

## A Pragmatic Interpretation of Face and Acts in President Olusegun Obasanjo's Speech Text "A Clarion Call".

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**Abstract:** This paper is a pragmatic analysis of the acts and face negotiation techniques deployed by former President Obasanjo in his letter to President Buhari, using Mey's Pragmatic theory and face negotiation theory. Its objectives are to identify and interpret the direct and indirect illocutionary acts, perlocutionary, face threatening and face saving acts in former President Olusegun Obasanjo's letter to President Muhammadu Buhari. The data adopted for this paper was collected from Daily Trust and Leadership Newspaper of January, 2018. The paper classifies the different acts and face mitigating acts. It was discovered that Obasanjo made use of negative face acts in representing Buhari, thereby raising fear and worry in the minds of Nigerians and positively presented himself. The paper concludes that linguistic structures are very important in politics and determines the mind of the populace at every given time.

**Keywords:** Pragmatic Interpretation Obasanjo Clarion Call.

## INTRODUCTION

Pragmatics studies the use of language in human communication. Mey (5) opines that pragmatics is interested in the process of producing language. The proper domain of pragmatics, as highlighted by Chomsky (18), is performance, that is to say, the way the individual goes about using language. For instance, one can either consider language use to be whatever happens when users are 'doing things with word' or, following a more restrictive procedure, one can demand that pragmatics refers explicitly to a user, when language is used. Austin as cited in Mey (71) declares that the only real issue at stake is the effect that our words have when uttered and the thing we can do with them. According to Austin, whoever says: 'give me all the information and I will predict what is going to happen and what this or that utterance is supposed to mean is at best a would-be pragmatician' (Mey 29).

Therefore, the ability to use the appropriate choice of words and expressions in politics moves the masses or the electorate, to a large extent, to the side of the government or the opposition. President Olusegun Obasanjo remains a remarkable force in the Nigerian Polity. He overtime has resorted in writing letters to incumbent presidents on the state of affairs. It is believed that his first letter to President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan played a great role in his failure at the 2015 General Elections and the emergence of President Muhammadu Buhari. It is believed that what we do with words determine the action we get. This paper therefore seeks to examine the linguistic structures and pragmatic acts inherent in this letter by President Olusegun Obasanjo. This is against the backdrop that the perceived perlocutions of his letters are as a result of the pragmatic acts exhibited.

This study aims to conduct a speech act analysis of Obasanjo-Buhari open correspondence. Thus, its objectives are to identify and understand: the direct and indirect illocutionary acts, perlocutionary acts, face threatening, and face saving acts in President Olusegun Obasanjo's Letter to President Buhari.

## REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

### Speech Act Theory

This was the earliest theory of modern pragmatics. It was propounded by the Oxford Philosopher J.L. Austin (19) and developed by Searle (74). The theory holds that utterances are made to perform acts of requesting, denying, accusing, warning, naming, declaring, etc. and that to realize these; people do not need to subject the meaning of their utterances to truth condition of the logical positivists. It challenges the positivists' views on the ground that not all sentences are statements and that much of conversations between people are made of questions, exclamations, commands and expressions of wishes, which cannot be said to be false or true (Saeed 223). Examples:

(a) Excuse me! (b) Hello. (c) Congratulations (d) How much? (b) Are you serious?

Based on the logical positivists' view, none of the above sentences can be accounted for because we cannot on hearing them say they are true or false. Yet, they are not meaningless; certain acts are contextually performed through them. For example, 'excuse me!' could mean let me pass or keep quiet, which are directive acts of requesting and commanding. 'Are you serious?' could mean 'I doubt you', you are joking, or work hard while 'Hello' could mean 'Listen', 'can you hear me?', or wait please! Etc. These are some of the examples of what can be performed with the sentences above. Speech act theory aims to tell us when it is that we ask questions but mean orders and request or when we say one thing with special (Sarcastic) intonation and mean the opposite (Fromkin and Rodman 186).

### Speech Act Types

Austin divides speech act into different but interconnected types of locution, illocution and perlocution. The locutionary act refers to the literal meaning of an utterance.

The illocutionary act, also known as performative act, is the communicative act that is intended to be achieved by an utterance (Jackson and Stock-well 180). It deals with what the speaker does or what he is understood to have done with his utterance. It is central in pragmatics studies and sometimes used interchangeably with the speech act in general. An illocutionary act is a nonlinguistic act performed through a linguistic (Locutionary) means. In other words, it is what is meant but not stated explicitly in a sentence. It can be direct or indirect, intended or unintended, conventional or nonconventional (Lawal 155). The third type of speech act is perlocutionary. It has to do with the effect an utterance or illocutionary act has on the hearer or reader.

In other words, perlocutionary act is the hearer/reader's linguistic (verbal) or extra-linguistic (non-verbal) reaction to the speaker or writer's utterance. For example, if a speaker says to his noisy and lively addressee: 'The man with whom you have just had a hand shake has tested ebola positive', the addressee is most likely going to be silent, inactive and disturbed. This addressee's silence and inactivity resulting from the speaker's statement is the perlocutionary act. In addition, an act of sudden screaming and fleeing that result when speaker X says to listener Y: 'See a snake behind you!' is also a perlocutionary act. This is why Austin defines language as a way of doing and making others to do. Mey posits that perlocutionary act is the most interesting aspect of speech acting (96).

In summary, it can be said that while locutionary act is what is said, illocutionary act what is done or meant, the perlocutionary act is the effect of what is done or said (Grundy 73). Kempson put the distinction between the three speech act types thus:

... Speaker utters sentences with a particular meaning (locutionary act) and with a particular force (illocutionary act) in order to achieve a certain effect (perlocutionary act) on the hearer (qtd in Osisanwo 58).

### Direct and Indirect Speech Acts

The classification of speech act into direct and indirect acts is to among other things show that in human communication, there is usually a difference between the structure of a sentence or an utterance and its communicative value. Grundy views direct speech acts as the conventionally expected function of language and indirect speech act as the extra-actual function of language (230). Finegan submits that one of the characteristics of indirect speech act is that, at least, it violates one of the Grice's maxims of cooperative principle (290). In direct speech act, the structure of a sentence tallies with its communicative functions while in indirect speech act, the sentence or utterance structure does not correspond with its communicative function (Osisanwo 69). Examples:

- i. What does one make of a case like that of Maina: collusion, condonation, ineptitude, and incompetence, dereliction of responsibility or kinship and friendship on the part of those who should have taken visible and deterrent disciplinary action? (is an indirect act of commanding performed through a direct act of questioning)
- ii. I thought President Buhari would fight corruption and insurgency and he must be given some credit for his achievement so far in these two areas although it is not yet Uhuru (is a direct act of commanding).
- iii. I believe strongly that God has endowed Nigeria so adequately that no Nigerian should be either in want or in despair.

Other striking examples of indirect speech act can be found in rhetorical questions (Leech and Thomas 192). For example, the question: 'Who cares?' is an indirect act of informing through annoyance; it means I do not care.

The need for politeness in communication is the motive behind indirect speech act (Mey 13). In many languages, including English, the occurrence of imperative sentences in orders or requests is not preferred despite their status as 'genuine' speech act of ordering or requesting. Lastly, Finegan opines that indirect speech act adds humour and politeness to communication (290).

### Categories of Speech Act

To further explain what language users actually do with their utterances directly or indirectly, Searle classifies illocutionary acts into representatives, commissives, directives, declaratives and expressives (Osisanwo 66). They are explained below:

- i. **Representatives:** represent a state of affair. They include announcements, statements, claims, hypothesis, descriptions, suggestions, etc.
- ii. **Commissives:** commit the speaker to a course of action in future. They include promises, pledges, offers, threats, oaths and guarantees, etc.
- iii. **Declaratives:** bring about a change in the state of affairs. Examples include acts of sentencing, christening, baptising, arresting, resigning, sacking or dismissing, banning, marrying, etc.
- iv. **Directives:** are intended to get the addressee to carry out an action. They deal with acts of commanding, daring, challenging, demanding, assigning, etc.
- v. **Expressives:** indicate speaker's psychological state and attitude. They are concerned with acts of apologising, congratulating, condoling, praising consoling, thanking, complaining, applauding, etc. (qtd in Finegan 284).

### Theoretical framework

Speech act and face negotiation theories are considered appropriate and therefore chosen for analysis in this study. Considering the personalities of the writer and addressee of the letter under investigation, there is the need to pay a special attention to how the addressees' face (public image) are managed. This informs the choice of face negotiation theory.

### Face Negotiation Theory

Face negotiation theory has to do with individuals' "public image or self-esteem". It was first proposed by Ting-Toomey (1985) to understand how different cultures throughout the world respond to conflict ([en.wikipedia.org/wiki/face\\_negotiation\\_theory](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/face_negotiation_theory)). Yule defines it as 'the public self image of a person (60) while Adebunmi views it as the emotional and social feeling of an interlocutor which he/she expects other participants in a discourse to recognise (6). In pragmatics, the concept of face is closely tied to the theory of politeness.

There are two types of faces; positive and negative faces. We have positive face when an individual desires approval, respect and appreciation from others while we have negative face when an individual desires freedom to always act without a check from others. One's face can be saved, threatened, and mitigated. Face saving act goes with polite utterances while face threatening act goes with impolite utterances.

Face threatening acts are illocutionary acts that are liable to damage the addressee's positive and negative faces. It sometimes occurs when an addressee is insulted; when what he/she holds dear is given disapproval; or when an imposition is placed on his/her freedom. An utterance aimed at reducing the severity of the damage done by a face threatening act is known as face mitigation. There are certain strategies that influence face mitigating acts. These strategies are based mainly on the size of the threat to be mitigated and the difference in the power status between the interlocutors.

Two main types of face management strategies are bald-on-record and off-the-record strategies. The former occurs when a face threatening act is not redressed or mitigated. It happens in two situations: when the power or status difference between the speaker and the listener is great or when the speaker is sure that his face threatening act is in the best interest of the addressee. The latter results when the powerful participant indirectly mitigates his face threatening act on the less powerful participant (7). Here are the examples of face threatening and face-saving acts under the context of an inconsiderate neighbour who in preparation for a journey wakes up at 4:00 am to warm his car engine. He keeps reviving the car engine until all the occupants of the surrounding blocks of flats were awake. Two of them reacted these ways:

The first Speaker:

Hei, hello Mr Man! Do you think you are the only car owner? ... Nonsense!!

The Second Speaker:

Hello, Mr Udo. We would appreciate it if you could just lower the sound of your car engine. Thank you.

The first speaker’s reaction is face threatening while the second speaker’s is face saving and face mitigating (Osisanwo 103).

## METHODOLOGY

The data for the study were collected from Daily Trust and Leadership Newspapers of January, 2018. A total of twenty-five sentences were randomly selected from the open correspondence written by Obasanjo to President Buhari and analysed based on illocutionary and perlocutionary act. In this study, only sentences that are performative are selected. In the case of lengthy sample sentences, those parts that performatively contribute nothing are deleted through ellipses. Face management acts analysis are also conducted where performatively relevant.

## DATA PRESENTATION

S/ No	Sentence	Direct Act	Indirect Act	Face Management	Expected Perlocutionary
1	I am constrained to issue this special statement at this time considering the situation of the country. Some of you may be asking, what has brought about this special occasion of Obasanjo issuing a Special Statement? You will be right to ask such a question. But there is a Yoruba saying that “when lice abound in your clothes, your fingernails will never be dried of blood. When I was in the village, to make sure that lice die, you put them between two fingernails and press hard to ensure they die and they always leave blood stains on the fingernails. To ensure you do not have blood on your fingernails, you have to ensure that lice are not harboured anywhere within your vicinity.	Stating Asserting	Lamentation Complaint	Negative face for President Buhari	Worry
2	The lice of poor performance in government poverty, insecurity, poor economic management, nepotism, gross dereliction of duty, condonation of misdeed “if not outright encouragement of it, lack of progress and hope for the future, lack of national cohesion and poor management of internal political dynamics and widening inequality “ are very much with us today. With such lice of general and specific poor performance and crying poverty with us, our fingers will not be dry of blood	Reporting Informing	Condemnation Instigation	Negative face for President Buhari	Worry Fear
3	I made it abundantly clear that I quit partisan politics for aye but my concern and interest in Nigeria, Africa and indeed in humanity would not wane.	Asserting Informing	Commitment	Positive face for President Buhari	Hope
4	I believe strongly that God has endowed Nigeria so adequately that no Nigerian should be either in want or in despair.	Stating Informing	Assuming Promise	Positive face for the Nigerian State. Negative for President Buhari	Hope
5	I believe in team work and collaborative efforts.	Educating Asserting	Assuming Promising	Positive face for Obasanjo	Hope
6	For Africa to move forward, Nigeria must be one of the anchor countries, if not the leading anchor country. It means that Nigeria must be good at home to be good outside.	Stating Informing	Acknowledging	Positive face for Nigerian	Hope
7	The situation that made Nigerians to vote massively to get my brother Jonathan off the horse is playing itself out again. First, I thought I knew the point where President Buhari is weak and I spoke and wrote about it even before Nigerians voted for him and I also did	Stating Asserting	Shaming Lamentation	Negative face for President Buhari	Fear Worry

	vote for him because at that time it was a matter of any option but Jonathan				
8	I know that praise-singers and hired attackers may be raised up against me for verbal or even physical attack but if I can withstand undeserved imprisonment and was ready to shed my blood by standing for Nigeria, I will consider no sacrifice too great to make for the good of Nigeria at any time. No human leader is expected to be personally strong or self-sufficient in all aspects of governance.	Reporting Stating	Exaggerating Complimenting	Positive face for Obasanjo	Hope
9	I knew President Buhari before he became President and said that he is weak in the knowledge and understanding of the economy but I thought that he could make use of good Nigerians in that area that could help.	Educating Stating	Ridiculing Challenging	Negative face for Buhari	Worry Fear
10	I know his weakness in understanding and playing in the foreign affairs sector and again, there are many Nigerians that could be used in that area as well.	Reporting Informing	Shaming Lamenting	Negative face for Buhari	Worry Fear
11	I thought President Buhari would fight corruption and insurgency and he must be given some credit for his achievement so far in these two areas although it is not yet uhuru!	Reporting Stating	Debunking Denying Disagreeing	Positive face for Buhari	Worry Distrust
12	But there are three other areas where President Buhari has come out more glaringly than most of us thought we knew about him. One is nepotic deployment bordering on clannishness and inability to bring discipline to bear on errant members of his nepotic court.	Informing Claiming	Complimenting	Positive face for Buhari	Hope
13	I believe the situation we are in today is akin to what and where we were in at the beginning of this democratic dispensation in 1999.	Informing Claiming	Complimenting	Positive face for Buhari	Hope
14	Where we are is a matter of choice but we can choose differently to make a necessary and desirable change, once again.	Stating Asserting	Shaming Challenging	Negative face for Buhari	Hope
15	Nigeria deserves and urgently needs better than what they have given or what we know they are capable of giving. 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.	Stating Asserting	Lamenting Challenging	Negative face for Buhari	Apprehension Concern

It is evident from the linguistic structures used by Obasanjo in his letter, *A Clarion Call: The Way Forward*, that he had used negative face strategies to portray President Buhari before the Nigerian people. As can be seen, he had carefully drawn analogy between the expected messianic nature of Buhari and the reality on ground. It is believed that these negative face strategies heightened the growing feeling of despondency among Nigerians. Even where President Obasanjo gives some credit to the President, he simultaneously ridicules the efforts by negatively mitigating such efforts.

## CONCLUSION

It is common knowledge, as it is clearly stated in the analysis, that language is a potent tool in politics, if it is well and maximally used. Obasanjo by using Negative acts have mitigated and eluded sympathy against the President whom he has presented in a negative way.

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