



Speech Act Features of Select Extracts in Chinua Achebe's *Arrow of God*: Leadership Perspective

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Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration between the two authors. Author SOA designed the study while author KSA supervised the study. The two authors managed the analyses. Author SOA wrote the first draft of the manuscript and managed the literature searches while author KSA edited the manuscript. Both authors contributed to the writing and interpreting of study results. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the speech act features of select extracts of Chinua Achebe's *Arrow of God* by examining the pragmatic implications of the speech acts employed and their relevance for promoting leadership in the contemporary society as it has been observed that the century has witnessed a great deal of leadership crisis especially in Nigeria. This paper is of the opinion that the use of appropriate speech acts through the various avenues opened up by language could beam light against the backdrop of the seemingly intractable socio-political conflicts that are prevalent across the globe. The exploration of certain portions of *Arrow of God* is a call for appropriate acts in the socio-political sphere in Nigeria and all over world. This study concludes that the effective acts in the communication of the leaders in government could enhance good governance through the investigation of the speech act choices and the perlocutionary effects in Chinua Achebe's *Arrow of God*.

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1. INTRODUCTION

There is no doubt, leadership tussle and battle for supremacy are major socio-political issues in the landscape of Nigeria. Despite these, there are clarion calls for appropriate changes on daily basis from the leaders. Leadership is defined by the *Advanced American English Oxford Dictionary* as 'the action of leading a group of people or an organization'. Though, there are different styles of leadership. Governance or governorship is related to leadership because leaders are expected to govern their subjects. The scope of governance is very wide and it encompasses all processes of governing through language, tradition, power, laws etc.

On leadership, it is opined that a leader is "a person who influences a group of people towards the achievement of a goal" [1]. Leadership centers on someone pioneering or setting pace for others in order to achieve a purpose. It is noteworthy that person, people and purpose are the three major factors in leadership.

Language as a social activity is a weapon in the hands of leaders to drive home their thoughts and feelings. Leaders govern their subordinates through avenues opened up by language. Relationships that exist between leaders and subordinates are determined through language use. A leader could be coercive, appealing, or argumentative in his discourse. To a large extent, the approach of a leader in language, style and power will go a long way to determine actions of the followers. Therefore, this paper intends to address the implications of certain speech acts in defining leaders through the examination of utterances of two leaders in the novel "*Arrow of God*".

Literature is a kind of discourse where the writer can assume relatively little knowledge about the receiver of his message or the context in which it will be received [2]. This makes language of a literary text different from a non literary text because a large number of audience or addressees are those the author or addresser has never met and may never meet. Yet, a literary text makes a continual pragmatic implication and relevance in the society for years.

The literary text, *Arrow of God* was first published in 1964. The novel portrays the initial years of British colonialism in Nigeria. The increasing rate

of linguistic attention to literary texts has made us interested in examining meanings that are relevant to the intentions of Chinua Achebe through the analysis of *Arrow of God* by providing answers to questions such as: what speech act features are significant to the plot development in Chinua Achebe's *Arrow of God*? What are the perlocutionary effects of the identified speech act features? and How are they significant and relevant for leadership and good governance?

The author of the novel, Albert Chinualumogu Achebe, was born in Ogidi, Anambra State, Nigeria in 1930. He studied medicine and literature at University of Ibadan. He wrote five novels: *Things Fall Apart* (1958), *No Longer at Ease* (1960), *Arrow of God* (1964), *A Man of the People* (1966) and *Anthills of the Savannah* (1988). Others are short stories and children's books. Before his death in 2013 at Boston, he had received various honours and awards as a literary colossus.

Achebe is an author who has successfully harnessed the colonizer's language to make it bear the burden of his native experience in his third novel-*Arrow of God*. [3]. Also, Chinua is perceived as 'a literary icon who can be regarded as Nigeria and Africa's best known novelist for his contributions to the literary development of Africa' [4]. People from all walks of life have been fascinated by Achebe's works through his creative Africanization of the English language.

Existing studies on *Arrow of God* are based on both linguistic and literary approach. Such studies have focused on lexical items [5], lexical cohesion [6], transition [4], stylistics [7], thematic structure [8], and imperial linguistic discourse [9].

It is also noteworthy that less attention has been paid to speech act features of literary texts in Nigeria as several studies abound on speech act analysis of non literary texts. Also, various researches have been conducted from pragmasylistic approach on non literary texts [10-14]. Therefore, the paper intends to fill the gap that exists in the speech act analysis of a literary text by concentrating on *Arrow of God*.

1.1 Aim and Objectives of the Study

The paper aims to emphasise the speech act features of Chinua Achebe's *Arrow of God*, with the primary goal of identifying the relevance to

leadership. Hence, the specific objectives are to identify the speech act features that are significant to the plot development in Chinua Achebe's *Arrow of God*, to examine the perlocutionary effects of the identified speech acts in the text's context and to relate them to contemporary issues of leadership and governance.

1.2 Linguistic Framework

Pragmatics serves as the linguistic approach for this research paper. In the opinion of Mey, pragmatics is concerned with 'the use of language in human communication as determined by the conditions of society' [15]. Also, pragmatics deals with appropriateness of linguistic choice to the context, and this covers the speaker's intended meaning [16]. It is the shift from truthfulness to appropriateness that characterises pragmatics ahead of semantics.

Albeit, the linguistic framework of any linguistic research serves as the tool for the analysis of data; towards this end, Searle's Speech Act theory as explained in Mey [15], will serve as the basis for our analysis and discussion. Speech acts are linguistic acts. In a nutshell, they are actions that are performed when words are uttered. In the process of making an utterance, the utterance is regarded as an action (locution), whatever is performed through the utterance is an action (illocutionary) and the production of consequences on the hearer is also an action (perlocutionary). In essence, a perlocutionary act includes any action performed by the hearer as a result of the illocutionary act(s). The theory of Speech Acts is also described as "How to Do Things with Words Theory" because it has its roots in the work of Austin and Searle. [17,18] They were able to provide a shift from constative notion to performative notion in the empirical verifiability of signs. Speech acts are classified into three aspects: Locutionary acts, Illocutionary acts and Perlocutionary acts [17,18].

It is argued that *illocutionary acts*, which are the actual acts performed in the course of uttering words (*locutionary*), are the core of any theory of speech acts [19], while the *perlocutionary* denotes the effects on the hearer or consequence of the locutionary act. The illocutionary acts are classified as follows [15,16]:

- i. *Representatives (or assertives)*: These speech acts are assertions about a state of affairs in the world.
- ii. *Directives*: As the name implies, these speech acts embody an effort on the part of the speaker to get the hearer to do something, to 'direct' him or her towards some goal (of the speaker's mostly).
- iii. *Commissives*: Like directives, commissives operate a change in the world by means of creating an obligation; however, this obligation is created in the speaker, not in the hearer, as in the case of the directives.
- iv. *Expressives*: This speech act, as the word says, expresses an inner state of the speaker; the expression is essentially subjective and tells us nothing about the world.
- v. *Declarations*: Declarations bring about some alteration in the status or condition of the referred to object or objects solely by virtue of the fact that the declaration has been successfully performed.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The data used in the present paper are the speech act features that manifest in select exchanges in the novel. As a result of certain limitations, and the purpose of thorough and detailed analysis, only 10 select extracts that are significant to the development of the plot are employed for the study. The locution, illocutionary and perlocutionary features of each extract are identified in accordance with the Searle's Speech Act theory as used by Mey [15].

It is imperative to note that it will be an uphill task to examine the speech act features of the whole text. Hence, the selection of extracts is based on the thematic preoccupation of leadership with the purpose of illuminating the lessons that are available for leaders in Nigeria in particular, and other nations. The 10 extracted utterances are labelled: I-X for the purpose of clarity and to aid better reference in our analysis and discussion. The conclusion and recommendations are based on the results of our analysis.

2.1 Speech Act Analysis of the Select Extracts

Before commencing the analysis of the extracted portions, the onus lies on us to give a brief contextualization of the novel. The novel is set in the background of Umuaro (Eastern Nigeria) in early 1920's with the spiritual leader (the chief priest of *Ulu*), a god worshipped by the six

villages of Umuaro. There is conflict between Umuaro and Okperi over a piece of land that is resolved by the whiteman and the conflict of religion over the arrival of a catechist(Christian missionary). Another conflict arises with Ezeulu's rejection of Winterbottom's invitation. This leads to imprisonment while the people begin to suffer the consequence because they cannot harvest yam. Famine begins and the Christian religion becomes an alternative for the people to offer thanks to avert the famine. The death of Obinna (Ezeulu's son) further makes the people to lose more confidence in Ulu and the Chief Priest (Ezeulu). Thereafter, the people convert to Christianity.

In order to enrich our analysis, there is the need for explanation on the context of each of the extract after the speech act analysis. This will give clear explanation on the speaker, preceding utterance, addressee, circumstance, time and place.

Extract I

Locution: 'If you choose to fight a man for a piece of farmland that belongs to him I shall have no hand in it.' pg 15.

Illocutionary Acts: Direct: Expressive, **Indirect:** Declarative.

Perlocutionary Effect: discouragement from pursuing a war with Okperi village.

The brawl between the people of Okperi and Umuaro over a piece of land leads to a meeting among respected elders of Umuaro that will determine whether to go to war with people of Okperi or not. Ezeulu recounts the story his father told him and argues that the land belongs to Operi. He ends his submission with Extract I, thereby discouraging other elders from participating in the war.

Extract II

Locution: 'Elders and Ndichie of Umuaro, let everyone return to his house if we have no heart in the fight' pg 16.

Illocutionary Acts: Direct: Expressive, **Indirect:** Directive.

Perlocutionary Effect: conflict through lack of support for Ezeulu's words.

Extract II is from Nwaka, the major antagonist in the novel as he reacts to the submission of Ezeulu in Extract I. Nwaka successfully convinces the elders of the six villages of

Umuaro to go to war through his utterance in Extract II.

Extract III

Locution: 'My father did not tell me that before Umuaro went to war it took leave from the priest of Ulu.' pg27

Illocutionary Acts: Direct: Expressive; **Indirect:** Directive

Perlocutionary Effect: conviction to war with Okperi people.

The utterance is spoken by Nwaka (antagonist of Ezeulu) during another meeting to few elders that give him support when he successful ended the earlier meeting in the day. They eventually go to war and they lose to Okperi people because the whiteman intervenes and the truth initially spoken by Ezeulu triumphs.

Extract IV

Locution: 'Our sages were right when they said that no matter how many spirits plotted a man's death it would come to nothing unless his personal god took a hand in the deliberation.' Pg 136

Illocutionary Acts: Direct: Expressive, **Indirect:** Declarative

Perlocutionary Effect: fear on the messengers of the white man.

The utterance is said by Ezeulu in the presence of Chief Messenger and his accomplice from the whiteman. There is reference to the spiritual position and the fact that Ezeulu does not have any fear as long as Ulu(god of the land) is not against him. The messenger quickly replies 'That is so; but we have not come on a mission of death'.

Extract V

Locution: 'You must first return, however, and tell your white man that Ezeulu does not leave his hut.' Pg 139.

Illocutionary Acts: Direct: Directive, **Indirect:** Declarative

Perlocutionary Effect: The messengers are stupefied.

Ezeulu does not know the intention of the whiteman that has sent for him. At the same time, the messengers do not suspect any harm. No wonder, the actions of Ezeulu surprises them. They are forced to get angry by replying Ezeulu,

the Chief Priest, thus 'Do you know what you are saying, my friend'. This makes Ezeulu to be more infuriated.

Extract VI

Locution: 'The white man is Ezeulu's friend and he has sent for him.' pg 143

Illocutionary Acts: **Direct:** Declarative, **Indirect:** Directive

Perlocutionary Effect: Unhappiness on the part of Ezeulu

Ezeulu calls for a meeting after the messengers from the white man have left. At the meeting, Nwaka feels happy that Ezeulu who has told the white man the truth about the land dispute they have with Okperi is getting into trouble. Hence, he refer to him as a 'friend' to the white man. Ezeulu becomes unhappy as Nwaka raises a lot of dust against him.

Extract VII

Locution: 'Tell the white man to go and ask his father and his mother their names.' Pg 174

Illocutionary Acts: **Direct:** Directive, **Indirect:** Expressive.

Perlocutionary Effect: Mr Clarke feels insulted and disappointed.

Ezeulu decides to visit the white man with annoyance because his people are making a mockery of him. He becomes impatient and feels insulted that he is being detained by the white man.

Extract VIII

Locution: 'Tell the white man that Ezeulu will not be anybody's chief, except Ulu.' pg 175

Illocutionary Acts: **Direct:** Directive, **Indirect:** Expressive

Perlocutionary Effect: Imprisonment of Ezeulu

Ezeulu feels insulted based on the fact that he has to leave his home and he is not ready to accept any offer from the white man and Mr Clarke becomes so embarrassed that he shouts: 'What!'

Extract IX

Locution: 'Go back to your villages now and wait for my message.' Pg 204

Illocutionary Acts: **Direct:** Directive, **Indirect:** Declarative

Perlocutionary Effect: Famine in the village of Umuaro

The men Umuaro approach Ezeulu after he is released by the white man so that he can mention the date for New Yam festival without which they may not eat yams. He feels that the people are selfish by not considering his plight and absence. Hence, he refuses to name the date for the festival by claiming that he has not completed the eating of the sacred yams because of his absence. He states further that 'I have never needed to be told the duties of the priesthood'.

Extract X

Locution: 'I am the Chief Priest of Ulu and what I have told you is his will not mine.' Pg 208

Illocutionary Acts: **Direct:** Expressive, **Indirect:** Declarative

Perlocutionary Effect: Loss of relevance in Umuaro.

Leaders of Umuaro come pleading with Ezeulu to salvage the community from famine as they are ready to bear the consequences from the god of Ulu. Extract X is Ezeulu's response to their plea. It is after this effort that most people turn to Christianity as an alternative way of offering thanksgiving to God. Therefore, Ezeulu loses relevance in Umuaro.

3. DISCUSSION

From our analysis, we have observed that prominent speech acts in the select sentences are mainly directives (35%), expressive (35%) and declaratives (30%). The other two types of Searle's Speech Act of Mey [15] are representatives and commissive and they do not manifest in our select extracts. Albeit, this does not imply that they do not manifest in other sentences in the novel but our focus dwells on the observed types in relation to the objectives of the paper. The use of directive and declarative speech acts are highly significant for the development of the plot of the novel as it centers on, the battle for leadership in Umuaro and the inappropriate management of crisis that crop up in the process which paves way for the propagation of, the Christian religion at the expense of the traditional religion.

In the speech act analysis of the sentences in the select extracts, there is the use of directives and declaratives by Ezeulu to assert his spiritual

power in the village of Umuaro as the Chief Priest. Nwaka(his major antagonist) makes use of the same acts to oppose Ezeulu in Extract II,III and VI only since other extracts are utterances of Ezeulu. As such, these acts portray the struggle for leadership, rivalry, and antagonism in the novel which has a lot to do with giving instructions and making orders that will give leadership and direction to the governed in the society.

Any leader should be prepared for change, by not being too rigid to permit change and positive influence in the society. Ezeulu fails in the provision of leadership and he loses followership and total relevance in the village of Umuaro. In our analysis, Ezeulu employs declarative acts to show or demonstrate the power and authority bequeathed on him as the Chief Priest and spiritual leader of Umuaro. He becomes over possessive with power that he refuses to reason with the people of Umuaro on the issue of the New Yam Festival. This eventually leads to his downfall. There are a lot of lessons to be learnt from this by leaders in Nigeria and the world at large. The Insecurity in Nigeria requires that our leaders take appropriate steps that are expressed in the discourse of leaders and such discourse should be translated into social actions that would solve problems, therefore, promoting governance. If not, leaders will lose followership and fail woefully as people will withdraw their support once they lose confidence in the leadership.

4. CONCLUSION

Resistance to change through undue assertion of power and authority through declarative and directive speech acts contribute significantly to the leadership failure of Ezeulu in *Arrow of God*. It is along this reasoning that, it is opined that 'to survive, all systems must strike a balance between what Whitehead calls "permanence" and "flux" or stability and change [20]. We see the management aspect of administration largely responsible for maintaining continuity and stability while the leadership function of administration introduces novelty and change.

It is based on this that we argue that the protagonist in the novel, Ezeulu refuses to allow the change introduced by the whitemen through indirect rule and this eventually leads to his downfall. He is so drunk with power to an extent that he could not sustain his leadership position,

hence, truncating continuity. Hence, leaders should learn a lot of lessons from this.

5. RECOMMENDATION

The research paper has been limited to the select extracts. Therefore, we are apt to recommend a wider scope of analysis of the novel from other linguistic approaches. The speech acts features of literary texts from Chinua Achebe or other authors could also be examined.

DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

Speech acts: actions that are performed in the course of saying words.

Locution: actual words uttered.

Illocution: actions performed through the utterance.

Perlocutionary: consequences of the utterance on the part of hearer or listener.

DECLARATION

Some part of this manuscript was previously presented in the following conference.

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COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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