

## **Language and National Security: A Linguistic Study of President Muhammadu Buhari's Broadcast on the Unity of Nigeria**

Babatope, Joel Kehinde

*Department of General Studies, The Federal Polytechnic, Ado-Ekiti, Ekiti, Nigeria.*

---

**Abstract:** *This work offers a linguistic study of the Nigerian President Muhammadu Buhari's broadcast to the nation on the 21st day of August, 2017 shortly after he arrived from his medical vacation having spent 103 days in the United Kingdom. The study leans towards Halliday's Systemic-Functional Grammar (SFG) and J. L. Austin's Speech Act Theory. The data for the study were collected on-line from the Punch published on 21 August, 2017. Linguistic analysis was carried out at the linguistic levels of form (lexico-grammatical analysis) and situation (pragmatic analysis). The lexical analysis reveals the field, setting, and themes of discourse as well as the determination of the Federal Government to provide security for the citizens; the grammatical analysis reveals the use of declarative clauses throughout the text while the pragmatic analysis reveals locutionary act of giving information, illocutionary acts of warning and declaration of order and perlocutionary acts of withdrawal of quit notice served on the Igbos by the Northern youths, and the relative peace currently being experienced in the country. The study concludes that language, if effectively utilized, can serve as a veritable tool in achieving national security and unity.*

**Keywords:** *Language, National security, Linguistic study, Unity, Nigeria.*

---

Date of Submission: 23-10-2017

Date of acceptance: 04-11-2017

---

### **I. Introduction**

For decades now, there has been a lot of threat to security globally. Terrorism and waves of war ravage our society worldwide today. The threats to national security rear its ugly head in Nigeria in form of inter tribal war that was not unconnected with tribal diversity and religion. The foregoing has then left its negative impact on our society in form of internal displacement of Nigerians within Nigeria. If there is security panic in the society it has a lot of ripple effects on individuals, human productivity and national economy at large. The attention is usually divided in such a situation and society. This is somehow the situational trademark of the Nigerian nation. Several concerted efforts have been made by each successive government to provide security for the citizens. Yet, insecurity has continuously showing its ugly head in a more aggressive form. The Kaduna declaration by the Northern youth leaders on 5 June, 2017, demanding x that the Igbos living in the North should leave the region on or before 30 September, 2017 had been a major security concern for the government and the people of the country until recently when the quit notice was withdrawn by the Northern youth leaders shortly after the President Muhammadu Buhari's broadcast. The president's broadcast might have played a major role in the withdrawal of the quit notice.

Language is a pivot upon which human activity revolves. This justifies Ferdinand de Saussure's view of language in Lyons (1981: 52) that 'langue' is seen as a human-specific attribute that is (like a pool of water) collectively shared by the speakers of a given speech community. Language creates cultural and social bonds for those who commonly speak it. It promotes a feeling of oneness and trust among those who inhabit that linguistic world. Language is a means through which society perpetuates and renews itself by inculcating its essential values into the people and reawakening their collective and individual consciousness.

National security has been defined as the "...aggregate of the security interest of all individuals, communities, ethnic groups, political entities and institutions which inhabit the territory of...Nigeria" (Dambazua, 2007:152). In his interpretation of this definition cited in Dambazua (2007), Lt-Gen. Aliyu Mohammed, the former National Security Adviser (NSA) concludes that:

*National security from any perspective is about safeguarding the interest of the citizenry and providing the type of atmosphere that is free of threats and could inhibit the pursuit of the good of all. It is about processes and measures required to preserve law and order (p.152).*

Anything which constitutes a danger to the security of a nation is a threat. A threat could be economic, political or social, and the threat of crime covers all three major categories. Crime as a threat to national security impacts on all aspects of human security, thus: food, health, environmental, personal, and political (Dambazau, 2007).

## **II. Background to the Study**

President Muhammadu Buhari addressed the nation at 7am on Monday, August 21 after spending 103 days in London on medical vacation. In his speech to the nation, the president spoke about the controversial quit notices being issued in different parts of Nigeria and the demand for secession by a part of the country. He said the unity of the country was not negotiable and insisted that every Nigerian could live in any part of the country they wanted without threat of eviction. The speech which did not last up to 10 minutes, addressed issues majorly bordering on security and also the wrong use of social media in spreading fake news. While most Nigerians seem happy to have the president back, others are not so pleased with the president's broadcast. While some described the speech as all encompassing, others saw it as lacking in matters that affected Nigerians.

The broadcast under study is essentially a political speech – a branch of political discourse that has not been given attentions by scholars in Nigeria. No serious academic work to the knowledge of the writer has specifically address the President's broadcast to the nation on August 21, 2017. Previous works on political discourse include Oha's (1994) which focuses on war speeches of Yakubu Gowon and Emeka Ojukwu, the two key players in the Nigerian civil war from 1967 to 1970, Adegbija (1995) which examines discourse tactics in military coup speeches in Nigeria, Ayodapo (2003) which investigates forms and functions of hedges in a presidential media chat programme hosted by the Nigerian Television Authority with President Obasanjo as Guest, Adeyanju (2006) which deals with pragmatic features of political speeches in English by some notable Nigerian leaders, and Adeyanju (2008) which deals with language and style in a state of emergency. This present study is the first academic enquiry into the problem of insecurity in Nigeria through the linguistic study of the President's broadcast on the unity of Nigeria. It is, therefore, an extension of the academic work on political discourse.

## **III. Theoretical Framework**

This work leans towards Halliday's Systemic-Functional Grammar and J. L. Austin's Speech Act Theory. Systemic-Functional Grammar, according to Melrose (1991):

*...meets some of the requirements of a process-oriented model particularly with regard to the matching of form to function and incorporation of contextual evidence (p. 24).*

In order to introduce functional dimension to the theory of language Halliday proposes four categories of grammar: unit, structure, class and system. The categories of unit, structure and class described the form of language while the category of system is used to explain the semantic function of language. The semantic function of language according to Halliday is subdivided into three functional components: ideational, interpersonal and textual components. The ideational component is that part of linguistic system which is concerned with the expression of content. It has two parts to it, the experiential and the logical, the experiential being directly concerned with the representation of experience while the logical expresses the abstract logical relations which derive only from experience. The interpersonal component is concerned with the social, expressive and 'connative' functions of language, with expressing the speaker's 'angle': his attitudes and judgments, his encoding of the role relationships in the situation, and his motive in saying anything at all. The interpersonal function is achieved by the use of mood system of declarative, interrogative and imperative clauses. The textual is text forming component in the linguistic system. This comprises the resources that the language has for creating text: for being operationally relevant and cohering within itself and contexts of situation (Halliday and Hassan, 1976:27).

Speech Act Theory is an important concept which relates utterance meaning to context. The theory of speech acts as developed by J. L. Austin (1962) and J. R. Searle (1969) has drawn attention to the fact that when we produced various utterances we actually do things. Such utterances Austin labels performatives and concludes that in 'issuing an utterance' a speaker can perform three acts simultaneously: a locutionary act which is the act of saying something in the full sense of 'say', an illocutionary act which is an act performed in saying something, and a perlocutionary act, the act performed (by the listener) as a result of an illocutionary act. He also suggests four 'felicitous' conditions that must be satisfied for utterances to be performative:

1. *There must exist an accepted conventional procedure having certain conventional effect, that procedure to include the uttering of certain words by certain persons in certain circumstances.*
2. *The particular persons and circumstances in a given case must be appropriate for the invocation of the particular procedure invoked.*
3. *The procedure must be executed by all participants correctly.*
4. *The procedure must be executed by all participants completely (Coulthard, 1977: 12-13).*

## **IV. Methodology**

The data for the study were collected on-line from the Punch on 21 August, 2017. Linguistic analysis was carried out at the linguistic levels of form (lexico-grammatical analysis) and situation (pragmatic analysis).

### **The Linguistic Study**

Systemic linguistics recognizes three primary levels of language: substance, form and situation. Substance is the raw material of language; that is, the means by which language is transmitted. Language substance is either phonic or graphic; phonic when language is transmitted by audible sound waves and graphic when language is transmitted by visible marks on a surface. Phonic potential in language cannot be fully accounted for without a reasonably phonological description. Phonology helps to throw light on features as alliteration, assonance, rhyme, onomatopoeia, rhythm and meter. Graphology is the study of the basic graphic substance of a language. Graphological features include the actual appearance of the text on the page, shape and size of the pages, use of different print types especially for stage directions, use of punctuation, italicization and capitalization.

Form refers to the way in which language substance is organized into recognizable bits. Form is subdivided into lexis and grammar, with lexis catering for the kind of patterning which operates between individual linguistic items, and grammar catering for the kind of patterning which operates between types of linguistic items such as verb, noun and adverb (Ajulo, 1994:12). In order to make explicit the fact that lexis and grammar are parts of the same level in language Halliday (1985: xiv) suggests a comprehensive term 'lexicogrammar'. There are two theoretical categories required for the formal description of lexis: 'collocation' and 'set'. Collocation is set up to account for the tendency of certain items in language to occur close to each other while 'set' accounts for the tendency of items to share part of their collocation range (see Spenser and Gregory 1964: 73-75). However, the formal description of lexis is limited, and semantics has been suggested to take over where formal description ends (see Spencer and Gregory, 1964:72). Semantics, according to Palmer (1981:1) is unarguably 'a part of linguistics' and is 'the technical term used to refer to the study of meaning'. The introduction of semantics will allow the possibility of viewing lexical items from the perspective of their semantic components. That is, the total meaning of a word will be seen in terms of a number of distinct elements or components. Grammar, on the other hand, is subdivided into morphology and Syntax. Morphology is an aspect of grammar which accounts for the grammatical units of morpheme and word while syntax is an aspect of grammar which accounts for the grammatical units such as group, clause and sentence.

The term 'situation' meaning the 'context of situation', in which a text is embedded, refers to all those extra-linguistic factors which have some bearing on the text itself (Halliday and Hasan, 1976: 21). The pragmatic analysis of language can be broadly understood to be the investigation into that aspect of meaning which is derived not from the formal properties of words and constructions, but from the way in which utterances are used and how they relate to the context in which they are uttered (Leech and Michael 1981: 290). Two important concepts which relate utterance meaning to context are Austin's Speech Act Theory and Grice's cooperative principle in conversation.

### **Lexico-grammatical Analysis**

Lexico-grammatical analysis accounts for lexical and grammatical features of language. It is a term suggested by Halliday for the formal description of language.

### **Lexical Analysis**

In this analysis lexical items are grouped according to their set membership. The assignment of items to sets is done based on the same collocation range shared by the items.

Some collocates in the President's speech help to determine the field of discourse as a political discourse:

1. National
2. Nation
3. Partisan politics
4. Federation
5. National assembly
6. National council
7. State
8. National discourse
9. Political evolution

Few collocates suggest the setting of discourse:

1. Nigeria
2. The country
3. Hometown
4. Daura

Some collocates help to determine the themes of the speech. The following items suggest the theme of insecurity:

1. Red lines

2. Problem
3. Trouble
4. Blood
5. Hindrance
6. Security agencies
7. Terrorists
8. Criminals
9. Attacks
10. Soft targets
11. Kidnappings
12. Farmers versus herdsmen
13. Clashes
14. Ethnic violence
15. Fuelled
16. Common challenges
17. Irresponsible elements

The following items suggest the theme of unity and peaceful co-existence:

1. Collective existence
2. A nation
3. One and united
4. Nigeria's unity
5. Co-existence
6. Together
7. Peace
8. Safety
9. Collective interest
10. Common challenges

Few lexical items suggest the Federal Government's determination to provide security for the citizens:

1. Tackle
2. Resolutely committed
3. Achieved
4. Maintained
5. Fought
6. Relentlessly

## **V. Grammatical Analysis**

As mentioned earlier, syntax is an aspect of grammar which accounts for the grammatical units such as group, clause and sentence. In this analysis, our main attention will be on the clause. This is because the mode of interpretation adopted here is a functional one, in which the grammatical structure is being explained by reference to the meaning. As earlier established, there are three principal kinds of meaning embodied in the structure of a clause. These are 'ideational', 'interpersonal' and 'textual'. In grammar, the interpersonal function of the clause is achieved by the use of mood system of declarative, interrogative and imperative clauses. A declarative clause has its subject preceding its predicator as in 'I am pleased'. An interrogative clause has either the subject included in the predicator or an initial WH element as in 'Is that your book?' and 'What is your name?' respectively. Imperative clauses do not contain subject elements at the surface structure as in 'Go out'.

Going by the systemic grammar explained above, we can conveniently say that all the clauses identified in the President's speech are declarative. None is interrogative or imperative. Examples:

1. The late Chief Ojukwu came and stayed as my guest in my home town Daura.
2. We both came to the conclusion that the country must remain one and united.
3. This is a step too far.

The subjects in the clauses above precede the predicators. The subject in example 1 is a nominal group with the structural elements of modifier and head (m h). The subjects in examples 2 and 3 are pronouns used to replace the nouns in the preceding clauses. The subjects in example 2 and 3 are, therefore, processes of anaphoric nominalization, a cohesive device which is used to achieve textual function.

The declarative clauses in the President's speech are used to give information to the citizens. The lack of interrogative and imperative clauses in the president speech shows that the president was not demanding information or commanding the citizens. He was simply giving information.

In addition to giving information, declarative clauses are also used to mark the President's humility and respect for his people. Interrogative and imperative clauses are marked for superiority, and lack of the clauses in the President's speech shows that the president did not see himself as superior to his people. Rather, he demonstrated that identified with them. It also shows that the President is truly democratic.

### **Pragmatic Analysis**

Three performative acts are identified in the President's Speech. They are locutionary act, illocutionary act and perlocutionary act. The locutionary act which is the act of giving information is demonstrated through oral mode of spoken words. This act also shows that the President is a man of action, cognition and affection.

The second performative act observed is the illocutionary act. This is demonstrated in the following examples:

1. We shall not allow irresponsible elements....
2. We shall tackle them all.
3. ...I am charging the security agencies....

The above examples 1 and 2 reveal the illocutionary act of warning to those who may be planning to disrupt the peace of the nation while the example 3 is a declaration of an order to the security agencies to go after the unscrupulous elements in the country. The use of transitive verbs of 'allow', 'tackle' and 'charging' reveals two participants: actor and goal. The actor is 'we' and 'I' while the goal is 'irresponsible elements', 'them' and security agencies in example 1, 2 and 3 respectively.

The third performative act identified is the perlocutionary act. This is the effect of the illocutionary act of warning on the concerned or affected people. The perlocutionary act is evident in the withdrawal of the quit notice earlier served by the Northern youth leaders on the Igbos living in the Northern region, and the relative peace being enjoyed in the country. Therefore, the perlocutionary acts can be said to be two:

1. The withdrawal of quit notice served on the Igbos by the Northern youths, and
2. The relative peace in the country.

The procedures for the performance of the locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary acts are appropriate, correct and complete. The procedures include the appropriate person, the President and Commander in Chief of the Federal Republic of Nigeria making a conventional broadcast in his official capacity as the President through appropriate media to the entire citizens of the country.

## **VI. Conclusion**

This study has attempted linguistic analysis of President Buhari's broadcast on the unity of the nation, Nigeria at the linguistic levels of form (lexico-grammatical analysis) situation (pragmatic analysis). Lexical, grammatical and pragmatic features are employed in the text to effectively pass the message of the author to the audience. The text exhibits an array of lexical collocates of a political discourse and the themes of insecurity and unity and peaceful co-existence. The investigation of the text's mood system reveals the overwhelming use of declarative clauses to foreground the President's humility and respect for the citizens. The author also employs pragmatic features to give information and warning, to declare an order, to resolve the conflict brought about by the quit notice served on the Igbos living in the North by the Northern youth leaders and to achieve relative peace in the country.

It is therefore clear that in certain institutional and national contexts where inter-group rivalry is severe, to the extent that development is hindered, language can be employed to achieve national integration and peaceful co-existence. In this way, it is hoped, inter-ethnic tensions and frustrations can be eased and the energies of the institution or country can be focused on development.

## **Reference**

**Primary Source:** Punch (Monday, August 21, 2017) [punchng.com](http://punchng.com).

### **Secondary Sources**

- [1] Adegbija, E. (1995). "I Major-General X: Discourse Tactics in Military Coup Speeches in Nigeria". *Text: An Interdisciplinary Journal of the Study of Discourse* 15(2), 253-270.
- [2] Adeyanju, D. (2006). "Pragmatic Features of Political Speech in English by Some Prominent Nigeria Leaders" . *Ife Studies in English Language*. 6 (1) pp. 48-63
- [3] Adeyanju, D. (2008). "Language and Style in a State of Emergency: An Illustration with Former Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo's Broadcast on the Crisis in Ekiti State, Nigeria". *Ibadan Journal of English Studies*. 5 pp. 59-73.
- [4] Ajulo E. B. (1994). *Investigating Lexis in English: Some Problems of Theory and Pedagogy*. Edo: Stirling Horden Publishers (Nig.) Ltd.
- [5] Aliyu, M. (2006). "Meeting Current Challenges to National Security". Lecture Delivered to the Participants of National War College, Abuja Nigeria.
- [6] Austin, J. L. (1962). *How to Do Things with Words*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- [7] Ayodapo, J. O. (2003). "A Pragma-Stylistic Study of Forms and Functions of Hedges in a Presidential Media Chat Programme on the Nigerian Television Authority". An Unpublished PhD Dissertation of the University of Ilorin, Ilorin.
- [8] Coulthard, M. (1977). *An Introduction to Discourse Analysis*. London: Longman Group Limited.



- [9] Halliday, M. A. K. (1985) *An Introduction to Functional Grammar*. London: Edward Arnold.
- [10] Halliday, M. A. K. and Hasan, R. (1976) *Cohesion in English*. London: Longman Group Limited.
- [11] Leech, G. N. and Michael, H. S. (1981) *Style in Fiction: A Linguistic Introduction to English Fictional Prose*. New York: Longman.
- [12] Lyons, J. (1981). 'Linguistics' *The New Encyclopedia Britannica* Vol. 10 15th Edition pp 992 - 1013
- [13] Melrose, R. (1991). *The Communicative Syllabus: A Systemic-Functional Approach to Language Teaching*. London: and New York: Pinter.
- [14] Oha, O. (1944). "Language in War Situation: A Stylistic Study of War Speeches of Yakubu Gowon and Emeka Ojukwu". An Unpublished PhD Dissertation, University of Ibadan, Ibadan.
- [15] Palmer, F. R. (1981). *Semantics: A New Outline*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- [16] Searle, J. (1969). *Speech Act*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- [17] Spenser, J and Gregory, M (1964). "An Approach to the Study of Style" In Spencer, J. (ed.) *Linguistic and Style*. London: Oxford University Press.

#### Appendix

##### The Full Text of President Buhari's Broadcast

- [18] My dear citizens,
- [19] I am very grateful to God and to all Nigerians for their prayers.
- [20] I am pleased to be back on home soil among my brothers and sisters.
- [21] In the course of my stay in the United Kingdom, I have been kept in daily touch with events at home.
- [22] Nigerians are robust and lively in discussing their affairs, but I was distressed to notice that some of the comments, especially in the social media have crossed our national red lines by daring to question our collective existence as a nation.
- [23] This is a step too far.
- [24] In 2003 after I joined partisan politics, the late Chief Emeka Ojukwu came and stayed as my guest in my hometown Daura.
- [25] Over two days we discussed in great depth till late into the night and analyzed the problems of Nigeria.
- [26] We both came to the conclusion that the country must remain one and united.
- [27] Nigeria's unity is settled and not negotiable.
- [28] We shall not allow irresponsible elements to start trouble and when things get bad they run away and saddle others with the responsibility of bringing back order, if necessary with their blood.
- [29] Every Nigerian has the right to live and pursue his business anywhere in Nigeria without let or hindrance.
- [30] I believe the very vast majority of Nigerians share this view.
- [31] This is not to deny that there are legitimate concerns.
- [32] Every group has a grievance.
- [33] But the beauty and attraction of a federation is that it allows different groups to air their grievances and work out a mode of co-existence.
- [34] The National Assembly and the National Council of State are the legitimate and appropriate bodies for national discourse.
- [35] The national consensus is that, it is better to live together than to live apart.
- [36] Furthermore, I am charging the Security Agencies not to let the successes achieved in the last 18 months be a sign to relax.
- [37] Terrorists and criminals must be fought and destroyed relentlessly so that the majority of us can live in peace and safety.
- [38] Therefore we are going to reinforce and reinvigorate the fight not only against;
- [39] elements of Boko Haram which are attempting a new series of attacks on soft targets kidnapings, farmers versus herdsmen clashes, in addition to ethnic violence fuelled by political mischief makers.
- [40] We shall tackle them all.
- [41] Finally, dear Nigerians, our collective interest now is to eschew petty differences and come together to face common challenges of economic security, political evolution and integration as well as lasting peace among all Nigerians.
- [42] I remain resolutely committed to ensuring that these goals are achieved and maintained.
- [43] I am so glad to be home.
- [44] Thank you and may God bless our dear Nation.

Babatope, Joel Kehinde Language and National Security: A Linguistic Study of President Muhammadu Buhari's Broadcast on the Unity of Nigeria." *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Invention(IJHSSI)*, vol. 6, no. 11, 2017, pp. 23-28.