An Ethnographic Study of Invective Songs Used by Politicians in Southwestern Nigeria

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Abstract

Our utterances as human become meaningful and capable of achieving specific purposes only when used in the appropriate social context, thus diction used in a wrong context is inappropriate. Most often in the Nigeria political terrain invective songs are used provocatively which is unhealthy for Nigeria's democratic system and they breed enmity, chaos, ethnic and ideological rivalry. The study, therefore employs Dell Hyme's Ethnography of Speaking to analyse the contextual and appropriateness of political invective songs used by politicians in Southwestern Nigeria. Simple random sampling was used for data collection. The scope was limited to two political parties the Southwestern geopolitical zone: All Progressive Congress (APC) and Peoples Democratic Party (PDP). The data were collected from online TV platforms: Channels TV online streaming platform, NTA (Nigerian Television Authority) online streaming platform and Bio TV online streaming platform. Sixteen out of the thirty-three invective songs collected were classified and analysed using Kodah's classification of invectives. It is observed that south-west politician's invective songs showcase Yoruba deep cultural heritage and feature their socioeconomic lives. The paper concludes that invective songs are effective mode of political communication and a revelation of politicking in Southwestern Nigeria. The paper recommends that further studies in invectives in socio-political discourse and related issues should be engaged towards consensus building and problem solving required for healthy nation building.

Keywords: invective songs, political discourse, south-west, Yoruba culture, language use

Introduction

The significance of language as the means through which human communication is possible in a particular social environment is indisputable. Language, being the tool through which different functions are performed, is embedded in human social activities among which politics is one. The intrinsic link between language and politics has long been recognised. For example, this is evident in Aristotle's words, "... that man is more of a political animal than bees or any other gregarious animals" (Joseph 2006**:**1). Nature as we often say makes nothing in vain and man is the only animal whom she has endowed with the gift of speech (Joseph 2006**:**1). To keep interactions going, all

languages have developed intricate sets of verbal and nonverbal tools whose main function is to keep the communicative channel open. Mateo and Yus (2014:1) classify these intricate sets as *phatic* that is, with the only intention to maintain the listeners' commitment in the exchange, while others have an ostensive communicative purpose.

Politics is an important aspect of human life through which humans organise themselves for the collective prosecution of desires. Bayram (2010:1-2) says "it is a struggle for power in order to put certain political, economic and social ideas into practice". In this process, language plays a crucial role, because every political action is prepared, accompanied, influenced and played by language. It is one of the vital tools that politicians use in order to shape the political thoughts of the electorates with the aim of selling their ideologies to them.

In Southwestern Nigeria, invective songs are often used by politicians in their rallies and campaigns against their opposition party members. Ademilokun (2013) notes that there exist an inextricable relationship between music and politics as a great deal of political communication at political rallies is rendered through political songs. Lamidi (2002) defines invective songs in Nigerian social context as songs common in local communities, which are employed to reprimand, condemn and ridicule people. He further observes that in Yoruba oral poetry, invective songs are employed in specific occasions just as such songs are employed by wives in polygamous homes, used to lampoon tyrannical kings, and employed to condemn disgruntled elements in the society. The importance of songs in instigating conflict is aptly captured by a Yoruba proverb that says *orin níí sáájú ọte*, meaning 'songs herald conspiracy' (Olarewaju 2011).

2015 General Elections at a Glance

Nigeria's 2015 elections were the most contested in the country since the return to democracy in 1999. For the first time, the Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP) which has been the ruling party since 1999 was voted out.

At one time, Nigeria had as many as fifty (50) registered political parties, but none of them had national spread, structure and deep pockets of the PDP. However, all this changed in 2013 when the All Progressives' Congress (APC) was formed by the coalition of the Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN), the All Nigeria Peoples' Party (ANPP), the Congress for Progressive Change (CPC) and a faction of the Grand Alliance (APGA). With this, there was an elevation in the manner that campaigns have been conducted, with the improvement

largely due to the influence of the APC. Its emergence to challenge the dominance of the PDP had gone beyond its new national spread, but translated into the nature of the campaign itself (Amaza 2015).

Invective as a Communicative Device in Political Language Use

Obviously, most political campaigns in Nigeria are negative discourse. According to Opeibi (2004), the use of negative adverts are due to several reasons which includes fear of losing elections, paucity of ideas, and probably to settle old scores between perceived political enemies. For example, during the second republic, in Kwara state, the dominant party, National Party of Nigeria (NPN) tries to tell the opposition that their candidate is popular by singing this song: *Sàràkí mì gboro tìtì, ó mì gboro; Ol*óyè mì gboro tìtì, ó mì gboro meaning Saraki (NPN financier and strong man) is shaking the city, he is shaking the city, he is shaking the city. The chief is shaking the city. The opposition party; The Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN), countered with this song: *ilé won náà nu nì* (2ce)*; Ilé àbèrè wò bí ilé èkúté, ilé won náà nu nì.* This song literally means; "this is their house, their house like rat's house (you have to bend to enter), this is their house. This second song was trying to discredit the National Party of Nigeria's members, as poor, not only of material well-being but also of ideas.

Boulton (1978:41) attested to the perspective of such potential for complexity in political campaigns. She also observed that "language is often used not to communicate but to deceive in political campaigns". This is often true of political propaganda. The intention to manipulate people's mind and thought are symbolically expressed through print and broadcast media, particularly during political campaigns and the eventual practice of politics in a given society. Furthermore, the concept of politics revolves around three (3) fundamental questions: '*Who governs? To what ends? By what means?'* These are played out through discussion, disagreement, lobbying, noting, campaigning and voting (Omozuwa, V. E. and E. U. C. Ezejideaku 2007).

Politics is concerned with power to make decision, to control resources, to control other peoples' behaviour and control their values. Politicians choose their words carefully because they believe in the power of language to influence thought. They believe implicitly in linguistic relativity. Most languages used in politics are rhetoric, grandiloquence or bombast which concerns jaw-breaking words and sheer linguistic flamboyance.

During campaign, vague utterances are often used. Politician makes use of certain words that are vague or indefinite i.e words that have no realistic way

of validating them, like rumour that lack veritable facts in order to discredit their opponent. Example can be seen in the following extracts; *Lagos rejects bitterness* (This day, Saturday March 17, 2007). *Go Ahead! we love Lagosians* (Punch Tuesday March 20,2007). *Kalu doesn't reject old age, tradition.* (Punch, Saturday March 3, 2007).

Invective according to Applauso (2014:1) is a term derived from *oratio invectiva,* which means the practice of verbally insulting, attacking and ridiculing an opponent either orally or in writing. According to him, the etymology and historical significance of invectives refers to the past participle of the Latin verb *invehi* "to inveigh against" and the noun *invectiva* "vituperation, reproach".

Kodah (2012) treats invectives from a literary perspective. In his work, the study of Ahmadou Korouma's novel *The Suns of Independence*, he defines invective as an 'abusive language, violent expressions'. He further examines the causes of invective use and aesthetic or stylistic significance to socio-political discourse in the text leading to the formulation of critical reflections on the phenomenon as a potential source of socio-political conflict and social disintegration.

He further identifies and analyses three forms of invectives considered as verbal violence used in the novel. They are (i) Descriptive: Descriptive invectives according to him, refers to all forms of abusive pictorial language use which provokes emotional outburst that can lead to physical confrontation. (ii) Attributive: The kind of attributive adjectives and participles which are considered as invectives are those used in sneering at people and situations. (iii) Symbolic: This form of invective in the novel refers to abusive language use marked by a metaphoric replacement of characters by animals or things.

Sekyi-Baidoo (2008), in his study of insults and social cohesion, discusses and establishes that contrary to causing social breakdown, insults are used among students to regulate social behaviour, foster social cohesion, identity and solidarity. It is therefore the intent of this work to situate invective songs as effective mode of political communication and as arts and acts of politicking in Southwestern Nigeria, which can be used to represent the pattern of political discourse in the country as a whole. The study also establishes that invective songs seems unhealthy for Nigeria's democratic system, especially with the way it is handled, which breeds enmity, chaos, ethnic and ideological rivalry.

Theoretical framework

Hymes (1962, 1964) proposes the term 'ethnography of speaking' to describe a new approach to understanding language in use. In doing this, Hymes aims to move away from considering speech as an abstract model and toward investigating the diversity of speech as it is encountered in ethnographic fieldwork. Essentially, Hymes argues in (Farah 1998:125) that:

> ...the study of language must concern itself with describing and analysing the ability of the native speakers to use language for communication in real situations (communicative competence) rather than limiting itself to describing the potential ability of the ideal speaker/listener to produce grammatically correct sentences (linguistic competence). This ability involves a shared knowledge of the linguistic code as well as of the socio-cultural rules, norms and values which guide the conduct and interpretation of speech and other channels of communication in a community... [T]he ethnography of communication... is concerned with the questions of what a person knows about appropriate patterns of language use in his or her community and how he or she learns about it. It handles the sociocultural rules governing the organisation of speech in different contexts.

Hymes (1972:9) states that, "the starting point is the ethnographic analysis of the communication conduct of a community". Communication conduct is what people do when they communicate with each other. He set out this theory to show that researchers could use his methods to study this communication (talk) systematically. Hymes approaches language from a broader perspective and claims that speaking a language was not simply a matter of putting to use an abstract set of rules a speaker has internalised, largely in virtue of an innate endowment called 'Universal Grammar' as Chomsky (2004:405) puts it.

The eight components of the acronym SPEAKING as prescribed by Hymes are: (S) Setting, including the time, place and physical aspects of the situation such as arrangement of furniture in the classroom; (P) participant identity, including personal characteristics such as age, sex, social status and relationship with each other; (E) ends, including the purpose of the event itself as well as the individual goals of the participants; (A) act, sequence or how speech acts are organized within a speech event and what topic/s are addressed; (K) key or the tone and manner in which something is said or written; (I) instru-

mentalities or the linguistic code i.e. language, dialect, variety and channel i.e. speech or writing; (N) norm or the standard socio-cultural rules of interaction and interpretation, and (G) genre or type of event such as lecture, poem, letter (Farah 1998:126).

Methodology

The study employs both qualitative and quantitative approach. The simple random sampling was used for data collection. Sixteen invective songs were randomly selected from two political parties in the Southwestern geopolitical zone political rallies: All Progressive Congress (APC) and Peoples Democratic Party (PDP). The data were downloaded from online TV platforms: Channels TV online streaming platform, NTA (Nigerian Television Authority) online streaming platform and Bio TV online streaming platform. The samples are classified using Kodah's classification of invectives.

Data presentation and Analysis

The data collected are presented and analysed following the socio-ethnographic framework and classification earlier presented as contained in the invective songs under investigation:

Datum 1: Descriptive

Sòrò ẹnu rẹ, ayé ò ní mú ẹ síi... x2
Akanbi, sòrò ẹnʊ rẹ, ayé ò ní mú ẹ síi
Múnimúni kìí mú òrìṣà...x2
Sòrò ẹnʊ rẹ, ayé ò ní mú ẹ sii

(*Say whatever you want to say, nobody will hold you for it*
Akanbi o, say what you have to say, nobody will hold you for it
The police cannot arrest the gods
Say what you have to say, nobody will hold you for it)

Ethnography of speaking

- **Setting**: In the datum, the setting is at Mapo Hill in Ibadan during the 2015 Presidential /Governorship mega rally of the All Progressives Congress on the 15th of January 2015.

- **Participants:** There are two participants; King Wasiu Ayinde Marshal (KWAM I), a Musician and Asiwaju Bola Ahmed Tinubu, the party leader. The audience in the setting is the general public or electorate.

- **End:** The initiator of the song is the musician and the major purpose of the

conversation is to motivate the politician, Asiwaju Bola Ahmed to effectively address the audience without any fear of arrest. He did that to criticise and ridicule the incumbent administration and regard them as being toothless. This he did, by making use of oríkì (praise name) and also metaphorically referring to Tinubu as òrìṣà (a god) who cannot be questioned.

- **Acts:** Act sequence here is castigating and provoking. The speaker care less of the aftermath of the speech.

- **Key:** The tone with which the act is performed is harsh and daring.

- **Instruments:** The linguistic code employed is Yoruba language. This indicates the tribe/language of the speaker as well as the dominant language of the target audience.

- **Norms:** *Múnimúni kìí mu òrìṣà* showcases the use of proverb and *ewì àwíse* 'incantation' by the Yoruba. It shows the Yoruba demonstration of rich culture and belief in the Ifa oracle. The generic use of the word *ayé* 'world' which can be used to refer to the entire community or nation or a sect as evident in the datum depicts the Yoruba use of homonym. The Yoruba also believe that the use of *oríki* 'praise name' – *Àkànbí* is a strong motivator to build self-esteem and confidence which was demonstrated in the song of KWAM 1.

- **Genre:** The genre of the communication is praise song.

Datum 2: Attributive and Descriptive

Ó fẹ́ àmójútó, ó fẹ́ ìtọ́jú ńlá,
Ẹni tó ṣe POWER tẹ́lẹ̀,
Tó wá di agbálẹ̀ ọjà……,
Ó fẹ́ ìtọ́jú ńlá

(*There is a need to monitor him,*
There is a need to take care of him,
The person who belongs to power [*identity of the opposing party*] *before,*
now turns a street sweeper needs to be monitored.)

Ethnography of Speaking

- **Setting:** The setting is at Ibadan PDP Secretariat during the 2015 gubernatorial sensitisation/campaign and 'Thank You' rally of Ekiti State Governor's victory in the July 15th 2014 polls.

- **Participant:** The speaker is Hon. Alao Akala, the former Governor of Oyo State, while the audience comprises the masses.

- **End:** The aim of the conversation is to ridicule and mock a particular politician (name withheld) that defected from PDP to APC. This he did by deriding the defector as a street sweeper for defecting to APC; this is indicative because the symbol of APC is broom. Also he attempts to show the superiority of PDP through the use of 'power' in his song.

- **Acts:** The act sequence is that of ridicule and mockery.

- **Key:** Alao Akala's song is harsh and scornful

- **Instruments:** The language code employed is euphemism in Yoruba

- **Norms:** The politician uses the phrase *agbálẹ̀ ọjà* as a euphemistic expression to mean a mad person. Here, the defector is referred to as being insane for leaving the government in power to join a party that has no bearing in the realm of power. 'Power' is the slogan of PDP; hence the defector according to Alao Akala is insensible. Euphemism comes to play here as street sweeper is used lightly instead of directly saying that the defector is mad. Euphemism is generally an innocuous word or expression used in place of one that may be found offensive or suggest unpleasant omen or taboo.

- **Genre:** Political talk.

Datum 3: Attributive

> Inú igbó dúdú la máa lé wọn lọ...x2
> Àwọn dẹmọ!
> Inú igbó dúdú la máa lé wọn lọ
> A kò gbọdọ̀ gbọ́ pé wọ́n wà nílẹ̀ yìí mọ́
> Inú igbó dúdú la máa lé wọn lọ
>
> (*We are going to send them into the evil forest,*
> *The pretenders,*
> *They will all be sent into the evil forest*
> *We must not see them in our midst again*
> *We will send them all into the evil forest*).

Ethnography of speaking
- **Setting:** The setting is at the Ekiti Pavillon, near Iyin road, Ado Ekiti, during the 2015 Presidential Campaign of the All Progressive Congress (APC) on the 24th of January.

- **Participants:** Governor Rauf Aregbesola of Osun State is the main participant, the musician, the general public and the opposition parties.

- **End:** The song is employed to show the determination and readiness of APC to put an end to the PDP administration by winning in the forthcoming elections. This, he depicts by using inappropriate identity marker '*àwọn dẹmọ*,' mocking the whole party (PDP) by referring to them as the pretenders.

- **Acts:** The acts of the speech is ordering the banishment of the opposition into the evil forest and affirming the victory of the APC in the elections.

- **Key:** The manner in which the song is sung is daring and fearless.

- **Instruments:** The code employed is Yoruba language.

- **Norm:** "*igbó dúdú*" in Yoruba means evil forest, thus sending the opposition party to the evil forest is total banishment from the land, and people who are banished into the evil forest cannot go back to the community where they once lived, they are supposed to remain there permanently.

- **Genre:** Talk

Discussion of Findings

It could be deduced from the analysis so far, that the political invective songs used by the south-west politicians portrays different spheres of the Yoruba ways of life and culture which is the dominant ethnic group in the region. It is discovered that Southwestern political invective songs are embellished with rich cultural lore and rhetoric.

From a cultural perspective, many of the invective songs sung at the 2015 election rallies show the depth of Yoruba folklore and myths. The songs, no doubt, give the discourse cultural tone and a show of oral performance as evident among the Yoruba people of Southwestern Nigeria. The invective songs showcase the rich culture of the Yoruba on chants, proverbs, traditional belief and their frown at betrayal. The Yoruba are also fond of using oríkì as a form of boosting self-esteem and confidence which is evident in the analysis.

In a similar vein in the analysis, it is observed that the politicians support their persuasion with religious allusion. Some of the songs sung are rooted in the religious views in the locale. Some of the invective songs are curled from certain religious songs – Christian or Yoruba traditional religious songs. Perhaps, this can be attributed to the fact that very many of such songs are fast becoming part of the indigenous Yoruba songs or were initially and originally Yoruba cultural songs. Also, the use of such songs in such public political event portrays the level of religious commitment among the people of Southwestern Nigeria.

Name-calling, unkind nicknames or biases are attributes designed to

hurt the others and to arouse their anger. Children often use words of this type like 'stupid', 'idiot'...etc., when addressing their siblings or friends. Our analysis shows that Southwestern political songs are filled with instances of name-calling. It ranges from subtle forms of intellectual sarcasm and humour to the crudest possible attacks on the opponent. Such stereotype may also be indirect, involving allusion and figurative speech. However at other instances, the labels may be explicit taunts, boast, name-calling and jokes directed at downgrading the dignity and self-esteem of the opponent. While employing euphemism and metaphoric expressions in the invective songs the use of symbolism and imagery is evident.

Conclusion

This study examines the terrain of Nigeria's political discourse and provides socio-cultural link with the Yoruba using political invective songs. The study engages Kodah's typology of invectives which points out that political invective songs are describing, attributing, symbolizing or employs combination of two or more of the typology. The study identifies interesting invective songs embellished with rich cultural lore and rhetorical devices. It is observed that invective songs are effective mode of political communication and they characterise the art and act of politicking in Southwestern Nigeria, which can be used to represent the pattern of political discourse in the country as a whole. However, invective songs seems unhealthy for Nigeria's democratic system, especially with the way it is handled, which breeds enmity, chaos, ethnic and ideological rivalry.

All these effect of the harsh use of such invective songs succeeds in misleading the electorate and makes it difficult to make a right choice during elections. In view of the study, politicians need to be educated on their choice of words during election rallies and campaigns in other to build a political conscious and healthy society for free and fair election and unbiased choice. In essence, decency in the choice of words among the political and elite class will go a long way in influencing the electoral and the masses towards a culturally sane society and foster united effort towards nation building, sustainable democratic development and social cohesion.

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