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# Language Use for Sustainable Development in Nigeria: a Systemic Functional Study of President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua's 7-Point Agenda

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#### Abstract

It has become almost the norm with the various successive governments in Nigeria, to launch, at the beginning of their tenures, a policy statement that would act as a guide to the attainment of their promises to the people during political campaigns. The 7- Point Agenda is one of such policy statements meant to impact on Nigeria's quest for sustainable development and its language is considered as a socially oriented discourse strategically performing illocutionary functions intended to meet a target trend. In this regard, its language in this paper is considered as an analyzable text meant to be explored through the eclectic deployment of both the systemic functional approach and the speech-act theory of pragmatics to ascertain its role. The study analyses five

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performative clauses from each of the seven Agenda using the pragmatic markings provided by Searle's categorization of the speech-act and concludes that the performative/illocutionary force of the language used tends to be weak and ineffectual to mediate action on the part of government, therefore, lacks the commitment to initiate action towards addressing the challenges of sustainable development in Nigeria. Appropriate deployment of language resources should therefore, factor into issues of development for growth and advancement in Nigeria.

#### Introduction

The aim of this paper is to present a systemic functional analysis of language use in the text of President Yar'Adua's 7-Point Agenda. The language of the agenda is considered as an analyzable text meant to be explored through the deployment of eclectic theories of pragmatics, namely, the speech act theory and systemic functional linguistics.. This is with a view to ascertaining the role that language could be seen to play in giving expression to the said agenda. Pragmatics, which is the basis of our study, has a great deal to account for in terms of human behavior and language use. Indeed, how language represents the world has long been, and still is, a major concern of philosophers of language including pragmaticians. This is because, as the basic means of communication, it is the belief that without language, no social organization can function properly. Language philosophers like Wittgenstein, (1921) and Austin (1962 Carnap have thought that understanding the structure of language could illuminate the nature of our reality. This belief is further strengthened by the view of Le page (1968:56) who states that "The human specie has survived because of its capacity for inventiveness and its capacity for social organization... both of these capacities depend upon language." (1968:56)

Therefore issues of human development and language use have always received considerable attention by scholars for a very long time. The text of the 7-Point Agenda of the Yar'Adua's administration is considered as one of such issues that bother on language use in social organization and development. For this reason and others, it occupied the front burner of Nigeria's political and economic discourse for a long time. It is said to aim at accelerating economic growth through institutional framework and reforms to make a concrete and visible difference in Nigeria's strive towards national development. A broad summary of the issues the agenda seeks to address through this deliberate policy intervention include (1) Critical Infrastructure,

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(2) the Niger Delta, (3) Food Security, (4) Human Capital Development, (5) Land Tenure Changes and Home Ownership (6) National Security and (7) Wealth Creation. It is the contention of the Yar'Adua's administration that with the successful implementation of these seven key areas of human and infrastructural development, almost all Nigeria's problems of development would be wiped-out and Nigeria will be one of the twenty best developed economies by the year 2020 (Vision 20-20-20).

It is the assumption of this paper that similar programmes might have suffered setbacks in implementation in the past as a result of many factors and linguistic factors could have been one of them. The primary motivation for the study is anchored on the theoretical conviction that language choice and language behavior differ from one another in communicative contexts. According to this conviction, factors responsible for this are enormous but the most commonly cited include choice of code, choice of lexical items and the nature of social setting. Otor, (1999:155). Beyond this, of course, language also lends itself to creative manipulations to capture the changing dynamics of the society and diverse linguistic needs of speakers in different contexts. The study therefore is intended to be an attempt at the explication of the phenomenon of language use in a communicative situation as exemplified by the text of President Yar'Adua's 7-Point Agenda. This is with a view to proffering, from a linguistic point of view, solutions to the onerous challenge of appropriate language use for effective communication on issues of sustainable national development strategies.

#### **Conceptual Framework**

Pragmatics as one of the tripods of semiotics provides the platform for an account of language as a tool in use and the speech-act theory in particular has provided the mappings to explore this account. Austin (1962:69) in one of his articles entitled "How to Do Things with Words" noted that the business of a sentence can only be to 'describe' some state of affairs, or to 'state some fact', which it must do either truly or falsely. Austin reminds us that we perform all sorts of 'speech acts' besides making statements, and that there are other ways for them to go wrong or be 'infelictious' besides not being true. In an attempt to improve on Austin's (1962) efforts, Searle, (1969:71) puts forward a taxonomy of illocutionary acts as 'representatives', 'declaratives', 'directives', 'expressives' and 'commissives' which are not radically different from Austin's. The 'representatives' are speech act whose function is to describe the processes, states, or events in the world, and for

which the speaker is committed to the truth of what he has just said. Examples include an assertion, a claim, a description, a hypothesis, a conclusion, a report, a suggestion, a prediction, etc. On the other hand, 'declaratives' are speech act which immediately changes the state of affairs in the world as soon as the utterance is made, e.g., baptizing, passing sentence, arresting, marrying, etc. while the 'directives' are speech acts which have the function of urging or persuading the addressee to carry out an instruction. This piece of instruction may be in the form of a verbal response or a physical action, e.g., questioning, commanding, requesting, pleading, inviting, etc The 'expressives', however, are speech acts in which the speaker expresses a psychological state (i.e. his feelings and attitudes) towards some state of affairs, e.g., apologizing, congratulating, thanking, appreciating, complaining, condoling, greeting, scolding, etc. On the other hand, the commissives are speech acts which commits the speaker to some future course of action (i.e. to do something in the future), e.g., promising, threatening, offering, guaranteeing, vowing, warning, betting, challenging,

With the above pragmatic mappings in mind, we can now focus our attention on the different types of speech-act identified for our study. It is interesting to point out that scholars in the field of pragmatics seem to disagree on the number of speech act types, (Austin, (1962), Levinson, (1963) and Allan, (1986). The three main types common to most of them, however, are the locutionary acts, the illocutionary acts and the perlocutionary acts. We shall proceed to look closely at each of them.

A locutionary act is the act of saying, producing meaningful sounds, words with certain reference. Locutionary act therefore refers to the formal and literal meaning of an utterance. The study of locutionary act belongs to the domain of descriptive linguistics which comprises phonetics and phonology, lexis, syntax and linguistic semantics. An illocutionary act, on the other hand, can be said to be a non-linguistic act performed through a linguistic or locutionary act. A hearer listening to an utterance made by a speaker perceives him (the speaker) to be doing certain things with the utterance(s). The speaker might be asserting, denying, predicting, confirming, informing the listener of something, questioning, requesting, prohibiting, advising, promising, greeting, apologizing, congratulating, baptizing, sentencing, knighting someone, judging something, commanding, nominating, warning, threatening, condemning, rebuking etc. Hence in making an utterance, a

speaker is seen to have performed an act. This act is an illocutionary act. A force normally accompanies the act, which is also called illocutionary force. Illocutionary acts can be effected through performative sentences, even when they do not contain performative verbs. As for the perlocutionary acts, a distinction is often made in speech act theory between illocutionary force and perlocutionary effect. Illocutionary force is the intended effect that an utterance ought to have on the hearer from the point of view of the speaker. It is the consequence that a speaker would want his utterance to produce on the part of his addressee. He may want his addressee to understand his utterance as a question, a command, a promise, a threat, a warning, an invitation, a request, etc. Therefore, perlocutionary act is the actual influence that the speaker's utterance has upon the beliefs, attitudes, or behavior of the hearer. In other words, utterances must be seen as acts, which perform different tasks in different contexts, based on certain social conditions.

One of the eclectic theoretical models adopted for this paper is the Systemic Functional (SFL) Approach. SFL as a theory stands in sharp contrast to Chomskyan Linguistics, (Lock, 1969). The Chomskyan Linguistics (Transformational Generative Grammar) has been described as rather a restrictive model of linguistic theory, (Butler, 1985). The theory also differs fundamentally from the structural linguistics. For this reason, there has been an increasing interest by linguists recently in a more functional model like the systemic functional model, especially considering its relevance in pragmatics, socio-linguistics, discourse and stylistic analysis. Indeed, pragmatics, which is often considered as the study of language in use, is itself, closely associated with SFL, (O' Donnel, 2007: 178) In fact, the idea of emphasizing language use and function, which is the major pre-occupation of pragmatics was first championed and popularized by SFL. Furthermore, when language is considered as conventional signs composed of arbitrary patterned sounds and assembled according to set rules interacting with the experience of its users, Wittgenstein, (1921) claims we should think of language not primarily as a system of representation but as a vehicle for all sorts of social activity. "Don't ask for the meaning," he admonished, "ask for the use." He further came up with his famous well known slogan "meaning in use" and the insistence that "utterances are only explicable in relation to the activities or language games in which they play a role" Wittgenstein, (1921:155)

Previous studies in the language use in different contexts identified some pragmatic features of texts and discourse types and were in the main influenced by the circumstances and the approaches used by the different scholars. For instance, in an interesting study on media headlines, Chiluwa, (2007) claims that headlines are discourse units that are analyzable as independent texts. News headlines are viewed as performing illocutionary functions as socially oriented discourse and are a critical strategy employed by journalists to denounce social malaise. Also, Agbedo, (2007) in a paper entitled "Pragmatics of 'garrison democrazy' Agbedo, (2007:16) as a metaphor in Nigerian media discourse" focused on the concept of garrison democrazy and its recurrent metaphorical manifestation in media political discourse in relation to the regimented character of the present contemporary democratic dispensation. Both these studies encapsulate attempts at the explication of language use and function in contexts, using different models, other than the one under the present study.

Halliday (1970), Coulthard (1977) and Leech (1993) amongst others, have also in their various studies added their strong voices to the imperative to examine aspects of language as tool in use, rather than as a mere formal systems. Some other studies, example, Dijk, (1992:6), Tannen, (1989), and Coulthard, (1977), have, however, shown that an utterance should not only be characterized in terms of its internal structure and meaning but more importantly, in terms of the act accomplished by producing such an utterance. It is for this reason that Carnap maintains that in "pragmatic investigation, it is an exercise that implies the investigation of language which explicitly involves the user of a language." In addition to this view, Martin (2003:56) distinguishes different kinds of pragmatic relation between a language and its users, viz., those of the acceptance, assertion, utterance, and belief of sentences at a time. Martin (2003) seems to be aware of the crucial role of intentional notions in characterizing pragmatics.

This explains why this paper adopts the speech-act theory in analyzing the use and function of language in the text of President Yar'Adua's 7-Point Agenda. Simply put, the speech act theory often associated with Austin (1962:23) states that while sentences can often be said to report states of affairs, the utterances of some sentences must in specific circumstances be treated as the performance of an act. Such act could be stating a fact, an opinion, confirming or denying something, making a prediction or request, asking a question, issuing an order, giving a permission, a piece of advice, making an offer, promise etc. In this

effort, the analyst seeks to determine the functions which language serves in expressing social relations and personal attitudes which are termed interactional. To this extent, the study intends to establish the appropriate or inappropriate role of the directional deployment of linguistic resources by President Yar'Adua in the 7-Point Agenda.

### Methodology

The primary data for this research is generated from the written text of the 7-Point Agenda. The study samples at least five analyzable texts tagged 'performative clauses' from each of the seven agenda making a total of thirty-five. This number is considered representative enough to enable us to undertake a systemic functional analysis and to subsequently arrive at a conclusion.

#### **Data Presentation, Analysis and Results**

The samples, as stated earlier, are language stretches represented by performative clauses. The study is textually-based, descriptive and involves the use of the pragmatic mappings provided for by the speech act theory guided by the different pragmatic markings provided for by Searle (1969)'s categorization of the speech-act, namely, the assertives, the directives, the commissives, the expressives and the declaratives. These categories are an explication of either direct or indirect illocutions known as performative clauses. The main tools of analysis are the different mappings of presupposition, implicature, and inference.

Under tAgenda 1 tagged 'Critical Infrastructure' as shown in Table 1, where critical issues like electricity, transport, and telecommunications and so on were discussed, it is noted that the two "directives" used are explicit imperatives either asserting or commanding action. The "commissive" used here carries the force of retrospective assertion of fact only and likewise the only "representative" carries a weak locutionary force because of the use of the 'hedge' 'estimated'

Table 2 - The Niger Delta region of Nigeria has of recent witnessed some restiveness including militant activities leading to general insecurity. Perhaps that is why the opening montage of this Agenda, which is the second of the seven, is a strong explicit imperative statement of commitment to a defined action. This commitment is quickly backed by the succeeding 'expressive' statements meant to highlight the plight of the region with regards to the prevailing human, ecological and economic conditions that exist there.

Agenda number 3 tagged 'Food Security' in Table 3 has as its explication the issue of food production and sustainable agricultural practices to ensure food availability to Nigeria's estimated population of about 150 million people. However, there is an explicit expressive admission of the factive preposition that '...the sector has been relegated to official neglect'. In view of this admission, highly embedded 'commissive' statements are closely made to address the issue. It is however noted that most of the commitments made carry weak illocutionary force except where national security is threatened. (Text 14)

Agenda 4 in table 4 is meant to address the problem of human development in terms of capacity building mechanisms to wipe out poverty in Nigeria. The language use in giving expression to the agenda consists in the main tacit expressive statements of facts stating the prevailing social and economic conditions under which Nigerians live. However, through an imbedded conditional statement, the bite of the grim conditions earlier painted is by implicative statements, not going to be left 'unchecked'.

Agenda 5 in Table 5 on Land Tenure perhaps best captures the mood of the entire 7-Point Agenda in terms of the strong commitment to act on the part of President Yar'Adua. The entire language used is imperative, committing the President to 'introduce' 'restructure' 'empower' 'convert' and 'adopt' one strong measure or the other in order to address the problem of land tenure system in the country.

On National Security and Intelligence which Agenda 6 in Table 6 captures, the prevailing illocution is that of explicit directives. This is perhaps due to the presuppositional assumptions that 'criminal records are neither centralized nor computerized', 'police stations have no network computers,' intelligence information not coordinated' and 'forensic laboratories not in existence.' This table carries a higher illocutionary force because of the use of the imperative directives that are almost commands in themselves.

Agenda 7 on Table 7 seeks to address the problem of wealth creation in the country. Through the explicit use of imperative statements, the agenda carries a strong illocutionary force that are' determining' 'creating', 're-orienting', retraining' and 'enhancing', implying that the government is going to 'create more wealth'.

### Concluding

From the foregoing analysis, it can be inferred that the direct performative/ illocutionary force of the language of the Agenda tends to be mainly the 'commissives' and the 'directives' through their act of vowing, pledging, commanding, stating, asserting and promising. It is also found out that there is a relatively small amount of the 'expressives' and the 'representatives' in the direct illocutionary force of affirming, declaring, assenting and notifying. The major illocutionary forces, namely, the 'commissives' and the 'directives which are all intended acts are used to perform various functions as outlined above. The context which is essentially social reflects the yearnings and aspirations of the society and in this case, Nigeria with her seemingly intractable challenges of human and infrastructural development. It can thus be safely inferred that the language used in the 7- Point Agenda satisfies only the textual function of language in a bid to address the challenges that the nation faces in terms of development. It is however noted that in satisfying these functions the language used lacks strong commitments to initiate action towards solving the challenges of development and, as well, offered tepid directives to no one in particular. Perhaps policy statements of this magnitude call for stronger, explicit commitments in order to help realize their objectives.

Finally, the findings of this study have succeeded in shedding more light on the notion of pragmatics as an investigation of the role of language as part of social process. It confirms and contributes to unraveling the communicative potency, as a textual discourse in public domain, of the language of President Yar'Adua's 7-Point Agenda. From the findings, one will wish to recommend that language factors be given due consideration in policy planning and articulation so as to impact well in implementation in Nigeria.

This paper focuses only on the illocutionary acts in the investigation of the contentious issue of language use in policy articulation in Nigeria. Other aspects of the speech-act theory which may require the activation of other competences including the perlocutionary forces are open to further investigations.

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Table 1: Agenda One: Critical Infrastructure

S/N	Performative Text	Marker	Illocution	Presupposition	Implicature	Inference	Language function
1	Power, transportation, the Niger Delta, and national gas distribution grids and telecommunication are <i>recognized</i> by this administration as essential economic infrastructure	'are recognized'	Expressive	Implicit statement suggestive of background knowledge of importance of these infrastructures	A preamble of action to be taken	An expressive undertaking	Expressive imperative foregrounding function
2	In 2000, the Obasanjo administration commenced the implementation of a two-pronged approach to address the problem and causes of inadequate and unreliable power supply	'commenced'	Commissive	Confirmatory statement on subsisting challenge	The challenge subsists	To continue or discontinue the two approaches	Retrospective implicit commitment
3	It is imperative that the issues and challenges that have held back the development of the Nigerian Electricity Supply Industry (NESI) must be decisively addressed.	'decisively addressed'	Directive	Exlicit admission of existing problem	Readiness to address the problem	Pre-emtory admission of past failure	Imperative directive function
4	An estimate of the cost of government efforts in reversing inadequate and unreliable electricity supply in Nigeria between 2000 to date has been estimated at US10 billion by industry experts.	' has been estimated'	Representative	Expression of future commitment to be met	Implicit representation of fact	Use of the hedge 'estimated' weakens commitment	Weak representative function
5	There must be a viable financing plan agreed upon at take off to tackle inadequate generation system.	'agreed upon'	Directive	Previously, no such plan existed	The plan ensures success	A solution is found	Explicit directive

Table 2: Agenda Two: Niger Delta

S/N	Performative Text	Marker	Illocution	Presupposition	Implicature	Inference	Language function
6	This administration will <i>give</i> to the NNDC what the Act prescribes.	' will give'	Commissive	Previously, what the act prescribes not given	Prescribed provisions of act would solve the problem	The act is the solution	Explicit commitment to solve the problem
7	About 73% of the households in the Niger Delta <i>have</i> five or more dependents without jobs	'have'	Expressive	Statistical expression of existing condition	Joblessness is high	Joblessness leads to restlessness	Explicit expressive function
8	The population growth rate in the region is <i>estimated</i> at 3.1 percent.	' is estimated'	Representati ve	Population growth is high	High rate of population growth breeds problems in the region	Population rate must be controlled	Imperative representative
9	Apart from the oil and gas industry, the region has not been able to <i>develop</i> a complementary economic base	' to develop'	Expressive	Oil and gas the only mainstream industry	Other economic activities could solve the region's problems	Expression of intent to encourage diversification of the region's economy	Expressive commitment
10	The region's coastal belt is detached from the rest of the country.	' is detached'	Expressive	Detachment of region contributory to restlessness	Region need be integrated	Integration could curb restlessness	Expressive imperative

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**Table 3: Agenda Three: Food Security** 

S/No	Performative Text	Marker	Illocution	Presupposition	Implicature	Inference	Language function
11	Nigeria's food sector has been relegated to official neglect	' has been relegated'	Expressive	Relegation is official	There is a failure the by govt.	Food sector in jeopardy	Expressive imperative
12	There is need to undergo lengthy process of guarantee and certification before our meat and diary products can be exported to markets abroad.	'to undergo'	Commissive	Meat products presently not exported	Lack of certification is bane of meat products' export	When certified it can be exported	Imbedded commitment
13	Agriculture must address the problems of production, processing, storage, marketing quality, standardization and financing.	' must address'	Commissive	These problems are bedeviling agriculture	Unless addressed the sector will continue to suffer	Tacit admission of failure	Strong imperative commitment
14	national security demands that government must constantly intervene in the sector.	'must constantly intervene'	Commissive	Food sector has security consequences	Neglecting the sector has security implications	Factual statement of security threat	Strong imperative commitment
15	Given sustained and focused investment for the next few years	'given sustained and focussed'	Commissive	Categorical statement of intention	Sector lacked focused and sustained investment	This commitment will enhance production	Weak imperative commitment

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Table 4: Agenda Four: Human Capital Development

S/No	Performative Text	Marker	Illocution	Presupposition	Implicature	Inference	Language function
16	Human development outcomes in Nigeria are poor.	'are poor'	Expressive	Poverty has defied solutions	Poverty has to be addressed	Tacit admission of fact	Expressive function
17	Nigeria has lower average life expectancy	'has lower'	Expressive	Nigerians die younger	Life in Nigeria is shorter	Nigerians hardly live long	Tacit expressive function
18	There are significant inequities in distribution of health and education	' there are'	Expressive	Inequalities exist among the populace	Inequities are human development challenges	Tacit admission of situation	Factual expressive statement
19	Unchecked, this combination is likely to further constrain the country's effort	' to further constrain'	Representative	Issues if left unaddressed will have negative consequences	Conditional implication		Imbedded conditional fact
20	The provision of or social safety nets are core to empowering the population	' are core to empowering'	Commissive	The population now not empowered	If provided, population can be empowered	Provisions should be provided to be empowered	Strong imperative commitment

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Table 5: Agenda Five: Land Tenure

S/No	Performative Text	Marker	Illocution	Presupposition	Implicature	Inference	Language function
21	Government would introduce new certification processes	' would introduce'	Commissive	There is an old process in place	The old process found to be defective	New process replaces the old	Explicit commitment
22	introduce registration for real Estate Developers/Trade association	' to introduce'	Commissive	Estate developers and trade associations not registered before	Registration of estate developers and trade associations important	A new innovative action	Commitment to act
22	Restructure and empower the Federal Housing Authority	'restructure' and 'empower'	Commissive	Federal housing authority is not properly structured and empowered before now	Its restructuring and empowerment considered important	The need to be restructured and empowered imperative	Double Imperative commitment
24	Convert existing NHF and Second Tier Institution (STI) focused on providing liquidity to primary lenders	' to convert'	Commissive	NHF and STI were unconverted before now to provide this service	Conversion of the NHF and STI considered important	Conversion is a new innovation	Strong imperative function
25	Adopt a monetary policy tool	'adopt'	Commissive	No monetary policy tool adopted before	Adoption of policy considered important	Adoption of policy tool innovative	Strong imperative function

Table 6: Agenda Six: National Security and Intelligence

S/No	Performative Text	Marker	Illocution	Presupposition	Implicature	Inference	Language function
26	Criminal records of arrested persons must be centralized and computerized.	' must be centralized and 'computerized'	Directive	Such records are presently neither centralized nor computerized	Arrests have not been well recorded	A move to a well coordinated security system	Explicit directive
27	All Police Stations must be fitted with network computers.	' must be fitted'	Directive	Police stations have no such systems	Security is compromised in the absence of such computers	Such a network will enhance security	Explicit directive
28	Central crime intelligence directorate will focus on pooling together of information	' will focus'	Commissive	Intelligence information not coordinated	Security is compromised in the absence of coordination	Coordinated intelligence gathering important	Imperative commitment
29	Creation of forensic laboratory is required	' is required'	Directive	Forensic laboratory not in existence	Absence of the laboratory is a threat to security	Creation of one will enhance security	Embedded directive
30	Joint Police-Military Operations: the two branches should form a nucleus.	' should form'	Directive	No nucleus of police- military operations exists	Absence of such nucleus is a threat to security	Formation of such a nucleus imperative	Embedded weak directive

**Table 7: Agenda Seven: Wealth Creation** 

S/No	Performative Text	Marker	Illocution	Presupposition	Implicature	Inference	Language function
31	Government is determined to create more wealth	'determined to create'	Commissive	There is wealth but more needs creation	More wealth could be created by government	Determination to create more wealth	Strong commitment
32	Course offerings (sic) in our universities will be re-oriented	'will re- oriented'	Commissive	University courses are considered un-oriented	Re-orientation of university courses will enhance development	Present courses have little impact on development	Imperative commissive function
33	we will retrain our youths in Information Technology, Communication and Financial Skills.	'will retrain'	Commissive	Youth trained before but now require retraining	Previous training considered inadequate	Retraining could enhance human development	Imperative commitment
34	The latent capacity of the poor for entrepreneurship would be significantly enhanced	' would be significantly enhanced'	Commissive	The poor possess latent capacity for entrepreneurship	That enhancing this capacity capable of wealth creation	Wealth would be created if entrepreneurshi p capacity is enhanced	Strong imperative commitment
35	Government should also encourage deposit money banks	'should also encourage'	Directive	'Deposit money banks not encouraged	Lack of deposit money banks is inimical to wealth creation	When these banks are created, wealth will also be created	Weak imperative directives