

A PRAGMATIC ANALYSIS OF NELSON MANDELA'S INAUGURAL SPEECH

Chinwe Theresa Eze

Okongwu Memorial Grammar School,

Nnewi, Anambra State

Email: ezetessy16@gmail.com

Abstract

Language according to Sapir is a human and noninstinctive method of communicating ideas, emotions and desires by means of voluntarily produced symbols. Speech act is doing something using language. When we say something, we are requesting, appreciating, appealing, commanding, ordering or proposing. This study is a pragmatic analysis of Nelson Mandela's inaugural speech presented at a critical moment of South Africa's history. It is aimed at examining what Nelson Mandela's inaugural speech may have meant to his people whom he represented in the fight for freedom. The locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary aspects of his inaugural speech were examined using the Speech Acts Theory to ascertain the extent to which his inaugural speech acts met the felicity condition as spelt out by J.L Austin. Data was collected through internet and library sources. The analysis was done using J.L. Austin's Speech Acts Theory. The researcher dwells on the illocutionary act namely the Assertive, Commissives, Directives, and Expressives. It is observed that in the representative or assertive acts that Nelson Mandela was explaining, informing, asserting, proving and stating the facts of the situation at hand. His speech met J. L Austin's felicity conditions. From the analysis of his speech, we find Mandela as a great orator and achiever. We also observed the speaker's cultural influence in terms of greeting, appreciating and thanking his audience. Nelson Mandela brought an end to apartheid using his communicative competence which helped in the complete eradication of apartheid in South Africa.

Keywords: Pragmatics, Speech Acts Theory, Nelson Mandela

Introduction

Nelson Mandela was known as one of the greatest leaders of all times. The media have written so much on his ascendancy to South Africa's presidency many years after his imprisonment. His speeches provide an opportunity for academicians to gain insight into who Mandela was, and how the black South Africans perceived him during those trying periods. Nelson Mandela's speech of May 10, 1994 marked his inauguration as the first black South Africa's president after apartheid was abolished. How did the audience of Black South African audience receive the speech? To what extent did the speech meet the felicity conditions as spelt out by J. L. Austin's Speech Acts

Theory? A pragmatic analysis of the inaugural speech of Nelson Mandela became necessary to answer the above questions. His inaugural speech gives an insight into who Nelson Mandela was and how the South Africans perceived him during and after the apartheid. The paper also looks at the specific context of the speeches and gives a full explanation of the pragmatic analysis of the speech. The researcher focused on critically analyzing the inaugural speech of Nelson Mandela considering the context of his political experiences. The researcher did this based on the conversational principles of pragmatics with great recourse to J. L Austin's Speech Act Theory. It is really the message and intentions of the speakers that bring about the perlocutionary act of the language. Ojukwu, Chika Kate (121).

Theoretical Framework

Speech act theory tries to explain how speakers use language to get the intended meaning and hearers get the intended meaning from what the speaker said. Speech act theory was first defined by Austin J. L (30). He did not use the term 'speech acts', but 'performative sentence' or 'performative utterance' which indicated that the issuing of the utterance is the performance of an action. The term itself was first used by Searle (22) asserting that "talking is performing acts according to rules" and that "speech acts are the basic or minimal units of linguistic communication" (16). Meanwhile, according to Yule (47), "people perform action through utterances when they attempt to express themselves and the actions they perform through utterances are generally called speech action."

Austin in Levinson's Pragmatics (236) recommends three basic acts in presenting an utterance. They are

- Locutionary act
- Illocutionary act
- Perlocutionary act

These are the three levels of analysis that project the meaning of utterances. The locutionary act simply shows its sense and reference. It performs the act of saying something. The illocutionary act makes statements, offer, promise etc. Illocutionary act is the purpose behind making an utterance. The perlocutionary act provokes the effect on the audience by uttering a sentence. The effects of the perlocutionary acts are enlightening, persuading, convincing, inspiring someone to realize something, whether intended or not (Austin, 30). The illocutionary act is the real action performed by the utterance where both saying and doing are conducted at the same time, such as betting, warning, ordering (Kempson, 51).

Thus, Searle in his classification of illocutionary acts (1 -23) proposes five types of speech act, namely:

- Assertives (presents the way things are): these are statements that describe a state of affairs in the world which could be true or false.
- Directives (instruct somebody to do something): These are statements that compel another person's action to fit the propositional elements. It is used to give orders thereby causing the hearer to take a particular action, request, command or advice.
- Commissive (commits oneself): It commits the speaker to certain future action. It could be in the form of promise thereby committing the speaker to a course of action.
- Expressives (express feelings and attitude): it is used to express sincerity of the speech act like excuses and sympathy thereby reflecting the feelings of the speaker.
- Verdictives/Declaration: That brings about change with the use of utterance. These statements are used to say something and make it so, such as pronouncing someone guilty and declaring a war. This is used by the speaker to weigh the action of another person often the hearer. These are words and expressions like I bet, I resign and I declare.

Conditions that must be fulfilled for actual realization of illocutionary acts are called felicity conditions. Felicity conditions refer to conditions necessary for the success of a speech act. The name is derived from a Latin root "Felix" or "happy". They are conditions necessary for the fulfillment of a performative. Ndimale (139) has it that the concept of felicity condition was proposed by J. L. Austin as those criteria which must be satisfied by a speech act if it must be termed successful to achieve its communicative purpose. According to Searle, there is a general condition for all speech acts so that the hearer must hear and understand the language.

An illocutionary act is adjudged felicitous if it meets conditions spelt out by J. L. Austin (72). The felicity conditions are given below:

- Sincerity condition- This shows how sincere the speaker is with a certain illocutionary act.
- Preparatory condition shows how appropriate the participants are in the speech act as well as the circumstances of the speech act for the successful performance of the speech act.
- Executive condition indicates whether the speech is properly executed. If yes, then the speech is felicitous on this ground.
- Fulfillment condition - This shows the perlocutionary effect of the speech act. If it has the desired effect, then it is also felicitous. Actually, when those felicity conditions are met by an illocutionary act, then it is said to be felicitous and it met J.L Austin's Speech Act.

Speech Acts Analysis of Nelson Mandela's Inaugural Speeches

The speech acts performed in the inaugural speech selected are classified based on Searle's classification of illocutionary acts. These speeches constituted a number of utterances, sentences and phrases have been selected for analysis as Assertive, Directive Commissive and Expressive acts in order to project their illocutionary imports.

Assertives/Representatives

These are utterances in the inaugural speech that make assertions about the state of affairs in the world with particular reference to the South African Socio-political context. The assertive acts in our data are for explaining, informing, proving, asserting and stating facts.

The following assertives are extracted from the speech:

Extract 1

Today **we** are entering a new era for **our** country and its people
Today **we** celebrate not the victory of a party but a victory for all the people of South Africa.

Extract 2

To my compatriots, I have no hesitation in saying that each one of us is as intimately attached to the soil of this beautiful country as are the famous jacaranda trees of Pretoria and the mimosa trees of the Bushveld.

Extract 1 is an assertive speech act as the speaker informs his people that they are in a new era of freedom for South Africa. The speaker had just won an election as the first black president in their country, South Africa and he is being inaugurated as president. The use of "we" implies himself and the people of South Africa and also the deictic pronoun "our" suggests that South Africa is their own. In the past, South Africa has always been ruled by the oppressive white minority and this latest period is that in which there is a change in the mantle of leadership. The utterance also makes a statement of fact. Nelson Mandela states that they are not rejoicing over a party conquest but for the whole of South Africa as a country.

In extract 2 the tone of the speaker is made clear "To my compatriots" is an utterance of endearment by a faithful leader who speaks to fellow citizens to assure them of their closer relationships since they are from the same country and has won the victory together. This assertion commits the speaker to the truth of the expressed proposition. The utterance is not like the empty promises of Nigerian politicians looking for votes but an assertion that reassures the citizenry of the mind of a leader to carry his people along and allow them to enjoy the fruits of their struggle together.

Directive Acts

Directive acts involves persuasion. In the directive acts, the speaker tries to get the hearer to do something. It includes the act of commanding, advising, warning, persuading, condemning and urging.

The following directives are extracted from his inaugural speeches.

Extract 3

Out of the experience of an extraordinary human disaster that lasted too long, must be born a society of which all human will be proud.

We must therefore act together as united people, for national reconciliation.

Extract 4

Let there be justice and peace for all

Let there be work, bread, water and salt for all.

In extract 3, Nelson Mandela admonishes the out of the unusual disaster that lasted too long, should be born a society in which all mankind will be proud. Nelson Mandela **insists** that they as a group should **unite** for national resolution, nation building and the birth of a new human race. The use of the modal auxiliary verb ‘must’ emphasizes this determination by the speaker. The use of the deictic pronoun “we” intensifies the strong unity that they require to achieve their freedom from apartheid.

In extract 4, Nelson Mandela **appeals** for justice for all and request for peace. In extract 4, Nelson Mandela asks for better living condition such as work, bread, water and salt. He made the request with the use of the verb “let”.

Commissive Acts

These statements commit the speaker to certain future action. It could be in the form of promise, pledge and offer thereby committing the speaker to a course of action.

Below are the commissive parts of the inaugural speech:

Extract 5

And the change is what **they will** get

We will tackle the widespread poverty

So pervasive among the majority of our people

Extract 6

As a government, the ANC **will create** a legal framework that **will assist** rather than impede the awesome task of reconciliation and reconstruction and development of our battered society.

In extract 5, Mandela **promises** that **change** is what they will get. The use of the verb phrase “will get” indicates future implication. They really had need for a change in South Africa which is a common knowledge to the Africans in the context and so, Mandela is promising this **real** change in government. Nelson Mandela distinguishes himself as a patriot. This change is not the kind of change we experience in Nigeria. “They” in this context, means “his people”. He went on to speak on tackling the extensive poverty among his people. He actually promised to do something.

In extract 6, the speaker promised that the ANC will create a legal framework that will exist rather than slow down the tremendous duty of rebuilding our **battered** society.

Expressive Acts

The expressive acts reveal the psychological state of the speaker. It talks about the state of affairs which the illocutionary presuppose. It is often used to communicate the speaker’s intention in relation to the situation.

The following are expressive acts of Mandela’s speech.

Extract 7

We thank all our distinguished international guests for having come to take possession with the people of our country of what is, after all, common victory for justice, for peace, for human dignity.

Extract 8

We deeply appreciate the role that the masses of our people and their political mass democratic, religious women, youth, business, tradition and other leaders have played to bring about this conclusion.
God bless Africa! Thank you.

In extract 7 and 8 above, Nelson Mandela really expresses his inner state of mind by using the deictic pronoun “we” to show a collective identity or a group membership and solidarity which he enjoys. He uses the performative verb “thank” to show his being grateful for having come to be the president and to control his country at last.

In **extract 8**, Mandela uses the adverb “deeply” to modify the verb **appreciate**. He shows appreciation to every group for their success and a lasting peace for everybody.

Nelson Mandela’s inaugural speech tends to expose or reveal his experiences, the pains and the eventual gains of the struggle. He really appreciates all that has identified with the struggle as individuals and corporate bodies to show that the victory is not his victory but the victory of South Africans and freedom to Africa as a whole.

Perlocutionary Acts of the Inaugural Speeches

The perlocutionary acts points to the intended and unintended effect of the linguistic act on the hearer or audience. In all the speeches made by Mandela during his inauguration, he proved his intended meaning to his audience.

In **extract 1 and 2**, he tried to remind and assert to his audience that the destruction caused by the Apartheid to Africa is so much. Mandela **enlightens** and convinces the audience about the evil effect of Apartheid and the need to break down the walls of segregation so that his people will enjoy the fruits of freedom. He **cheers** his audience that they celebrate not just the victory of the party but a victory for all. He stirs his audience to appreciate the after effect of their labour and **persuades** his audience to accept the winning party as a faithful organ of future peace and fulfillment. Nelson Mandela **requires** the South Africans to place their **vision** of a new constitution for South Africa on the table as a way to extend the olive branch of cooperation. He **encourages** his people to partner with him as they were partners in the battle for freedom. Mandela asserts that the national mood changes as time changes. The spiritual and physical agreement they share as a group in their homeland proves the intensity of the hurt they experience in their hearts as their motherland disintegrated as a result of racial discrimination which cut them off from the rest of world.

Nelson Mandela went on to condemn the oppressors. He believes that out of their unusual human disaster that lasted for so long should be born a society in which mankind will live with hope and pride. He requests for better life in general in such areas as work, bread, water and salt. The speaker promises that the ANC will create a legal framework that will propel rebuilding and proving the battered society. He resolved to be committed to the spirit of a government of national agreement and stand firm to initiate and bring about the change they desired. Mandela promised seriously a virile country in which all South Africans both black and white will enjoy the right to human dignity. He was happy in extract 7 and 8, as he expresses joy when the situation of South Africa changes from oppression to liberty. These speeches have far reaching

effects that sustained the struggle for freedom and in so doing ensured that freedom is achieved and that the fruits will be enjoyed by all (Ojukwu 121).

Felicity Conditions of the Speeches

In this analysis, we shall subject Nelson Mandela's inaugural speech to the felicity conditions as spelt out by Austin J.L to assess their effectiveness.

Sincerity Condition

The sincerity condition is an important felicity condition as this speech really provoked necessary reaction needed in the circumstance. The information here constitutes some promises made by Mandela towards the eradication of Apartheid in South Africa. The speeches based on performative are uttered by the right person at the right time in the right situation and effectively accomplished the social act. He promised to build a society in which South Africans both black and white walk tall without fear in their hearts. Racial discrimination or apartheid was abolished in 1990 and in 1994, Nelson Mandela was elected first black president of South Africa. Nelson Mandela has fulfilled all these promises and therefore, these speeches are sincere -true and hence felicitous.

Preparatory Condition

Preparatory felicity condition seeks to reveal the appropriateness of the participants in the discourse and the successful performance of the speech act. Nelson Mandela, an African activist brought an end to Apartheid. He was ready to die for this course by making much sacrifice to achieve that. He really committed himself to the struggle to obtain equality for all South Africans. Nelson Mandela's inaugural speech at Pretoria is a highly sensational address and his speech is made under the right circumstances hence the illocutionary act are felicitous having fulfilled Austin J.L. Felicitous condition.

Executive Condition

This shows whether the speeches were properly executed. Nelson Mandela's communicative competence is a key part in eradicating apartheid. Nelson Mandela is a great communicator who uses the power of language to explain, inspire, persuade and express his psychological state of mind by making promises for future actions. He properly executed his speeches and these speeches are therefore felicitous.

Fulfillment Condition

The fulfillment condition really answers the research questions what Nelson Mandela's inaugural speech may have meant for his people and if it meets J. L. Austin's felicity condition. This speech has the desired effect on the participants as Nelson Mandela persuades, enlightens, convinces and inspires

his audience to accept his own opinion. All these speeches broke the solid rock of apartheid and ensured peaceful transfer of power in the harsh segregated nation. Nelson Mandela's inaugural speech achieved the desired purposes as they fulfill the necessary felicity conditions (Ojukwu 121).

Conclusion

The language of Nelson Mandela is studied through the inaugural speech in order to get to his thoughts. In this study, the researcher examines what Nelson Mandela's inaugural speech may have meant to his people who he represented in the fight for freedom. The researcher uses speech acts theory to interpret Mandela's speech and determine the perlocutionary acts of the inaugural speech in order to judge if his speech met the felicity conditions as spelt out by J. L. Austin's Speech Acts Theory. Referring to Searle's taxonomy of illocutionary acts, the researcher found out that the four categories of Searle's speech acts - Assertive, directive, commissives and expressives manifested in these speeches. These selected speeches are powerful, enlightening convincing, inspiring and memorable both in national and international forums. Nelson Mandela expressed joy and happiness when the situation of South Africa changed from oppression to liberty. He demonstrated happiness by blessing Africa. The effect of the speech excites his audience so that they share with him in the joy for the positive change. These speeches ensured that freedom is achieved and that the fruits will be enjoyed by all. He emphasizes that the victory is not just victory for the party alone but a victory for all lovers of freedom in South Africa and the international community who actually contributed in different ways to sustain the tempo of the struggle and in so doing, democracy was achieved.

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