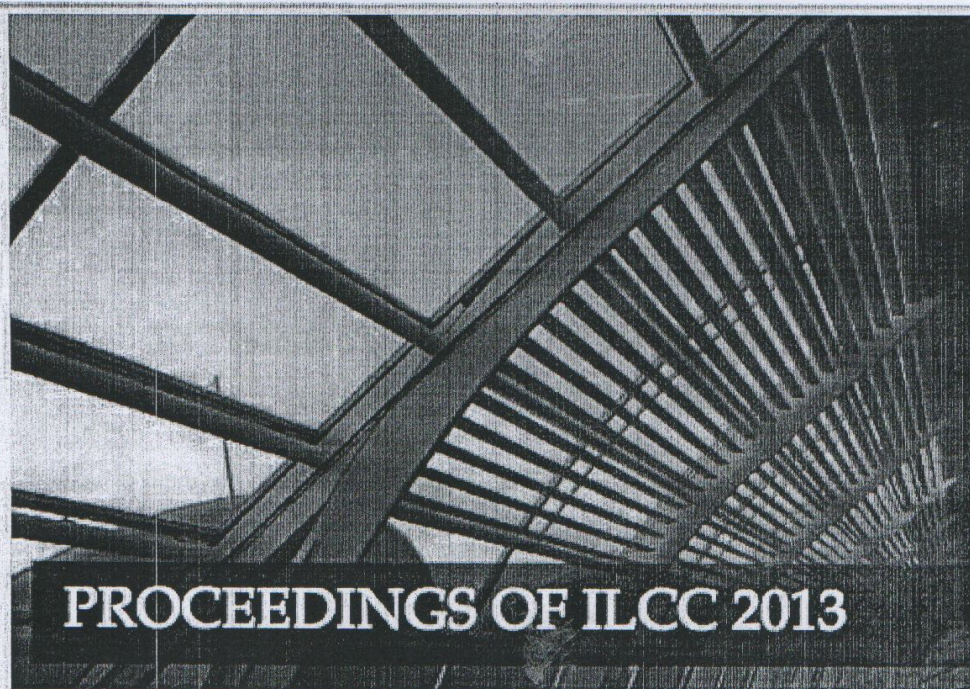


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"Engaging Global Community: Breaking
the barriers to effective communication"

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A PRAGMATIC STUDY OF MEDIA WAR AGAINST MILITARY RULE IN NIGERIA (1989-1999)

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Abstract

This paper examined the deployment of language as "terrible weapons" (Akinfeleye, 1988:112) by the Nigerian media in fighting military rule over a ten-year period in Nigeria. Based on the speech act theory of pragmatics which construes utterances as not mere statements of truth and falsity but as action-performing linguistic elements, the study highlighted the analysis of thirty headlines of *News watch*, *Tell* and *The News* magazines in combating the military in the last decade of its rule in Nigeria. The paper, while overviewing the Nigerian press, military rule and the three magazines, reported the various speech acts engendering the casting of the various headlines as well as their analysis. It concluded by affirming the truism of words being mightier than the sword and that language is powerful tool which can be used to achieve various results when deployed effectively.

Keywords: press, military, *News watch*, *Tell*, *The News*, speech acts, pragmatics.

1. Introduction

In the world of information or the Information Age in which we live today, the kind of language that man uses, hears or reads, shapes, to a surprising extent, the world he lives. According to Birk and Birk (1959:3), mere words can make and prevent wars, create understanding or inflame prejudice, form constitutions or destroy them, sell shoddy or superior products or ideas, justify man's worst actions or express his highest ideals. "There is no substitute for words" (Boulton, 1960:8) and it is through words that language attains its essence as "a symbolic manifestation of experience" (Brooks, 1964:99).

Language, as used by the media or press, both of which are used interchangeably, has been reckoned by Kwame Nkrumah (cited in Akinfeleye, 1988:120) as "a weapon of fighting illiteracy, poverty, ignorance and the essential weapon to overthrow colonialism". It is also considered a "powerful tool for construction and a powerful weapon for destruction and defense" (Birk and Birk, 1959:19). The essence of language lies in its effectiveness in achieving the purpose for which it is meant. This paper highlights, using the pragmatic theory of speech-acts, how the Nigerian media, through the deployment of language, launched offensives on three military regimes over a ten-year period culminating in the successful attainment of democracy in 1999. It focuses on headlines of three news magazines and concludes that the war of words waged on the Nigerian military regime was largely responsible for the enthronement of democracy in the country.

2.0 The Diachrony of the Media and Military Rule in Nigeria

The media or press, which includes radio, television, wire services, newspapers, magazines and such other channels of communication, evolved in the collection and dissemination of information (Olugbiji et al 1994:117). The press is a pervasive, indispensable aspect of human existence without which the society will cease to exist; that is, if its members do not interact or share information (Okonkwo, 1978:117). The primary responsibility of the press is to report accurately and wherever possible

, seek out the truth (Jason, 1997:115). According to Medubi (1999:109), there are four major functions underpinning the responsibility of the press: information dissemination (i.e. reporting news and events), education/interpretation (i.e. giving enlightenment and being a watchdog for the society), service function (providing services like advertisement, measures against health hazards, etc.) and entertainment function.

While Ekwelie (1978:202-115) discusses the functions of the press from the viewpoints of (a) the news function, (b) the education-information function, (c) the economic function, (d) the opinion function and (e) entertainment and other functions, the over-arching duty of the press, as espoused by St. Louis Despatch (cited in Agbese, 1997a:67-111) is to:

Fight for progress and reform and never tolerate injustice and corruption, always fight demagogues of all parties, never belong to any party, always oppose privileged classes and public plunderers, never lack sympathy with the poor, always devoted to the public welfare, never be satisfied with merely printing the news, always be drastically independent, never be afraid to attack wrong, whether by predatory plutocracy or predatory poverty.

The Nigerian press, regarded as "the most outspoken volatile, witty and free in black Africa" (Arnold 1977:113) started with "Iwe Irohin Fun Awon Egba ati Ijebu" published in 1859 by Henry Townsend in Abeokuta. More stables were to join the pioneering Iwe Irohin during the anti-colonial protest and the nationalist struggles of the first half of the twentieth century. The press, after printing, is "the oldest of the modern occupations in Nigeria", for there were pressmen "before there were lawyers, doctors, engineers and educationists" (Dare, 1985:114).

With Independence attained on October 1, 1960 and the resultant freedom and awareness it brought about, the Nigerian press blossomed with more newspapers, magazines and radio/television stations. The birth of the Nigerian press is aptly captured by Golding and Elliot (cited in Oso, 1997:5) that "Nigerian journalism was created by anti-colonial protest, baptised in the waters of nationalist propaganda...."

The post-independence era with its drastic, unprecedented socio-political changes, public enlightenment and economic crisis, heralded the emergence of more stables, all aimed at positive social change. "The Nigerian press is not for the faint-hearted" (Akinrinade, 1997:112) though to Alhaji Sheu Shagari and some others, "the Nigerian press is misleading... inept...mischievous...self-serving...illiterate" (Newswatch, Jan.9, 1989-p.41). It is flamboyant and exuberant, especially with the long military intervention in Nigerian politics, which ceased some fourteen years ago, which made it imbibe the concept of advocacy journalism, which Oso (1997:10) defines as a practice of journalism where the practitioner refuses to comply with the canon of the profession which compels him to be a disinterested, impartial or neutral recorder of events, the journalist chooses and defines objectives, goals and causes which he thinks and in public interest and uses his stories to canvass, champion, project and defend such ideas.

The practitioners of advocacy journalism, which was the hallmark of the last decade of military rule in Nigeria, otherwise known as the radical press, the guerrilla press, the agitational press, the militant press, etc. are, for the purpose of this study, are those journalists in Newswatch, Tell and The News who launched psychological offensives, hauled linguistic missiles and deployed words as weapons to confront the military.

Meanwhile, the history of the Nigerian press is replete with the gloomy pictures of suppression and repression by the state power, especially the military, which had ruled the country for more than thirty of its fifty years independence. The animosity and contempt that the military has for the press surfaced just three years after its incursion into politics with the overthrow of the first civilian government. Thus, in November 1969, Daily Times was closed and its principal officers, including its Chairman, Alhaji Babatunde Jose, were detained. The paper was eventually taken over (or 'captured') by the Government in 1976 and the press had to be walking a tight rope.

The trial of the publishers of the African Spark, Dr. Olanbamu, for an alleged false story against General Muritala Muhammed, the banning of Newbreed by General Olusegun Obasanjo and the shavi

ng of the hair of Minerre Amakiri of the Tide on the orders of the then Rivers State Governor, Diette Spiff, are just a few of the various infractions against the press before the second republic (Onanuga, 1997:117). The return of the military on December 31, 1983 subjected the press in Nigeria to further stiff legislations and official gagging. The notorious Decree No 4 of 1984 was promulgated by the Buhari/Idiagbon regime to protect public officers and the first victims of the decree were Tunde Thompson and Nduka Irabor of The Guardian, who were jailed for publishing reports on Government diplomatic postings, in addition to the newspaper being fined N50,000.00.

The assumption of power by General Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida (IBB) on August 27, 1985 marked a watershed in the annals of the military aversion to the free press. Series of harassment, haunting, hunting, detention and intimidation of journalists characterised his government, which allegedly murdered Mr. Dele Giwa, the founding Editor-in-Chief of Newswatch, through a letter bomb. When his phantom transition programme was on course, in 1989, IBB ordered the closure of The Guardian as it was later done for Concord. Previously, General Babangida had ordered the closure of Newswatch for six months, based on argumentum baculinum (one based on force and power), on April 6, 1987.

The trying political period of the early 90's gave birth to Tell and The News, considered the most vibrant Nigerian newsmagazines which "more than any other publication... suffered the most harassment (sic) in the hands of General Babangida's security agents" (Olugboji et al. 1994:114), and which were repeatedly shut in 1993 and 1994. In 1990 alone, at least five media houses were shut down by the Nigerian military authorities (Civil Liberty Organisation 1991:43) with scores of journalists arrested and traumatised.

The darkest period for the press was witnessed under the regime of General Sani Abacha who seized power on November 17, 1993 from the Interim National Government, which was headed by Chief Ernest Shonekan. Barely a year after General Abacha seized power, more journalists had been arrested and detained than the combined number of those arrested in the Nigerian history (Olugboji et al. 1994:2).

In July 1995, media organisations were asked to register with the Newspapers Registration Board, a booby trap designed to further gag the watchdog. The order was challenged in court. In 1996, there were several cases of detention of journalists, though no media house was shut. Six journalists were incarcerated for alleged complicity in a coup plot and notable were the travails of Godwin Agbroko of The Week, Eyiwumi Tosin of Vanguard, Richard Akinola and Muyiwa Daniel of Concord and Bunmi Aborishade, publisher of the defunct June 12 magazine.

With the self-succession bid of General Abacha and the public denunciation and disapprobation of such as spear-headed by the press, 1997 was the year of "Operation Total Crackdown" (Headline, Tell, Nov. 24, 1997). Tension mounted up and by 1998, it was "Murder incorporated" (Headline, Newswatch March 2, 1986) again as "Abacha Declares War" (Headline, Tell August 29, 1994) on the tea drinking opposition. Cases of human rights violation of the journalists and the public at large were legion (Civil Liberty Organisation, 1991).

The assumption of power by General Abdulsalami Abubakar, after the sudden death of General Abacha on June 8, 1998, brought relief to the besieged press and the embattled public. But the press was too experienced to trust a seemingly unassuming military man. Having paid considerably for trusting General Babangida, General Abubakar was closely monitored, carefully attacked and continually hit until he fulfilled his promise to hand over power to a civilian president.

Hence, to a considerable extent, General Abubakar was given the benefit of the doubt and was closely tackled and persistently covered by the media missiles until he fulfilled his promise. General Abubakar eventually handed over to the democratically elected Chief Olusegun Obasanjo (on May 29, 1999) who was declared winner of the election, and who assumed power again twenty years after he also voluntarily relinquished power to a civilian president, in the same manner.

3.0 An Overview of Newswatch, Tell and The News

The quest to use the power of language and its chief function of communication to transform, or at least, sensitize the Nigerian public, was the impetus behind the establishment of the three magazines sampled for this study. The three media organisations were conceptualised and born during military regimes. The dictatorial, revolutionary undercurrents which characterise military rule perhaps informed the militant, radical posture of the magazines in distilling their messages. One thing they all have in common is courage and determination to articulate their views without minding whose ox is gored in the process. To quote Onanuga (1997:42), the Editor-in-Chief of *The News* extensively here is considered desirable:

Newswatch, *The News* and *Tell* were all established by journalists who were nurtured on the noble ideals of journalism and who believe that the ideas must not be extinguished by the crushing weight of the jackboot. Because these journalists cannot contemplate living without journalism, they are stuck to publishing, jackboot threat, or no jackboot threat. For them, journalism is more than a business. It is a lifetime vocation. For them, their existence derived from the failure of the government media to live up to their responsibilities to both the people and the government.

Newswatch magazine was founded by four editors, Dele Giwa, Ray Ekpu, Yakubu Muhammed and Dan Agbese, all seasoned journalists. According to Dele Giwa, they wanted "to build a magazine which will be open even to the most radical of ideals, as long as they are positive and well written" (cited in Osundare, 1990:118). The magazine hit the news stands on the 28th of January, 1985, setting out with a moral mission powered by a human and fearless conscience, "to help society grow while itself growing in the process" (Osundare, 1990:6). Barely two years after its inception, it became an international award winning magazine and Dele Giwa had to pay the supreme price for the magazine's 'radical' views. Even though *Newswatch* became "moderate" and "less critical" of the government with time, probably for survival sake, it received further harassments under General Babangida and the succeeding military regime of General Abacha.

Tell, Nigeria's independent weekly, is the quintessence of advocacy journalism, with its characteristic use of emotive language, sensational and populist appeal to emotion and public sentiments. "The language is also combative and negative, designed to ... portray the opposition camp in negative, deprecatory and threatening light" (Oso, 1997:11). Its founding fathers are Nosa Igiebor, Dele Omotunde, Onome Osifo-Whiskey, Dare Babarinsa and Kolawole Ilori who all decamped from the *Newswatch* to pursue what Adeniyi (2001:111) refers to as "a single-minded determination, a course that was to confer on it a golden plank of heroism".

The founders of *Tell* appear to have parted ways with *Newswatch* to pursue combat journalism from which the latter was diverting. At its birth on the 18th of April, 1991, its editors thought of a magazine "intended to inform, educate and entertain the Nigerians" (Adeniyi, 2001:12) and they remained faithful to their ideals and their integrity. The magazine and its staff suffered untold hardships, harassments, intimidation and persecution from the agents of Generals Babangida and Abacha.

Moreover, *The News* magazine was founded by the team of Bayo Onanuga, Sani Kabir, Idowu Obasa, Dapo Olorunyomi, Babafemi Ojudu, Kunle Ajibade and Seye Kehinde. The magazine, with the motto, "defining the present, shaping the future", began in January 1993 with a mission, according to Onanuga (cited in Oso, 1997:11), to

Be dedicated to the promotion of the principles of civilised nationalism, democracy, liberty and the equality of the various ethnic groups of the Nigerian federation... to partisanly neutral on the side of truth, justice and good government.

The News maintained a defiant, militant position and expectedly stepped on powerful toes which made it face trials and tribulations during the incumbency of General Babangida and General Abacha administrations. Apart from roping one of its editors, Kunle Ajibade, into a phantom coup saga which was almost fatal, the General Abacha regime saw to the mysterious disappearance of one of its reporters, Bagauda Kalto. By 1994, a year after it hit the news stands, *The News* was voted by the Commonwealth Press Union (CPU) to have made the most outstanding contribution to the commonwealth paper industry. The magazine, which claims to be fresh, spicy and authoritative, is ab

out people, reporting their pains and their triumphs.

4.0 Pragmatics and the Speech Acts Theory

The word "pragmatics" derives from the Greek word "pragma" which means "deed" or "action". The term pragmatics, according to Taylor (1998:118), was first used by Morris (1938) who described it as one of the three (with syntax and semantics) component fields of semiotics. The main goals of pragmatic theories, as Adegbija (1999:1989) avers, are to explain: how utterances in contexts and in particular situations; how contexts contribute to the encoding and decoding of meaning; how speakers and hearers of utterances perceive them; how speakers can say one thing and mean something else; and how deductions are made in context with respect to what meaning has been encoded in a particular utterance.

In other words, as Lawal (1997:152) proposes, pragmatic theories must revolve around speech act functions, along with presuppositions, implicatures and mutual contextual beliefs (MCB's). Thus, the theory of pragmatics is that of meaning interpretation and pragmatic theories generally explicate the reasoning of speakers and hearers (Katz, 1977:19). Scholars and theorists like Bach and Harnish (1979), Adegbija (1982), Leech (1983), Thomas (1995), Lawal (1995), Kreidler (1998), Osisanwo (2003), among others, are unanimous in submitting that pragmatics accounts for specific meanings of utterances in particular social and situational contexts.

While pragmatics is important as it enables the understanding of the principles and procedures guiding the interpretation of socio-cultural and contextual meanings of utterances, the aim of pragmatic theories is to explain how speakers of any language can use the sentences of that language to convey messages which do not bear any necessary relation to the linguistic content of the sentence used (Kempton, 1977).

The dominant theory of pragmatics is the "theory of doing things with words", popularised by Austin (1962), one of its pioneering theorists. This is further advanced by Mey (2001:6) who describes the theory of pragmatics as follows:

Communication in society happens chiefly by means of language. However, the users of language, as social beings, communicate and use language on society's premises; society controls their access to the linguistic and communicative means. Pragmatics, as the study of the way humans use their language in communication, bases itself on a study of those premises and determines how they affect, and effectualize, human language use.

Until the post-humous publication of Austin (1962), philosophers, especially the logical positivists, had solely construed a sentence as either analytic or empirical. In other words, sentences were verified as either true or false (Thomas, 1995:30) giving verve to what is studied in linguistics as truth conditional semantics.

Austin (1962) sets out to challenge this myopic approach to language, asserting that utterances need not necessarily have truth conditions but are rather used to perform actions or carry out actual events. Austin differentiates between constatives (sentences that have truth/falsity values) and performatives (sentences that do things with words). A speech act, according to Austin, is the total situation in which the utterance is issued (Thomas, 1995:51). This concept has received further appraisal and modification by Austin's student, Searle (1969) and a vast army of scholars including Bach and Harnish, 1979; Adegbija, 1982; Levinson, 2003; Leech, 1983; Thomas, 1995; Yule, 1996; Lawal, 1995; Kreidler, 1998; Mey, 2001; Osisanwo, 2003; Odebunmi, 2006; Babatunde, 2007; and Sbis, 2007.

Mey (2001:95) considers speech acts as verbal actions happening in the world. According to him, "uttering a speech act, I do something with my words. I perform an activity that at best intentionally brings about a change in the existing state of affairs." To Yule (1996:134), a speech act communicates while Babatunde (2007:51) considers the thrust of the speech act theory as a consideration

n of the social and linguistic contexts of language use. According to Adegbija (1998:44), the core principle of the speech-act theory is that in uttering a sentence, a speaker, besides making a proposition about a state of affairs in the world – about the truth or falsity of a proposition, committing himself to a future course of action, or making somebody else do something – also performs an action such as requesting, stating, commanding, or informing. The theory is relevant to media discourse as it has been found that news reports perform the illocutionary acts of advising, commending, warning, threatening, condemning, highlighting and exposing (Adedimeji, 2005: 133-138).

Searle (1969), building on Austin's work, defines speech acts as "the basic or minimal units of linguistic communication" and goes further to develop his five illocutionary classes as: Representatives or Assertives (the speaker asserts a proposition to be true with verbs like affirm, boast, conclude, deny, report, etc.), Directives (the speaker wants the hearer to do something with verbs like order, command, invite, insist, beg, entreat, etc.), Commissives (the speaker commits himself/herself to a future course of action with verbs like pledge, promise, guarantee, vow, undertake, etc.), Expressives (the speaker expresses an attitude to a phenomenon using such verbs as apologise, appreciate, congratulate, deplore, detest, regret, etc.) and Declarations (the speaker changes the status or reality of a person, object or situation solely by making utterances like "I name this art work Mona Lisa", "I pronounce you guilty", "I sentence you to two years imprisonment" (Adegbija, 1982; Odebunmi, 2006; Babatunde, 2007).

Speech acts are actions performed by the use of an utterance to communicate. They are the linguistic acts made while speaking, which have some social or interpersonal purposes and pragmatic effects (Wales, 2001:363). Speech acts can either be direct or indirect. Direct speech acts are utterances that are explicitly expressed. What is meant is clearly stated in direct speech acts. Indirect speech acts, however, are utterances in which we say one thing and mean what we have said, and also mean another illocution with a different propositional content (Adegbija, 1999:196).

Leech and Thomas (1990:191) see indirect speech acts as "cases in which one illocutionary act is performed indirectly, by way of another". While they assert that speakers use indirectness for politeness (Leech and Thomas, 1990:194), they cite factors such as "clash of goals", "instrumental rationality", wishing "to say and not to say something simultaneously" (by using indirectness, the speaker says one thing and implies another, leaving him/herself an 'out' in case of reprisals) and "interestingness" as the motives for indirectness. A speech act, can also be locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary. The speech-act theory is considered relevant to literary works as observed by Pratt (1977:86) thus:

Speech act theory provides a way of talking about utterances not only in terms of their surface grammatical properties but also in terms of the context in which they are made, the intentions, attitudes, and expectations of the participants, the relationships existing between participants, and generally, the unspoken rules and conventions that are understood to be in play when an utterance is made and received.

This study adopts the set of speech acts proposed by Kreidler (1998) which tends to incorporate the essentials of Austin and Searle's classifications. According to Kreidler (1998:182-194), seven types of utterances are identifiable based on their general purposes.

Assertives are "concerned with facts that are subject to empirical investigation" such as "inform", "report", "state," etc. (which relate to Searle's Representatives). Performatives are those acts that bring about a change in the state of affairs they name, a category that corresponds to Austin's Performative utterances and Searle's Declarations. The felicity condition of this category is that the speaker and hearer must be within an extralinguistic institution before they can "perform". According to Kreidler (1998:187), "the speaker must be recognised as having the authority to make the statements. The circumstances must be appropriate" and examples include "resign", "declare", "sentence", "excommunicate", etc.

Verdictives, which are just like Austin's, are "acts in which the speaker makes an assessment or judgement" about the acts of the addressee; for example "thank", "accuse", "rank", etc. Expressives assess or evaluate "the actions – or failure of the speaker to act or perhaps the present result of

hose actions or failures", for instance, "apologise", "confess", "admit", etc. This category differs from that of Searle's Expressives because it is retrospective in nature, making an anaphoric reference directly or indirectly to a previous situation; Searle's is basically expressive as the term denotes.

Directives, on the other hand, are illocutionary acts by which "the speaker tries to get the addressee to perform some act or refrain from performing an act", the examples of which include "command", "direct", "charge", "forbid", "warn", etc. This category corresponds directly to Searle's Directives and is related to Austin's Exercitives. While Commissives are "speech acts that commit a speaker to a course of action", e.g. "agree", "threaten", "decline", "promise", etc. which squarely match Austin's and Searle's Commissives, the last Kreidlerian category, "phatic utterances," derived from the concept of "phatic communion" coined by Malinowski, is used "to establish rapport between members of the same society." Examples here include greetings, farewells, polite formulas, etc. especially when they are neither Verdictive nor Expressive in nature.

All the above classifications are part of the illocutionary act, with which the force of an utterance is made. As Kempson (1977:51) puts it, "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". It is noted that the speech acts theory is chiefly the theory of illocutionary acts because illocutionary acts "are the central objects of study of speech acts" (Adegbite, 2000:76).

5.0 Data base

Three magazines namely Newswatch, Tell and The News are sampled. The magazines are selected on the basis of their prominence in the respective military regimes and the similarity of their agenda. Ten headlines from each of the three magazines over a total period of ten years that marked the highest point of agitation against military rule in Nigeria were selected. The data presented are in three groups, A, B and C. Group A data feature Newswatch headlines cast against General Babangida (between 1989 and 1993). Group B data constitute Tell's fireworks against the government of General Abacha (1993-1998) while the last group, Group C, presents The News attacks on General Abubakar (1988-1999).

The following are headlines of Newswatch, Tell and The News:

Group A: Newswatch

- | | | |
|-------|---|----------------|
| (1)a | N BEYOND REACH | Feb. 13, 1989 |
| (2)b | IBB's Surprise Move The Sacking of AFRC | Feb. 20, 1989 |
| (3)c | The 3rd Republic How New is the Constitution ? | March 27, 1989 |
| (4)d | Is Judiciary in Retreat ? | Jan. 29, 1990 |
| (5)e | Count down to 1992 IBB Changes Gear | |
| | In the Last Lap of the Race | Sept. 10, 1990 |
| (6)f | Transition in Turmoil | Oct. 26, 1992 |
| (7)g | 1993 to Be or Not To Be ? | Nov. 16, 1992 |
| (8)h | Nation in Darkness | Dec. 21, 1992 |
| (9)i | Hardship | April 19, 1993 |
| (10)j | Standstill No Light No Water No Fuel More Strikes | May 31, 1993 |

Group B: Tell

- | | | |
|-------|---|--------------------|
| (11)a | ABACHA DECLARES WAR – The Role Emirs Played | August 29, 1994 |
| (12)b | ABACHA MUST GO IN 1995- Military Commanders | December 12, 1994 |
| (13)c | SECRET ACCOUNTS/HOW ASO ROCK LOOTED THE NATION | |
| | | January 30, 1995 |
| (14)d | AMERICA SHAKES THE JUNTA Threatens Tougher Measures | |
| | | September 11, 1995 |
| (15)e | PANIC GRIPS ASO ROCK Military On Red Alert | December 4, 1995 |
| (16)f | ABACHA Vs ABACHA His Latest Plot to Succeed | |

- Himself Whey He May Fail February, 17, 1997
- (17)g "THIS REGIME IS GODLESS...It's Bound To Fail" GANI February 24, 1997
- (18)h NO WAY FOR ABACHA Nigerians Say Enough is Enough April, 14, 1997
- (19)i THE ODDS AGAINST ABACHA Self-Succession Plan in Trouble June 9, 1997
- (20)j OPPOSITION UNITES AGAINST ABACHA
"We Can Die For Him"... Daniel Kanu March 23, 1998

Group C: The News

- (21)a. REVEALED ABUBAKAR'S AGENDA The IBB Connection 3 August, 1998
- (22)b THE IGBO what have They Done ? 10 August, 1998
- A Story of MARGINALISATION
- (23)c. Guerrilla War in Niger Delta 14 September, 1998
- (24)d. ABUBAKAR Agenda Unfolds Why He Can't
Sack Abacha Boys 5 October, 1998
- (25)e. Abubakar GIVES UP 18 January 1999
- (26)f Return of the CHAGOURIS How Abacha' Business
Partners Penetrate Abubakar 1 February, 1999
- (27)g. Rumpus in The MILITARY Bama'iyi Battles Abubakar 22 March, 1999
- (28)h. THE RUSH TO Share Nigeria Abubakar Under Fire 29 March, 1999
- (29)i. Abubakar's FINAL COUP Obasanjo, Governors-Elect PANIC 12 April, 1999
- (30)j. The Soyinka Interview Abubakar's Junta DUBIOUS 3 May, 1999

The summary of the analysis (see Adedimeji, 2002) is presented in the following table:

Data	Speech Act	Type	Function
1	Indirect	Verdictive	Complaining
2	Indirect	Expressive	Reporting
3	Indirect	Directive	Questioning
4	Indirect	Directive	Questioning
5	Direct Assertive		Stating
6	Indirect	Verdictive	Assessing
7	Indirect	Verdictive	Questioning
8	Indirect	Verdictive	Complaining
9	Indirect	Verdictive	Complaining
10	Indirect	Expressive	Reporting
11	Direct Assertive		Affirming
12	Direct Directive		Commanding
13	Direct Expressive		Reporting
14	Direct Assertive		Threatening
15	Direct Assertive		Threatening
16	Direct Expressive		Informing
17	Direct Expressive		Condemning
18	Direct Assertive		Rejecting
19	Indirect	Expressive	Reporting
20	Direct Assertive		Threatening
21	Indirect	Expressive	Exposing
22	Indirect	Directive	Questioning
23	Indirect	Expressive	Reporting
24	Indirect	Verdictive	Assessing
25	Direct Assertive		Reporting
26	Direct Expressive		Exposing

27	Direct	Expressive	Informing
28	Indirect	Verdictive	Assessing
29	Direct	Assertive	Stating
30	Indirect	Verdictive	Judging

6.0. Analysis

It is evident from the foregoing summary that indirect speech acts, which are utterances where one thing is said but another thing is meant with a different propositional content in addition to what is said (Adegbija, 1999:196) or cases in which one illocutionary act is performed indirectly by way another (Leech and Thomas, 1990: 191) are preponderant during General Babangida's regime (Group A) constituting 90% while there is only one instance of direct speech acts or (utterances where what is meant is clearly stated) or 10% of the data. There are five verdictives, two expressives, two directives and one assertive. In Group B or under General Abacha, however, there is only one indirect speech act (10%) while most speech acts (90%) are direct, the opposite of the Group A result in that category. There are also five assertives, four expressives and one directive. In Group C or under General Abdulsalam, the distribution of direct and indirect speech acts is almost even at ratio 6:4 or 60% and 40% respectively. There are also four expressives, three verdictives, two assertives, and one directive.

The result shows that the press, for certain reasons, did not criticise General Babangida directly. Deliberate attempt was made in the casting of the headlines to condemn him and his government in a subtle way. Except in two instances, the name IBB was not mentioned as a strategy of avoiding confrontation, as much as possible. General Babangida's antecedents of allegedly masterminding the murder of the magazine's founding Editor-in-Chief and his perceived deceptive, often cunning countenance, with which he consolidated himself in power, are some of the reasons for this approach of the press. There is a strong reliance on using images, colours and pictures – which often lend themselves to divergent interpretations – rather than verbal linguistic codes to achieve what Lascal (cited in Leech and Thomas 1990:194) refers to “an ‘out’ in case of reprisals”.

The language of the press was thus that of doubt and scepticism while his policies, programmes and the state of the nation were criticised with his name seldom mentioned in the headlines. It can be gainfully surmised that General Babangida was attacked without causing him a lot of damage, for fear of reprisals, giving his previous antecedent and experience of the sampled press medium, Newswatch.

In other words, the press under General Babangida's leadership, within the scope of our data was critical, but not combative, anti-status quo but diplomatic in approach. General Babangida's reaction to all these criticisms was repressing the media men and houses as well as forcefully quelling the various protests under his regime. For instance, the January 30 1989 edition of Newswatch presented a cover story highlighting various wicked measures taken by IBB to further gag the suppressed press. The headline of the edition was aptly captioned “Media Decree – chaining the Watchdog”.

Though thousands of civilians died under his practical step to subjugate the public including the volatile media, General Babangida was eventually “forced to ‘step aside’ from power on 26 August 1993, replacing himself with Shonekan” (Uweche, 1996:119). As such, General Babangida was defeated, at a high cost although.

In the Group B data, against what used to be the case under General Babangida's rule, there was a tendency to directly confront and unapologetically criticise General Abacha. The language of the press was highly combative, decidedly offensive with direct speech acts that amounted to linguistic missiles. The media left no stone unturned in condemning, rejecting, exposing, threatening and attacking the General based on the perceived lessons of deception and hypocrisy learnt from General Babangida. “Aso Rock”, “The Junta” in respective frequency dominate the headlines where “Abacha”, mentioned in six out of ten instances, is not used, all in an attempt to portray the government of General Abacha the way it was perceived, without taking recourse to much indirectness. The text

s of the headlines are powerful and forceful with performative "violent" verbs selected for pragmatic effect. It is entailed that given the prevailing autocratic ruthlessness of General Abacha, he should also be fired by linguistic missiles ruthlessly. It is doubtful if any other Nigerian military leader had been so terribly criticised, condemned and embarrassed by such level of language use.

The reaction of General Abacha to the media warfare and public demonstrations was brutal. He brooked no dissent in unleashing a "Reign of Terror" on the nation, as the headline of *Tell*, 3rd November 1997 indicates. His tyranny was thus unprecedented as he had the singular "honour" of being "the worst ruler Nigeria ever had" (Uweche, 1996:2). All opposition regardless of being military or civilian, high or low, was decisively dealt a fatal blow. However, despite the "operation total crackdown" launched by General Abacha and the resultant deaths, closures (of press houses), detention and tortures of the ubiquitous opposition groups, the press especially did not relent. The psychological warfare of the press arguably occasioned the heart-attack General Abacha allegedly suffered, culminating in his unexpected death. Though, he did not surrender willingly to the linguistic power, he had to vacate the seat he so much coveted when he was gripped by the hands of death.

Definitely, the press attacks on General Abubakar, as the study shows, were not as serious as those launched on the previous regimes. Much attention was given to uncovering the various atrocities perpetrated by General Abacha. One can gainfully assert that he was being made to partly pay for the sins of his comrades-in-arms, the previous two rulers. There was a tendency, moreover, to mildly criticise General Abubakar so that he would not attempt to truncate his transition programme as the two Generals before him did. With appropriate word density and face threatening acts, General Abubakar was "covered" to achieve the perlocutionary effect of not disappointing Nigerians.

Practically, General Abubakar reacted to the missiles against him by freeing all the political detainees and others who were unjustifiably incarcerated by General Abacha. He was intimidated enough to announce an epoch-making less-than-a-year transition programme. His activities were closely monitored and he made good his promise by conducting elections as scheduled and handing over to a democratically elected president.

7.0 Concluding Remarks

This paper has shown that language to the press is like missiles, bombs and explosives to the military: they are used to wage war or make peace as the situation warrants. In Nigeria, it is discovered, the press had been at the forefront of setting agenda and fighting the cause of democracy, the rule of law and justice in compliance with the opinion of Nnamdi Azikwe, "one of Africa's most glamorous politicians and journalists", as quoted by Akinfeleye (1988:121) that, "there is no better means to arouse African people than by power of pen and of the tongue".

During the worst decade of military rule in Nigeria (i.e. 1989-1999), the scope of this study, headlines were cast, projected and propelled with force – as great and compelling as such could be – to awaken protest against the status quo and force the military out of power. A study of thirty headlines, ten for each of the regimes of General Babangida, General Abacha and General Abubakar revealed the facets of assault on the military through linguistic (and non-linguistic) means by a selection of the Nigerian vocal media. It can be deduced that the press set the machinery for the eviction of General Babangida in motion, practically chased General Abacha out of power (or out of this world) and blackmailed General Abubakar into quickly stepping out of power.

It is noted that the media did exceedingly well by fighting the military to achieve democracy with the force of language deployed through speech acts. It is a challenge as well to the press to allow the hard-fought-for democracy to thrive as it should desist from all temptations to advertently or inadvertently provide a springboard or excuse for military overthrow of the civilian government. The greatest of such temptations is "the prevalent cancer of corruption" which not only threatens the "credibility" of the press "but also its capacity to perform its constitutional roles" and which has caught the attention of "serious-minded professionals" (Aiyetan, 2002:112). It is believed that the rot in the media should be treated accordingly, at least, for the sake of democracy while truth should be its hallmark, not lies in its various ramifications (Adedimeji, 2013). Lastly, the synopsis of this study

y can be presented thus, in the words of a former Senate President and current Secretary to the Government of the Federation, Anyim Pius Anyim, with whom we agree that:
The power of the media is, therefore, enormous and far reaching since the colonial era until this time, government has seen the media as sometimes helpful, sometimes dangerous but always an 'indispensable institution for social control (Sunday Punch, 2002:12).

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