

Oath as a Strategy for National Security: An Appraisal of The Nigerian Political Oaths of Administration

¹**Bosede Juliet AKINWUMI** E-mail:
akinwunmiore@yahoo.com Tel: +2347034488304 &

²**Olubimpe Olasumbo ADEKUNLE**
E-mail: olubimpe.adekunle@yahoo.com Tel: +2348101796333

^{1&2}Department of English
Federal College of Education, Osiele, Abeokuta

Abstract

This paper appraised the Nigerian Political Oaths of office designed as security measures to guide, and checktakers in order to uphold the rule of law and maintain order in the society. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and the Speech Act theory, were synthesized to consider how committing or limiting the vocabularies employed in formulating the texts of Nigerian oaths of offices are. Two oath texts – Oath of office of president and governor were purposively sampled for critical examination. Findings revealed that self-assertive expressions such as 'will be faithful', 'will discharge my duties', 'will abide by', deployed to demonstrate willingness and obligation are harped upon in the texts to the neglect of options that are germane to enforcing the translation of those promises into concrete actions. The paper opined that it should be included in the oaths taken that oath defaulters be prosecuted or impeached to serve as punitive measures.

Key words: Nigeria Political oaths of office, Security measure, Critical Discourse Analysis

Introduction

Security or protection is the third but by no means the least basic need of man apart from food and clothing, which cannot be discounted. It is an issue that is pertinent to individuals, families, societies and nations. Security can be appreciated better if considered from the perspective

of the opposite. Insecurity is a state of fear and despondency resulting from lack of protection which prevents peace and progress resulting in diseases, distress and even death. Insecurity at the national level can have disastrous consequences hence the need for national security.

National security can be attained through various means such as entering into treaties and diplomatic relations, through the use of arms and ammunition and by meting out punishment like imprisonment or banishment on perpetrators and agents of insecurity. Rules, regulations and laws are also measures designed by the society for security purposes. These rules and regulations are referred to as the Constitution of a country that control its affairs and are implemented by the leaders. In order to ensure that these leaders adhere to the dictates of the constitution, the leaders are placed on oath as security measures and serve as checks to these leaders.

Oath and oath taking is an age long security strategy used to ensure loyalty and commitment among groups and especially among leaders. Oath taking is a potent facility for securing and facilitating human relationships and communalism that has not been utilized to maximum effect in modern day Nigeria. In Nigeria today, the Constitution, is the legal document that contains the laws and principles that regulate governance and other institutions in the country. It harbours also, the oaths that serve as control measures for compliance with or observance of these laws. Leaders in their various capacities are therefore expected to take the oaths that should influence and regulate their behavior in office. The Political oaths of Administration in the Constitution are specifically designed for political office holders such as the President of the country, the Governors of States, the Vice-president and Deputy Governors, Ministers, Commissioners, Special Advisers, members of the National and Houses of Assemblies and the Judiciary.

The Oaths of Allegiance is a general oath that all these office holders must take in addition to oaths that are peculiar to their specific offices. It reads thus:

I, do solemnly swear/affirm that I will be faithful and bear true allegiance to the Federal Republic of Nigeria and that I

will preserve, protect and defend the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.
So help me God.

The key words such as 'faithful', 'true allegiance', 'preserve', 'protect' and 'defend' (the Constitution) one would expect should guide and control the leaders. However, in the country today, the offices and positions are now used to perpetrate corruption. Political leaders who took the oath above are the ones involved in money laundering, petrol bunkering, smuggling etc. These observations are the motivations for this paper which appraised the Nigerian political oaths of administration in order to determine its potency as a security measure.

What is Oath?

Oath is a socio-linguistic phenomenon that has been defined from various perspectives by different people. For instance, Silving (1959:1339), quoting Aristotle, the great philosopher described oath as "an unproved statement supported by an appeal to the gods". This implies that oath is a statement that is to be proved through future deeds or actions hence the need to enlist divine presence as a token of witness to persuade and convince the listeners. The New English dictionary and Thesaurus (2002) defines oath as "a solemn declaration to a god or higher authority that one will speak the truth or keep a promise". This definition also aligns with the earlier one that oath is deployed to persuade and convince listeners.

Amusa (2001:147), from a legal perspective, described oath as "a form of attestation by which a person signifies that he is bound in conscience to perform an act faithfully and truly, or an outward pledge by the person taking it that his attestation is made under an immediate sense of responsibility to God".

In addition to the function of convincing and persuading listeners in the earlier definitions, Amusa's definition harped on a salient function of oath which is relevant and crucial to security issues. Oath is a means of binding the taker in conscience to perform an act faithfully and truly. At the same time, it is an upward display of sense of responsibility. This means that oath taking should involve not just the outward deeds but

also the inward dispositions: and in fact, the whole being. Oath therefore, is meant to commit the taker totally to a course of action. In other words, apart from the social aspect, there is or should be a cognitive aspect to oath and oath taking.

Jegede (2011: 131) also defined oath as:

a solemn formal calling upon the divine to witness and to validate the truth of an action, event or statement, be it a rehearsal of past events or a promise of future responsibility through the manifestation of particular consequences.

Going by this definition, Jegede (2011) submitted that oath is the most effective way by which the truth of an expression and actions are validated and the only way by which the promise of commitment to or allegiance can be upheld. This definition also upholds the importance of language in the practice of oath taking.

Language and the concept of oath and oath taking

Language is a key factor in human relationships. It is a crucial natural resource for exploring life and as gregarious animals human beings derive their essence from associating and relating with other human beings. Enghlom, quoted by Nwadike (1998) corroborates this assumption in the following threads:

*Language is the key to the heart of the people.
If we lose the key, we lose the people, if we
treasure the key and keep it safe, it will unlock
the door to untold riches which cannot be
guessed at from the other side of the door.*

In essence, and as opined by Adeyanju (2002) there is no meaningful human endeavour that can be undertaken without the facility of language. Furthermore, Hayakawa (1964), in describing the power of language declares that language can be used in getting soldiers to march up a hill and the same language can be used to make the same people start to stone the marchers. This implies that inherent in language is the power

to manipulate human beings. If properly deployed therefore, language can wield more influence and have greater effect on man than arms and ammunition. This corroborates the saying, 'the Pen is mightier than the Sword'. In fact, human beings are said to be a sum total of words; the words spoken, the words heard and the words acted upon (Kwakpovwe, 2013)

Language is thus very crucial to the concept of oath taking. As a human social-philosophical undertaking, oath gets initiated and concretized as a social reality by the facility of language. Oath texts are made up of words and they are taken or administered on others using words. Thus, oath and oath administration are intricately intertwined in language.

Theoretical Framework

The conceptual framework for this paper is a synthesis of Pragmatics and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) because pragmatics studies "the general cognitive principles involved in the retrieval of information from an utterance (Kempson, 1986:561), while Critical Discourse Analysis is interested in how language use and social structures and ideology interact (Eggins, 1994). From these two broad frameworks, Austin's speech Act theory and van Dijk's concept of ideology were adopted for analysis.

Austin (1964), in his Speech Act Theory believed that utterances were not made in a vacuum but were rather used "to do things". He argued that many utterances do more than convey information, in fact, they were indeed actions performed, hence, they are Speech Acts. He categorized utterances into two. Those classified as constatives were factual and verifiable but those which he called performatives were not subject to truthfulness and falsehood conditions but were actions performed. Hence, utterances such as: '*I have bought a new car*' and '*He is a teacher*': are constatives because they can be verified as being false or true. Utterances such as "*I promise to buy you a car*, and '*I swear to God who made me*', however, are performatives because the acts of promising and swearing have been performed.

Another major aspect of the Speech Act theory is the three-fold distinction of speech into locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary acts which Austin claimed are crucial to a total speech act.

Locutionary Act

The locutionary act is the act of making an utterance with a specific meaning. It is the formal and literal meaning of an utterance e.g 'This is my house' 'I have two cars'.

Illocutionary Act

This is the act of doing something in the saying i.e. it is the act performed in what is said. It is the meaning intended in the utterance (locutionary act). Illocutionary act is the action performed by uttering some meaningful words. E.g I name this house, 'Jesus Villa'. The illocutionary act of naming has been performed.

Perlocutionary Act

The perlocutionary act is the effect of what is said on the hearer, e.g. shut up or I'll slap you! If the hearer perceives the threat (illocutionary act) in the utterance (locutionary act) and refrains from speaking further, then a perlocutionary act has been performed. Kempson (1977:51) summarized this three-fold distinction thus:

A speaker utters sentences with a particular meaning (locutionary act) and with a particular force (illocutionary act), in order to achieve a certain effect (perlocutionary act) on the hearer.

The illocutionary act is the crucial aspect of speech acts because it is the force that triggers performance of utterances. The force of these acts may be explicit (overt) or implicit (covert). Where an utterance does not produce a 'force that can ensure compliance on the part of the hearer, then the sentence is not likely to be effective. In the case of oath taking, oath texts are meant to commit the taker and bind him to his utterance/promises. This is possible where there is a perceived force in the words employed to so.

Teun van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach to discourse and the concept of ideology

van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach to discourse is premised on how his submission that contexts influence and control what people say and how they say it. To him, utterances have both mental and context models. Mental models are subjective representations of reality which include evaluation of events or situations which are stored in the episodic memory. Also included are personal knowledge and opinions, beliefs and the instantiation of general, socially shared knowledge or beliefs (Dijk, 2006c:367)

Context model is also a type of mental model of communicative situations which comprise of personal and local interactional constraints besides the social, political and cultural constraints. Implicitness characterizes mental models of text producers thus forming a basis for underlying hidden ideologies.

Ideologies are systems of social belief and values which are held in common by a group of people. Ideologies are cognitive and they indirectly control the mental representations of individuals. They govern people's mind to guide their behaviour or form the basis of their interpretation of discourse or text.

Ideologies are closely linked to power and language. They are linked to power because the nature of the conventions in which ideological assumptions are embedded depends on the power relations that underlie the conventions. Moreover, ideologies are means by which existing social relations and differences of power are legitimized. The close link with language is due to the fact that 'using language is the commonest form of social behaviour' (Fairclough, 2001:2).

According to Dijk (1995:248), ideologies are ...basic frameworks of social cognition, shared by members of social groups, constituted by relevant selections of socio-cultural value, and organized by an ideological schema that represent the self-definitions of a group. Besides their social function of sustaining the interests of groups, ideologies have the cognitive function of organizing the social representations (attitudes, knowledge) of the group, and thus indirectly monitor the group-related social practices, and hence also the text and talk of members.

Oath as Speech Acts

The political oath texts, precisely the oath of office of the President and that of the Governor are our data for this paper. They are analysed below in tabular form as speech acts.

Oath of Public Administration/oath of Office – The Presidential oath of Office

I, ...do solemnly swear/affirm that I will be faithful and bear true allegiance to the Federal Republic of Nigeria.	Commissive	Promising
that as President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, I will discharge my duties to the best of my ability, faithful and in accordance with the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria and the law, and always in the interest of the sovereignty, integrity, solidarity, well-being and prosperity of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.	Commissive	Promising
that I will strive to preserve the Fundamental Objectives and Directive Principles of State Policy contained in the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria;	Commissive	Promising
that I will not allow my personal interest to influence my official conduct or my official decisions.	Commissive	Promising
that I will to the best of my ability preserve, protect and defend the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.	Commissive	Promising
that I will abide by the Code of Conduct contained in the fifth schedule to the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.	Commissive	Promising
that I will not directly or indirectly, communicate or reveal to any person any matter which shall be brought under my consideration or shall become known to me as President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, except as may be required for the due discharge of my duties as President.	Commissive	Promising
and that I will devote myself to the service and well being of the people of Nigeria.	Commissive	Promising
So help me God.	Expressive	Praying

Oath of Office – State Governor

I, ...do solemnly swear/affirm that I will be faithful and bear true allegiance to the Federal Republic of Nigeria.	Commissive	Promising
that as Governor ofState, I will discharge my duties to the best of my ability, faithfully and in accordance with the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria and the law, and always in the interest of the sovereignty, integrity, solidarity, well-being and prosperity of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.	Commissive	Promising
that I will strive to preserve the Fundamental Objectives and Directive Principles of State Policy contained in the Constitution of Federal Republic of Nigeria;	Commissive	Promising
that I will exercise the authority vested in me as Governor so as not to impede or prejudice the authority lawfully vested in me as Governor so as not to endanger the continuance of Federal Government in Nigeria;	Commissive	Promising
that I will not allow my personal interest to influence my official conduct or my official decisions.	Commissive	Promising
that I will to the best of my ability preserve, protect and defend the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.	Commissive	Promising
that I will abide by the Code of Conduct contained in the Fifth Schedule to the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.	Commissive	Promising
that in all circumstances I will do right to all manner of people, according to Law, without fear of favour, affection or ill-will.	Commissive	Promising
that I will not directly or indirectly, communicate or reveal to any person any matter which shall be brought under my consideration or shall become known to me as Governor of State except as may be required for the due discharge of my duties as Government.	Commissive	Promising
and that I will devote myself to the service and well being of the people of Nigeria.	Commissive	Promising
So help me God.	Expressive	Praying

Oath as Ideology

The definition of ideologies proffered by van Dijk (1995:248) as ...basic frameworks of social cognition shared by members of social groups, constituted by relevant selections of socio-cultural values, and organized by an ideological schema that represents the self-definitions of a group..., can therefore classify oath texts as ideologies. This is so because oath texts are borne out of a mental perception of certain societal needs which are believed in by members of the group where they are used, (people or country) and are relevant to the socio-cultural values of the people concerned. Just as ideologies sustain the interests of groups, (people and country) as well as organize the attitudes and knowledge of the group, in order to monitor their social practices, oath texts in like manner are directed at sustaining group interests, organizing the attitudes and knowledge of the leaders of a group for the purpose of monitoring social practices that can facilitate social security.

Moreover, the practice of oath taking evolved from the need to ensure the sincerity, loyalty and commitment of man to a particular course. Oath texts are developed to be taken by all the individuals involved in a course to forestall treachery. Arguably therefore, oath taking is a strategy for security.

Oath taking is a common phenomenon in the Nigerian society. Oath taking is a practice among professionals, public servants, societies, social groups and between individuals. Among the occult group, oath taking is a serious practice that is not taken with levity. According to Amusa (2001), oath among the occult, which, he refers to as 'nocturnal' oath "is strictly adhered to in order to avoid the penalties which are the consequences of a breach". In essence, oath among this group is a potent strategy for social security. Moreover, according to Quarcopome(1987), oath was very effective in the traditional African/Nigerian society and the leaders used them as tools for social order. However, Amusa (2001) observes that oath-taking in the legal parlance in Nigeria today, "is more honoured in breach than observance." This implies that the political oaths of administration are defective.

Analysis of oaths of office of president and governor

The public oaths of office are divided into two parts: the promises and the conclusion or prayer. Language is the tool used to project these promises. The core lexical items of the promises are presented below with their possible interpretations followed by the conclusion.

Lexicalisation in oath texts and the interpretations

Lexical items	Interpretations
Solemnly swear/ affirm	Sincerely promise
Faithful	Loyal, trustworthy, reliable
True allegiance	Genuine loyalty
Discharge my duties	Perform obligations expected of me
To the best of my ability	Use my talents and capability excellently
Strive to preserve	Put all effort to protect
Do right to all	Be just and true to everybody.
Without fear or favour	Avoid partiality.
Devote myself	Commit oneself totally

The choice of words here makes the utterances performatives since they are promises and are directed at the perceived social needs which can ensure order and stability (security).

The second part of the oaths ‘so help me God’ is a prayer, a call for divine assistance. The oath of office of the governor has one additional clause (promise) to that of the president and is stated below:

“I will **exercise** the **authority** vested in me as governor so as not to **impede or prejudice** the **authority lawfully vested** in the president of the Federal Republic of Nigeria and so as not to **endanger** the **continuance** of Federal Government in Nigeria”.

The implications of the promises in this clause; indicated by the highlighted lexical items is that the governor will be submissive to the president for security reasons.

Discussions

A close consideration of the content of these Nigerian political oaths above is necessary so as to determine its potency in stemming the tide of security challenges in the country. There are two assumptions in these oath texts. Assumptions about leaders and assumptions about the lexical options adopted for the composition of the oath texts. First, it is assumed that the leaders who take these oaths are reliable, trustworthy, capable, dependable and venerable, so after taking the oaths, they are expected to deal with the people they are serving according to the dictates of the promises made. The second assumption is that the oath content has the necessary illocutionary force to ensure compliance. Experience however, shows something to the contrary. For instance, an example of an oath violated by leaders is that of Assets declaration. Clearly stated in the Constitution of Nigeria, Section 52 (1) is the article below:

Declaration of Assets and Liabilities; Oath of Members

Every member of the Senate or House of Representatives shall, before taking his seat, declare his assets and liabilities as prescribed in the Constitution and subsequently take and Subscribe the Oath of Allegiance and the oath of membership as prescribed in the Seventh Schedule to the Constitution before the President of the Senate or, as the case may be, the speaker of the House of Representatives...

The oaths taken notwithstanding, corruption and insecurity are widespread in the society. It is now history that a top notch decision and lawmaker in the country violated this injunction and yet remains in position of authority to date.

An important observation about the diction of the oaths is that they are self-expressive. The personalities involved and their dispositions are simply assumed. The clauses in the oath texts have to do with what the oath takers promised to do in the interest of the country, but there are no clauses in the oath stating clearly what the country would/should do

to the oath taker who does not live up to expectation. For instance, it should be stated clearly in the oath texts that any taker who fails to live up to expectation will be prosecuted and sentenced without an option of fine. Secondly, the choice of lexical items are mainly denotative (plain/ /literal) and there are no communal echoes (beliefs/customs/practices) which typify and an African setting and which border on the core values of being one's brother's keeper. The oath content therefore is individualistic. Finally, the concluding clause, 'so help me God' which is purposively deployed to indicate the invitation of the divine to witness and/or sanction oath takers incidentally connotes other meanings. The first word 'so' that starts the clause is an adverb which can express manner, agreement or confirmation'. In this case, it is used to mean a confirmation of what had been said earlier. Invariably, the oath taker appears to be the decision maker (promising this and that) who also ratifies the decision by soliciting the help of God, not His judgment, nor his wrath. The content of the oath therefore is lacking in capacity to bind the taker to the promises made. Going by the speech act theory therefore, the content of the oath texts in English in Nigeria lack the illocutionary force hence the apparent ineffectiveness. Little wonder therefore that looters of the nation's treasury and confirmed assassins are allowed to go free.

English as the language of public administration oath texts in Nigeria

The English language has come to stay in Nigeria. In fact, the English language has become so domesticated that we have the Nigerian brand which native speakers of English may not be able to interpret off hand due to certain contextual factors. This invariably boils down to the fact of indispensability of context in interpretation of language. The extent of domestication of English notwithstanding, certain aspects of the Nigerian culture cannot and have not been adequately expressed using the English language because appropriate situational (Nigeria) contexts which Omole (1985), referred to as the

extra-verbal elements of communication such setting (including context of culture), participants, intent and effect, medium, genre and interactional norms

cannot all be captured by the English language. The public administration oath texts in English in Nigeria are lacking in these “extra verbal elements of communication” and our argument is that whatever will exert influence on the behaviour of people must reflect social rules which emanate from cultural norms and values. The public administration oath texts in Nigeria which is expected to guide the leaders of the country and serve as a security measure is grossly ineffective because the oath content does not contain social rules which place demands of compliance on the conscience of the takers hence there is no obligation on their part.

To corroborate the lack of “extra-verbal elements of communication...” in the Nigerian public administration texts, it has been observed that Nigerian leaders will rather take oaths using the Bible or Qur’an than cutlass or gun even if they are idol worshippers because the cultural implication of the use of cutlass or gun is too obvious to be risked.

Summary and Conclusion

Shakespeare affirms that, “there is no art to find the mind’s construction in the face” (Macbeth, Act 2 Scene 4). This corroborates the Bible’s description of the human heart as being “deceitful above all things and desperately wicked;...” (Jeremiah 17:9).

These submissions imply that human nature is prone to crime ...nobody is immune to crime, (whether) rich or poor, young or old, elite or non-elite....”(Oduwole 2002) These submissions are pointers to the fact that to guarantee peaceful co-existence among unpredictable human beings there must be a confirmed means of binding those involved. This paper submits that the political oath texts in Nigeria do not invoke those conditions that are capable of binding the taker to promises made.

Recommendations

Going by the apparent loopholes observed in the current oath texts being administered to public officers, it is important to recoin the public officers’ oath to include the following clauses:

- Clauses that spell out in clear terms their duties to the society.
- Clauses that spell out their commitment to transparency.

- Inclusion of punitive sanctions such as imprisonment or imprisonment of the officers concerned should be stated in the Constitution of the Country.
- Inclusion of punitive divine action in the last clause which says “so help me God” to read: “so help me God to deliver but punish me if I default” or breach the trust to enrich myself..

Finally, this paper is of the view that public administration oaths should be written and taken in the dialect of the taker.

References

- Adeyanju, D.S. (2002), *Sociolinguistics: An Introductory Insight in* Babatunde, S.O. and Adeyanju, D.S. (ed) (2002). *Language, Meaning and Society*. Ilorin: Hayteee Press.
- Amusa, K.O. (2001), *Oath Taking Conundrum – The Legal Perspective*: Olabisi Onabanjo University Law Journal Vol. 3: 146-174
- Dijk, T.A. van (2006), *Discourse, Context and Cognition, Discourse Studies*. SAGE. Vol. 8(1): 159 – 197.
- Fairclough, N. (2001), *Language and Power*, London: Pearson education LTD.
- Hayakawa, S.I. (1964), *Language in Thought and Action*, New York: Harcourt Brace and World
- Jegede, C.O. (2011), *Shrines, oath taking and jurisprudence in Yoruba and Igbo religions in Nigeria*, Germany: Lambert Publishing Company.
- Kempson, R.A. (1997), *Semantic Theory*, London: Cambridge University Press. Kwakpovwe, C.E. (2013), *Our Daily Manna* (April – June) Lagos: Our Daily Manna. Nwadike, I.U. (1998), *“The role of Igbo language in enhancing National Unity*. Ibadan: Lolyen communication.
- Oduwole, E.O. (2002), *The Concept of Truth in Yoruba Language: An Exercise in Conceptual Decolonization*. Unpublished Ph.D Thesis U.I.
- Omole, J.O. (1985), *A sociolinguistic analysis of Wole Soyinka’s: The Interpreters*. Unpublished Ph.D Thesis. Winsconsin-mill Waukee University.
- Silving, H. (1959), *The oath 1: The Yale Law Journal. Vol 68 (7): 1330-388.*