

**A Speech Act Analysis of the Formal Declaration of Interest for  
Presidency and Inaugural Speeches of  
President Muhammadu Buhari**

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**President Muhammadu Buhari**

Courtesy: <http://www.tori.ng>

**Abstract**

This study investigated the speech acts of two political speeches of President Muhammadu Buhari. The speech acts of locution, illocution and perlocution were analyzed using the Speech Acts Theory of Austin (1962) and Searle (1969) using the illocutionary acts of directive, expressive, declarative, verdictive, commissive and assertive. The data for the study were drawn from two political speeches of the President- Formal Declaration of Interest for Presidency and Inaugural Speeches- which were judgmentally selected. Also, these speeches were labelled A and B and ten sentences were extracted from each of them thereby generating a

total of 20 sentences from which 40 speech acts (direct and indirect illocutionary acts) were obtained. These speech acts were further analyzed using the quantitative research methodology (descriptive survey method). The analysis of data revealed that the Overall Relative Frequency Percentages (ORFPs) of the said speeches were: commissive (60%), assertive (70%), directive (20%), expressive (15%), verdictive (20%) and declarative (15%). From the data analysis, it was revealed that the President employed more assertives and commissives so as to indicate the sincerity of his intentions, to assure the masses and to make promises. The study concluded on the note that the President should match his words with the necessary actions as the people still believe and hope in his change mantra.

**Key words:** President Muhammadu Buhari, formal declaration of interest and inaugural speeches, speech act theory, pragmatics, political language.

## **Introduction**

Language is a unique attribute of humans, which is used as a chief medium of communication, for building interpersonal relationships, exchange of ideas and passing of information. Martinet defines it as “a formidable instrument of communication... by which human experience is analysed...” (1970). It does not exist in a vacuum as a system of communication, but operates in a context of situation. It is these contexts which determine the variations in language that we call register. Politics has to do with the struggle for power in order to put certain political, economic and social ideas into practice (Bayram 2010). For a politician to win any political office, he must master the art of rhetoric (language) which is the ability to communicate effectively and convincingly. Chilton (1998) subscribes to this view when asserts that politics is “the art of governance and power” while language is “the universal capacity of humans in all societies to communicate”. Politics is concerned with power to make decisions, control resources, and control other people’s behaviour and, at times to control their values. In this process, language plays a crucial role, for every political action is prepared, accompanied, influenced and played by language. Language, therefore, plays an important role in politics because its main function in different political situations is to enable politicians to form structurally stable social relationships. In other words, regimes, whether totalitarian or democratic have to communicate so as to inform, persuade, advertise, issue rules and regulations, legislate, and so on (Gunta and Karapetjana 2009). Taiwo (2009) observes that language conveys

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Cynthia Nkechinyere Okoro, M.A.

A Speech Act Analysis of the Formal Declaration of Interest for Presidency and Inaugural Speeches of President Muhammadu Buhari

power. It moves people to exercise their franchise, debate and even revolt. It is therefore a central explanation of political stability or polarization. Sharndana and Mgbemema are of the opinion that the language of politicians is characterized by their ability to manipulate the linguistic resources in order to sell their political ideologies and manifestoes to the electorates (2015).

The office of the president is the highest political office in any country; therefore, it needs to be in constant touch with the people and this can only be made possible through speech making. The election of President Muhammadu Buhari made history in Nigeria as it was the first time an incumbent and a member of the ruling party; the Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP) was voted out of office and the main opposition taking over the mantle of leadership as the President and Commander-in-Chief in a democratic dispensation. It is therefore of paramount importance that a democratically elected president or government should place premium on the electorates as democracy is government of the people, by the people and for the people. Speech-making, therefore, is the primary means of building, establishing and strengthening these social relationships, expressing feelings and selling policies, ideas and programmes in any society. From this point of view, it is quite agreeable that politics has now become a linguistic affair while language has become a political issue (Ayeomoni and Akinkuolere 2012).

This paper was limited in study to two political speeches of President Muhammadu Buhari: Formal Declaration of Interest for Presidency held in October 2014 at the Eagles' Square, Abuja and his Inaugural Speech on May 29<sup>th</sup>, 2015.

### **Objectives of the Study**

This paper investigates the pragmatics of two political speeches of President Muhammadu Buhari. To achieve this, the following specific objectives were formulated:

- a. To identify the speech acts features of the selected political speeches, and
- b. To determine how the identified features project the message of the president in the speeches.

### **Review of Existing Studies**

Studies on presidential speeches as an aspect of political discourse have been carried out by different scholars. Shevelena (2012) undertook a study of the lingua-rhetorical and socio-

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Cynthia Nkechinyere Okoro, M.A.

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pragmatic peculiarities in political speeches of Barack Obama. Al-Faki (2014) explored the political speeches of some African leaders from a linguistic perspective. The aim of the study was to contribute to the field of critical discourse analysis and the sub-field of political discourse analysis by examining and analyzing political speeches from a linguistic perspective. Akinwotu (2013) explored the speech act in the acceptance of nomination speeches of Chief Obafemi Awolowo and Chief M.K.O Abiola. Ayeomoni and Akinkuolere (2012) examined the pragmatics of victory and inaugural speeches of President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua. Olaleye (2015) investigated the pragmatics of some selected poems in Osundare's *Random Blues* using the Speech Act theory for his textual analysis. Other studies include the works of Ehineni (2014) who focused on a critical discourse analysis of modals in Nigerian political manifestoes, Otieno's (2016) article which centred on metaphor in political discourse and Ajewole-Orimogunje's (2016) which explored the speech acts and welfarist ideology in governor Aregbesola's May 1, 2013 address. In the study of political speeches, a major theory which comes to the fore is the theory of Speech Act.

### **Theoretical Tenet: Speech Act Theory**

Pragmatics will serve as the linguistic framework on which this study rests as it focusses on the use of language in actual linguistic situations. This field of linguistics is historically attributed to the philosophy of language and the American Philosophical School of Pragmatics. Various scholars have attempted to define pragmatics from different perspective and as a result of this there is no universally acclaimed definition. To Crystal (1987) "pragmatics studies the factors that govern our choices of language in social interaction and the effects of our choices on others".

From Gadzar's viewpoint "pragmatics has as its topic those aspects of the meaning of utterances which cannot be accounted for by straightforward reference to the truth conditions of the sentence uttered" (1979). The point being made here is that utterances carry indirect and underlying meanings which may be in contrast with the actual utterance. This underlying meaning can only be deciphered when a listener/reader places that utterance under critical analysis by putting it in context. It is important to state that an effective study of pragmatics cannot be studied without recourse to context. Context is the focal point in every pragmatic study.

The theoretical framework for this study is the theory of Speech Act which is historically attributed to the Austrian philosopher, Ludwig Wittgenstein, but was given prominence by the British philosopher, John Langshaw Austin, in his William James' Lectures at Harvard in 1955. His ideas, however, were refined and systematized by his pupil, John R. Searle, the American philosopher. Griffiths (2006) defines speech acts as the "basic units of linguistic interaction" while for Osisanwo (2003), "an utterance is a speech act". This is because in any utterance a person makes, an act is performed. Acts performed include the following, but are however not restricted to them: stating a fact, an opinion, confirming or denying something, making a prediction or a request, issuing an order, asking a question and so on. It should be noted that "speech acts are tied to sentences" (Verschueren 1999). This, therefore, means that a ceremonial or political speech is not a speech act but a sequence or series of speech acts. The speech act theory aims to do justice to the fact that people do more things with words than what their words ordinarily encode. The most crucial part of the Speech Act Theory is a tripartite distinction of Speech Acts into different kinds which are the Locutionary act, the Illocutionary act and the Perlocutionary act.

The locutionary act is the act of saying something, illocutionary act is the act performed in saying something, while the perlocutionary act is the act performed by saying something, the effect the utterance has on the psychological state of the hearer. Austin (1962) is of the opinion that the locutionary act is composed of three important components or acts which are the phonetic act, the phatic act and the rhetic act. The phonetic acts are "acts of pronouncing sounds, phatic acts are acts of uttering words or sentences in accordance with the phonological and syntactic rules of the language to which they belong and the rhetic acts are acts of uttering a sentence with sense and ...reference" (Oshi 2006). It is pertinent to state that the illocutionary act occupies a middle ground between locutionary and perlocutionary acts. It is the proper domain of pragmatics and the central focus of the Speech Act theory as it centres on the speaker and what (s)he intends to achieve in producing an utterance which is evident in the illocutionary force of that utterance.

The illocutionary forces of utterances have been classified by notable scholars like Austin (1962), Searle (1969) and Keith Allan (1986). Austin classified illocutionary forces of speech acts into five: verdictives, behavities, expositives, commisives and exercitives. Searle, refining

on Austin's model, developed five: commissives, expressives, directives, assertives and declaratives. However, for the analysis of this work, Austin's verdictive feature and Searle's expressive, commissive, directive, assertive and declarative features will be adopted.

**Verdictive:** This class is typified by the giving of a verdict by a jury, arbitrator or umpire. It may also include giving an estimate, assessing, reckoning or appraisal.

**Expressive:** This class of illocutionary act expresses a psychological state, which includes, but not limited to thanking, apologizing, congratulating, welcoming and greeting.

**Commissive:** This group of illocutions tend to commit the speaker to some future course of action. Paradigm cases include promising, threatening, offering and swearing to do something.

**Directives:** These acts are attempts by the speaker to get the addressee to do something; they tend to bring an effect through the action of the hearer. They include ordering, requesting, begging and questioning.

**Assertive:** This class of illocutionary act is also called representatives and it commits a speaker to the truth of the same propositions. They are statements that describe a state of affairs in the world, which could be true or false (Ayeomoni and Akinkuolere 2012). They include stating, claiming, reporting and announcing.

**Declarative:** This class effects immediate changes in the institutional state of affairs and tends to rely on elaborate extra-linguistic institutions such as excommunicating, marrying, firing from employment, declaring a war and so on. Ayeomoni and Akinkuolere (2012) posit that "they are used to say something and make it so". Other examples of declarative acts include resigning, sentencing, dismissing and christening.

**Assertive:** This class of illocutionary act is also called representatives and it commits a speaker to the truth of the same propositions. They are statements that describe a state of affairs in the world, which could be true or false (Ayeomoni and Akinkuolere 2012). They include stating, claiming, reporting and announcing.

**Directive:** Directive acts are attempts by the speaker to get the addressee to do something; they tend to bring an effect through the action of the hearer. They include ordering, requesting, begging and questioning.

## **Research Methodology**

The quantitative research methodology would be adopted for the analysis of data alongside the descriptive survey method. The sample for this study comprised of two political speeches made by President Buhari: Formal Declaration of Interest for Presidency and Inaugural speech. These speeches belong to the non-spontaneous category of oral speeches in that they were formally prepared for oral delivery. Each locutionary act was however divided into direct and indirect illocutionary acts from which we had the illocutionary act of expressive, verdictive, commissive, directive, declarative and assertive. Also, the perlocutionary effects these speeches tend to have on the electorates were presented.

These speeches were arrived at using the judgmental sampling technique. Data were collected via the library, internet, and newspaper dailies. The two selected speeches were labelled A and B and from each speech, ten sentences were extracted, making a total number of twenty sentences, which was used for the analysis of data. Also, each sentence was labelled A1-10 and B1-10 to aid simplicity of the analysis. The percentages of the illocutionary act types of these speeches were also calculated after generating their frequencies on tables. The percentages generated were reflected on a bar chart which formed the basis for the discussion of result. This formula was thus generated to perform this arithmetic operation:

$$\frac{\text{Total number of speech acts}}{\text{Total number of sentences used for analysis}} \times \frac{100}{1}$$

## **Presentation of Data and Analysis**

### **Data A: Formal Declaration of Interest for Presidency**

#### **A1**

#### **Locution (The act of saying something):**

I would like, Mr Chairman, if I may, pay tribute to Nigerians as a whole who are enduring all sorts of hardships and deprivations on a daily basis.



**Illocution (The act performed in saying something):**

- i. Direct- assertive (stating)
- ii. Indirect- verdictive (assessing)

**Perlocution (The act performed by saying something):** Sobriety

**A2**

**Locution (The act of saying something):**

It is everyone's duty to resolve and help the national effort to overcome these immense challenges.

**Illocution (The act performed in saying something):**

- i. Direct- directive (inviting)
- ii. Indirect- assertive (stating)

**Perlocution (The act performed by saying something):** Encouraging

**A3**

**Locution (The act of saying something):**

I humbly wish to present myself before you, before all of Nigeria and before God seeking to be elected as APC's presidential candidate.

**Illocution (The act performed in saying something):**

- i. Direct- declarative (confirming)
- ii. Indirect- verdictive (assessing)

**Perlocution (The act performed by saying something):** Cheerfulness

**A4**

**Locution (The act of saying something):**

Nigeria in my experience has never been so divided, so polarized.

**Illocution (The act performed in saying something):**

- i. Direct- assertive (stating)
- ii. Indirect- expressive (complaint)

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Cynthia Nkechinyere Okoro, M.A.

A Speech Act Analysis of the Formal Declaration of Interest for Presidency and Inaugural Speeches of President Muhammadu Buhari



**Perlocution (The act performed by saying something):** Worry

**A5**

**Locution (The act of saying something):**

We in APC are resolved to bring change to Nigeria.

**Illocution (The act performed in saying something):**

- i. Direct- commissive (guaranteeing)
- ii. Indirect- assertive (stating)

**Perlocution (The act performed by saying something):** Hopefulness

**A6**

**Locution (The act of saying something):**

We plan to do things differently.

**Illocution (The act performed in saying something):**

- i. Direct- assertive (stating)
- ii. Indirect- commissive (assuring)

**Perlocution (The act performed by saying something):** Hopefulness

**A7**

**Locution (The act of saying something):**

We plan to put priority on protection of lives and property.

**Illocution (The act performed in saying something):**

- i. Direct- assertive (stating)
- ii. Indirect- commissive (promising)

**Perlocution (The act performed by saying something):** hopefulness

**A8**

**Locution (The act of saying something):**

We plan to put priority on reviving industry to generate employment.

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A Speech Act Analysis of the Formal Declaration of Interest for Presidency and Inaugural Speeches of President Muhammadu Buhari

**Illocution (The act performed in saying something):**

- i. Direct- assertive (stating)
- ii. Indirect- commissive (promising)

**Perlocution (The act performed by saying something):** hopefulness

**A9**

**Locution (The act of saying something):**

We plan to put priority on tackling corruption which has become blatant and widespread.

**Illocution (The act performed in saying something):**

- i. Direct- assertive (stating)
- ii. Indirect- commissive (assuring)

**Perlocution (The act performed by saying something):** hopefulness

**A10**

**Locution (The act of saying something):**

We plan to put priority on respecting the constitutional separation of powers.

**Illocution (The act performed in saying something):**

- i. Direct- assertive (saying)
- ii. Indirect- commissive (assuring)

**Perlocution (The act performed by saying something):** hopefulness

Table 1. Formal Declaration of Interest for Presidency

<b>SPEECH ACTS (DIRECT AND INDIRECT)</b>	<b>FREQUENCY</b>	<b>PERCENTAGE</b>
Expressive	1	10%
Assertive	9	90%

Declarative	1	10%
Directive	1	10%
Verdictive	2	20%
Commissive	6	60%
Total number of speech acts=		20

## **Data B: Inaugural Speech**

### **B1**

#### **Locution (The act of saying something):**

Today marks a triumph for Nigeria and an occasion to celebrate her freedom.

#### **Illocution (The act performed in saying something):**

- i. Direct- assertive (stating)
- ii. Indirect- verdictive (assessing)

**Perlocution (The act performed by saying something):** Cheerfulness

### **B2**

#### **Locution (The act of saying something):**

Our journey has not been easy but thanks to the determination of our people.

#### **Illocution (The act performed in saying something):**

- i. Direct- assertive (stating)
- ii. Indirect- expressive (happy about the outcome)

**Perlocution (The act performed by saying something):** Cheerfulness

### **B3**

#### **Locution (The act of saying something):**

I would like to thank President Goodluck Jonathan for his display of statesmanship in setting a precedent for us that has now made our people proud to be Nigerians wherever they are.

#### **Illocution (The act performed in saying something):**

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- i. Direct- commissive (appreciating)
- ii. Indirect- declarative (confirming)

**Perlocution (The act performed by saying something):** Applause

**B4**

**Locution (The act of saying something):**

I would like to thank the millions of our supporters who believed in us even when the cause seemed hopeless.

**Illocution (The act performed in saying something):**

- i. Direct- expressive (appreciating)
- ii. Indirect- declarative (confirming)

**Perlocution (The act performed by saying something):** Cheerfulness

**B5**

**Locution (The act of saying something):**

I intend to keep my oath and serve as President to all Nigerians.

**Illocution (The act performed in saying something):**

- i. Direct- commissive (assuring)
- ii. Indirect- directive (appealing)

**Perlocution (The act performed by saying something):** Hopefulness

**B6**

**Locution (The act of saying something):**

I belong to everybody and I belong to nobody.

**Illocution (The act performed in saying something):**

- i. Direct- directive (warning)
- ii. Indirect- commissive (assuring)

**Perlocution (The act performed by saying something):** Excitement

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Cynthia Nkechinyere Okoro, M.A.

A Speech Act Analysis of the Formal Declaration of Interest for Presidency and Inaugural Speeches of President Muhammadu Buhari

## **B7**

### **Locution (The act of saying something):**

There will be no paying off old scores.

### **Illocution (The act performed in saying something):**

- i. Direct- assertive (stating)
- ii. Indirect- commissive (promising)

**Perlocution (The act performed by saying something):** Cheerfulness

## **B8**

### **Locution (The act of saying something):**

The past is prologue.

### **Illocution (The act performed in saying something):**

- i. Direct- assertive (stating)
- ii. Indirect- commissive (assuring)

**Perlocution (The act performed by saying something):** Hopefulness

## **B9**

### **Locution (The act of saying something):**

Nigeria under our administration will be ready to play any leadership role that Africa expects of it.

### **Illocution (The act performed in saying something):**

- i. Direct- assertive (stating)
- ii. Indirect- commissive (assuring)

**Perlocution (The act performed by saying something):** Hopefulness

## **B10**

### **Locution (The act of saying something):**

We have an opportunity, let us take it.

**Illocution (The act performed in saying something):**

- i. Direct- directive (requesting)
- ii. Indirect- verdictive (assessing)

**Perlocution (The act performed by saying something):** Motivating and inviting

Table 2. Inaugural Speech

<b>SPEECH ACTS (DIRECT AND INDIRECT)</b>	<b>FREQUENCY</b>	<b>PERCENTAGE</b>
Expressive	2	20%
Assertive	5	50%
Declarative	2	20%
Directive	3	30%
Verdictive	2	20%
Commissive	6	60%
Total number of speech acts= 20		

Table 3. Summary of Tables A-B (Overall Relative Frequency Percentages)

<b>Speech Act (Direct and Indirect)</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Assertive	14	70%
Directive	4	20%
Expressive	3	15%
Verdictive	4	20%
Commissive	12	60%
Declarative	3	15%
Total number of speech acts= 40		

## Discussion of Result

The role of language in politics cannot be over-flogged as it is through this means the thoughts and ideologies of politicians are deciphered. From the analysis of his speeches, it was discovered that President Buhari employed illocutionary acts that were assertive, declarative, directive, expressive, verdictive and commissive. The analysis further revealed that the Overall Relative Frequency Percentages (ORFPs) of these speech acts were: assertive (70%), commissive (60%), verdictive (20%), directive (20%), declarative (15%), and expressive (15%). The study also revealed that his first speech in which he declared his intention to formally run as the president of Nigeria in 2015 has a preponderance of assertives (90%) and commissives (60%). He also employed the speech acts of directive (10%), expressive (10%), verdictive (20%) and declarative (10%). As he was officially declaring his intentions to run, it was pertinent for him to make use of commissives to make promises and assure the masses of his manifesto and vision. He also made use of assertives to state his claims as according to him “we in APC are resolved to bring change to Nigeria ...we plan to do things differently”. It would be out of place for him to declare his intentions by making use of more verdictives and directives as we are not in the military era where the masses’ opinions are ignored or where one’s idea is forced on another person.

In the inaugural speech, there is a preponderance of commissives (60%), directives (30%), declaratives (30%) and assertives (50%). This is because as a newly elected president of the country, the onus rests solely on him to make promises that his administration would fulfil within the next four years of his tenure. He went on by assuring the masses of his unfailing allegiance to them: “I intend to keep my oath and serve as the President to all Nigerians... I belong to everybody and I belong to nobody”. This speech acts has the perlocutionary effect of hopefulness in the masses as they believed they had finally seen the light at the end of the tunnel. He employed directives and verdictives to affirm his position as the President and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces.

On a final note, President Buhari’s speeches achieved the aim for which it was intended as he came out victorious at the polls of 2015. This is in line with Adeyanju’s assertion as cited in Ayeomoni and Akinkuolere (2012) that “the major preoccupation of Nigerian political leaders



is the quest for acceptance and cooperation which is borne out of the idea that a political leader cannot succeed if he does not enjoy the acceptance and cooperation of the people”.

## Conclusion

Political speeches and language are inter-twined as no politician would succeed at the polls without a mastery of the art of political language. The political language of politicians would achieve the aim for which it is intended if it has the right illocutionary force. It is the speech acts in these sentences that will bring to the fore the meaning because in the process of saying something an act is performed whether directly or indirectly. By analyzing the speeches of President Buhari using the Speech Act theory of Austin and Searle, we have brought to the fore the political message of the President. President Muhammadu Buhari is a political leader who won the hearts of the masses in 2015. The masses were hopeful and they believed his coming into power would turn the political events of the country for the better. The people are still hopeful and believe so much in his change mantra.

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