

## **Exploring Speech Acts in The Editorials of *the Punch* and *the Blueprint* Nigerian Newspapers**

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**Abstract:** *The study looks at how specific words in the Nigerian Newspapers Punch and Blueprint manifest their intended functions. The goals of speakers' remarks and the actions they use them to accomplish are ascertained through speech act analysis. Thus, the study looks at the predominant speech actions that editors utilize while writing editorials and how they interpret the statements. The information was obtained from editorials in the Punch and Blueprint newspapers. The statements collected are the topic sentences of the first five paragraphs in each of the editorials. The data are analyzed using Speech Act Theory of Searle (1969) to reveal the preponderant acts performed by the editors in writing the editorials for meaning-making, with particular reference to illocutionary act classifications which are representatives, directives, commissives, expressive and declaratives. The findings reveal that there are 6 representative acts constituting 60%. The dominance of representative act shows that the major functions of the news editors is to inform the readers. Equally evident, the editors skillfully employed two directive acts—20% of the total—to construct meaning in the editorials by requesting that Nigerian leaders fulfill specific obligations. Additionally, the editors employed two expressive acts—20% of the total—to convey their opinions regarding the issues raised by the data. However, it is equally revealed that both commissive and declarative acts are not used in the data elicited. There is no declarative act in the data collected because declarative act is only used to present verdicts made on certain issues. The insignificant use of commissive acts shows that editors do not rely on commissive acts in writing editorials. The study, therefore, contributes to the increasing works in the field of pragmatics by revealing the peculiarity and usage of speech act theory in analyzing the editorials in the selected Nigerian newspapers.*

**Keywords:** Speech Act, Editorials; Newspapers; Punch; Blueprint.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Nigeria is one of the largest populated countries whose citizens use English as second language (ESL) because of the numerous functions it performs, including serving as the language of education, government, commerce and industry, law and legal drafting, science and technology, interaction and mass media. Although other main indigenous languages are used in mass communication, English is the language of mass media, particularly print media. The print media which consists of newspapers, magazines, books, pamphlets and comics that carry messages to the masses of people by appealing to their sense of sight employ written medium of communication. In a communication process, language skills are employed. Speech is the first language skill, and it is acquired before the written skill (Akinkuolere and Kumuyi, 2013:1). In other words, speech is primary while writing is secondary. According to Hasan (2013:16), the written form of language takes several years to develop. This is based on the assumption that writing is subordinate to speech, the fundamental form of language. The literacy skills of a language include writing and reading; while writing is a productive skill, reading is a receptive skill; hence, print media involves all forms of writing in the newspapers, magazines, books, pamphlets and comic that pass information to the masses of people. The universal acceptability and usefulness of print media is enhanced basically because of the spread of literacy in the world.

The newspapers can be considered as one of the modern, fastest and most trustworthy sources of news and information. A newspaper is a publication containing written information about current events and happenings. Newspapers have become one of the conventional means of information dissemination in our society today. However, the use of online news in recent times is more pronounced among some people and has reduced the utilization of the newspapers but it does not in any way erase the use and importance of newspapers in our society. It can be said that newspapers play a significant role in information dissemination. Farinde (2019:84) observes that “the language of the news plays a major part in the construction of what has been referred to as the social construction of reality”. This means that the language used in writing newspapers can impact positively or negatively on the readers and the society in different forms. Newspaper is one of the media through which information is passed to the masses, examine various fields of endeavour such as education, health, economy, politics, sports and law. The acts performed by the editor of Nigerian newspapers can be made known through the language used.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Previous studies have examined newspapers from various linguistic perspectives such as syntax, discourse analysis, cohesion, semantics and semiotic analysis. These studies include Abba and Musa (2015), Agbeleoba (2015), Ariyo (2014), Olowu (2013), Akinkuolere and Kumuyi (2013), Touria (2010) and Chiluya (2007). In all these

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studies, discourse and pragmatic frameworks like cohesion, implicature, presupposition and speech acts theories were utilized.

All these suggest that there are significant numbers of works on newspapers. However, as numerous as these researches are, there are still some gaps left unfilled by these studies. None of these studies had used speech act theory to examine the language of the selected Nigerian newspaper editorials. Also, these studies have not looked at the preponderant acts being performed by these editors in writing their editorials. It is on this premise the researcher intends to fill the gap using speech act theory in analyzing editorials in selected Nigerian newspapers. It is imperative to state that various works have been done using speech act framework but not on editorials of the selected newspapers (Akinkuolere, 2012; Abuya, 2012; Thomas, 2015 and Duffy, 2017). Hence, this research focuses on the manifestation of speech acts in the editorials of *The Punch* and *The Blueprint* Nigerian newspapers using speech act theory of Searle (1969).

Editorial Department is an important arm in the print media organization. Its equivalent in the electronic media is known as News and Current Affairs Department. In the print media, the department is headed by the Editor-in-Chief. The functions of this department include coverage of events, writing of news stories, editorials and articles and designing pages for newspapers. Bamisaye (2008:85) opines; "The editorial department aims at producing the best newspaper items through identification, deployment and utilization of essential editorial resources". The views of the editors on any news item in the print media are called editorials. Editorial is a section in the newspapers or magazines in which the editors share their opinions or views on ongoing issues in the society. It is an article that presents the newspaper's opinion on a topic which represents the majority voice of the editorial board. The editors compose the editorials.

It is also one of the duties of the editors to supervise, monitor and correct journalists and the guest writers in their writings. According to Ogundowole et al. (2006:52); "The news editor is the key to the operation and the heart of the newspaper industry". An editor's job among others, includes choosing what events should be covered and giving guidance on how story structures should be featured. He or she juggles the supervisory position of news writing boss with the general task of supervising the editing department (Akinkuolere and Kumuyi 2013:4).

The editorials of *The Punch* and *The Blueprint* are usually coded "The Editorials" and appear on a page of each edition. In summary, the editorial is the official position of the Editorial Board on issues in the newspapers. Thus, the features of the language of the newspaper editors deserve scholarly attention in any or all sub-fields of linguistic study.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Speech act is interested in what we use language to do. Dada (2012) asserts that speech act analysis of a language is the investigation into that aspect of meaning that is derived

not from the formal properties of words and constructions, but from the way utterances are used and how these utterances perform actions in relation to the context in which they are uttered. According to Austin (1962:27), in every utterance, a person performs an act such as stating a fact, stating an opinion, confirming or denying something, making a prediction or a request, asking a question, issuing an order, giving a permission, giving a piece of advice, making an offer, making a promise, thanking somebody or condoling somebody. These are all speech acts. Therefore, it can be said that any utterance is a speech act.

In accordance with the speech acts theory, when language is employed, certain acts are performed. This theory hinges its argument on three different acts that are performed when an utterance or statement is made which are locutionary act, illocutionary act and perlocutionary act. When a speaker makes an utterance, that is a locutionary act and he definitely has a particular intention in mind which is an illocutionary act and the effect of the utterance on the hearer is called a perlocutionary act (Dada, 2004). Thus, the three types of speech acts are:

- i. Locutionary act: This is the process of speaking something that makes sense when using language; it consists of a phonic act (the production of actual noise), a phatic act (the production of specific words in a specific syntactic order), and a rhetic act (the conveying of a specific message). Locutionary act, therefore, refers to the formal and literal meaning of an utterance or statement (Adetunji, 2009 in Dada, 2012:86).
- ii. Illocutionary act: An illocutionary act can be seen as a non-linguistic act performed through a linguistic or locutionary act. This is the act of giving meaning to an utterance which is performed through the medium of language. The illocutionary meaning of an utterance can be warning, promising, requesting, stating, naming, informing and many others.
- iii. Perlocutionary act: This is the effect that an illocutionary act, such as misleading, persuading, convincing, reacting, and so on, has on the listener. A perlocutionary act may or may not be successful. The criteria that determine whether a specific act succeeds or fails are known as felicity conditions or appropriacy conditions.

These principles guide the exploration of the manifestations of these selected editorials of *the punch* and *the blueprint* Nigerian newspapers.

## **METHODOLOGY**

To conduct a thorough analysis of editorials from The Punch and Blueprints, a structured methodology was carried out. This involved certain purposive factors focusing on relevance to current issues and publication date range. A specific time frame for the selected editorials was established, allowing for a snapshot of the editorial stance for about three months covering June to August, 2023. The statements collected are the topic sentences of the first five paragraphs in each of the editorials in the two newspapers namely the Punch and the Blueprints. Samples of these were taken for analysis.

### **Data Presentation and Tagging**

#### **Speech Acts in *The Punch Newspaper* Editorial**

##### **Datum 1**

Locutionary Act: The President, Major-General Muhammadu Buhari (rtd.), should stop the dangerous pussyfooting today, designate the insurgents and mass murderers as terrorists that they are, and unleash the full coercive arsenal of the state against them.

Illocutionary Act: expressive (Feeling)

Expected Perlocutionary Act: Confusion

##### **Datum 2**

Locutionary Act: He told us that the equipment is meant for the war against terrorists and insurgents and since these are bandits, they (Tucano planes) cannot be deployed.

Illocutionary Act: Representative (Informing)

Expected Perlocutionary Act: Disappointment

##### **Datum 3**

Locutionary Act: Who then are these bandits?

Illocutionary Act: Directive (Questioning)

Expected Perlocutionary Act: Annoyance

##### **Datum 4**

Locutionary Act: As far as their modus operandi is concerned, terrorists and insurgents are the same.

Illocutionary Act: Representative (Affirming)

Expected Perlocutionary Act: Condemnation

##### **Datum 5**

Locutionary Act: The Global Terrorism Index has ranked Boko Haram and its offshoot, ISWAP and Fulani herdsmen among the world's five most deadly terrorist groups.

Illocutionary Act: Representative (Reporting)

Expected Perlocutionary Act: Fear

#### **B. Speech Acts in *The Blueprint Newspaper* Editorial**

##### **Datum 6**

Locutionary Act: The recent call by the Speaker of the House of Representatives, Femi Gbajabiamila, on President Muhammadu Buhari to treat the stealing of Nigeria's crude oil as treasonable felony attracting death penalty could not have come at a better time.

Illocutionary Act: Representative (Stating)

Expected Perlocutionary Act: Concern

##### **Datum 7**

Locutionary Act: Mr President, permit me to convey the disquiet in the House of Representatives arising from the reports of massive decline in the volume of crude oil export due primarily to theft and diversion by criminal elements.

Illocutionary Act: Directive (Requesting)

Expected Perlocutionary Act: Restlessness

##### **Datum 8**

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Locutionary Act: Therefore, our position is that their actions constitute treason against our country, for which they and their enablers must be held accountable to the fullest extent permitted by law.

Illocutionary Act: Representative (submitting)

Expected Perlocutionary Act: Hopefulness

#### **Datum 9**

Locutionary Act: Therefore, we are urging a swift and system overhaul of the systems in place to protect the country's oil and gas resources.

Illocutionary Act: Expressive (Praying)

Expected Perlocutionary Act: agitation

#### **Datum 10**

Locutionary Act: Gbajabiamila's advocacy came on the heels of the lamentation by the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the Nigerian National Petroleum Company Limited (NNPCL), Mele Kyari that Nigeria is in calamitous situation over oil theft, pipeline vandalism with attendant low production.

Illocutionary Act: Representative (Advocating)

Expected Perlocutionary Act: Despondency

### **DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS**

The table of speech acts analysis reflects that the preponderant speech act in the selected editorials is representative. Out of 10 identified speech acts, 6 are representatives, constituting 60% of the total percentage. The representatives use language to inform, state, claim, submit, recount, disagree, assume and stimulate the readers. This shows that the primary duty of news editors is to inform the readers. Hence, the editorial boards of these selected newspapers have lived up to their expectations in discharging their duties by being highly assertive in the editorials.

From the analysis, there is significant employment of directive acts in the construction of meanings in the editorials. Directive acts are 2 in number, making 20% of the total percentage. Directive act is used to command, insist, question, suggest, plead, invite and request the hearers to carry out an obligation. The use of these two directive acts is based on the fact that editors or journalists are requesting the leaders to heed the calls of the society.

Next in numerical strength to acts depicting directive is expressive. The presence of 2 expressive acts which constitute 20% attracts one's attention. Expressive acts are mostly direct face-saving acts used in praying, sympathizing, condoling, worrying, congratulating, apologizing, thanking, feeling, condemning, regretting etc. The presence of these expressive statements in the editorials is due to the fact that editorial is a forum for the editors to express their opinions and feelings.

From the analysis, it is revealed that the editors of these newspapers do not use declarative acts. This is because declarative act cause instantaneous change in the

institutional state of affairs which must satisfy the felicity condition in order to be met. Declarative act perform the function of blessing, hiring, baptizing, arresting, marrying, sentencing christening and so on which none of the statements elicited actually performed. This, therefore, shows that declarative act is not a popular speech act used by the editors in writing their editorials.

The commissive act is not attested to in the selected newspaper editorials. The insignificant use of commissive acts clearly implies that editors are not committed to any statement in the editorials. This act is used to create obligations in the speakers not in the hearers. The act functions in form of promising, swearing, threatening, vowing, warning, loving etc., which make the editors responsible for the proposition. Also, this shows that commissive act of Searle (1969) is not a popular speech act utilized by the editor in writing editorials of newspapers.

## CONCLUSION

The study has shown that editors are not just making statements but rather performing actions with their statements. This study helps to examine and account for the language employed by the newspapers' editors which aids in meaning-making process. Since statement is used to perform an act by the editors, the study of this nature significantly shed more light on the type of speech acts usually employed by the editors which help the readers to fathom what is said. Furthermore, the findings of the study help to identify the area of challenges to both the editors and the readers, which can only be explained through speech act analysis. Finally, this study assists the readers to know the preponderant speech acts being used by the editors in writing their editorials about societal issues.

From the analysis, the study finds that speech act theory can explain the numerous acts performed by the Editorial Boards of the selected newspapers in making meaning and composing editorials. These speech acts have perlocutionary implications on the readers in the process of constructing meaning. The study constitutes a fair representation of editorials in Nigerian newspapers in which societal issues are discussed.

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