

Intertextuality in President Obasanjo's "Before It Is Too Late"

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Abstract

A letter is commonplace written communication which takes different forms depending on its social context. The context includes various societal currents that are responsible for the production, consumption and interpretation of such letter. Hence, a letter is semantic unit which incorporates the writer's perceptions of an event which may be clearly stated or obfuscated. It is upon this platform that this study interrogates the intertextual strategies exploited by former President Obasanjo to present his view to former President Jonathan in his letter of appeal. The paper uses a theoretical framework of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to reveal the ways in which linguistic structure and communicative devices overtly or covertly harbour ideological meaning. President Obasanjo adopts intertextual strategies to bring a memory of past events into President Jonathan's mind. This is because recreating knowledge of the past in texts tends to give hearers or readers a fairly clear understanding of the current situation. The paper therefore concludes that it is impossible not to have intertextual reference in any expression longer than a sentence.

Keywords: *intertextuality, ideology, social structure and CDA*

Introduction

Latter is a written text and a semantic unit. The production and reception of a latter or any given text represent an interaction between a writer and a reader and this mainly depends upon their knowledge of other texts. As Bloor and Bloor (2007:7) point out "text is a product of discourse and often used to describe a linguistic record of a communicative event". For a text to be meaningful, it must meet seven standards of textuality, namely: *cohesion, coherence, acceptability, intentionality, informativity, situationality, and intertextuality* (Beaugrande and Dressler, 1981 as cited in Bloor & Boor, *ibid*). The concern of this work is to carry out a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) of the use of intertextuality or intertextual analysis of the latter of appeal written by former President Obasanjo to former President Jonathan in 2013. There is no single approach to analysing the complex incident of intertextuality in writing production and interpretation. Corroborating this view, Wang (2008: 364, citing Culler, 1981: 103), who avers that "it is just impossible to establish the origin of all intertextual elements in texts, as texts draw not only on other specific texts but also discursive practices, and codes whose origins are lost". Thus, the analysis of intertextuality becomes merely a matter of charting the multiple texts, voices, discourses, and genres or identifying the sentences on which texts draw (Wang, *ibid*).

Historical Perspectives of Intertextuality

Interest in the ways in which texts and prior texts are connected is often traced to the Russian linguist Mikhail Bakhtin (Johnstone, 2008: 164). Bakhtin's work covered a period of 1920s to 1940s but was not known in the West until the 1960s because of little communication between Soviet scholars and outsiders. The French scholar Julia Kristeva, who introduced Bakhtin's work to Western readers, coined the term 'intertextuality' to explain the way in which texts and ways of talking refer to and build on other texts and discourses. The concept of 'interdiscursivity' is modelled upon and closely related to 'intertextuality' (Kristeva 1980, Bakhtin, 1986, Johnstone, 2008), and like intertextuality it focuses on the historical view of texts as transforming the past – existing conventions, or prior texts – into the present (Fairclough, 1993). In other words, interdiscursivity deals with the conditions in which texts incorporate other texts; texts talk in response and anticipation of other texts. This term is related to a few others such as *polyvocality* – the ways in which texts incorporate the voices of other texts, and *dialogicality* – the ways in which texts speak.

Approaches range from focus on linguistic conventions such as White (2002) to social conventions such as Lemke (1995a). An elementary type of analysis is to examine the intertextual composition of a single text, describing both the explicit (e.g. the direct quotation) and implicit (e.g. mentioning of a belief or issue of context). Scholars in different fields consider the notion of intertextuality from different perspectives for different purposes. These scholars could roughly be categorised into two groups. The first group is the scholars from semantics, mainly from so-called literary semiotics scholars, this group concerns themselves with exploring the complex and heterogeneous nature of literary works appropriating the concept of

intertextuality. The second group comes from area of discourse analysis and critical discourse analysis. For these of scholars, their major concern is non-literary works. They perceive intertextuality not only as a form through which texts are interrelated but also a social practice that involves particular socially regulated ways of producing and interpreting discourse (Fairclough, 1992a&b, 1995). Fairclough (1992:85) identifies two types of intertextuality – manifest intertextuality and constitutive intertextuality.

Similarly, for Kristeva (*ibid*) intertextuality is viewed from different positions: horizontally and vertically. Horizontal intertextuality as to do with how texts build on texts with which they are related sequentially (or systematically, to use the traditional terms in linguistic), in other words, the texts (utterances) which they follow or precede. For example, speakers pick up other speakers sounds and words and phrases and reuse them (new personal – experience stories in a conversational story – round may pick up on character types or plots from previous ones: or someone spoken to in particular professional register may respond in the same style). Vertical intertextuality refers to how texts build on texts that are paradigmatically related to them in various ways, members, that is, of the same or similar categories. For example, an email message may borrow from and transform the conventions of letter writing, or property transactional report which has the characteristics of both news reports and advertisements.

Intertextuality as a Concept

Intertextuality or intertextual analysis is a key component of discourse practice in Fairclough's three dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis (henceforth CDA). At this level the model, Fairclough (1995b) points that while there is linguistic analysis at the text level, there is also linguistic analysis at discourse practical level which he refer to "intertextual analysis". The focus of intertextuality is on the border line between text and discourse practice. It is looking at text from the perspective of discourse practice. That is looking at traces of the discourse practice in text (Fairclough, 1995b: 16). For Wallace (1992: 47), "all texts contain traces of other texts, and frequently they cannot be readily interpreted or at least full appreciated without reference to the other text". She therefore views intertextuality "as the principle of textual reference" (Wallace *ibid*). Intertextuality establishes a relation of specific variables, symbols or sets of signs including citation, allusion, attribution of ideas, references to historical contexts, specific utterances, cultural practices, etc (Bloor and Bloor, 2007:55).

Also, as Scollon (1998) states, "today's news production is seen as follow-up to yesterday's story". Meanwhile, interdiscursivity works on different levels or dimensions from intertextuality in the sense that it deals with genres, situations, registers, social practices which are appropriated as significant aspect of the mediated action. For instance Fairclough (1992, 1995a, 1995b), elucidates an instance in which the discourse of advertising has been appropriated interdiscursively as part of the academic discourse which he referred to as a 'marketization of public discourse'. A university produces a brochure which not only uses the genre of advertising to promote the university and its courses, but takes on the language of advertising to position the university as commodity within the discourse of a consumer.

Discourse Practice

Discourse practice is seen as discursive practice, which is a process involved in production, distribution and consumption of texts in society. Fairclough sees this process in terms of the circulation of concrete linguistic objects i.e., production of specific texts or text-types (Fairclough, 1992). Using the term in the Foucaultian sense, he views discourse practice as connecting the micro-level of a particular text with the macro-level of the socio-cultural context. It also focuses mainly on issues of interdiscursivity and manifest intertextuality, i.e., on how writers draw on already existing discourses and genres to create a text and how receivers of the texts also use available discourses and genres in the consumption of texts (Phillips and Jorgensen 2006:69). Therefore, the discursive practices in the newspaper reporting are processes through which journalists produce news texts, and readers use and understand them.

Sourcing or Quoting

Letter, which is in a form of newspaper reporting, is a representation of event by reporter who either has witnessed the event or sought other witnesses and sources who will be considered by the reader – or at least are presented to them as – trustworthy, and their utterances as authentic and value-laden. Sourcing is one of the effective tools that are widely used in this kind of reportage to align the reporter at a certain distance close or far from what he/she reports. By choosing whose voice is sourced, the reporter positions the reader attitudinally with regard to the content of the report (Pasha, 2011).

Newsmakers tend to present their sources as informed knowers and legitimate sources so what is reported will go unquestioned and will be accepted as facts. Sourcing as Tuchman (1972) is of four “Strategic rituals” for achieving “Objectivity”. van Dijk (1998) refers to sourcing as a way to achieve hegemony, because access to information is not available to everyone but “members of more powerful social groups and institutions, and especially their leaders (the elites) have more or less exclusive access” (van Dijk, 1998b:5). Sourcing as property of intertextuality takes two forms: direct and indirect quoting. Directly quoting the source indicates the trustworthiness of given information. In this way direct quotes help to present the message or information as a fact that is invulnerable to questioning because it is coming from an official, an informed source or witness.

Presupposition

Presupposition is a term that is widely used in both pragmatics and linguistics. In text and talk, there are some basic assumptions that writer or speaker makes about the reader or listener in relation to the topic of discussion. Such assumptions are made without any challenge from interactants because they are built on shared background knowledge. This is referred to as presupposition. One feature of presupposition is that a presupposition of a sentence is also a presupposition of its negation (Yule, 1996: 29, Johnstone, 2008:164). Presupposition can also occur at the sentence level in the form of persuasive rhetoric that can be used to convey the impression that an agent of power says carries more weight (Huckin, 1995: 2002). A sentence may presuppose other sentences, for example, the sentence John son is named Peter. Presupposes the sentence John has a son. Thus presupposition is previously known meaning which is implied in the sentence. The programmatic presupposition is nonlinguistically realized and depends in its interpretation on the context of the utterance or the proposition. Understanding this type of presupposition derives from the relation of enounce (Proposition) to its context, including the context of the discursive rules which ascribe to certain forms of language, certain pragmatic functions.

Methodology

The data for this study is in form of document – “a useful method of data collection in qualitative research in social sciences” (Cresswell, 2008). The type of document used in this paper is public document which is an open letter published in the Nigerian daily newspapers and also available online. The paper interrogates intertextuality in President Obasanjo’s open letter (Before it is too late) written on the 2nd December, 2013. The purpose of selecting the text is multifarious as the writer provided ten reasons why the letter was made open. Some of the reasons include the exigencies of political life and complete departure from advertently or inadvertently dividing the nation along weak seams of North-South and Christian-Moslem. The writer claimed to have written four letters to President Jonathan without any of them eliciting an acknowledgement or any response and finally it is a letter written to guard, protect and defend our fledgling democracy, nourish it and prevent bloodshed.

The document is a letter of 18 pages, written in Standard English. This letter contains a great number of intertextual strategies but a few were randomly selected for our analysis because of the nature and size of this study. The study is purely a text based and thus content (descriptive and interpretative) analysis was carried out on the sampled extract.

Aim and Objectives

The aim of the analysis is to investigate the choice of language used by President Obasanjo in his attempt to reformulate social occurrence and represent the reality of issues of national concern. It also attempts to provide pattern for assessing intertextuality in discourse.

Theoretical Framework

The study of President Obasanjo’s letter of appeal “Before it is too late” to President Jonathan via intertextuality or intertextual analysis is deep-rooted in CDA. CDA is a branch of Applied Linguistics. It is a field that is concerned with studying and analysing written and spoken texts to reveal the discursive sources of power, dominance, inequality, and bias (van Dijk, 1998a). It examines how these discursive sources are maintained and reproduced within specific social, political and historical contexts. CDA cannot be classified as a single method but is rather viewed as an approach, which consists of different perspectives and different methods for studying the relationship between the use of language and social context. As van Dijk (1998a) avers CDA “is not a specific direction of research” hence “it does not have a unitary theoretical framework.”

But, van Dijk (1998a) asserts, given the common perspective and general aims of CDA, we may also find overall conceptual and theoretical frameworks that are closely related. CDA, in all its ramifications, is based on neo-Marxist theory claiming that cultural and economic dimensions are significant in the creation and maintenance of power relations.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Given the social practice effect of intertextuality in discourse, the study engaged in describing and explaining the nature of intertextuality which permeates President Obasanjo's letter "Before it is too late". The author's use of intertextuality is ultimately ideological. Perhaps the communicative mechanism may be employed by the writer to present his argument as incontrovertible fact there by influencing the reader to accept his claims. The socio-cultural background of the letter is political which one of the major concerns of CDA. As an elder state-man and political god-father of President Jonathan there is a unique language power and hegemony in the entire text. The following are the analysis of some intertextual strategies employed by Obasanjo in his open letter to Jonathan on state of the nations.

Presupposition/Negation

Excerpt 1

I must say that it is not ingenious. You may wish to pursue a more credible and more honourable path. (P.3)

The excerpt contains to clauses of a connected speech. The sentences are remarks made by the writer after he viewed the activities of President Jonathan on his preparation for 2015 presidential elections and placed it side by side with his utterance where he told the writer that he had not told anybody that he would contest in 2015. The linguistic or discursive intertextuality in this excerpt is negation which is a form of presupposition-when one thing is not this. Our material world is in such a way that options are always available. For instance, if something is not up it will be down, good and bad, left and right etc. Thus, the decision of President Johnathan to contest in 2025 election is unsuitable for him, his party, PDP and Nigeria. The writer appeals to him to drop an incredible and dishonorable idea.

Excerpt 2

Assisting criminals to evade justice cannot be part of the job of the Presidency (P.10)

Also in excerpt 2, there is a presupposition arising from the use of negation. The writer adopts intertextuality to make his case stronger by appealing to the emotion and feeling of President Johnathan. He maintains that the decision to free one of the Abacha boys who was accused of murder to evade justice and offered presidential delegation to welcome him home can only be in a bad taste. This intertextuality is used to chide President Johnathan for bringing job of the presidency so low at the point of sending a delegate to welcome an accused person.

Excerpt 3

It is now not a matter of turn on any section or geographical area but the best interest of Nigeria and all Nigerians. (P.2)

Here is another example of negation that presuppositions something else. In this datum, the writer evince that the position of the president of federal republic of Nigeria is not supposed to be zoned as in the PDP arrangement. Thus, the expression: "It is now not a matter of turn of any section or geographical area..." evokes prior texts saying the position of the President should not be taken turn by turn.

Presupposition/Quotation

Excerpt 4

Later, I heard from other sources including sources closer to you that you made the same commitment elsewhere, hence my inclusion of it in my 2011 as follows; (what follows is an extensive quote that took the whole of pg.4 and part of p.5).

In excerpt 4, we have a number of intertextual strategies. However, the concern here is to look at the manner in which presupposition and quotation are embedded in this example. First, the use of article "the" in English language can create an effect of intertextuality by introducing a proposition handed down from previous discourse. In this datum, the finale of your campaign in 2011, presupposes a state of affairs in which a campaign took place. Thus, the writer employs this strategy not just to make the addressee fall in line with his observation but to authenticate his propositions. Second, the addresser begins the sentence with sourcing that is bringing another voice into a proposition. This is achieved by integrating an externally sourced voice into ones text or talk. Often time, this is achieved through paraphrase, a blend of a writer or speaker own

words with another person. And, towards the end of the sentence, the writer a quote from another text via the introductory phrase: as follows.

Excerpt 5

You were exemplary in words when during the campaign and the 2011 elections, you said “My election is not worth spilling the blood of any Nigerian (p.6).

The writer is ironically assertive in the above proposition when he states that the addressee is exemplary in words, perhaps not in action. A writer is said to be assertive when an auxiliary copula is verb is used in a declarative sentence. The assertion in this regard indicates President Obasanjo ideological understanding of the fact that no one’s political ambition worth spilling the blood of any Nigerian. In this excerpt, the writer is seen to have clearly inserted the wordings of an external source (President Jonathan) into the text and thereby making it to bear the traces of another text. The implication of this is that a clear boundary is being set up between the wordings of the writer and that of the participant or cited source. This is evident in the use of the inverted commas to separate the writer’s voice from that of the externally sourced person.

Allusion/Reference

Excerpt 6

I could sense a semblance between the situation that we are gradually getting into and the situation we fell into as a nation during the Abacha era. (P.1)

Allusion is another form of intertextuality in that is employed in the letter, it occurs at different levels in spoken and written communication. Allusion is something said or written that refers to or mentions another person or subject in an indirect way. In excerpt 6, the writer relates the situation that he is talking about to the Abacha era. This regime was marred with violation of human rights and freedoms as people were not allowed to freely express their feelings and opinions. The writer adopts this communicative strategy to bring a memory of the past event into the minds of the addressee and the general public. It is also used to lend credence to the truth, validity and plausibility of the claims made by the writer.

Excerpt 7

Allegation of keeping over 1000 people on political watch list rather than criminals or security watch list and training snipers and other armed personnel secretly and clandestinely acquiring weapons to match for political purposes like Abacha and training them where Abacha trained his own killers, if it is true, it cannot augur well for the initiators, the government and the people of Nigeria. (P.9)

Metadiscursive Strategy

Excerpt 8

For you to allow yourself to be “possessed”, so to say, to the exclusion of most of the rest of Nigeria as an Ijaw man is a mistake that should never have been allowed to happened.

Meta-discursive strategy is a way of making discourse be about discourse- speakers or writers can situate themselves outside their words by hedging the description of a quality. The appraisal word “possessed” is placed in between the inverted commas and the hedging adverbial phrase. Hedging is used in communicative event to maintain face and display some level of politeness.

Conclusion

It is evident that intertextuality concerns the way in which the use of a certain text depends on knowledge of other text. For instance, the letter we analysed in the paper may appear as an independent text; however, it relies on the traditions of letter writing and we bring our knowledge of what a letter is to the reading of it. Thus, in any discursive event, it is almost always impossible not to have intertextual references. This is so because recreating knowledge of the past in texts tends to give readers a fairly clear understanding of the current situation.

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