

A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF REV. FR. PROF. B.A.C. OBIEFUNA'S "LET'S WALK TOGETHER"

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Abstract

On Tuesday, 30th September, 2014, lecturers of the Faculty of Arts, NnamdiAzikiwe University, Awka voted Rev. Fr. Prof. B.A.C. Obiefuna in as the Dean for a two-year tenure. The speech under analysis is his inaugural address in which he enlightens members of the Faculty Board on his dreams and agenda for the Faculty. The theoretical framework guiding this study is Fairclough's model of Critical Discourse Analysis. Analysis reveals that the Professor tactfully uses language to legitimize proper and acceptable conducts capable of building a united Faculty of Arts while illegitimizing behavior that could provoke further cleavages. Language is a means of regulating human conduct.

Introduction

The administrative head of the university faculty in Nigeria and in many other universities in this part of the world is the dean. The office of the Dean is one of outstanding importance for the proper conduct and management of university affairs. Among its duties are: representing and advocating the interests of the faculty to the university management; being available for consultation and advice to members of the faculty as well as other members of the university community that might need attention; helping to resolve problems that may arise among his subjects; convening all meetings of the faculty and overseeing the works of all faculty committees; taking custody of all faculty records; ensuring peaceful and conducive atmosphere for academic activities in the faculty and advising the university administration on matters concerning the faculty. Consequently, the deanship of the university faculty is the exclusive preserve of professors and accessible through democratic elections.

Leadership at all levels is achieved through the instrumentality of language. "The use of language is a common human privilege, a human right", but this privilege is unevenly distributed among members of society (Mey 2001, p. 293). Since we are studying language in the context of social life, we shall handle it as discourse which according to Fairclough is "a form of social practice" (1989, p. 22). Every society encourages the stratification of people into powerful and less powerful groups. Those in control of power have access to the limited societal resources, including discourse, and use it tactfully to regulate the position of self in relation to others. Through a strategic selection of linguistic items, power elites control the actions of others, and whoever controls peoples' actions controls their minds. This study argues that the Dean's selective linguistic choice masks the ideology, belief, and worldview which underlie his speech and to which he wants his audience to conform. The dominated group, relying on some basic conventions which guide texts and talks in such gatherings in society, subscribe to this ideological workings of discourse unawares. The study targets such covert use of language to control the behavior of others by those in position of power with a view to educating the people on the operations of ideology in discourse.

The analytical model adopted for this study is Fairclough's three stages of Critical Discourse Analysis. It includes description, interpretation and explanation. According to him:

- Description is the stage which is concerned with formal properties of the text.
- Interpretation is concerned with the relationship between text and interaction – with seeing the text as the product of a process of production, and as a resource in the process of interpretation...
- Explanation is concerned with the relationship between interpretation and social context – with the social determination of the processes of production and interpretation, and social effects. (1989, p. 20).

Suffice it to say that description involves text analysis; interpretation involves process analysis, while explanation involves social analysis. Analysis of discourse, therefore, entails the study of the interrelatedness of texts, interaction and contexts.

Language and Control

Power and dominance are implicated in control. Power deals with the control of members of a group over another group based on privileged access to wealth, knowledge, position, income, force, information, authority, discourse, and other scarce societal resources. Such control may impact on the actions and cognition of the less powerful by limiting their freedom from doing certain things and influencing their minds so that they would do the bidding of the powerful. Consenting to this, Van Dijk observes that:

Besides the elementary recourse to force to directly control action (as in police violence against demonstrators, or male violence against women), ‘modern’ and often more effective power is cognitive, and enacted by persuasion, dissimulation or manipulation, among other strategic ways to change the mind of other in one’s own interests (1993, p. 254).

Mind control is, therefore, a function of texts and talks, and does not always mean manipulation. Dominance, on the other hand, may be enacted and perpetuated by the use of everyday text and talk that seem natural and harmless, but in the real sense are taken-for granted commonsensical assumptions on the ideal ways of doing things, and are ideologies. Discursive power abuse has been so naturalized that they are rarely challenged. The power and dominance that breed such power abuse and inequality are usually highly institutionalized, and in many cases “supported and condoned by other group members, sanctioned by the courts, legitimated by laws, enforced by police, and ideologically sustained and reproduced by the media and textbooks” (Van Dijk 1993: 255). This is true considering that the structures and forces of the social institutions in which we operate constrain what we say, how we say them and how others react to them. In the words of McGregor, “our words are politicized, even if we are not aware of it, because they carry the power that reflects the interest of those who speak” (2003, p. 2). Language, therefore, is discourse or action used by members of society bound together in relationships and practices shaped by struggles for power, and the linguistic choices we make are ideologically shaped to reflect such relationships of power. To this effect, the discursive practice that reflects social function is willingly left opaque by the dominant group to the detriment of the dominated and less powerful members of society. “Critical language studies” creates a framework for decreasing the opacity (Fairclough, 1989).

Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a type of discourse analytical research that primarily studies the way social power abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political contexts. It is a research perspective that targets instances of dominance and inequality in texts and talks with a view to exposing covert use of language to the disadvantage of the less powerful members of society. Critical in CDA does not mean critique in the negative sense of it, but fostering in-depth interpretation of texts and talks so as to open up hidden power relations. Such deeper understanding helps to reveal whose interest the text and talk serve. The objective of CDA is to raise consciousness towards ideological workings of language since according to Fairclough “it is the first step towards emancipation” (1989, p. 1). In line with this, (Mey, 2001, p. 310) describes it as ‘liberating’ or ‘emancipatory’. CDA draws attention to power imbalance, non-democratic practices, social inequality, and other injustices with a view to promoting social justice, fairness and social equality. Critical Discourse analysts contend that public communication should not be accepted at its face value, but should be subjected to critical analysis for evidence of ideology. They, therefore, target power elites who enact, reproduce, perpetuate and ignore social inequality, and show solidarity with the less powerful who are the victims of discursive power abuse.

Theoretical Framework

Critical Discourse Analysis is open to different theoretical frameworks, but Fairclough’s three dimensional model of discourse analysis which involves three complex and interrelated relationship between texts, discourse (discursive) practice and social conditions is adopted for this study so as to conduct an in-depth analysis of the text. The relationship is represented in the boxes below:

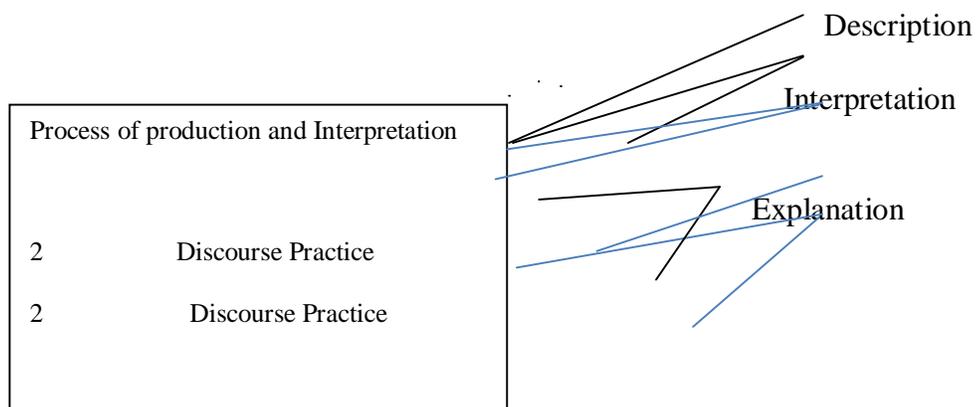


Figure 1. Fairclough’s (1989, 1995) Model for CDA

The text is the product of the process of text production and interpretation. We cannot talk about texts without reference to the past discursive practices in the form of conventions which underlie their production. The discursive practice involves the processes of text production, consumption and interpretation. It deals with the ways in which the text is produced and how these ways affect their consumption and interpretation. These processes vary according to social factors, and are socially constrained in two ways: “by the available ‘member’s resources’ ” and “by the specific nature of the social practice of which they are parts” (Fairclough qtd in Dalley-Trim, 2005, p. 130). By ‘members’ resources’(MR) Fairclough means those socially generated schemas which

reside in the brain and upon which language users draw during the production and interpretation of texts. They include "... their knowledge of language, representation of the natural and social worlds they inhabit, values, beliefs, assumptions and so on" (Fairclough, 1989, p. 24). The last of the dimensions, the social conditions of production and social conditions of interpretations, refers to the social factors that lead to the production of a text and the effect of these factors on its interpretation. It deals with the interrelatedness of discourse, power and ideology. Texts are produced in specific social situation, and the processes of production and interpretation are socially constrained. The interdependence and interaction of Fairclough's model is exemplified by the embedding of the three boxes. This model does not provide a linearly tidy analysis but makes the analyst move forwards and backwards intricately between the different types of analysis. Aghagolzadeh and Bahrami-Khorshid affirm that "it is in the interconnections that the analyst finds the interesting patterns and disjunctions that need to be described, interpreted and explained" (219). Suffice it to say that description involves text analysis; interpretation involves processing analysis, while explanation deals with social analysis. Analysis of discourse, therefore, entails the knowledge of the interrelatedness of text, interactions and contexts.

Let's Walk Together: The Analysis

Before embarking on the analysis of the speech, it has to be contextualized by sketching the socio-political situation of the Faculty at the time of the speech. This may sound like preempting the explanation stage of the analysis, but since the investigator is not restricted as to which stage to begin the analysis, she has chosen to begin from there because of the background information it offers. Meanwhile Fairclough remarks that "it is often helpful to come back to a stage one has already applied in the light of what emerges from applying the other stages" (1989, p. 176). The text of this speech will be unpacked at the descriptive, interpretative and explanatory stages by providing answers to the questions that guide the analysis.

The Socio-Political Background of the Faculty

Since its inception in the 1992/1993 session with a handful of lecturers and less than twenty students, the Faculty has witnessed continuous growth in all ramifications over the years. It now houses ten Departments and over one hundred lecturers. Along the line, the deanship seat became hotly contested. Politics of name-calling, propaganda, abuse, accusations and counter accusations, which mirrors the current political trend in Nigeria, was imported into the academic community. The political enmity persists long after the election and soon created a gulf analogous to that between the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) and the All Progressives Congress (APC) in the Faculty. Lecturers chose which 'party' to belong and which 'political leader' to show loyalty. Disunity, acrimony, hatred, vilification, intolerance, divisiveness, bickering and lack of mutual trust and respect crept in and started ravaging the departments. Efforts made by past Deans to restore peace and mutual understanding in the departments did not yield the desired result, rather cleavages formed in different departments. As the 2014 Deanship Elections in the University was approaching, apprehension began to build in the minds of staff members of the Faculty of Arts on who becomes the next Dean. The Rev Fr. Prof. B.A.C. Obiefuna indicated interest to serve. That closed the whole matter. For once, the Faculty presented one candidate for election and all the lecturers present for the election cast their votes in his favour.

“Let’s Walk Together” is a sermonized speech aimed at reconstructing the social and political map of the Faculty so as to reconstitute a base upon which positive change can be achieved. It is a text of 2151 printed words aimed at talking members of staff into jettisoning conducts capable of breeding disunity, and embracing good morals that will make the Faculty one big united family “of harmony, mutual trust, mutual respect, justice, conviviality, mentoring, socio-infrastructure and academic excellence” (para 2 line 5-6).

Description (Text Analysis)

Question 1: what relational values do textual features have?

Relational values give insights into the social relationships between discourse producers and discourse consumers enacted through the former’s discourse. Clues as to the relationship between the Dean and his “dear colleagues” will be got through the way he represents them, their beliefs, experiences and conducts in his discourse. Such clues are readily provided by pronouns, and choice of words.

a) Pronouns

Pronouns, especially personal pronouns, are capable of creating distance between discourse producers and consumers and the situation, as well as expressing solidarity and unity (Nakaggwe 2012). The way leaders deploy pronouns in their speech determines the effect it will have on the audience.

1. ‘We’ – the professor deploys the inclusive ‘we’ all through the speech to indicate group membership. The *we* gives him the authority to speak for other members of his group as people that are in the same ‘business’ together. The inclusive ‘we’ makes listeners feel they are fully involved in the subject of the speech. Example:

On this note, we are advised to avoid any form of intimidation, disrespect, and witch-hunting of any of member of our family, the noble Faculty of Arts. All we owe ourselves is LOVE. By this we more and more make the terrain on which we work smooth and hence achieve greater results. (Lines 40-44)

This type of ‘we’ is relationally significant since it represents both the speaker and the listeners as people belonging together. ‘We’ is also used inclusively in lines 36, 48, 51, 53, 59, 68-69, 76, 103, and 145. However, it is unclear whether the possessive form of ‘we’, ‘our’, in *To do this, our approach will be selfless and people oriented.* (Line 22) refers to the Dean and all the members of the Faculty Board or the Dean and his administrative team alone.

In line 39, he remarks “*in this way, there is no ‘we’ and ‘they’*” (Line 39). ‘They’ is ideally used to promote otherness – to distance the speaker and his/her in-group from the opposition (the out-group). But in this speech, it is strategically used to make anaphoric reference as exemplified in line 73-75.

And so, they do their best (or should do their best) to avoid negativities in life, hasty conclusions and building of idols in their mind. Where *they* refers to “*members of our noble Faculty*” in the preceding sentence. It is also used in lines 82, 85, 86, 87, 88, 92, 95, and 96 to make anaphoric reference to “*those who operate in adragon-free zone*” in line 81.

2. ‘You’ – leaders use ‘you’ mainly as an indefinite pronoun to refer to people generally as well as present their beliefs and ideas as general, thereby making it hard for them to question or doubt what is said. The use of impersonal ‘you’ is relationally important

because speakers use it to claim solidarity with the audience, hence it is ideological.
Example:

Thomas More admonished me thus: “You must not abandon the ship in a storm because you cannot control the wind”. Rather “you must seek and strive to the best of your power to handle matters tactfully. What you cannot turn to good you must make as little bad as you can”. (Lines 129-132)

Though the Dean initially personalizes the admonition, he tactfully robes in members of the Faculty Board to register solidarity with Thomas More by choosing ‘you’ instead of ‘one’ which would have introduced distance between More and the audience.

- b. **Relational values of vocabulary items** – the Dean tactfully selects lexical items that mark solidarity with his audience rather than deploying words that may alienate them. His choice of words shows his resolve to maintain close relationship with his colleagues despite his position of power. He deliberately and repeatedly refers to the Faculty as a family in lines 10, 21, 28, 29, 40, 64, and 75 with the aim of emphasizing his desire for unity in the Faculty.

*And a peaceful and progressive **family** is my dream for our dear Faculty. (Line 29)*

Also, his speech shows a choice of high percentage of popular words laced with words with usage labels of formal, philosophy, technical and literary in the Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary of Current English. Examples:

wont, inordinate, ruminates, immediacy, negativities, advancement, predicated, covertly, overtly, endowments, elixir, reposed, tripartite, and a few others, all of them relatively familiar to his audience. The total absence of highly formal vocabulary and Latinate words in such a formal speech delivered by a Professor of Religion and Reverend Father is relationally very striking and amounts to ideology.

- c. **The Dean’s Assertion about his “Dear Colleagues”** – the Dean implicitly claims authority as the leader to direct his colleagues on the conducts that must be jettisoned for the dream of a “progressive family” to be realized. He creates the metaphor of “dragons” around such bad conducts which he enumerates as:

suspicion, self –righteousness, pride, selfishness, tale bearing, unfriendly criticisms, rumours, gossips, laziness in research, misinterpretations and misrepresentations, misinformation, inordinate ambition and lack of cooperation in team building and work” (Lines 78 -80)

The dragon is known for its aggressiveness, a feature that does not promote harmonious work environment. Likening the conducts above to dragons portrays their destructive tendencies. Since dragons can only be slain by engaging them in fierce battles, the speaker requests of his audience “*let us slay the dragons in us for a better image and reputation of our noble Faculty. And each of us has one or more dragons to slay*” (Lines 97-98).

Though this display of power is capable of creating a distance between the Dean and his audience, it marks him out as the person with special authority over them. In other words it presents him as the leader. The features analyzed display contrasting features of solidarity and authority which may suggest a new articulation of discourse type.

Question 2: What values do textual features have in terms of the subject position of the producer?

We shall concentrate here on studying the subject position the speaker strives to structure for himself which assigns him the father figure. He assumes the role of a leader determined to enforce discipline on his subjects. Studying the modes and modality as well as his stance as supplied by the text will help us investigate question 2.

The declarative mode is predominant in the text. In this mode, the subject position of the speaker is that of a giver of information, while the addressees' position is that of a receivers of the information. Examples:

Only experts in specific areas of specialization are invited for external examination and not one person for ALL the candidates from all areas of specialization in a particular course of study. (Lines 89-91)

There will be meetings with the non-teaching staff. However, any day we have Faculty Board meeting, both the teaching and non-teaching staff will take lunch together. (Lines 116-118)

In all of these he gives information to his audience whom he assigns the role of listening. He also deploys the imperative mode, mainly requests, which places him in the position of demanding actions from his colleagues, while they themselves are the complaint actors. Examples:

Permit me to extend my earnest appreciation to Prof. C. C. Agbodike and Very Rev. Msgr. Prof. J.P.C. Nzomiwu who came before you and actually saw to the creation of the Faculty of Arts from Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences. (Lines 144-147)

Asymmetries exist between the two modes considered above, placing the Dean in positions of power (giver of informations and demanding for action), and the members of the Faculty Board in subordinate positions (receiver of information and complaint actor to the request of the Dean).

Modality deals with the discourse producer's authority as embedded in the text. Modal verbs are used to convey the addresser's attitudes and judgments (Wang, 2010, p. 259). The speech we are studying shows a deployment of both "relational modality of obligation" and "expressive modality" of categorical truth, possibility, intention, permission (Fairclough, 1989, p. 183). Relational modality is employed by speakers when their aim is to give non-negotiable commands. *Must, should, have to, as well as outright commands* as found in the admonitions of St Paul for cordial relationships in lines 156-160 are used to assert authority over the audience. The use of *must* to convey obligation, for instance, predominates in lines 129-131.

Thomas More admonished me thus "You must not abandon the ship in a storm because you cannot control the wind". Rather "you must seek and strive to the best of your power to handle matters tactfully. What you cannot turn to good you must make as little bad as you can". (Lines 129-132).

The wording of this sentence makes it sound as if the command was coming from somebody else to the Dean while in actual sense he strategically makes it binding on the members of the Board present. To further assert his own personal authority aimed at fostering positive change in the Faculty, he uses the power element soon afterwards:

That is why we must have the good name and reputation of our noble Faculty as we elect the Associate Dean today. (Lines 135-137).

'Should' is also used in line 57, "*meaningful scholarship should be the watchword here*" to show his colleagues that nothing short of this is acceptable.

The categorical nature of these excerpts show members of the Board that they had no choice in these, but to do his bidding.

In other not to sound autocratic, he mitigates the relational modals with expressive modals in the following sentences:

What might NOT be acceptable is to hear that any of us is suspected to maliciously delay seminar or other presentations of candidates, more so, our colleagues. (Lines 53-55)

Might here denote permission.

That would be exclusivist than inclusive. (Lines 39-40)

Would shows probability.

To do this we need to be consciously disposed to mutual communication, self-awareness, self-acceptance... (Line 35-39)

Need denotes necessity.

I will give unflinching support to any Committee that makes effort to attract sponsorship to any of our programmes. (Lines 122-124).

Will shows intention.

These modals lack the force of *must*, *should* and the outright command 'do not'. The sway from authoritative wording to minimizers as found in expressive modality shows inconsistencies from position of power to the use of discretion.

Question 3: what values do textual features have with respect to the subject position of members of the Faculty Board?

Clues to the subject position of the audience are provided by the use of coordinate structures in the text. The Deans construal of his colleagues is summed up in this description:

...suspicion, self-righteousness, pride, selfishness, tale bearing, unfriendly criticisms, rumours, gossips, laziness in research, misinterpretations and mispresentations (sic), misinformation, inordinate ambition and lack of co-operation in team building and work. (Lines 78-80)

These negative and detestable Attributes coordinate with another list of attributes which the dean is desirous of in them:

...harmony, mutual trust, mutual respect, justice, conviviality, mentoring, socio-infrastructure and academic excellence. (Lines 21-22)

The Dean presents similar lists of coordinate structures in lines 36-39 and 40-42. These lists are doing ideological works because the relationship between them is covert, leaving the work of inferring the connection between them to the interpreter.

Question 4: what traces are in the features of the text of struggle between the Dean and conducts of members of the Faculty Board?

Negative and emphatic assertions as well as passive sentences provide evidence of struggle in the text. "Negative assertions evoke and reject corresponding positive assertions in the intertextual context" (Fairclough, 1989, p. 188). Producers use them when the deployment of positive assertion would portray the opposition or offending behavior in positive light. The Dean strategically uses negative sentences because he cannot attribute positive assertions to conducts he is meant to condemn. It is an ideological reformulation that substitutes the opposing wording for the ones that favours the text producer. A number of negative sentences features in this speech, among which is:

What might NOT be acceptable is to hear that any of us is suspected to maliciously delay seminar or other presentations of candidates, more so, our colleagues. (Lines 53-55)

The negative assertion is ideologically used to substitute for the wording that favours the condemnable act of deliberate delay of Post Graduate programmes of colleagues. Meanwhile, the use of the upper case in NOT emphasizes the degree of rejection.

Emphatic sentence: this is the opposite of negation. It helps the producer to reiterate assertions earlier made in the speech. Example:

All we owe ourselves is LOVE.

This sentence sums up all he has said in the whole speech. He reiterates the theme of love which runs through the speech.

Passive sentences: The obfuscation of agency is ideologically motivated in lines 40-42:

On this note we are advised to avoid any form of intimidation, disrespect and witch-hunting of any member of our family, the noble Faculty of Arts

The Dean avoids using the active voice in that sentence to keep his listeners in the dark on who is advising.

Interpretation (Processing Analysis)

Fairclough identifies situational context and intertextual context as central to interpretation. Situational context determines which discourse type is appropriate to draw from in situations of language use. We shall conduct this level of analysis by answering the following questions which relate to the four main dimensions of the situation:

What's going on? This is subdivided into activity, topic and purpose. Activity type is behaviour regulation through speech delivery in an academic institution. The topic is inaugural speech, and the purpose is to unite the Faculty.

Who's involved? It specifies subject positions. In this study, we have speaker and addressee roles. There is no alternation of roles between them because speech delivery is a single term genre. Another relevant aspect of the participants in this speech is that the speaker is a Reverend Father whose target is to preach LOVE to the Faculty members, and the addressees are academics who have different political and social interests that needed to be fulfilled in the new administration.

In what relations? Here, we look at subject positions, more dynamically, in terms of the relationships of power, social distance set up and enacted in the situation. The Dean is the head of a university faculty and as such, primarily a personality with power and authority.

What's the role of language? Language is used instrumentally to regulate the conducts of colleagues in an educational institution. The Dean of a Faculty convinces his colleagues in a public speech to discard unhealthy work habits and develop habits capable of fostering unity and productivity.

Explanation (Social Analysis)

Our assumption here is that any discourse is shaped by institutional and societal power relations enacted and sustained by the workings of ideologies. The educational institution, particularly at the level of administration of a university faculty is enmeshed in power asymmetry, with the dean at the helm. Saddled with the responsibility of building a united Faculty of Art, the Dean

stands on the general acceptance of his sole candidature in the Deanship race as he rightly points to in lines 1-6, to “*build and make one family Faculty of Arts*” (lines 10-11). He articulates the challenges facing him by deploying anaphora in lines 7-15 “*I am intimidated because...*”. Notable among these is “*I am intimidated because in a large group as our Faculty, there is every possible of cleavages, each doing everything possible to get you to their side and in opposition to every other*” (Lines 14-16). His listeners are academics of different ranks, ranging from Professors to graduate assistants, some of whom are deeply involved in the crises ravaging the Faculty, and may wish to convert the new Dean to their sides of the conflicts.

His discourse displays tactful choice of linguistic items through which he tries to suppress the power relations that flow from him to the junior academics, by claiming solidarity along all the ranks. Such show of solidarity is concessional, and underneath the seeming equality which it recreates lies the real inequality of university administration. The power/solidarity mix in the discourse enables the Dean to claim solidarity with his colleagues while asserting his authority mildly by informing them that “*all we owe ourselves is LOVE. By this we more and more make the terrain on which we work smooth and hence achieve greater results*”, which is the target of all human endeavours. Ideology is implicated in this use of discourse to change the conduct of a people from unacceptable and retrogressive ones to acceptable and progressive ones, without formal disciplinary measures in the form of punishments.

At the societal level, he sets off a different social identities for himself and his audience based on the long term power relations within which he operates. As a professor whose social relations with colleagues know no status boundary, and a Reverend father who commends virtues and condemns vices unequivocally in different social and religious gatherings in and around the University, he stealthily directs his colleagues to shun such bad conducts as the ones listed in lines 78 – 80, and other parts of the address as they are capable of jeopardizing the peace and unity of the Faculty. In this discourse, he is ‘the preacher’, while the audience is ‘the congregation’. The effect of the discourse on the audience is positive change for the betterment of the faculty of Art.

Conclusion:

Outright control of people’s conducts is often perceived as an infringement on their freedom and is often resisted. Discourse, through the ideological workings of language, is a safe and effective means to control people’s behavioural pattern without their knowledge. This takes the form of commonsense that certain basic sociolinguistic conventions are obtainable in society and must be obeyed. Most commonsense is ideological and have been institutionalized to serve the power elements in society, to the detriment of the less powerful, and CDA targets such covert use of language with a view to exposing them. The speech we analyzed shows that the Dean of Arts makes a conscious selection of linguistic items that makes him reshape the behavior of his Faculty members to acceptable norms without the use of force or outright autocratic language. Language, therefore, is a means of regulating the behavioural patterns of people.

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