

“I am concerned as a democrat”: Rhetoric, ideology and power in Olusegun Obasanjo’s open letters

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Abstract

Ideology is a critical notion in discourse because language is ideologically driven and discourse does ideological work. Open political correspondence, a genre of political discourse is one of the ways leadership is sensitized to political accountability. Understanding such letters demands investigating the underlying beliefs, knowledge, attitudes, ideologies, values, and social norms that play out in their production. This study is a critical discourse investigation of the rhetoric of Olusegun Obasanjo’s open letters “Before it is too late” and “Points for Concern and Action” to show how ideological meaning and expressions of power are constructed in them. The study reveals that in his bid to speak to the Nigerian leadership, legitimize his position and achieve his persuasive goal, Obasanjo constructed himself as a populist, amplifying the voice of the people through positive self and negative Other representations. The prominent ideological strategies he engaged in his letters, which are deeply rooted in the social structure of the country, are Actor Description, Authorization, Evidentiality, Comparison, Illustration, Implication, Lexicalization, Populism and Metaphorization.

Keywords

ideology; power; open letters; ideological discourse analysis; Obasanjo; socio-political context

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INTRODUCTION

Political resistance comes in different forms and contexts, sometimes from the people against the political actors and sometimes among political actors, especially in the context of power play between those who hold political authority and their opposition. Resistance discourse can be expressed in speeches, literary writing (fiction, drama, poetry), songs, humour, and so forth. While documenting resistance in writing is a common practice for literary critics and protesters, it is now becoming more common among politicians in Nigeria, especially after the return of the country to democracy after several years of military rule. Such writing, which is made accessible to the public through the media, but written specifically to a political actor is generically referred to as an “open letter”. An open letter (OL henceforth) according to *Merriam Webster Dictionary* is “a published letter of protest or appeal usually addressed to an individual but intended for the general public”. It is written usually to protest or give an opinion about something or evaluate and criticize any aspect of the social and political life. OLs have two levels of audience: the explicit audience (persons to whom the letter is actually addressed) and the implicit audience (persons the writer is trying to persuade). OL is gradually becoming the preferred means of contesting power by politicians in Nigeria. While Nigerian politicians still believe in the power of speech as a means of expressing political resistance, the deliberate shift to and popularization of open letters as the means of expressing deep apprehensions and concerns about social issues and opening up discussions about issues of contention is worth researching. The use of OLs as a means of social protest against the government in power in Nigeria is popularized by the former President of the country, Olusegun Obasanjo.

Obasanjo is known to have made a number of controversial utterances in the past, and such expressions have been studied by scholars to bring out legitimization strategies as well as the construction of power and ideologies in them (Ayoola 2005; Adetunji 2006; Taiwo 2008). Based on existing studies on OLs by Olusegun Obasanjo, the main purpose of an OL is to typically inform and evaluate the various socio-political policies, programmes and actions of political actors and socio-political institutions in a society as well as to offer practical solutions or valuable recommendations where necessary (Igwebuiké and Kamalu 2015; Aikoriogíe and Ugwu 2014). Within Nigeria’s context, political actors or other members of the public mostly use OLs to direct attention of the people to certain issues the writers considered significant, especially by the subject the letter is addressed to. However, really underlying such letter is the issue of power relations among socio-political actors.

The diverse issues raised in OLs usually attract comments from different groups of people within and outside the country, most especially those who have some stakes in the issues raised. Since political discourse is always about the prevailing socio-political issues, they are not devoid of the expression of the ideological leaning of the writer. Like any other political discourse, politicians’ multiple ideologies are enacted, through OLs. Political discourse like OLs arise in the context of conflicts of interest, struggles for dominance and assertion of power by individuals or groups (Chilton 2004, 8). Olusegun Obasanjo popularizes this form of political correspondence in order to achieve his self-proclaimed political objective of being “a concerned democrat”, as claimed in one of his letters. In a letter written to him by his daughter, a former Senator in Nigeria, Iyabo Obasanjo, she acknowledges the fact that his father popularises the trend of OLs among politicians in the country (Obasanjo-Bello 2013).

Due to its nature, research on OLs in Nigeria have been dominated by linguists and social scientists (Fasua 2013; Ohia 2014; Aikoriogíe and Ugwu 2014; Ekhareafor and Ambrose 2015; Makinde 2016; Igwebuiké and Kamalu 2015; Oghogho and Alhaji 2016; Anaedozie 2016; Omilusi 2018; Fawunmi 2020). These studies have observed that most OLs in the country are geared towards expressing concerns about the state of the nation and in the process, they have polarized the nation along the line of those who support or oppose the views expressed in them.

Identifying the typologies of OLs, Fawunmi (2020, 9) classified them based on the Flow of Communication (FoC). In his classification, he identifies Horizontal flow (OLs between political actors), Vertical (which could either be top-bottom, e.g. OL from a member of the public to a political actor or from a political leader to the people); Diagonal, like an OL written by an activist to a group; Familial, which is an OL within a family and Global – OL addressed to all and sundry. The FoC is illustrated in Table 1:

Table 1. Flow of communication (FoC) in open letters

Horizontal Context	Vertical Context		Diagonal Context	Familial Context	Global Context
	Downward	Upward			
An OL written by a political actor to another; for instance, OLs written by Olusegun Obasanjo to Goodluck Jonathan and Muhammadu Buhari	An OL written by a political actor to a group or members of a socio-political institution or general public	An OL written by a member of the public to any political actor	An OL written by an activist or union leaders of a particular group	An OL written by a family member; for instance, Iyabo Obasanjo's letter to Olusegun Obasanjo, her father	An OL written to all and sundry; for instance, an OL written to Nigerians

Despite the fact that OLs are usually addressed to specific individuals or groups, they deal with issues of public interest and this is why they are made open to the public in order to garner public support on the issues raised. Once an OL gets to the public space, it is received with mixed feelings and reactions, which could be coloured by ethnic, religious and other sentiments.

Existing studies in stylistics, discourse analysis and pragmatics have extensively investigated political speeches, such as independence and democracy day speeches, campaign speeches, manifestos and so on. While studies on OLs are still unfolding, there is the need to examine how the discourse reflects the social structure in the society as well as the ideological leaning of the authors. This study focuses on the horizontal context of political communication by conducting an ideological discourse analysis of two OLs written by Olusegun Obasanjo, one to Goodluck Jonathan and the other to Muhammadu Buhari with a view to identifying and analysing prominent ideological discourse features in them. The letters: "Before it is too late" and "Points for Concern and Actions" were investigated with a view to showing how they instantiate power relations among political actors within Nigeria's socio-political context and express ideologies of the writer.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The term "ideological discourse" was coined by van Dijk in order to show how politics, discourse and ideology are related (Dijk 2006). He argues that if the political field is thoroughly ideological, then so are its political practices, and hence its discourses. Aptly, discourses make ideologies observable in the sense that it is only in discourse they are overtly conveyed and formulated. Thus, it is mainly "through discourse that political ideologies are acquired, expressed, learned, propagated, and contested" (Dijk 2006, 732). This is why van Dijk (2006) argues that political discourse is not only defined in terms of political discourse structures but also in terms of political contexts. Context includes participants in the communication. So, the relationships between the participants are examined through their discourses which are largely influenced by underlying ideologies. These underlying ideologies are what constitute van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach to Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA henceforth), which is the focus of this study.

Power and ideology are two critical elements in human society and are either intrinsically or extrinsically motivated. Certainly, they are either directly or indirectly the epicentre of contemporary research works on social issues. Given the fact that the duo is like Siamese twins, ideology expands and thrives through power. The questions that readily come to mind are: what are the general notions about ideology and power; how does ideology thrive in the context of power, and what effect do discursive formations have on ideology and power and vice versa.

The study of ideology originally conceived to be a study of ideas was invented by a French philosopher Destutt de Tracy about 200 years ago and it was negatively labelled by philosophers and political thinkers such as Marx and Engels who described it as “false consciousness” (Dijk 2006, 728). So, the concept bears this negative inscription within the realm of politics and social sciences throughout the 20th c. With development in research, scholars assert that ideology is not always negative, which means it could also be positive. Thus, within the field of CDA, ideology can be described as a distinct form of social perception or cognition shared by social groups which shape the core of social representations and practices of members including their discourses (Dijk 1993, 1998, 2001 a, 2006). Since language is ideological, the discourses of group members function as the means of ideological creation, recreation and challenge.

For ideology to unfold, power becomes a useful object. This assertion is summarized by Vadai (2016, 4) who claims that “ideology unfurls in discourse and strongly relies on power”. Power generally is usually described as the ability of an individual to use force or sanction to compel obedience. As good as this definition is, it does not capture the concept of social power which is our focus in this study. So, power will be defined in terms of social power and not personal or individual. From that general definition, it is evident that power aims at these three things in order of ascension – control, domination and hegemony. Thus, social power, according to van Dijk (1993), refers to the advantaged access to knowledge and other socially invaluable resources such as wealth, income, status, and group membership. Van Dijk (2016) further argues that control may be that of cognition or action. He implies that a group which has enormous power could influence the minds of others or may restrict their liberty of actions. Undoubtedly, in the field of CDA, power and ideology are crucial within the human social structure and adequately exploited in the understanding of the discursive choices deployed by social actors to perceive and construe realities. In literature, scholars have investigated discursive and rhetorical signals of ideology and power within diverse societal domains. Within the domain of politics, Taiwo (2009) observes that Obasanjo uses metaphors to project himself as a kingmaker and to legitimize his party’s influence over the public. Taiwo (*ibid*) also notes that in a bid for Obasanjo to demean the other contesting party, he uses lexis that denote criminality, such as *rogue*, *spoilers*, *criminals* and so on to describe his opponents and his group members, thereby establishing an ideological polarization.

The media is a discursive space for constructing ideology and power. Scholars have demonstrated how media contents are constructed for this purpose (Taiwo 2007; Hassan 2018). Taiwo (2007) investigates how editors deploy linguistic items in newspaper headlines to portray ideologies and power relations that exist in the Nigerian society. The study shows that editors of newspapers engage discursive forms in newspaper headlines and imbue them with hidden ideological meanings in order to initiate, sustain discourse and shape the views of the readers on national issues. In another study, Taiwo (2011) shows how ideology and power play out in local and Western media reportage of Nigerian news. The study corroborates how the use of linguistic elements, such as thematization, construction of major actors and foregrounding portray power and ideology as well as project an imbalance in news reportage.

In a study that straddles political and media discourse, Ademilokun & Taiwo (2013) examine the discursive strategies in Nigerian newspaper campaign advertisements for the 2011 elections. Their results show that the advertisements engaged metaphorization of party symbols, use of deictic

pronouns for discursive inclusion and exclusion, deployment of rhetorical questions for persuasion, identification with the youth culture; allusions to historical issues and negative other representation. In order to persuade the readers, the advertisements engaged specific information packaging and graphological foregrounding, as well as the use of imagery, repetition and lexical choice for legitimization and delegitimization in the discourse. In the same vein, Ayoola (2011) engages an identical study like that of Taiwo (2007). He examines how language has been used to present ideological contradictions in Niger-Delta discourse in some Nigerian national newspapers. He finds that journalists and media houses showcase the binary ideological oppositions that exist in Niger-Delta discourse. The studies of Taiwo (2007) and Ayoola (2011) are similar and have consistent findings with Ayoola (2010) and Taiwo (2011). However, they differ in their data. While Taiwo (2007) uses newspaper headlines, Ayoola (2011) uses newspaper reportage. From the two studies, it can be inferred that power relation is a complex phenomenon as power relations exist between the media and the people; the government and the media, and amidst members of media houses.

Oji (2018) explores the cognitive models of ideological expressions of host and participants in Nigerian Television Talk Show (henceforth TTS) in Silverbird Television (STV) and African Independent Television (AIT) with a view to seeing how they construct their general knowledge. The study uses van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach to CDA. The study observes that no neutral ideologies exist on Nigerian TTSs because both the host and the participants usually strive to make their points from different ideological standpoints.

Power and ideology also exist in the domain of religion. Al-Haq and Qura'an's (2014) study shows how CDA can be used to explain the ideological tenets of Islam in Prophet Mohammad's use of persuasive strategies in His letters. The authors assert that *words* not *swords* are powerful tools to expand Islam and its views. The study notes that the letters exhibit the power and justice in Islam, and also discovers that power relations are between God and Prophet Mohammad; Prophet Mohammad and the rulers, and the rulers and the Muslims. Furthermore, in Rizwan's (2011) study, she investigates the features of *majilis-e-Hussain*, that is the speech that celebrates the martyrdom of Prophet Mohammad's grandson, Hussain. The study explores how linguistic features portray power relations and ideologies in the speech. It is discovered that through the use of imperative and interrogative sentences, there exist power relations between the *majilis* reciter and the listeners. Since the reciter is accorded with power to lead the gathering, it behooves on the people to obey adequately.

In an educational domain, Kamalu and Tamunobelega (2014) examine the ideological contents in David Oyedepo's address to Vice Chancellors of universities in a conference which was held in June 2011 at Covenant University, Canaan Land, Ota, Nigeria. The researchers use a discourse-stylistic approach in investigating the ideologies and rhetorical strategies deployed in the speech. The lexical items and rhetorical strategies employed in the address presented Oyedepo as a revolutionary leader whose ideological leanings clearly advocate for social change through resistance to internal amnesia and domination of foreign ideologies in the African social setting.

Since literary works are reflections of social realities and the authors' presentations of ideas in literary works are the sum total of their experiences in their world, scholars have also paid attention to ideological meaning in literary works. From the literary perspective, Ohwojevwe and Aribisala (2018) investigate ideology and form in Okey Ndibe's *Arrow of Rain* using the theoretical orientation of new historicism. The study finds that the text is an allegorical representation of social and political injustice and disorder such as rape, repression, oppression, inhumanity and so on that exist in Nigeria during the military rule and the existing social imbalances in contemporary era.

Olaniyan and Oyewo (2019) in another study explore the aesthetic deployment of political satire and ideology in Soyinka's *A Play of Giants*. The study concentrates on the authorial and aesthetic ideologies used in the text. The study shows that Soyinka deploys literary devices such as burlesque and grotesque to depict the absurdity, ineffectiveness and ineptness of African cruel and tyrannical

rulers. Soyinka's satirical grotesque depictions of African leaders portray them as mystical, violent and thuggish, and cannibalistic. These depictions are projected through the characters in the play.

From the foregoing, it is evident that ideology and power relations are inevitable in different social domains, such as politics, religion, the media and literature. However, the focus of this present study is the construction of ideology and power in a kind of political discourse – OLs, written by the former President of Nigeria, Olusegun Obasanjo.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

The study uses a descriptive and qualitative approach. It describes the ideological features used in the OLs of President Olusegun Obasanjo and how these features were deployed to instantiate power relations among the political actors within Nigeria's socio-political context. The primary source comprised two selected OLs by Olusegun Obasanjo titled "Before it is too late" (7,121 words) retrieved from *Premium Times* online archives¹ and "Points for Concern and Action" (4,110 words) retrieved from *The Guardian* online archives². "Before It is Too Late" was written on 13th December, 2013 to Goodluck Jonathan, while "Points for Concern and Action" was written on 18th January, 2019 to Muhammadu Buhari. These letters were chosen because they were written at different political dispensations in Nigeria to address diverse issues of social and political concerns in the country. The analysis was guided by van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach to CDA.

The socio-cognitive approach to CDA is one of the mainstream approaches that extends the study of discourse beyond the classical investigation of the structural properties of text and talks by relating these structures to the social structure. The approach fills the crucial socio-cognitive dimension of critical analysis of discourse based on shared common ground, social knowledge, attitudes and ideologies of language users. It takes keen interest in examining the cognitive processes, influences and mental representations that mediate between discourse structures and social interaction as well as social structures. It is based on the fact that text and talk can only be explained on the basis of people's interpretation of the social environments where they occur (Dijk 2008, 2009). In a nutshell, van Dijk summarises the socio-cognitive approach thus:

...language is a social phenomenon as it implicates power abuse and inequality between social actors and groups; it is a cognitive phenomenon which intends to control and affect the participants' minds, and it is a discursive-semiotic phenomenon which is exercised via spoken (talk), written (text) and visual messages. (Dijk 2001b, 2006, 361)

This approach is essential for understanding the message in the selected OLs because these messages are rooted in the socially shared underlying cognition within which the writer, Olusegun Obasanjo operates. In addition, discourses in political fields as well as political practices are understood from the perspectives the ideologies expressed, propagated and contested through them. This buttresses the understanding of the focus of this study on the discursive ideologies in the letters being analysed.

1 <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/opinion/151348-records-late-olusegun-obasanjo.html>

2 <https://guardian.ng/features/for-the-record/full-text-of-points-for-concern-and-action-by-obasanjo/>

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section identifies the recurrent ideological principles in the letters based on van Dijk's (2001b) categories of ideological Discourse Analysis. Thus, a close reading of the letters helps to identify the prominent ideological components and interpret them within the socio-political context of Nigeria. For easy reference to the text, Obasanjo's letter to Goodluck Jonathan "Before it is too late" is tagged OLJ, while his letter to Muhammadu Buhari "Points for Concern and Action" is tagged OLB. In each extract, the paragraph in which it is taken is indicated with "P".

The two letters going by their titles suggest that the state of the nation during the period they were written was not good and could be worse if appropriate steps were not taken to redeem the situation. The letters border on the performances of the two Presidents and Obasanjo's perception of such performances and their non-eligibility in the nearest political dispensations to continue in the office of presidents. In the letters, Obasanjo presented himself as a concerned and responsible democrat, loyal party member, patriot, nationalist and realist, whose overall concern is the national interest. In the following sections, we will present how Obasanjo expresses his ideologies as well as construct political power.

Actor Description

The representation of political actors is a prominent feature of the letters. This is tagged Actor Description by van Dijk (Dijk 2006, 735). Actor Description reveals how social or political actors or agents are described either negatively or positively in a discourse. Usually, the members of the writer's/speaker's group are portrayed positively while those of the other group are negatively represented. This is sometimes achieved through categorization. Through his argumentation in the letters, Olusegun Obasanjo portrays himself as a democrat, patriot and nationalist. He presents arguments that explain his thoughts and declarations and advance the social acceptance of his concerns.

- OLB1 (P1) *I am concerned as a democrat who believes that with faithful and diligent practice of democracy, we can get over most of our political problems and move steadfastly and surefootedly on the course of stability, unity of purpose, socio-economic growth and progress for all.*
- OLJ1 (P8) *With common identity as Nigerians, there is more that binds us than separates us. I am a Nigerian, born a Yoruba man, and I am proud of both identities as they are for me complementary.*

In these extracts, he made clear what underlies his concern and motivates his writing of the letters – patriotism and nationalism. Writing from the angle of a retired soldier, former military head of state and former civilian president of the nation, he is proud of these identities, which portray him as a person positively disposed to actualizing the Nigerian dream and legitimizing his position through self-praise and self-identification as source of authority, reason, vision and sanity (Chilton 2014, 47).

- OLJ2 (P3) *On two occasions, I have had opportunity to work for my successors to the government of Nigeria. On both occasions, I never took the easy and distabilising route of ethnic, regional or religious consideration, rather I took the enduring route of national, uniting and stabilising route.*

OLB2 (P27) *While Nigeria must appreciate Buhari for the little he has done and allow him to depart for home in peace if he allows free, fair, peaceful and credible elections, we must also tell ourselves that Nigeria deserves better at this point in time than what Buhari is capable of offering. History will note that he has been there. Nigeria now needs a man with better physical and mental soundness, with an active mind and intellect.*

In OLJ2, Obasanjo engaged in self-praise which promotes his positive self as one who plays a vital role in ensuring the emergence of his successors without destabilizing the country. His overt assertion and call on Nigerians in OLB2 is hinged on cognition and moral acceptability by himself and the group of Nigerians he claims to represent, which gives him a better understanding of the political terrain and events.

On the other hand, Obasanjo delegitimizes the two presidents he addressed in the letters by emphasizing what he considered negative about their acts which motivated him to write the letters.

OLJ3 (P14) *Maybe you also need to know that many party members feel disappointed in the double game you were alleged to play in support of party gubernatorial candidates in some States where you surreptitiously supported non-PDP candidates against PDP candidates in exchange for promise or act of those non-PDP Governors supporting you for your election in the past or for the one that you are yet to formally declare.*

OLB3 (P8) *It is no use, at this juncture, to keep lamenting about the failure, incompetence, divisiveness, nepotism, encouragement and condonation of corruption by Buhari administration as there is neither redeeming feature nor personality to salvage the situation within that hierarchy.*

Actor description in the extract above hinges on delegitimization of Jonathan and Buhari respectively through negative other representation. Obasanjo attacks the moral characters of these leaders by accusing them of engaging in double-dealing (OLJ3), incompetence, divisiveness, favouritism and corruption (OLB3).

Obasanjo's use of patriotic **we** also helps him to identify Nigerians with his thinking, presenting them as stakeholders the Nigerian dream and a people he could work with to sustain democratic ideals in the country.

OLB4 (P5) *This is a time for vigilance to fight to safeguard our votes and defend our democracy. The price of liberty and sustenance of our democracy is eternal vigilance and appropriate reaction to ward off iniquities. **We** must all be ready to pay that price and not relying on hollow words of callousness.*

OLJ4 (30) ***We** must all remember that corruption, inequity and injustice breed poverty, unemployment, conflict, violence and wittingly or unwittingly create terrorists because the opulence of the governor can only lead to the leanness of the governed.*

The use of *we* in the extracts above is a deliberate political strategy for obtaining people's support or acceptance of the challenge to defend democracy and oppose all forms of social vices that could deprive them of the dividends of democracy.

Authorisation/Evidentiality

In an attempt to establish an argument, speakers and writers recourse to moral leaders, classical quotes, organisations, scholars, constitutions, and so on. Usually, the authorities are beyond party politics. Authorization brings in voices of authority to show that the arguments advanced are supported by experts who also think the same.

OLJ5 *Thomas Paine said “my country is the world”; for me, my country I hold dear.*
(P7)

OLJ6 *Chinua Achebe said, “One of the truest test of integrity is its blunt refusal to be*
(P13) *compromised.” It is a lesson for all leaders including you and me.*

OLB5 *If you cannot change your mind, you cannot change anything is the assertion of*
(P16) *George Bernard Shaw.*

Quoting established authorities, such as philosophers and literary writers as done above is a way of validating claims. Thomas Paine’s quotation above is a paraphrase of the saying popularly ascribed to the English-American writer, political activist and philosopher “the world is my country, all mankind are my brethren, and to do good is my religion.” Obasanjo employed it to portray his loyalty and patriotism to Nigeria. The other two quotations were drawn from well-known literary writers, Nigerian novelist, Chinua Achebe and British playwright and activist George Bernard Shaw. To drive home the point on integrity in leadership, Achebe’s saying is used. The quotation of George Bernard Shaw is part of a larger expression by the author “Progress is impossible without change; and those who cannot change their minds cannot change anything.” The goal of using this quotation is to corroborate Buba Galadima’s claim about Buhari’s inflexibility, thereby legitimizing Obasanjo’s position about Buhari’s obstinacy.

Related in a way to authorization is evidentiality, which is a confirmation of epistemicity of the writer’s evaluation, judgement and degree of commitment to the truth value of a piece of information. It points at the kind of evidence at the writer’s disposal. The letters made explicit references to authorities and assert claims with evidence. Obasanjo drew from first-hand and reported knowledge of other political actors to support some of his assertions. In order to support his source of knowledge in the discourse, Obasanjo reports the opinions of two major political actors on issues he himself has condemned in the letter.

OLB6 *Bode George put it bluntly in his statement of December 3, 2018 when he said:*
(P16) *“The other day, the Vice-President of Nigeria, Professor Yemi Osinbajo – a learned man, an enlightened person in all parameters – was seen at various markets in Lagos State and Abuja distributing N10,000 each to market women. What an absurdity!”*

OLB7 *Buba Galadima, who knows Buhari very well as a confidant and National*
(P16) *Secretary of Congress for Progressive Change, CPC, the Buhari’s party before it joined in forming All Progressives Congress, APC, has warned us this time around that no matter what he promises, he cannot change his character and attitude. He describes him as inflexible, insincere, dubious, intolerant, never accepts responsibility when things go wrong and impervious to reason and advice for change.*

Chief Bode George is one of the key leaders of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), the opposition party. He, prior to the period the letter to Buhari was written, had condemned the federal government's loan programme targeted specifically at petty traders and artisans to empower them in their businesses. The scheme had attracted severe criticisms from the opposition because of its execution at a time very close to the general elections. Obasanjo only joined other critics to question the appropriateness of the programme thereby amplify their opposition to it. This is also a means of discrediting the propaganda of the ruling party in which the Vice President physically gave out monies to traders at open markets in Lagos, the commercial hub and Abuja the capital of Nigeria. On the other hand, reference to Buba Galadima, who was a very close friend and associate of Buhari before they parted ways due to political differences, is a very strong means of corroborating Obasanjo's claims about Buhari hardliner and despotic nature. Quoting these political actors is a deliberate means of negatively constructing Buhari and his government and appealing to the reader's emotion.

Another strategy for establishing authorisation and evidentiality is through the use of adages and proverbs, some of English origin and others of Yoruba origin translated into English. Proverbs, which often demonstrate fundamental polysituativity, polyfunctionality, and polysemanticity, are repositories of the people's collective socio-cultural wisdom and analytic tools of thought. Despite the fact that proverbs are originally aspects of oral arts, they sometimes feature in written documents

OLJ7 *The Yoruba adage says, "The man with whose head the coconut is broken may
(P25) not live to savour the taste of the succulent fruit."*

OLB8 *To be forewarned is to be forearmed. A battle long forewarned does not embroil
(P5) the cripple nor catch him unawares. A word is sufficient for the wise.*

The two proverbs above are meant to be warnings to the two leaders about the likely consequences of electoral incredibility and insecurity that characterised the periods in which the letters were written. Obasanjo cashed on the moralistic, evaluative, and argumentative values of proverbs to strengthen, legitimize and further his position of the source of reason and sanity.

Comparison

This is a strategy used to compare in-groups and out-groups. Usually, the in-groups are compared positively while the out-groups are compared negatively as evident in the following extracts:

OLJ8 *Don't always consider critics on national issues as enemies... You must also
(P34) differentiate between malevolent, mischievous and objective criticism. Analyses, criticisms and commentaries on government actions and policies are sinew of democracy... Please, Mr. President, be very wary of assistants, aides and collaborators who look for enemies for you. I have seen them with you and some were around me when I was in your position. I knew how not to allow them create enemies for me. If you allow them, everybody except them will be your enemy. They are more dangerous than identified adversaries. May God save leaders from sycophants.*

Obasanjo constructs himself as a member of the critical group whose ultimate goals are patriotism and nationalism and compares them with Jonathan's aides whom he describes as sycophants. This creation of two sides of an event in which he and Jonathan's critics belong to the 'us-group' and Jonathan and his aides belong to the 'them-group', is a legitimisation strategy in which

Obasanjo presents his group as the patriots and nationalists, whose criticisms are meant to guide the president in his attempt at nation building.

In addition to positive-self and negative-other descriptions, Obasanjo validates his positions by constantly alluding to and drawing comparisons between the Abacha era and the period in which he wrote his letters, thereby resonating in readers cognitive structures that have been naturalized through time in their psyche, and which they all socially share (Reyes 2011).

OLB9 (P24) *Today, another Abacha Era is here. The security institutions are being misused to fight all critics and opponents of Buhari and to derail our fledgling democracy. EFCC, Police and Code of Conduct Tribunal are also being equally misused to deal with those Buhari sees as enemies for criticising him or as those who may not do his bidding in manipulating election results.*

OLJ9 (P1) *I could sense a semblance between the situation that we are gradually getting into and the situation we fell into as a nation during the Abacha era.*

Allusions to the Abacha Era has the tendency of stimulating certain emotions, such as anger, fear, sense of insecurity, which characterised the period of the late military dictator, Sani Abacha. The era of Sani Abacha would always bring about the memories of all the negative and anti-democratic acts of the late despotic ruler. Here, we can see a legitimization process that projects the future according to the possible actions taken in the present. In addition, Obasanjo's comparison of the regimes of Jonathan and Buhari to Abacha is an attempt to use the emotion of fear to legitimize his concerns about the state of the nation. In another section of his letter, in his bid to evoke the mental response of fear from Nigerians, Obasanjo hinted at the plans of Buhari on the elections that was forthcoming then.

OLB10(P21) *The current plan is to drape the pre-determined results with a toga of credibility. It is also planned that violence of unimaginable proportion will be unleashed in high voting population areas across the country to precipitate re-run elections and where he will be returned duly elected after concentration of security officials as it happened in Osun State.*

The mention of "violence of unimaginable proportion" has the tendency of evoking nuances in the readers which are linked with previous experiences. Nigerians have memories of the dastard effects of electoral violence, it exists in their collective memory and shared experience and they would not want to witness such again. Therefore, reference to electoral violence, even when they are yet to physically manifest, could be explored for manipulative purposes as it is the case here.

Examples/Illustrations

In his bid to defend his arguments, Obasanjo supports his assertions with examples and illustrations for persuasive purpose. Such illustrations come in form of a short story, figures and statistics and so on. Such examples or illustrations are drawn from socio-political and economic activities in the country that could serve as support for the argument being advanced in the message, thereby serving persuasive purpose.

OLJ10 (P14) *It happened in Lagos in 2011 when Bola Tinubu was nocturnally brought to Abuja to strike a deal for support for your personal election at great price materially and in the fortune of PDP gubernatorial candidate.*

OLJ11 (P31) *The serious and strong allegation of non-remittance of about \$7bn from the NNPC to central bank occurring from export of some 300,000 barrels per day, amounting to \$900 million a month, to be refined and with refined products of only \$400m returned and Atlantic Oil loading about 130,000 barrels sold by Shell and managed on behalf of NPDC with no sale proceeds paid into NPDC account is incredible. The allegation was buttressed by the letter of the Governor of Central Bank of Nigeria to you on non-remittance to the Central Bank.*

Obasanjo, in trying to corroborate Jonathan's anti-party activities, gives a concrete example of his fraternity with Bola Tinubu, an opposition leader, in order to gain his support for election. He also supplied figures to support the allegation. These illustrations are delegitimization strategies devised to attack the moral character of Goodluck Jonathan and thereby construct him as an unpatriotic leader of his party as well as a corrupt leader.

Furthermore, as earlier shown in OLB7, Obasanjo supports his claim about Buhari's unlawful strategy towards the winning of 2019 Presidential General Election with Bode George's comments on what he termed illegal distribution of ten thousand Naira by the Vice President Yemi Osinbajo. This illustration is geared towards negative presentation of Buhari and Osinbajo, his Vice President, in order to discredit them before the electorates. Obasanjo in the letter engages illustrations to further support, justify and advance his positions in the correspondences.

Implication

In a discourse, speakers or writers share similar understanding of the subject matter. This may affect their choice of words. Most expressions, therefore, remain implicit and such implied ideas can be deciphered by the recipients based on mutual and shared knowledge. This shared knowledge often constructs the mental models of events or actions. As evident in the letters, the following extracts are instances of implication:

OLB11 (P5) *Some men of God would hold President Buhari to his word on free, fair, credible and peaceful elections. I am a realist and I reiterate that I go by track record. Therefore, I am not persuaded by a track record of hollow words, impunity, insensitivity and 'I-couldn't-careless' attitude, or by the sanctimonious claims of any candidate and his campaign staff. I will only believe what I see.*

OLJ12 (P42) *Saying that I recommended a wanted criminal by UK and USA authorities to you or your aides to supplant legitimately elected PDP leader in South-West is not only unwise and crude but also disingenuous. Nobody in his or her right senses will believe such a story and surely nobody in Ogun State or South-West zone will believe such nonsense.*

In the extracts above, Obasanjo conceals meaning which could be deduced through shared knowledge of information. In OLB11, a conclusion can be drawn about Obasanjo's denigration of Buhari as a leader he cannot trust due to his attitude and track record. By extension, he is indirectly sensitizing Nigerians to the kind of leader he perceived Buhari to be and what their attitudes should be to his person and government.

Obasanjo in OLJ12 made an allegation against Jonathan about the lies he purportedly told about him. While he is careful not to mention any name in the allegation, he gives enough information and

clue to anyone who is familiar with politics in the country to identify the “wanted criminal by UK and USA authorities”. Readers can draw inference from his reference to Ogun State in the southwestern part of the country and identify the “wanted criminal” he is referring to.

Lexicalization

According to van Dijk (1998), lexicalization is the major dimension of (ideologically controlled) discourse meaning because opinions may be conventionalized and codified in lexicon. This is an ideological strategy that portrays views, opinions, feelings of speakers or writers about actors using specific lexical items. The choice of certain lexical items gives clue to the ideology of the text producer and the overall goal of such ideological strategy is the representation of Others. Below are some lexical items used in the letters that have significant ideological meaning and their referents.

Lexicon	Referents
<i>executive recklessness</i> (OLB:P8)	The Vice-President’s distribution of money to petty traders and artisans
<i>idiotic programme</i> (OLB:P9)	Trader moni: the federal government’s economic empowerment programme for artisans and petty traders
<i>Buhari’s apologists</i> (OLB:P14)	0
<i>Mad desperation</i> (OLB:P18)	Buhari’s bid to silence his opponents
<i>“It is my turn and I can do what I like” attitude</i> (OLB:P28)	Buhari’s perceived attitude of impunity
<i>paymaster</i> (OLJ:P6)	Jonathan as the one who determines what happens in his party
<i>possessed as ... an Ijaw man</i> (OLJ:P24)	Jonathan’s nepotistic attitude
<i>satanic officials</i> (OLJ:P33)	0

The choice of lexicon in the letters, which could be seen as intentional, is directly targeted at either discrediting the persons of Jonathan, Buhari, their associates or any act they have been involved with the goal of delegitimizing them as leaders. These lexicon – *recklessness, idiotic, apologist, mad, desperation, satanic*, which are mostly negative in meaning, are chosen as face-threatening acts and to negatively construct the persons of Goodluck Jonathan and Muhammadu Buhari. They express negative evaluations of the targets’ positive face as they throw up issues such as dishonesty, recklessness, desperation, nepotism, selfishness, and impunity, which are condemnable acts in leadership.

Populism

This ideological strategy is used to claim that the “people” are or “everybody” is in support of one’s argument. It is a strategy that is targeted at appealing to the people by pitching them against the elites and rulers. In his bid to achieve his persuasive goal, Obasanjo put together in his letters issues that he knows the generality of Nigerians would condemn in the leaders he addressed his letters to, one of such being corruption and high-handedness in leadership.

OLJ13 (P42) *Putting a certified unashamed criminal wanted abroad to face justice and who has greatly contributed to corruption within the judiciary on a high profile of politics as you and your aides have done with the man you enthrone as PDP Zonal leader in the South-West is the height of disservice to this country politically and height of insult to the people of South-West in general and members of PDP in that zone in particular.*

OLB12 (P5) *This is a time for vigilance to fight to safeguard our votes and defend our democracy. The price of liberty and sustenance of our democracy is eternal vigilance and appropriate reaction to ward off iniquities. We must all be ready to pay that price and not relying on hollow words of callousness.*

OLB13 (P26) *This is a tough time for almost all Nigerians in different respects, but the people's will shall triumph. All people who have registered to vote with their PVCs must never allow anybody or anything to deny or deprive them of the right of performing their fundamental civic duty of voting and sustaining democracy.*

Populism is a strategy of using popular opinions of people as a basis for justifying one's view in a discourse. Populism gives reliability to one's argument and may also weaken the out-groups who perceive they are not supported by the people. Populism thrives through identification with the people and focusing on those things that matter most to them. For instance, bringing forth political issues that he considered to be of disservice and insulting to the people seems to have put Obasanjo on the same page with the people on their view about leaders.

In the letters, Obasanjo sometimes expresses the extreme view of inciting the people to act to defend themselves against the corrupt leaders as can be seen in OLB12, where the people are challenged to be vigilant and "fight" in order to defend and sustain democracy in the country. He sees through the lens of the common man and describes the period as "a tough time". He also encourages every Nigerian who has registered to exercise their voting rights. His use of inclusive expressions is to evoke a sense of rapport with Nigerians and encourage group actions against the leaders.

Metaphors

Metaphor as Lakoff & Johnson (1980) observe, is a feature of most of our ordinary daily conceptual system. Metaphors signal the language user's cognitive understanding of a concept in relation with another and it signifies how we think and perceive things. Metaphors enable us to move from the physical and literal to the abstract domain, an act which requires sophisticated associative cognitive skills in Obasanjo's letters. One major issue stressed in the letters is the failure of leadership to deliver the dividends of democracy. In constructing this failure Obasanjo construes a country whose democracy is about "derailing" (OLB14) and one that is "bleeding" (OLJ14).

OLB14 (P5) *The **derailment** of Nigerian democracy will be a monumental disaster.*

OLJ14 (P23) *Nigeria is **bleeding** and the **hemorrhage** must be stopped.*

These conceptual constructions are significant for Obasanjo's socio-political diagnostic critique and mental representation of leadership failure in Nigeria. Derailment draws on the cognitive

conception of a train coming off the track, thereby causing a disaster for the passengers. It indicates a dislocation of the wheels propelling the country's democracy from the principles of ideal democratic practices. Metaphors of derailment and haemorrhage which signify warning are meant to drive home a major issue of concern – the impending failure of the Nigerian democracy under these two rulers. In the light of positive construction of himself, Obasanjo described himself as a “good father”

OLJ15 (P45) *But like a good father, all I seek is peaceful and amicable solution that will reunite the family for victory and progress of the family and the nation and nothing else.*

He conceives the failure of his party, PDP as the failure of the nation and the victory of the party as a victory and progress for Nigeria. The cognitive mapping of fatherhood with his image is quite significant here because he takes on the crucial responsibility of ensuring peace within the family, thereby legitimizing himself as the custodian of the power to negotiate the common good of the entire nation.

In order to understand discursive forms used in any political discourse, there must always be a recourse to the social representations, such as beliefs, attitudes and cultural common grounds that are expressed through them. In the two letters of Obasanjo analysed in this study, he constructs himself as a populist and identifies with the common people and became their voice amplifying their concerns, such as accountability, free elections and responsible governance. In order to do this, he had to engage in legitimizing his position through positive self-construction and delegitimise the leaders he wrote through negative Other construction.

CONCLUSION

This study has demonstrated an understanding of how ideological meaning is constructed in open correspondences, especially in the context of conflict and resistance in a bid to sustain power among the political class in Nigeria. Obasanjo's OLs, just like several other forms of political discourse are replete with ideological meaning arising from the shared understanding of the socio-political structures of the context in which the letters were produced. Obasanjo engages his values, norms, beliefs and experiences as a political figure to discursively construct himself, his addressees and other Nigerians and legitimize the position he advances in the letters. The primary ideological strategies he engaged in his letters, which are deeply rooted in the socio-cognitive system of the country, are: Actor Description, Authorization, Evidentiality, Comparison, Illustration, Implication, Lexicalization, Populism and Metaphorization.

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