

## African political speeches and pragmatic meanings: a study of president Goodluck Jonathan's 50<sup>th</sup> independence speech

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**Abstract:** This study investigates the semantic and pragmatic meanings of modals in President Good-luck Jonathan's speech during Nigeria's 50th independence jubilee. It involves analyses of the sociolinguistic, semantic and pragmatic implications of the independence speech. We examine the social characteristics of bureaucratic and political communication in order to bring to fore a coherent and well-defined approach in analyzing political speeches. This paper studies President Jonathan's speech during Nigeria's 50<sup>th</sup> independence anniversary using speech acts to identify the impact of the speech on the Nigerian populace, also to identify the meanings of the pragmatic clue(of modal auxiliaries) as used in the speech. We conclude that this is not an ordinary congratulatory speech to invite the Nigerian to vote for the ruling party as identified in the 46th anniversary independence speech of former Nigerian president, Obasanjo, but a tailored speech intended to remind Nigerians that our future and development as a nation depends on our unity and urge them to forget tribal and religious differences and foster unity among its diverse tribes. The President extolled the virtues and sacrifices of the founding fathers that made compromises in the midst of ethnic and religious differences in order to build a unified nation. He regretted the actions of certain individuals whose intensions have been geared towards destabilizing the foundation of our unity. The president used the modal auxiliaries: will (intention), must (obligation), can (ability) more in his speech to prove his good intentions for the wellbeing of Nigeria, the obligations before him and Nigerians to build a virile nation, and the ability of Nigerians to do things right. We therefore conclude that the President's speech is not just a congratulatory message common during independence anniversaries, but one intended to encourage and stir up Nigerians to work together towards building a nation where future generations would live in peace and unity.

**Key-words:** Political discourse. Semantic-pragmatic meaning. Sociolinguistic implications.

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## INTRODUCTION

Language is an effective means of controlling people's opinion in social, cultural and political context. In political settings, language remains a weapon to invade nations of the world, organize people's mind and opinion and control societies with varied socio-cultural backgrounds. It is also, the bullet which politicians employ to bring down their opponents, diminish their relevance, and construct a positive image for them. We agree with Dijk (1995) and Wei (2010) that Political discourse is an instrument of mind control by the dominant ideology. Political language refers to the use of language by the government or political parties to either encourage or persuade the society. The language of politics is aimed to persuade audience to accept the perspective of the speaker. It is the study of this nature that enables us to understand how language is used by those in power, those who wish to exercise power and those who wish to keep power.

This paper focuses on the use of modal verbs in President Good luck Jonathan's speech during Nigeria 50<sup>th</sup> independence celebration on the 1<sup>st</sup> of October, 2010. Modals in political discourse are employed as effective weapons needed in preparing the minds of the citizenry for the new dawn in Nigeria's political history and an independent and a democratic nation. In his speech, the president articulates a new ideological direction, which reflects on the pre and postcolonial efforts of past leaders and nationalists and urges the people to set a landmark as a legacy to future generation of Nigerians. According to Kamalu and Agangan (2010) political discourses like Independence speech, declaration of candidacy for political office, political campaigns, presentation of party manifestoes and other forms of political fall within the purview of deliberative rhetoric. They are aimed at marketing the ideology of the candidate or parties represented. Past Nigerian leaders are remembered for their eloquence of speech and oratory. Nationalists like Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, Chief Obafemi Awolowo, Sir Mbonu Ejike and Chief Mbad-iwe were known for their eloquence of speech and rhetorical prowess. Political leaders are believed to have risen to power because of their ability to persuade masses who votes them into power, just the roman plebeians in William Shakespeare's Julius Caesar who were easily swerved by the persuasive speeches of their leaders. In De Wei's words 'politicians rise to power mainly because they

talk persuasively to voters and political elites”, he stressed that politicians are endlessly geared to persuade voters to their own or party’s point of view.

## THE CONTENT OF THE SPEECH

This study for its data has examined the president 50<sup>th</sup> Independence anniversary speech delivered by President Good-luck Jonathan on the first October, 2010. The speech titled *Building on the Foundations of Unity and Progress* (<http://www.theinfostrides.com>). President Jonathan recalled the event of Nigeria’s Independence from colonialism on October 1 1960. The speech was informative in relaying and reminding the Nigerian citizenry who seem too have forgotten the efforts of the founding in the bid of ensuring Nigeria’s political independence. In addition, educating the younger generation of the commitment Nigeria’s foremost nationalist in the struggle for independence from colonial rule. As a political discourse, we discovered that as a political discourse just like other Nigerian Presidents’ speeches, it contains certain linguistic features. This further proves that political lexicon is a conglomeration of several semantic fields: defence, mass media, religion, commerce, economics, science and technology.

The president extolled the virtues and unrelenting courage and determination of the founding father in the fight for independence. In the midst of internal challenges and differences: tribal/ethnic and religious, forged ahead to build a nation where all would be proud of. He noted that they forgot ‘self’ but were driven by needs of the generality of Nigerians. As a result, the compromised their differences and made sacrifices to build a viable country where progress and peace reigned supreme. He commented on opinion of some Nigerians who sees no progress made in line with the dreams and aspirations of the founding. Such pessimists’ feel Nigeria would have been better had the colonial masters stay longer. An attitude, the president alludes as arising and justified by a sense of frustration. Nigeria’s failures catalogued in internal structural and institutional development, which has been as a result political instability and the military incursion into politics that had severally truncated the short and long-term developmental plan of the nation.

The president employed vocatives as measures in marking out or serialising the speech. The vocative-Dear compatriots was used a discourse move which seem to imply that we need not allow the challenges and the assumed past failures to blur our vision to forge ahead for a brighter future lying before us. He reminded Nigerians the need to celebrate our nationhood that it is time to take stock of our past, which will inform our future that it is time to look forward to opportunities, and challenges that lie ahead for Nigeria. Furthermore, the president recounted the success and achievements (science, medicine, literature and art) of Nigeria and Nigerians in the past fifty years of its nationhood. He emphasized that our greatest achievement as a nation is our togetherness. He therefore called on all to emulate the spirit and vision of our founding fathers to build a nation where our children will live in peace and harmony and enjoy good quality of life comparable to best the world can offer.

He further informed Nigerians that the 50th independence is a new era for Nigeria that it is in our hands to determine what we can make out of it. He enjoins every Nigerian to reawaken the spirit of the founding father. It is only through this we can build a great nation where future generations would be proud. He advised Nigerian to break away from the past and progress into a better future. Mention that made some selfish and greedy Nigerians who believe that things should work their own way else Nigeria should be torn apart. He reminded Nigerian that our founding fathers.

As evidenced in President Jonathan's speech, it is required of a Nigerian President to ground in all aspects of human endeavors, which are inevitable to political competence. The president Jonathan exhibited a good knowledge and familiarity of the Nigerian political terrain.

## DATA ANALYSIS

President Good-luck Jonathan was the major source of data collection. Sentences involving the use of modal verbs were extracted from the president's speech for analysis. The speech was recorded from live broadcasts of President Jonathan. The text was later downloaded from the internet for proper analysis.

## Locutionary acts

The data for this study is the presidential speech. It consists of forty-three paragraphs of varying numbers of sentences ranging from one to seven sentences. There are two hundred and thirteen major sentences that could be analyzed into subject (S), predicator (P), complement (C) and adjunct (A), while there are about thirty-two minor sentences that do not contain all the important elements of the major sentences. The following are the examples of the two categories of sentences:

- a) They did not dream of a country where neighbours and friends would exchange bullets in place of handshakes. (major sentence);
- b) This is also a time for stocktaking, to consider our past so that it will inform our future. (major sentence);
- c) My fellow citizens (minor sentence);
- d) Dear compatriots (minor sentence).

In the presidential speech, most of the sentences are major sentences as a result; they have the locutionary act of full sentences. We agree with Asiyanbola 2008:217, that the illocutionary acts behind the speech can be implicitly determined as the performative verbs are explicitly or overtly stated. Furthermore, we shall attempt to determine the illocutionary act in each of the sentences through lexical and syntactic forms of the sentences containing the speech... it is through the examination of the illocutionary acts that we shall generate the perlocutionary acts or the effect of the speech on the readers (R) or the hearers (H)

In the table below, we represent the summary of the total number of sentences as in the online source.

**Table 1:** Table showing locutionary acts in President Jonathan's 2010, Nigeria's 50<sup>th</sup> Independence Speech

Locutionary Acts	Frequency
Minor Sentences	32
Major Sentences	213
Total	245

### Illocutionary acts and perlocutionary acts

In the speech under study, there are nine types of illocutionary acts, which have various numbers of occurrences shown in the table below:

**Table 2:** Table showing the summary of illocutionary acts recorded in President Jonathan's speech under study

S. N	Illocutionary acts	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Assertive	28	19.2%
2.	Informing	21	14.4%
3.	Confirming	18	12.3%
4.	Judging	27	18.5%
5.	Promising	17	11.6%
6.	Requesting	11	7.5%
7.	Greeting	6	4.1%
8.	Reassuring	3	2.1%
9.	Regretting	15	10.3%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>146</b>	<b>100%</b>

The assertive/command illocutionary act occurred 28 times out of 146 illocutionary acts identified. That is 19.2% of the acts fall within the assertive category. This is because urgency and attention that the Nigeria situation in order to build a nation void ethnic and religious dichotomy, but on unity in diversity.

- a) This we must build on! This we must strengthen! (Ph 27, S.6&7);
- b) To do this, we must change the old ways of doing things. (Ph 29, S. 2).

The informing illocutionary acts occur 21 times out of 146 acts accounting for about 14.4% of the total illocutionary acts. We can say that the president was quite knowledgeable of events of independence, the effort of the founding fathers hence his ability to discuss on event before independence and the trend of development after independence till the fiftieth independence anniversary of Nigeria. The president presentation of useful information was done in a manner characteristic of an academia. The information ranged from history, religion, politics, agriculture, economic, science and technology, medicine and the literary arts.

- a) While there were differences and disagreements, they did not waver in their desire to build a country that future generations would be proud of;
- b) They made compromises and sacrifices. They toiled night and day to build a viable country where progress and peace would reign supreme;
- c) They did not dream of a country where brothers would be killing brothers and sisters killing sisters.

The confirming act occurred 18 times out of 146 acts that account for about 12.3% of the total illocutionary acts. The president confirmed that though Nigeria has not indeed attained the expected height as an independent nation but has made impact in several disciplines. He noted that Nigeria may be at par with some of the developed nation as a result of laudable discoveries made in medical science by a team of Nigerian Scientist who discovered CD4 Lymphocyte baseline for testing people living HIV/AIDS, also Dr Louis Nelson's progress in medicine has aided in managing yellow fever which ravages the lives of about 123 million people globally. Professor Wole Soyinka, the first African Nobel Prize Laureate in literature, Professor Chinua Achebe, Ben Okri.

- a) This is also a time for stock-taking, to consider our past so that it will inform our future;
- b) In fifty years, we have in several respects attained heights that we should be very proud as a nation;
- c) If we could achieve so much under tough conditions, we are capable of achieving even much more in our journey to the Promised Land;

- d) While we may not have landed a spaceship on the moon or developed nuclear technology, the feats of our inventors and innovators have made globally acknowledged contributions.

President Jonathan indeed spoke with authority as one has a good knowledge of Nigerian politics and terrain. He asserted, informed and confirmed information given in his speech

The judging illocutionary acts occurred about 27 times out of 146 illocutionary acts accounting for about 18.5% of the total illocutionary acts. He president passed judgment on some Nigerians who are of the opinion that Nigeria has not made any appreciable success as a nation, but felt Nigeria would have been better as a nation under colonial rule.

- a) All these postulations, we must admit, are borne out of a somewhat justifiable sense of frustration;
- b) Clearly, these are indication that within us are potentials that can be harnessed for greatness.
- c) The future can only be brighter as competition in this sector breeds improved quality and better creativity.
- d) This should tell us something: that daunting as our circumstances have been. We are still full of ability and capability.

The promising act occurred 17 times out of 146 illocutionary acts which accounts for 11.6% of the total illocutionary acts. In his speech, the president resolved to fight corruption at every level which has been the bane of Nigeria's problems. It remains a challenge in our national and international outlook which has denied Nigeria a credible image globally. His intention is not to launder Nigeria's image abroad as was the case with past administrations but to stamp out corruption in its entirety. He promised to enhance Nigeria's economic growth through implementing the national fiscal policy.

- a) I will fight corruption and demand transparency so that we can all take pride in our government;
- b) Through various policies we shall continue to seek ways to grow the economy further, give our citizens greater opportunity so that we can compete better in the global market place;
- c) I am committed to the implementation of a national fiscal policy that will encourage growth and development;



- d) We will give priority to wealth creation and employment generation;
- e) I am determined to implement to the letter the recently launched power sector road map and I am confident that we will soon be able to provide the power that we need today as well as the resources to meet the needs of tomorrow;
- f) All the issues bordering on peace, justice and stability in the Niger Delta are being addressed and will continue to receive attention as we consolidate on the Amnesty Programme.

The requesting act occurred 11 times out of 146 illocutionary acts which accounts for 7.5% of the total illocutionary acts. In the informing act, the president charged Nigerians to emulate the visions and efforts of the founding fathers who besides all odds worked together for an independent and unified nation. The information was presented in a simple and clear language that there is a need for Nigerians to change the old way of doing things which has produced desired result and chart a new course of patriotism, integrity and commitment to good governance.

- a) We have the opportunity of imitating our forefathers by envisioning a new society where our children and children's children will live in peace and harmony and enjoy good quality of life comparable to the best the world can offer;
- b) We must reawaken in ourselves the hunger and aspirations of our founding fathers for a strong, united and prosperous, nation that shall be the pride of future generations;
- c) To do this, we must change the old ways of doing things;
- d) The core values of patriotism, hard-work, integrity and commitment to good governance must hence forth take precedence;
- e) We should not allow Nigeria to be pulled back again by those who believe it is either they have their way or the country should fall to pieces.

The greeting act occurred six times out of 146 illocutionary acts accounting for about 4.1% of the total illocutionary acts. The president used vocatives in the greeting act to create a sense of oneness and comradeship. It further buttressed the president's servant leader attitude that identifies the Nigerian populace as partner in this enterprise of renewing the Nigerian ideals. He further prayed for the goodwill of Nigeria and Nigerians. So it is assumed that the president performed functions of both a spiritual and a political leader and prayer for Nigerians and Nigeria.

- a) Fellow citizens
- b) My dear compatriot
- c) My dear brothers and sisters
- d) The great people of Nigeria
- e) May God Almighty bless you all!
- f) May God bless the Federal Republic Nigeria!

The reassuring act occurred three times out of 146 illocutionary acts accounting for about 2.1% of the total illocutionary acts. The President reassured Nigerians of his commitment of ensuring a free and fair election come April 2011 general election. The late President Yaradua had earlier declared that the election that brought them (Yar Adua and Jonathan) into power was fraudulent hence his stance for a free and fair election. The reassuring act of the president is a proof that president is not making empty promises of ensuring that a free and fair election holds in April 2011, but a determination to fulfill the promise of his predecessor late president Yar Adua who in his inaugural speech of 29<sup>th</sup> May 2007 states that “we (Yar Adua and Jonathan) acknowledge that our elections had short comings. Thankfully, we have established legal avenues of redress...I will set up a panel to examine the entire electoral process with a view...raise the quality and standard of our general elections and thereby deepen our democracy”.

- a) I have said this and I will say it again, with all the conviction in me: Our votes must count! One man, One Vote!
- b) We may not have overcome our challenges, but neither have our challenges overcome us.

The regretting act occurred 15 times out of 146 illocutionary acts accounting to about 10.3% of the total illocutionary acts. The president regretted the economic downturn of Nigeria, a nation blessed with abundant natural resources but impoverished by self and corrupt managers. He noted that inter tribal wars and crisis in Nigeria especially in the Niger Delta region fall short of the visions of our founding fathers.

- a) It is discomforting that we are lagging behind as the economic indicators among nations now show;
- b) They did not dream of a country where neighbours and friends would exchange bullets in place of handshakes;
- c) We should not allow Nigeria to be pulled back again by those who believe it is either they have their way or the country should fall to pieces.

Modal verbs are identified in President Jonathan's speech were also analyzed for meaning implications. According to Kosur (2010), Aremo (2004), Muir (1972), Quirk and Greenbaum (1973) modal auxiliaries express the subjective attitude of the speaker, which includes opinions about possibility, probability, necessity, obligation, permissibility, ability, desire, and contingency. The nine modal verbs in English are: Can/ could, may /might, must, shall / should, will /would.

The eight modal auxiliaries used in the presidential speech under study are: **may, will, would, shall, should, must, can, could.**

The use of the modal auxiliary WILL in the president speech implies the intention of the president himself/ the president and his cabinet: promising the Nigerian populace a better which lies on the youth-Nigeria's greatest resource. The modal **will**, which occurred 14 times (25.9%), was a way of declaring the good intentions of the president for the nation. He expressed his intentions f rebuilding the Nigerian economy.

- a) I will like to speak to Nigeria's' greatest resource: our young people;
- b) That is how this generation will make its mark;
- c) That is how we will make the most of these opportunities;
- d) That is how we will ensure that, five decades from now as our children and grand children celebrate our nation's centennial as a republic;
- e) We will be remembered as having contributed to the great history of Nigeria;
- f) We will rebuild our economy by continuing the implementation of the reforms in the banking and other sectors to ensure economic progress.

The modal auxiliary MAY which occurred 8 times (14.8%) of the total modal auxiliaries was used to express probable differences in our beliefs, language and culture, yet we need to tolerate one another as people within a plural society working towards a common goal.

- a) Our faith may be different;
- b) We may not speak the same language;
- c) We may not eat the same kind of food. However, we are in a plural society where we have continued to accommodate one another and integrate without reservations.

The modal auxiliary CAN which occurred 9 times (16.8%) of the total modals expressed the ability of Nigerians to do things right. It is within our power to resolve our differences, contribute to the well-being of Nigerians, and also move the nation to a prime of place in the community of nations.

- d) We can choose to focus on the imperfections and problems that easily beset us as a nation or we choose to focus on the unlimited possibilities that we have;
- e) We are neighbours who sometimes offend each other but can always sit down to talk over our differences.

The frequency of occurrence of the modal auxiliary MUST is higher than any other. The modal MUST occur 18 times (33.3%) of the total number of modal auxiliaries. It refers to the assertive/commanding illocutionary act in the presidential speech. It was used in the president's speech as emphasis for the need for all Nigerians to be involved in rebuilding the nation. It is say that Nigerians understand the language of force based on our past military rule experiences.

- a) This we must build on! This we must strengthen!
- b) We must reawaken in ourselves the hunger and aspirations of our founding fathers for a strong, united and prosperous, nation that shall be the pride of future generations;
- c) To do this, we must change the old ways of doing things;
- d) The core values of patriotism, hard-work, integrity and commitment to good governance must hence forth take precedence;
- e) The new Nigeria ahead of us, the new Nigeria we have to build together, is a society where everybody must feel at home;
- f) It must be a place we can all be happy, comfortable and confident to call our country;
- g) It is not just enough for us to talk about how Nigeria can be great; it is our duty to make Nigeria great;
- h) We can change Nigeria from our communities, villages and cities;
- i) We must not allow our future to pass us by;
- j) We must grasp it and shape it, drawing on the same spirit and vision that inspired our founding fathers fifty years ago;

- k) When God give you an opportunity, you must use it to His glory and to the glory of His creations;
- l) We must therefore pay special attention to the advancement of our democracy through credible elections;
- m) We must have a new sense of purpose and a determination to make things work;
- n) **We must collectively transform Nigeria.**

Modal Auxiliaries	Frequency	Percentage
1. Modal auxiliary <b>will</b> signifying <b>intention</b>	14	25.9%
2. Modal auxiliary <b>would</b> signifying <b>desires</b>	4	7.4%
3. Modal auxiliary <b>may</b> signifying <b>probability</b> and <b>possibility</b>	8	14.8%
4. Modal auxiliary <b>must</b> signifying <b>obligation</b>	18	33.3%
Modal auxiliary <b>could</b> signifying <b>possibility</b>	2	3.70%
6. Modal auxiliary <b>can</b> signifying <b>ability</b>	9	16.8
7. Modal auxiliary <b>should</b> signifying <b>necessity</b>	2	3.70%
6. Modal auxiliary <b>shall</b> signifying <b>futurity</b>	1	1.85%
<b>Total</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>100%</b>

## CONCLUSION

The concern of this paper is the investigation of the semantic and pragmatic meaning of president Good luck Jonathan's 50<sup>th</sup> Independence anniversary speech delivered on October 1, 2010. Our intension in this study has been on the linguistic meaning of the text, its effects and impacts on the Nigerian populace as the intended consumers of the speech. It made use of the speech act theory in identification of meanings and intentions of the speaker in the speech. In addition, the pragmatic clue of modal auxiliaries was examined and their meaning in the speech identified. In this study that the speech was well intended for the good of Nigeria and the Nigerian citizenry. It differed from some of the past Independence speeches, which either presented congratulatory messages only or intended to draw the sympathy of the Nigerian in order to vote for the ruling party. However, President Jonathan's speech shows him as a

man of good intentions who is greatest concern is on the well-being of Nigeria and the Nigerians. The president in his speech appreciated the efforts of the founding fathers of the independent Nigeria, so encouraged Nigerians to be aligned with their visions for Nigeria. The president used the modal auxiliaries: will(intention), must(obligation), can(ability) more in his speech to prove his good intentions for the wellbeing of Nigeria, the obligations before him and Nigerians to build a virile nation, and the ability of Nigerians to do things right. We therefore conclude that the President's speech is not just a congratulatory message as is common during independence anniversaries, but one intended to encourage and stir up Nigerians to work together towards building a nation where future generations would live in peace and unity. Finally, we observed from our corpus the president's speech is a gamut of illocutionary act of promising, advising, directing, warning, appealing, declaring, asserting, entreating and personal commitment.

**Resumo:** Este estudo investiga os significados semântico-pragmáticos do modal – intenção (quero), obrigação (devo), capacidade (posso) – no discurso do presidente Goodluck Jonathan durante o jubileu de 50 anos de independência da Nigéria, e faz uma análise das implicações sociolinguísticas. Levando em conta as características sociais da comunicação burocrático-política, traz à tona uma abordagem coerente e bem definida na análise de discursos políticos. Tendo em foco o discurso do presidente Jonathan durante o 50º aniversário da independência da Nigéria para identificar o impacto do discurso sobre a população nigeriana, também para identificar os significados da ideia pragmática. Conclui que este não é apenas um discurso de congratulações apenas, mas um discurso destinado a lembrar-nos (nigerianos) que o futuro e o desenvolvimento como nação depende da vontade e da união de todos e exorta-nos a esquecer as diferenças tribais e religiosas e promover a unidade entre as diversas tribos. Lamentou as ações dos que intencionam desestabilizar a unidade nigeriana. Concluímos, portanto, que o discurso do presidente é, antes de tudo, uma mensagem destinada a incentivar e despertar os nigerianos para o trabalho conjunto da construção de uma nação onde as futuras gerações viveriam em paz e unidade.

**Palavras-chave:** Discurso político. Significação semântico-pragmática. Implicações sociolinguísticas.

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