Chapter 9

A Critical Political Discourse Analysis of President Goodluck Jonathan’s Declaration of State of Emergency on Adamawa, Borno, and Yobe States of Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This chapter analyzes the text to other connected discourses (intertextuality) and to historical and synchronic contexts with a view to demonstrate how the President can wield power in a democratic dispensation. The paper demonstrates that Declaration of Emergency Rule is indeed a political discourse. The paper also reveals that political powers are symmetric and asymmetric whereby the president may sound authoritative in one instance; he may sound appealing on the other. The paper also concludes that declaration of state of emergency is an embodiment of ideology, power and hierarchy. Lastly, the paper reveals that political discourses are couched bearing in mind the speaker, the listeners, and the context that gave birth to it including some sociological variables.

INTRODUCTION

Sequel to the declaration of state of emergency by President Goodluck Jonathan of Nigeria on states where the activities of the Boko Haram sect had become a threat to the corporate existence of the country, the Nigerian public was divided on whether or not the president should declare the state of emergency. Whereas some viewed his inaction as a sign of weakness, others construed the declaration as fiat and draconic. A state of emergency, according to Cambridge English Dictionary on Line is “a temporary
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system of rules to deal with an extremely dangerous or difficult situation”. However, from a linguistic point of view it is a speech act or simply put ‘doing things with words’. As a discourse, it is an attempt by the President to express power through illocutionary act (see Austin, 1962; Searles, 1969) within the framework of the constitution. But as a political discourse, it is characterized by power. Hence, this chapter attempts to do a critical political discourse analysis of the text with a view to making visible the interconnectedness of language and power with other social variables within the framework of Critical Discourse Analysis. The text for analysis is the declaration by the President as replicated on one of the pages of Nigerian daily Newspapers. To this end, attempt is made to analyze the text with other connected discourses (intertextuality) and historical and synchronic contexts with a view to demonstrating how the President can wield power in a democratic dispensation. The results provide new support that political powers are asymmetrical, unequal and empowering to those vested with such powers.

A declaration of emergency rule is usually a pre-scripted speech and the prerogative of the President of Nigeria with the backing of the National Assembly especially when the country comes under threat. And there is no doubt that the activities of Boko Haram and other groups over the years have threatened the corporate existence of the nation called Nigeria. Hence on the 13th of May 2013 the President, Goodluck Ebele Jonathan, declared a state of emergency on three states that were most hit by the activities of Boko Haram. Boko Haram literally translates to “Western Education is Sin”. The goal of the sect is to create an Islamic State and impose sharia laws on the northern part of Nigeria. A lot of write ups have been made both locally and internationally in this regard to show the intensity of this phenomenon, Forest (2012) has written a book titled: Confronting the Activities of Boko Haram in Nigeria. As the title suggests, issues addressed by the author are political, socioeconomic and security. To the best knowledge of the writer, no linguistic scholarly work has been done on the full text of President Jonathan’s declaration of state of emergency in Nigeria. Hence, the focus of the chapter is to demonstrate the power of linguistic studies used in an interdisciplinary way, a tool for understanding behavior and predicting human action specifically in the context of terrorism and national security in Nigeria, how the President can wield power tacitly and otherwise in a democratic dispensation and how the declaration appeals to him and the citizenry alike. The theory of Critical Discourse Analysis is employed to analyze the political issues of the declaration.

UNDERSTANDING CRITICAL POLITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

It will be interesting to start by examining the concept ‘Critical Linguistics’. According to Van Dijk (1993:131), CL can be defined as “a shared perspective on doing linguistic, semiotic or discourse analysis”. Nowadays, it is conventionally used in a broader sense to denote, the practical linking of “social and political engagements” with a sociologically informed construction of society. Hence, critiquing is essentially making visible the interconnectedness of things. (Fairclough, 1995, 35). But according to Wodak (2002, 1), the terms Critical Linguistics (CL) and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) are often used interchangeably.

CDA is anchored on the notions of ideology, power, hierarchy and gender together with sociological variables. It sees “language as social practice” (Fairclough & Wodak 1997, 2), and considers the context of language use to be crucial. (Wodak, 2000, 3; Benke, 2000, 2) Describing and order of discourse as social practice implies a dialectal relationship between a particular discursive event such as the situation(s), institution(s) and social structure(s) which frame it. In this regard, the discursive event is shaped by