

A SPEECH ACT ANALYSIS OF HATE SPEECHES IN THE 2015 GENERAL ELECTION CAMPAIGN IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Political campaign, as an integral part of democracy, thrives on the centrality of language use. The 2015 general election in Nigeria witnessed a campaign of calumny, full of inflammatory rhetoric and verbal attacks on perceived political opponents, capable of truncating the country's nascent democracy. Hence, this paper examines, from perspective of pragmatics, instances of hate speeches made by political actors during the 2015 general election campaigns in Nigeria with the aim of revealing their pragmatic import. Since language is an instrument of action, the Speech Act theory (SAT) by Austin (1962) and Searle (1969) serves as our theoretical framework. The data analysed were retrieved from publications of purposively selected Nigerian newspapers and magazine between 2012 and 2015. A total number of 20 (twenty) speeches were selected and subjected to illocutionary act analysis (direct and indirect) which brings the total speech acts performed to 40 (forty). The perlocutionary effects of the locutions were also measured from the illocutionary force of each utterance. The findings revealed that campaign speeches made prior to the 2015 general elections in Nigeria serve as weapons of intimidation, blackmail, incitement and coercion and thus created an atmosphere of fear and anxiety within the polity. Based on this, the paper recommends enlightenment programmes on the tenets of democracy and good governance for all citizens to protect Nigeria's nascent democracy.

KEYWORDS: Hate Speeches, Political Campaign, Election, Democracy, Political Actors