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**Domian Transfer as a Strategy Deployed to
Portray Massive Corruption in Olusegun
Obasanjo's Open Letter to President Jonathan: A
Pragmatic Survey**

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Abstract

This essay is a pragmatic analysis of Olusegun Obasanjo's open letter, dated 2nd December 2013, to the sitting president, Goodluck Ebele Jonathan. The letter titled "Before It Is Too Late" raises

pertinent national issues bothering on massive corruption and the degenerating state of the country's social, economic, and political make up. There have been on-going conversations in almost every facet of the country, and outside, on the content of the letter. Also there are variations of public opinion on the intent, content, and context of the epistle, many of which come from the power brokers in Nigeria. What this essay does is to examine cases of domain transfer in the text. In the process, it discovers that the writer deploys lexical items from source domains- religion, military, business world, and Cricket game, et cetera to implicitly or explicitly portray issues of corruption in the text.

Key words: open letter; domain transfer; Obasanjo; Jonathan; corruption.

Introduction

Olusegun Obasanjo's letter came as a bomb shell to the entire nation. This is because of its volatile content, and specifically because Nigerians consider him a god-father to President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan. The letter entitled "Before It Is Too Late" addresses critical issues which the writer summarizes thus:

- a) The current Nigerian situation and its consequent possible outcome
- b) The previous four letters addressed to president Jonathan have not been replied
- c) Nigerians are inquisitive about what Obasanjo wants
- d) There is a semblance between the current situation and the Abacha era
- e) The urgent need to guard and protect Nigeria's fledgling democracy
- f) The need to protect the country from dividing
- g) The need to protect the country from economic degeneration
- h) The international community is studying the signals coming out from Nigeria

- i) Nigeria should take advantage of the present favourable international interest to invest in Africa
- j) The president's legacy.

For weeks, the issues in the epistle became top discourse topics in most gatherings, media houses, headlines of dailies, religious gatherings, academic environments, and even market places. The pertinent questions on most people's minds, whether spoken or unspoken, were: why did Obasanjo write such an indicting open letter to President Jonathan? Couldn't he have made it discreet? What is Obasanjo's intention of doing that? What is left of the relationship between god-father and god-son? These series of unanswered questions took a dramatic twist when the nation woke up the next morning to learn that the two persons had a breakfast in Kenya.

Methodology

This essay is a pragmatic analysis of the text which has generated on-going conversations on the internet, social media, dailies, et cetera. The letter has generated responses from almost all corners of the country. The Federal Government of Nigeria goes as far as describing it as a treasonable offence. This essay collates the pertinent different comments (in the Literature Review), and does a pragmatic analysis of domain transfer in the letter. The essence is to show the subtle propositions and skills the writer deploys, and how the reader interprets them.

Not all comments made on the letter are reviewed specifically because of its relevance, and availability of space. The paper only reviews pertinent comments from notable citizens in the country. This is because these citizens occupy (or once occupied) notable portfolios in the country and the generality of Nigerians take their words importantly.

This essay deploys Romero and Soria's Phrasal Pragmatics. In doing this, the researchers select lexical items which originally belong to

other domains, but which the writer uses to pass across subtle propositions and their effects. In the end, it is observed that Obasanjo deploys lexical items from different source domains to enhance his subject matter which is massive corruption.

Literature Review

It is imperative to note here that to the best of the researcher's knowledge, no serious academic and substantive analysis has been carried out on Obasanjo's letter to President Goodluck Jonathan. What are available are comments, opinions, criticisms from various quarters of the country, hence this essay reviews them. It reviews them for two reasons:

- a) there are no serious academic materials on ground
- b) comments made on the text serve as a motivational factor.
This is so because the researchers in analyzing the text, test the credibility of those comments

Therefore this essay is significant not only because it is the first to do so, but also because it paves way for further research on the letter.

Femi Fani Kayode, a former aviation minister of Nigeria, thinks that if there is anybody that can help call the president to order, it is the former president. This is because Obasanjo imposed Jonathan on Nigeria and Nigerians (1). Kayode believes that all is not well with the country which calls for a divine intervention. Such is the letter by the former president.

Also, another former Vice-President of Nigeria, Atiku Abubakar says the letter is a reflection of the evils of god-fatherism (qtd in Oge Okonkwo 1). He urges Nigerian leaders to focus on the country and her citizens. He says "our priorities must be lasting solutions to unemployment, safety, and security for all, vastly improving our failing education systems" (qtd in Okonkwo 1). In a belated rejoinder by a former minister of information, Chief Edwin Clark who served when Obasanjo was then the minister of works, describes the former president as a mischief maker and an ego maniac who always wants to

play to the gallery. He counters Obasanjo's proposition that Jonathan has taken an ethnical stand, and blasts the letter as treasonable, thus:

In addition, I want to buttress the assertion that all Nigerians are equal no matter where they come from, that is, no one is a second class citizen of this nation. You have no right to plunge Nigeria into crisis as your past actions and recent open letter to the president connotes. The generality of Nigerians think your letter is treasonable (1).

Clark believes the writer is an unrepentant trouble maker who is bent on embarrassing all past Heads of States and Presidents in Nigeria through open letters and unsavoury comments.

Similarly, Uche Ohia tries to deconstruct the content of the former president's letter to President Jonathan. Ohia states that Obasanjo raises salient issues which are founded on his aversion for the idea of Jonathan seeking re-election for a second term in office, the handling of the cases in the ruling Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP), his disgust with Jonathan for overriding his (Obasanjo) political leadership, and influence culminating in the imposition of a particular person as PDP zonal leader in the South-West zone, Jonathan's incompetence in various respects (1). On the rest of the issues Ohia says that:

The rest of Obasanjo's letter consist of a bundle of contradictions, allegations, lamentations, and admonitions plus veiled chest-beating and a bizarre confession of his role in past electoral manipulations and such other outbursts that a wizened old fox would haul from a safe distance at a younger and more virile one that has outfoxed him in the jungle. Shorn of political jingoism and patriotic pomposity, the only thing that can be deduced from Obasanjo's bellicose

letter is that he has an axe to grind with President Jonathan. (1)

Tope Fasua does a psychoanalysis of the letter. He focuses on constructing the events that precipitated the epistle from Obasanjo looking at specific statements in the letter, the choice of language, and the inferences (Fasua 1). On specific statements, Fasua blames the president for ignoring four previous letters Obasanjo wrote him. According to him, had Jonathan replied those letters, then open letter would have been avoidable (1). Furthermore, Fasua upholds that Nigeria's image degenerates every day, and it is just a case of adding insult to injury that the writer uses expressions such as: *Please move away from the extremes...and carry ALL along. (You are) assisting criminals to evade justice...unbridled corruption and obscene rulers' opulence...when the guard becomes the thief nothing is safe* (Fasua 1). From the above, it is not out of place to say that the generality of Nigerians understand the content of the letter. It is also important to note that they are able to infer within the content of the letter and within the context of the Nigerian political history to interpret the writer's message. But how do they come about this interpretation and comprehension? How is the average Nigerian able to know that Obasanjo criticizes President Jonathan and his government? These are issues that the essay resolves. It explains the pragmatic process-domain transfer- the writer deploys, and how the reader uses it to get both the implicit and explicit meanings of the text.

In the epistle, the writer holds the President responsible for the unfortunate twist of fate that Nigeria currently experiences. For instance, Obasanjo upholds that the act of threatening fire and brimstone by some Ijaw elements on the North is unacceptable. This is even made more unfortunate by President Jonathan's silence which the writer reads as subtle approval. Also Obasanjo believes that the sycophantic and overzealous aides who surround President Jonathan make matters worse. The one which raises alarm most is the allegation that the President trains snipers to sniff out perceived state enemies.

All in all, Obasanjo summarizes the Nigerian situation in a sentence, "Nigeria is bleeding and the hemorrhage must be stopped" (8).

This essay upholds that the centre theme of the former president's letter is massive corruption. This he believes has been enhanced by President Jonathan's docility, deniability, and calculated silence. This hydra-headed corruption surfaces in different talons: tyranny, political insecurity, deception, and god-fatherism. This paper therefore does a pragmatic analysis of pertinent lexical items in the epistle. It stretches their semantic domain within the context of the Nigerian political terrain. That is to say, these words or phrases have been chosen by the former president to subtly pass across serious propositions. The onus therefore lays on Nigerians to interpret these propositions. Hence this essay becomes inevitably significant because it helps explain this subtle process: domain transfer.

Phrasal Pragmatics

Phrasal Pragmatics was introduced by Romero and Esther as a complement to lexical pragmatics (183). To them, Robyn Carston's pragmatic programme is incomplete without Phrasal Pragmatics (Romero and Soria 183). Lexical Pragmatics is an off-shoot of Robyn Carston's Ad hoc Construction. Ad hoc Construction emanates from the belief that linguistic elements do not equate human thought processes. The general orientation of Carston's pragmatics is that the linguistically encoded element of an utterance is not generally geared towards achieving as high a degree of explicitness as possible, but rather towards keeping processing effort down (Carston 130). These elements only stand in for the actual propositions, hence the concept ad hoc. In lexical pragmatics, Carston tries to account for how ad hoc concept constructions, that is, lexicalized atomic concepts can through pragmatic derivation, yield ad hoc atomic concept (Romero and Soria 185).

Reinhard Blutner describes lexical pragmatics as a research field that tries to give a systematic and explanatory account of pragmatic

phenomena that are connected with the semantic under specification of lexical items (115). In this case, the systematic and explanatory account has to do with how the former president does domain transfer from sources such as religion, military, dramatic literature and so on. In a more explicit expression, lexical pragmatics starts from the assumption that the meaning communicated by a word is underdetermined by its semantics (Christoph Unger 1). There is therefore the need to study the processes involved by bridging the gap between the encoded and the communicated meaning of words (Christoph Unger 1). Deirdre Wilson simply upholds that the goal of lexical pragmatics is to explain how linguistically specified (literal) word meanings are modified in use (343). This modification process continues until the hearer/reader reaches optimal relevance. Nevertheless, it is imperative to note that lexical pragmatics has been flawed on the ground that semantic modulation is insufficient enough to ascertain the propositions of lexical items. Hence they introduce Phrasal Pragmatics.

Romero and Soria believe that it would be incomplete if lexical pragmatics is the only means of ascertaining the truth condition of phrases in propositions. Phrasal Pragmatics studies the behaviour of phrases and their meanings, and how these meanings must often be pragmatically adjusted to determine the truth condition with which they contribute to what is said by means of the utterances of the sentences that include them (Romero and Soria 183). While Lexical Pragmatics studies pragmatically derived atomic concepts, Phrasal Pragmatics studies pragmatically derived complex concepts. One of the limitations of Lexical Pragmatics, as opined by Romero and Soria, is how to explain the possibility of a complete change in the denotations of a lexicalized concept, as in the case of metaphor (186). To solve this, they postulate that metaphor must be explained as a case of transfer of meaning by a mapping from the source domain to the target domain (Romero and Soria 187). Consider this. Two undergraduate students just had a lecture, and the following conversation ensues:

Charlie: How do you view Prof. Rancho's account of the incident?

Titi: Don't mind the man. He was just **garnishing** the story.

'Garnishing' in Titi's response is a diction common with the culinary register. Its transfer into the above context does not only portray the lecturer's incredible 'improvisation', but also pulls its sense and its paraphernalia effects.

In Obasanjo's letter to Jonathan entitled "Before It Is Too Late", there are cases of domain transfer deployed to enhance the writer's subject matter- massive corruption. In the words of Barry C. Smith, "advocates of cognitive pragmatics suggest that what we mean in using a sentence is almost never what the sentence means; instead we rely on a great deal of non-linguistic inference to figure out what is said when a sentence is uttered in a given context" (93). Similarly, what we mean in using linguistic items- specifically words, is almost never what the words mean. The question then is how do we get to the meaning of the words? Smith provides an answer. He says that "Relevance theorists like Carston assume that since the semantic context of a sentence (in our case words) typically fails, by itself, to determine the thought-content communicated by an utterance of the sentence..., cognitive processes are needed to get at the precise thought-content conveyed" (95 emphasis mine). In this essay, the cognitive process employed is domain transfer. The researcher uses the source domains of significant linguistic items in the letter to interpret the thought-content (massive corruption) Obasanjo conveys.

This subject matter is discussed under four headings: tyranny, political insecurity, deception, and god-fatherism. This paper therefore states that Obasanjo deploys lexical items from different source domains- religion, military, et cetera to portray issues of corruption in his open letter to President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan.

Tyranny

To show the height of dictatorship in Jonathan's government, Obasanjo compares it to the implied despotic Abacha era: "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" (1). The implication here is that in Nigeria, Abacha is an icon of tyranny. Some of the features of Abacha's tyrannism reflect in some sectors of Jonathan's government. He further stretches the implication when commenting on the crisis rocking the People's Democratic Party (PDP), Obasanjo believes that the party's national chairman is not to blame as he is playing the tune dictated by the paymaster:

"The Chairman is playing the tune dictated by the Paymaster" (3).

In most socio-cultural parlance, the paymaster tells the piper what tune to play. However, in the open, the dancers hold the piper accountable for whatever tunes emanate from his flute. In interpreting the writer's communicated meaning, the reader transfers the 'piper-paymaster' relationship to Nigeria's political discourse. In doing this, Obasanjo suggests that Nigerians should look beyond the open PDP internal crisis with the national chairman, and hold the paymaster (President) responsible. Also the relationship between the paymaster and piper is that which can be described as 'absolute loyalty'. Even if the piper has a better different tune in mind, the paymaster's is more paramount. It is this relationship which exists between the President and the party's national chairman. And Obasanjo describes it as tyrannical- an instance where the piper publicly bears the sins of the Paymaster. This further suggests that the government does not encourage individual inputs, as the will of the president overrides others. A significant trait which characterizes dictatorship is sycophancy. The followers tend to pay lip service to the tyrant in order to stay relevant. In this context, the national chairman is portrayed as a bootlicker who does everything to stay alive on the payroll of the paymaster.

To further portray the “god-like” nature of the president, the writer describes his portfolio as the Nigerian CEO: “And no group solely by itself can crown any of its members the Nigerian CEO” (2). CEO is an acronym for Chief Executive Officer. It is often used in the business environment. A CEO is the owner of an establishment. He is the creator who has powers to hire and fire people. Nobody argues with the CEO, and he is seen as a god whose words are laws within the jurisdiction of his establishment. In this context, it means that President Jonathan has assumed the CEO of Nigeria. This implies the dictatorial inclinations of his government. Where as in a democratic setting, elected public office holders are supposed to serve the people. That is why some state governors who think along this line refer to themselves as chief servants. With this distinction, Obasanjo's proposition becomes lucid. A CEO has an air of pride, pomposity, and (in the case of Nigeria) tyranny. But a Chief Servant radiates humility, servitude, and a heart to stomach criticisms.

However on a soft note, Obasanjo describes his former alleged protégé as “Captain of the ship” (13). This is a slight departure from the above two lexical items because “Captain of the ship” suggests a protective leader who has a course and purpose for his followers. In the marine transport system, a captain of a ship must be one who is tested, trusted, and effective. The captain directs the affairs of a ship, and the lives therein. This means that the profession is a noble one. The president is portrayed in this light because millions of Nigerians depend on his policy formulations and implementations. One wonders why the former president uses this apparently endearing and noble domain to portray the president after he had tongue-lashed him. The reason is unknown. However this essay infers that the former president may be subscribing to the Yoruba adage which says that when a father chastises his son with his right hand, he draws him closer with the left.

Political Insecurity

The writer affirms that insecurity is an effect of combined socio-economic failures on the part of the government. He lists drug,

indoctrination, fundamentalism, hate culture, poverty, unemployment, poor education, and so on, as the culminating causes of Boko Haram. To this end, he says “Nigeria is bleeding...” (8). Bleeding is a state of gradual death if it is not stopped. It occurs as a result of injury or wound. Bleeding could be internal or external. The internal causes emanate from within the body, while the external bleeding is caused by factors outside the body. In the Nigerian socio-political context, bleeding refers to signs of the country’s disintegration caused by the factors listed by the writer. The internal factors are: drug, indoctrination, fundamentalism, hate culture, money laundering, poverty, unemployment, poor education, and revenge. The external factors are: gun trafficking, human trafficking, religion, and international terrorism. That the internal factors are more than the external ones is an attestation to the fact that the root of Nigeria’s problems is majorly within.

The writer further illuminates the issue of insecurity when he describes Boko Haram as a ghost, thus: “...Boko Haram which requires carrot and stick approach to lay its ghost to rest...” (8). In Africa a ghost is the spirit of a deceased who refuses to leave the earth until its causes are appeased. The ghost continues to torment the living until they do its biddings. Could this account for why the Nigerian combined military forces struggle to even track the activities of Boko Haram- because ghosts are untrackable? Could this also account for why Nigerians do not know where the next bomb would land- because ghosts are unpredictable when stirred? However, ghosts naturally are peaceful if uninterrupted. Obasanjo thus describes Boko Haram as a ghost in order to pass across subtle propositions. First of all, the writer reminds President Jonathan that Boko Haram used to be a peaceful organization before one of its leaders was gruesomely murdered by the military. He feels this injustice done to the sect is one of the causes fueling their violent acts. The writer counsels that the president “initiates measures that will bring all hands on deck to deal effectively with this great menace” (8). One of such measures includes addressing the injustice done on the sect. This is the ghost that needs to be laid to

rest. Others are poverty reduction, job creation, and economic enhancement strategies as implied in the letter.

Similarly, the former president describes youth unemployment in the midst of unbridled corruption and obscene ruler's opulence as a ticking bomb (11). A (timed) ticking bomb is a disaster that is waiting to happen. It can be prevented if the time is stopped or reversed. During war or something of its sort, timed bomb is one of the strategies deployed by a soldier camp against its opposition. The unique thing about it is that it is timed, and at the appointed time it is sure to detonate. Likewise in Nigeria, that bomb is youth unemployment. Its time is controlled by corruption and rapacious loot. The implication when it gets to its saturated point, Nigeria will have no choice than to explode into anarchy. What this lexical item, "ticking bomb" does is to strike fear into the heart of the present government warning that if corruption and obscene rulers' opulence continue to prevail, then anarchy is inevitable.

Furthermore, the writer delves into the state of insecurity in the party (PDP). That the president now sacrifices other party members' aspiration for his own, is expressed in the sentence, "... the interests of such party candidates have to be sacrificed on the altar of your personal and political interest" (6). In the religious setting an altar is a place of sacrifice. It is believed to be sacred because of the extraordinary powers it exudes. The effect of this usage in this context is that it carries a spiritual sense and blood-letting exploitation. This further strengthens the allegation that the president has turned the party into a temple where the blood of dreams of other members of PDP is shed to rejuvenate his egocentric ambition. Furthermore, an altar conveys a sense of worship. If there is a worshipper, then there has to be the worshipped. The writer's silence on this aspect tacitly makes it inevitable for the reader to associate evil with the party and its activities.

Deception

This is one of the reflections of corruption. Whenever a corrupt government tries to hide the truth from the people, it resorts to the tool of deception. In the letter, the former president draws President Jonathan's attention to the letter of the Governor of Central Bank on non-remittance of about Seven Billion Dollars from the NNPC to the Central Bank. He raises alarm over the possible denial, bribery, and cover-up of this strong allegation, and describes the politicians involved as "dramatis personae" (11). *Dramatis personae* is diction common with the theatre/drama parlance. It is a term which describes the roles played by actors and actresses in a play. In drama, there is a suspension of disbelief. By this is meant that the audience pretends to believe that the characters on stage are real. Meanwhile they know that there is a difference between the characters and the persons acting the roles. Hence there is a deliberate deception in drama- though drama critics see this as an art. It is this sense of deception that is transferred into the context of the Nigerian politics. Obasanjo sees these politicians who are involved in cover-up, denial, and bribery to carpet the Seven Billion Dollars allegation as actors playing out a script written by an unnamed 'playwright'. The implication is that these actors are not sincere to themselves and the people. They are bent on deceiving the people in as much as it rakes in more petrol-dollars into their pockets.

This domain transfer has a provocative effect on Nigerians. This is because it opens their eyes to the theatrical deception of politicians. Thus, there is a subtle call in the letter for the people to rise and stand against *dramatis personae* in government.

Furthermore, the writer reflects on the deception he has had with the president on a personal level. Prior to President Jonathan's election in 2011, he promises the writer to run for a single term. This prompts Obasanjo to support him wholeheartedly. However recently, the writer observes that there is a divergence between the president's actions and his promise. There are indications that President Jonathan wishes to rerun in 2015. The writer feels deceived, and he upholds that: "if

constitutionally you are on a strong wicket if you so decide, it will be fatally and morally flawed” (5). Wicket is a diction common with Cricket. Thus, the writer transfers the sense of dismissal in the domain of cricket into change of government in the political domain. In Cricket the word ‘wicket’ has several distinct meanings, some of which are:

- a) A set of stumps and bails
- b) The pitch
- c) The dismissal of a batsman

Of the above three meanings, the one which corresponds with the context of Obasanjo’s letter is (c): the dismissal of a batsman. It refers to the event of a batsman getting out. The batsman is said to have lost his wicket. If dismissed by a bowler, the bowler is said to have taken his wicket. In the context of this essay, the Nigerian government is likened to the game of Cricket. In government we have the batsmen and the bowlers. The batsmen are those currently holding on to power, while the bowlers are those fighting tirelessly to capture power. If the incumbents are defeated, they are said to have lost their wicket (power). If the opposition party takes over government, it is said to have taken the incumbent’s wicket (power).

With this domain transfer, Obasanjo subtly threatens the incumbent president of the consequence of renegeing on personal agreement-dethronement, loss of power.

God-Fatherism

God-fatherism in Nigerian politics today has become a bane to development. The writer makes remarks to him being a god-father to contemporary Nigerian politicians who come from PDP. He debunks the notion in some circle that the disaffected Governors and members of PDP are his children. He believes everybody is his children, and those who think otherwise are like a river that has forgotten its source. A river that has forgotten its source will sooner or later run dry. In the same vein, a PDP politician who disregards Obasanjo as his lineage

will lose relevance. Thus, the writer seems to dignify himself as the brain behind the success of PDP politicians. Clark must have interpreted it in this manner to describe Obasanjo as “a mischief maker and an ego maniac who always wants to play to the gallery” (1). Ohia must have also interpreted it likewise when he says the letter contains bizzare confession of the writer’s previous roles in past electoral manipulation. The question now is: does rigging election for one constitute the duty of a god-father to a god-son?

Conclusion

So far, this essay has examined the subject matter (massive corruption) of Obasanjo’s letter to President Jonathan from a pragmatic perspective. It looks at issues of domain transfer in the text, and observes that the writer deploys lexical items from source domain- military, Cricket games, religion, drama, business et cetera to shed light on the so called derailing train of Nigeria’s current political clime. The essay divides this subject matter into three subtopics: tyranny, political deception, and god-fatherism. Finally, the essay concludes that Obasanjo uses transfer of domain to better portray issues of massive corruption (naked grand corruption, unbridled corruption or high corruption) to the president, and to Nigerians at large.

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