



Discourse Strategies in Chief Olusegun Obasanjo's Letter to President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan

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Abstract

The paper sets out to investigate the discourse strategies deployed by former President Olusegun Obasanjo in his open letter to President Jonathan on December 12, 2013 which was published in most of the nation's major newspapers. The work adopts M.A.K Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar as its theoretical framework because of the great importance which the model attaches to meanings and functions of a linguistic expression in relation to its context of usage. The researchers, through content and qualitative analysis, identify the discourse strategies used by the encoder of the speech to have the desired maximum effects on the decoders, especially President Goodluck Jonathan. Our findings reveal that President Obasanjo makes use of six discourse strategies in the letter for achieving some aims. The discourse strategies are: references to national interest; using the vocative "Mr President"; mentioning and portraying God in different perspectives; making direct appeals to the president; making references to late Gen. Sanni Abacha and copious repetitions of Nigeria and Nigerians in the text.

Keywords: Discourse Strategies, Open Letter, National Interest, Goodluck Ebele Jonathan, Olusegun Obasanjo

1. Introduction

Political leaders and politicians generally need to communicate their thoughts, feelings, intentions, and opinions to their associates, followers, opponents, and contemporaries in the entire political area(s) over which they superintend (local government, state or the entire country). The most acceptable medium to achieve this is through language. This agrees with the position of Emeka-Nwobia (2016:13) that language is “the central focus of human existence and the paradigm of expression of intent, thought and actions”.

Depending on several factors, political leaders and politicians may make use of either the spoken or the written medium to pass on their messages. Depending again on several considerations, especially what such politicians or political leaders hope to achieve, the nature and composition of the audience, the nature of the message, the urgency of feedback etc, several channels are open for politicians to pass on their intentions, feelings, and thoughts. Fairclough (2003) writes that the ability to determine the most appropriate channel is very germane to the effectiveness of communication. He further asserts that the channels encompass both oral and written modes. He also observes that while written communication does not have the merit of immediate feedback and interaction, it can be the most appropriate and effective means of conveying a large amount of information.

It must have been because of the advantage of written communication as identified above that made former President Obasanjo on December 12, 2013 to choose the written medium, precisely the form of an open letter to make known his opinions, thoughts, feelings, and observations about Dr Ebele Jonathan and his administration. Commenting on the volume of the letter, Ekhareafu and Ambrose(2015:294) write that “ The letter is pagged 18 which is a copious one for a busy person like a president of a nation to read.”

The letter falls within the purview of political discourse. By political discourse, we mean discourse “about the text and talk of professional politicians or political institutions such as Presidents, Prime Ministers and other members of government, parliament or political parties, both on the national and international levels” (Van Dijk, 1997:12). However, the scholar (van Dijk 1997: 12) adds that the text must have political functions and implicatures. The text under study is a political discourse because it is a letter written to the then President of Nigeria (Dr Goodluck Jonathan) by Chief Olusegun Obasanjo who himself was a two-term president of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1999-2007).

1.1. Highlights of the Letter

The letter was written on the 12th of December, 2013 and published in different national dailies and given different titles. While *The Guardian*

captions it “Obasanjo writes Jonathan”, *Nigerian Tribune* entitles it “Before it is too late” The letter informs Dr. Jonathan (the then president) of the various political, economic, social, and security challenges facing the country. Chief Obasanjo blames him for not measuring up in some areas. He also accuses Dr. Goodluck Jonathan that he is not loyal to the party – Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) which brings him to power but that he promotes the interest of other political parties in different states of the federation over that of PDP in order to further his personal political ambition. In the letter, Obasanjo also openly accuses Dr. Goodluck of not being a man of his words by planning to contest for the post of President in 2015 general elections despite his earlier assurances that he would not contest. Furthermore, he indicates that Dr. Goodluck assists a notorious murderer to evade justice and even sends presidential delegations to welcome him home. Chief Obasanjo equally writes that he is privy to the information that the president is secretly training some snipers and other armed personnel for political purposes. Other sections of the letter accuse the president of the inability to control corruption that stinks all around him, shielding an internationally known drug baron from justice as well as promoting him politically, allowing and tacitly encouraging the people of the Ijaw nation to insult other tribes in the country simply because the president (Dr. Goodluck Jonathan) is from Ijaw, and stepping down infrastructural development in Rivers State for political reasons.

Ordinarily, there is nothing bad or strange for an ex-president to make his observations (positive or negative) about the state of the nation known to the ruling president and the entire citizens. However, different people will look at it from different perspectives and give different interpretations to the action of Chief Olusegun Obasanjo. While some people will interpret the content of the letter as issue-based, others will see it as a personal attack on the president and an attempt to ruin him politically. The encoder of the letter himself must have thought of how his intention of writing the letter would be interpreted (rightly or wrongly), hence, the use of some strategies to achieve specific goals in the letter.

1.2. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework adopted for this work is Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) pioneered by M.A.K. Halliday. SFG places emphasis on the relationship between language and the social situations of its use. In the words of Fairclough (2003:7), “systemic functional linguistics is concerned with the relationship between language and other elements and aspects of social life and its approach to the linguistic analysis of texts is always oriented to the social character of texts”. SFG is a grammar that places emphasis on meaning, function and language use”. (Ojo, 2018:1). This simply means that the grammar is not solely concerned about formal analysis of

sentences or phrases but also with their functions in context. This view supports the position of Martin and Mathiensen (1997:3) quoted in Omotunde and Akinwotu (2018:97) that the grammar makes it possible to have more knowledge about language in context and that it provides us with “a tool for understanding only a text the way it is”. SFG is noted for its metafunctions which are ideational, interpersonal, and textual. It is the interpersonal function that is relevant to this work. In the words of Halliday (1978):

The interpersonal component represents the speakers’ meaning potential as an intruder. It is the participating function of language, language as doing something. This is the component through which the speaker intrudes himself into the context of situation, both expressing his own attitude and judgments and seeking to influence the attitudes and behaviours of others (p.112).

The above simply means that it is through the interpersonal component of language that speakers or writers pass on various meanings and messages to their listeners or readers. Also, through interpersonal meaning, speakers and writers exhibit their attitudes towards the subject or object of discourse.

Another important thing about Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) is the notion of “choice” which is very central to the realisation of meaning in discourse. On the issue of choice, Ademilokun (2016) declares that:

SFL echoes the view that language users make choices out of the options available to them anytime they use language and the options are determined by the conditions of language use. The theory has a deep view of context as it accounts for how the context of language use shapes the language that is used(p .31).

The above reveals that the issue of choice is essential to the realisation of the exact message and meaning which speakers and writers have in mind. This is why Fontaine (2013:11) writes that “there is general agreement that meaning is choice and choice is meaning”. This theory is appropriate to this work because, first, the interpersonal function of the grammar will make it possible to reveal the various meanings and functions of the discourse strategies used by Chief Olusegun Obasanjo in his letter to President Goodluck. Also, the researchers believe that some expressions/words used by Chief Olusegun Obasanjo when writing the letter are deliberate choices in order to realise certain interpersonal meanings.

2. Literature Review

The type of political discourse under investigation is not as common as other genres like campaign speeches, inaugural speeches, acceptance speeches, and Independence Day speeches by Presidents and Governors.

However, the few available ones, specifically on the letter in question, are reviewed below.

Omojuyigbe's (2015) work centres on discourse markers in Chief Olusegun Obasanjo's letter to President Goodluck Jonathan. The author reveals that discourse markers were engaged to make readers believe that President Jonathan was guilty of all the allegations leveled against him in the letter. However, the analysis mainly dwells on the discourse markers such as: or, nor, however, now, so to say, but, for now, and others which have clear meanings in their context of use. This approach is far from the current linguistic investigation.

Ekhareato and Ambrose (2015) investigate the letter in question from the angle of critical discourse analysis. Though the work adopts critical discourse analysis as its theoretical framework, it only centres on the few situations where metaphorical extensions, linguistic irony, pun, and face threatening acts are used in the letter as well as where there are demonstrations of power and superiority in the speech. In other words, the paper has a different focus from our work. Anaedozie (2015) makes use of insight from the metaphor of cancer to analyse not only Obasanjo's letter but also Jonathan's reply to the letter. It is important to note that the work is only a commentary on the issues of corruption raised in the two letters and they are not discussed from the angle of linguistic analysis. In addition, Aworo-Okoro and Mohammed's (2016) work is a speech Act Analysis of the letter from Lawal's theory of speech acts and Levinson's Negotiation theory. However, the findings from the work cannot be generalised in that it only makes use of eleven sample sentences from each of the two letters used for the study. Apart from the above, the work under review is not the same in focus with the current research. Lastly, Oguche and Ibrahim (2018) examine the letter from the angle of political science by adopting democratic-participant theory meaning that the work adopts a totally different approach towards studying the letter under investigation. The above are the few scholarly works which the authors of this paper could get and it is clear that none of them is centred on the discourse strategies used by Chief Olusegun Obasanjo for the purpose of achieving some goals in the letter. The current research endeavour fills the gap.

3. Source of Data and Method of Data Analysis

The data for this study were obtained from *The Guardian* newspaper of December 12, 2013, although other major national dailies in Nigeria published the letter since it was a major news item. After carefully reading the letter, the researchers identify some major discourse strategies adopted by the writer of the letter after which excerpts are taken from it to back them up. The significance of each particular discourse strategy identified is also fully explained. References are made outside the text to clarify some points where

such will aid comprehension of the point being made. The authors use a qualitative approach in their analysis of the discourse strategies identified in the text under study.

4. Data Analysis / Result

This section discusses the discourse strategies adopted by Chief Obasanjo in our data.

i. Mentioning “National Interest”

This is one of the most significant strategies used by Obasanjo in the letter. He mentions “national interest” fifteen (15) times for achieving different pragmatic intentions. This is a way of endearing himself to the minds of his readers not only in Nigeria but other people in other parts of the world. It is a way of indicating that whatever he writes about President Jonathan and about his administration is not borne out of any selfish or ulterior motives. Mentioning “national interest” repeatedly is also a way of saying that national interest supersedes any other interest. In fact, it is a way of silencing all would-be critics of the letter. Below are a few examples of where “national interest” is used in the letter.

- a. *I am constrained to make this an open letter to you for a number of reasons. One, the current situation and consequent possible outcome dictate that I should before the door closes on reason and promotion of **national interest**, alert you to the danger that may be lurking in the corner. (emphasis ours).*
- b. *Mr. President, you have on a number of occasions acknowledged the role God enabled me to play in your ascension to power... You put me third after God and your parents among those that have impacted most on your life.... For me, I believe that politically, it was in the **best interest of Nigeria** that you, a Nigerian from a minority group in the south, could rise to the highest pinnacle of political leadership. If Obasanjo could get there, Yar’adua could get there and Jonathan can get there, any Nigerian can. It is now not a matter of the turn of any section or geographical area but the **best interest of Nigeria and all Nigerians**.*
- c. *I have had opportunity in recent times to interact closely with you, and I have come to the conclusion painfully or happily that if you can shun yourself to a great extent of personal and political interest and dwell more on **the national interest** and also draw the line between advice from selfish and self-centred aides and advice from those who in **the interest of the nation** may not tell you what you will want to hear, it will be well.*

- d. *This is being oblivious of the sacrifices others have made in the past for the unity, stability and democracy in Nigeria in giving up their lives, shedding their blood and in going to prison. I personally have done two out of the three sacrifices and I am ready to do the third if it will serve **the best interest of the Nigerian dream.***
- e. *But I will not support what I believe is not in **the best interest of Nigeria** no matter who is putting it forward.*

A closer look at the above excerpts will reveal that Obasanjo uses the phrase “national interest” or its equivalent for many things.

In excerpt “a”, national interest or its equivalent is used to justify his current letter to Jonathan. The phrase “national interest” is used in the second sentence of the 18-page letter. Here, it is strategically used to give the impression at the outset of the letter that the purpose is mainly the promotion of national interest. In excerpt “b”, he uses it to justify his staunch support for Jonathan to become the president of Nigeria in 2011. In excerpt “c”, pragmatically, the phrase “national interest” or “in the best interest of the nation” is used to advise Jonathan to allow national interest to guide his actions as the president of Nigeria then. In excerpt “d”, in a rare show of commitment to one’s country, Obasanjo reveals the extent he can go because of national interest – that he can die for Nigeria. To explain further the excerpt under consideration (“d”), Obasanjo fought during the Nigerian Civil War (where he shed his blood); he was imprisoned by Abacha on a trumped-up charge of planning to overthrow the government of Abacha, and here in this letter, he writes that “I am ready to do the third if it will serve the best interest of Nigerian dream”. In essence, Obasanjo is saying here that he can die for Nigeria if it is going to serve the interest of Nigeria. In excerpt “e”, Obasanjo reveals what he will not do in the national interest. The above has shown that Obasanjo’s use of “national interest” or “in the best interest of Nigeria” is a discourse strategy used to pass across different messages.

ii. Using the vocative “Mr. President”

The vocative “Mr. President” is used fourteen (14) times in the letter by Obasanjo. Even though Obasanjo surpasses Jonathan in age, political experience (both nationally and internationally), personal recognition (both nationally and internationally), he still gives Jonathan the recognition and respect due to his office as the President of Nigeria then. The continuous mentioning of “Mr. President” is a way of acknowledging Jonathan as the overall head of the country and that he (Obasanjo) is not out to disrespect that office or undermine his authority. The second reason for repeating “Mr. President” is to pragmatically inform Jonathan that he should take note of some points. In essence, he uses “Mr. President” anytime he (Obasanjo)

wishes to advise or plead with him. In other words, Obasanjo uses Mr. President as an attention-getting device.

- a. Mr. President, let me plead with you for a few things that will stand you in good stead for the rest of your life. Don't always consider critics on national issues as enemies.
- b. Mr. President, be very wary of assistants, aides and collaborators who look for enemies for you. I have seen them with you and some were around me when I was in your position.
- c. Mr. President, let me again plead with you to be decisive on the oil and gas sector so that Nigeria may not lag behind.
- d. Mr. President, let me hope that as you claimed that you have not told anybody that you are contesting and that what we see and hear is a rumbling of overzealous aides, you will remain a leader that can be trusted.
- e. My last piece of advice, Mr. President is that you should learn the lesson of history and please, do not take Nigeria and Nigerians for granted.

In all the above excerpts, Obasanjo uses the vocative "Mr. President" to ensure that he (Jonathan) listens to and digests his (Obasanjo) advice, entreaties and pleadings.

iii. **Mentioning and portraying God in different perspectives**

This is a very unusual political discourse in that Obasanjo mentions God seventeen (17) times. He portrays God in different perspectives. The majority of Nigerians erroneously believe that political leaders who make references to God often must be a "God-fearing" person, hence, reliable, trustworthy, and responsible with the overall conclusion that such leaders are qualified to be supported. In short, mentioning God several times in the letter is meant to convince his Nigerian readers that he is a real Christian who "knows" God and His various attributes and power with the overall aim of convincing his readers that what he has written in the letter is nothing short of the truth and that all his conducts are divinely guided. The excerpts below convey some of the different perspectives in which Obasanjo portrays God in order to project the image of somebody who is close to God.

- a. Mr. President, you have on a number of occasions acknowledged the role **God** enabled me to play in your ascension to power. I have always retorted that **God** only put you where you are and those that could be regarded as having played a role were only instruments of **God** to achieve **God's** purpose in your life. (Emphasis ours).

Obasanjo is saying above that it is only God that “enthrones” or “crowns” somebody, hence, Jonathan’s presidency is an act of God and that he (Obasanjo) is only an instrument in the hands of God through which Jonathan became the president.

What Obasanjo is saying here in the religious parlance is that “he returns all glory to God” which is meant to thrill the adherents of the three major religions in Nigeria.

- b. We must all remember that corruption, inequity and injustice breed poverty, unemployment, conflict, violence, and wittingly and unwittingly create terrorists because the opulence of the governor can only lead to the leanness of the governed. But **God** never sleeps. He is watching, and bidding His time to dispense justice.

The perspective of God which Obasanjo shows above is that God is the judge of exploiters, oppressors, and corrupt people.

- c. May **God** grant you the grace for at least one effective corrective action against high corruption which seems to stink all around you in your government.

The only reason Obasanjo could bring God into the above scenario is to portray himself to Nigerians as a leader who relies on God for everything. Otherwise, it is self-discipline, national interest and legal steps that Jonathan needed that time to take an “effective corrective action against high corruption” that surrounded him at that time.

- d. **God** is never a supporter of evil and will surely save PDP and Nigeria from the hands of destroyers.

Mentioning God as the solution to PDP and Nigeria’s problem is self-serving. These are mundane problems that require mundane approaches to finding solutions to. In essence, Obasanjo only wishes to give the impression that he is a person who believes in God in tackling or resolving every problem pertaining to Nigeria.

iv. Direct Appeals to the President

There are more than ten (10) appeals in the letter. These appeals normally come at the end of any serious issues or observations raised by Obasanjo. The main purpose of the appeals is to show that he (Obasanjo) is not merely interested in pointing out the problems or issues at hand in order to castigate or ridicule the president or to show that he is not capable, but rather to indicate that he is really concerned with how to solve the problems in the interest of the nation. One of the ways of showing this concern is through

appeals. The appeals in the letter are in the form of pleading, advising, and appealing. Few examples are given below.

- a. I wish to see no more bloodshed occasioned by politics in Nigeria. Please, Mr. President, be mindful of that. You were exemplary in words when during the campaign and the 2011 elections, you said “my election is not worth spilling the blood of any Nigerian.” From you, it should not be if it has to be... let peace, security, harmony, good governance development and progress be for Nigeria... **you can do it and I appeal that you do it.** (emphasis ours).

The expression in bold letter above is an appeal to Jonathan not to allow political violence to engulf Nigeria, but instead do all he can to promote peace, security, harmony, good governance, development, and progress for Nigeria.

- b. Nigeria, which is the Saudi of Africa in oil and gas terms, is being overtaken by Angola only because necessary decisions are not made timely and appropriately. **Mr. President, let me again plead with you to be decisive on the oil and gas sector so that Nigeria may not lag behind.** (Emphasis ours).

The appeal above is made to President Jonathan to take an economic decision that will benefit Nigeria. The appeal shows again that Obasanjo is economically concerned about Nigeria.

- c. Mr. President, **let me plead with you for a few things that will stand you in good stead for the rest of your life.** Don't always consider critics on national issues as enemies. Some of them may be as patriotic and nationalistic as you and I who had been in government. Some of them have passion for Nigeria as we have. (Emphasis ours).

Obasanjo uses the appeal above to show his concern for how Jonathan may wrongly judge and assess some people who have come to genuinely advise him (Jonathan).

- d. I know you have the power to save PDP and the country. **I beg you to have the courage and the will with patriotism to use the power for the good of the people.** (Emphasis ours).

The appeal above is to indicate his concern and his love for the generality of Nigerians, hence, his appeal to Jonathan to use his power for the good of the people.

v. Direct References to Abacha

Abacha's name is mentioned five (5) times in the letter. Abacha was a military ruler who ruled Nigeria with a heavy hand from 1993 to 1998. He was the greatest dictator known in modern Nigeria. At a later time of his inglorious regime when he wanted to transmute into a civilian president, he became very ruthless and impatient towards any dissenting opinions. Many notable Nigerians were killed and many others had to flee the country to save their lives. The encoder of this letter (Obasanjo) and many other notable Nigerians were hauled into prison on trumped-up charges. In fact, no living, sane, and mature Nigerian at that time would ever forget Abacha's regime and Abacha's name. Financially, Abacha looted the country to the point of comatose. Below are some of the excerpts in which Abacha's name is mentioned.

- a. I could sense a semblance between the situation that we are gradually getting into and the situation we fell into as a nation during the Abacha era.
- b. The harassment of my relations and friends and innuendo that are coming from Government Security apparatus on whether they belong to new PDP or supporters of defected Governors and which are possibly authorised or are the works of overzealous aides and those reading your lips to act in your interest will be counterproductive. It is an abuse of the security apparatus. Such abuse took place last in the time of Abacha.
- c. Allegation of keeping over 1000 people on political watch list rather than criminal or security watch list and training snipers and other armed personnel secretly and clandestinely acquiring weapons to match for political purposes like Abacha and training them where Abacha trained his own killers, if it is true, it cannot augur well for the initiator, the government and the people of Nigeria.

All the excerpts above show some negative things that Abacha did when he was ruling. So, making references to Abacha is a discourse strategy meant to achieve two things:

- a. To make Nigerians start scrutinising, monitoring and checking president Jonathan's actions very well in order to prevent misuse of power and dictatorial tendencies.
- b. To make Jonathan himself have a re-think and a review of some of his actions that may make Nigerians to associate his name with Abacha and to prevent history from judging him harshly.

vi. Repetitions of Nigeria/Nigerians

In the text, Nigeria and Nigerians are mentioned 92 times. These could have been replaced or substituted with "nation/country" and "citizens of the

country” respectively. Mentioning Nigeria and Nigerians is a discourse strategy meant to show his love and patriotism for the country. These repetitions indicate that the overall concern of the encoder of the letter is Nigeria and Nigerians. Below are examples where Nigeria and Nigerians are strategically mentioned in the text.

- a. I want nothing from you personally except that you run the affairs of **Nigeria** not only to make **Nigeria** good, but to make **Nigeria** great for which I have always pleaded with you and I will always do so. And it is yet to be done for most **Nigerians** to see. (emphasis ours).
- b. My last piece of advice, Mr. President, is that you should learn the lesson of history and do not take **Nigeria** and **Nigerians** for granted. Move away from the culture of denials, cover-ups and proxies and deal honestly, sincerely and transparently with **Nigerians** to regain their trust and confidence. **Nigerians** are no fools...

In the above excerpts, “Nigeria” and “Nigerians” are strategically mentioned to show that Obasanjo’s main concerns are Nigeria and Nigerians, hence, a way of informing Nigerians that he wrote this letter in the interest of Nigerians apart from the overall national interest already mentioned.

5. Discussion

The paper aims at determining the reasons behind Obasanjo’s choice and use of certain words and expressions in the letter under study. These different choices have been referred to as discourse strategies adopted for the purpose of releasing certain intentions. In the text under study, Obasanjo uses the phrase “national interest” fifteen times. It has been revealed by Deighton (2017) that “when politicians use the phrase “national interest”, they seek to convey a message about the importance of what they are saying”. By mentioning national interest with respect to different situations and events as evident in our analysis, Obasanjo probably wishes to achieve three things. The first one is to accuse Jonathan of not taking national interest into consideration in his mode and style of governance. The second one is to glorify himself or show that he is a patriotic Nigeria whose actions and policies have been and will be guided by national interest. Third, Obasanjo wishes to charge Nigerians to allow national interest to guide all their actions.

Another discourse strategy used in the letter is the use of the vocative “Mr. President” fifteen times for two main reasons. First, it is a strategy to make the president be fully aware that the message or the content of the letter is addressed to him in person and not to the invisible or abstract entity called the “presidency”. Second, it is to give the impression that he (Obasanjo) still has maximum respect for Jonathan as the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, hence, Obasanjo’s repeated use of the exalted title. The third strategy

identified in the letter is mentioning God several times. Different scholars have interpreted the use of “God” in political texts by politicians differently. For example, Emeka-Nwobia (2016:18) in her work on other Obasanjo’s political texts where he mentions God copiously writes that mentioning God “is a major rhetorical strategy utilised by politicians to manipulate their audience”. However, Ekhareato and Ambrose (2015) when commenting on the mentioning of God by Obasanjo in the letter under consideration write that Obasanjo’s obvious show of piety by mentioning God in the letter is a clear show of power which is implied in the sentences they appear. The authors of this paper disagree with the view of Ekhareato and Ambrose (2015) and align with the position of Emeka-Nwobia that mentioning God by politicians is for manipulative purposes. Emeka-Nwobia (2016:17) says that “manipulation is realised when the listener cannot see the speaker’s covered intentions behind what is actually said”. The various intentions or manipulative tendencies of Obasanjo in mentioning God copiously in the letter have been discussed under some of the excerpts given in which Obasanjo mentions God. However, the one that catches our attention most is where Obasanjo writes that God is biding His time to dispense justice against corrupt people in power. This is very surprising in that Obasanjo was a former president who knows that there is machinery of the state put in place to deal with corrupt people and fight against injustice. In fact, his administration established The Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC) to combat corruption and other related offences. In essence, Obasanjo only writes the above in order to warm himself into the hearts of the masses who take solace in the conviction that it is God who will fight for them against the oppressors, exploiters, and the corrupt ones in power. Obasanjo knows that the prayer of an average Nigerian in church or mosque is that God should punish and judge all exploiters and corrupt individuals in government who have made life unbearable to the masses.

Obasanjo also uses the strategy of direct appeals to the president. The appeals take the form of pleading, advising, and begging. The aim of this is to soften Jonathan’s heart and make it appear as if he (Obasanjo) is only after the success of Jonathan and his administration as well as the progress of Nigeria in all the areas in which he (Obasanjo) has appealed to Jonathan. Making direct references to Late General Sanni Abacha is also a strategy to warn Jonathan to be careful of how history will judge him after leaving the office; it is also a strategy to warn Nigerians to be watchful of Jonathan’s actions before they become something else. Lastly, mentioning Nigeria/Nigerians 92 times in the letter is simply for emotional reasons. Obasanjo uses this strategy to give the impression and the conviction that he dearly loves Nigeria and Nigerians and that the interest of Nigeria and Nigerians is his principal focus in the letter.

Conclusion

Rozina and Karapetjana (2009:114) write that “it is axiomatic that language plays an essential part in politics because its main function in different political situations is to enable politicians to form structurally stable social relationships”. This, probably, may mean that all the discourse strategies adopted by Obasanjo in the letter using the medium of language are to achieve “stable social relationships” with Jonathan on the one hand and the entire Nigerians on the other. For example, making references to “national interest”, “God”, “Abacha”, “Nigeria and Nigerians” copiously in the letter may be to achieve stable social relationships with the majority of Nigerians. On the other hand, the strategy of repeating the enviable title “Mr. President” and the use of appeal discourse strategy may be to achieve “stable social relationship” with Jonathan despite the fact that the letter criticises some aspects of Jonathan’s leadership style and administration.

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