

A Discourse Analysis of Language Use in The Speeches of Selected Nigerian Women Entrepreneurs

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Abstract

Several women in Nigeria have contributed their quota to the national growth, socio-economic advancement and even global technological development. In Nigeria in particular, there exists a crop of distinguished women who have worked assiduously in rebranding and uplifting Nigeria. For the purpose of discourse analysis, this work critically examines language use in selected speeches of women entrepreneurs in Nigeria with a view to revealing how their use of language is connected to their achievements in promoting Nigeria's development in the course of their services to the nation. The corpora comprise two selected speeches of Professor Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala (a former Minister of Finance, and later, Foreign Affairs, in Nigeria), and Mrs. Folorunso Alakija (rated the richest African woman entrepreneur). The paper uses insights from M.A.K Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics to analyse the transcribed data at three linguistic levels – lexical, grammatical and discourse. The findings reveal that through the frequent and consistent use of the first person plural, e.g., "we", "our", "us", the women collectivise actions and subscribe to the inclusion of everyone in working towards the new Nigerian agenda while the lexical items, "revamping", "improved", "environmental safeguard", "youth empowerment", "technology", "innovations", etc. show that they are interested in nation building for economic growth in Nigeria such that the younger generation of women can follow suit to birthing a better Nigeria. The study therefore concludes that women should rise up and take bold steps in educating and equipping themselves in the task ahead to move our nation to the next level in achieving set millennium goals.

Keywords: Discourse analysis, language use, speeches, women, entrepreneurs

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1. Introduction

"A lizard that jumped from high Iroko tree without falling said he would praise himself if nobody does". (Achebe, 1958)

With the changing world and global social experiences, the roles of women had also changed from the traditional roles of managing the kitchen and playing the housewife (Fapounda, 2010). Researches and observable samples have proved this in our present world, looking at the statistics and performances of women in various fields of endeavour. Several of these women are well known, and some not so well known. But as the proverbial expression states: "Many daughters have done virtuously, but thou excels them all."

This study is a discourse analysis of the speeches of two women. It also identifies and describes the linguistic and extra linguistic features that prove that African and Nigerian women in particular have large hearts and are concerned about the technological and economic growth of the dear nation on issues bordering women and

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youths, most especially the first speech of Mrs. Ngozi Okonjo- Iweala. She was a former Managing Director of the World Bank and the current Independent Director of Twitter, Inc. The speech contains her concerns about the banks of Afghanistan which was on the verge of collapse and how the economic downturn afflicting the country could be reversed. The second speech is by Mrs. Folorunso Alakija as earlier indicated, she is considered the richest woman entrepreneur in Africa, rated by Forbes organization (2015). Her focus was, and still is, on empowering the Nigerian youth, to equip the graduate and undergraduate job seekers, working class, and the self-employed youths in Nigeria with the knowledge and skills they need to support their families and contribute to nation building through entrepreneurship and innovation in Nigeria. In her words, quoting from her speech, after welcoming the participants of the 4th edition of her youth empowerment programmes organized for the Nigerian youth, she said:

“Our goal is to empower the Nigerian youth to enable them to achieve their individual potentials and contribute to the economy while also reducing vices in our society”.

Several scholars had carried out studies on women and their contributions to national development, technological growth and economic development of nations at local and at the international scenes.

Suleiman, Sikiru and Jimoh (2012) examined the challenges and contributions of women to the Nigerian economy and the strategy for achieving the millennium developmental goals; (MDGs) at Utara University Malaysia and University of Technology Adamawa State, Nigeria from 2001–2007. They concluded that if women were empowered, they could have done much better than they had done in their present position in the world, and that educating the female is not a waste of funds, as some men count it in the society. They consider the Beijing Women Conference held in September 4th – 5th, 1995 in China as a good starting point.

Alutu and Audu (2009) examine female participation in information communication and technological development in Nigeria and the implication for early career guidance from the University of Benin, Edo State, Nigeria. The paper encourages the Nigerian government to start the education of the female in ICT at an early stage. Their research was carried out on a cross section of working class women in various establishments in Benin City. Their study reveal that there was a need to develop a training programme for interested women, and organise enlightenment seminars for the women which, in turn, will ensure improved technological development in Nigeria. They implore the Nigerian government to carry out, as stated in the national policy on Education, regarding introduction of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) into the Nigerian school system at the primary level of education so that the Nigerian female children can compete with their counterparts at the international level.

Umar and Bakare (2018) researched on barriers to women participation in information technology in Nigeria, at the Open University of Nigeria. The study reveal that among issues such as socio-cultural and economic problems, religion and culture also deny the Nigerian woman access to effective participation in information technology, and the danger of such barriers is a consequent denial of access to the international languages that dominate the web. The study concluded that women should be fully engaged in the use of the internet so that they could also participate and contribute their quota to the shaping of the information society most especially in the northern part of Nigeria.

The main aim of this study is a discourse analysis of the language use of selected speeches of women who had contributed to the growth of our nation in various fields of endeavour, most especially in the fields of technology and entrepreneurship, not minding the social handicaps of the feminine gender as well as their many duties as wives at home. In addition, the study examines how the speeches of these women are connected to their achievements in promoting the image of Nigeria, both nationally and internationally.

The specific objectives are to explore and reveal the outstanding characteristics and achievements of our women, rising above their roots amidst many challenges facing women in the society, and to analyse and discuss those speeches that backup their actions, showing that, from their hearts, they love and desire a better society and they are ready to support the men in their efforts to move the nation forward by contributing their quota and finally promote themselves as role models to the younger generation of women, inspiring them to think: if God could help these women to excel and be outstanding in their various offices, they too could also do well later in life in their various fields of endeavour and be a blessing to the society.

2. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study is Halliday's (1994), metafunctions of language at three broad functional levels of language. These are the ideational, interpersonal and textual functions. "Language is an instrument of communication among human beings. They interact through language by talking to one another. This talk is termed "discourse" and its organizational structure has to be accounted for and studied, hence discourse analysis. Meanings emanate from such talks, and these meanings have to be analyzed, hence semantics (Osisanwo 2009). However, in this study, features of speech acts, contexts, word-level grammar of linguistic features shall be discussed.

3. Analysis of the speeches

In understanding of the speeches of Dr Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala and Mrs. Folorunso Alakija one has to start with the choices of their language features at the various linguistic and discursal levels. This study shall start with the linguistic level.

3.1 Lexicon-semantic and Grammatical levels

From the choice of words of the two women, lexical items such as: symbolic, desire, reshaping, future partner, equip, youth, just to mention a few were observed. That these women were determined to take up issues concerning their nation's development can be seen in their addresses on the issues of the next level for self and national growth and development.

The second observable linguistic marker and language use that make their speeches relevant to national development and love for people is their use of the collective pronoun: "We" and the first person pronoun: "I", spread over nearly all the paragraphs in the speeches. Samples are;

"... 'I' welcome you all to the 4th edition of our youths programme."Mrs Folorunso Alakija.

"All of us who have been in government..." -Dr Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala

"We should 'support'" -Dr Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala

"Our" own account....." – Mrs. Folorunsho Alakija

"Our target" – Mrs. Folorunsho Alakija

All the ways these speakers express themselves by the use of these pronouns in discourse indicate that these speakers align with the hopes and aspirations of the society and see themselves as the part of the society to solve the problems together and move the nation forward.

This frequent use of 'I' and 'We' shows that our women are strong and willing to work together with people for the progress of the nation.

3.2 Discoursal Level

At the discoursal level, there are many speech acts observed in these texts that prove that the women speeches examined in this paper are performing acts and the women are still putting efforts to see that our society is technologically advanced and entrepreneurially skilled. Performative words, sentences, and utterances according to Benhabib, Dallmayr, & Austin (1962) are action performing languages.

The term ‘performative’ will be used in a variety of cognate ways and constructions, much as the term ‘imperative’ is. The name is derived of course, from ‘perform’, the usual verb with noun “action”: it indicates that the issuing of the utterance is the performing of an action.”

Also observed are the informative acts by the women, showing that apart from the teaching skills obtained by their listeners to imbibe positive attitude towards our national development through their speeches, informative acts are bound to inform participants in the conference of new ideas, innovations, skills and techniques. Samples of informative acts in their speeches are:

...As a former Finance and Foreign Minister in Nigeria, I know that development is measured not in months but in years and even in decades ...

.....young people can offer the much needed human capital to speed up economic growth and foster sustainability of any country.....

.....In Nigeria today the youths have a wrong notion of the ‘get rich quick syndrome’

.....The World Bank is here for the long haul, but this commitment comes with clear expectations that a more selective and achievable set of benchmarks will be measured and monitored....

All the above linguistic expressions by these women are Rhetorical Strategies” that are used to coerce and persuade listeners in these conferences which may later in life yield positive results. This is in line with M.A.K. Halliday’s theory of metafunctions of language (1994) and (2004), that language performs functions of a given idea, interacting with others and social emphatic purposes to form good relationships and textual purposes meant for future references.

To Brown and Yule (1983), in a definition of discourse, “the analysis of discourse is necessarily the analysis of language in use”.

Also, Simchair(?) and Coulthard (1975); Coulthard (1977) which define discourse analysis as the study of language in use. Stubbs (1995:1) said that language is used in terms of social contexts in particular with interactions or dialogue between speakers. These are to support the notion or the idea that our women are performing and acting through their language use in the society. People are encouraged to take steps and move forward to the next level in any area of life’s endeavour, using rhetorical samples, this is in accordance with John Austin and John Searle, philosophers, both of who believe that language is used not just to describe the words but to perform a range of other actions that can be indicated in the production of the utterance itself.

Samples are;

“I encourage you to give this life-changing programme all the seriousness it requires....”

“Get involved ...”

“I also commend all the staff of the Foundation for their hardworking and commitment to the cause of this programme”

“Thank you Mr. Chairman for the opportunity to address this conference...”

“God bless you all...”

From the excerpts highlighted above, we can observe that language use in these expressions can motivate the listeners and move them forward and that there is still hope for the future, for an adage says: “When there is life, there is hope”.

4. Conclusion

This paper has examined the language use of selected speeches of two women who had excelled and distinguished themselves among other women in the society from the perspective of discourse analysis. And as seen in the study, these women had skilfully manipulated language and its rhetoric and discursal resources to speak to their listeners and participants at the conferences they were invited to, to alert them of the need for our society to rise up and take bold steps in educating and enlightening themselves, most especially our youths and women to the task ahead to move our nation towards achieving the millennium goals and move us from the developing or underdeveloped nation, as rated by Transparency International, to be among the developed. It concludes that speeches in conferences, meetings, are tools of informative, directives, elucitives that promote unity, harmony, interrelationships between language and the society for progress and economic development and confirms the theory of M.A.K. Halliday’s metafunctions of language and Adegbija’s layers of meaning that language put in use by these women can yield laudable progress for our economic growth and technological advancement.

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Appendices

1. SPEECH BY FOLORUNSO ALAKIJA

I welcome you all to the 4th edition of our Youth Empowerment Program and its first segment this year.

The YEP program has been designed to equip graduates and undergraduates, job seekers, working class and self-employed youths in Nigeria with the knowledge and skills they need to support their families and become a useful part of the society.

The first and second editions were restricted to the beneficiaries of the Rose of Sharon Foundation alone, however, we decided to open the program in November last year, and going forward, to both our beneficiaries and the general public.

Our goal is to empower the Nigerian Youth to enable them to achieve their individual potentials and contribute to the economy while also reducing vices in our society.

As you know, it is said that the *“idle mind is the devil’s workshop”*. When an individual is busy, he/she will not have time for negative habits that can destroy their lives.

Our target is to have 2000 participants at this program and as at yesterday, about 2666 participants had registered online to attend and I believe others have also registered onsite today.

The theme for today’s program is *“Reshaping the mindset of the Nigerian Youths – A step towards a better future”*.

According to the United Nations definition of Youth, they are regarded as *“persons between the age bracket of 15 and 24 years”*. Wikipedia says, this age group is about 34% of our estimated population as at 2017.

Young people can offer the much-needed human capital to speed up economic growth and foster sustainability in any country. This is because it is at this age bracket where they are the most active and productive.

Other major characteristics of this age bracket is their sociability. People in this age group are subject to influences that shape their future. If they are channeled in the right direction, they grow to become successful adults.

However, if they fall into the wrong company, they may end up to become menaces to the society at large.

In Nigeria today, the youths have a wrong notion of the *“get rich quick syndrome”*.



They want to make it at all costs. This is evidenced in the high number of crimes and social vices perpetrated by this age bracket.

Nigeria is in a situation now that if we do not curb these negative mindsets in our youth of today, the country will not have a beautiful future.

For those of you who are thinking of leaving the country, trust me *“the grass is not always greener on the other side”*.

If you don't develop these virtues, you might not be able to cope with the pressure of living abroad.

Today, we have seasoned professionals who will be teaching and sharing with you, information on how to better your lot as an individual. They have volunteered their time, energy and skills to impact your lives by sharing their wealth of knowledge and experiences with you.

I trust that after today's session you would have gotten the life skills to help you change your mindset to see the potentials that abound around you and opportunities you can tap into.

I encourage you to give this life changing program all the seriousness it requires. Make sure you take notes and make the best use of the information you are getting free of charge today.

On behalf of RoSF, I sincerely thank the Management of Yaba College of Technology who have continually supported us over the years.

I also commend all the staff of the Foundation for their hard work and commitment to the cause of this program.

Once again, I welcome you all to today's session.

Get involved! God bless you.

2. SPEECH BY Prof. Okonjo-Iweala Ngozi

As Prepared for Delivery



Speech by Ms. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, Managing Director, The World Bank at The Kabul International Conference

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen and distinguished delegates.

Let me begin by acknowledging the accomplishments that have been made. There is a great deal that is going right in Afghanistan.

It has been said that the fact that we are having this conference in Kabul is evidence of this. I agree. It is symbolic of Afghanistan's desire to control its own future. Afghanistan has invited the world in to see what they have achieved. The cluster process, which is the basis for this Conference, is an impressive exercise in development planning and implementation and we should support it. All of us who have been in Government realize how difficult it is to make trade-offs and set priorities when the needs of a country are so great. The World Bank is happy to have been a partner with the Government. We have managed for our own account and for the Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund (ARTF) some \$5 billion in assistance to Afghanistan since 2002.

The Government has improved its revenue generation and the essentials of a public financial management system are now in place. Last year, under the leadership of Minister Zakiwahl and the Ministry of Finance, Government generated revenue reached 8.9% of GDP, surpassing its target of 7.4% and representing an increase of 28% on the previous year. This gives hope that over the long-term Afghanistan can increasingly finance itself and reduce donor dependence.

Afghanistan's rich mineral resources offer a tremendous source of growth, employment and revenue for the current and future generations. Its potential, however, will only be realized if development is done in a transparent and equitable way and with a commitment to social and environmental safeguards that protect and benefit the communities where these resources are located. Improved regional transport links and trade will likewise be necessary to get Afghanistan's minerals (and other goods) to global markets.

Laws and systems are necessary to protect this birthright of the Afghan people from being wasted or captured by special interests. I congratulate Minister Sharani on the steps that they have taken. Just 2 days ago, the Government published its mining contracts in local newspapers and on the internet so that people can see exactly what is being done with the country's resources.

Successful national programs are delivering. A nation-wide basic health program is active in every province. The training of female community health care workers is saving the lives of women and children and demonstrates, in a very tangible way, that women matter. In education, school enrolment is now the highest in Afghan history and Government is turning its attention to education quality. To date, the lives of over 18 million Afghans have been touched by the National Solidarity Program and the \$1.5 billion roll-out of the program just approved by the World Bank's Board has just approved will enable the Government to reach every rural community in the country. This is powerful!

Now let me focus briefly on the significant challenges. First, the first national poverty profile completed by the Bank and the Afghan Government shows about 9 million Afghan people, or 36% of the population, are not able to meet their basic consumption needs. Poverty is spread throughout the country – and often the worst levels of poverty are in the areas of least conflict. This is an important finding. Donors need to ensure that assistance is equitable and effective over the long-run. Short-termism and an over-emphasis on insecure parts of the country too often feeds corruption and undermines Afghan trust because it neglects those people in more stable regions who are facing dire levels of poverty.



Clearly corruption remains a major concern. The World Bank fully supports Government's call to donors to hand over the reins of development spending in Afghanistan by putting more of its money through budget. At the same time, concrete improvements in governance will be necessary to give donors the assurance that tax-payers' money is being well spent. One example is that the good Public Financial Management roadmap presented today must be fully implemented.

Finally, let me say a few words on partnership. On behalf of Bob Zoellick, the Bank's President, I want to express our deep appreciation to the donors for their continued support for the Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund. It is a proven and reliable means for putting donor funds on budget in a transparent and accountable way. It demonstrates what donors and Government can achieve when working together with a common purpose. But in other ways, we could do better.

As a former Finance and Foreign Minister of Nigeria, I know that development is measured not in months, but in years and even decades. So in any country, we must always remind ourselves to be realistic and pragmatic. We must also be careful that our impatience does not harm what is already working well. Let us not load on good programs demands that they cannot deliver.

The World Bank is here for the long-haul, but this commitment comes with clear expectations that a more selective and achievable set of benchmarks will be measured and monitored. The idea is to use this to drive results. I propose that we think long and hard before having more conferences until we are sure of seeing more results. As donors we should put our support fully behind reform and good leadership. Donors should not, however, usurp the responsibility from Afghan institutions nor set unrealistic time frames. Reform is possible in Afghanistan – one only need to look at the progress at the Ministries of Finance, Health and Education, Communications, the Central Bank. It is not unreasonable to set performance benchmarks against which Government can be judged. The people of Afghanistan deserve nothing less.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for the opportunity to address this Conference.