

Impact of Hate Inducing Speech in Nigeria: the case of Media Discourse

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative research exposes negative impact of hate inducing speeches in Nigeria and recommends solutions. Data for this study were collected from Nigerian national dailies (print and online media discourses) about Nigerians and Nigerian leaders not minding their ethnicity, religion or social status and most were accessed through the social media. Fifteen political hate speeches made by Nigerian leaders before and after independence till the year 2020 were carefully selected and analysed using Austin's (1962) and Searle's (1969) speech acts theory. The data analysed reveal that Nigerian political leaders are power-drunk and are willing to do anything to come into or remain in power. The researchers recommend that the Independent National Commission for the Prohibition of Hate Speeches Bill should be revisited and possibly swing into action. Religious and political leaders should be enlightened on the tenets of unity, tolerance, team work, democracy and good government. Media aides of political and religious group leaders should rise up to their responsibilities and ensure that what comes out for public consumption does not instigate hate and violence. Again, Nigerian masses should desist from propagating hate inducing speeches on social media but should report messages that go against Nigerian Community Standards to their social media service providers.

KEY WORDS: Hate speech, speech act, media, ethnicity, Nigeria.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Nigeria as a multi-ethnic society over time has adopted the English language as her lingua franca and National language. However, there are three other languages (Igbo, Hausa and Yoruba) that were captured in the National Policy on Education of 1977 as Nigerian regional languages. These four mentioned languages are the four major languages often used in Nigerian media discourses with English taking the lead. Without language, these communication channels through which news, entertainment, education, data, or promotional messages are disseminated would not have been functional. Media, being the communication outlets or tools used to store and deliver information or data to a larger society comprises components of the mass media communications industry, such as print media, publishing, the electronic media, photography, cinema, broadcasting (radio and television), billboards, direct mail, telephone, fax, internet and other means of advertising. However, advancement in modern information and technology has given room to social media which is a form of media that allows people to air their views about certain issues of personal or public interest at the comfort of their homes or elsewhere without stress.

The term 'speech' refers to the expression or ability to express thoughts and feelings by articulate sounds using the vocal apparatus which are human biological organs and/or a formal address or discourse delivered to an audience. A speech that induces hatred is a hate speech and such reflects prejudice, preconception, detriment, harm, disadvantage, damage, injury, hurt, impairment, loss, disbenefit, injustice etc. for a targeted individual or a group of persons. Hence, hate speech is any speech that belittles or unfairly criticizes people on the basis of their ethnicity or race, religion, gender, nationality, sexual orientation or disability. Gagliardone, Gal, Alves, and Martinez (2015) believe that hate speech also includes any communication that promotes discrimination, hostility and violence and all forms of racist, xenophobic and sexist comments/speeches. Such exists in all societies of the world possibly because of freedom of speech that

accompanies democratic leadership which has been in operation in almost all the countries of the world. Özarlan (2014:56) observes that with the widespread usage of smart phones and other mobile devices, the social media have become a more visible and easily-accessible public platform for some people who wish to express their hatred against others. He adds that news media have the potential to contribute to the democratization process in a society and could also be used as effective tools not only for intensifying existing conflicts among different ethnic/religious/sexual identities but reproduces same in daily life. Hence, the idea of hate inducing speech is not only limited with the traditional media, but also disseminates professionally and ordinarily in print and social media platforms. This paper, therefore, exposes different ways through which mass media has encourage secession of Nigerian state through the propagation of hate inducing speeches and it also suggests the possible ways to overcome the menace to ensure peace, political stability, tolerance and security of lives and properties in Nigeria.

Nigeria and her ethnicity

In the words of Adeniji and Ofiwe (2015:71), ‘Nigeria is a multi-ethnic nation-state with socio-cultural differences among its component ethnic groups all of which have resulted into cultural dissimilarities.’ These cultural dissimilarities have been manifested in such areas as language, diet, dress and type of social system. Nigeria, being a product of British imperialism, was an amalgamation of the Southern and Northern Protectorates and has over 300 ethnic groups, over 520 languages according to world population review, several dialects and religions, with different cultures and histories. It was this amalgamation that made people of diverse cultures and languages to come together, hence the description of Nigeria as being ‘multi-ethnic’. Having been described as ‘multi-ethnic’, Umezina (2012:229) calls for the strengthening of Nigerian ethnic groups as the only way through which economic, social and political development can be achieved. According to him, ‘ethnicity in Nigeria is based on natural affinity... Like every other natural phenomenon, it can be gainfully employed for the wellbeing of man. Attempts should rather be geared towards making every ethnic group in Nigeria to be very united. When unity is achieved, economic, social and political development will follow inexorably’. Whether this unity is achievable is not for us to decide now. Umezina touts the same line of argument with Azeez (2004) who earlier views the strength of ethnicity as one which is often derived from a sense of fellow feeling that has its foundation in the combined remembrance of past experience and a common hope and desire for the future.

With the rapid increase in the use of hate speech in Nigerian media discourses especially amongst the youth and a critical look on the multi-ethnic nature of Nigeria, one may be tempted to agree with Ekanola (2006) who describes Nigeria as an anomalous entity in which various ethnic groups that constitute the country have no shared history, culture or language, such that members of specific ethnicity are easily identified through their attributes. Consequently, Edewor, Aluko and Folarin (2014) describe Nigeria as a multi-ethnic and culturally diverse society that has witnessed conflicts arising from her ethnic and cultural diversity. Such conflicts as stated above are often triggered by hate speech initiated by the political, ethnic or religious leaders.

Hate speech in Nigerian mass media

Mass media, according to Garian (2012), refers to communication devices, which can be used to communicate and interact with a large number of audiences in different languages. It is classified into three. First is the print media which has to do with mass communication in the form of printed publications, such as newspapers, magazines, etc. Next is the electronic or broadcast media that take advantage of electronic technology in the dissemination of information. They may include television, radio, internet, fax, etc. Lastly and most current is the new-age media which refers to high technology mass media that is not only faster than the other forms, but is also most widespread. Of all these three classifications of mass media, the print media and new-age media (also known as social media) seem to be the most frequent platforms through which hate speeches are unleashed to the Nigerian society with the new-age/social media taking the lead.

Media functions as an avenue for the dissemination of information, the implementing of non-formal and informal education, entertainment, socialisation of individuals and as such make many people to allocate more time for virtual activities, in detriment of the real life. This implies that people in any given society emphasise their views about a given phenomena through mass media and that is because the mass media makes it possible for easy assessment and public view. In doing this, most of the times, hate speeches are usually employed.

To this end, Ononye and Nwachukwu (2019:48) add that “despite different international laws and local legislations against free speech and such defamation as libel or slander, different forms of hate speech still abound today, not only because of the increased awareness in the freedom of expression in modern societies, but more uncontrollably as a result of the advances and hence ease in social media communications”. This exposes the fact that media which suppose to be the watchdog, public voice and public educator has been ridiculed by some supposed professionals into hate breeding ground. In addition, Ezeibe (2015) states that there have been

instances of hate utterances by politicians and religious figures being disseminated in some popular Nigerian newspapers but such are not usually transmitted through the Nigerian electronic media. Özarlan (2014:62) writes that 'it is a fact that mainstream mass media could be instrumental in reinforcing negative associations and stereotypes of the 'others' by their representations, which makes prejudice become systematic and thus fostering nationalistic sentiments and provoking as well as sustaining above mentioned conflicts' which affect economic, social and political development of our country.

II. METHODOLOGY AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This research is qualitative and adopts the descriptive research design. Data were collected from print and online media discourses about Nigerians and Nigerian leaders not minding their ethnicity, religion or social status. Though there are many of such speeches on Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp, the researchers depend mostly on Newspapers whose sources are verifiable either electronically or otherwise.

The theory adopted for this study is Austin's speech act theory of 1962 which was further developed by Searle (1969). The theory reveals how things are done by speakers of a language using words. The proponent of this theory believes that language is a tool used to initiate and/or perform actions and that the meaning/idea decoded from any given utterance depends on the user's intention, and not the meaning of words that make up the utterance. This implies that communication is successful only when the meaning inferred by the speaker has been captured or comprehended by the hearer. Lawal (1997) states that speech act theory is specifically concerned with how interlocutors (speakers and listeners) understand one another. Austin (1962) identifies three fundamental acts that are performed by speakers which include locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary acts. The locutionary acts refers to the action of saying something through the grammar of the language without any form of lexical or structural ambiguity or misinterpretation. Illocutionary act focuses on the conventions that make it possible for the speaker to perform an act(s) by mere saying something such that the statement signifies an action. As in *I forgive you, she condemns it, we christen Oliver* etc. While perlocutionary acts centre on the effect of the action performed via speech (illocutionary acts) on a given situation.

The theory of speech acts is partly taxonomic and partly explanatory in the sense that it systematically classifies speech acts and the ways in which they can succeed or fail. The rising rate of hate speech, call for referendum/secession and demand for abolition of 1999 Constitution by indigenous people of Nigeria across the six geo-political zones of the country have proved that every speech made have its locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary effects. This is one of the reasons why the researchers have adopted the theory for this research. However, Searle (1969) extended the Austin's illocutionary acts under five aspects which include representatives (or assertive), directives, commissives, expressive and declaratives acts. And these were employed in the analyses of the political hate speeches made by Nigerian leaders years past which have taken Nigeria to the recent sorry state.

Discussions of selected Nigerian hate speeches

In this section, the fifteen hate speeches selected for the study are presented and discussed using Austin's tipodal speech act theory which involves locution, illocution and perlocution. From a pragmatic point of view, these three components of every discourse are vital to all form of verbal communication since the *locution* centres on the semantic or literal significance of the utterances; *illocution*, on the other hand, revolves around the intention of the speaker while *perlocutionis* concerned with how the discourse is received by the listener. Whatever the listener decodes always has an after effect on the Nigeria state which is worth analysing. The discourses (D) shall be numbered to allow ease of reference.

D1. Locution: "Igbo domination of Nigeria is only a matter of time" - Charles Onyeama, a prominent Igbo lawyer and member of the Central Legislative Council, 1945. (*Page 204 Ethnic politics In Kenya and Nigeria* by Godfrey Mwakikagile) as stated by Femi Fani-Kayode and reported by Premium Times October 28, 2012

Illocutionary act

- **Direct:** assertive (predicting)
- **Indirect:** declarative (challenging)

He predicted that by the nature of Igbo's commitment, they would dominate other ethnic groups in Nigeria both in government and commerce.

Possible perlocutionary effect: It rather leads to anxiety, hatred for the Igbo and fear of Igbo domination on side of other ethnic groups in Nigeria. That some leaders of other ethnic groups called upon their people not to allow the Igbo man to head any establishment in Nigeria let alone being the number one citizen of the country. Though it is believed that the Igbo are always ahead of other ethnic groups in commerce.

D2. Locution: “It would appear that the God of Africa has created the Igbo nation to lead the children of Africa from the bondage of ages...” – Dr Azikiwe, President of the Pan-Igbo Federal Union. (*The West African Pilot* of July 8, 1949). Also stated by Femi Fani-Kayode and reported by *Premium Times* October 28, 2012

Illocutionary act

- **Direct:** assertive (describing)
- **Indirect:** declarative (pronouncing)

The speaker asserts that he is the leader of Africa and his race has been chosen by God while others are subject to his ethnic affiliation. This appears to be part of the motivation of the perceived hatred some ethnic groups have for the Igbo in Nigeria.

Possible Perlocutionary Effect: fear, anxiety, ethnic sentiments.

D3. Locution: “God willing, by 2015, something will happen. They either conduct a free and fair election or they go a very disgraceful way. If what happened in 2011 should again happen in 2015, by the grace of God, the dog and the baboon would all be soaked in blood.” (General Muhammadu Buhari, Presidential Candidate of Congress for Progressive Change, in 2012) Reported by Lika Binniyat in *Vanguard Newspaper* on May 15th, 2012

Illocutionary act:

- **Direct:** Assertive (stating and predicting)
- **Indirect:** Commissive (swearing and warning)

He contested in 2011 and lost to Goodluck Ebele Jonathan who was the incumbent president after having taken over from Umaru Musa Yar’adua who died in office. Buhari predicts electoral malpractice in 2015 and vows to shed blood should he lose again in 2015. Owing to the date of D6 made by Asari Dokubo, one can say that this was a reaction to it.

Possible perlocutionary effect: It created fear of war and coercion among Nigerians and propelled the Nigerian electoral commission to rig him into office in order to avoid cold war that may likely ensue.

D4. Locution: “You want to know who started tribalism in southern politics and the politics of the southern protectorate of Nigeria, it was not the Yoruba or the southern minorities but the Igbo” – Femi Fani-Kayode. *Premium Times*, October 28, 2012

Illocutionary act

- **Direct:** assertive (stating)
- **Indirect:** Declarative (confirming)

Possible Perlocutionary Effect: fear and anxiety among the Southern Nigerians. They are being manipulated to the favour of the North politician by making the Igbo to be the scapegoat.

D5. Locution: The Igbos will never rule Nigeria again. Abubakar Mamman Ngulde, *Daily Post* May 19, 2013

Illocutionary act

- **Direct:** assertive (predicting)
- **Indirect:** directive (threatening)

The Igbo being one of the three major ethnic groups of Nigeria can see this assertion as a threat to their person as Nigerians.

Possible Perlocutionary Effect: fear, anxiety, inter-ethnic violence; Igbo may desire for the country (Nigeria) to be so as to have independent state of their own. Lack of trust and continuous agitation for secession.

D6. Locution: “I want to go on to say that, there will be no peace, not only in the Niger Delta, but everywhere if Goodluck Jonathan is not president by 2015, except God takes his life, which we don’t pray for”. (Alhaji Mujahid Asari Dokubo, leader of the Niger Delta Peoples Salvation Force (NDPSF) in 2013) *Premium Times* June 16, 2013

Illocutionary act

- **Direct:** Commissive (threatening)
- **Indirect:** Directive (warning)

He threatens to wage war against those that threaten Jonathan while he was in office. And warns that President Jonathan should be allowed to complete his two term tenures or the Nigerian economy will crumble as a result of attack on Nigerian assets/sources of revenue in Niger Delta and other parts of the country.

Possible perlocutionary effect: Fear and anxiety, penury and lack, economic crises and lack of trust.

D7. Locution: “They have accused the Nigerian people of being tribalists and Igbo-haters simply because we have not had an Igbo President since 1966 forgetting that Nigeria was magnanimous in victory and that she not only gladly welcomed them back into the fold after the civil war... Worst of all, generally speaking, they have

no restraining factors because money and the acquisition of wealth is their sole objective and purpose in life.” (Femi Fani-Kayode, former Aviation Minister) *Premium Times* August 13, 2013

Illocutionary act

- **Direct:** Expressive (Complaining)
- **Indirect:** Assertive (judging)

He complains the Igbo should not have struggled for a sovereign state let alone going for war against Nigeria. He judges them as people whose sole intension in life is acquisition of wealth forgetting that it was not all the Igbo he addressed at that time partook in that civil war.

Possible perlocutionary effect: caution and discouragement. Lack of trust and disunity amongst the southern Nigeria.

D8. Locution: “That short man called Ngige, we gave him power and he joined the Awolowo people; the people that killed Igbos.” (Chief Arthur Eze, PDP Chieftain) *Premium Times*, November 13, 2013

Illocutionary act

- **Direct:** Assertive (suggesting)
- **Indirect:** Expressive (complaining)

The speaker suggests that he and others are the king makers in a democratic state and complains that a man they gave power (then governor of a state in South East Nigeria) abandoned their own political party and embraced a political party of a perceived political enemy.

Possible perlocutionary effect: Anxiety, ethnic bigotry, political instability, lack of unity, intolerance.

D9. Locution: “We’ll regard anyone that vote for PDP as enemy of the North.” (Northern Elders Forum in 2014), *Vanguard*, 15 October 2014

Illocutionary act

- **Direct:** Commissive (threatening)
- **Indirect:** directive (Commanding)

The forum threatens enmity against anyone who votes for any candidate from the People’s Democratic Party (PDP), a registered political party in Nigeria.

Possible perlocutionary effect: anxiety and fear, breach on the people’s franchise and disregard for the Nigerian constitution.

D10. Locution: “You should not be bordered with cockroaches of politics. Cockroaches are only found in the toilet even at homes, if you see cockroach in your house, crush them.” (Governor Shema Ibrahim of Kastina State in 2014) *Premium Times* on 19th November, 2014

Illocutionary act

- **Direct:** Directive (Requesting and Commanding)
- **Indirect:** Commissive (guaranteeing)

The speaker encourages his political allies to maim any perceived political enemy not minding the blood relationship or ties they share with such person(s).

Possible perlocutionary effect: political thuggery, destruction of lives and properties, success of unpopular candidate.

D11. Locution: “Nigerians be warned! Nigeria... I set before thee life and death. I therefore choose life that both thee and thy seed may live... Will you allow history to repeat itself? Enough of state burials.” (Peter Ayodele Fayose, The Governor of Ekiti State, in 2015) *Sahara Reporters*, January 19, 2015

Illocutionary act

- **Direct:** Directive (questioning/advising/warning)
- **Indirect:** Commissive (betting)

The publication has pictures of three late (dead) Nigerian Leaders from North West geo-political zones: Murtala Muhammed, Sani Abacha and Umaru Yar’Adua. Mohammadu Buhari’s follows with a question mark on the picture. The publication bets Nigerian as if the writer holds the life of the candidate.

Possible Perlocutionary Effect: It cautions and discourages the electorates from voting that particular candidate whose picture he placed a question mark. Such can also lead to electoral violence and stigmatization.

D12. Locution: Our people do not give birth to uncountable children. Our men don’t give birth to children that they dump in streets. We are not like people from that part of the country (Patience Jonathan, Wife of former President, in 2015). Presidential campaign in Calabar, *The Nation*, March 10, 2015

Illocutionary act

- **Direct:** assertive (stating)
- **Indirect:** Commissive (complaining/mocks)

The speaker does not complain but also makes mockery of the Northern Part of the country and Islamic religion for encouragement of Almajiri which denies some children the joy of childhood via parent child relationship.

Possible Perlocutionary Effect: caution, anxiety, religious and ethnic/political sentiments.

D13. Locution: “On Saturday, if anyone of you, I swear in the name of God, goes against my wish that Ambode will be the next governor of Lagos state, the person is going to die inside this water.” (Oba Akiolu of Lagos in 2015) Sahara Reporters, 9th April 2015

Illocutionary act

- **Direct:** Assertive (predicting)
- **Indirect:** Directive (warning)

This kind of statement ridicules Nigerian democracy. A traditional ruler forces his subjects to vote a given candidate and threatens that whoever that refuses to obey him “is going to die inside ... water”.

Possible Perlocutionary Effect: fear, anxiety, political violence and ethnic bigotry.

D14. Locution: “Nigeria’s problems started with Awo’s introduction of tribal politics” — Dr Paul Unongo. Vanguard News June 26, 2017

Illocutionary act

- **Direct:** assertive (suggesting)
- **Indirect:** Commissive (challenging)

Such suggestion is aimed at driving hatred for the Yoruba of Nigeria.

Possible Perlocutionary Effect: Nigeria has been in economic, religious, tribal and inter-ethnic cum political problems emanating from hatred for one another.

D15. Locution: “If they want violence, we will show them violence” – Godwin Obaseki (Edo State governor) *Punch News* August 3, 2020

Illocutionary act:

- **Direct:** assertive (stating his stance against an opposition political party)
- **Indirect:** Commissive (threatening)

This is a threat on Nigerian Democracy.

Possible perlocutionary effect: Electoral violence, destruction of lives and properties, anxiety amongst Nigerians and lack of faith in the Nigerian state and democracy. It depicts the weakness and the selfishness of the Nigerian leaders. Again, on the part of the people to whom that speech was addressed, fear can be created. The governor, who is contesting for a second tenure in office, has shown from this statement that he was willing to do anything to remain in the office.

III. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This research examined the negative impact of hate inducing speeches in the Nigeria society. There are many hate inducing speeches on the social media platform without anyone claiming ownership though the targeted person or group is often known. Some are also on YouTube where the identities of the speaker(s) and the targeted groups are known but this research focused on hate speeches that affected only the political system of Nigeria which are documented in the dailies and their effect. It does not discuss those calling for secession of the Nigerian state. It reveals that the ethnic multiplicity, cultural and language (and dialectal) diversity have made it possible for Nigerians to either consciously or unconsciously leave themselves in the dark; they have ended up making themselves slaves to destructive criticisms; the worst being that Nigerians wash their dirty linens in public by exposing their weakness on Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp groups and other social media platforms. It has continued to haunt Nigeria unity, security, law and order, politics and governance, lives, properties and national cohesion. And it has continued to create negative impact on the younger and upcoming generations. It is quite a shame that most of these hate inducing speeches are asserted, directed, expressed or declared by Nigerian political and religious leaders who use their social status and overwhelming influence on their people to instigate intellectual, political, economic or religious fight against others. It is recommended that the Independent National Commission for the Prohibition of Hate Speeches Bill introduced to the Senate on March 2018 should be revisited to avoid excesses and possible swing into action once freedom of speech is addressed properly. This paper also calls for enlightenment of religious and political leaders on the tenets of unity, tolerance, team work, constitutional amendment, democracy and good governance. Media aides to our

leader should rise up to their responsibilities; they occupy such positions to guide our leader right to ensure that whatever they present to the public should be devoid of hate. And the masses should use the social media as an avenue for strengthening national unity and alert their service providers once there is information against Nigerian community standards.

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