



Kpakpando Journal of History and International Studies

A Critical Stylistic Study of Coup Announcements and Speeches of Selected African Military Heads of State

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Kpakpando Journal of History and International Studies: Vol. 1 no. 4 July, 2024. ISSN: 2437-1750

Abstract

A coup d'état is a quick, brilliant and highly successful takeover of a government, especially a civilian government by a group of military officers. This paper is interdisciplinary in nature as it involves history, politics and language in use. It aims to identify and analyze the linguistic and stylistic peculiarities in coup speeches of selected African military heads of state and expose how these speeches were used in representing reality as demonstrated in the words and structures of the texts as well as the ideologies and power relations embedded in them. Coup speeches between 1984 and 2004 were selected from west and central Africa, in all four speeches were selected. The English versions of the French speeches were downloaded from YouTube, and transcribed while that from Nigeria was downloaded from the internet as text script. The speeches were analyzed using Jeffries (2010) critical stylistics framework. Analysis shows that certain linguistic features such as naming and describing; used to achieve prominence of location, setting or social background, use of proper noun and noun phrase to show inclusivity and emotional connection to the listeners; Representing actions, events and states such as use of material process clauses to represent their experiences in the real world, which reveals intention and events; Implying and assuming, which utilizes assumptions and implications in the speeches to give common sense to the listeners and to reveal some of their ideologies and influence the view points of the listeners or readers, among others. The paper concludes that military coup speeches and announcements manufacture consent in order to appear acceptable and democratic through coercion and manufacture of ideological indoctrination and all these are embedded in their choice of words and sentences.

Keywords: Critical Stylistic Study, Coup Announcements, Speeches, Selected African Military Heads of State, Ideological Indoctrination

Introduction

This paper is an inter-disciplinary study as it involves history, politics and language in use. The concept of stylistics and the analytical tools of critical stylistics framework are used to unravel the textual meaning and the intended meaning of the speakers' choice of words and sentences and the hidden ideologies and power relations in the speeches.

In order to situate, this paper to its proper context, a brief survey of language, speech stylistics and critical stylistics analysis is imperative. Human language is a signaling system a creation of man's social needs on which society depends for its very existence. It is an absolute prerequisite for man's social, political and economic lives and the most important and effective medium through which organized thought proceeds. Language performs expressive, informational, phatic or social and aesthetic functions. Apart from these, language can be used to direct and influence the behaviour and attitude of others.

A person's language could be used to reliably predict the social situations under which such language is generated. The primary function of language is to convey ideas from one person to another be it information, command

or entreaty. Language plays a major role in the regulation of and control of society. It is possible to use language extracts or texts such as speeches, letters and recorded conversations to gauge the sociopolitical pulse of a people as well as the situational constraints that determine the linguistic choices speakers make. Military coup speeches for instance are integral parts of a nation's socio-political history and can be used to account for the strategies used to oust an old government and institute (legitimize) the new government.

Speech making is one of the linguistic devices man uses in expressing his desires, persuading his audience and exercising the power of language as a potent means of social control. The purpose of a speech and the expected reaction from the audience pose linguistic constraints on the source person, who must choose the right lexical and structural choice to suit the communication exigency. Speeches are written first before they are delivered. A speech may be designed to stimulate belief through conviction to alter the view points of the audience or to arouse the emotion of the audience.

Consequently, the nature of the audience, their social status, prejudices, anxieties and dedications, purpose of the speech and

occasion will determine to a very great extent the speaker's choice of expressions and approach to the subject matter. From the foregoing, one could conclude that language, the means of communication among mankind does not take place in a vacuum, the context or social activity in which it is used actualizes it and accords it meaningfulness. Thus, a language user is always matching ideation and verbalization to suit particular social activities. Each of these social activities has its peculiar characteristics in terms of ideas and how these ideas are communicated. Apart from variation according to user that manifest as idiolects and dialects, there are variations according to use which have to do with specialized features of vocabulary or lexis, semantics and syntax. It is in this context that this study critically and stylistically examines coup speeches of selected African Military heads of state.

Theoretical framework

Stylistics is simply defined as the linguistic study of style in literary and non-literary texts and their effective communication of social meaning within a social context. Contemporary studies in stylistics have extended its focus to other discourses outside literature such as political speeches,

advertising, multimodal publications, newspaper editorials, etc.

Crystal (2008, 460) defines stylistics as 'a branch of linguistics which studies the features of situationally distinctive uses (varieties) of language and tries to establish principles capable of accounting for the particular choices made by individual and social groups in their use of language'. In a broad sense, it includes the study of all situationally distinctive language use.

Critical stylistics

Critical stylistics was first used by Lesley Jeffries (2007). It is concerned with bringing together the main general functions that a text has in representing reality which is based on the fact that 'there is a level at which texts organize the world we experience and that this is demonstrable in the words and structures of the texts themselves. Critical stylistics bridges the gap between CDA and stylistics by using and further developing the critical linguistics approach to text analysis. Critical stylistics provides a more comprehensive and systematic set of analytical tools and reveals ideologies and power relations in discourse. It argues that all texts are ideologically based whether these ideologies are part of a conscious or unconscious process.

The theory adopts a functional perspective which centres around Halliday's (1985) ideational meta-functions; that is the set of tools presented in the theory are all related to how language represents the world. Critical stylistics concerns the textual meaning which is the focus of stylistics and how this meaning is promoted from Halliday's ideational function of language to represent a version of reality with ideological consequences. Relying on Halliday's suggestion that a language consists of a network of linguistic options that enable users to communicate a particular meaning (Halliday, 2004,23). Jeffries is of the view that textual meaning is encoded by the stylistic choice of linguistic features that are embedded in a text. In order to reveal the underlying meaning of a text using linguistic features, Jeffries offers a critical stylistic framework that combines the text analysis of stylistics with the ideological awareness of critical discourse analysis CDA (Jeffries and McIntyre, 2010,194). The critical stylistic analytical tools are not completely new, it is a combination of previous tools used by critical discourse analyst Fairclough (1989) and critical linguists, Fowler (1991) and Simpson (1993), in addition to new tools added by Jeffries which work in the same way as transitivity and modality. The analytical tools are

presented in the form of a list of functions that may be represented by more than one linguistic feature. They are:

1. **Naming and Describing:** Naming indicates the choices of a noun that may be used to denote the same entity, choosing nouns from the available alternates, using certain modifications to describe that referent within the noun phrase domain and using nominalization in specific contexts that can be expressed using verbs. These methods can invent ideological meaning in the text.

2. **Representing**
Actions/Events/States: This tool displays how the speaker or writer expresses the event in terms of actions events, and states. It deals with the noun phrase semantic function according to the verbal element.

3. **Equating and Contrasting:** This tool indicates that every text can create new synonyms and antonyms between words, phrases and clauses or within a whole paragraph. It explains how the world is structured in the text in terms of both equation and opposition. The semantic relations that are textually constructed refer to similarities and difference in meaning.

4. **Exemplifying and Enumerating:**
This is used in some text and relies on

pragmatic inferencing. It is used to decide which of the items exemplified or listed is more relevant than the other in a given case.

5. **Prioritizing:** While structuring the sentence of the language, certain information is prioritized over the other. In some structures, we put the essential information at the beginning and in other structure we put the prioritizing information in the final position, as the main obligatory clause bears the most critical information.

6. **Implying and Assuming:** This tool is mainly concerned with pragmatics which deals with the implicitly in language. The utilization of assumptions and implications to give common sense to the ideologies is called naturalization. It is a method of vital importance that can influence people's viewpoints.

7. **Negating:** It is used in general to deal with the conceptual practice rather than the verb negative form. It has the power of a persuasive kind. It can be a negative power or a positive one. It helps the speaker produce a hypothetical version of reality. Such constructions in a text create implicatures about the other realities that may occur by disregarding the Gricean maxim of quantity.

8. **Hypothesizing:** The hypothetical reality in the text can be manifested by using modality. Halliday (1994) believes that the languages interpersonal metafunctions can be expressed by using the modal system. Jeffries assumes that modality is ideational according to the conceptual meaning that it has. It can show the different ways of influence on the reader or hearer (Jeffries, 2016).

9. **Presenting Others' Speech and Thought:** This tool presents others' words and thought through direct and indirect speech and according to the textual function (Jeffries, 2016).

10. **Representing Time Space and Society:** This shows the moment, place, audience and context of the text, displayed through the linguistic realization. The use of deixis within the text becomes more sensitive to textual ideology (Jeffries, 2016).

The Context of Military Speeches

Some of the works done on military speeches are more on the inaugural speeches of military heads of states than on the coup speeches.

Few studies on military speeches from the stylistic and discourse point of views include; Igwebuike and Alo (2009). 'A stylistic analysis of major Chukwuma Kaduna

Nzeogwu's coup speech of 1966'. Their study concludes that lexico-semantic, syntactic and phonological choices help to encode meaning and realize persuasion in the speech and the deployment of specific rhetorical strategies reveal the ideological stance of Major Nzeogwu especially the coercive strategies realized in the superordinate structures are used to coax, instill fears and to threaten the autonomy face wants of the oppositions.

Similarly, Anyachonkeya and Nwosu-Okoli (2023) worked on the discourse style of Nigerian coup plotters. They analyzed coup plot speeches of Lt. Yakubu Gowon of 1966, Murtala Mohammed of 1975, Major-General Muhammadu Buhari of Jan 1, 1984 and Gideon Orkar of April 22, 1990. The paper concluded from investigated selected excerpts that the broadcast idiolect revolves around propaganda, polemic and discursive styles through which the speakers intimidate their opponents as well as the civilian populace into submission and resignation of fate.

Generally, literature on the stylistic nature or study of military coup speeches is quite scarce, though much have been written on stylistic analysis of political speeches, there has not been conscious effort to apply critical

stylistic framework in the analysis of military coup speeches of selected heads of state not only from Nigeria but from other west and central African countries. It is this gap in knowledge that this paper aspires to fill. The researcher is of the opinion that coup speeches negotiate an intelligent purpose and contains potent lexical and structural features than can be used to mark it out as type.

Aim of the study

The aim of this study is to identify and analyze the linguistic and stylistic peculiarities in coup speeches across West and Central Africa as well as expose how these texts are used in representing reality as demonstrated in the words and structures of the texts and the ideologies and power relations embedded in them.

In the last four years, there have been series of military coup d'état in countries across West and Central Africa even when we thought they have embraced democracy and civilian rule. These coup announcements over National and International television stations inspired the researcher to study the linguistic components of the speeches. Coup speeches and announcements between 1984 and 2004 were selected from West and Central Africa; that is within the last forty years of their independence.

Methodology

The study analyzed four coup speeches/announcements. A coup d'état is a quick, brilliant and highly successful takeover of a government, especially a civilian government by a group of military officers. Most often the length of a coup speech is usually short, not very long. The speeches were downloaded from the internet and YouTube. The English versions of the French speeches were recorded, written down and studied for analysis. The researcher analyzed them using relevant stylistic concepts and critical stylistic analytical tools. The speeches are numbered for easy reference and a brief background is given for meaning explication. They are;

Text 1: December 31, 1983, Nigerian coup announcement by Brigadier Sani Abacha that brought President Mohammadu Buhari to power in 1984 and ousted Alhaji Shehu Usman Shagari.

Text II: Burkina Faso military leader coup announcement led by Capt. Ibrahim Traore on 30th September, 2022 which overthrew Lt. Colonel Paul – Henri Sandaogo Damibia.

Text III: Gabon coup announcement of 30th August 2023 led by Gen. Brice Oligui Nguema which brought to an end the 56 year

long rule of bongo family. Ali Bongo came to power after his father's death in 2009 and won a third term in the just concluded election of 2023 before the coup.

Text IV: Niger coup speech of Gen. Abdourahmane Tchiani of July 26, 2023. Gen. Tchiani is a former Chief of the country's presidential guard. He ousted President Mohammed Bazoum who was elected two years ago.

Analysis

The following linguistic features were identified in the selected speeches; naming and describing, representing actions events and states, implying and assuming representing time, space and society.

i) **Naming and Describing:** In the following excerpts from the speeches, there are use of naming and describing.

‘I, Brigadier Sani Abacha of the Nigerian army address you this morning, on behalf of the Nigerian army forces (Name of the coup announcer (proper noun)

‘Accordingly, Alhaji Shehu Usman Shagari ceases forth with to be the President and commander-in-chief (Name of the outsted President) (proper noun)
.....Text I

Line I: ‘People of **Burkina Faso**, dear fellow countryman and women’ (Name of the country involved in the coup) (Noun apposition)

.....Text II

Line II: ‘Our beautiful country, **Gabon** has always been... (pre-modifier to the head noun) (Name of the country involved in the coup or geographical location.Text III

Line III: ‘Combatant people of **Burkina Faso**, this noble cause that motivated our action is still burning inside most of us today, **September 30th, 2022** (country, month, year) (proper noun).....Text II

The location in each of those speeches is to convince the citizens, the international community and neighbouring countries that what they have heard is real and not an abstraction. Naming are used in the texts to achieve prominence of location, setting or social background.

Use of Noun in Apposition through Pre-modification of the Head Noun

Line 1: “Nigerien, Nigerien, my dear compatriots, on Wednesday June 26, 2023 the defence... ..Text IV

Apposition is the use of a noun phrase immediately after another noun phrase which refers to the same person or thing. The proper

nouns in most cases are in opposition to the noun phrases. Thus, the speech writers used proper noun and noun phrase to show inclusivity and emotional connection as could be seen in the excerpt ‘Nigerien, Nigerien,mydear compatriots.’.....‘The CNSP’s actions were motivated by the sole desire to preserve our beloved homeland’.....Text IV

The noun phrase in the complement position is pre-modified with ‘our beloved’ as evaluative adjective showing inclusion. This type of evaluative adjective is used throughout the speeches studied to show that the coup plotters are concerned with the state of affairs in the country and that they have come to salvage the country from the former administration. This could also be seen in Text I- ‘The armed forces of Nigeria is ready to lay its life for our dear nation but not for the present irresponsible leadership of the past civilian administration’

“our beloved nation.” “Our brave people”.....“Brave people of Burkina Faso”. The actions of Lt. Colonel Damiba convinced us that his ambition is not in line with our common ambition. Because of all these, we decided today, the 30th of September, 2022 to suspend the transitional government of Lt. Colonel Damiba, so we

can pursue our common ideal with the Burkinabe people'.Text III

'Our beautiful country Gabon.....'Honour and loyalty to our homeland ' Text II

'The armed forces of Nigeria is ready to lay its life for our dear nation...'. Text I

'Fellow countrymen and women...'..... Text I

This pre-modification of the country and its citizens with the collective 'our' and passionate 'dear', 'fellow' gives fillip to the unity of purpose and commonality of interest, anxiety dedication and passion for their country. These greeting devices in the text are also used to capture the attention of the audience by reinforcing the familiarity and social ties that bind the speaker and his audience.

There are use of such political and military lexemes like 'security'. Lieutenant, colonel army officer's territory, government, national assembly constitution. House of assembly, constitution, president compatriots etc. these are all nominals and reveal the field of discourse which is political/ military context.

There are also use of command structures, as a coup is essentially a military activity. It is issued at the spur of the moment that is why

it is mostly forceful and persuasive in tone, for instance in Text III, 'the general elections of August 28th 2023 as well as its falsified results are cancelled, boarders are closed until further notice.'

Text I: The federal military government hereby decreases the suspension of the provision of the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1979... All the political parties are banned... "You are to await further announcements.'

Representing Actions/Events/States

This is achieved through the ideational meaning or metafunction of the systemic functional linguistics. They include the following;

ii) Transitivity Model:

There is the use of transitivity to promote the ideational functions in the texts studied. Two kinds of verbs were used, material and relational process.

In transitivity model, Process is realized by a verbal group, participants by a nominal group while circumstances are realized by an adverbial group or prepositional phrase.

Material process are used in the texts to represent the process of 'doing' in the physical world. It involves two participants, the actor, who is the doer of the action and an

obligatory participant and the goal which is an optional participant. Material clauses used in a text are concerned with our experience of the material world. For instance in the following excerpt: “Colonel Damiba rejected this proposition and continued with the military articulation that caused the failure of President Rock Marc Kabore’s regime...” (Text II).

The verbs in the above are transitive because the actions affected another participant, President Kabore.

Actor	Process	Goal
Colonel Damiba	Rejected	This proposition (of launching counter-offensive army)
Damiba	Continued	With the military articulation that led to the failure (of the former President)

The goal expresses the entity whether animate or inanimate affected by the process.

The above analysis reflects intention, supervision (meaning that the goal follows the process or is dependent on the process for truth) and event.

Relational Process: This is a process of being. This can be illustrated in the following excerpts:

“The general elections of August 28th, 2023 as well as its falsified results are cancelled” (Relational process by intransitive verb)..... (Text II). Others include:

“Our educational system is deteriorating at alarming rate” (Text I)

Carrier P. Relational Attribute

“The current security approach has failed to secure our country” (Text IV)

Relational processes are called processes of being and having which can be realized by the verb ‘be’ and other copular verbs like seem appear, become, own, possess, have/has. Relational process involves two participants: carrier and attribute. Carrier refers to the entity which carries the attribute, while attribute refers to that which qualifies

the entity. (something that exists, something that has the properties of being real)

Relation clauses help to characterize and identify entities in the text such as ‘the general elections of August 28th, 2023’, the educational system, ‘security situation’

iii) **Implying and Assuming:** There are utilization of assumptions and implications in the selected speeches to give common sense to the listener or reader and to reveal some of their ideologies and influence the view points of the listeners. These can be illustrated in the following excerpts; “People of Gabon, we are finally on the road to happiness” (Text III). This implicates that the people have been unhappy all these years of President Ali Bongo’s regime.

“Added to this is the irresponsible and unpredictable governance which result in continuing deterioration in social cohesion with the risk of leading the country into chaos.’...Text III. This presupposes that this is the reason for the mutinous soldiers to announce the coup and take over power, to restore peace and security.

Existential presupposition – When a speaker calls a name or refers to a definite noun phrase, his action is based on existential presupposition, for instance;

“Accordingly, Alhaji Shehu, Usman Shagari ceases forthwith to be the President... (Text I)

“Unfortunately, Lt. Colonel Paul-Henri Sandaogo Damibi that we trusted, betrayed our initial ideal... Text II

There are also use of possessive constructions which are based on existential presupposition as can be seen in the following excerpts

“Our educational system is deteriorating”... Text I

“Our beautiful country Gabon”... Text III

“...To restore the security and the integrity of our territory (Text II)

These assumptions are made because of the shared common ground or background information between the speaker and the listeners. The speaker did not go further to explain because he believes the listeners will know the names mentioned and the possessive constructions used, show that ‘the country has an existing educational system’, ‘Gabon is a beautiful country’, ‘there was a good security in their territory’.

Representing Time, Space and Society:

The speeches studied reveal the time, context, society and audience which were displayed through the linguistic realizations in the texts. Context of situation which is one of the levels of language in systemic functional linguistics accounts for the socio-cultural background surrounding the text under discussion. It takes care of features like location, time of a text, information about participants in the construction and interpretation of the text, what the participants are talking about and the extra-linguistic features used in the text. These could be seen in the texts studied, the date, society, that is, the country, the audience and the social background of the speeches were all revealed.

Power Relations and Ideologies in the texts

There is use of instrument of power and control as well as social construction of reality in the texts analyzed. The speakers construct versions of the social activities in their countries before the take-over of power in a way that favour their interests. They utilize expressions that foreground the contrast between the ousted administration and the in-coming one. They cast aspersions on the ousted administrations using negative words that demonize them and show their

administrative ineptitude which made the change of leadership necessary. These expressions could be seen as extended shibboleths, used to mobilize support for the in-coming administration. They are cast in active declarative sentences as statements of facts which make the speeches explicit and direct. For instance;

Abacha in his coup announcement presented the civilian leadership as ‘reveling in squandermania, corruption indiscipline and as irresponsible.’ Text I

Capt. Traore presented the former civilian leadership thus: ‘Damibia that we trusted betrayed our initial ideal, indeed the deterioration of the security situation which justified our action has been relegated to the background in favour of unfortunate political adventures’....Text II.

It can be seen that coup announcers’ list of the performance failures and moral denigration of the former administration were by implication exploited to frame the coup as the people’s only viable option. This gives the listeners or citizens, who are viewed as the oppressed, the impression that the oppressive leaders have been removed from power and that happy days are ahead. In framing, words are used to articulate and legitimize prejudices.

Military coup speeches and announcements manufacture consent in order to appear acceptable and democratic. This is done through coercion, manufacture of total consent and ideological indoctrination. All these are achieved through their choice of words and sentences.

Conclusion

This paper has attempted a critical stylistics analysis of coup speeches and announcements of selected African military heads of state. Critical stylistics, in addition to revealing the general functions of the texts by examining the words and structures of the texts, reveals the power relations and ideologies embedded in the texts. The linguistic features identified such as naming and describing; used to achieve prominence of location, setting or social background, use of proper noun and noun phrase to show inclusivity and emotional connection to the listeners; Representing actions, events and states such as use of material process clauses to represent their experiences in the real world, which reveals intention and events; Implying and assuming, which utilizes assumptions and implications in the speeches to give common sense to the listeners and to reveal some of their ideologies and influence the view points of the listeners or readers, among others were used by the speakers to

give out their intended meaning and affect their audience or listeners into accepting the change in government. Finally, the overriding tone of the speeches is formal, persuasive, forceful and appealing to the sensibilities and rationalities of the listeners and readers.

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