

## **SPEECH ACTS AND WELFARIST IDEOLOGY IN GOVERNOR AREGBESOLA'S MAY 1, 2013 ADDRESS**

**Ajewole-Orimogunje Christiana Oluremi (Ph.D)**

Department of General Studies, the Federal Polytechnic, Ede, Osun State, Nigeria.

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**ABSTRACT:** *Politicians make use of language for the purpose of achieving desired goals. In political utterances, many acts are performed as politicians through their speeches try to manipulate the listeners by the way they use language. This study investigates the deployment of speech acts and welfarist ideology in Governor Aregbesola's address to the Osun State workers in commemoration of year 2013 "Workers' Day". The speech is selected for analysis to bring out Aregbesola's language use and to highlight the welfarist ideology of the government of Osun State of Nigeria. The speech titled "Productivity is the key to Wealth" is analysed within the framework of J.R. Searle's Speech Acts to bring out the illocutionary force in it. The analysis reveals Aregbesola's language use in performing certain actions with a view to changing the attitudes of workers and also to project the government as welfarist in its programmes.*

**KEYWORDS:** Politics, Speech Acts, Language, Welfarist Ideology, Labour, Rauf Aregbesola.

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Speech is a primary form of language and acts as a means of getting things done. We use language to express ourselves and also to perform actions. Oyeleye (1997:90) observes that "language transforms itself to become a meaningful part of our human social behaviour". A speech becomes effective when it is able to persuade the hearers and change their actions. In public speaking, persuasive language is necessary. According to van Dijk (1988), we do not merely describe the forms or the meaning of verbal utterances but rather the social act we accomplish by using such an utterance in specific situation. He states further that such acts, referred to as speech acts are social acts accomplished by the use of words. Speech Acts theory seeks to explain how speakers and writers perform actions using language in specific contexts.

Babatunde and Odepidan (2009:297) assert that analysing a speaker's language use for persuasion and effective communication "involves the context, the speaker's intention and the beliefs he or she shares with the participants". Discourse can be viewed as a culturally and socially organized way of speaking and as noted by Richardson (2007:24), researchers who adopt this definition of discourse "assume that language is used to mean something and to do something and that this meaning and doing is linked to the context of its usage. He states further that if we want to interpret a text properly, "we need to work out what the speaker or writer is doing through discourse, and how this doing is linked to wider interpersonal, institutional, socio-cultural and material contexts". Language is used to construct political ideology and to influence people's behaviour; it is the most important point of entry into the habits of thoughts of the people.

The first day in the month of May every year, which is popularly known as 'May Day' is a celebration of the International Labour Movement and it is observed as a national holiday in

some countries including Nigeria. The Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) was formally constituted as the only federation of trade unions in Nigeria in 1978 (Wikipedia). The fundamental aim and objectives of NLC are to protect, defend and promote the rights, well-being and the interests of all workers, pensioners and the trade unions; to promote and defend a Nigerian nation that would be just, democratic, transparent and prosperous and to advance the cause of the working class generally. The speech under analysis was delivered by the governor of Osun State of Nigeria, Mr. Rauf Aregbesola to commemorate year 2013 May Day in the State. Governor Aregbesola is a civilian ruler under the Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN). The speech can thus be viewed as a political discourse. As stated by Fairclough (1995:182), political discourse “provides the clearest illustration of the constitutive power of discourse; it reproduces or changes the social world by reproducing or changing people’s representation of it and the principles of classification which underlie them”.

Earlier studies on political speeches include Ayoola (2005), Adegaju (2005, 2013), Adetunji (2006, 2009), Ajewole-Orimogunje (2006), Babatunde and Odepidan (2009) and Ehineni (2014). Ajewole-Orimogunje’s (2006) study focussed on the patterns of argumentation in selected speeches of Obafemi Awolowo; Babatunde and Odepidan (2009) examined the role of pragmatics and rhetoric in effective communication in politics and government. Adegaju’s (2013) was a critical discourse analysis of Liberian President Johnson-Sirleaf’s inaugural address while Ehineni (2014) focussed on a critical discourse analysis of modals in Nigerian political manifestos. Recent studies include Sharndama (2015) which critically analysed the inaugural speech of Nigerian President Muhammadu Buhari and Otieno’s (2016) article which is a review of studies on metaphor in political discourse.

### **Speech Acts theory**

Speech acts are actions performed by a given utterance to communicate and necessitate a change in a given situation. The British philosopher – J.L. Austin in his seminal work *How to do things with words* (1962) claims that a person performs an act by speaking and that meaning is found in what an expression does, in the act it performs. He classifies speech acts into three components: Locutionary act – the utterance of some words in a construction and uttering them with a certain meaning; Illocutionary act – an act performed in saying something eg. asking questions, giving verdicts etc.; and Perlocutionary act – the effect the speaker produces on the hearer as a result of the utterance made or the force of such an utterance (Austin 1962:96-102).

Austin classifies illocutionary acts into five – verdictives, exercitives, commissives, behabitives and expositives. The American philosopher J.R. Searle extended Austin’s ideas, emphasising the need to relate the functions of signs or expressions to their social context. Searle’s (1969) classification is based on the argument that Austin’s classification is deficient and came up with five classes:

- Assertives: commit speakers to the truth of some propositions eg. stating, reporting, claiming, announcing etc.
- Directives: utterances used to get something done eg. requesting, ordering, commanding, demanding, begging etc.
- Commisives: commit speakers to some future actions eg. promising, offering, swearing etc. to do something.

- Expressives: expression of some psychological state eg. thanking, apologising, condoling, congratulating etc.
- Declaratives: speech acts whose successful performance brings about the correspondence between propositional content and reality eg. naming a ship, resigning, dismissing, accepting etc.

Illocutionary acts include commanding, daring, nominating, resigning, threatening, warning, condemning, rebuking etc. Speech acts theory is essentially concerned with how interlocutors (speakers and listeners) understand one another in spite of the possibility of their saying what they do not mean, and meaning what they do not say (Lawal 2003). According to Odeunmi (2006:90), “linguistic communication takes place largely when we perform illocutionary acts, that is, when our intentions eg. making promises, offers, apologies etc are communicated to the hearer”.

### **Welfarist Ideology**

Ideologies according to van Dijk (2000) consist of socially shared beliefs that are associated with a group, such as their identity, their position in society, their interests and aims, their relation to other groups, their reproduction, and their natural environment. Welfarist ideology is a political system in which the government assumes the primary responsibility of assuring basic health, education and financial well-being of all its citizens through programmes and direct assistance (Encarta Dictionaries).

### **Political Discourse and Persuasion**

Language and politics are intertwined. As observed by Woods (2006:50), political discourse functions as speech acts to “protest, legitimise, intimidate, persuade the people or lead them to act in a way that is consistent with this view by voting for a particular party”. Rhetoric is often understood in a broader sense as the discipline that deals with all aspects of persuasive speaking or writing. Rhetoric deals with the persuasive dimension of language use, and more specifically, with the account of those properties of discourse that can make communication more persuasive (van Dijk 1988:28). According to Aristotle as cited by Alo and Igwebuike (2009:331), the ability of the speaker to persuade an audience has been linked to three forms of appeal: ethos, pathos and logos. While ethos deals with the speaker’s ability to display a personal character which makes his speech credible, pathos is concerned with the power of the speaker to stir up the audience’s emotion and logos lies in the power to provide the truth by means of persuasive argument. Olateju and Adesanmi (2009:306) also submit that “politicians decide to employ the use of language as a weapon of construction or destruction depending on their political inclinations because they are fully conscious of the fact that language and politics are inseparable”.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study is based on Governor Rauf Aregbesola’s May 1, 2013 Address to the Osun State workers on the celebration of the annual anniversary of workers popularly known as ‘May Day’. The speech titled “Productivity is the key to Wealth” is analysed using the framework of Speech Acts theory to bring out the illocutionary force in it. Also, the analysis is done to explore the welfarist ideology of the government of Osun State of Nigeria. This is with a view

to revealing the intention of the speaker in using language to bring about changes in the hearers. The Speech Acts theory as propounded by J.L. Austin and modified by J.R. Searle is found useful and utilised in the analysis.

### Text analysis

For the purpose of analysis of the text, Searle's (1969) classification of illocutionary acts is adopted. The text consists of sixty sentences and these are analysed by focussing on the three major illocutionary acts found in the speech. These are: Assertives, Expressives and Commisives. Assertive acts are speech acts such as telling, describing, predicting, claiming, suggesting etc. Such acts can be seen in the following extracts:

1. You *will agree* with me, however, that workers *have* since *gone* past the industrial Revolution era.
2. Workers *are* the greatest asset of any people.
3. At whatever level, a critical issue that *has* always *soured* workers-employers relationship is appropriate remuneration, often leading to paralysis and government shutdown, with the generality of the people we all *pledge to serve* being the victims of this avoidable muscle flexing.
4. I *want* you to know, however, that no responsible government *will want to deny* workers their appropriate remuneration.
5. We *have been making* practical, conceited efforts *to restructure and modernize* the State's Civil Service for effective service delivery.
6. This *is done* in order *to ensure* that we *enjoy* continuous healthy relationship.

The assertive acts performed by Governor Aregbesola can be seen in the verb phrases in the above extracts. The act performed in extracts 2 and 4 is that of stating, while in extract 5, the act is that of announcing, that is, the efforts of the government to reorganize the State Civil Service. Assertives are used by the speaker to inform, state, explain and also to clarify some issues that are pertinent to having a good relationship between the government and the workers. Different acts of claiming, declaring, reporting, announcing etc are performed in the utterances.

Expressive acts in the speech are found in the extracts below:

1. I will like to thank the leadership of the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC)....
2. For this and many more, we appreciate our workers.
3. Let me thank you once again for the invitation to be here.
4. I wish us all a happy and fulfilling Workers' Day celebration.
5. I thank you for your kind attention.

The expressive acts in the above extracts are used to communicate the speaker's intention in relation to the situation. The speaker acknowledges and expresses his appreciation to the NLC. This is a strategy aimed at giving the workers a sense of belonging and according them respect and recognition. Commissive acts are the least employed in the speech. An example can be found in "Our goal is to transform Osun into a hub of economic development". Here, the speaker gives information on a future line of action. The act of pledging, vowing is indicated

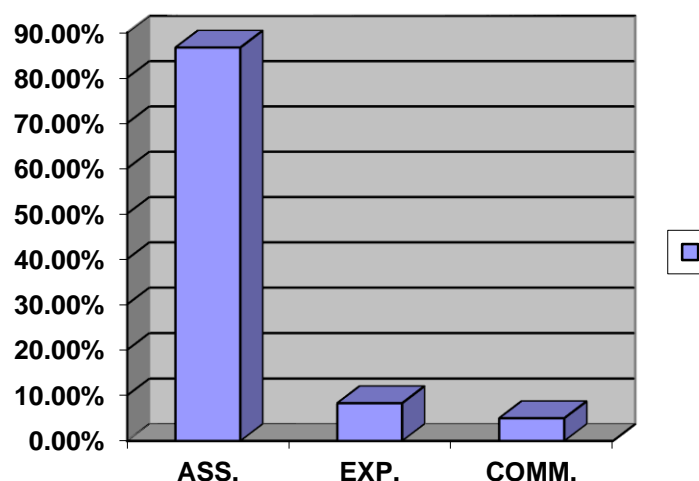
in the verbal phrase – *is to transform*. Thus, the governor performs the illocutionary act of promising to do something that will bring development to Osun State.

Our analysis shows that Assertives dominated the speech with 86.7%, followed by Expressives with 8.3%. Commisives are the least with 5%. The analysis shows that Aregbesola employed the use of language to state, claim, report, declare, assess, inform, solicit and promise in communicating with the workers. Thus, it can be clearly seen that his speech is highly made up of Assertives. This agrees with Enkvist views as cited by Ayodabo (2003:147) that “the style of a text is a function of the aggregate of the ratios between the frequencies of certain features and the frequencies of the corresponding items in contextually related norm”. The frequency distribution of the speech acts is represented in the following Table:

**Table 1: Frequency Distribution of Speech Acts in Aregbesola’s Speech**

ASSERIVES	EXPRESSIVES	COMMISIVES
86.7%	8.3%	5%

This is further represented in the following Chart:



**Figure 1: Frequency Distribution of Speech Acts in Aregbesola’s Speech**

The pattern revealed in the analysis shows the nature and purpose of the speech; it is an address to the Labour force in the State. Thus, the workers need to be informed about the activities of the government especially as regards workers’ welfare in terms of remuneration and other benefits.

### **Welfarist ideology in the speech**

Aregbesola’s speech features a lot of expressions which project the welfarist ideology of the government he represents. The governor took the advantage of the Workers’ Day to enumerate and project his government as welfarist. The extracts below highlight welfarist ideology as contained in the speech:

1. As of habit and necessity, our administration is very responsive and alive to the wellbeing of others.
2. We are using the vast instrumentality of government to address the fundamental challenges, all in a bid to make life more abundant for workers and citizens as well.
3. The current salaries and allowances have risen from about N1.3 billion in October 2010 to over N2 billion in April 2013. Consequently, since the inception of this administration, we have paid a little over N45 billion as salaries.
4. We have therefore paid N2.6 billion as gratuities and N8.6 billion as pension since our coming.
5. In comparison, while the last administration paid N1.1 billion as monthly salaries, we are currently paying workers N2.5 billion, which is more than double.
6. For the first time in the history of the state, our administration has revolutionised the payment of pension. Now, pensioners are paid directly into their accounts and not through intermediaries as was the case in the past. By this development, all forms of fraud and bureaucratic bottlenecks in the payment of pension are gone, thereby making the system more efficient, robust and transparent and eventually blocking all leakages and loopholes.
7. Government has already commenced the automation of salaries and allowances of its workforce with a view to entrenching probity, transparency and accountability. It is ultimately aimed at bringing about efficiency and elimination of the phenomenon of ghost workers in the system, thereby blocking all leakages, loopholes and fraud that may have bedeviled the system in the past.
8. Now, public servants' leave allowances are paid alongside with their salaries and allowances and it is based on their dates of birth. Government has approved the payment of such allowances to April 2013. The benefit and method is that the era of accumulation of leave allowances is gone. This is unprecedented.
9. The minimum amount of car loan applicable to public servants has been increased from N100,000.00 to N170,000.00 while the maximum loan available has been raised from N5000,000.00 to N750,000.00. The government has equally approved the monthly release into the Vehicle Loan Account from N10 million to N20 million (100 per cent). Similarly, the minimum housing loan available has been increased from N300,000 to N400,000 while the maximum has been increased from N600,000 to N750,000.
10. We do all these not because we have the money but based on the consciousness that it is by meeting our financial commitment to workers that the economy can be energised and workers can be put in the best position to fulfil their obligations to their employers and ultimately increase productivity and wealth.

In Extract 1, the governor stresses the importance of the workers and this serves as a means of maintaining a cordial relationship between the government and the workers. This is a propaganda aimed at winning the support of the workers. Propaganda is employed in political contexts to refer to certain efforts of the government and political groups. According to *Wikipedia*, propaganda is a systematic form of purposeful persuasion that attempts to influence

the emotions, attitudes, opinions and actions of specified target audiences for ideological, political or commercial purposes. Aregbesola sees the well-being of workers as paramount to the growth and continuity of the State. The statement is made to illustrate or demonstrate his administration's care for the workers. This is said to further garner their support.

The welfarist ideology that underlies Governor Aregbesola's speech and which projects his administration as assuming the responsibility and devotion to workers' well-being can be seen in the above extracts. This provides a kind of relief and high expectations from the worker who might have been expecting such gestures from the government. In Extracts 2, 3, 4, 9 and 10, the governor employs the use of figures and statistics to highlight the welfare package of the government. The figures given in the extracts suggest preciseness and are used strategically to portray the government as caring and willing to alleviate the suffering of the workers. The increment in salaries and allowances, payment of pension and gratuities, payment of leave allowances, approval of monthly release of vehicle loan, the availability of housing loan, and the automation of salaries and allowances of the workforce are all geared towards winning the support of the workers. This is further to show government's devotion to the promotion of workers' welfare, to show government's sensitivity to the plight of the workers and at the same time to enhance the reliability of the government. This is also propagandistic as the governor presents facts selectively to encourage the listeners. Apart from using facts and figures to propagate the activities of his administration, Aregbesola's speech contains loaded messages as can be seen in extracts 6 and 7. The information contained in the extracts and the reference to the past government may produce an emotional response in the hearers. It projects Aregbesola's administration in a positive way while the 'past government' is projected negatively. This is strategic and serves the purpose of furthering the political agenda of the governor and his political party – Action Congress of Nigeria.

The welfarist ideology in the speech is further revealed in Aregbesola's use of certain lexical items and collocations. Such usages include: *efficient workforce*, *well-motivated civil service*, *periodic training and unvarying promotion*, *healthy relationship*, *increased productivity*, *appropriate remuneration*, *economic development*, and *improved income*. These lexical items express the State government's concern for its workers. As noted by van Dijk (1998:12), "lexicalization is a major and well known domain of ideological expression" The noun phrases – *efficient workforce*, *appropriate remuneration*, *improved income*, *increased productivity* and *economic development* – all suggest that the efficiency of the workers will bring about good earnings and allowances which will in turn lead to economic development of the State.

The various welfare packages highlighted by the governor in his speech are also aimed at persuading and manipulating the listeners in order to win their affection and acceptance of the government. As observed by Lakoff (1982), persuasive discourse is a non-reciprocal discourse whose primary aim is to persuade listeners to change their behaviour, feelings, intentions or opinions by communicative means; the communicative means, being linguistic or non-linguistic. Katrnakova (2001) also notes that persuasion refers to affective or cognitive changes of message recipients and speakers employ different strategies to influence the audience. The expression in Extract 10 is manipulative. It is employed in order to exercise control over the audience to influence their knowledge, beliefs and actions. The Labour Unions often struggle for the members they represent and the government strives to win and sustain their support to avert any form of protest or strike. As noted by van Dijk (2006), manipulating people involves manipulating their minds and beliefs such as knowledge, opinions and ideologies, which in turn control their actions.

The expressions – “Now, pensioners are paid directly into their accounts and not through intermediaries as was the case in the past”, and “It is ultimately aimed at ... thereby blocking all leakages, loopholes and fraud that may have bedeviled the system in the past” as contained in Extracts 6 and 7 presuppose that the past government in the State had been involved in fraudulent practices. It also suggests incompetence and insensitivity of the past government to the plight of the workers. As noted by Fairclough (1995), any text is a combination of explicit meanings – what is actually said - and implicit meanings – what is left unsaid but taken as given, as presupposed. According to him, “presuppositions anchor the new in the old, the unknown in the known, the contentious in the commonsensical” (p107).

We note the use of the first person plural pronoun “we” in the speech. The governor uses the pronoun – *we* - severally in the speech and this is strategic. He uses *we* inclusively and exclusively to identify himself and his political party – Action Congress of Nigeria. This is exemplified in the following;

- We have been making practical, concerted efforts....
- We are very much aware....
- We are using the vast instrumentality of the government....
- ...we have paid a little over....
- ...we are currently paying workers....
- We have therefore paid....

As noted by Fairclough (1995:181), inclusive uses of *we* are a common feature of political discourse. According to him, “on the one hand, they (the government) claim solidarity by placing everyone in the same boat, but on the other hand, they claim authority in that the leader is claiming the right to speak for the people as a whole”. As also noted by Wechsler (2010:333), English first person pronouns can be used to “refer to any group of individuals that includes the speaker or speakers; that group may also include the addressee(s) and/or others who are neither speakers nor addressees”. Aregbesola’s use of *we* in the above extracts brings out his intention (the illocutionary act) and the attendant effects (perlocutionary act) on the hearers. This corroborates van Dijk’s (1988:82) assertion that “even if the listener or reader has understood perfectly what we mean – semantically or pragmatically – this is half of the intent of communication; we also want him to accept what we say, that is, believe our assertion, perform the actions suggested and execute our commands”. Through the speech, Governor Aregbesola demonstrates his administration’s commitment to the cause of the workers and expresses his concern as a leader to the people. The illocutionary force in the expressions therefore, is meant to inspire, motivate, encourage and manipulate the workers.

## CONCLUSION

Political discourse is extensively expressed through the use of language. Our analysis of Governor Aregbesola’s speech reveals the deployment of speech acts in his May 1 address to the Labour Unions in Osun State of Nigeria. The speech features Aregbesola’s use of Assertives majorly to inform the people about the state of affairs and to highlight the activities of his administration. Thus, his speech contains the illocutionary acts of claiming, stating, reporting, announcing etc. The speech acts employed in the speech contain the performative force to persuade, manipulate and garner the support of the hearers. The speaker also uses the advantage of the speech and occasion to highlight and project the welfarist ideology of his



government and his political party – the Action Congress of Nigeria. This reveals the thoughts and the political ideology of the party. It divulges the intention of the speaker towards garnering the support of the workers and it is also used to affect the socio-cultural beliefs of the people. This study shows the importance of language use for effective communication.

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