

## **DOING THINGS WITH WORDS: NIGERIAN-CAMEROON FACEOFF OVER BAKASSI PENINSULA**

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### **Abstract**

Words have the power to start wars, end wars, save lives, and ruin lives. Austin used this understanding to write the well-known *How to Do Things with Words*. The resolution of the Nigeria-Cameroon Bakassi crisis was lauded by all and sundry. But how did they do things with words before the eventual compromise? The purpose of this research is, therefore, to subject various utterances made during these periods to speech acts theory. To achieve this, speeches made in the English language by diplomats of the two countries were selected. Our findings show that assertives, commissives, expressives were predominant in the discourse. The minor difference in the number of times they occur suggests that diplomatic discourse contains functional overlap between speech acts.

### **Introduction**

The nations that made up the sovereign nations of Africa have never existed in isolation since pre-colonial times. They established one type of relationship or another with countries in far-flung geopolitical contexts (Ani, Kinge and Ojajorotu, 2018). This relation was somehow marred by words: both countries were claiming ownership of the Bakassi Peninsula and making utterances that support their claim. Utterances can be interpreted

in a variety of ways. Ludwig Wittgenstein, an Austrian-British philosopher, laid the groundwork for what we now call a ‘speech act’. Wittgenstein stated in one of his lectures that the meaning of language is determined by its actual use, and that "words are deeds" (Wittgenstein, 1966).

### **Doing Things with Words**

In his work, *How to Do Things with Words*, Austin (1962), however, became the first person to clearly suggest that by making statements, we also perform acts such as stating a fact or an opinion, confirming or denying something, asking a question, issuing an order and so forth. He classified the speech acts into locutionary (the act of saying something or what is said), illocutionary (what is meant by what is said), and perlocutionary (the effect of what is said). Austin’s speech act theory later paved way for many other studies, one of which was John Searle’s (1969) indirect speech acts. Searle asserts that it is possible to perform one illocutionary act by performing another. Searle introduced the term ‘indirect speech act’ when he gave an example with the sentence Can you pass the salt? which can be interpreted as a question on the hearer’s ability to pass the salt or a request to pass the salt (in Ezirim, 2020). In other words, we can say one thing and mean something else.

John Searle’s contribution, however, has received a huge commendation. Searle believes that speech acts perform five general functions. These functions are assertives— acts that commit the speaker to something like boasting, suggesting, concluding, and swearing, directives— acts that try to make the speaker perform an action like inviting, ordering, and begging, expressive —acts that express how the speaker feels about a situation like welcoming, thanking and apologizing, commissive —acts that commit the speaker to do something in the future like

promising, vowing, and betting and declaratives —acts that can change the world via the speaker's utterance like christening (Searle, 1969). Expanding on Searle's 'indirect speech acts', Clark further identified the multiplicity of meaning, the logical priority of meaning, rationality, conventionality, politeness, and purposefulness as the six attributes of indirect speech.

Thus, the term speech act does not refer simply to the act of speaking but to the whole communicative situation, including the context of the utterance (that is, the situation in which the discourse occurs, the participants and any preceding verbal or physical interaction) and paralinguistic features which may contribute to the meaning of the interaction (Badriah, 2015 in Ezirim, 2020). In his popular book *How to Do Things with Words*, Austin states that "...issuing of the utterance is the performing of the action" (6). In other words, by saying something, we have done something. For elucidatory and explanatory purposes, Austin further categorized speech acts into locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary.

Following Searle's contribution, Yule further expanded the discussion on direct and indirect speech: acts that show the way a speaker uses various linguistic forms with certain functions (54-56). Yule narrates that there is a relationship between the three structural forms (declarative, interrogative, imperative) and the three general communicative functions (statement, question, command or request). For example, a speaker uses a declarative form to express a statement, an interrogative form to express a question, and a command or request ifor imperative. Clark and Clark (1977) in a later study distinguished between direct and indirect speech acts. Direct speech acts appear when there is a direct relationship between a structure and a function; it is used by a speaker to deliver the literal meaning that the words conventionally express. Indirect speech acts, on the other hand, are

somehow complicated and can subject a discourse or speech to multiple interpretations. This ability to convey two or more messages at the same time makes it an efficient tool of communication, especially in political discourse.

### **Previous Literature**

Recent research on African borders has tended to focus on either the growing number of state-to-state border disputes or frontier locations that are supposed to provide local residents with a diverse variety of economic prospects (Konings, 2005). Border skirmishes and battles between African states were relatively infrequent for a long period after independence, and governments more or less stuck to the sanctity of the boundaries inherited from colonial times. However, as countries began to gain global exposure, the need to verify the authenticity and ownership of various communal lands increased. The mineral reserves in the Bakassi peninsula heightened the tensions between Nigeria and Cameroon. When a man is dissatisfied with certain conduct, words are usually the first means of expressing his dissatisfaction. In the instance of the Nigeria-Cameroon dispute, those who made statements appeared to have a greater impact on the probability of inciting inter-country war. The argument is this: if a speech act is assertive, it is more likely to come across as forceful or hesitant to take full responsibility, which can lead to increased resistance from the hearer(s).

Waya and Nneji (2013) identified specific pragmatic features in Goodluck Jonathan's victory and inaugural speeches. They observed that Jonathan employed more assertive words than other speech acts, implying that he never full responsibility for the government's operations or the promise of transforming Nigeria. Similarly, Rayahd and Zina (2015) explored the use of speech acts in the language of five political propaganda texts provided by

Barack Obama during the election period. They study discovered that assertives are the most commonly employed speech act, with a variety of rhetoric techniques being used for persuasive, metaphorical, repetitive, and manipulative purposes.

An inaugural speech, which expresses the agenda of an elected candidate's reaffirmation of the electioneering campaign promises and the goals, is made on the occasion of the official inauguration or swearing-in of the candidate. Thus, speeches of presidents and heads of states have always been subjected to linguistic and non-linguistic analyses. The first inaugural addresses of Goodluck Ebele Jonathan (2011) and America's Barrack Obama (2009) as presidents were then compared by Ubong and Sifonde (2012). The results demonstrate that the speeches are similar because each speaker speaks for his country, regardless of the political party, and both speeches contain a large number of "representatives" and "commissives." President Jonathan's commissives, on the other hand, employ modal verbs to communicate intention more frequently, whereas President Obama's commissives use modal verbs and infinitive clauses to project volition and intention.

However, President Muhammadu Buhari's inaugural speech has not enjoyed much-documented analysis, perhaps because of its recency. Osisonwa (2017), nonetheless, examines the use of words by the president from a pragmatic perspective in order to identify the pragmatic acts involved and the goals of the acts. Applying aspects of Jacob Mey's (2001) pragmatic acts theory for descriptive analysis, and statistical details for quantitative analysis, he identified nineteen acts from the total of the ninety-nine (overlapping) acts in the speech. Each of the acts achieved a specific goal. For example, while proposing, promising, stating and assuring achieved the goal of revealing intention; acknowledging,

thanking, remarking, saluting achieved the goal of admitting and appreciating; appealing, reminding, instructing/calling, advising, hoping, charging, informing, extending achieved the goal of direction/directives; and identifying, describing and defining achieved the goal of giving details on issues. The study also indicates that pragmatic acts were marked with some pragmatic tools, including shared situation knowledge, relevance, reference, inference. In a similar study, Bushra (2017) used the four commissive acts (promise, threat, guarantee, pledge) to analyze specific selected American political speeches. He studied the speeches of four American presidents: George Bush, Bill Clinton, George W. Bush and Barack Obama. Interestingly, Bushra, for example, concentrated on the issue of applying the speech acts theory to political speeches, demonstrating how these acts overlap. By extracting some semantic rules for the Speech Act of threatening, guaranteeing, and pledging and taking into account John Searle's general framework, he seeks to change John Searle's felicity conditions and semantic rules of promise for the acts of threatening, guaranteeing, and pledging. However, he was unable to offer and advocate for a particular classification for the acts that would eliminate the "overlapping and ambiguity."

### **Methods**

The qualitative approach was used in the study with the target group identified as Nigerian and Cameroonian government presidents of state, their foreign affairs ambassadors, or anyone else authorized to speak for and on behalf of the government. However, only speeches that are linked to the two countries' dispute were selected. The researcher also employed a purposive sample technique to choose the speeches because not all speeches made by the selected population qualifies as diplomatic discourse.

### **Data Presentation and Analysis**

In order to capture the individual acts and ascertain their suitability in the classifications, we have presented both the data and the analysis side by side. Following Bushra (2017) argument that a single speech act can overlap and have multiple meanings, I have numbered the data to enable one to know when such data is re-captured in another illocutionary act (See the appendix for the data). The analysis covered the five illocutionary acts: assertive, commissive, expressive, directive and declarative.

Table 1: Speech Act Analysis

<b>Assertive Acts</b>		
<b>Speech Act Type</b>	<b>Data Number</b>	<b>Analysis</b>
Assertives	1	In the first sentence, the speaker performed an assertive act by conveying the information that the agreement between Nigeria and Cameroon is ‘a great achievement.’
	6	Here, the speaker began with an assertive act of stating: ‘as the ICJ itself recognised and as we indicated after the verdict’, and moved to another assertive act of describing: ‘human beings are involved’.
		This statement began with a claim (an assertive act) that ‘The

Assertives	7	maritime boundary by the verdict of the ICJ is less problematic' before the speaker suggested (assertively) that a physical demarcation of the boundary would help forestall problems in the future.
	11	The first sentence is captured via the use of an assertive illocutionary act.
	15	An assertive of insistence was deployed when the speaker averred that: 'On Bakassi, we have to negotiate'.
	16	Here, the speaker assertively states that 'the fate of its people affected by the judgement of ICJ', not the boundary, is her utmost concern.
	18	This speaker used an assertive act in the first sentence to describe how unfair the Bakassians were treated.
	20	'We have been sacrificed for the world to have peace' assertively suggests that the speaker and/or his people were unfairly treated.
	26	This speaker assertively claims that by adhering to the judicial verdict, they have made history



		that would continue to be remembered in the future.
	28	‘By ceding Bakassi, we have shown what respect for peace and rule of law is all about’ is an assertive act.
	30	Sequel to the International Court of Justice judgment, this speaker used the assertive act of describing to express the feat.
	32	This speaker used assertive act of stating to describe why they ceded the contested land- which he referred to as ‘artificial border’.
	33	A descriptive assertive act was used to state the preference for peace over war.
	36	The speaker’s disappointment on the decision and judgement passed by the ICJ was shown and captured via the use of assertive claim.
	40	Assertively (swearing), this speaker deployed the use of degree adverb- ‘absolutely’- as a linguistic tool for encouraging his people and strengthening their trust of his commitment and assurance.

	41	When this speaker said, ‘Bakassi has never been in dispute’, he was assertively stating what he believed was the truth.
	42	In this utterance, our speaker suggests (assertive act) that problems do not solve themselves.
	47	This utterance is replete with the assertive act of stating.
	50	This speaker assertively insisted that local and regional conflict resolution commission be allowed to play their role before involving the international communities
	51	Here, the speaker simply asserted by reminding his hearers their commitment to their bilateral relationship.
	54	Here, the speaker insists (assertive act) that Bakassi has not been fully ceded to the Cameroonians since the ‘determination of the land boundary’ has not been undertaken.
<b>Total Assertive Acts</b>	<b>21</b>	

Commissive Acts in the Data		
Commissives	1	The clause 'I dare say' is a commissive act which was used by the speaker to express his view of extending his directive act above to the world.
	2	As a response to the speaker in data 1, Biya used a commissive illocutionary act to inform both parties that he is resolute to ensuring that the peace treaty is sustained.
	3	A commissive illocutionary act of vowing was performed by the speaker to reassure the Bakassi settlers of their safety.
	4	By accepting the verdict of the court (a passing declarative act), the speaker has successfully adopted an indirect commissive act.
	5	A commissive act of promise was used when the speaker said that <i>'it will continue until all Nigerians in the area who wish to be resettled are resettled'</i> . This commissive act was used as an act of reassurance.

	6	An illocutionary act of promise (a commissive) was performed via the expression: 'their interest will be protected'.
	8	'Nigerian troops will withdraw within the next 60 days...' is a commissive act of promise.
	11	a commissive act of promising (we will scrupulously implement it) were performed after the speaker had used both assertive and expressive acts in the preceding sentences.
	14	This speaker, supporting the previous speaker, used a commissive act of promise to reassure the two parties of their willingness and commitment to ICJ verdict.
	24	Here, the commissive act of intention and promise were used by the speaker.
	31	'We were only forced' suggests a commissive act of threatening which is inevitable and thus guaranteed peace in the battled demography.
	34	Our speaker here used both commissive acts of promise and vow to reassure Nigeria Bakkasi settlers of their safety.

	35	The statement contains an indirect threat (commissive act) or reluctance to accept the judicial verdict.
	37	The introduction of the act of help to 'strengthen' the 'brotherly relations' of the two countries makes the utterance commissive
	39	In this utterance, the clause 'I reassure them' captured a commissive illocutionary act of promise, vow and commitment to future action.
	43	After making an expressive act, this speaker went further to promise, in the form of threat (a commissive act), that until the federal government of Nigeria does something, Nigerian citizens will continue to be wasted.
	44	Here, the expression, 'we will not leave it' captured a commissive act of promise and vow.
	49	'Nigeria and Cameroon will find a workable diplomatic solution' was a commissive act of promise used to reassure the Bakassians of the commitment made by the government of the two countries.

	52	‘We want to sit down and work things out’ - is a commissive act of promise used as a tool for reassuring the people and shows the willingness of the leaders to adhere to the ICJ verdict.
	53	The speaker’s statement of developing an acceptable mutual diplomatic solution to the dispute is a commissive act.
<b>Total Commissive Acts</b>	<b>20</b>	
<b>Expressive Acts in the Data</b>		
	9	The speaker began by thanking both the governor of Cross River state and ‘Nigerians living in Bakkasi’ – an expressive act. He went further to promise them that they ‘will never let them down’.
	10	Similar to Data 9, the speaker continued with expression of thanks (expressive act): ‘I thank all Nigerians...’ and ‘...the international community.’
	11	After using an assertive act in the first sentence, the speaker here used an expressive act of

Expressive		welcoming ('we accept it wholeheartedly')
	12	'I must not end this address without thanking' has both the assertive act of telling and an expressive act of commendation.
	13	The expressive act of 'thanks' is being used here again.
	17	In a move to ease the challenges of Nigerians living in Bakassi, the speaker used the expressive act of warning to plead with the Bakassians not to pass any judgement over their fate.
	19	Our speaker here expressively deplores what he claimed is the feeling of Nigerian settling in Bakassi.
	21	This statement captures an expressive act where Nigeria is described as adherents of rule of law and thus, should be commended.
	22	Through this statement, the speaker used expressive act to condemn the insensitivity of the colonial powers in creating the demography of the conflicting nations.

	23	‘I greet you all’ is an expressive act which in this context is congratulatory.
	25	By thanking, ‘the government of the UK, USA, France and Germany’, an expressive act has been performed.
	27	The speaker used expressive acts of thanks, when he commends the Bakassians for adhering to the verdict.
	29	‘Nigeria will continue to pursue its obligation...’ is an expressive act of promise, indirectly implying a commitment.
	35	This speaker applied the expressive act to deplore and condemn the judgement passed by ICJ
	42	After the utterance implying that problems do not solve themselves, this speaker, thus, encouraged that some inevitable problems are welcomed (expressive act).
	48	In this statement, an expressive act was used to commend the two leaders for choosing the path of peace and jettisoning war and/or anarchy.



	50	The assertion here indirectly approved the credibility of ‘Joint Commission’.
<b>Total Expressive Acts</b>	<b>17</b>	
<b>Directives in the Data</b>		
Directives	1	A directive act was performed when the speaker requested that the model be used as a template in resolving conflicts in other crisis prone African countries.
	18	In the speaker’s second sentence, a directive act of defying was performed when the speaker said that they ‘are not in any way bound by the decision of ICJ.’
	41	After the first sentence, this speaker used the directive act of challenge to re-emphasize his innocence.
	45	‘Judgement on Bakassi is an international legal fraud’ is an utterance which dares and defies (directive acts) the pronouncement made by the International Court of Justice (ICJ).

<b>Total Directive Acts</b>	<b>4</b>	
<b>Declaratives in the Data</b>		
Declaratives	4	Accepting the verdict of the court is a passive declarative act
	46	According to this speaker, the ICT sentence (declaration act) did not re-christen Nigeria Bakassi settlers as Cameroonians. They are still Nigerians.
	54	From the speaker's statement, Cameroon is certain that they would reclaim the land. This is evident by the declaration they made while a case is still on.
<b>Total Declarative Acts</b>	<b>3</b>	

## Discussion of Findings

The different speakers employed all five of Searle's illocutions: assertive, directive, commissive, expressive, and declarative, each one a different number of times. The speakers performed a total of 66 illocutionary acts (assertives, 22, commissives, 20, expressives, 17, directives, 4 and declarative, 3). Assertive acts

were the most common, appearing 22 times out of the total acts. Diplomats' commitment to future action is one of their distinguishing characteristics or major linguistic style. The most common communicative presumptions utilized in diplomacy are promise, threat, warning, and refusal.

Commissives which occurred 20 times (2 times less than the assertives) are a special kind of illocutionary act because the speaker primarily intends to bring about a special perlocutionary effect in the addressee, namely that H (hearer) will believe A (speaker). This is dominant in diplomatic language. Specific language choices are made by the speakers, as seen in the analysis like promising. These speakers do not bother themselves on whether or not the hearers believe these promises. Their major goal is to keep to their mode of communication. It is now left for the hearers to either believe them or not.

The expressive, directive and declarative acts occurred 17, 4 and 3 times respectively. Thus, while commissive and expressive acts represent 14 per cent and 12 per cent of the illocutionary acts respectively, directive acts which account for 7 per cent of the acts were used the least. Primarily, the expressives are used to express one's attitudes and/or feelings about objects and facts. This illocutionary act occurred 20 times in the data with expressions of thanks, welcoming and congratulations being dominant. The number of expressive acts that occurred in the data is not all that surprising because, normally, when the commissive acts by the same speakers are positive, our result becomes its effect. Again, the data reveals one of the major features of diplomatic language: mutual acceptance depicted or captured via the language of affinity and friendship. Unlike the directives and declaratives which occurred 4 and 2 times respectively, the affinity shared by the number of occurrences of commissive, assertive and

expressive act (each separated by a difference of two) reveals their status in diplomatic discourse.

## **Conclusion**

This study investigated the different pragmatic features of diplomatic discourse. The researcher did this by putting the diplomatic conversation through a speech act test. Because negotiations are a process of interaction and exchange, pragmatic discourse analysis assisted us in examining the most fundamental aspect of these interactions and exchanges: the language and speech used and their various subtleties. This case study yielded useful insights about the use of language in diplomatic discourse and negotiations in particular, which can assist diplomats in a real context, but it also demonstrated the importance and viability of a discourse-theoretical approach to the problem. This case study gave some insights on the use of language in diplomatic discourse and negotiations in particular which can help diplomats in specific situations. More importantly, it showed the vitality and viability of a discourse-theoretical approach to the study of diplomatic negotiations.

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## Appendix

[https://docs.google.com/document/d/1oEYiYoUMdPxtKhr6oF6VFGPP6KZuIx\\_QOVch4jYnb08/edit](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1oEYiYoUMdPxtKhr6oF6VFGPP6KZuIx_QOVch4jYnb08/edit)