

**A PRAGMATIC STUDY OF VERBAL ABUSE BETWEEN GOVERNOR NYESOM WIKE AND
SENATOR DINO MELAYE**

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ABSTRACT

The deliberate use of foul language by political actors in the Nigerian social space is alarming. Often times, their choice of words that make headlines in the different social media handles especially, during election periods is devoid of courtesy. This pragmatic study on Wike and Melaye's outburst on Channels Television and African Independent Television (AIT) on the 11th of April, 2023 adopts an eclectic approach using Leech (1983) and Goffman (1967) Face-Attack theory and sets out to assert the politeness maxims exploited or violated by Wike and Dino and also identify the face-attack strategies employed by the interlocutors to attack each others positive or negative face. This essay adopts a descriptive approach to analyze twenty excerpts from both Wike and Melaye's utterances. Findings from the study, expose violation of approbation, agreement, modesty, sympathy, generosity and pollyana principles. Worthy of note also, is the excessive attack on each others quality face, social identity face, equity rights and association rights. The paper, therefore, recommends that political parties, as frontliners in the nations democratic process should caution, and educate their loyalists on the need for polite practices so that the country would not be presented in a bad light to the international communities. Teachers of English language and literature should incorporate in their curriculum literary texts that would teach students at all levels verbal hygiene and the need to maintain each others positive face during discussions, also, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) should accomodate in the electoral act laws that prohibit the use of abusive languages by aspirants and politicians followed by sanctions or disqualification of offenders.

Introduction

Human relationship is a highly sensitive one as it often involve individuals with varying values, beliefs and personal idiosyncracies from different socio-cultural backgrounds who use verbal and/ or non-verbal language where necessary to interact at different points and situations in life. These interactions many times lead to conflict owing to improper choice and use of speech items which when not properly handled generates further forms of discord.

Hayawa (2002) in Egonu and Akinola (2017), confirms that bad language is a syptom of an already sick relationship. Ajayi abd Buhari (2014) in Egenti and Okoye (2016), assert that conflict arises from the interaction of individuals who have partly incompatible ends, in which the ability of one actor to gain his ends depends on an important degree on the choice and decisions that the other people will take.

The above assertion by Egonu and Akinola (2017), affirm Governor Nyesom Wike and Senator Dino

Melaye's relationship. The National Publicity of Afenifere, a Yoruba socio-political organisation, Comrade Jare Ajayi on January 23, 2023 in the Nigerian Tribune maintains that Nigerian politics ought to have matured beyond brickbats as the verbal attacks emanating from some candidates and their spokespersons were encouraging their supporters to violently attack opponents in a manner that could result to bloodshed.

There is a strong affinity between language, politics and politeness. Politeness helps individuals to maintain inter-personal relationships or respectful partnership. Watts (1992) in Onyema (2021) is of the view that politeness helps to regulate membership and appropriate behaviour within it.

Election period is often times marked by factions within political parties, there is usually the aggrieved pertaining to issues centering on zoning or power rotation. The People Democratic Party (PDP) in the just concluded 2023 election witnessed ugly situations such that some members publicly worked against the party at the presidential polls. This disagreement led to verbal and counter-verbal attack and the prevalent situation requires caution in language use by the actors involved.

Kisembe (2018) in Ewurum and Njoku (2019), states that while clashes are unavoidable, the usage of specific vocabulary and terminology will significantly reduce the embers of their burning. She goes on to say that how people view conflict and their resulting language usage responses, which may be constructive or negative, are critical in times of confrontation. She argues that inciting words incite and stimulate confrontation, which can escalate into verbal or fistcuff attacks when the face is in danger.

This issues provide the basis for this paper on a pragmatic study of verbal abuse between Governor Nyesom Wike of Rivers State and Senator Dino Melaye, PDP gubernatorial candidate for the forthcoming Kogi State gubernatorial election coming up in November 11th, 2023.

Objectives of The Study

This study sets out to:

- i. assert the politeness maxims exploited or violated by Wike and Dino
- ii. identify the face-attack strategies employed by the interlocutors to attack each others positive or negative face

Context

Excerpts from the interviews granted by Governor Wike on Channels Television and Senator Dino Melaye on African Independent Television (AIT) on the 11th of April 2023. Wike disagrees with the PDP's nomination of Dino as the Kogi gubernatorial flag bearer of the party while Dino responds immodestly. Eighteen utterances from Wike and Dino form the text for this study using Leech (1983) politeness principle and Goffman (1967) face theory.

Conceptual framework

Words can be used to achieve various ends, language is at the heart of all things human (O'Grady, Achibald & Katamba, 2011). Through the instrumentality of language, politicians can split the universe into two halves of 'me' and 'you' instead of 'you' and 'me'. (Nwobia, 2016 in Oboko, 2021). The split according to him is achieved when politicians juggle with language to become or achieve what they want. Politicians employ language to exercise power and assert supremacy over their equals and contemporaries.

Lakoff (1990) in Balogun and Murrana (2018) asserts that language is politics, politics assigns power, and power governs how people talk and how they are understood. It is language that provides the opportunity for politicians to explore its verbal communicative resources and manipulate words to suit their intention.

Oboko (2021) is of the view that Nigerian politics is characterized by verbal abuse and manifestations of impoliteness strategies by politicians who engage in exchange of words among themselves or with those considered as being perfidious.

Verbal abuse according to Stack (2015) in Onyema (2021) is the use of derogatory, negative language to harm another. She adds that verbal abuse harbours hidden aggression and is extremely manipulative, often through insults, intimidation, threats, shaming, demeaning or name-calling.

In the same vein, Gordon (2022) explains verbal abuse to be a means of controlling or maintaining power over another through words to assault, dominate, ridicule, manipulate, and/or degrade another and negatively

impact that person's psychological health. She also lists different forms verbal abuse could take to include blaming, condescension, criticism, gaslighting, humiliation, judging, manipulation, name-calling, ridicule, threats and withholding.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopts an eclectic approach in analyzing the data supporting the views of Leech (1983) politeness principle, and Goffman (1967) face theory.

Besides cooperation, most interactions are governed by politeness, that is to say by what is considered a 'polite social behavior' within certain culture. Being linguistically polite involves speaking to people appropriately in the light of their relationship to you, Inappropriate linguistic choices may be considered rude. Being polite means getting the linguistic expression of social distance right as far as your addressee is concerned. The politeness principle is a series of maxims, which Geoffrey Leech (1983) has proposed as a way of explaining how politeness operates in conversational exchanges.

Leech defines politeness as a type of behaviour that allows the participants to engage in a social interaction in an atmosphere of relative harmony, politeness involves 'verbal and non verbal behaviour which help in maintaining harmonious relations'. Speakers may adhere to more than one maxim of politeness at the same time. Often one maxim is on the forefront of the utterance, while a second maxim is implied.

Leech mentions seven maxim, all of which are related to the notion of minimizing cost and maximizing benefit to the hearer.

i. The tact Maxim

Minimize the expression of belief which imply cost (inconvenience) to other, maximize the expression of belief which imply benefit to other. The speaker can weaken (soften) an imposition by making it easier for the hearer to refuse it.

ii. The Generosity Maxim

Leech's generosity maxim states: 'minimize the expression of benefits to self, maximize the expression of cost to self.

iii. The Approbation Maxim

Minimize the expression of beliefs which express dispraise/ disapproval of other, maximize the expression of beliefs which express approval of other. It is preferred to praise other than one self.

iv. The Modesty maxim

Minimize the expression of praise of self, maximize the expression of dispraise of self.

v. The Agreement Maxim

Minimize the expression of disagreement between self and other; maximize the expression of agreement between self and other.

vi. The Sympathy Maxim

Minimize antipathy between self and other, maximize sympathy between self and other.

vii. Consideration Maxim or Pollyana Principle

Maximize the hearers comfort or pleasure, minimize the hearers discomfort or displeasure.

Face

Erving Goffman (1967) proposes the idea of face, which represents the positive meaning an entity assigns to himself based on the line others believe he has taken during a personal interaction. Face, according to Goffman (1967, p. 419), is a person's sense of self-esteem and ability to champion their own course of action. Face is a trait that all humans share, and it is linked to self-esteem. It represents the emotional, physiological and social feelings of self which an individual has and expects others to recognize. .

Goffman (1967), concept of face depends on the fact that every individual in an interaction aims to communicate and achieve his needs and wants. Thereby, they not only create and present a certain image of themselves which is to be recognized by other participants but, are also interested with introducing and maintaining that public image of themselves, that is 'face' when communicating. Yet, this societal recognition is not fixed, it changes and develops out of our social relationships and environment. It is on loan to every individual from society. (Goffman, 1967 in Locher 2004:52). In his studies Goffman points

out that participants in a communicative interaction solicit to protect and preserve the fragile regard they have of themselves, at the very least, reduce the damage to this esteem but, at best to increase it.

Again, Goffman (1967), identifies two types of face, in other words, the two ways of expressing concern for people's emotions in conversation:

- Positive face- desires to be liked, respected, appreciated, admired, ratified, and related to positively
- Negative face - desires not be imposed upon

Face-Attack-Act (FAA)

Any performance or utterance, no matter how harmless, that could conceivably disturb the fragile balance of face maintenance, according to Goffman (1967), is a face-attack action (FAA). There are a variety of face-attack events that occur regularly and can be very inconvenient. A person in a discussion that is humiliated, insulted, or hurt will be embarrassed, upset, or hurt. In a conversational environment, all parties work together to ensure that neither they nor others are defaced, out of face, or in the wrong face. When one of the interlocutor partners makes statements that endanger the face value of others, a dispute can arise. Impoliteness is unquestionably one manner in which the 'face' is harmed. When a person's face is threatened by rudeness or a challenge, confrontation is inevitable.

Culpeper (2005) cited in Fauziati (2014) suggests the different types of face attack to include attack on:

- quality face- desire to be evaluated positively in terms of personal qualities
- social identity face—desire for recognition of our social identity and responsibilities
- equity rights—belief that we are entitled to be considered equally by others
- association rights—belief that we are entitled to communicate with others in compliance with the form of partnership.

Data Analysis

A descriptive analysis is made on eight excerpts from Wike and twelve from Dino using Leech (1983) Politeness Principle and Goffman (1967) Face Theory.

Wike's Utterances

Excerpt 1:

When you give Dino that ticket, you know he won't win in Kogi.

We see a violation of the approbation maxim in this utterance. Wike disqualifies Dino's candidacy and presents him a misfit for the Kogi guber race. He violates Dino's positive face and attacks his quality face.

Excerpt 2:

Why would Kogi indigenes say they would vote for a candidate like Dino? Are you joking?

The use of the interrogatives show the authenticity of his claim. The utterance does not present Dino's self-worth. This is a violation of approbation maxim and an attack on Dino's positive face, his desire to be seen as a credible person for the office of the governor come 11th November 2023. Wike by this utterance attacks Dino's social identity face. The implicature deduced from the utterance is that Dino is not a force compared to the other contestants.

Excerpt 3:

The mere fact that someone is from a place does not equate to electoral success if such a person contests in an election.

We observe a violation of modesty maxim, as the success of a candidate in an election is determined by the acceptance and support of the electorate within his jurisdiction. This is an attack on Dino's equity face.

Excerpt 4:

Dino does not have what it takes for crying out loud, he knows me well. He does not have what it takes to be a governor.

Classifying Dino incompetent for the gubernatorial election violates the approbation maxim and an attack on his quality face. The implicature is that he would lose in the election.

Excerpt 5:

If the PDP gives the ticket to the former Kogi West lawmaker, the party is doomed to lose the exercise.

There is a violation of the agreement maxim as Wike disagrees with the PDP national body's adoption of Dino as their gubernatorial candidate in Kogi state. Dissociating himself from this activity is an attack on the party's association right.

Excerpt 6:

Does it mean now that PDP wants to win the election, it would give the ticket to Dino and you say tomorrow that you were rigged when you have already killed yourself

Maximizing a negative feeling towards his party PDP and Dino the flag bearer is a violation of sympathy maxim and Pollyanna principle. The implicature is that PDP has already lost the election and this is bad news. This is an attack on the association right.

Excerpt 7:

Are we saying that we want to win election or just have a candidate? We are not talking about drama, this is politics.

Wike violates the sympathy maxim by maximizing antipathy between himself and Dino. He perceives Dino unqualified and unfit to win in the election. The comparison between drama and election asserts that governorship election is not an easy feat that should be undertaken by everybody. Wike attacks Dino's equity right by trying to stampede his opportunity of becoming the PDP flag bearer and by extension the incoming governor of Kogi state.

Excerpt 8:

You don't just come because Dino was the one abusing people on behalf of the party, therefore, that entitles him to fly the flag of the party in Kogi State. He was their attack dog, who can abuse anybody so that's the compensation

This excerpt maximizes the disapproval of Dino's candidacy. Wike violates both the sympathy and approbation maxims. The lexeme 'attack-dog' is derogatory and 'compensation' implies that Dino is unfit and not qualified. This is an attack on Dino's social identity face.

Dino's Utterances

Excerpt 9:

Wike is suffering from a psychotic disorder because he falsely sees himself as a godfather outside Rivers State, which is a sign of psychotic disorder.

Dino violates the approbation and sympathy maxim as his utterance shows disapproval and antipathy to governor Wike. He attacks Wike's quality and social identity face by ridiculing him in the public.

Excerpt 10:

My credentials are clear. I am not corrupt, no anti-corruption agency is looking for me. I was a two-time member of the National Assembly, I served my people diligently and attracted developments to my constituency and senatorial district respectively. After May 29, we will get to know whether Wike is wanted or not.

We see a violation of modesty maxim and Pollyanna principle. Dino maximizes expression of praise of self and dispraise of Wike. Also, predicting misfortune to befall Wike after May 29 2023 is not a pleasurable news. Presenting Wike as a corrupt politician is an attack on his quality face.

Excerpt 11:

What is even the worth of Wike's support? The answer is zero or total failure. In the just concluded 2023 general election, he wasted Rivers State government money in Cross

River State to install a governor for them but his candidate, senator sandy onor failed woefully. similarly, he embarked on the same misadventure in Akwa Ibom State, his candidate Senator Bassey Akpan, lost to the PDP candidate. Also, his closest friend in the G5 misadventure, Samuel Ortom, couldn't win a senatorial election despite the amount of Rivers money misappropriated into the venture. Wike refused to support PDP in Osun State, yet Adeleke emerged as the governor in Osun State. so, Wike should steer clear of Kogi politics!

There is a violation of the approbation maxim in this excerpt. The inability of Wike to install his preferred candidates in the just concluded 2023 election in Cross River, Akwa-Ibom, Benue and Abia state is bad news as those he didn't support won gallantly. These lexemes which show Wike's attributes 'total failure', 'woefully', 'misfortune', 'misappropriated' and 'misadventure' indicate an attack to his social identity face.

Excerpt 12:

I want to tell you that Wike is a pretentious character, a liar and he has no iota of integrity.

Dino maximizes expression that shows dispraise of Wike. Attributing the above character traits to a sitting Governor is a violation of the modesty maxim. There is evidence of attack on wike's social identity face.

Excerpt 13:

So the man who saw competence, who saw capacity and even invested his money in that project, today in 2023, he's saying that I'm not qualified. The only explanation to that is psychotic disorderliness, the only explanation to that is mental fatigue, the only explanation to that is that he's having some problems upstairs.

There is a violation of the approbation maxim. Painting wike as a lunatic is undesirable. This is an attack on wike's quality and social identity face.

Excerpt 14:

When Odili was governor, when Amaechi was governor, Rivers State was turning 1 million votes, but shamefully, everything Wike brought in the last election for the party he supported in Rivers State was two hundred and something thousand votes, that's to tell you the law of diminishing return. That is after rigging, after malicious practices, after introduction of violence...a man who has done anti-party.

Dino discrediting wike's capabilities which he describes as having a diminishing return, is a violation of approbation maxim and an attack on his quality face.

Excerpt 15:

Instead of him to concentrate on how he is going to face life outside government, because he is already on his way to prison. Infact Wike's prison uniform will have embroidery because of the way he has stolen the resources and patrimony of the Rivers people.

This bad news is a violation of the pollyana principle and approbation maxim. Calling Wike a thief justifies the predicted prison custody. This is an attack on wike's social identity face.

Excerpt 16:

If somebody like Yahaya Bello and Wike can become Governor, then you are saying the intellectual mobile, fine boy Dino cannot be Governor. How? Me and Wike, we are poles apart, poles apart in everything, every ramification, am not his mate, am not proud of him as governor.

Senator Melaye violates the modesty maxim by rating himself high above two sitting Governors; Yahaya Bello and Wike. Also, saying that he is not proud of Wike as a Governor maximizes antipathy between him and Wike, and violates sympathy maxim. This is an attack on his Wike's quality face.

Excerpt 17:

A character who is not stable, like that, who is influenced by alcohol, and other things I don't know should not be taken seriously.

Calling Wike, a sitting Governor, a drunk is a violation of the approbation maxim and an attack on his quality face.

Excerpt 18:

A Governor who wears blue on yellow, yellow on green, at times with purple, who does

not have a dress sense, who does not even know what the time is globally today. Am a town boy, I know what it is, I know what time it is, and I've got something upstairs. We see a violation of approbation and modesty maxims. Dino discredits and disapproves Wike's dress sense and rates himself better both socially and intellectually. This is an attack on Wike's quality face.

Excerpt 19:

So am just warning him o, make him stay for him lane o. If he do garagara, him don de talk to people, talk to people, if he do garagara come my own side, me I go grind am o, me I go lose skit for am. I go sing for am, I go release album for am. On daily basis I will finish him, so make him stay where God put am. Kogi no be Rivers. That's my advice.

Dino violates the sympathy by maximising antipathy between self and Wike. There is evidence of an imposition, warnings and threats which violates the tact maxim and pollyana principle. He uses existential presupposition 'Rivers and Kogi' to establish operational boundaries for Wike. This is a violation of the tact maxim. The use of Nigerian pidgin register exposes the mutual contextual background and familiarity both of them operates. This is an attack on Wike's equity and association rights.

Excerpt 20:

I am used to taming lions, whether black lion or white lion, whether in the forest or on the water or in the sea. My speciality is to tame lions and I will tame both Wike and Yahaya Bello. I will! I am Dino Melaye, am a Daniel.

Dino violates the modesty maxim by thinking highly of himself. He adopts name-calling and criticism in his referent to Wike and Yahaya Bello and assumes superiority over both. This is an attack on both Wike and Yahaya Bello's quality face.

Conclusion

From the research, we observe that language is the live-wire of every facet of politics, and politicians use language to exercise power and control over their equals and contemporaries. Duyile (2005), says that an important task for the media under democratic rule is to monitor political life and to draw attention of the public to how politicians are fulfilling their responsibilities to the society. In agreement with this definition, the interviews examined expose Wike and Dino's verbal inadequacies.

The study notices that the politicians language are confrontational, insulting, judgemental, and abusive. Their language violates politeness maxims and depicts extreme attack on face, their desire to be accepted or appreciated by the public.

Worthy of note, is the fact that Dino's response outnumbers Wike, who initiated the interview. This goes on to say that in conflict situations, people responds to a face-attack with more face-attack

Recommendations

- The paper recommends, the adoption of polite practices by politicians as its use will make them conform closely to their ideals of correctness and civility, as well as present the country in a good light to the international observers as these interviews are viewed globally.
- Teachers of English language and literature should incorporate in their curriculum literary texts that would teach students at all levels verbal hygiene and the need to maintain each others positive face during discussions.
- Also, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) should include in the electoral act laws that prohibit the use of abusive languages by aspirants and politicians followed by sanctions or disqualification of offenders.

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