

**WHEN LANGUAGE MEANS POWER: A SOCIOLINGUISTIC
STUDY OF BILL CLINTON'S *BETWEEN HOPE AND HISTORY:
MEETING AMERICA'S CHALLENGES FOR THE 21ST CENTURY***

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INTRODUCTION

The acknowledgement of language as a medium for acquiring power is integral in all communicative situations aimed at rhetorical or sociolinguistic effectiveness. Every sociolinguistic setting operates with disparate set of linguistic rules in order to maximise power in such instance. Thus, the kernel of this study is to interrogate how power is exerted and couched in political languages or speeches that take as their primacy the social arrangement of the people being addressed. Studies abound regarding sociolinguistic strategies that are employed to gain power through well crafted linguistic pieces that pay attention to target audience's social, political and cultural configurations. The realisation of the significance of language in human society particularly in the political and social facets is crucial in apprehending how to exert or gain power. It is within this mould that Pierre Bourdieu remarks in his stimulating book, *Language and Symbolic Power* that

The political life is ... the site par excellence in which agents seek to form and transform their visions of the world and thereby the world itself: it is the site par excellence in which words are actions and the symbolic character of power is at stake.¹

The significance of language in human articulation of thought process, social construction and power exertion as indicated above is being corroborated in this statement: "language itself provides us with a way of structuring our experience of ourselves and the world"². Although language offers man the opportunity of interpreting the relations of power in the society, as well as making sense of the political world, its provenance is subsumed in the experiences in the social world. To this end, in the sociolinguistic perspective, language is derived from the inner working of the social arrangement.

Books that emphasise ineluctable power gained from using appropriate linguistic tools for effects or power in a sociolinguistic environment include Roger Dawson's *Secrets of Power Persuasion* (1992), *Power and Influence: Mastering the Art of Persuasion* (1991) by Robert L. Dilenschneider, *Communication: Ethical and Moral Issues* (1973) by Lee Thayer and *Language and Power: An Introduction to Institutional Discourse* by Andrea Mayr (2008), among others.

An outstanding feature of Bill Clinton's *Between Hope and History: Meeting America's Challenges for the 21st Century* is its attention to the demand of sociolinguistics, which is amply demonstrated in the book to be an effective method

of achieving political and ideological ends as well as reaching out to the electorate. In the book, Clinton has no choice but to fashion the linguistic elements therein to be able to carry the weighty burden of the American experience, his accomplishments of the past four years in office as the president of the United States of America and a distillation of his “American journey” (as said by one of his biographers: Nigel Hamilton) in the context of how well to move America forward in the comity of nations. In the main, a sociolinguistic study of the book brings to the fore the relevance of social setting regarding choice of language for communicative effectiveness.

Thus, a sociolinguistic analysis of the book anneals the dynamics of Clinton’s first tenure of office as well as his lofty vision and manifestoes for the second term. Call *Between Hope and History* a panoply of President Bill Clinton’s political apparatus, his campaign rhetoric for winning presidential election of 1996 or “a snapshot of President Clinton’s ‘New Democratic’ philosophy as he segues from his first to (he hopes) second term”³, the book trenchantly assays the Clintonian “the age of possibility” rhetoric. Clinton’s “the age of possibility” language is couched in the triumvirate: opportunity, responsibility and community – which are the three main divisions (chapters) of the book. It is on this tripod of political, philosophical and ideological ethos that Clinton’s second term rests; it is on it that part of the political achievements and policies of his first term rest as well. In substantiating this, Clinton makes the same point in his acclaimed autobiography, *My Life* (2005). As Bill Clinton notes,

Between Hope and History... highlighted the policies of my first term through stories of individual Americans who had been positively affected by them, and articulated where I wanted to take our country in the next four years.⁴

Similarly, in her memoir, *Living History* (2003), Hillary Clinton’s statement about *Between Hope and History* corroborates the above statement by Bill Clinton in his own memoir, *My Life*. By extrapolation, the logic of *Between Hope and History* resides not in mere campaign sloganeering, but in a new vision of America nuanced with Bill Clinton’s politico-philosophical paradigm, which rests squarely on the tripod: opportunity, responsibility and community. Accordingly, Hillary Clinton notes that *Between Hope and History* is

about ideas, not slogans and would offer leadership that will restore the American dream, fight for the forgotten middle class, provide more opportunity, demand more responsibility from each of us and create a stronger community in this great country of ours.⁵

The primacy of the social class considered in the above instance is the *raison d’être* for the choice of language used in the book. The sociolect or language used takes into consideration the disappearing middle class, who represents the majority of Americans in dire straits for economic and social restoration on the heels of the realities of small government: government of the rich, by the rich and for the rich. It is therefore in the consideration of what is of utmost importance to the majority of

American people that the language of *Between Hope and History* is forged; the language of the book is not formed in a vacuum.

In addition, the sociolinguistic success of the book is essentially articulated in Clinton's foremost consideration of the calibre and political proclivity of the American citizens (or voting public) within the context of the performance of his near-ending first term with the controversies that plagued it. Through the network of communication premised on the structures of language used that systemically accentuates deeper reflections regarding the truth of the general message of *Between Hope and History* with emotive, political, and ideological bent, Clinton assuages the feelings of Americans concerning some of the failings of his first presidency – and skilfully makes a promise to “reinvent” America. This is largely a rehash of the metaphor of spring that Clinton talks about in his first inaugural address that has effectual powers to force renewal : “a spring reborn in the world’s oldest democracy that brings forth vision and courage to reinvent America” (see Clinton’s first inaugural address).

Many aspects of the book are replete with political conscious adaptations of relevant linguistic properties that have sociolinguistic effects. This is exemplified in the preponderance of situational constrained expressions, sociolects, dictions, referents, signifiers, syntax and other paralinguistic as well as sociolinguistic elements to get at readers/voters. In doing this, Clinton recognises the importance of the social class whom he is dealing with as well as pays keen attention to the performance of his use of words on the political psychology of the target audience. This is achieved through the employment of appropriate sociolect (language) directed towards the political proclivity of the (perceived) voting public; this is also done with the hope of truncating possible victory of the architects of small government: Republicans. Sociolect is a social dialect. It is a dialectal variation necessitated by disparities in the constitution of social classes. The significance of sociolect in identifying the appropriate language used in a given situation has been addressed by linguistic scholars like Eco⁶ and Jakobson⁷. This is crucial hence sociolect largely has to do with group-dependent similarities in language use and application for appropriateness aimed at reaching a particular social group based on the linguistic code used as well as narrative structures employed.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical approach adopted to apprehend the dynamics of Clinton's *Between Hope and History* in relation to how the social tectonics of his audience shapes his use of language is sociolinguistics. Sociolinguistics is a branch of linguistics that considers the effects of society, including context, expectations, norms and mores, on the manner language is used in a particular social setting or environment. In his influential book, *Language and Society* (1984), Downes defines sociolinguistics as “that branch of linguistics which studies just those properties of language and languages which require references to social, including contextual, factors in their explanation.”⁸

Similarly, in the thinking of Florian Coulmas, “the primary concern of sociolinguistic scholarship is to study correlations between language use and social structures.”⁹

The mainstay of sociolinguistics is to locate the effects of society on the use of language. The emphasis here is language and its sociolinguistic use comes to the user from the society. Sociolinguistics borders on the appropriate language or sociolect used in terms of the nature of society being considered at a particular time in which an utterance is being made. Thus, the language of *Between Hope and History* is basically informed by the nature of American voting public. The sociolect adopted in the book is a variable that pays attention to the political psychology of the social class referred to in the book. J. K. Chambers in his *Sociolinguistic Theory* gives credence to the foregoing:

Upon observing variability we seek its social correlates.
What is the purpose of this variation? What do its variants
symbolise? ... [These] are the central questions of
sociolinguistics.¹⁰

THE LANGUAGE OF *BETWEEN HOPE AND HISTORY*: POSSIBILITY, POLITICS, POWER

In his *Introducing Stylistics* (1989), John Haynes states that “whenever we actually speak or write we are affected by social and linguistic conventions and by the expectations of readers or hearers.”¹¹ Thus, in the preface to *Between Hope and History*, Clinton takes cognisance of the visionary failure of the preceding administration; he also comments on the moral, economic, political and leadership deficits of Republicanism, which is enmeshed in trickle down economics that constantly holds the populace down in political calculus. To this end, Clinton makes allusion to the Bible for sense of vision and morality to shepherd Americans out of their economic and political gridlock. Though a paratextual aspect of the book, Clinton’s allusion here is a portal to his “the age of possibility” paradigm, which has the political will to reinvent America. Clinton alludes: “Where there is no vision, the people perish.”¹² From the above allusion, Clinton brings to the fore the importance of context and the people in using a particular language to achieve effects. For semantic anthropologists such as Kay Milton, this is very vital in making effectual statement. For him, “if meaning depends on context then the analyst’s ability to infer meaning depends on his identification of the appropriate context.”¹³

Therefore, by understanding the need for inclusive and populist-oriented government that takes full responsibilities of its citizens against the backdrop of “Reagan Revolution”: the precursor to Bush administration that preaches “less government is almost always better than more of it.”¹⁴ Thus, Clinton’s understanding of the social and political context of that period is needful in making apt statements relevant to the occasion as exemplified in the book.

In shedding light on the responsive and responsible nature of the Democrats especially in the wake of failed healthcare, battered economy and America’s

international relations torn apart by hawkish politics of the Republicans, Clinton brings pointedly the saliences of good governance:

The most fundamental responsibility of any government is to protect the safety of its citizens. All of the other things government does on our behalf amount to very little if it fails in this task.¹⁵

The above finds continuation in the prolegomenon of Clinton's first inaugural address, where he talks about re-inventing America (as indicated earlier) through the refurbishment of America's oldest democracy, renewal and even better government: a sure way of driving the message of responsibility:

Reinvention works. It doesn't shrink the federal government, it changes it. It takes us beyond the stale debate between more government or less government to a government that is smaller *and* better. In so doing, it helps restore America's government to its rightful owners, the American people.¹⁶

The government of "in-between-ness" that is "better" is mainly part of the political success of Clinton-Gore administration. It is a type of government that stands between responsibility and opportunity – the one that brings about community, what Nigel Hamilton calls "society as community",¹⁷ in his *Bill Clinton: an American Journey*. The government that puts the people first is broadly shared in Clinton and Gore's book *Putting People First: How We Can All Change America* (1992). This style of government characterised Tony Blair's one decade of government in Britain. Blair called his the "Third Way", a political philosophy that transcends right-wing and left-wing politics by advocating a combination of both.

In appreciating the perceived response of his readership (voters), Clinton makes concrete steps in the language (sociolect) of the text to draw examples in order to sustain his political manifestoes and to instantiate the achievements of his administration for the past four years. By doing this, he re-echoes the principle of responsibility, a major facet of the book. Clinton makes this attempt in recognition of the puffery and inaction that percolate political sloganeering in projecting electioneering manifestoes:

In the last four years, we have pursued this responsibility in four broad areas: first, strengthening individual and community responsibility through, among other things, welfare reform and crime prevention; second, meeting public responsibilities better by reinventing the federal government; third, encouraging businesses to take more responsibility for the welfare of their workers and their families; fourth, working at all levels of society to address our responsibilities to future generations by improving how we protect our natural environment.¹⁸

Located within the context of power, Clinton in the above statement uses apt language, exemplification, reference and concrete instances to establish the possibility

of his “the age of possibility” political ethos, which can be adduced in his lexical choice as well as clear demonstration of his politico-ideological imperatives. Apart from the fact that the statement reverberates with the major thrusts of the book, it is also a medium of winning the votes of the voting public in the forthcoming presidential election, hence, through his achievements in the first term, there will be possibility of the consolidation of such achievements if elected the second time. Thus, the strength of the language used in the above context is inherited in gaining power for muscling opposition in a given social setting. Fairclough in his *Language and Power* (1991) supports this contention: “power in discourse is to do with powerful participants controlling and constraining the contributions of non-powerful participants.”¹⁹

Furthermore, the language of *Between Hope and History* is imbued with power politics. And the mainstay of this position is the sociolinguistic structure of the target readership. Therefore in achieving power via well forged political statements, language should be considered cardinal as a channel of communication hinged on the objective, political world in question, yet an ever present operative part of the social process.²⁰ It is basically within this sociolinguistic mould that language ensures possibility – a penumbra of Clinton’s “the age of possibility” paradigm.

LANGUAGE AND POWER: CONTEXTUALISING IDEOLOGY AS POWER DISTILLATE

The affinity between power and language is a quotidian constant in the study of power relations. Language is a major vehicle for the transportation of ideological bias as well as power. In *Language, Ideology and Point of View*, Paul Simpson sees ideology as “ways in which what we say and think interacts with society.”²¹ The definition of ideology offered here has strong affinity with the use of language in the context of power acquisition. In *Between Hope and History*, Bill Clinton exemplifies socio-linguistic based words to convey power and ideological equation. Clinton’s appropriate, efficacious and convincing use of words encapsulated in well tailored expressions for political and ideological effects are quite illustrated in the book. As a (political) ideologue, Clinton reasons

That words matter that they have a power that can change men and their worlds, sometimes dropping the scales from their eyes or shackles from their hands. Ideologists believe in the power of the idea as vested in the word.²²

Corroborating this, Clinton believes that men are open to persuasion capable of engendering change of political thought and culture by appealing to their ideals and political affiliation through appropriate language use. This line of thinking is in consonance with J. L Austin’s speech act theory – particularly the “perlocutionary act”, which gauges the psychological consequences of language use. Another aspect of the speech act theory is “Perlocutionary act”, which is the ability of stylistic variation to persuade, convince, enlighten and inspire. The third ensemble of the speech act theory is “locutionary act.” This one has to do with the traditional use of words, which is the surface meaning of statements or utterances.

Thus, appropriate use of language within the right context places premium on sociolinguistic elements capable of provoking the needed effect: this effect amounts to ideological manipulation that foregrounds power. In this connection, Anton Pelinka therefore says that

Language reflects power structures – and language has an impact on power structures. Language can be seen as an indicator of social and therefore political situations – and language can also be seen as a driving force directed at changing politics and society. Language is an in-put as well as an out-put factor of political systems: It influences politics – and is influenced by politics.²³

The language of *Between Hope and History* is largely about discourse of power and ideology couched in the recognition of what word is capable of doing if applied in the right sociolinguistic environment. The major functions of language in the context of how it carries the social constituents of a people will be considered presently.

The manner in which certain values, tradition, beliefs are conditioned through ideology by speakers for power consolidation and acquisition or to what dimension power relations is implicitly expressed as well as how people understand the dynamics of politically charged communication is replicated in the three functions language performs, namely: textual, ideational and interpersonal as considered by Malmkjaer²⁴ and Halliday.²⁵ The ideational, textual and interpersonal functions provide a reflection on contents of speech, social relations and subject positioning. The ideational meaning or function of language provides the propositional content of textual properties employed in a given statement. The textual meaning has to do with the text as message in such utterance, while the interpersonal function or meaning of text deals with the speaker's colouring of the text.

The table below offers a visual illustration of the functions of language discussed within the context above. It is adapted from Fairclough.²⁶

Dimensions of Power Exertion	Language Functions	Structural Effects
Contents	Ideational	Knowledge/Beliefs
Relations	Interpersonal	Social Relations
Subjects	Textual	Social Identities

At this juncture, we shall make an analysis of Bill Clinton's language choice in the book regarding how it suggests power and ideology in the context of the functions of language as expressed in the above graphic representation.

1. Pronominalisation as Aspect of Interpersonal Function

In *Linguistic Processes in Sociocultural Practice* (1990), Kress argues that “the increasing democratisation of... society, that is, a society in which power difference and superiority could no longer be openly asserted”²⁷ has spawned a pattern in which explicit expression of power or ideological bias through *you/thou* has waned considerably. There is a clear demonstration of this sociolinguistic model in the book, where Clinton rather draws attention to the problems of all Americans, not his own problems. This is achieved through pronominalisation. By doing this, Clinton lets the American people realise that the urgency of inclusive governance.

We're taking the same approach in managing the public's natural resources. We're sitting down with landowners in vital wildlife habitats around the country to draw up Habitat Management Plans that protect rare species before they become endangered and protect the landowners from future government constraints. We are using similar techniques for timber, rangeland, and national parks management.²⁸

The use of we in the above quote, includes the speaker (Clinton) into a larger group and it also confers him with some measure of impersonality, anonymity and distancing. Besides, the use of we makes a case for diffusion of responsibility; it passes responsibility concerning protecting America's environment to all and sundry.

Furthermore, Clinton's reference to community – the third part of his commitment to his “the age of possibility” credo is sustained here through the use of we:

We live in and have responsibility to many communities at once. First, our families are perhaps the smallest and most important community in which we live, and meeting our obligation to them has grown steadily... Second, we live in neighbourhood and communities that are increasingly diverse... And we live in a community of nations, a global village in which we have both good and bad neighbours, all of whom we must deal with every day.²⁹

The constant use of “we” in the above snippet captures the concept of pronominalisation, which is a crucial sociolinguistic factor in the book. Also, in another statement, Clinton appropriates this pattern:

[...] when we made the fateful decision to declare our nationhood, when we fought each other in a Civil War to preserve the Union and end slavery, when we renewed our basic principles and values in the face of a new Industrial Age that seemed to throw them into question,

when we fought and helped win two world wars abroad, when we defeated the Great Depression and opened the door to prosperity here at home, and when we struggled against a mighty enemy to contain communism in the Cold War.³⁰

In *Between Hope and History*, there are diverse instances of pronominalisation, which technically make a case for inclusiveness – a sociolinguistic pattern that makes the act of government everybody’s problem. By the recurrent use of this grammatical element, Clinton gets all and sundry involved in the business of governance. It is essentially a method of achieving power; hence, people get enmeshed in Clinton’s political thinking without realising it. This method is an implicit way of exerting power in the minds of readers/voters. In addition, here the people see the question of change, renewal and re-invention that Clinton speaks about as their own issue through the use of the pronoun “we”, a plural nominative case of the pronoun of the first person (“I”). According to David Crystal in *Making Sense of Grammar*, “it is unusual to hear the authorial ‘we’ in speech”,³¹ or statements because it is traditionally stifled by sense of inclusiveness.

2. Nominalisation as Performing Ideational Function

The act of “using language effectively, for effects such as conveying meaning”,³² as well as ideology has largely resulted to syntactic variation aimed at acquiring power. This syntactic variation amounts to nominalisation. Also, this process is also “a matter of expressing and constituting and reproducing social identities and relation, including relations of power.”³³ Nominalisation is in the main a very important linguistic apparatus, which in the thinking of Fairclough has overarching structural consequences, and does unleash an immense ideological opportunities to speaker/listener.³⁴ This is arguably why Huegli and Luebcke see ideology as an inevitable function of thinking, acting, even power³⁵ capable of varying the ways words (nominals) are used. In the following statements by Clinton, we shall examine how he appropriates nominalisation for ideological effects.

Without responsibility, no free society can prosper. In the absence of responsibility, for example, free-market capitalism veers into consumer fraud, insider trading, and abuse of employees. In the absence of responsibility, a mentality of entitlement creates narrow interest group politics, a rhetoric of helplessness, and an inability to serve the larger public interest. In the absence of responsibility, individual liberty is just selfishness....³⁶

In the above statement, it could be gleaned that the nominalised actions are thus presented without any clue of agents; the causes of the actions are absent from the situation being referred to in the statement. This process of nominalisation brings up signification without asserting “whose responsibility”, “whose politics”, and “whose liberty”. Therefore, there is a clear case of the speaker not making conscious effort to attribute any responsibility (not “responsibility” as used in the statement above) directly to himself.

Also, Clinton continues the use of this sociolinguistic technique in another statement: “Our brand of democracy is about individuals and families, business and labour, government and community organisations, all shouldering responsibility....³⁷ By such representation, it is not explicit who actually takes responsibility or makes decision regarding *shouldering responsibility*. This anonymous way of representing “who does an activity” does not make the question of *responsibility* personal. It is in the use of the pronoun *our* that it could be understood that the agent of this statement involves everybody – “all” as seen in the statement. Let us consider another example:

America was built upon a foundation of mutual responsibility. Strengthening that foundation is critical if we want our vision of the twenty-first century to become real. Since so many of the answers to our social problems require people to assert control over their own lives and to assume responsibility for their conduct and their obligations, we have to develop community-based approaches that respond personally to these problems, not impersonally... We must be willing to help people make decisions that are not destructive to them and costly for the rest of us. That is a national responsibility.³⁸

The words “obligations”, “responsibility”, “foundation”, “problems” and “people” are rather confusing regarding agents of the actions. They rather indicate that “responsibility” is essentially a question that every American citizen has an answer to: it is responsibility of the people – not a person, group or sect.

One major effect of nominalisation is that significant aspects of statements are not categorically specified, this is essentially so about matters regarding causality, which largely borders on the act of giving power to execute certain actions or activities to classes of social agents in a given statement.³⁹ Therefore Clinton’s use of nominalisation in *Between Hope and History* is borne out of using language for power and ideological leaning without stating overtly through linguistic elements used the agents of actions carried out. This process of syntactic variation foregrounds subtlety in using language for power.

3. Lexis and Textual Function

The use of appropriate vocabulary in a given sociolinguistic setting or context is an important step in determining the meaning, attributes and value that are attached to a people, and, which therefore impacts on the subject positions being set up. In the statements to be analysed here, there are diverse ideological based lexis that carry different meanings as well as political positions which are coded in vocabularies used. Accordingly, the use of right vocabulary is a form of persuasion that is ideologically motivated. This is even more crucial as we live in the present order that Fairclough calls era of “linguistic turn,”⁴⁰ a period in American history where there is “a pitched battle for the hearts and minds of U.S.”⁴¹ public. The battle referred here is the one aimed at ideological dominance and power acquisition.

Referring to community, in the third segment of *Between Hope and History*, Clinton warns that for the American people to live as a community, they must know that it is a function of responsibility and opportunity. After acknowledging that: “The

most fundamental responsibility of any government is to protect the safety of its citizens,’’⁴² he goes ahead to assert that responsibility is a duty every citizen owes: the government, parents, churches, civil society, among others.⁴³ And in corroborating the opportunities that his administration has made available to the American people, Clinton uses the right vocabulary to articulate a major aspect of the opportunities. This aspect deals with education, a focal point of Clinton’s administration; Clinton sees this area as a driver of other facets of opportunities, especially in the present global economic order: a period Peter Drucker dubs “knowledge worker” era. Clinton states downright that

We have moved into a world where knowledge, which has always been a key to individual opportunity, is now the key to the success of the whole society and is literally the dividing line between those who can continue to do well for a lifetime and those who risk being left behind.⁴⁴

In instantiating this political commitment, Clinton makes reference to one part of his achievements on education as governor of Arkansas, where he created “Education Standard Committee,’’⁴⁵ a reverberation of his Goal 2000: “Educate America Act.”⁴⁶ This strategy is also responsible for Clinton’s establishment of “College Opportunity Strategy’’⁴⁷ as well as his commitment in the feasibility of Pell Grant programme of 1965, which is targeted towards children from poor families. Clinton’s reference to the “GI Bill” (46) in the book as well as his adumbration of his administration’s creation of \$500 national service scholarship for higher school student, his asking the “Congress to pass a tax cut of up to \$10, 000 a year to help families for the cost of all education’’⁴⁸ and his interest to ensure that students in the top 5% of every high school class get \$1,000 demonstrate the use of right lexes (vocabularies) for appropriate effects. In this context, Clinton’s good knowledge of the social set-up of his audience or readership, has given rise to apt lexical structures that foreground “social meanings which reflect the organisation of a society... its relationship with its environment’’⁴⁹ and essentially orchestrates the opportunity deal of his presidency.

Thus, through the right use of lexical elements, Clinton demonstrates that for the American people to harness the promises and opportunities that his presidency offers (or his second presidency would offer), they must be responsible to the building of America which will in the final analysis bring about “interdependence’’⁵⁰ – another term for community. Under this rubric, Clinton invokes the message in Robert Putnam’s *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (2000), which inheres in “networks” – the essence of social capital. More than that, the subject matter of interdependence is surmise in these lines:

Take a penny from your pocket. On one side, next to Lincoln’s portrait, is a single word: “liberty”. On the other side is our national motto. It says *E Pluribus Unum* – “Out of Many, One”. It does not say “Every Man for Himself”. That humble penny is an explicit declaration – one you can carry around in your pocket – that America is about *both* individual liberty and community obligation. These two commitments – to protect personal freedom and seek common ground – are the coin of our

realm, the measure of our worth.⁵¹

Therefore the apposite use of lexical items in a given sociolinguistic environment is very vital in using ideologically oriented language or discourse to distil power. By using lexes that reinforce oneness – ‘community’, Clinton sustains the lexical dimension of the words used in the above quote. The semantics of the above statement sustains the argument regarding using apt lexes in a given sociolinguistic situation.

NEGOTIATING APPEALS/EFFECTS: DICTION AND SYNTAX

Language experts’ attention on discourse and language in recent time is progressively shifting from the traditional preoccupation with the linguistic structure of texts or lexical elements in language to how texts mean in the social process. Thus, knowledge of morphology, syntax, semantics, grammar, phonology and even pragmatics of a text does not essentially amount to understanding of texts. The coherence, rhetoric intent, ideological wavelength and power play that a speaker/author or receptor/hearer brings to the text are vital ingredients in unearthing the (deeper) meanings of texts. In this connection, language is undeniably no longer a mere manifestation of reality or its creation; rather it is integrally involved in the production of reality. From a sociolinguistic viewpoint, language does not exist in a vacuum; it is not a neutral representation of man’s thoughts and actions. Rather, language is a vehicle for carrying speakers’ ideology, power base and interests, even political affiliations.

In depicting ideological leaning, power relations and linguistic effects, language is of utmost importance. Hence, language is a *sin qua non* in negotiating effects, appeals and power in a given sociolinguistic setting. However, in ascertaining the right language to use in a given social environment, Fairclough has identified three basic factors that constrain a speaker or writer to portray reality through language. They include the following: contents of what is said or done; subjects or the ‘subject positions’ people can take; and relations (that is) social relations that people articulate in discourses.⁵² It is in consideration of these factors that the use of language to achieve power as well as to negotiate appropriate appeal comes pointedly.

In negotiating power mediated through discourses that embody sociolinguistic expressions capable of conveying ideological positions or political leanings, the manner of language use is crucial. And the manner of language used in such expressions or texts is a function of the social setting in question. Good and effective communicators, which include Bill Clinton, are constrained in certain situations when they utter sentences or speak in the light of acquiring power. Therefore, virtually all social relations involve a modicum of display of power.⁵³ In consonance with this position, in sociolinguistic environment, ‘all linguistic form is affected by social circumstances.’⁵⁴

DICTION

For stylistic felicity, appropriate use of words couched in texts whose various parts are semantically balanced orchestrates coherence and symmetry. Such textual arrangement calls for appropriate locution or language that has rectilinear relationship

with the subject being discussed. Technically, the use of required diction – choice of words – enhances the sociolect adopted as well as brings to the fore the situational constraints responsible for the textual variation used in such instance.

In considering how apt expressions could galvanise support as well as provoke right political thinking, President Bill Clinton places premium on good language choice (diction) that wrings out the saliency of his politics. His idea here is similar to Edward Sapir's when he reasoned that

Language is not ordinary thought... it powerfully conditions all our thinking about social problems and processes. Human beings do not live in the objective world alone, nor alone in the world of social activity as ordinarily understood, but are very much at the mercy of the particular language which has become the medium of expression for the society.⁵⁵

The significance of apposite words or expressions for communicative effectiveness and sociolinguistic appeals are what the above quote portrays. The sociolinguistic tradition which consigns contradiction resulting from using the same expression for different situations for communicative effectiveness is what Alvin Gouldner dubbed “paradoxical linguistic liberalism.”⁵⁶ In recognising the pitfalls of this sociolinguistic pattern, Clinton uses language nuanced with apt diction that is in congruence with the social condition of his readers or voting public for maximum political ends. In instantiating this, a look at Clintons statement towards the end of the introduction to *Between Hope and History* substantiates this pattern.

In the face of bewildering, intense, sometimes overpowering change, people react differently... And there are those who embrace the future with all its changes and challenges and engage in what Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes once called “*the action and passion*” of our time... F. Scott Fitzgerald, said we grew up “*to find all gods dead, all wars fought, all faith in man shaken*”. In the tradition of Teddy Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson, we embraced a view of ourselves and our democracy that Franklin Roosevelt described as “*built on the unhampered initiative of individual men and women joined together in a common enterprise.*”⁵⁷

Through the use of fitting language choice ground on the anvil of relevant metaphors as well as references, Clintons takes into deep perspective the sociolectal importance of language choice. Thus, by referring to past distinguished American Presidents – even Theodore Roosevelt, who is not a Democrat, Clinton's statement transcends party line as well as adumbrates the realities of his credential regarding contesting for the second term. In another instance, Clinton uses the right diction for effect: “We have been expanding our vision of a ‘united states’ ever since the failure of the Articles of Confederation caused the states to agree on a national Constitution....”⁵⁸ Clinton's use of such phrases like ‘United States’, ‘vision’ and even ‘failure of the Articles of Confederation’ portend his idea about community and “big government”⁵⁹ ideal that is couched in re-inventing “America's oldest

democracy’’ and making the people the reason for governance. To herald this political message, Clinton makes use of right diction that reinforces his political philosophy.

SYNTAX

This is has to do with the rules for sentence building or construction. In contextualising Clinton’s textual relations in *Between Hope and History*, there are clear demonstrations of apt use of words through good syntactic appropriation for appeals – the appeal that plays on the sense of logic, syntax, aesthetics and ideology of the audience/readers or readers. One of such syntactic variation for effects is the employment of anaphora. Anaphora is the deliberate repetition of first word(s) or set of words in a clause, sentence or phrase for syntactic effect that audience naturally see as a function of the logic of speech. In Clinton’s definition of leadership in the introduction of the book, he draws his readers’ attention to the importance of good leadership nuanced with the principle of co-existence and world peace through emphasis that is achieved through anaphora

In our time, for example, leadership means standing with our allies to build peace in Bosnia, even though it places our own soldiers at risk. It means standing behind the forces of good will and peace-making in the Middle East, even after a brave leader like Prime Minister Yitzhark Rabin is assassinated. It means... It means... It means standing up to terrorists and other forces of division and destruction...⁶⁰

In recognition of the fact that Democrats are considered to be weak on political realism, Clinton uses appropriate textual properties to substantiate the fact that his administration will do its best in making the world safe – by being seriously involved in fighting terrorism, though not being hawkish as the Republican would. So the constant repetition of the first two words (phrase) at the beginning of successive clause or sentence illustrates the anaphoric sense of the linguistic properties used for effective sociolinguistic effect. This sociolinguistic consideration is also noticed in another instance, where Clinton constantly uses anaphoric expression: “when we”/ “when we”/ “when we”/ “when we.”⁶¹ Also, constant reference to anaphora is evident here: “the responsibility of ”/ “the responsibility of ”/ “the responsibility of .”⁶² There is also another example of this pattern here: “In the absence of responsibility, for example”/ “In the absence of responsibility, a mentality of entitlement...”/ “In the absence of responsibility, individual liberty is just selfishness...”⁶³ Also, the virtual constant feature of “we live”⁶⁴ in the beginning of every clause on page 119 stresses this linguistic appropriation.

Another syntactic element that Clinton uses profusely in the book is parallelism. It is a linguistic item that ensures that sentences or textual relations are balanced. It also ensures structural similarity of a set of textual properties. In this case, the subject for the verb does not require restatement; rather, textual properties in successive phrases or clauses demonstrate the relational dimension of the words employed as well as their linkages for effects. What this approach does essentially is to light up sense of coherence amongst textual items. Speaking on the achievements of his first term, Clinton uses parallelism to bring to the attention of readers, voters and audience that it was a huge success. The statement is also a pointer to his

responsibility concept – one of the tripartite parts of the book (the rest being opportunity and community).

During the last three and a half years we have taken a number of steps to make college more accessible and affordable for more Americans. We have created a direct loan programme that cuts loan costs and offers students more repayment options... We have tried, every year, to increase the Pell Grant programme for people from working families... we passed national service programme, Americorps, which has given nearly 45,000 young people a chance to work their way through college by serving their country and their community.⁶⁵

By using parallelism in the above excerpt, Clinton undoubtedly orchestrates some of the achievements of his first term. This is done by constant recourse to stylistic balance, which is inherited in coherence and similarity of syntactic units for balance and logic. There is more of this in the book. Commenting on the three-part economic blueprint of his first term – as part of the achievements of that term, Clinton uses parallelism to underwrite these achievements. Let us consider this: “... *Putting our economic house in order, tapping the full potential of global trade, and investing in the capacity of our people.*”⁶⁶ The words in italics depict parallel language enacted for effects.

Another linguistic variable used in the book that puts into perspective the sociolinguistic implication of its use is antithesis. It is a literary device that foregrounds counter-proposition by showing direct contrast to the original proposition. In establishing the opposite idea, Clinton in the statement below brings out by direct contrasts the opportunities that abound in his tenure, but also makes efforts to prove to the voting public (readers) through definition, interpretation and semantics that his presidency is mindful of the challenges which may arise in circumventing these obstacles.

We live in an age of enormous possibility. But it is also a time of difficult transition. As we move from the Industrial Age into the Information Age, from the cold war to the global village, the pace and scope of change is immense... The opportunities this age presents us are extraordinary; more of our children will have the chance to turn their dreams into reality than any previous generation of Americans ever had. But the challenges of this age are also extraordinary and the cost of failing to meet them is high.⁶⁷

Through counter-opposition as could be gleaned from the underlined words above, Clinton distils through antithetical phraseology his brand of presidency, which will consign opportunities in the place of challenges. Furthermore, the antithetical nature of his choice of words which foregrounds contrasts for balance and legitimacy of political statements is also ensconced in this expression, where Clinton presents counter-proposition, capable of invoking his acknowledgement of the need to rise above the contemporary American challenges by providing opportunities. Let us here

him: “Opportunity is only half of America’s basic bargain. The other half is responsibility.”⁶⁸

Allusion is another syntactic element Clinton utilised in the book to instantiate how language is used to negotiate effect/appeals. There is a clear demonstration of this feature in the preface to the book, where he makes allusion to the Bible for political vision and leadership strength: “where there is no vision, the people perish.”⁶⁹ Clinton’s reference to the Bible, which is considered conventionally as a masterwork that illuminates visionary approach to leadership is significant in sociolinguistics. Since Solomon, the writer of Proverbs is universally regarded as an unparalleled success in leadership, using a quote from Proverbs strengthens his argument concerning relevant blueprint for transcending the post-Bush era. Also, what this quote demonstrates is that if Bush administration was visionary, America would not have been embroiled in its present murky politics and asphyxiating economic order.

Clinton’s constant reference or comparison of his government to previous governments that exemplified good leadership gauges the feasibility and vision of his government. Here Clinton cites Martin Luther King Jr. regarding the need for Americans to live together as a community with great social networks: “We must learn to live together as brothers, or we will perish as fools.”⁷⁰ Also, by referring to America’s national motto: *E Pluribus Unum* – “Out of Many, One,”⁷¹ Clinton instantiates the logic of solidarity, which is inhered in community. Similarly, by alluding to Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s assertion regarding this same subject of community, Clinton once again scores political point in the sociolinguistic configuration of the language used. Thus, as Clinton states, Roosevelt sees America’s democratic ideals as being “built on the unhampered initiative of individual men and women joined together in a common enterprise.”⁷² The “common enterprise” referred here is “community”, a part of the triad that characterise the hallmark of *Between Hope and History*.

Conclusion

The preoccupation of this study is predicated upon the relevance of sociolinguistic analysis in comprehending the essence of Bill Clinton’s book, *Between Hope and History: Meeting America’s Challenge in the 21st Century*. It has been argued in this study that such investigation is needful in order to underscore the political, ideological, social and linguistic imports of the book within the context of using appropriate language to serve occasion thereby gaining power. There is no gainsaying the fact that the book through its apt linguistic elements brings pointedly the effects of society on the use of language. Thus, Clinton’s readership or American public is the determinant of the structures of language (words) used in the book.

Endnotes

¹ Bourdieu, Pierre, *Language and symbolic power*, Cambridge, polity press, .26.

² Burr, V, *An introduction to social construction*, London, Routledge, .33.

³ Toner, Robin, Review. *Between Hope and History*, 1996, 1.

- ⁴ Bill Clinton, *My Life*, 1996, 722.
- ⁵ Hilary Clinton, *Living History*, 2003, 102.
- ⁶ Umberto Eco, *A Theory of Linguistics*, Bloomington, Indiana Uni. Press, 1977, 368.
- ⁷ Roman Jakobson, "Linguistics and Poetics", ed. *Language in Literature*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1987, 62-94.
- ⁸ Willimas, Downes, *Language and Society*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1984, 15.
- ⁹ Florian, Coulmas. *The Handbook of Sociolinguistics*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1997, 1.
- ¹⁰ J. K. Chambers, *Sociolinguistic Theory: Linguistic Variation and its Social Significance*, London, Blackwell Publishers, 1995, 203.
- ¹¹ John Haynes, *Introducing Linguistics*, New York, Routledge, 1989. 8.
- ¹² Bill Clinton, *Ibid.*, xi.
- ¹³ Kay, Milton, "Meaning and Context": The Interpretation of Greetings in Kisugu". *Semantic Anthropology*. 2nd ed., David Parkin, New York, Academic Press, 1982, 261.
- ¹⁴ Bill Clinton, *Ibid.*, 89.
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 75.
- ¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 95.
- ¹⁷ Nigel, Hamilton, *Bill Clinton: An American Journey*, London, Century, 2003, 228.
- ¹⁸ Bill Clinton, *Ibid.*, 65.
- ¹⁹ Norman Fairclough, *Language and Power*, New York, 1991, 46.
- ²⁰ K, Malmkjaer, *The Linguistic Encyclopaedia*, ed., London, Routledge, 1991, 89.
- ²¹ Paul, Simpson, *Language, Ideology and Point of View*, London, Routledge, 1993. 5.
- ²² Alvin Gouldner, *The Dialectic of Ideology and Technology*, London, Macmillan Presss, 1977, 27.
- ²³ Ruth, Wodak, "Language and Ideology – Language and Ideology". *Journal of Language and Politics*, 6.1, 2007, 1.
- ²⁴ K, Malmkjaer, *Ibid.*, 161.
- ²⁵ M.A.K Halliday, *Langauage and Society*, London, Continuum, 1975, 17.
- ²⁶ Norman, Fairclough, *Ibid.*, 112.
- ²⁷ G, Kress, *Linguistic Processes in Sociocultural Practice*, London, Oxford Uni. Press, 1990, 60.
- ²⁸ Bill Clinton, *Ibid.*, 108.
- ²⁹ *Ibid.*, 119.
- ³⁰ *Ibid.*, 171.
- ³¹ David, Crystal, *Making Sense of Grammar*, Essex, Person Education, 2004, 249.
- ³² Norman, Fairclough, *Language and Power*, New York, 1991, 237.
- ³³ Irena, Urbanaviciene, "Political Speeches: Exertion of Power through Political Means. *Studies about Languages*, 2004, 59.
- ³⁴ Norman Fairclough, *Ibid.*, 80.
- ³⁵ A, Hueglis and P. Luebecke, eds, *Philosophielexicon*, Reinbeck, Rowohlt, 1991, 282.
- ³⁶ Bill Clinton, *Ibid.*, 36.
- ³⁷ *Ibid.*, 62.
- ³⁸ *Ibid.*, 64-5.
- ³⁹ Irena, Ubernaviciene, "Political Speeches: Exertion of Power through Political Means. *Studies about Languages*, 2004, 55.
- ⁴⁰ Norman, Fairclough, *Language and Power, Language and Power*, New York, 1991.
- ⁴¹ Kopperud, S. "what's Animal Agriculture Doing about Animal Rights? *Agricultural Engineering*. (1993, May), 20
- ⁴² Bill Clinton, 71.
- ⁴³ *Ibid.*, 71.
- ⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 50.
- ⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 41.
- ⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 43.
- ⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 45.
- ⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 47.
- ⁴⁹ R. Fowler, *Linguistic Criticism*, Oxford, Oxford Uni. Press, 1990, P. 147.
- ⁵⁰ Bill Clinton, *Ibid.*, 118.
- ⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 117.
- ⁵² Irena, Ubernaviciene, "Political Speeches: Exertion of Power through Political Means. *Studies about Languages*. 2004, 5, 54.
- ⁵³ G, Kress, *Linguistic Processes in Sociocultural Practice*, London, Oxford Uni. Press, 1.

- ⁵⁴ Fowler, R. *Linguistic Criticism*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1990.
- ⁵⁵ Sapri, Edward, *The status of linguistics as a science, Culture, language and personality*. Berkeley, UCP, 1929.
- ⁵⁶ Gouldner, Alvin, *The Dialectic of Ideology and Technology*, London, Macmillan Press, 1976, p. 52.
- ⁵⁷ Bill Clinton, *Ibid.*, 15-16.
- ⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 88.
- ⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 11.
- ⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 5.
- ⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 171.
- ⁶² *Ibid.*, 71.
- ⁶³ *Ibid.*, 62.
- ⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 119.
- ⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 46.
- ⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 57.
- ⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 10-11.
- ⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 58.
- ⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, X1.
- ⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 133.
- ⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 117.
- ⁷² *Ibid.*, 16.

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