

‘Verbal Carpentry’ As Language of Political Corruption in Nigeria

Chris Uchenna Agbedo

Department of Linguistics, Igbo & Other Nigerian Languages, University of Nigeria Nsukka Nigeria

Abstract: *This paper examines the ingenious ways Nigerians use the English language with less integrity and in so doing, abuse the power of language, and consequently enthrone corruption through deception, manipulation, judgmental accusations, and lying. The grave implications, which this practised state art of what can be described as “verbal carpentry” portend for good governance in Nigeria and Africa by extension call for a radical departure from this depraved communication system. To give the power of the English language its rightful place in Nigeria, the political leaders should strive to use and appreciate the power of language with integrity, teach the power of articulate speech that captures the intensity of our feelings, without using it as a weapon of mass deception, and abhor the abuse of this power that violates and insults the sensibilities of the people.*

Keywords: *corruption, Nigeria, language, verbal carpentry*

I. Introduction

A wealth of terms, both technical and every day, are carefully defined and argued over in the design of information systems. When they are used in live systems to explain what is happening in the organization they colonize the understanding of members and define the terms of debate (Bloomfield, Coombs, and Owen, 2006). The foregoing illustrates the power that language has. Of course, it is simply emphasizing the obvious to posit that language is a facilitator of the flow of *power*. It is a substrate that links people, and allows them to coordinate and construct *systems*, ideas based on groups rather than individuals. Every word in a language is a "term". Every word has both meaning and assumption. A language has society and emotion in its very essence. It evolves as a people evolve. To understand a language, then, is to live within it and its culture. It is little wonder then that the deliberate ingenious use of *language* as a technology for shaping people is becoming fashionable in contemporary times. Many are quite aware already that when you want to control people's thoughts, influencing the use of words towards your own persuasion is one of the most powerful techniques. By subtly biasing the way people think, it is possible to get people to do things they wouldn't otherwise allow. Today, there is clear evidence of renewed predilection of politicians for a kind of linguistic gobbledygook, a convoluted verbal carpentry intended to bamboozle, mesmerize, hoodwink and coo those who are pathologically susceptible to such manipulations, at the heavy cost of telling the truth and good governance. One of the worst aspects of our discourse these days is how rarely our political language is used to express honest and clear thought (G. Orwell in Ed, 2004). Although G. Orwell heaps the blame partly on the school system, which tends to reward the complexity of thought and the use of obscure words, the real problem with our political discourse these days, in his opinion, is the purposeful use of words to lie and mislead. In one of his essays, George Orwell, continues Ed, noted that the tendency to use unclear language can be a flaw found in any political persuasion. But the real danger according to Orwell comes when people purposely pervert language, because their goal is to mislead people and deny them the ability to make decisions based on accurate information.

In Nigeria, the deliberate perversion of the English language for achieving the twin goals of deception and corruption has become a hallowed statecraft, which tends to grip a typical Nigerian political leader with irresistible allurements. When such superficially harmless words and phrases as ‘misapplication’, ‘misappropriation’, ‘presidential retreat’, ‘capacity building workshop’, ‘presidential task force’, ‘presidential steering committee’, ‘presidential intervention fund’, ‘restoration of Abuja master plan’, ‘rule of law’, ‘due process’, ‘vision 20...’, ‘privatization’, ‘concession’, ‘import waiver,’ ‘soft landing’ etc. shoot from the lips of a typical Nigerian public officer, it is most likely that he/she hardly reckons with the minimum content of such words beyond the attractive prospects of deploying them for perpetrating varying degrees of malfeasance. In this depraved art of verbal carpentry, the typical Nigerian public office holder looks up to the roadside carpenter for inspiration. Taking a cue from the uncanny dexterity, with which the carpenter hews out planks, cuts and joins pieces of wood to knock up a ‘woman bench’, the political office holder engages in the mechanical concatenation of sonorous lexical items to produce catchy phrases bereft of any significant relevance to good governance except for the regular Turn Around Maintenance of the machine of corruption. If he is not making a requisition of hundreds of millions of Naira or Dollars for a ‘retreat’ on ‘capacity building’ for his horde of Senior Special Assistants to be held in one of the most expensive five star hotels in the world, he is busy

mortgaging and signing away the collective future of Nigeria under the hypocrisy of 'concession' agreement. Such has been the pervasive and ubiquitous nature of the mischievous hobgoblin called corruption that Nigerian wordsmiths have taken to punning as a literary pastime. Such words referring the three arms of government (where political corruption seems most pronounced) as *executive legislature judiciary* have now become 'executhieves' 'legislooting' 'judisharing', perhaps to underscore the interlocking nexus where political corruption is conveniently incubated and consummated.

Perhaps, the deliberate use of deceptive language to mislead people and possibly perpetrate corrupt practices is not altogether new or peculiar to the Nigerian situation. In this depraved art of statutory deception, language often provides a handy potent tool. In USA for instance, the top strategists of the right-wing have used deceptive language in their pursuit of power for several decades. They have spent much money and energy putting together think tanks and focus groups to find ways to "sell" their message. And for years they have used language to demonize Democrats as a way to gain control of the government. Newt Gingrich even produced a booklet that recommended words to use when describing Republicans (strong, moral, citizen, protector) and how to describe their opponents (Gingrich, 1996). In his 1996 GOPAC memo, entitled 'Language: A Key Mechanism of Control,' Newt Gingrich counsels the Republicans in the following words: "As you know, one of the key points in the GOPAC tapes is that 'language matters.' In the video, 'We are a Majority,' Language is listed as a key mechanism of control used by a majority party..."

After 9/11, the right-wing radicals gloated that they had won the battle for the hearts and minds of the American public. Rather than wallowing in self-delusion that their ideology was so compelling that the majority of Americans would be won to their side without lies, there is consensus among the right-wing radicals that it is okay to lie to people because the ends justify the means. Gingrich further avers that the fire of Leo Strauss' theoretical construct, which posits that only a select few, could really understand the truth and that it is necessary to deceive the public, has not only influenced many radical conservatives in the United States, but also caught on with the proponents of abortion agenda. Deceptive and confusing language is being used to disguise the abortion-advocacy agenda.

The realities of governance in contemporary Nigeria suggest that Leo Strauss' theoretical construct has equally gripped the ruling elite with irresistible fingers of excitement, as they daily perfect the art of using imprecise and deceitful language to disguise real policies of government and perpetrate corruption. The grave implications of this depraved communication system for governance in Nigeria form the thrust of analysis in this paper.

II. Framework

Using a language as a primary means of communicating our thoughts is so natural for normal human beings that it is often too difficult to realize what in the real sense the functions of language are. Due to their diversity, the functions of language might be divided into two categories: micro functions, which refer to specific individual uses, and macro functions, which serve more overall aims, (Wisniewski, 2007). The micro functions of language range from physiological, phatic, reasoning, identifying, recording, pleasure, to communicating. Macro functions, on the other hand, include ideational, interpersonal, poetic, textual, among others. The well-known model of the functions of language introduced by the Russian-American linguist, R. Jakobson distinguishes six elements, or factors of communication, that are necessary for communication to occur: (1) context, (2) addresser (sender), (3) addressee (receiver), (4) contact, (5) common code and (6) message. Each factor is the focal point of a relation, or function that operates between the message and the factor. The functions are the following, in order: (1) referential, (2) emotive, (3) conative, (4) phatic, (5) metalingual, and (6) poetic (Jakobson, R. 1960). When we analyze the functions of language for a given unit (such as a word, a text or an image), we specify to which class or type it belongs (e.g., a textual or pictorial genre), which functions are present/absent, and the characteristics of the functions, including the hierarchical relations and any other relations that may operate between them. Following Jakobson, any act of verbal communication is composed of six elements, or factors (the terms of the model): (1) a context (the co-text, that is, the other verbal signs in the same message, and the world in which the message takes place), (2) an addresser (a sender, or enunciator), (3) an addressee (a receiver, or enunciatee), (4) a contact between an addresser and addressee, (5) a common code and (6) a message. Each factor is the focal point of an oriented relation, or function that operates between the message and the factor. This, in turn, yields six functions aforementioned.

In a proper analysis, it is important to start by determining whether each of the functions of language is present or absent. In theory, each factor is necessary to communication, although this does not necessarily mean that each function is always present. The assumption is that while one or more – or even all – of the functions of language may be absent in short units (such as an isolated sign), lengthy units can activate all of them. Where more than one function is present, it becomes possible to establish either: (1) a simple hierarchy, by identifying the dominant function and not ranking the other functions, or (2) a complex hierarchy, by specifying the degree of presence of some or all of the functions. In terms of establishing the functional hierarchy, various criteria can

be used. For example, R. Arcand and N. Bourbeau use an intention-based criterion. The dominant function is the one that answers the question, "With what intention was this message transmitted?" ...and the secondary functions are there to support it. We must distinguish the intention associated with each fragment from the overall intention, which is a sentence or series of sentences that corresponds to an intention (Arcand, R. and Bourbeau, N. 1995). Since the intention can be hidden, the function that is dominant in terms of overt degree of presence may not be dominant in terms of intention. Arcand and Bourbeau also distinguish between direct and indirect manifestations of intention, which correlate to the opposition between actual and overt functions. The appellative (conative) function is manifested directly in "Go answer the door" and indirectly in "The doorbell rang" (which is equivalent to "Go answer the door"), where the overt function is the referential (or informative) function.

In this paper, we shall adopt Arcand and Bourbeau's intention-based criterion in establishing the functional hierarchy of the verbal communication act being performed by Nigerian political leaders in the routine course of walking the tightrope of governance. In essence, it seems pertinent to determine the extent to which the overt degree of presence of intention is dominant in terms of message being transmitted. This harks back to J. L. Austin's felicity condition of sincerity (Austin, J. L. 1962) and Paul Grice's maxim of quality, which evaluate the truth conditions of message(s) intended in a given set of speech acts (Grice, P. 1975). In this regard, our primary aim is to examine the communication system of Nigerian politicians from the intention-based perspective of Arcand and Bourbeau (1995) and determine the extent to which it impacts on the quality of governance deriving from a constitutional democratic experiment.

III. Verbal Carpentry As Language Of Political Corruption

Corruption is an all-pervading phenomenon in Nigeria. If the 'Nigerian factor' is corruption, the primary mode of illegitimate corruption in Nigeria is 419, named after the number in the Nigerian penal code that deals with a specific form of fraud (Smith, D. J. 2006). Citing Apter (2005), Smith notes how 419 emerged as Nigerians became disillusioned with the state at the same time that the state itself, no longer awash in oil money, relied on the politics of illusion to maintain its eroding legitimacy. There is no gainsaying the fact that the original 419 scams have continued to flourish and innovate with dizzying sophistications. If anything, the scam businesses have increased and diversified as the Internet has democratized unlimited access to the technology of 419. But even more significant than the continued practice of 419 scams through e-mail is the fact that the traditional meaning of the original 419 scams has undergone rapid semantic extensions to become an all-encompassing metaphor in Nigerian discourse for any behavior that relies on dissimulation, illusion, or some other manipulation of the truth in order to facilitate illicit gain or undue advantage. In fact, virtually nothing illustrates better the Nigerian encapsulation of political corruption than the wide spectrum of activities and behaviour of political leaders that are described as 419. In this section, we subject this perverse act of criminality to linguistic lie detection device and determine the extent to which 419 – illusion simulation through ingenious deployment of deceptive language- is the central strategy.

Our linguistic lie detection technique derives from Nejolla Korris' Scientific Content Analysis (SCAN). Korris' SCAN is a type of linguistic lie detection device, which relies on a series of reliable tip-offs to catch deceivers in the act (Elliot, R. 2007). One such trigger is the subject's emotions. Those telling the truth are quite emotive when telling their version of events, and they will use words like stolen, theft, and fraud during their testimony. Conversely, liars are emotionally controlled, because they have rehearsed their answers ahead of time, and they are likely to use words such as missing, misplaced, and gone. "When it is playing like it's a real-time story, it usually is a real-time story, and it is not coming from anywhere in the memory," says Korris. Criminals share one trait in common, regardless of their nationality. They think they can fool interrogators with clever stories.

In this paper, we examine the deceptive use of language by political office holders to perpetrate corruption and see whether the same trait of deception runs through them. Our analysis may prove us as a Nejolla Korris with whom criminals are less likely to succeed in fobbing off with fables if they crossed his paths.

1. Avoidance strategy

Here, we intend to show how political corruption in Nigeria is perpetrated through avoidance strategy, that is, the deliberate use of deceptive words to obfuscate corrupt practices. By using Arcand and Bourbeau's intention-based criterion to establish the functional hierarchy of such words/phrases as misappropriation, misapplication, soft lading, we would, perhaps be predisposed to determining the extent to which the overt degree of presence of intention is dominant in terms of the message being transmitted. In essence, the intention-based criterion in concert with Austin's (1962) felicity condition of sincerity and Grice's maxim of quality provides the theoretical basis for evaluating the truth conditions of such words aforementioned. Our working

hypothesis is that such words are intended to simulate illusions as a necessary prelude to perpetrating political corruption in Nigeria.

In Nigeria, the use of such words as *theft*, *stealing*, *embezzlement* to instantiate corruption is strictly contextualized. As would be evident in the following analysis, the social status of the person(s) involved determines whether to characterize such corrupt tendencies either as 'theft', 'stealing' or 'misappropriation', 'misapplication'. Specifically, it does appear that the ordinary common Nigerian 'steals' but the high and the mighty, shakers and movers merely 'misappropriate' or 'misapply' public fund. The Zamfara State Sharia legal system is clearly illustrative. In January 2000, Sharia law was introduced in Zamfara State by the then Governor, Alhaji Ahmed Sani Yerima. Yerima promised that his made-in-Nigeria Sharia would not affect non-Muslims, but would 'purge the system' of corruption. Though Yerima's version prescribes the loss of limbs and public flogging for petty thieves he paradoxically and audaciously proclaimed that it was perfectly alright for State Commissioners and other government officials to accept bribes provided the work was done. He declared that receiving bribe (by government officials) is not stealing. In other words, his made-in-Nigeria version was going to be a poor man's Sharia (Egbejumi-David, M. 2009). And true to his words, in March 2000, as reported in *African Confidential* Vol. 41 No. 8 (14 April, 2000), a notorious cow thief, Baba Bello Care Garhie Jangedi was arrested for *stealing* a cow. He was prosecuted and convicted by a Sharia court. His right arm was consequently amputated in accordance with the provisions of the Sharia legal system. Then, in 2002 when His Excellency's shoes were stolen from the Government House mosque, Yerima threatened that if and when the thief was caught, he would have both his hands and legs cut off. As Egbejumi-David further observes, Sharia's practice "...has followed a similar dichotomous path: only the poor masses are force-fed a deceitful doctrine that does not apply to the rulers, the rich, and their kinds."

Shortly after the adoption of the Sharia legal system (precisely in June 2000), the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), according to Egbejumi-David (2009), accused Yerima of "high corruption, misappropriation of public funds and squandermania." Former EFCC boss, Mallam Ribadu had once said of Yerima in a BBC interview: "The case of Zamfara is a tragedy – direct stealing – no third party." Now, currently a Senator, Egbejumi-David observes that "Yerima's corrupt practices have only been reinforced." Again, Aziken (2006), after months of investigation of the petitions and allegations of corruption against 31 of the state governors/governments, the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), on September 27, 2006, handed over to the Senate its findings which established cases of corruption against 15 of the governors (Aziken, E. 2006). The EFCC Chairman, Nuhu Ribadu described Zamfara State as one of the worst cases facing the commission with the Governor of the state, Yerima Sani, fingered as being involved in direct stealing of state funds. He described the allegations against the Governor and the counter efforts by Governor Sani as a tragedy. Later, (i.e. 28 August 2006), Ribadu's EFCC, notes Egbejumi-David, formally dragged Sani Yerima and seven other officials before an Abuja Federal High Court on a 36-count charge of money laundering and conspiracy. The EFCC charge detailed that the looting was "gross misappropriation of local government funds, award of contract, Ecological funds, Education Trust Fund and illegal bank loans. Perhaps, the original and appropriate word- *steal*- was considered a regrettable gaffe or slip of tongue that needed to be corrected by the EFCC. In essence, the former Governor did not *steal* any money; he was charged with allegations of mere *misappropriation* of public fund. Moreover, the Sharia law only has *stealing* or *theft* as a word and not *misappropriation*, which the Islamic law frowns upon as an offence that attracts prosecution and amputation in the event of conviction. For having merely *misappropriated* and not *stolen* the state's fund, the *Sharia* Governor did not commit any crime that would have lumped him together with the likes of Baba Jangedi. Later, Alhaji Ahmed Sani Yerima was privileged to occupy the hallowed chambers of the Senate as an **honourable** Senator of the Federal Republic of Nigeria! Egbejumi-David laments that the Governor who had threatened to cut off the hands and legs of the shoe thief "still has his own limbs and beard well intact... Nobody has flogged him; instead, his corrupt practices have only been reinforced in the Senate where he is today living large and rubbing shoulders with other great guns..."

2. Deceptive Language

When one uses language that is deceitful, the policies that are proposed are also suspect. In America for instance, When the Bush administration decided to sell the war on Iraq as a part of the War on Terror, they manufactured weapons of mass destruction, which they gleefully ascribed its patent to Saddam Hussien. They created the illusion that the continued existence of a safe America as a sovereign nation is inextricably tied to the immediate invasion of Iraq and outright dismantling of Saddam's weapons of death. They created a nightmare for the national troops and for the ordinary Iraqis who are now living in a chaotic, war-torn country. They also created the cesspool of Abu Ghraib where soldiers believing that the prisoners in their power were terrorists or had information about terrorists, were given the green light to indulge in torture and sadism because terrorists are evil. And just as the Americans will feel and live with the consequences of Bush's needless war of choice justified with lies for years, as evident in Bush's 2007 State of the Union address, (Rudyk, I. 2007), so

would Nigerians learn to cope with the avoidable nightmares of political corruption forged on the anvil of make-believe projects couched in populist catchy terms through the instrumentality of verbal carpentry and rendered with mellifluous suavity and patrician cadence.

3. Phony Projects: National Integrated Power Projects

In his 14 March, 2000 nationwide broadcast on the state of power generation and his government's agenda for the defunct NEPA, now PHCN, President Obasanjo declared: "Let me reiterate the essence of the covenant implicit in my taking oath of office. My word is my bond. If I tell you I will deliver, by the Grace of God, I will use everything within my power not to let you down. And so be it with NEPA." Like his American counterpart, who failed woefully to smoke out the much touted weapons of mass destruction from Saddam's nuclear arsenal, Obasanjo, in an ironic twist, only succeeded in bringing the 4,800 megawatts he inherited in 1999 down to less than 2,600 megawatts some eight years later, during which he spent \$16 billion with little or nothing to show for such stupendous expenditure. This is not altogether surprising given that the ultimate objective of deceptive language is to dress government policies in borrowed robes. This ugly scenario played out very well in the area of power generation during the Obasanjo presidency. Analysts contend that a large chunk of all the billions pelted at the power sector between 1999 and 2007 simply developed legs and walked into private pockets (Onyemaizu 2008). Also, writing under the caption, 'A Can of Worms,' Abimboye notes that on-going investigations into the activities of the federal government in the last nine years have uncovered losses of huge sums of money through fake contracts and other illegal transactions (Abimboye, D. 2008).

A World Bank report in 2005 had estimated that \$10bn was needed to ensure that at least 75 per cent Nigeria's population had access to electricity. This has meant that the \$16bn mismanaged by Obasanjo government, if judiciously spent, should have largely mitigated the monumental electricity crisis in Nigeria (Adewale, P. 2008). Perhaps, Adewale's observation was not a mere wild speculation as Ndudi Elemelu, Chairman of the House of Representative Committee that probed the power sector described Obasanjo's huge expenditure in the power sector as a 'puzzle'. In his words, "the puzzle is not merely that the huge expenditure failed to translate to more electric energy, but for the most time, it actually translated to less electric power for the people with its attendant consequences." The objective of the investigations into the power puzzle, notes Mr. Elumelu, was "...to unravel the classic mystery in Nigerian development whereby the more you spend on power, the less electric power you get." At the close of public hearing, he came up with a summary of the submissions, which in itself turned out an enigma wrapped in a mystery. "From the oral and documentary evidence, it has been clearly established that the total expenditure in the power sector during the period was about \$13.28 billion which is well over \$10 billion as reported by Mr. President. Indeed, had the supplementary budget of the power sector in 2007 been released/reflected, it could then have been over \$16 billion as reported by the Honourable Speaker of the House of Representatives," Mr. Elumelu concluded.

It seems pertinent to wonder how the former President achieved this monumental feat of monumental proportion, on which President Yar'Adua (now late) first blew the whistle on 18 February, 2008 at the 8th edition of the Nigeria Oil and Gas Conference in Abuja (Abimboye, D. 2008). Of course, the former President could not have succeeded in consummating this high-wire political corruption without resorting to verbal carpentry. When the Chairman of the Revenue Mobilisation, Allocation and Fiscal Commission (RMAFC), Dr. Hamman Tukur, was summoned by the House Committee on Power to testify on the role of his Commission in the power projects, he captured Obasanjo's seeming obsession with the art of verbal carpentry in the following submissions: "These power projects seem to be classified under three distinct names. When we started raising alarm in the commission, it was called Niger Delta Power Holding Company and the first payment was \$666,000. When we drew the attention of all the governors including the National Assembly, they now changed the name to NNPC Joint Venture Operation Gas for NNDC plants. Again, the sum of \$213 million was withdrawn directly from the Federation Account... "Under whose authority, we are yet to know, on the 28th of December 2005. We again drew the attention of those concerned, all the beneficiaries of the Federation Account including the governors, the minister of finance, and all the local governments. We said this should not have been withdrawn from the Federation Account. Then the name changed again. It now became National Integrated Power Plants."

A commissioner at the RMAFC, Ambassador Kabiru Rabi, who addressed the Committee on the status of the NIPPs said: "As "part of my assignment, I went to Cross River State. I went to see how they (NIPPs) were utilising money from the Federation Account. I was directed to visit one of the sites where the NIPP projects were being done. I went to visit one of the sites commissioned by President (Olusegun Obasanjo) at the time. We almost passed the site because it was over-grown by weeds. There was no access road. There was no road there."

Ordinarily, Obasanjo would have had the undue presidential privilege of hiding behind one finger by pointing fingers at the contractors and absolved himself of any complicity to defraud the nation. But he gave himself up as an accomplice by commissioning many projects that were either non-existent or uncompleted with

pomp and pageantry (Adewale, P. 2008). The Chairman of the Revenue Mobilisation and Fiscal Allocation Commission (RMFAC), Hamman Tukur alluded to this grand executive deception when he disclosed at the hearing that a power project commissioned by Obasanjo in Cross River was discovered to be an empty site! "We went to some of the sites and there was nothing on the sites; so where was the money going?" (*Punch* newspaper, March 21 2008). The House committee itself while on the spot assessment tour discovered an uncompleted N9.8bn (\$83m) power project that was commissioned in Bayelsa. What is more; the RMFAC Chairman further shocked the probe panel members when he disclosed that "Between 2005 and 2006, \$3.974, 394,143 was withdrawn for power projects, and we were surprised that commissions were paid to the Central Bank even after the projects were stopped. To whoever the commissions were paid, we do not know. On 17th of May 2007, \$2 million was paid as commission charged (by the Central Bank) on Letters of Credit." According to the final report of the Elumelu-led Committee Obasanjo's government "...spent the sum of \$13.28 billion (n1.567 trillion) on the power sector between 1999 and 2007 'with unfunded commitments of over \$12 billion (N1.416 trillion)'. Put together, the report says Obasanjo **wasted** over \$25.28 billion (N2.983 trillion) without making 'a difference in the country' (Adekeye, F. 2008).

4. Concession Agreements

If this despicable statecraft, which Adewale describes as *political scam artistry* was executed with a kind of pin-point precision that could earn the undertakers a Nobel Prize, the stakes were raised severally notches higher when the Obasanjo administration entered into concession agreements with an Indian outfit, Global Infrastructure Nigeria Limited (GIL) in respect of the Ajaokuta Steel Company. The deceptive undertone of the concession agreement came to light when President Yar'Adua approved the revocation of the sale of the steel company at a give-away price of \$525million to the Indian ruse of a company, Global Infrastructure Limited on Wednesday, April 2 2008. The panel had indicted GIL for several breaches of the 10-year concession agreements, which included failure to submit a workable time frame and non-payment of concessionary fees (Uffot, E. 2008). GIL was also indicted for embarking on the cannibalization and exportation of plants and equipment of the company. Later, in a special report, entitled, 'Ajaokuta: The Steel Rust', Uffot observes that Ajaokuta Steel was conceived as the bedrock of Nigeria's technological transformation but that dream appears to have crashed with the looting of vital equipment from the plant. Other nerve-frying discoveries by the panel include that the purported Share Sales Purchase Agreement between government and GIL on Ajaokuta Steel is technically not in force given that the share transfer to the private sector was never effected. Consequently, President Yar'Adua ordered commencement of criminal proceedings against federal government officials indicted by the EFCC and promoters of GIL for asset stripping.

Also in the long list of political scam artistry, which provides convenient theoretical framework for prosecuting political corruption with resounding 'dividends of democracy' in Nigeria are Aviation Intervention Fund, Restoration of Abuja Master Plan, Christmas Bonus, Retreat, Soft Landing. The list is endless but we shall for the purpose and scope of this paper limit to these.

5. Aviation Intervention Fund

According to a newspaper report, (July 1, 2008), the Senate Committee on Aviation commenced public hearing on the disbursement and application of the Aviation Intervention Fund as approved by former President Obasanjo (Ojeifo, S. 2008). On 30 June, 2008, the two former Ministers of Aviation, were arrested by the EFCC after testifying before the Senate Panel on the Aviation Fund for being the two principal actors at the centre of the N6.5 billion Safe Tower Projects in four major airports in Lagos, Abuja, Port Harcourt and Kano. According to Ojeifo, "...their arrests came on the heels of last week's arrest of the Head of AVSATEL Communication Limited, whose company got the N6.5 billion Safe Tower Project. The contract," continues Ojeifo, "was confirmed to have been inflated by N4.5 billion, going by the global best estimate provided by the Technical Consultant to the Senate Committee, Captain Daniel Omole."

6. Restoration of Abuja Master Plan

The Restoration of Abuja Master Plan, a pet project, which the former Minister of the FCT, Mallam Nasir el-Rufai, pursued with such orchestrated patriotic zeal, came under scrutiny at the public hearing of the Senator Abubakar Danso Sodangi-led Committee on the FCT. With the revelations that came out of the National Assembly, Adegbamigbe reports that there is no doubt that el-Rufai's excreta has hit the ceiling fan, spattering dirt all over and keeping the accuser and the accused, his acquaintances, principal - former President Obasanjo – and others busy in the attempt to clean up themselves (Adegbamigbe, A. 2008). Testifying at the public hearing, the General Manager of Abuja Geographical Information Service, Mr. Ismaila Iro explained that 37,998 plots were allocated between 1999 and 2007, while 2,807 were revoked within the period, adding that plots were revoked for different reasons, which included overriding public interest, breach of provisions of the master plan, encroachment on green areas and refusal to pay for Certificate of Occupancy – C of O.

However, one of the scandals that broke out at the Senate Committee public hearing, as Adegbamigbe reports was that “former President and members of his family were allocated choice parcels of land, altogether measuring over 1 million square metres in different parts of the FCT.” The former Minister of FCT and members of his immediate and extended el-Rufai family, continues Adegbamigbe, own 19 parcels of land in different choice parts of the FCT. A deluge of submissions made at the public hearing revealed how el-Rufai demolished ‘illegal structures’ and revoked plots under the pretext that either they distorted the FCT master plan or that they encroached on the green belt zones only to turn round to re-allocate same to his benefactors, family members, friends, and cronies. It was on the strength of this overwhelming evidence that the Senate Panel on FCT ordered an immediate revocation of a good number of allocations, particularly those that encroached on the green belt zone as well as thousands of allocations he made on his last day in the office as the FCT Minister. Also, part of the Report’s recommendations is that Mr. el-Rufai be banned from holding any public office again in Nigeria.

7. Christmas Bonus and Retreat

If ‘restoration of Abuja master plan’ provided the convenient phrase for capturing the pervert linguistic ingenuity of perpetrators of political corruption in Nigeria, Christmas bonus and Retreat provided the leeway for prosecuting bureaucratic corruption, reported by M. Mumuni & T. Agbaegbu as the ‘The Looting Spree’ in the Federal Ministry of Health. President Yar’Adua had directed that unspent monies from the 2007 budget allocations to all MDAs be returned to the national treasury (Mumuni, M & Agbaegbu, T. 2008). The N400 million, which was part of the unspent money from the 2007 allocation to the Ministry of health was withdrawn and passed as Christmas bonus for the year 2007. The alleged arrowhead of the scam, the ministry’s Director of Administration and supplies, H.B. Oyedepo, shared the money among the Ministers and staff of the ministry according to positions and ranks. Beneficiaries of the loot also included the Senate Health Committee, chaired by Iyabo Bello-Obasanjo who initially denied ever receiving the N10 million share of the loot. Later, it was confirmed the Committee actually received such an amount, but which the Committee argued was for sponsoring its members for a ‘retreat’ in Ghana.

Perhaps, the choice of Ghana, amidst all the choice resorts in Nigeria and elsewhere, far from being a mere chance, was strategic enough, given that ‘Ghana-must-go’ bags usually provide convenient suitcases for carting away money realized from such sleazy deals. Of course, Nigerian parliamentarians are not new to the sight of ‘Ghana-must-go’ bags struggling for space on the floor of the supposedly hallowed chambers of the National Assembly. The looting spree led to the sacking of the two Ministers of Health, Professor Adenike Grange and Gabriel Aduku and their subsequent prosecution by the EFCC. Also, all the staffers of the Ministry that partook of the ‘Christmas bonus’ were sent on compulsory leave pending the outcome of their prosecution by the EFCC. Meanwhile, Iyabo Bello-Obasanjo got arrested after playing hide-and-seek game with the anti-corruption agency and is currently facing corruption charges in the court. In this advanced case of political cum bureaucratic corruption, ‘Christmas bonus’ and ‘retreat’ have joined other words and phrases in the lexicon of verbal carpentry.

8. Soft-landing policy

Soft landing is one of those phrases, which plays very prominent role in lubricating the monstrous wheels of political scam artistry in Nigeria. It is a term specifically designed to shield a trusted colleague in the art of political corruption from embracing the thorny chest of the law in the event of proven case(s) of corruption against him or her. This term is better understood in the context of the N628 million house renovation scandal involving the former speaker of the House of Representatives, Mrs. Patricia Olubumi Etteh. In an article captioned ‘Nigeria: Etteh Splits Panel’, C. Ekpunobi reports: “Strong indications emerged yesterday that some members of the House of Representatives probe panel investigating the N628 million contract scam involving Speaker, Hon. Patricia Etteh and her deputy, Hon. Babangida Nguroje may have rejected the report of the committee slated for submission tomorrow. Concerning the panel’s report,” Ekpunobi, C. 2007). Ekpunobi further notes that it was gathered that the planned minority report followed sharp disagreement over the Hon. David Idoko-led committee on critical recommendations of the panel. Quoting his sources, Ekpunobi reports that some members of the panel alleged to be working for the forces against the embattled Speaker were said to have opposed certain recommendations in the draft report of the panel which they considered a *soft landing* for the Speaker and her deputy.

When Mrs. Etteh eventually bowed to the pressures asking her to step down, Andrew Aota writes that the Report of the Idoko-led committee of the House, did indict all the stakeholders in the contract scam, namely the management of the National Assembly, the Speaker and her Deputy as well as the principal officers of the House of Representatives, including the minority wing of the Nigerians lower parliament. Later, the Senate Majority Whip, Senator Mahmud Kanti Bello and other chieftains of the ruling Peoples Democratic Party were mandated to broker a last minute peace at the party’s headquarters between the Honourable Farouk Lawal-led

Integrity Group and others favourably disposed to the embattled speaker (Aota, A 2007). The crux of the meeting, according to Aota's report, was to provide a **soft landing** for the former Speaker by appointing a Speaker pro-tempore from her group, who would also tow the line of the party in the debate on the Idoko report. Although the Integrity Group had their way by easing out Mrs. Etteh, the principle of soft landing for the former speaker was strictly adhered to by the PDP hierarchy, perhaps also in the curious spirit of 'family affair'. Throughout the tenure of the 5th National Assembly, Mrs. Patricia Etteh sat pretty well in the House of Representatives as an 'honourable' member, courtesy of the PDP's policy of 'soft landing' for any member of the 'one family' indicted for corruption. Of course, Mrs. Etteh was a sole beneficiary of PDP's soft landing policy.

One of the PDP chieftains and confidants of Former President Obasanjo, Chief Olabode George, was indicted twice by the EFCC for the massive corruption that shook the Nigerian Ports Authority to its very foundations when he was the Board Chairman. The EFCC submitted its Reports to the Federal Executive Council but nothing came out of it. Before he was later prosecuted, convicted and jailed, Chief George was a free man, wielding even more powers in the PDP. Shortly before April 2007 general elections, *Saharareporters*, an Internet-based investigative outfit, claimed it has "uncovered the existence of the real list submitted by the EFCC to the Presidency," but according to their highly reliable source, "elements within the presidency doctored the final list that was released to the media after excluding names of presidential favorites." Today, all those people aforementioned as having been indicted one way or the other are unrepentant beneficiaries of PDP's soft landing policy, which has become a highly favoured option in the Nigeria's infamous culture of corruption.

While the power probe lasted, Nigerians were daily treated to a reality show at the public hearing on power sector expenditure on how the previous Olusegun Obasanjo government that strutted around as an Olympian height of virtue and wisdom had made fortune out of misfortune of the entire nation. But beyond the startling revelations that underscored the egregious corruption which characterised the Obasanjo government, Peluola Adewale warns that the masses should not expect any fundamental outcome from the public hearing and entire power project probe. Of course, Obasanjo is on trial but he considers the entire exercise as a circus show. He has not lost sleep, notwithstanding the ignominy the hearing has unleashed on him. Reacting to the probe, he boasted, "God has never disappointed me. I sleep well, exercise well, and eat moderately. I don't allow anything to weigh down my mind. I thank God for creating me." (Punch, March 16, 2008). In Adewale's opinion, it is not God that makes Obasanjo to be so confident but his experience. He knows all the anti-corruption exercises in Nigeria are mere show trials or publicity stunts; he organised a number of them himself while in office. The National ID card scam, the Ikoyi House scandal, NPA fraud, bribe for budget episode, PTDF, etc are some of the features of Obasanjo anti-corruption crusade that, after momentary sensationalism generated in the media, were thrown into the dustbin of history.

9. Turn Around Maintenance (TAM) and Oil Block Allocation

The concepts of *turn around maintenance* (TAM) and *oil block allocation* represent another instance of verbal carpentry as language of corruption in Nigeria. Gary Busch, in an article entitled, 'How Emeka Offor ruined the National Refineries,' published on the *Saharareporters* website (20 June 2007), identified the NNPC as the engine room of corruption in Nigeria. In his words, "the root of Nigeria's problems can be found at the Nigerian National Petroleum Company. This is the most important constraint on Nigeria's economy and the mother lode of Nigeria's corruption." Perhaps, it is this combustion chamber of political corruption that underscores the relevance of these twin concepts. According to Busch, "...In one of his deals, Chrome Consortium [owned by Mr. Offor] was paid millions of dollars for the repairs of the old and new Port-Harcourt refineries. According to experts in the industry the nation was ripped off to the tune of about \$100 million as inflated payments in this contract alone... The turnaround maintenance underperformed by Emeka Offor, at great expense, has been an unrelieved disaster."

The suit by Malabu Oil & Gas, seeking US\$2.5 billion in the U.S. courts against former President Obasanjo and former Vice-President Atiku Abubakar, is clearly illustrative of how such a seemingly harmless term as *oil block allocation* is fast gaining pre-eminence in the lexicon of Nigeria's political corruption. Revelations at the probe of the House of Representatives' Committee on Petroleum, as reported by the *NewsWatch* of 14 July 2008, bespeak volumes of how former President Obasanjo presided over a corruption-ridden oil sector as the *de facto* minister for eight years. In his report entitled, 'A Chamber of Scandals', Ajaero (2008: 14) notes that "the oil industry under former President Olusegun Obasanjo was a huge chamber of fraud and corruption."

IV. Conclusion

According to Toomey (1999), Liberation psychology teaches us how to use and appreciate the power of language with integrity. Integrity is the key word, because without it, the power of language is abused. Integrity,

or honesty, in self-expression, eliminates deception, manipulation, judgmental accusations, abusive tongue lashings, and lying. Our orientation toward this communication system, therefore, must be to preserve its integrity by being respectful and honest with the information that gets transmitted through it with the intention of understanding it and having intimacy with it. From the foregoing discussions, it is obvious that the overt degree of presence of intention of our politicians' system of communication is dominant in terms of message being transmitted. A critical examination of the truth conditions of the message(s) from the intention-based perspective of Arcand and Bourbeau (1995) suggests that political corruption in Nigeria rides on the roller-coaster drive of pervert linguistic ingenuity, which we have chosen to refer to in this paper as *verbal carpentry*. With effortless ease, politicians hew out planks of words, chop them up into immediate constituents and glibly string them together into catchy phrases, intended to create an illusion of a populist development paradigm but which in reality is a corruption-driven enterprise.

In the light of this festering culture of corruption, prosecuted most often through the ingenious art of verbal carpentry, it is only expected that its all-pervading effects on Nigeria as a nation would be everything but salutary. In 2006 the then head of Nigeria's Economic and Financial Crimes Commission, Nuhu Ribadu, estimated that Nigeria lost some US\$380 billion to corruption between independence in 1960 and the end of military rule in 1999. Nigeria's corruption epidemic has continued since then. Exact figures are impossible to come by, but some western diplomats estimate that Nigeria lost a *minimum* average of \$4 billion to \$8 billion per year to corruption over the eight years of the Obasanjo administration. In May 2000, Jack Blum, a partner of Lobel Norins and Lamont, experts in transparency and corruption, testifying before the US House of Representatives Sub-committee on Domestic and International Monetary Policy, revealed that "From independence to the present time, past leaders in Nigeria have either stolen or misappropriated state funds estimated at N400 billion (\$40 billion) . . . The amount also involved funds received on behalf of the country by key government officials as international assistance, loans from international financial institutions, kick backs to government officials involved in purchasing and special arrangements for currency conversion. The amount includes misappropriated oil revenue emanating from international oil deals between Nigeria and her customers abroad. Quoting David Blair of London *Telegraph* (June 25, 2005), George Ayittey (Distinguished Economist in Residence, American University) notes, "Nigeria's past rulers stole or misused $\text{u}220$ billion (\$412 billion). That is as much as all the western aid given to Africa in almost four decades. After that mass theft, two thirds of the country's 130 million people—one in seven of the total African population—live in abject poverty, a third is illiterate and 40 per cent have no safe water supply." On the whole, Ayittey listed inefficiency and waste, budget deficit problems, disinvestment, economic contraction and collapse as the major deleterious effects of corruption on the Nigerian state.

In the opinion of this paper, the above chilling statistics on Nigeria's corruption profile were mainly facilitated by deliberate deceptive use of language. Therefore, one real challenge in our contemporary times is reclaiming the right to clear and truthful language. To reclaim our inalienable rights to this kind of information predisposes us as Nigerians to make good decisions as a people who live in a real democratic society. The time to condemn the bare-faced lies and grand deception, achieved through the instrumentality of verbal carpentry and confront head-on the perpetrators of political corruption is now.

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