

ENGENDERING HARMONY THROUGH LANGUAGE: AN EVALUATIVE STYLISTIC STUDY OF FORMER GOVERNOR BABATUNDE RAJI FASOLA'S RESPONSE TO A PRESIDENTIAL ORDER

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Abstract

This study discusses language as a human property and highlights the range of knowledge and skills that should be acquired to enhance the employment of appropriate style in any communication event. The study notes that appropriate use of words is crucial so as not to hamper communication, the consequence of which may be disastrous. Effective communication is even more desirable now in this period galloping inflation on goods and services, general insecurity and harsh economy felt by greater majority of the people all over Nigeria. The paper analyses the style employed by Governor Fashola of Lagos State in his reply to a presidential order using evaluative stylistics approach. The outcome of the analysis is that the paper established that the Governor employed appropriate words and structures which have helped to forestall crisis between the Federal Government and the State Government. It therefore concludes that language style, when used appropriately can engender peace in the society.

Keywords: Language, style, linguistic-stylistics, evaluative stylistics, presidential order.

Introduction

Language is a human property. In fact, there cannot be any human organisation or community without language. Language is how human beings express their feelings, pass information, share ideas and opinions, project their inner and outer worlds etc. As a human property, it is this feature that distinguishes human beings from other creatures on the earth. Gomwalk (2000) asserts that man cannot function without a language. He adds that all human activities (political, social, economic, educational, religions etc) have language at their nucleus and that language regulates man's activities. Also, Iwara (2005) opines that language is the principal medium of culture and socialization and the most powerful instruments of thought.

From the foregoing, we have observed that language is a unique feature of man. It is no doubt a sine qua non in every human society. Despite the importance of language among humans, it is observed that a lot needs to be done in the development of language in view of the dwindling knowledge and skills/performance in language. Alo (1998:7) highlights the use of language in communication as involving a range of knowledge and skills such as:

- a) Knowledge of the system and workings of language at the levels of sounds, words, structure and meaning.
- b) The basic communication skills of speaking, listening, comprehension, reading and writing.
- c) Knowledge of the world including physical, environment, human behaviour, and activities, social, relationships, cultural norms and conventions and
- d) Knowledge of the appropriate use of language forms and structures in a variety of human and communication situations.

The acquisition of skills highlighted above would enhance effective communication in English. Effective use of language in the prevailing

socio-economic realities in Nigeria will engender peace in our macro and micro societies and even the world at large. When there is a breakdown in communication by way of inappropriate use of words and structures, then, trouble is inevitable and the outcome of which will be very unpalatable. The hallmark of effective communication in English is appropriateness. Appropriateness in the sense that language forms used are suitable in specific communicative situations. In effect therefore, communications cannot be effectively done by mere mastery of the grammar of English alone. Learners must take cognisance of variation in English and must also be familiar with the range of style available in the language to enhance better communication in English. In addition, users of English must also put into consideration the culture of the society/the people, situation, and timing when they are communicating. Below is an example of inappropriate use of language between a student and a lecturer.

Consider the following exchanges between a student and a lecturer.

- 1) A lecturer walking in a particular direction on the school campus met a student of his and the following conversation ensued:
 - a. **Student:** Good morning
 - b. **Lecturer:** Good morning. How are your studies?
 - c. **Student:** Fine (Departs)
 - d. **Student:** (shouting from behind) Sir, I want to see you. I missed your test last week.
- 2) A lecturer left his office and about 50 meters away from there, he met a student who was perhaps heading to the lecturers' office.
 - a. After exchanging brief greetings.
 - b. **Student:** Excuse me Sir, I want you to register me. (Flashing the registration form) to the lecturer's face.

The participants in the two exchanges are Yorubas. Though the student's use of the word 'Sir', on the surface, seems to indicate a mark of respect, nonetheless, the statement 'I want to see you' is disrespectful among Yoruba speakers of English to address a lecturer that way along the road. The language is very incongruous when one considers the culture of the participants and the social hierarchy between the addressor and addressee.

In the second exchange, what the (student) said is also inappropriate. A Yoruba lecturer would take this as an act of disrespect for a student to accost him on the way and tells the lecturer that he/she wants the lecturer to endorse his/her registration form. The feelings of the lecturer would have been different if this same statement is uttered right in the lecturer's office. The exchanges above underscore the importance cultural consideration in communication. When communication is hampered, or when inappropriate words and structures are employed, it may lead to crisis/disharmony, and this is undesirable in our macro and micro societies.

Apart from the above inappropriate use of words highlighted above, there are also instances of divisive and inciting language used by Nigerian political elites, heads of sub-national government that could exacerbate ethnic tensions. For example, a two-term governor of Kaduna State and former Minister of Federal Republic of Nigeria, Mallam Nasir-El-Rufai referred to Federal Government led by President Tinubu as '**Yoruba-led**' government aimed to create divisions and emphasise ethnic differences over national unity. Also, the current governor of Bauchi State has at different fora launched attacks at the Tinubu's administration. At a forum, he accused the government of putting the North and Nigerians under strain with his economic reform policies. He described President Tinubu's nationwide address to the protesters as "**empty**" stressing that "unemployment is everywhere. **Our educational system is not working**. The new policies brought by the Federal Government are not working." **It is their programmes that**

have caused all these problems. The Bauchi governor also spoke strongly against President Tinubu's proposed tax reforms arguing that they are **anti-north** and capable of triggering anarchy from the region while hosting a delegation of the Christian community, he stated "we will continue to be **loyal for the time being**. If the situation persists, **they will see our real colours; we are going to fight it.**"

Nigeria's recent shift in economic policies under President Tinubu's administration, marked by the removal of petroleum subsidy and floating of the naira has led to criticism and intense debate from sub-national governments, political elites and opposition figures. The resultant inflation in prices of goods and services and other associated challenges has further increased tensions in the polity manifesting in divisive, inciting and hate rhetoric from some political elites and political actors. This trend raises concerns about potential political crises, social unrest and erosion of national cohesion. In this context, this study seeks to explore the critical role of language in shaping Nigeria's socio-political landscape, advocating for a more appropriate, refined, polite and non-combative language that promotes peace and unity of the Nigerian nation rather than perpetuating divisions or total disintegration of Nigeria.

Analytical Approach

In analysing the style of this non-literary piece, it is expedient to state here the four uses of the term 'style' as proposed by Davy Crystal and Derek Davy in *Investigating English Style*. This is necessary to put the analysis in proper perspective. Davy Crystal and Derek Davy (1976) recognise or propose four uses of style. They are:

- i. Style may refer to some or all the language habits of one person.
- ii. style may refer to some or all of the language habits shared by a group of people at one time, or over a period of time.

- iii. Style may refer to the kind of language used in creative literature.
- iv. Style is used in a restrictive and evaluative sense to refer to the quality or effectiveness of a work or expression.

In describing the style of language use in the text, this paper attempts to analyse the piece in the light of the fourth description of the term style as stated above. Since this approach to style description may be suitable to examine a non-literary text as it will not require thorough linguistic description as will be required for a literary work. Hence, the approach that is adopted in analysing the text is evaluative. This approach is complemented by the Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) of M. A. K. Halliday (1985) in the aspect of the classes of words in English.

The employment of the evaluative approach is also premised on the definition of stylistics as given by Widdowson (1975). He defines stylistics as involving both literary criticism and linguistics, as its morphological make-up suggests. That the 'style' component relates to literary criticism and the 'istics' component relates to linguistics. Going by the definition of stylistics as given by Widdowson, then the description of a piece of communication (especially non-literary one) by considering the values of such piece is a form of stylistic description/interpretation so long the analyst does not lose sight of how the codes are constructed. In addition, Alo (1998) as well commented that style may be approached from the perspective of evaluating the effectiveness of a piece of communication. He refers to this as evaluative stylistics and that it attempts to determine how effective an expression is in a text. It makes value judgement on the intrinsic merits of a text and the writer. Value judgement on style entails comments like refined style, heavy style, clear, polite, rude, advisory etc and the effect of the use of language on the addressee.

Data of the Study

The data of the study is the reply of the former Governor of Lagos State Mr. Babatunde Raji Fashola to a presidential order which gave the Governor 14 days to wind up the 37 Local Council Development Areas created by the Lagos State Government. The reply was published on page 6 of *The National Newspaper* dated 27th July 2009. In the analysis and description, only those sentences considered useful for linguistic stylistic description are isolated for analysis. The study does not concern itself with the legality or otherwise of the issue in dispute as the letter or reply is heavily laden with arguments on the constitutionality of the creation of additional local councils and the interpretations of the various courts on it.

Summary of the Issue in Context

The Government of Lagos state created additional 37 Local Council Development Areas to the existing 20 Local Government Councils to make 57 Local Councils. The Federal Government headed by the former President Olusegun Obasanjo seized the Local Council funds accruable to the 20 Local Governments insisting that Lagos State Government must reverse itself to the status-quo. Reprieve came the way of Lagos State Government following the intervention of some leaders of thought who prevailed on President Obasanjo to release the seized funds. Only parts of the funds were released.

After the exit of President Obasanjo, the new President, Yar'adua wrote to Lagos State Government no headed by Governor Raji Fashola ordering him to wind up the 37 Local Council Development Areas within 14 days, otherwise he shall be compelled to direct that necessary action be taken by the relevant organs of Nigeria State to defend the constitution.

For this study, we shall contend ourselves with the reply of the Governor to the Presidential order. Specifically, only the words and

expressions that are significant for stylistic description and interpretation shall be isolated as earlier stated.

The Analysis

Sentence 1

It is *curious* and *worrying* that your Excellency *has elected* to act on advice suggesting that a lower court can pronounce as illegal what the Supreme Court has declared as valid.

From the sentence above, the adjectival group '*curious* and *worrying*' are mild and refined language. *Curious* and *worrying* are suggestive of the fact that but for some covert reasons other than that expressed by the President, the President ought not to act on the advice given him. If the Governor had relied on his immunity as provided for by the constitution, he could use some other adjectives in these places which may be harsh or impolite e.g *surprising* and *disheartening*. Here '*surprising*', may be interpreted to mean that the President is portrayed as an ignoramus, who is expected to know much better. '*Disheartening*' will therefore mean that the writer is pained that the country is unfortunate to have such person as President. Also, the verbal group *has elected* is carefully chosen. It portrays the President as someone who acts not based on his wish but based on other options given to him by advisers.

Sentence 2

I *regret* that I am *unable to accede* to your request to alter the current status quo...

The verbal group in *regret* and *unable to accede* in the sentence above are appropriately chosen by the governor. The verbs are refined. '*Regret*' creates the image of pains. The writer is pained that he would not be able to carry out the president's order. Also, the expression or

verbal group *unable to accede* points to lack of power or inability to act/implement the wish of someone, specifically the President. It would be uncivil/impolite to express what has been said above thus: As the head of a State Government that is committed to the highest standard of constitutionalism and legality, I can never alter the current status quo.

Sentence 3

I must caution that any steps taken outside the due process of the law by the Nation's Executive against...

The use of the verbal group *must caution* is intended to give advice, to make the Federal Government headed by the President to exercise restraint. The verbal group is appropriately used. For example, if in the place of the verbal group '*must caution*', the Governor used '*must warn*', then obviously the Governor is poised to engage the President of Nigeria in avoidable crisis.

Sentence 4

As your Excellency is aware, the interpretation of law is the constitutional preserve of the Judiciary.

The adverbial clause in italics is a civil or polite way to address the nation's leader. The Governor presumes that the president is conversant with the constitutional provisions on disputes between State and the Federal Government. Therefore, the President knows that the right thing to do is to approach the court for adjudication on the dispute. The Governor does not claim that he is in position to educate the President on what to do in such circumstance.

Sentence 5

I respectfully urge your Excellency to *re-appraise* the advice given on this matter.

Still in line with the tone of the letter, the governor employs the adverbial *respectfully* to show the respect he has for the President. Though it may seem that if the adverb '*respectively*' is omitted, the sentence will still hold, nonetheless, its omission will alter its semantics. The use of '*respectfully*' shows the high regard or respect the Governor has for the President of Nigeria. Also, the verb 'to-reappraise' is very appropriate in the context. Imagine if the Governor has used the expression 'to have a rethink' on the advice given on the matter, that would be insulting and very impolite way to address a president of a nation.

From the foregoing, it is observed that the Governor in his reply successfully employed appropriate words and expressions devoid of insult, arrogance, disrespect, posturing etc. to say an emphatic No to the President's order. The Governor does this successfully using a civil, polite, and respectful language all through in his reply to the President. This perhaps may be the reason why after the receipt of the letter, that no further dust was again about the issue.

Conclusion

From the analysis carried out above by means of the use of evaluative stylistics, it has been revealed that adequate knowledge of the basic skills of language, knowledge of the grammar and sounds as well as the culture of the users is highly essential to enhance effective use of the language. It has therefore been proved that when appropriate words and expressions are used in communication, it will engender peace in this period of harsh economic conditions.

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Appendix

Re: Constitutionally Recognized Local Government Structure in Lagos State by the State Government and Its Implications for Constitutionalism and National Unity

Your Excellency,

Your letter of 14th July 2009 refers.

Mr. President, after declaring a public amnesty with regards to the Niger Delta crisis, which was intended to bring peace to the country and calm frayed nerves in order to set a platform for meaningful development, the receipt of your letter signed barely twenty four (24) hours after an unprovoked attack on Lagos on the 13th July 2009, in

which officers and men of the Nigeria Military lost their lives came as a shock to me.

As Commander-in-Chief, your silence in spite of this attack, and the timing of this letter heightens my concerns and causes me very deep apprehension about the motives behind the advice in which your Excellency has acted in this matter and the intent of the letter at a time when all levels of government must be working towards promoting peace and stability.

In specific response to the issues raised in your reference, it is perhaps proper to start with a reminder that the decision of the Lagos Government to conduct elections on 11 October 2008 into 20 Local Government Councils and 37 Local Council Development Areas was based on Laws validly enacted by the Lagos State House of Assembly pursuant to its legislative competence under the constitution. The Law under which the Local Council Government Areas were created and under which the elections were conducted are as follows:

- (i) The Creation of Local Government Areas Law No. 5 of 2002.
- (ii) The Creation of New Local Government Areas (Amendment) Law No. 15 of 2004.
- (iii) The Creation of New Local Government Areas (Amendment) (No.2) Law of 2005 and
- (iv) The Lagos State Independent Electoral Commission Law 2009.

The decision of the Supreme Court noted in your Excellency's letter in the case of Attorney General of Lagos State.

- (v) Attorney General of the Federation (2005) 2 WRN 1 affirms the validity of two of the laws mentioned above namely, the Creation of Local Government Areas (Amendment) Law 2004.

In the judgment delivered by Uwais CJN, as he then was, the Supreme Court held that:

“Having read all the provisions of the Constitution aforementioned, I am satisfied that the House of Assembly of Lagos States has the right

to pass the creation of Local Government Areas (Amendment) Law 2004” See AG Lagos V. AG Federation & Ors.

His Lordship further noted that:

“... the laws are valid but inchoate until the necessary steps as provided by the constitution are taken by the National Assembly”.

This position is also supported by the judgment of Iguh JSC when his Lordship held that:

“I have therefore no difficulty in coming to the conclusion that the Lagos State Government’s law No.5 of 2002 is unquestionably constitutional and having complied with the provision of sections 7(1) and 8(3) of the Constitution” are AG Lagos v. AG Federation & Ors.

Consequently, there is no conflict between the laws under which the new Local Council Development Areas were created and the Constitution of the Federation Republic of Nigeria.

I therefore cannot agree with the advice that you have been given that the decision of the High Court in Chief Taiwo Joseph Tovi-Hungevu v. Abraham O. Ogabi Ors in any way suggests that the creation of Local Government Areas Law No. 5 2002 and the creation of New Local Government Areas (Amendment) Law 2004 are null or void in effect.

It follows that the renamed Local Council Development Areas cannot be referred to as illegal administrative bodies having been validly created under laws enacted by the Lagos State House of Assembly, which the Supreme Court has pronounced as validly made Laws.

Indeed, the Supreme Court **NEVER** declared them illegal. It is curious and worrying that Your Excellency has elected to act on advice suggesting that a lower court can pronounce as illegal what the Supreme Court has declared to be valid. This is a grave threat to the long-established hierarchy of our Courts and judicial system and **is not the rule of law.**

As the head of a State Government that is committed to the highest standards of constitutionalism and legality, I regret that I am

unable to accede to your request to alter the current status quo by stopping the operation to the 37 Local Council Development Areas.

It would require me as head of the Executive arm of the State Government to alter the provisions of an existing and valid law made by the Lagos State House of Assembly.

Your Excellency, I must reiterate that the Lagos State Government, pursuant to **section 8 of the Constitution** had forwarded returns of the necessary processes relating to the creation of the new Local Government Councils, to the National Assembly to enable it to make consequential amendments to the first schedule of the Constitution.

While we await the National Assembly's discharge of its responsibility, the doctrine of separation of **powers** requires that each arm of government should be allowed to operate without interference from any other arm of government.

It will be pre-emptive for the Executive arm of Government to take any position that would prejudice the exercise of the power of the legislature to discharge its responsibility, when there is no competent challenge to the validity of the Laws passed by the Lagos State House of Assembly that can in any way affect the administrative entities created there under.

Respectfully and contrary to your Excellency's assertions, I must caution that any steps taken outside the due process of the law by the Nation's Excellency against a sub-national government such as Lagos State in this matter will post a grave threat to constitutionalism, our democracy and good governance, because it will amount to a usurpation of constitutionally guaranteed State autonomy and a violation of the Constitution.

An unavoidable fact is that the legal advice you have received seems to be rooted in disparate (I believe patently wrong) interpretation of the decision of the Supreme Court referred to above. While actions of the Lagos State Government have been dictated by our belief that

the decision supports the actions that we have taken, the Federal Government apparently has a contrary view.

As your Excellency is aware, the interpretation of law is the Constitutional preserve of the judiciary. Where parties are in genuine controversy as to the legality of an action, the rightful course is to approach the judiciary to seek authoritative pronouncement on the legality of disputed actions.

Permit me to draw your attention to the advice of the Supreme Court in **Attorney General of Lagos State v. Attorney General of the Federation** as follows:

“If the Federal Government felt aggrieved by Lagos State creating more local governments, the best solution is to seek redress in a court of law, without resorting to self-help. In a society where the rule of law prevails, self-help is not available to the executive or any arm of government”.

I respectfully urge your Excellency to re-appraise the advice given in this matter.

In a constitutional democracy, the Federal Government does not enjoy the prerogative of compelling a state entity to conform with its will however well-conceived except where that will conform with the law.

The Federal and State Government are autonomous entities within the sphere of authority and competence vested in each Government under the Constitution. In **Attorney General of Lagos State v. Attorney General of the Federation & 35 Ors (2003) 35 WRN 1 Uwaifo JSC** stated a follow:

“But I do not need repeat that Nigeria operates a federal system of government Section 2(2) of the 1999 constitution re-enacts the doctrine of federalism. This ensures the autonomy of each government. None of the governments is subordinate to each other. This is particularly of relevance between the State Governments and the Federal Government, each being as said by Nwabueze in his book

The Presidential Constitution of Nigeria, page 39-42, an autonomous entity in the sense of being able to exercise its own will in the conduct of its affairs within the constitution, free from direction by another government”.

Should your Excellency take further and alternative legal advice as I respectfully urge that you now do, you will find that where any party particularly the Federal Government, is of the opinion that the Lagos State Government has acted contrary to the decision of the Supreme Court, it should follow the procedure for the enforcement of the judgements as stipulated by the rules of court and certainly not to employment the uses of Federal “... Organs of state to .. preserve the authority of the Federal Government” as stated in your letter. This is the practice that will be consistent with the rule of law.

Finally, your Excellency at this time when our economy is challenged and our people are expectant and looking up to us for leadership and direction, our country can do without a political or constitutional crises over a matter which constitutionally and demonstrably constitutes no threat to our nation.

To persist, as Your Excellency threatens in your letter, will suggest that this is a deliberate political crisis and not one of necessity.

However, let me continue to assure you of my unwavering commitment to constitutionalism and the due process of the Law: you will find that my office and the Government of Lagos State will remain willing partners in development and amicable resolution of disputes when called upon.

Your Excellency, please accept my best wishes and sincere compliments.

Babatunde Raji Fasola (SAN)
Governor of Lagos State