all Nigerians. Therefore, exophorically all the pronominal references in the speech refer to Nigerians. But the government in which these faceless pronominals are used, is still “a faceless or illegal government.”

### **Lexical Borrowings and Allusions**

The feature of Lexical borrowings and Allusions are equally preponderant in the political language of Nigerian political elite. In this respect, it is discovered that words are often taken from various sources and fields of human endeavours like Geography, Economics, Politics, Judiciary, Sociology and so on. This is done in order to convey the exact communicative intention of the speaker, as it gives a vivid picture of the situation. So, in the cause of trying to achieve this aim, allusions to relevant fields or units of the society are resorted to. For instance, Major Nzeogwu in 1966, in his speech, alludes to the geographical features of Nigeria. He said:

Data (XVIII)

... I leave you with a message of good wishes and ask for your support at all times, so that our land, watered by the Niger and Benue between sandy waters and Gulf of Guinea washed in salt by the Might Atlantic, shall not detract Nigerian from gaining sway in any great aspect of international endeavour. (Ademoyega: 88).

In the speech above, the following words and phrases are widely used; Land, watered, Niger, Benue, sandy waters, gulf of Guinea, and Mighty Atlantic, these are geographical terms normally found in the lexical register of Geography. In the context of usage here, they perform demarcating functions as it identifies and specifies the geographical terrain affected and covered by the speech, and of which subjects are being addressed. Besides, the speech is also meant to adore and shower praises on the creator for the natural blessings and gifts bestowed on this country, as a way of exposing the greatness of the country! This is however, also meant to woo the populace and lure them into accepting him as the new ruler. General Aguiyi Ironsi reinforces this feature further in data (XIX), when he said:

Data (XIX)

The National Military Government further decrees:

a)

That there shall be appointment a Military Governor of the Regions shall continue to hold their appointments...

b)

That all holders of appointments in the civil service of the Regions shall continue to hold their appointments...

c)

That all Local Government Police Forces and Native Authority Police Forces shall be placed under the overall command of the Inspector-General. (Ojiako:11).

The three sentences (a-c) above, which are extracted from January 17, 1966's speech are framed in accordance with the legal variety of language, because it has some of the notable features of Legal variety of English.

i.

Introducing or beginning the sentences with the subordinating conjunction, 'that

ii.

The use of the non – obligatory future present tense auxiliary 'shall' in the place of "must" to indicate compulsion.

iii.

The sentences are lengthy with a close use of punctuation marks.

The intention of these military politicians here is to bring legality and sanity into their illegal act and government. So, it is a way of legalizing their illegal government so as to gain acceptance and popularity.

### **Conclusion**

It is obvious from the analysis of the political speeches given in this paper, that the language of the political elite in Nigeria, more often than not, exhibits some unique language features. Besides, it is generally felt, as it has already been established in this paper, that language and politics are intertwined and inseparable: this quality is usually explored to an advantage by the political class to grasp power and to consolidate it. Towards acquisition and consolidation of power, they use language in various forms to achieve their political intentions and goals. Thus the language of politics in Nigeria is discovered (from the data used for this study) to manifest the following features:

There is always a preponderant use of simple declarative sentence typology that is balance and complete in components. This simple structural sentence form usually facilitates easy flow and conveyance of their intentions and messages.

In some contexts, these politicians often resort to using figurative or metaphoric language. They adopt this style, when they intend to convey their intentions or message convincingly so that the impression and intention projected could be printed and lasting in the minds of their listeners. It is also a language strategy used to arouse the feelings and collective excitement and sentiments of their followers, so as also to sustain their support, loyalty and following. In addition, they often resort to using liberal and exaggerative rhetoric, which tone is soft, mild, appealing and inviting. This is often the strategy adopted when they are campaigning or scrambling for power. This strategy is also often used when they are trying to ‘sell’ their programmes and entrench themselves in office.

In addition, coercion is also part of the elements of this variety of language. This strategy is normally used to compel people to submission and to secure their obedience and compliance to laws and orders of the land. This is more or less a negative way of securing the loyalty and cooperation of the governed as well as their mandate.. This language strategy is mainly used during the period of crises, disruption, anarchy or when there is a total breakdown of law and

order. However, it is of note that this strategy is more popular with the military political elite than their civilian counterparts.

Finally, the language style or strategy adopted at a particular socio-political setting, depends on a number of variables such as subject matter, nature and form of setting, participants or listening audience and of course, the language prowess or communicative skill of the communicator or the speaker.

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