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Corruption as a Word Class in the Nigerian State: A Synchronic Linguistic Perspective

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Abstract:
Corruption as a linguistic item belongs to the noun word class. In the Nigerian state, corruption is a daily occurrence in its different forms ranging from police collecting bribe from motorists to heads of government 'looting' the nation's treasury. This study lays emphasis on financial corruption and so came up with the following findings: (i) the lexical items on corruption do not occur alone but in syntactic structures, particularly, phrases and clauses; (ii) financial corruption has no regard for figures as the money corruptly acquired can be as low as N100 (one hundred naira) and as high as €929,589 (nine hundred and twenty nine thousand, five hundred and eighty nine pounds); (iii) corruption always has locations and time (dates). This is because corrupt practitioners struggle to get the best opportunities in places and dates to act. As Nigeria is getting older (1914-2014), it is expected that corruption should be minimal, if not completely eradicated, however, it sadly makes top among issues featured in our national dailies; an evidence for high cases of its occurrence in the Nigerian state.

1. Introduction

According to Thakur (2007:4), "In most textbooks of traditional grammar, (e.g., Curine, 1935) the term "Parts of Speech" included the following word classes: noun, pronoun, verb, adverb, adjective, preposition, conjunction and interjection". The traditional notion of Parts of Speech was open to a number of serious objections. For example, the use of hazy semantic criteria for defining the parts of speech was bad enough but what made those traditional definitions of the parts of speech worse was the fact that not all the parts of speech were defined with reference to the same criteria. Nouns, verbs and interjections were, for example, defined in terms of semantic criteria but adverbs were defined in terms of their syntactic functions. There was, in other words, no consistency of approach in those traditional definitions of the Parts of Speech.

Thakur (2007:7) continues that:

The grammatical class of a word, i.e., its part of speech can be ascertained on the basis of its typical inflexional ending. A verb, for example, can be identified because of its potential to take (-s), (-ed) and (-ing); and a noun, because of its potential to take the plural suffix and the genitive suffix. Similarly, an adjective can be identified because of its potential to take the comparative suffix (-er) and the superlative suffix (-est).

Word classes in English are also derivationally identified. For example, words ending with derivational suffixes like, -ation, -hood, -ity, -ism, -ment, -ness and –ship are generally nouns; words ending with suffixes like, -en, -fy and –ize are verbs; and words ending with suffixes like, -able, -ish and -less are generally adjectives.

Also, according to Thakur (2007:8),

The grammatical class of a word can also be identified on the basis of its syntactic function in a sentence or a phrase. For example, a noun can be the subject of a sentence, the object of a transitive verb and the complement of a preposition. An adjective can be identified on the basis of its potential to operate as a subject-complement or an object-complement and, similarly, a verb can be identified on the basis of its potential to operate as the predicator element in a sentence.

The discussion above therefore, places 'corruption' into the noun word class. Corruption can also syntactically occupy the subject position of a sentence, the object of a sentence and a complement of a preposition. E.g.,

    S   P   C   A
(i) ///Corruption / is / the main problem / of Nigeria.///
         S   A   P   C
(ii) ///The main problem / of Nigeria / is / corruption.///
         S   A   P   A
(iii) ///The problem / of Nigeria / is / in Nigeria.///

Since corruption has become endemic particularly, in the Nigerian state, this article will discuss the Nigerian state briefly.

2. The Nigerian State: An Overview

According to Rasheed (2007), the Nigerian state is about to undergo unprecedented economic, political, ethical and cultural change. The changes are all geared towards creating a new nation driven not by oil and other natural resources by knowledge. Already, the signs are becoming very visible in education, particularly, in scientific literacy, which can lead to meaningful changes in relative wealth and position of knowledge. Economy will acquire direct and deliberate control over those who ignore the changes and turn their backs on building empires of the mind. In our knowledge driven world, the power of skill, not power of property is the ultimate arbiter. Nigerians will soon be forced to choose either to learn to surf these new and powerful wave of change, or to be crushed and consumed by them.

Oil-rich nation states like Nigeria have not been able to exploit their petroleum and other natural resources adequately because they have not been able to understand that the dominant language and economic driver of this century is knowledge. In other words, they have not accorded education the priority it deserves. As Enriquez (2001:47) argues, "Rich countries no longer need great deposit of gold or diamond or an abundance of land or millions of people. They need to educate their population".

To understand the impact of knowledge economy on a nation state like Nigeria, Enriquez (2001:51-52) relates the story of Singapore's transformation from tiny Island to a rich modern state. In 1950, Singapore was an isolated, tiny poor island. It was not even a country before 1965. Its future was so bleak that its leaders went to Malaysia and requested that it be absolved into the Malaysian state. Malaysians declined, arguing that absolving Singapore would make the country (Malaysia) poorer. Around that period, nation states such as Nigeria, Ghana, Burma and Sri Lanka appeared richer, far more promising than the impoverished Singapore. Because it was not endowed with natural resources like gold, oil, etc, Singapore had no choice but to educate its people, reform its government, and create a knowledge economy. Today, Singaporeans enjoy a standard of living compared to that of the United States. They have a standard of living almost three times higher than Malaysia which 50 years earlier regarded it (Singapore) as an unviable territory. Of course, there is no basis for comparing Singapore with Nigeria or even Malaysia with Nigeria.

Knowledge, then, is indispensable in today's digitalised world. Many scholars of the Nigerian state have focussed on corruption and mismanagement to explain why the country's abundant natural resources have not improved the quality of life of the generality of the citizens. This work dwells on similar chronicle of corruption as a linguistic item which has been prominent within the history of the Nigerian state which we now mark (a century of Nigeria's existence).

3. Methodology for Data Collection

Selected sentences from two (2) national dailies will be used: "Daily Sun", Wednesday, November 21, 2007; "Daily Trust", Wednesday, December 5, 2007; "Sunday Sun", October 20, 2013. From the sentences, the linguistic items signifying corruption in the present state of Nigeria will be the focus. The study also focuses specifically on financial corruption.

4. Data Presentation

"Sunday Sun", October 20, 2013, page 13

/// "The inmate who recently regained freedom from the prison also alleged that inmates paid between N100.00 to N150.00 for a bucket of water".///

///In a chat with "Sunday Sun", the former inmate who would not want his name in print said "You must pay before you are taken to count; if you don't pay nobody takes you to count and that is why many prisoners don't come to count; they say the money is for the Black Maria, and it's N2,000.00 each".///

"Daily Trust", Monday, February 4, 2013, page 4

///"The resolutions passed last June by the Senate on the report of our investigation into person found mismanagement are sacrosanct and must be implemented by the executive…."///

/// Etok said his committee had given Maria enough opportunity for fair hearing in the recent investigation into the fresh N195 billion pension scam….///

5. Discussion on the Data Presented

Discussion on the data will follow the pattern below:
- The lexical and syntactic items signifying corruption.
- The figures in monetary terms involving corruption.
- The dates and locations of corruption in the sentences cited as data.

5.1. Lexical and syntactic items signifying corruption from the data

"Daily Sun", Wednesday, November 21, 2007

(i)   Count 1: by false pretence and with intent to defraud… (2 prepositional phrases).

(ii)   Count 2: by false pretence and with intent to defraud… (2 prepositional phrases, same as above).

(iii)   [… in respect of a contract allegedly awarded….] (Adverbial phrase).

"Daily Trust", Wednesday, December 5, 2007

(i)   [… in connection with a suspected case of theft….] (Adverbial phrase).

"Sunday Sun", October 20, 2013

(i)   /// "You must pay // before you are taken to court,..."/// (alpha clause and a beta clause).

                +

(ii)   ///[[… they say the money is for the Black Maria // and // it's N2,000.00 each.]]/// (2 alpha clauses).

(iii)   [[…if you don't pay, nobody takes you to court…]] (Adverbial clause of condition)
"Daily Trust", Monday, February 4, 2013
(i)   /// "The resolutions passed last June by the Senate on the report of our investigation into <u>person found mismanagement</u> are sacrosanct and must be implemented by the executive…."/// (alpha clause).
(ii)   /// Etok said his committee had given Maria enough opportunity for fair hearing in the recent investigation into <u>the fresh N195 billion pension scam</u>…./// (alpha clause)

5.2. Figures in monetary terms involved in corruption
(i)   Daily Sun, Wednesday, November 21, 2007
Count 1
- /N6,263,000.00 (Six million, two hundred and sixty three thousand naira)/
Count 2
- /N41,000,000.00 (Forty-one million naira)/
(ii)   Daily Trust, Wednesday, December 5, 2007
- /ϵ11,560.00 (Eleven thousand, five hundred and sixty pounds)/
- / ϵ918,029.00 (Nine hundred and eighteen thousand, twenty-nine pounds)/
(iii)   Sunday Sun, October 20, 2013
- /N100.00 to N150.00 (One hundred – One hundred and fifty naira)/
- /N2,000.00 (Two thousand naira)/
(iv)   Daily Trust, Monday, February 4, 2013
- /N195,000,000,000,000.00 (One hundred and ninety-five billion naira)/

5.3. The dates and locations of corruption
(i)   Daily Sun, Wednesday, November 21, 2013
Count 1
- /Kogi State Directorate of Rural Development/ (location)
- /…on or about 6th day of February, 2001/ (date)
Count 2
- /…on or about 5th day of March, 2002/ (date)
- /Kogi State Directorate of Rural Development/ (location)
(ii)   Daily Trust, Wednesday, December 5, 2007
- /on 20th of January, 2004/ (date)
- /at 127 Chiltern House, Portland, London SE17/ (location)
- /Barclays Bank, London/ (location)
- /Flat 28, Regents Plaza, apartment 8, Greville Road, London NW6/ (location)
(iii)   Sunday Sun, October 20, 2013
- /…prison…./ (location)

6. Findings and Conclusion
- The lexical items pointing to corruption did not occur alone but rather in syntactic structures as follows:
  Daily Sun, Wednesday, November 21, 2007 contains four (4) prepositional phrases denoting corruption and one (1) adverbial phrase. Also, the Daily Trust of Wednesday, December 5, 2007 contains an adverbial phrase denoting corruption.
  For Sunday Sun, October 20, 2013, a sentence containing an alpha and a beta clause points to corruption. There is also a conditional adverbial clause that indicates the necessity for corruption should a prisoner refuses to oblige the condition.
  In Daily Trust, Monday, February 4, 2013, there are two (2) noun phrases in two (2) alpha clauses indicating corruption.
- As for figures in monetary terms that have corruptly been acquired, in Daily Sun, Wednesday, November 21, 2007, N47,263,000.00 (Forty-seven million, two hundred and sixty-three thousand naira) was discovered. In Daily Trust, Wednesday, December 5, 2007, ϵ929,589.00 (Nine hundred and twenty-nine thousand, five hundred and eighty-nine pound) was discovered to have been embezzled. In Sunday Sun, October 20, 2013, between N2, 100.00 and N2, 150.00 (Two thousand, one hundred naira and two thousand, one hundred and fifty naira) are spent by prisoners on prison officials to obtain favour. In Daily Trust, Monday, February 4, 2013, one person was discovered to have fraudulently acquired N195 billion.
- For dates and locations of corruption, Daily Sun, Wednesday, November 21, 2007 reports that on or about 6th February, 2001, at the Kogi State Directorate of Rural Development, the event of corruption took place. Also, on or about the 5th March, 2002, in the same Kogi State Directorate of Rural Development, a similar event of corruption took place.
- Daily Trust, Wednesday, December 5, 2007 reports that on 20th February, 2004, at 127, Chiltern House, Portland Street, London SE17, a case of corruption was discovered. Also, a Barclays Bank London Account was discovered to be harbouring some amount of money that was corruptly obtained. At flat 28, Regents Plaza apartments, 8 Greville Road, London NW6, also, a case of corruption was reported. In the Sunday Sun, October 20, 2013, an ex-convict reported some incidents of corruption that is perpetuated against prisoners by some prison officials.

The above findings reveal that the word 'corruption' can appear in different syntactic structures normally using lexical items in phrases and clauses or sentences that point to it (corruption). Financial corruption has no regard for figures. The figures can be as low as N100.00 (One hundred naira) and as high as N195,000,000,000,000.00 (One hundred and ninety-five billion naira). Corruption always has locations and dates (time) it occurs. This is because corrupt practitioners struggle to get the best opportunity in places and dates to act. This is a clear indication that most public office holders in Nigeria do not have adequate moral training that will equip them to resist the urge to be corrupt. Some public office holders do make some people (like prisoners) to discover the angle of the crime of corruption if such people had not toyed that path before. As Nigeria is getting older (1914-2014), it is expected that corruption should be minimal, if not completely eradicated, however, it sadly makes top among issues featured in our national dailies; an evidence for high cases of its occurrence in the Nigerian state.

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