

A Stylistic Study of “Sustenance of Democracy” by Nigeria’s President Olusegun Obasanjo

C. O. Awonuga

Department of English, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria
E-mail: megola18@yahoo.com

KEYWORDS Pronoun; coupling; strings (of words); metaphor; analogy; repetition

ABSTRACT This paper examines the linguistic features that are manifested in the broadcast to the nation by Nigeria’s President Olusegun Obasanjo on 25th August, 2002 entitled “Sustenance of Democracy”. It was found that the speech contains examples of the use of personal pronouns, coupling, strings of words, eight types of metaphor, analogy, repetition and Biblical echoes. It was also found that President Obasanjo’s use of coupling and strings of words puts his language in the mainstream of language use by other Nigerian politicians of Yoruba extraction, such as Chief Adegoke Adelabu and Chief Obafemi Awolowo on the one hand, and the creative writer Wole Soyinka on the other.

INTRODUCTION

In the first half of the year 2002, the news of moves by the Federal House of Representatives to impeach Nigeria’s President Olusegun Obasanjo rocked the nation. As part of his attempt to douse the tension generated in the country by the conduct of the legislators, the President addressed the nation on the electronic media on Sunday, August 25, 2002. It is that broadcast, which was entitled “Sustenance of Democracy” that is analyzed and studied here, from the perspective of general stylistics. General stylistics is concerned with the study of registers of language with the aim of identifying and classifying the characteristic linguistic features of such registers.

In this paper, it is the language of political broadcasts that is examined, using Chief Obasanjo’s broadcast as an example. Attention is focused on the President’s use of personal pronouns, lexical items or words, metaphor, analogy and repetition on the one hand, and the occurrences of Biblical echoes on the other.

OBASANJO’S USE OF PERSONAL PRONOUNS

We find from our reading of “Sustenance of Democracy” that President Obasanjo uses such personal pronouns as “I”, “me”, “my”, “we”, “our”, “us”, “you”, “your”, “they” and “their”. We discuss below the ways in which he has used these pronouns.

In political rhetoric, especially in speeches or

addresses to the nation such as the one we are examining here, the relationships among the participants in the discourse situation are mediated by personal pronouns “which delineate a social or political ‘space’ in which people and groups have a ‘position’” (Chilton and Schaffner, 1997: 216).

In “Sustenance of Democracy”, the pronoun “I” occurs 15 times, “me” in “Let me...” occurs 3 times, “my” once, “you” 6 times, “your” twice, “we” 21 times, “our” 15 times, “us” twice, “they” once, “their” 4 times and “them” once. Of the 15 times that “I” occurs in the speech in question here, it occurs together with verbs of saying 11 times. Here are five examples of this phenomenon.

- a. “I will like to start [speaking] by thanking all Nigerians...”
- b. “I have had occasion to say that Nigerians did not choose democracy as our preferred system of government...”
- c. “...I assured them [over the telephone or through their representatives] that our country was a land that was full of surprises...”
- d. “Here again, I thank God Almighty...”
- e. “...I say to you without any fear of equivocation whatsoever...”

In example (a), “I” occurs together with “thanking”, in examples (b) and (e), it occurs with “say”; in example (c), it occurs with “assured”, and in example (d), it occurs with “thank” (recall example (a): “thanking”). These examples clearly establish Chief Obasanjo as the speaker in the passage being studied here and, by extension,

the rest of the country who are literate as the addressees.

This observation is buttressed by the use of “me” in the expression “Let me...” (“Let me at this juncture assure you”, etc) and “my” (“...my dream of making Nigeria the leading nation of Africa...”) on the one hand; and of “you” (“...you can imagine what disaster will follow if...”), “your” (“We thank you all for your confidence...”), “Fellow Nigerians” three times in a vocative sense and once in a non-vocative sense, “Fellow countrymen and women” once in a vocative sense and once in a non-vocative sense, on the other. Thus, while the President is the addresser, the other people in the country constitute the addressees.

But while “you” and “your” refer collectively to Nigerians, “they”, “their” and “them” refer either to certain designated people among the addressees, or to those foreigners who are regarded as friends of Nigeria. We shall discuss here, briefly, the examples in question. The President starts by thanking all Nigerians for bearing “patiently, in anguish and uncertainty, certain developments in the polity over the last few weeks”. He then goes on to single out certain individuals and groups of people for special mention. He now narrows down those that he is thanking in various ways. For instance, he thanks “those who by prayer, by writing, by petition, by press conferences and interviews and by telephone calls have shown that they are soldiers for the nurturing and sustenance of democracy”. It is obvious that the people being referred to here are certain groups of Nigerians and not all Nigerians.

The President then goes on to thank “the women and youth of our father land”, thus restricting the referents of “Their” in “Their role is worthy of commendation and emulation”, and in “For their future, especially the future of the youth, depends on what happens to democracy in our country today”. In the last part of his speech, however, the referents of “you” and “your” (“May the Almighty God be with you and your families...”) are again all Nigerians, as these constitute the President’s primary audience. Chief Obasanjo also addresses, albeit indirectly, another sub-audience within the larger audience made up of all Nigerians. This group is made up of “the enemies of change”, who “are the beneficiaries from the status quo.” The President’s message to these people is that there

will be change whether they like it or not.

Furthermore, the pronouns “them” and “their” are also used to refer to African and non-African friends of Nigeria who called to express “their concern for the situation in Nigeria” (“I assured them that our country was a land that was full of surprises...”; and “Some leaders from outside Africa also called to express their concern”). Contained in the references to these friends of Nigeria is an implicit expression of gratitude from the President.

The use of the third person plural pronouns “we”, “our” and “us” by Chief Obasanjo is particularly interesting. There are, in the speech, certain places where these pronouns refer clearly to all Nigerians, including the President himself. But there are also those places where they refer only to the President and his government. And there are yet other places in the address where it is not easy to clearly identify the referents of the pronouns. In other words, there are places in the speech where it is difficult to be categorical about the referents of “we”, “our” and “us”. Discussed below are five examples that lend weight to this observation.

- a. “Fellow Nigerians, what we have witnessed in the last two weeks is that our choice of democracy has gone through a litmus test and emerged virile and dynamic.”
- b. “But as quickly as we emerge from the unnecessary distraction and overheating of the polity, we will be stronger, we will be more focused...”
- c. “It has also shown that our democracy is firmly established as a government of the people, established by the people...”
- d. “There should be no room for resentment and bitterness in our hearts...”
- e. “We chose it [democracy] because it is imperative for us, as a result of what we went through under the military...”

In example (a), the fact that it is all Nigerians that are being referred to is buttressed by the phrase “Fellow Nigerians”, which is vocative in function. In example (b), the three occurrences of “we” also have Nigerians in general as their referents. As quickly as “we [that is, the entire nation] emerge from the unnecessary distraction..., we will be stronger [as a country], we will be more focused [as a people],...”

It is also clear that “our” in examples (c) and (d) and, indeed, in (a) is referring to all Nigerians as a whole. The choice of democracy as a form of

government for the country is "our choice" [examples (a) and (e)], the democracy itself is "our democracy" [example (c)] all because that is the system of government that all Nigerians collectively decided to have. Also, "our" in "our hearts" [example (d)] has all Nigerians as its referent in the sense that the President is urging Nigerians in general to continue loving one another so that Nigeria as a country can be uplifted and edified.

We have already examined briefly the first part of example (e) in our consideration of example (a). Now, we like to add that one clue that we have concerning the referent of "us" in example (e) is the use of "We" at the beginning and towards the end of the sentence in question. We know that these two occurrences of "we" have Nigerians in general as their referents. We (all Nigerians) decided to choose democracy as a result of our collective bitter experience under successive military regimes.

In addition to the foregoing, the following examples show that there are also places in President Obasanjo's address to the nation where the pronouns "we" and "us" clearly refer only to the government, and not to Nigerians in general.

- a. "We will remain faithful to all the policies and ideals enunciated at the inception of this administration and nothing will divert us from the commitment."
- b. "We thank you all for your confidence and support."

In example (a), there is no doubt that "We", which occurs initially in the sentence, and "us", which occurs later in the sentence, are referring to those people in government who are the ones running the affairs of the country. The clue to this line of interpretation is supplied by the words "policies" and "ideals", and by the expression "this administration". So, what the President is saying here is that the people in government, including himself, set out certain policies and ideals when the government assumed power and that the government is committed to implementing those policies, as failure to do so would result in the people seeing their leaders as irresponsible people. In example (b) above, one knows that "We", which also occurs initially in the sentence, is referring to the government as a result of the contrastive use of "you". President Obasanjo is, on behalf of his colleagues in the government ("We"), thanking the people of Nigeria ("you") for their confidence in and support of the

administration.

As pointed out earlier in this paper, there are, however, those parts of Chief Obasanjo's address where the referents of "we" and "our" are not clearly specified. One example of this phenomenon will suffice. In paragraph 11 of his speech, the President states,

I have faith in God and in the good people of Nigeria that my dream of making Nigeria the leading nation of Africa, politically, economically and socially, by the first decade of the 21st century will be achieved (1). We are firmly on course, but we must remain dedicated, committed and focused (2). No matter how good, far-reaching and laudable our vision may be, we must work together for the realisation of vision and our dream (3).

In this extract, Sentence 1 begins with the first person singular pronoun "I", which is undeniably referring to the President in his role as the addresser. In the same sentence, we have the expression "my dream", which still has the President as the referent. But in Sentence 2, we have a switch to the plural pronoun "We" in "We are firmly on course, but we must remain dedicated, committed and focused". Now, it is not easy to place the referents of "we" here: does it refer to the government, of which the President is its highest representative? Or does it refer to all Nigerians, the primary audience of the address? Similarly, there is talk of "our vision" and "our dream" in Sentence 3 in the extract above. We also have "our goal" in the first sentence of paragraph 13 ("our goal will be accomplished when the vision is cast clearly, creatively, popularly and consistently"). But then, the questions arise, Whose vision? Whose dream? Whose goal? It seems that it is "my dream" in Sentence 1 of the extract that has now become "our vision", "our dream" and "our goal", all of which are capable of two interpretations in our text: they could be referring to either the government or all Nigerians in general. This phenomenon is quite common in political addresses such as the one we are examining here (See Chilton and Schaffner, 1997: 218-219).

At this point in this paper, it is important to draw attention to a place in his address where President Obasanjo refers to the people in government, including himself, not by means of a personal pronoun but in an indirect way. Here is the extract in question.

Let me at this juncture assure you fellow compatriots, that with the spirit of service and sacrifice on the part of those who have been given the opportunity by providence to serve our fatherland at this point in time, Nigeria and Nigerians should have nothing to fear politically, economically and socially.

The reference to the people in government is contained in the following clause: "... those that have been given the opportunity by providence to serve our fatherland...". Instead of saying, "those of us that have been given the opportunity by providence to serve our fatherland", the President chooses to talk in terms of the third person. The impression that one has here is that Chief Obasanjo is being humble. According to him, the people in government, including himself, are only there by providence, the implication being that any other group of people could have been so favoured, or could be so favoured at any point in time. There is also the additional implication that this is one of the advantages of democracy.

OBASANJO'S USE OF WORDS

In this section, we discuss two lexical features that stand out prominently in Chief Obasanjo's broadcast. These are:

- (a) "coupling" and (b) strings of words

Coupling

By coupling is meant the practice of using two words linked by the conjunction *and* in the same linguistic environment. In some of the examples of coupling from Chief Obasanjo's speech, one word would have been adequate where two have occurred together. But there are other examples in which the two words coupled have different meanings. However, all the instances of coupling manifest the President's love of words. Set out below are five examples of coupling from our text: the first five belong to the first category of coupling mentioned above while the next batch belong to the second.

- a. "virile and dynamic", in "...our choice of democracy has gone through a litmus test and emerged virile and dynamic."
- b. "special mention and commendation", in "I must single out for special mention and commendation the women and the youth of our fatherland."
- c. "illusion and delusion", in "Leadership that

has right without vision is, at best, myopic if not afflicted with occult illusion and delusion."

- d. "resentment and bitterness", in "There should be no room for resentment and bitterness in our hearts,..."
- e. "uplift and edify", in "That is the spirit that can uplift and edify."

In example (a) above, either "virile" or "dynamic" would have been adequate in the sentence in which they occur. The President is talking here of the resilience of democracy, the implication being that it is the most reliable form of government. Thus, by opting for democracy, Nigerians have made the right choice. In example (b), "special mention" can be taken as one word in the sense that it is an idiomatic expression having a specific meaning. In the sentence in question here, then, "special mention" and "commendation" express the same idea: the President is thanking Nigerian women and youth for the roles they played in bringing down the temperature of the country's overheated polity.

In example (c), too, we find that either "illusion" or "delusion" would have sufficed in the sentence in which they occur. For the two words express the idea of someone deceiving himself. Thus, leadership that lacks vision is only deceiving itself. It cannot go far, the implication being that it cannot benefit the people whose destinies it is expected to direct. Furthermore, the words "resentment" and "bitterness" in example (d) portray the same idea: Nigerians should love one another and live in peace and harmony with everybody around them. In example (e), either "uplift" or "edify" would have sufficed. The point that Chief Obasanjo is making here is that it is only the expression of love, harmony and unity by Nigerians that can uplift the country. From this point of view, resentment is counter-productive.

We shall now mention two examples of coupling where the two words in question have different meanings.

- a. "commendation and emulation", in "Their role is worthy of commendation and emulation."
- b. "democracy and unity", in "Here again, I thank God Almighty and I thank those our fellow citizens who allowed maturity.... patience and firmness for what is right in support of democracy and unity of Nigeria, to prevail."

Strings of Words

In addition to the examples of coupling highlighted above, there are, as already pointed out, also examples of strings of words in Chief Obasanjo's speech. Five instances of this phenomenon are first reproduced here and then discussed briefly.

- a. "firmer", "stronger" and "more resilient", in "Our democracy is being tried and tested and so far it has emerged from the crucible firmer, stronger and more resilient."
- b. "maturity", "suppressed and dignified anger," "restraint", "composure and balance", "patience and firmness", in "I thank God Almighty and I thank those of our fellow citizens who allowed maturity, suppressed and dignified anger, restraint, composure and balance, patience and firmness for what is right in support of democracy and unity of Nigeria, to prevail."
- c. "dedicated", "committed" and "focused", in "We are firmly on course but we must remain dedicated, committed and focused."
- d. "good", "far-reaching" and "laudable", in "No matter how good, far-reaching and laudable our vision may be, we must work together for the realisation of vision and dream".
- e. "unacceptable", "deplorable", "demeaning" and "obstructive", in "The situation from where we started was unacceptable, deplorable, demeaning and destructive."

These examples show that in addition to coupling words together, Chief Obasanjo loves piling up words. In example (a), we have "firmer", "stronger" and "more resilient" used together in the same linguistic environment where one of them would have sufficed. A similar situation exists in example (b), where one of "maturity", "suppressed and dignified anger", etc. would have clearly expressed the idea in question. Also in the third example, "dedicated", "committed" and "focused" have been used together instead of just one of them. In example (e), four words "unacceptable", "deplorable", "demeaning" and "obstructive" have been used to describe the same phenomenon. One of the first three words would have sufficed. It is only in example (d) that the words piled up one after the other "good", "far-reaching" and "laudable" cannot be said to be synonymous in the same way that the words in the other examples are. But they still manifest the President's love for using strings of words.

Putting Chief Obasanjo's Use of Coupling and Strings of Words in Perspective

President Obasanjo's use of coupling and strings of words will now be examined against the background of what has been described as "the Yoruba prose style in English" (Lindfors, 1973: 153-175). One important characteristic feature of this style of writing is

Verbal ebullience. Yoruba writers exaggerate, embroider, reiterate and rant. Preferring to use ten words where one might suffice, they bombard their readers with bombast, goading them to laughter. Their bold inventiveness and keen appreciation of the ridiculous often find expression in bizarre incongruities of action and pyrotechnical poetic conceits... (Lindfors, 1973: 166)

We describe here, briefly, three examples of the Yoruba prose style in English from the writings, in English, of three prominent Yoruba: (a) Wole Soyinka, a poet, novelist, playwright and essayist and one-time winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature; (b) Chief Adegoke Adelabu, a prominent politician in the Western Region of Nigeria in the 1950's; and (c) Chief Obafemi Awolowo, another politician of note. Chief Obasanjo himself is Yoruba.

The following passage from Soyinka's novel *The Interpreters* shows him as being "exuberantly imaginative" (Lindfors, 1973: 163. Cf. Osundare, 1983: 25-26):

The rains of May become in July slit arteries of the sacrificial bull, a million bleeding punctures of the sky-bull hidden in convulsive cloud humps, black, overfed for this one event, nourished on horizon tops of endless choice grazing, distant beyond giraffe reach... (Soyinka, 1981 edn.: 155)

In this extract, "slit arteries" and "a million bleeding punctures" are describing the same phenomenon: the torrential rains falling in July. Then, we have in the same sentence the piling up of words and expressions "...hidden in convulsive cloud humps, black, overfed for this one event, nourished on horizon tops of endless choice grazing, distant beyond giraffe reach".

Verbal ebullience is also noticed in the following extract from a book by Chief Adelabu (See Lindfors, op. cit., p.165).

...Truth stands no chance of receiving an audience unless it is clothed in Fashion, adumbrated in Novelty, adorned in

Sensationalism and enthroned on the Pedestal of Originality (1). This is the Apologia for my literary style, suffused as it is with excessive exuberance (2). It is in accordance with the Spirit of the Age (3)...

The use of the expressions “clothed in Fashion”, “adumbrated in Novelty”, “adorned in Sensationalism” and “enthroned on the Pedestal of Originality” together in the same linguistic environment clearly shows that they constitute an instance of the piling up of words.

In addition to the foregoing, the writings of Chief Obafemi Awolowo, too, contain numerous examples of coupling and strings of words. We shall examine, briefly, only one example here.

“alert”, “agile”, “sound”,... “clever”, “resourceful”, “fearless”, “psychologically aggressive”,... “ambitious”, “self-confident”, “justifiably proud”, in “...it had, over the centuries, produced a breed of leaders who were alert, agile and sound, both in body and mind, a breed of leaders who were extremely clever, resourceful, fearless and psychologically aggressive, indeed, a breed of leaders who were ambitious, self-confident, justifiably proud and who rightly believed that they had a glorious destiny and could hold their own in any encounter whatsoever and wheresoever.

(Awolowo, 1977: 26)

This passage is, without doubt, a celebration of the act of piling up of words. Chief Awolowo seems to revel in it. This instance of the compound use of a string of words is further compounded by the repetition of the expression “a breed of leaders who ...” (See Awonuga, 1988: 168).

OBASANJO'S USE OF METAPHORS

We have been able to identify nine types of metaphor used by Chief Obasanjo in “Sustenance of Democracy”. These are: (a) water-derived metaphor; (b) motor vehicle-based metaphor; (c) riding-derived metaphor; (d) growth-derived metaphor; (e) military-derived metaphor; (f) building-related metaphor; (g) science-based metaphor; (h) medicine-derived metaphor; and (i) farming-derived metaphor. In addition to the use of these metaphors, we also have the analogy of flying an aeroplane, repetitions and echoes from the Bible.

Water-derived Metaphor

“Sustenance of Democracy” contains three

examples of water-derived metaphors:

- (a) “I assured them that our country was a land that was full of surprises and that things would fizzle out in due course.”
- (b) “Therefore, I am buoyed by the commitment of Nigerians to democracy, financial discipline, transparency, accountability and probity,...
- (c) (i) “We are firmly on course, but we must remain dedicated, committed and focused.”
(ii) “Once again, let me assure you that Nigeria is on course...”

In example (a), the expression “fizzle out” is metaphorical. When used as a verb, the word fizz has the following meaning: “(of a liquid, usu. a drink) to produce hollow balls (BUBBLES) of gas, making the sound typical of this” (Procter, 1978: 417). For something to fizzle out, then, is to come to nothing after a good start, or to end disappointingly. Thus, the point that Chief Obasanjo is making in the sentence in question is that the unnecessarily overheated polity would soon return to normal.

The metaphors in examples (b) and (c) are sea-related. Denotatively, the word buoy can be used either as a noun or as a verb. When used as a noun, it refers to a floating object fastened to the bed of the sea to show ships where there are rocks. And when it is used as a verb, it usually occurs in passive sentences; and it means to keep (someone or something) floating, for instance, “He was buoyed by the water”. In our example (b) above, the word “buoyed” is used metaphorically to refer to the President’s joy and satisfaction at the commitment of Nigerians to democracy, financial discipline, and so on. In this regard, we are reminded of the phrasal verb or idiomatic expression, “to buoy up”, which means to raise the spirits of, for instance, “Her spirits were buoyed up by hopes of success”.

Example (c) shows that the expression “on course” is used twice in President Obasanjo’s speech. The phrase normally refers to the direction of movement taken by someone or something, and the movement is usually over water in ships. In the two occurrences of the expression, the President is saying that Nigeria is moving in the right direction, the implication being that there is no cause for alarm.

Motor vehicle-based Metaphor

There are two examples of this type of metaphor in President Obasanjo’s address:

- a. "But as quickly as we emerge from the unnecessary distraction and overheating of the polity, we will be stronger, we will be more focused..."
- b. "One great advantage of democracy [is] that it has rugged shock absorbing capacity, the people are its shock absorbers."

With regard to example (a), we normally talk of the engine of a vehicle overheating, but connotatively, it is the polity (that is, the entire Nigerian society) that is overheated, in the sense that there is apprehension that there could be chaos in the country if the impeachment moves against the President by the Federal House of Representatives should succeed.

In example (b), the reference to the people as the shock absorbers of democracy is metaphorical. Shock absorbers function to lessen the effect of rough roads on vehicles, thus helping to prolong the lives of the vehicles. Connotatively, what President Obasanjo is saying here is that it is the people that help to sustain democracy in Nigeria. They go through challenges but they do not allow those difficulties to dampen their enthusiasm for democracy. This attitude, according to the President, is commendable.

Riding-derived Metaphor

"The last two weeks have also shown that no arm of government can run rough-shod over any of the others..."

In this sentence, we have the image of riding a horse in a carelessly destructive manner and injuring other people's feelings. Here, Chief Obasanjo is saying that no arm of government can take the others for granted. Each aspect of government has to be accorded the respect due to it; otherwise, there will not be harmony in the running of government and, consequently, there will be no development in the country. The President seems to be implying that in such a situation, it is the people that suffer.

Growth-derived Metaphor

"I will also like to thank those who by prayer, by writing, by petition, by press conferences and interviews and by telephone calls have shown that they are soldiers for the nurturing and sustenance of democracy."

Actually, there are two metaphors in this example (see the next section), but we shall

examine only one of them here: the one concerning the nurturing of democracy. In denotative terms, to nurture someone, usually a child, is to provide food and other things that he needs for his growth and development. In this example, however, the word "nurture" is used figuratively to describe the activities of certain people in the society who are committed to the survival of democracy. By praying, writing to the President, and so on, they are demonstrating their heartfelt commitment to the survival of democracy in Nigeria.

Military-derived Metaphor

"I will like to thank those who by prayer, by writing, by petition,...have shown that they are soldiers for the nurturing and sustenance of democracy."

This sentence is the same one that was quoted in the last section above, and which was said to contain two metaphors. We shall now examine the second metaphor. It is to be found in the description of the people being talked about as soldiers. Soldiers are typically those who defend a country against external aggression. They are always ready to, and often do, die in defence of their country. Similarly, the people being talked about in this example have demonstrated resilience and a willingness to defend democracy with everything they have got.

Building-related Metaphor

"Therefore, I am buoyed by the commitment of Nigerians to democracy, financial discipline, transparency, accountability and probity, which are some of the main pillars on which this administration stands."

Pillars are usually associated with buildings, they are used to support buildings by holding them up. A building cannot stand without pillars. Similarly, Chief Obasanjo's government stands on certain pillars. But, unlike pillars supporting a building, these pillars are not concrete. Rather, they are abstract: democracy, financial discipline, transparency, accountability and probity. The point being made by the President, then, is not just that democracy, financial discipline and so on, are very important to his administration but that without them, his government would not be able to function properly; and it may even collapse.

Science-based Metaphor

“Fellow Nigerians, what we have witnessed in the last two weeks [is] that our choice of democracy has gone through a litmus test and emerged virile and dynamic.”

A litmus test is an experiment that is carried out in the laboratory for the purpose of finding out if a substance is acid or alkali. In this example, President Obasanjo is saying that democracy in Nigeria has gone through an endurance test and that it has passed with flying colours.

Medicine-based Metaphor

“Once again, let me assure you that Nigeria is on course and has a clean bill of health.”

The expression “a clean bill of health” is a medical term that gives a favourable report on someone’s health. It can also be used in a non-medical sense to give a favourable report on something for instance, “The school was given a clean bill of health by the government.” In our example in this section, both meanings are appropriate. From this point of view, Chief Obasanjo seems to be saying that all is well with Nigeria and that there is therefore no cause for alarm.

Farming-related Metaphor

“We have put our hands on the plough and there is no looking back.”

We shall discuss this figurative use of language from two perspectives: (a) the perspective of the register of farming (in this section); and (b) that of the language of the Bible (see the last section below). From the first perspective, then, the word “plough” belongs to the register of farming. Farmers usually plough (their fields) by using a farming tool to break up and turn over the earth before planting their seeds. In metaphorical terms, however, to put one’s hand to the plough is to begin a serious or difficult piece of work with the will to finish it. In our example here, the President is mobilizing all Nigerians afresh for the challenging work of nation building. There can be no looking back.

USE OF ANALOGY

There is the analogy of flying an aeroplane in Chief Obasanjo’s speech. The passage containing the analogy is reproduced here and discussed briefly.

“Leadership is not and cannot be a one-man show (1) For leadership to be effective in a democratic dispensation such as ours, it must involve all leaders who are either elected or appointed to lead (2). By way of an analogy, you can imagine what disaster will follow if, in the cockpit of an aircraft, the captain is pressing the throttle for the plane to take off with full power, the co-pilot is pressing the [brakes] and the engineer is switching off the engine (3). Leadership, therefore, must be collectively imbued with a common mission and a common vision (4)...

In this passage, the President is talking about the need for those in government to have a common goal and work towards that goal with unity of purpose. In Sentence (3), he uses the analogy of flying an aircraft to drive home his point. There would be disaster if the captain of an aeroplane was accelerating for take-off while the co-pilot was at the same time depressing the brakes and the engineer was switching off the engine. The aircraft in which this scenario takes place is bound to crash. Similarly, a government in which people are working at cross purposes will definitely fail to provide meaningful leadership. The result will be chaos in the country.

REPETITION

Another feature of President Obasanjo’s language in “Sustenance of Democracy” is repetition. Repetition is a fundamental rhetorical “device” of intensification, especially in poetry (See Leech, 1969: 62-86). There are two basic forms of repetition: free repetition and verbal parallelism. “Free repetition of form means the exact copying of some previous part of a text (whether word, phrase, or even sentence), ...” (Leech, 1969: 77). Verbal parallelism, however, has to do with the repetition of syntactic patterns at the levels of phrase, clause or sentence (Cf. Leech, 1969: 79-86).

There are examples of both types of repetition in Chief Obasanjo’s address. First, there are certain key words that are repeated, namely, “democracy” (used 10 times), “God” (used 5 times, occurring once in the phrase, “God-pleaser”), “vision” (4 times), “dream” (2 times), and “change” (3 times). The repetition of these words helps to highlight the major thrust of the President’s speech. Second, there is a sentence in President Obasanjo’s address that contains an example of verbal parallelism.

But as quickly as we emerge from the unnecessary distraction and overheating of the polity, we will be stronger, we will be more focused, our vision will be sharper, and our environment will surely be more conducive to welcome friends, visitors and investors in our midst.

The example of syntactic parallelism is contained in the following clauses: "we will be stronger", "we will be more focused", "our vision will be sharper" and "our environment will surely be more conducive to welcome friends, visitors and investors in our midst". They can be analyzed this way:

Subject	Verb	Complement
we	will be	stronger
we	will be	more focused
our vision	will be	sharper

(and) our environment will surely be more conducive to welcome friends, visitors and investors in our midst.

From this analysis, we find that it is the same syntactic or sentence pattern that is repeated in the first three clauses: Subject+Verb+ Complement. We also find that the words at Complement position, though adjectives, are different from clause to clause. Also, at Subject position, "our vision" in the third clause is different from "we" (pronoun) in the first two clauses. In addition, we notice that the last part of the example is different from the other parts, in the sense that it contains two clauses ("(and) our environment will surely be more conducive" and "to welcome friends, visitors and investors in our midst").

The syntactic pattern of each of the clauses is also different from that of the first three clauses. So, we say that this part of our example is only partially parallel to the three earlier clauses. Be that as it may, however, these parallelistic structures are significant in the sense that they have the effect of emphasizing the point that Nigeria will come out of the unnecessary distraction of the previous fortnight more cohesive as a nation.

ECHOES FROM THE BIBLE

In addition to the foregoing, there are also echoes from the Bible in President Obasanjo's speech. Here are two examples of this phenomenon:

- a. "I learned very early in my life that a leader must endeavour to go beyond being a people-pleaser to being a God-pleaser (1). You cannot please God without pleasing majority of the people (2).
- b. "We have put our hands on the plough and there is no looking back."

The need to please God in whatever one does is clearly stated in several parts of the Bible (See Proverbs 16:7; Romans 8:8; 1 Corinthians 7:33; Hebrews 11:6 and so on). The President wants his audience to know that he is God-fearing and that he will, as a result, endeavour to please God at all times, the implication being that by pleasing God, he will please majority of the people. Our second example above echoes Luke 9:62 from the Bible ("And Jesus said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the Kingdom of God" (King James Version)). The impression that one has here is that there should be total commitment to nation building by every Nigerian, whether in government or not.

CONCLUSION

In this paper, we have examined seven characteristic linguistic features of President Obasanjo's use of language in his address to the nation entitled "Sustenance of Democracy". It is hoped that this study will complement similar efforts aimed at identifying and discussing the peculiarities of the President's use of English.

REFERENCES

- Awolowo, O. 1977. *The Problems of Africa: The Need for Ideological Repappraisal*. London and Basingstoke: Macmillan Education Ltd.
- Awonuga, C. O. 1988. "Political Rhetoric: Awolowo's Use of Language", *ODU: A Journal of West African Studies*, No. 34: 150-196.
- Chilton, P. and C. Schaffner 1997. "Discourse and Politics," (pp. 206-230) in Teun A. van Dijk (ed.), *Discourse as Interaction*. London: SAGE Publications.
- Leech, G. N. 1969. *A Linguistic Guide to English Poetry*. London: Macmillan.
- Lindfors, B. 1973. *Folklore in Nigerian Literature*. New York: Africans Publishing Company.
- Osundare, N. 1983. "Words of Iron, Sentences of Thunder: Soyinka's Prose Style." *African Literature Today*, 13: 25-34.
- Soyinka, W. 1981. *The Interpreters*. London: Heinemann.