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Strategic Choice of Language Use in Bush's COVID-19 Message: A Linguistic Adaptation Perspective

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ARTICLE INFORMATION	ABSTRACT

Language is essential not only in maintaining interpersonal relationships but also in achieving other social or political goals. In politics, the language is a tool creatively used by politicians to brainwash, manipulate, encourage and persuade their citizens or masses to do something. Strategic choice of language has made it easier for politicians to influence citizens' emotional and mental perception with their political speeches and messages. Through the use of Verschureren's Linguistic Adaptation Theory, this study analyses President Bush's COVID-19 message to examine how it adapts to the three-communication context in correlation adaptability and how it influences the emotional and mental perception of the US citizens in abiding with the stipulated health regulations and fostering unity and solidarity. The findings of the study show that, through the strategic choice of language use which adapts to the social, mental and physical world, the former American President Bush tends to persuade, encourage and inculcate the sense of unity and the American spirit in the American citizens to remain calm by following the health regulations.

1. Introduction

Language has always been an object of fascination and a subject of great inquiries over a long period of time. The primary function of language is for the purpose of communication. It is a vehicle that enables speakers of the language to communicate with one another, to express ideas, hypothesis, emotion, desires and all other things that need expressing. It is also seen as a social institution system and a catalyst for nation-building. Language plays a crucial role in all aspects of any communicative discourse. It can be seen as an essential instrument used by man in the implementation of successful governance in any country. Chilton (2004) asserts that language is the heartbeat of politics, obviously and evidently.

Politics as we all know is immersed with the fight for power and supremacy in which language serves as the backbone. Language is seen as strategic machinery for communication which is creatively manipulate by politicians in creating manifestos, seeking endorsements and forming alliances to acquire political power.

According to Beard (2000), making "a speech is a vital part of the politician's role in announcing policy and persuading people to agree with it" (p.35). This means that politics is all about quest and struggle for power and the language used is significant as it is primarily organized to convince the masses or citizens to buy into the speaker's ideology or belief. Most importantly, political communication demonstrates the speaker's ability to express and establish meanings for opinions and ideas in contexts of their use. Beard (2000) is also of the view that it is important to study the language of politics because it allows us to understand how language is used by "those who wish to gain power, those who wish to exercise power and those who wish to keep power" (p.2). Political actors adopt linguistic and rhetorical strategies that enable them to communicate effectively with their audience to gain political relevance.

Political speech is becoming a popular concept especially in the area of linguistic research. It is said to have originated from Greek philosophers' rhetorical works like Sophist, Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. Several speeches are made to address the citizens or masses before elections. Some are made after the election and some are also made at one point in time as situations

dictate. Such situations can be during an emergency, political and economic instability and global pandemic situation like the COVID-19 case.

The COVID-19 has become a global pandemic that affects all countries of the world. In this current COVID-19 circumstance, drastic measures and public awareness have been raised to curb the spread of the virus. Various countries' presidents and political stakeholders have given various speeches and massages from time to time in order to persuade, inspire, calm or swirl the heart of the citizen or masses. They are meticulous in strategic language choice. Such messages are not meant to antagonize political opponents in most cases but meant for citizens' safety. Linguistic communication becomes successful if the listener recognizes the speaker's communicative intention. But sometimes, the speaker always faces the problem of getting the listeners to recognize that intention.

To this end, this research analyzes the COVID-19 message delivered by the former USA president George Bush on 4th May 2020 to answer the following questions:

a. What contextual correlates do Bush's linguistic choices adapt to?
b. How does his strategic choice of language adapt to those contexts?

1.1 The Objective of the Study
This study investigates the strategic use of language the former American president Bush strategic use of appropriate language choices in maintaining not only the social relationship but also to persuade, motivate and encourage the US citizens in his COVID-19 message. This is done from the perspective of Linguistic Adaptative theory。

1.2 Significance of the Study
It is believed that this study will create a new area insight to be researched by scholars and linguists. The massive research on political speeches, especially in inaugural or campaign speeches, while less research emergency speeches or massages have been dealt with. It is believed that this study will create and pave the way for a new assumption for scholars to deal with such areas of speeches aside from the usual campaign or inaugural speeches using different theoretical perspectives.

2. Review of Related Literature
2.1 Presidential speeches
Numerous researchers and scholars have done varieties of researches relating to the political discourse of different political speeches of presidents of different countries of the world.

Wang (2010) summarizes presidential speeches' linguistic features using two speech samples of Obama, his victory speech in 2008, and inaugural address on 20th January 2009. Horvath (2009) studied the persuasive strategies of Obama's public speaking as well as the covert ideology enshrined in his inaugural address.

Kamalu and Iniworikalo(2016) examined metaphor in some political speeches of Nigerian democratic presidents from the conceptual metaphor perspective to investigate how it is use to manipulate the masses.

Alemi et al (2018) focused on the use of persuasion by President Obama, the former US president, as a discursive strategy in his two speeches delivered on 7/Aug/2014 and 10/Sep/2014 regarding ISIS. Analysis of these speeches was done using Searle's typology theory (1978) as a theoretical framework. The findings of the study revealed that in both speeches assertives were the most frequently used speech act utilized.

Bird (2011) investigated the rhetorical style in President Clinton's speeches which were delivered during harsh moments of domestic tragedy.

Ayeomoni (2012) investigates the Nigerian military coup speeches of the three military-political rulers; General Thomas Aguiyi Ironsi, General Yakubu Gowon, and General Murtala Muhammad from a CDA perspective.

2.2 Linguistic Adaptative Theory
Lian (2018) centred on a pragmatic function of fuzziness in News reports using linguistics adaptative theory, the study aimed to find out the important role of fuzziness in news reports and this shows that the rationality of the proper use of fuzziness in news reports is can affect the accuracy of news reports.

Huang (2019) studied the interactive communication between the salesperson and the potential customer in the process of personal selling from the perspective of Linguistic Adaptative Theory. He discovered that most salesperson uses a persuasive utterances and appropriate language choice in selling their items to the customers.

Shi and Du (2017) conducted a study on the adaptability of chinese-english code-switching in adverstizingdiscourse from the perspective of Verschuren's Adaptative theory and Guodong's Adaption Model. The study tends to find out reasons for and

features of Chinese-English code-switching. The finding however, shows that code-switching is a pragmatic strategy and tactics used by advertisers to facilitate and promote their products efficiently. Therefore, code-switching is seen as an essential tool in advertising discourse. It shows how language can be adapted to linguistics reality, social rules and in persuading and satisfying their customers.

Lulu (2019) conducted a study on the analysis of the stance of E-sports commentary discourse from the perspective of pragmatics using Shen's proposed eight pragmatic means to represent communicators' stances and Verschuren's Language Adaptative theory. The E-sport competition between a Chinese team and European team was used as data for analysis. Through the use of Shen's Eight pragmatic means, the results of the analysis showed that the commentators were biased towards their own country's team and the reasons for showing such tendency were analyzed using the Adaptative language theory.

Qiang (2013) studied the interpretation context from the Linguistic Adaptative Theory perspective. He attempts to examine how interpreters are meant to adapt to various contextual situations during the course of interpretation.

Du (2016) explored what communicative contexts foreign teachers need to adapt to in teaching practice from the Linguistic Adaptative approach. The study showed how to better improve the quality of college foreign language teaching and how to cultivate students' comprehensive ability to use language.

To investigate the marketing strategies used by companies and industries not only to entice and attract the consumers but also to influence their choice or consumption behaviour through the use of language, Chen (2018) carried out a study on the use of vagueness in English advertisement from the perspective of Verschuren's linguistic Adaptative theory. The findings of the analysis carried out through the use of some selected English cosmetic advertisement, showed that vagueness in some advertisement which stems from the creative choice of language use, results in misleading, cheating or manipulating the consumers.

From the above review of related literature, it is obvious that previous studies have covered political discourse on presidential speeches from various linguistics theories such as Critical Discourse Analysis, Speech Act Theory, Systemic Functional Perspective and such speeches are mostly inaugural speeches, election or war. The Linguistic Adaptative theory focuses mainly on advertisement, translation and so on. Therefore, this study will examine This study shall, therefore, examine the strategic choice of language used by former US president George Bush in his COVID-19 message of hope which has not been tackled in the previous studies. It will examine the strategic choice of language strategies used and how this linguistic choice of language used adapts to the context of manipulating, swirl, persuade, encourage and motivate the US citizens during such thriving circumstances/condition from the Linguistic Adaptive Theory perspective.

3.1 The model of the study
3.1.1 Jef Verschueren's linguistic Adaptation theory
Linguistic Adaptation   Theory is seen as a perspective theory first proposed by Hartmond Haberland and Jacob Mey in the Journal of Pragmatics, but Verschueren further developed it in his thesis "Understanding Pragmatics" in 2000. It is a theory, according to Huang (2019), that "attempts to seek the human language communication mechanism and the role of society and certain cultural background to reveal various phenomena appearing in the human language" (p.234). Verschueren proposes that "using language must consist of the continuous making of linguistic choices, consciously or unconsciously, for language-internal (i.e., structural) and/or language-external reasons" (Verschueren, 2000, p55-56). This means that the speaker makes their choices constantly to adapt to the aspects of communicative strategies and linguistic forms. The language user is under an obligation to make choices whenever he/she enters the dynamic process of communication. Furthermore, these choices are made not only by language politicians but also by interpreters, and both types of choice-making are of equal importance for successful communication made with varying degrees of consciousness.

According to Verschueren's theory, language use is a process of choice-making based upon the three properties of language, namely; variability, negotiability, and adaptability, and are interconnected.

Variability is the property of language that accounts for the range of possibilities from which choices can be made; negotiability is the property of language responsible for the fact that choices are not made mechanically, follows a strict rules or any kind of fixed form-function relationships, but rather based flexible strategies and principles; adaptability is the property of language that enables people "to make linguistic negotiable choices from a variable range of possibilities in such a way as to approach points of satisfaction for communicative needs" (Verschueren, 2000, pp. 59-61). it should be emphasized that these three notions are interrelated properties which cannot be separated in pragmatic perspectives, according to Al-Gublan (2015). The former two are necessary for an adequate understanding of the third property, which is a higher-order notion in the hierarchical ranking. Using the higher-order notion of adaptability as the starting point of language study, the four focal points include contextual correlations of adaptability, structural objects of adaptability, adaptability dynamics, and the salience of the adaptation process.

The structural object of adaptability has to do with the languages' structural organisations. It refers to the hierarchical organization of structure ranging from the least to the highest-level form of the language. This means that communicative choices can take place at any possible linguistic structure of the language, from the phoneme, words, sentence levels to discourse level, or even beyond. The dynamics of adaptability refers to the generation of meaning or the process of choice-making in communication. It can also be seen as how communicative strategies and principles are utilized in the course of making linguistics during the process of production and interpretation of utterances. The salience of the adaptation process accounts for the fact that not linguistic choices are haphazardly or made with a relatively high degree of consciousness. It can also be seen as a state of the process where the generation of mean is related to the cognitive mechanism. The contextual correlate of adaptability, which is the study's focal point, will be vividly discussed and elaborated.

3.2.2 Contextual Correlates of Adaptability

Context is the environment in which language exists, develops and is used (Qiang 2013, p.126). Therefore, Contextual correlates of adaptability include all the ingredients of the communicative contexts with which linguistic choices have to be inter-adaptable. This means that to achieve successful communication purposes, both the speaker and the listener must adapt to the language context and communication context. Such contextual adaption includes elements in a communicative context such as the physical surroundings, the interlocutors' cognition or state of mind and the social relationship between the speaker and the listeners. This will be carefully elaborated on three communicative aspects.

The Social World

The choice of language used by interlocutors is closely related to the social element. The social world comprises the social standard, principles, and environment. It is quite obvious that certain social factors such as nationality, age, race, education, religion, social status, and gender affect the linguistic choice of language. On the other hand, the linguistic choice of language can also affect social relation or power. Hence, to successfully achieve a communicative purpose, interlocutors tend to adapt to the social world through the strategic use of language choice.

The Mental World

Verbal interaction is no doubt communication from mind to mind- though we should never forget that minds are 'minds in society" (Versehueren 2000, p.87). The mental world enshrines the interlocutors'' cognitive and psychological world. Such cognitive and psychological worlds can be seen in different factors such as interlocutors' or language users' attitudes, emotions, beliefs, motivations, intentions, and desires. There are two kinds of the mental world's communicative context, the cognitive and emotive elements. According to Verschueren (2000), the cognitive element "provides a bridge between the mental and social in the form of conceptualizations in terms of which social interaction is interpreted (90). On the other hand, the emotive element provides a bridge that affects and helps in the colourization of interaction.

The Physical World

The physical world refers to the geographical location or natural human environment where human beings in different areas with different physical features may have a different perception, ideology and mindset when using the language (Chen 2018). There are two categories or ways of anchoring language choices into a physical world: temporal and spatial reference. The spatial reference is usually relative to a perspective that can be either utterer space or reference space. The temporal reference is useful in making a distinction between event time, time of utterance, and reference time. According to Versehueren（2000）, the physical world comprises various elements such as language users, gestures, bodily postures, physical appearance, physical condition, and biological property. Therefore, such elements or factors influence the choice of language in communication and any changes in such elements will also result in the change of certain mental or psychological states.

The structural object s of adaptability comprises the structures' organisation at the various linguistic levels such as phonetic, phonology, morphology, syntax and so on. The dynamic of adaptability entails how meaning is generated during communication and explains how various linguistic and non-linguistic strategies are used to negotiate and make choices of utterances and interpretation. The salience of the adaptation process is the last stage of the investigation. It accounts for how meaning is generated and how not all linguistic choices have an equal degree of consciousness (Al-Guban, 2015).

3. Methodology

3.1 Data collection for the study

This study investigates how Bush's strategic choice of language use in persuading, motivating, encouraging and wooing the Us citizens adapt to the physical, mental and social world. The data used was extracted Bush's Covid-19 message which was aired on May 2020. It was extracted from YouTube.

3.2 Data analysis

The data was analyzed qualitatively following Verschueren's Linguistic Adaptative Theory, emphasising the contextual correlate of Adaptation; physical, mental, and social world.

4. Analysis of George Bush's COVID-19 Message

This is a <u>challenging</u> and solemn <u>time</u> in the life of our nation and world. A <u>remorseless</u>, <u>invisible</u> enemy <u>threatens</u> the elderly and vulnerable among us. The disease that <u>can quickly take breath in life.</u>

The first statement shows the severity of the period through the use of the lexical item "*challenging*" and "*solemn time*". The strategic use of short sentences and choice of lexical items like "*remorseless*", "*invisible enemy*", "*threatens*" and *"quickly take breath"* describes the ruthless and indiscriminately nature of virus which preys on the US citizens.

Medical professionals are <u>risking their own health for the health of others</u> and we're <u>deeply grateful.</u> Officials at every level are setting out the requirements of public health that <u>protect us</u> all and <u>we all need to do our part</u>.

Appreciating the health workers and other health officials is meant to indirectly remind and appeal to the emotion and mental perception of the citizens of their efforts through the use of the lexical item "*risk*" to enable the US citizen not only to recognize and appreciate the efforts of the governmental health works and officials but also minimizing risks by doing their part which entails keeping the health regulations stipulated by government health officials.

The disease also <u>threatens</u> broader damage, harm to our <u>sense of safety security</u> and <u>community</u>. The larger <u>challenge</u> <u>we</u> <u>share</u> is to confront an <u>outbreak of fear</u> and <u>loneliness</u> and it is <u>frustrating</u> that many of the <u>normal tools of compassion</u>; <u>a hug, a touch</u> can bring the <u>opposite of the good</u> we intend.

The virus can easily take people's lives, but it has also disrupted the normal human activities such as the normal touch and hugs, which are signs of expressing human feelings and compassion are seen as medium of transferring the virus.

<u>We save our neighbour by separating from them</u>. <u>We cannot allow physical separation to become emotional isolation</u>. This requires us to be not only compassionate but creative in our outreach and people across the nation are using the tool of technology.

Through stylistic devices, he positively encourages the US citizens not to see the social distancing as a form of emotional separation but as a means of protecting their neighbour.

Following 9/11, <u>I</u> <u>saw</u> a great nation <u>rises</u> <u>to honour the brave</u>, <u>to grieve with the grieving</u> and <u>to embrace unavoidable new duties</u> and <u>I</u> have <u>no doubt</u> , <u>none at all</u> that this <u>spirit of service and sacrifice is alive and well in America.</u> Second let us <u>remember</u> that <u>empathy</u> and <u>simple kindness</u> are essential powerful tools for <u>national recovery</u> even at an appropriate social distance, we can <u>find</u> ways to be <u>present</u> in the lives of others to <u>ease their anxiety</u> and <u>share</u> their burdens. Let us <u>remember</u> that the suffering we <u>experience</u> as a nation doesn't fall.

Making reference to the historical 9/11historical terrorist incidents that took countless American citizens' lives was meant to refresh their memories of how they had survived such a nefarious event. Through the government's collective efforts and the masses were able to pull through. So, therefore, this COVID-19 situation should not be different. The transition from the first-person plural "We" to the first person perceptive is to make an emotional appeal that helps him to identify and forge a good relationship with his audience. He used mental verbs "saw" "rise" "remember" "experience" , and the emotional verbs "honour", "grieve" "empathy" "embrace" to motivate and invoke spirit of solidarity and unity in the hearts of the US citizens.

Finally, let <u>us</u> <u>remember</u> how <u>small</u> <u>our differences</u> are in the face of this shared threat. In the final analysis <u>we</u> are not <u>partisan combatants</u>. <u>We</u> are human beings <u>equally vulnerable</u> and e<u>qually wonderful</u> in the sight of God. <u>We</u> <u>rise or fall together</u> and we are <u>determined</u> <u>to rise</u>. God bless you all.

He intends to motivate the US citizens not to see any differences in another irrespective of any political affiliation or race because that should not be so important under such critical circumstance but rather being united. Making reference to God's benevolence bestowed on mankind to motivate and prompt them that in making America great depends on each and every one of them. His use of the mental verb "*determine*" shows his faith and confidence in America successfully conquering the virus.

4.1 Contextual correlation of Adaptation
Adaptation to the physical world

According to Versehueren, the physical world comprises various elements such as language users, gestures, bodily postures, physical appearance, physical condition, and biological property. In Bush COVID-19 message, the physical world is the United

State of America, which was clearly seen and mentioned in the message. As well as the 9/11 historical event attributed to the American Nation.

*Following **9/11**, I saw a great nation rises to honour the brave, to grieve with the grieving and to embrace unavoidable new duties and I have no doubt , none at all that this spirit of service and sacrifice is alive and well in **America**.*

It is also an undeniable fact that as a former US president with reputable influence, integrity and having such hierarchical status will definitely exert some influence in communication or making linguistic choices that will have a maximum effect on the US citizens.

Adaptation to the social world

In Jef's Adaptation theory, the social world comprises the social standard, principles, and environment. The choice of language used by interlocutors is closely related to the social element. On the other hand, these social elements such as nationality, age, race, education, religion, social status, and gender affect the linguistic choice of language use and linguistic choice of language, on the other hand, can also affect the social relation or power. The social world was during the COVID-19 period during the lockdown to curtail the virus's further spread. In order to successfully achieve a communicative purpose,Bush adapts to the social world through the strategic use of language choice by focusing on the revised normalance of the social condition of living in America since the outbreak of the COVID-19 virus. "*hugs*" and "*touch*" which are an attribute that fosters interpersonal relationship among people is seen as a taboo due to the virus.

Adaptation to the mental world.

The mental world enshrines the interlocutors'' cognitive and psychological world. Such cognitive and psychological worlds can be seen in different factors such as interlocutors' or language users' attitudes, emotions, beliefs, motivations, intentions, and desires.

Through this message, the former US president does not only tries to appeal but to encourage, motivate and also tends to manipulate the emotional and mental perception of the US citizen in observing the health rules to avoid the escalation of the virus. The strategic choices of emotional and mental verbs, short clear sentences and citation of the biblical and historical or memorable event was meant to elicit and influence the emotional and mental state of the US citizens in abiding with the stipulated health regulations, foster unity and an assurance of a hopeful future.

Linguistic contextual adaptability

Bush's COVID-19 message was characterized by wide strategic choice of lexical terms, making it possible to motivate, encourage, and persuade US citizens. The wide use of emotional verbs such as *"honour", "grieve" "embrace" "sacrifice", "loneliness"* etc and mental verbs like "*remember", "experience", "see"* etc, was meant to influence or spike the mental perception and emotions of the Americans. The use of the first person plural pronoun "WE" shows a sense of identification and strengthens the relationship between him and the American citizens. The transition from the first person plural pronoun to the first person singular pronoun "I" was to present himself as an individual speaking from his own perspective, preferably not highlighting one's good qualities and accomplishments (Bramley 2001:259), but trying to motivate and install the spirit of resilient in the American citizens.

On the sentential level, it is seen that the Ex American president COVID-19 message is marked by syntactical features such as the use of simple and short sentences, less use of passive voice and more of active voice to make it easier for his listeners to comprehend the message effectively. Through less passive voice, the interpersonal relationship has been established, and a friendly atmosphere is created. Through cohesion and cohesive devices such as repetitions, comparison, contrasting, substitution and making biblical and historical references, he makes his message communicative and clear to the American citizens.

The use of the 9/11 historical event to make an analogy with this current pandemic condition was to motivate and induce an emotional response from them to stay together in united and in solidarity.

5. Conclusion
This study investigates the former American president Bush strategic use of appropriate language choices in maintaining the social relationship and persuading, motivating, and encouraging the US citizens in his COVID-19 message. Verschueren proposes that "using language must consist of the continuous making of linguistic choices, consciously or unconsciously, for language-internal (i.e., structural) and/or language-external reasons" (Verschueren, 2000, p55-56), and the process of making linguistic choices entails three core properties which are variability, negotiability and adaptability. In making any linguistic choices to meet communication needs, adaptability as a core property of language cannot be undermined.

It is undeniable that the strategic choice of language use plays a prominent role in any given form of communication. Through the data analysis, it is evident that the previous American president Gorge Bush made use of strategic language choices adapts to the three contextual correlations, the physical, social and mental world, to manipulate, motivate, encouraging and persuading the American citizens in obeying the stipulated health regulations, keeping social distancing, and helping those in need. It was a call for unity and solidarity among American citizen. The selective use of words, short sentences, less passive voice, analogy, famous citations and biblical quotes enables them to trigger their citizens' mental cognition to adapt to their ideological beliefs.The use of contextual adaptability in analyzing the COVID--19 speech ignoring the three other focal areas of adaptability is also crucial in choice-making. However, it is suggested that the study will pave the way for other researchers to integrate the four focal areas of adaptability in analyzing any form of politcial speeches.

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