

Underpinning the Foolery Concept of OBJ and IBB: The Gricean Conversational Maxims Perspective

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Abstract

The Gricean conversational maxims posit that all conversations follow a basic set of rules, which people use to express themselves when speaking. The four basic rules (maxims) include quality, quantity, relation, and manner. Failure to observe any or all of these maxims results in conversational implicature. In this paper, we explore the possibility of fitting the foolery concept of OBJ and IBB into the Gricean theoretical framework; determine the extent to which it obeys the cooperative principles, and the implications for leadership in the nation's evolving democratic culture. From the analysis, the claims of OBJ and IBB about one another as former Presidents of Nigeria violate the cooperative principles thus leading to conversational implicature. This by implication runs contrary to the proper use of language in the contemporary Nigerian environment. The foregoing imposes urgent demand on OBJ and IBB to refrain from expletives and mudslinging quite demeaning and unworthy of the status of former Presidents of Nigeria and foster a kind of national leadership that encourages temperance in the use of language in interpersonal communications.

Keywords: conversational maxims, cooperative principles, fool, IBB, language, OBJ.

1. Introduction

This paper plucks its note from the verbal warfare between the two former Presidents of Nigeria, Olusegun Obasanjo (OBJ) and Ibrahim B. Babangida (IBB) as was reported in the Nigerian print media. In this regard, it examines the kind of political leadership foisted on Nigeria since 1960 that has produced post-independence leaders in the likes of Generals Obasanjo and Babangida, who in recent times had engaged themselves in verbal fisticuffs. From the perspective of Paul Grice's Conversational Maxims and Implicature, we undertake a theoretical underpinning of such 'unpresidential' altercation and determine the extent to which such verbal exchanges are in sync with their antecedents as elder statesmen and/or offend our collective sensibilities as Nigerians striving to evolve an enduring democratic culture.

"Managers," in the words of Bennis (2003:29), "are people who do things right, while leaders are people who do the right thing." According to McFarland (1969: 167), a leader "is one who makes things happen that would not happen otherwise. If the leader causes changes that he intended, he has exercised power, but if the leader causes changes that he did not intend or want, he has exercised influence, but not power." Influence and power as perquisites of leadership resonated sonorously in Henry Kissinger's depiction of a leader as one who has the power to invoke the 'alchemy of great vision.' Gardner (1978) adds the 'duty' prerequisite, which leaders must have. Part of the onerous duties of leaders, in his view is to help societies "understand the problems that all must face, to aid in the setting of goals and priorities, to work with others in finding paths to those goals chosen, maintaining public morale, and motivation and nurturing a workable level of public unity." Furthermore, it behooves the leaders to "activate existing institutions in pursuit of the society's goals or, when necessary, help redesign institutions to achieve that result. Leaders must also help people know how they can be at their best ...with malice toward none, with charity for all..."

According to Hakala (2009), leadership is one's ability to get others to willingly follow. A leader with **vision** has a clear, vivid picture of where to go, as well as a firm grasp on what success looks like and how to achieve it. Hakala listed the top leadership qualities to include integrity, dedication, openness, magnanimity, humility, creativity, fairness, assertiveness, and a sense of humour. Integrity, in his opinion, is the integration of outward actions and inner values. A person of integrity is the same on the outside and on the inside. Such an individual can be trusted because he or she never veers from inner values, even when it might be expeditious to do so. A leader must have the trust of followers and therefore must display integrity. Honest dealings, predictable reactions, well-controlled emotions, and an absence of tantrums and harsh outbursts are all signs of integrity. Also, the 7th of the 12 characteristics of a great leader as listed by Jean Klett says: "Leaders are well spoken. They know how to say the right thing at the right time."

In this context therefore, a 'leader' refers to persons who have occupied in the past or are presently occupying important positions of authority and power in the formal polity of the Nigerian nation. Against the backdrop of the foregoing, we set out to examine the statements credited to former Presidents Olusegun Obasanjo and Ibrahim Babangida, which referred to one another as 'a fool at 70' and 'the greatest fool of the century' respectively. These statements, which were reported mostly as headlines in a good number of Nigerian newspapers and news magazines in August 2011, have been dominating media political discourses. This paper therefore, is our own response to the challenge thrown up by the decision of OBJ and IBB to let Nigerians and indeed the international community have a peep into the stinking underbelly of the brand of instrumental leadership, which they foisted on Nigeria when they held sway as President and Commander-in-Chief. This is in line with the practical and pragmatic character of our academic orientation, which predisposes us to utilize the insightful hindsight and resources offered by sociolinguistic theories in examining historical and contemporary issues of political and socioeconomic relevance. In doing this, we shall follow the theoretical and analytical procedures of Grice (1975) 'Co-operative Principles, the basic tenets of which we shall discuss in the section that follows presently.

2. Framework

Grice's (1975) theory of conversation starts with a sharp distinction between what someone says and what someone 'implicates' by uttering a sentence. What someone says is determined by the conventional meaning of the sentence uttered and contextual processes of disambiguation and reference fixing; what he implicates is associated with the existence to some rational principles and maxims governing conversation. What is said has been widely identified with the literal content of the utterance; what is implicated, the implicature, with the non-literal, what it is (intentionally) communicated, but not said, by the speaker. According to Grice, the 'calculation' of conversational implicatures is grounded on common knowledge of what the speaker has said (or better, the fact that he has said it), the linguistic and extra linguistic context of the utterance, general background information, and the consideration of the 'Cooperative Principle (CP)'. This Principle requires interlocutors to make their conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which they are engaged.

The CP is implemented, in the plans of speakers and understanding of hearers, by conforming to the maxims of quantity, quality, relation, and manner. The quantity maxim requires interlocutors to make their contribution as informative as is required and not to make it more informative than is required. The maxim of quality emphasizes the truthfulness of the interlocutors' contributions, avoiding what they believe to be false and that for which they lack adequate evidence. The maxim of relation *requires that* the interlocutors stay on the topic. In other words, it is ensured that their comments fit with what is being talked about. *Maxim of manner* states that comments should be direct, clear, and to the point. Using vague or ambiguous language when speaking should be avoided. Frame whatever you say in the form most suitable for any reply that would be regarded as appropriate; or, facilitate in your form of expression the appropriate reply.

Grice sees the principles governing conversation as deriving from general principles governing human rational cooperative action and attributes to these principles an essential role for the definition and the interpretation of conversational implicatures. In essence, failure on the part of the interlocutors to observe the cooperative principle, which by implication leads to the violation of the four maxims, results in conversational implicature. In this paper, we subject the foolery concept of OBJ and IBB to analysis within the Gricean principle and see how the concept is a manifestation of conversational implicature, which derives from the failure of the former Nigerian Presidents to observe the cooperative principle and by extension, the violation of the conversational maxims. In doing this, we shall first, put the concept of *fool* in more intelligible perspective by providing its etymological and denotative overview.

3. Fool: Etymological and denotative overview

Fool, as a word derived from the Latin term, *folies*, which meant "a bag or sack, a large inflated ball, a pair of bellows." Users of the word in Late Latin, however, saw a resemblance between the bellows or the inflated ball and a person who was what we would call "a windbag" or "an airhead." According to Roger's *Thesaurus*, the word, which passed into English by way of French, is first recorded in English in a work written around the beginning of the 13th century with the sense "a foolish, stupid, or ignorant person." Comic entertainer whose madness or imbecility, real or pretended, made him a source of amusement and gave him license to abuse and poke fun at even his most exalted patrons. Professional fools flourished in diverse societies from ancient Egyptian times until the 18th century. Often deformed, dwarfed, or crippled, fools were kept for luck as well as amusement, in the belief that deformity can avert the evil eye and that abusive raillery can transfer ill luck from the abused to the abuser. In some societies, they were

regarded as inspired with poetic and prophetic powers. The greatest literary characterization of the fool is found in William Shakespeare's *King Lear*.

In denotative terms, Roger's *Thesaurus* defines fool in two senses: (i) One deficient in judgment and good sense: ass, idiot, imbecile, jackass, mooncalf, moron, nincompoop, ninny, nitwit, simple, simpleton, softhead, tomfool. Informal usage has dope, gander, and goose while slang equivalents include cretin, ding-dong, dip, goof, jerk, nerd, schmo, schmuck, turkey; (ii) A person who is easily deceived or victimized: butt, dupe, gull, lamb, pushover, victim, sucker. As a verb, *Thesaurus* explains fool in four senses: (i) To cause to accept what is false, especially by trickery or misrepresentation: beguile, betray, bluff, cozen, deceive delude, double-cross, dupe, hoodwink, humbug, mislead; (ii) To waste time by engaging in aimless activity: doodle, putter; (iii) To handle something idly, ignorantly, or destructively: fiddle, meddle, mess, tamper, tinker; (iv) To move one's fingers or hands in a nervous or aimless fashion: fiddle, fidget, monkey, monkey, play, putter, tinker, toy, trifle, twiddle. As a phrasal verb - *fool around*, *Thesaurus* has the following: *phrasal verb* (i) To waste time by engaging in aimless activity: doodle, fool, putter; (ii) To make jokes; behave playfully: jest, joke; (iii) To engage in kissing, caressing, and other amorous behavior; (iv) To be sexually unfaithful to another: philander, womanize.

Given the foregoing, we shall examine the foolery concept as enunciated by OBJ and IBB and determine the extent to which it fits into the etymological and denotative frames.

4. Data presentation and analysis

On the eve of his 70th birthday (16 August 2011), the former Military President of Nigeria, General Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida (IBB) had, while fielding questions from newsmen during a press conference at his Hill Top Villa in Minna, Niger State, recounted his numerous achievements in office between 1985 and 1993 in spite of the "modest" oil revenue, while his successors, he said, enjoyed higher oil revenue and did not do better. Specifically, he said that his 'senior' in the Nigerian Army wasted a whopping \$16 billion to build power plants without anything to show for it. "During my years as president, I managed poverty to achieve commendable results but these days, people manage affluence to achieve poverty," he said. Accordingly, he dismissed former President Obasanjo's eight-year civilian rule as 'visionless' and 'lacking in focus'. The next day (17 August 2011), Chief Obasanjo (OBJ) replied IBB, saying that "Babangida is a fool at 70."

According to Olukoya & Samuel (2011), "Obasanjo, who quoted from the Book of Proverbs, chapter 26 verses 4 and 5 in the Holy Bible, justified his reason for referring to Babangida as a fool, contending that the statement ascribed to the former military president was not well thought out. His words:

Well, normally when I read these things, I don't believe them... It's a little bit unlike Babangida. But if Babangida had decided, on becoming a septuagenarian, that he will be a fool, I think one should probably do what the Bible says in Proverbs chapter 26, verse 4. It says 'don't answer a fool because you may also become like him.' When you go to the same Proverbs chapter 26, verse 5, it says 'answer a fool so that he will not think he's a wise man.' So, I am now torn between which of the two verses I should follow in this respect. Some of the things he said unfortunately were not well thought out... I also read where he said that in his time, he gave the dividends of democracy and at the same time he regretted. When I read that, well I said Babangida should be pitied and shown sympathy rather than anger or condemnation, because the old saying says a fool at 40 is a fool forever and I would say a regret at 70 is regret too late. Well, a regret at 70 is a regret to the grave...

On his own part, IBB reacted swiftly to OBJ's comment on him through his media consultant, Kazeem Afegbua, wondering how Obasanjo could refer to him as a fool, even against the backdrop of efforts he had made to assuage the disgrace he had suffered through imprisonment and after which he facilitated the process of his becoming the president of Nigeria in 1999. His words:

We do not want to believe that he (Obasanjo) truly said that, but if it is true that he did say that, Nigerians know who the greatest (sic) fool is. The history of Chief Obasanjo is an open sore that is irredeemably contrived in several incongruities and contradictions. When he pleaded with IBB to be given another chance to extend his tenure, IBB was not a fool then. When he was released from prison and granted state pardon, bathed in cerebral ornaments and clothed in royal beads and later crowned as president of Nigeria, IBB was not a fool then... Now that he is at the extreme of his thoughts and engagements, he can decide to dress IBB in borrowed robes. But the histories of both of them, when put to public scrutiny comparatively, IBB is far glowing and instructively stands poles apart from Obasanjo. In terms of decency, finesse, class, distinction and general conduct, IBB could be described in the superlatives, but for Obasanjo, God bless Nigeria... Calling IBB a fool at 70, especially by a man reportedly and allegedly

accused of incest by his own son, was, at best, a compliment. Nigerians surely know who is truly a fool or the greatest fool of this century... For a man who cannot possibly tell his true age, one may excuse his present outburst as the effusions of a witless comedian trying effortlessly to impress his select audience. (www.vanguardngr.com Friday, 19 August, 2011)

Not unexpectedly, this altercation between the two former Presidents elicited spontaneous reactions from a good number of Nigerians. In no time, the Nigerian print media literally ran amok with all manners of comments and opinion articles. Though variegated in texture, tone, and rendition, the comments were united by their outright condemnation of the war of words by the two retired generals as a national disgrace. (See Johnson, 2011; Kolawale 2011; Eme, 2011)

Viewed against the backdrop of the comments, we subject the OBJ-IBB verbal exchanges to a critical analysis from the theoretical standpoint of Paul Grice's conversational maxims. By framing the foolery concept of OBJ and IBB within the Gricean theoretical prism, we hope to be better disposed to determine the extent to which the OBJ-IBB interlocution conformed to or violated the cooperative principles anchored on the conversational maxims of quality, quantity, relevance, and manner. The value of such analysis portends far-reaching implications for nurturing a brand of national leadership that is in sync with the basic tenets of constitutional democracy.

4.1 Textual analysis: IBB's 70th birthday press statement

The former military President of Nigeria between 1985 and 1993 took the opportunity of his 70th birthday to recount his achievements in office but surprisingly ended up dismissing Chief Obasanjo's eight-year tenure (1999-2007) as a huge failure for reasons that he enumerated. From all perspectives, this statement runs against the grains of Gricean cooperative principle and violates the conversational maxims. The CP, which requires interlocutors to make their conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which they are engaged, does not license IBB to violate the conversational maxims. His birthday anniversary should have provided him an ample opportunity to educate his listeners on his many achievements during his eight-year reign as a military President. Incidentally, he chose to transcend this rational bound, thereby violating all the conversational maxims of quantity, quality, relation, and manner. To dismiss OBJ's eight-year rule as visionless perhaps for 'managing affluence to achieve poverty,' may not be totally correct. OBJ may have made mistakes in office as a President, which are not unexpected as a human being but it is equally pointless to ignore his 'modest' achievements.

Opinion writers and commentators in the Nigerian print media wonder why IBB chose to use his 70th birthday anniversary to launch attacks on OBJ. For Momodu (2011), the OBJ-IBB verbal face-off was a pleasant surprise. "Little did we suspect that the occasion of Ex-President Ibrahim Babangida's 70th birthday would supply such a major scoop, a rare opportunity to hear septuagenarians address themselves as fools, and other interesting aliases!" Kolawale (2011) expressed his surprise thus, "I must confess that I am a bit surprised Babangida chose to play the role of the antagonist in this instance. The original attack came on the eve of his birthday unprovoked. This is very rare." An anonymous commentator in *Saharareporter* observed, "IBB took a sad and wrong step using his 70th birthday to describe OBJ's tenure as 'a failure'. A wiser person would have used the opportunity to reflect on his own contributions to Nigeria!"

4.2 OBJ's reply

From the foregoing analysis, IBB's statement about OBJ's eight-year tenure violated the cooperative principle and thus leading to conversational implicature. Nonetheless, OBJ's response did little to lift the conversation from the base level. Instead, it drove the conversation further down the gutter precipice of profanity and verbal abuse. The 'cooperative principle' implies a general agreement of cooperation between interlocutors in a conversation, which requires each participant to conform to certain conventions in speaking. These conventions or maxims, according to Brown & Yule (1983: 83) have to do with the *quantity* or (informativeness), the *quality* (truthfulness), the *manner* (clearness) and *relevance* of conversational contributions. The maxim of quantity requires the interlocutor to make his contribution as informative as is required. In other words, he should not say more or less than is expected of him. The maxim of quality predisposes the speaker/writer to speak or write only, that which is true and authentic. The relevance maxim ensures that the interlocutor's speech is relevant in the context of the speech act. In other words, the speaker is expected to stay on the topic and resist the urge to wander away from the topic of discussion. The maxim of manner requires the language user in a communicative event to be clear, brief, orderly and avoid vague and/or ambiguous expressions.

If one should follow the first sense of a fool as defined by the Roger's Thesaurus as 'one deficient in judgment and good sense,' OBJ's depiction of IBB could be seen as conforming partly to the maxim of quantity. This is because it makes little sense for anyone to dismiss his eight-year rule as a waste, bearing in mind the flashes of achievements recorded during the period under review. IBB's assessment lacked objectivity and looked more like one borne out of frustration. IBB, it was who 'stepped aside' in 1993, a veiled reference to his reluctance to relinquish power and the ambition to reclaim it a later time. According to Momodu (2011), "part of his strategy was to support Obasanjo's come-back bid. This was in the hope that Obasanjo would remember his good deeds and help whenever the time comes for him to step back into the ring." But contrary to IBB's wildest imagination, OBJ turned out an ungrateful tenant, who changed the locks soon after the doors were opened to the utter stupefaction of his landlord. This 'ingratitude' in the opinion of Momodu, is the basis of the OBJ-IBB verbal fisticuffs.

Kolawale (2011) expressed a similar opinion when he attributed the fallout of 'the cold, freezing war between the generals' to this act of betrayal. His words:

My conclusion, therefore, is that with nothing more to lose or gain at 70, Babangida simply let go of his bottled-up resentment for Obasanjo. He had been too loyal to Obasanjo for ages and hardly got anything in return.

For Frank (2011), "IBB is angry and frustrated. He wanted to be a civilian President, but failed. That was why when he was disgraced after annulling June 12. He said he was stepping aside. He thought he would return later as a civilian President to continue with his evil genius." Moore (2011) claims that IBB had hoped to celebrate his 70th Birthday in his beloved Aso Rock, which OBJ tactically denied him and made sure that his dream of returning to Aso Rock after stepping aside in 1993 at the heat of the June 12 annulment became a history. IBB could not hide his indignation for OBJ's betrayal. He could not hide the fact that OBJ has made him redundant in Nigeria politics, and now comes the bitter IBB throwing decorum to the dustbin, Moore theorizes.

From the perspective of public opinion (Momodu, 2011; Frank, 2011; Momodu, 2011; Kolawale, 2011), IBB's assessment of OBJ's tenure was defective and lacked good sense. This Freudian slip provided the tinder box for the latter's foolery enunciation, which partly conforms to the Gricean conversational maxim of quality. Nonetheless, the maxims demand total compliance, a kind of zero sum allegiance from interlocutors, not shades or gradations of conformity. To that extent, OBJ's depiction of IBB as a fool violates the maxim of quality. In the opinion of Kazeem Afegbua, IBB's spokesman, "General IBB only made allusion to the on-going probes in the National Assembly, several of which have exposed the rotten underbelly of that democratic regime of Obasanjo. He should rather call those who are exposing him through the probes fools and not direct his anger towards IBB." It would be recalled that the week-long fact-finding exercise by the upper chamber of the National Assembly in August 2011, revealed sordid deeds and deals and how the Nigerian state was crudely and primitively short-changed by the administration of former President Olusegun Obasanjo.

According to Blueprince (2011), "all those that testified at the Senate panel were in tandem in chorusing the name of Obasanjo as responsible for the violations of the BPE Act with impunity in a manner that the collective interest of Nigerians was sacrificed on the altar of personal gains... Obasanjo was accused by the Acting Director General of the BPE, Ms Bolanle Onagoruwa, and past heads of the bureau that included former minister of the FCT, Malam Nasir El-Rufai, of subverting all laid-down procedures in the privatization exercise by selling off some of the companies to individuals and organizations that did not participate in bids for the companies as they were traded off at prices far lower than those of bidders." For more detailed reports on the issue in the Nigerian print media, see Akogun, (2011); Folasade-Koyi & Anumie (2011); Odetola (2011); Olatunji (2011); *PeoplesDaily* Editorial (2011); Uche (2011). It was against this backdrop that Afegbua considers it a height of crass irresponsibility for his principal to be described as a "fool at seventy" as a birthday message from a man who has gained more from IBB. To drive home his angst, Afegbua enjoined the *Vanguard* reporter, "Please go and check the dictionary meaning of 'fool' and you will know the import of what I am saying."

By implication, the media consultant is not unaware of what OBJ's verbal abuse portends for IBB. The underlying factor in the dynamics of verbal abuse, according to experts, is the abuser's low regard for the abused. As a result, the abuser attempts to place his victim in a position to believe similar things about him or herself, a form of warped projection. After exposure to verbal abuse, victims may fall into clinical depression and/ or post-traumatic stress disorder. If started at a young age, verbal abuse could lead to codependency, borderline personality disorder, narcissistic personal disorder, and other psychological disorders that often plague many people into adulthood. Perhaps, it is within this context that one can appreciate IBB's resolve to take refuge in verbal self defence, which called for his use of words to prevent, de-escalate., or end an attempted assault. Experts are also in agreement that verbal self defense is necessary as a means of enforcing personal boundaries and limits. Part of learning these skills

includes learning how to identify communication triggers which cause one negative feelings and, in some cases, what those triggers represent with regards to what personal values the other person are violating.

Furthermore, OBJ's speech act violated the maxim of relevance, which requires speakers to stay on the topic. Calling IBB 'a fool at 70' for criticizing his regime hardly provided appropriate response to the pertinent issues raised in the critique. This point was underscored by IBB's media consultant, Afegbua, in his reaction to OBJ's barb: "We expected Chief Obasanjo to react to the substance of General Babangida's submissions and not deploy this distractive strategy to shy away from the real issues at stake... We think and most Nigerians do, also, that the former leader went beyond his bounds to use very uncouth language to respond to what IBB said in his interview. I want to refer you to the published interview and, please find out for me, where we castigated Chief Obasanjo." Besides, OBJ had been in the habit of criticizing IBB's government without incurring the latter's invectives. In spite of such harsh criticism, IBB had maintained his cool mien. The reason, as claimed by Afegbua was that "General IBB is very magnanimous and tolerant of criticism; he does not like joining issues with his subordinates and superiors." Apparently, Afegbua, while returning 'fire for fire' had rejected avoidance, withdrawal, deflection, compromise and all other such techniques for defusing potentially volatile and/or abusive situations of conflict, thereby setting an ominous precedent, the implications for Nigeria, of which brims over with the extremities of the reverse and obverse sides of the coin.

5. The foolery concept and implications for Nigeria

The implications of the festering war of words are many and varied some of which would be discussed in this sub-section.

5.1 Children as victims of culture of intemperate language

If anything, there seems to be no foreseeable end to this bizarre and grotesque naked dance in the marketplace by two of Nigeria's most notable former leaders. The intractability derives largely from the revving verve, agility, verbal acrobatics, and regimented masterstrokes that are deployed by the competitors with effortless ease and feline fluidity to out-dance the other. But somehow, it could do Nigeria some good. This naked dance is a kind of competition, where the two contenders are comparing notes about who was more rudderless, visionless, vicious, and wicked than the other. Yes, they are irredeemably locked in a fierce duel, or better still, in an inebriate stupor, exchanging notes with irritating metallic sibilance in the full glare of the public about who wasted the nation's golden opportunities the most. They strove diligently to educate us on the extent their ludicrous kind of vision contributed towards perpetual darkness in contemporary Nigeria, thus turning the nation into a national development paradox of some sort – rich Nigeria, poor Nigerians.

The only snag with this kind of verbal warfare is that Nigerian children (like all other children, marked out by their imitative tendencies) are prone to contracting the foolery virus as stoutly enunciated by OBJ and IBB and take it as a standard for expressing in-group and out-group phatic communion. And in the event of this acquired virus developing into a full-blown AIDS-like disease, the chances are that a typical Nigerian child would glibly snort out 'You are a fool' as an appropriate response to such a simple fatherly injunction: 'Go and prepare for school'. This is in the light of the fact that leaders are easily given to embedding and transmitting culture. Two of the major primary culture-embedding mechanisms are what leaders pay attention to, measure, and control on a regular basis and how they react to critical incidents and societal crises. In essence, what a leader systematically pays attention to communicates major beliefs, what is noticed, comments made, casual questions and remarks, becomes powerful if leader sees it and is consistent. That way, the leader through the instrumentality of subtle reinforcement mechanisms completes the culture embedding and transmission cycle.

It is usual for parents to take relish in recollecting the noble achievements of their children at old age, but it is unusual for sane parents to celebrate openly the hopelessness of their own children at the sunset of their life. At the dawn of nationhood, OBJ and IBB had the rare privilege of meeting a nation that bristled with vigour, vibrancy, hope, promise, and indeed immense potentialities. As the formative stages progressed, the two lucky fellows (both thrown up by the fortuitous engineering of barrack alchemy) had the rare and exclusive fortune of directing the young blooming tendrils of the new-born nation along the stake of destiny to blossom into an exuberant foliage. But against the run of nature and contrary to the grand and ennobling visions of Nigeria's founding fathers, they seized the nation by the jugular and practically engaged her in a reverse gear of monumental ruins. Evidence of this failure of leadership is clearly scripted and acted out by our nation's degenerate state of social infrastructure, parlous economy, high incidence of poverty, hunger, and destitution, comatose and epileptic power supply, flourishing crime wave, insecurity of red alert proportion, joblessness, high mortality rate. Not a few Nigerians think alike. (See Kolawale, 2011; Orjiako, 2011; Olumhense, 20011).

5.2 *Stoking the fires of 'Arab spring'*

In this era of "Arab Awakening" when leaders (or rather, rulers) who plundered the collective patrimony of their people are being brought down from their Olympian heights to their knees through popular mass uprising, the ilk of OBJ and IBB who unleashed unmitigated despoliation on our collective psyche with the jackboot mentality and acquisitive proclivity of an occupation force are daily mocking our group complacency. It would only amount to unbridled audacity and callousness for these characters to embark on a lowly and mean downhill skiing of calling themselves 'fool' at a very inauspicious time of grave political socioeconomic challenges, the roots of which could easily be traced to their regimes. Or perhaps still, such verbal indiscretions derived from their bloated confidence that Nigeria is allergic to or is naturally immune from the political tsunami that swept through Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and still ravaging Syria, Yemen Bahrain and the entire Arab world wherein the people are calling their leaders to question and cutting them to size. Well, the bad news is that such confidence is anchored on the shifting quicksand of fatuous fallacy given that the OBJ-IBB verbal fisticuffs bears the imprimatus of combustible embers that often feed the classic populist revolution foretold by Karl Marx.

6. The foolery concept and Marxist ruling class contradictions

In this section, we seek to situate the OBJ-IBB verbal warfare within the theoretical prism of Marxism and explore the extent to which the face-off was foregrounded by Karl Marx as contradictions within the ruling class that must precede every revolution. The wisdom of this line of reasoning derives from the fact that it serves the common interests of Nigeria and Nigerians to help magnify and amplify the battles and contradictions of the ruling elite as one sure way of exposing the stinking rot, upturning the woeful status quo, and freeing Nigeria from the ravenous claws and jaws of underdevelopment and mammon of neo-colonial servitude to which our parasitic ruling class has irredeemably tethered the Nigerian nation. Perhaps, it is only reasonable and fair to worry about the parlous state of our dear Nigerian nation after fifty-one years of independence, because our post-independence leaders (nay, rulers), contrary to common logic and against the grains of nature, have willfully and blissfully engaged Nigeria in the perpetual reverse gear of underdevelopment.

Given the OBJ-IBB verbal fisticuffs, one needs not wonder again why Nigeria has been 'underdeveloping' rather than developing. As Momodu (2011) opines, "If we had any doubts in the past about why Nigeria is in this squalid state, this divine intervention is designed to unveil what the masquerades have been hiding from us." Of course, the stench that oozed from the 'unpresidential' altercations provided useful insights into the mindsets that had informed instrumental leadership in Nigeria since 1960.

The several social theories that emphasize social conflict have roots in the ideas of Karl Heinrich Marx (1818-1883), the German political philosopher, political economist, and social theorist. Social conflict theory as a Marxist-based social theory, argues that individuals and groups (social classes) within society have differing amounts of material and non-material resources (the wealthy vs. the poor) and that the more powerful groups use their power in order to exploit groups with less power. The two methods by which this exploitation is done are through brute force and economics. Thus, the social conflict theory states that groups within a capitalist society tend to interact in a destructive way that allows no mutual benefit and little cooperation. The solution Marxism proposes to this problem is that of a workers' revolution to break the political and economic domination of the capitalist class with the aim of reorganising society along lines of collective ownership and mass democratic control. Marx expected that the resulting economic cycles of expansion and contraction, together with tensions that will build as the working class gains greater understanding of its exploited position (and thus attains class consciousness), will eventually culminate in a socialist revolution.

Through the socialist revolution as Marx reasoned, men will enter 'the realm of freedom'. Consciousness will then not be the distorted ideology of oppressive social relations, resulting from the product's domination over the producer, but will be the expression of the scientifically-orientated will of the collective producers, of 'socialized humanity'. 'The free development of each will be the condition of the free development of all.' By implication, working-class consciousness is then, for Marxists, the comprehending in struggle of the process through which the proletariat develops from its identity as formed by capitalism (the mass of exploited wage-labourers, the class 'in itself') to the working class organized as a revolutionary force for the taking of power and the building of socialism (the class 'for itself').

The ruling class contradictions, which were clearly evident in the OBJ-IBB verbal face-off offers the Nigerian working class limitless opportunities to challenge the enslaving political economy of Nigeria being adroitly sustained by the apostles of instrumental leadership and enter 'the realm of freedom' in the Marxist sense. Luckily, the gladiators have been quite prodigal in supplying Nigerians with sizzling scoop about each other's ignoble exploits and other instances of official malfeasance when they held sway as the President and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of the Federal Republic of Nigeria at various times. Momodu (2011) alluded to this fact thus:

It is pertinent to examine both leaders critically since they have deliberately provided us the unique opportunity of seeing their dirty linens in public. Many of our youths who hardly have a good knowledge of Nigerian history would ultimately benefit from this unfortunate saga. I pray they would and seize this opportunity to know how Nigeria landed in this intractable mess. These two Generals are the luckiest Nigerians alive. Both have managed the biggest chunk of our resources with little to show for it. It would be nice to have them tell us where all that money has disappeared.

While returning the unprovoked jab thrown by IBB, OBJ went down the gory lane of memory to dig up the filthy mess, which IBB bequeathed to the hapless future generation of Nigerians. According to Olukoya & Samuel (2011), OBJ wondered why Babangida would describe his eight-year rule as a waste, explaining that he (Babangida) had the opportunity to build more power plants and dams when he was president considering the amount of money the nation had in its coffers at that time. On his part, IBB reacted even with greater intensity to OBJ's claims, contending that Obasanjo had no moral standing to address him, given reports of gross misdemeanours for which he (Obasanjo) was noted for as a civilian president. According to IBB's media consultant, Kazeem Afegbua, "Obasanjo cannot contemplate a comparison of his conquistadorial and largely acquisitive regime that plundered our hard-earned state resources, with that of IBB government with verifiable record of achievements."

This naked dance in the public is a clear manifestation of elite class contradiction, which Karl Marx believes, provides good reason for the downtrodden masses of Nigeria to enter the realm of freedom through populist revolution. Not many analysts are very optimistic about the success and viability of such popular uprising in Nigeria for reasons that border on the nation's multicultural and diverse ethnic character as well as the uncommon legendary resilience of Nigerians. But given that even the height of resilience has its elastic limits, unending class contradictions have inherent homogenizing effect on ethnic diversity and unify variegated viewpoints towards mustering a formidable front that would light the tinder of proletarian revolution and upstage the ignoble system.

7. Conclusions

A week after the altercation, IBB declared that he would embrace former President Olusegun Obasanjo if they met. He reportedly made the comment in a brief interview with journalists at the Presidential Wing of the Murtala Muhammed Airport, Lagos on his way to Minna. The journalists, who accosted him, asked what he would do if Obasanjo walked into the Presidential Lounge. Obviously, IBB was on damage-control mission. But unfortunately, it is too belated to vitiate the pang of the sting. Words are like arrows. Once shot forth; it is impossible to recall them. Embracing OBJ after referring to him as the 'greatest fool of the century' is a fruitless face-saving act that could neither recall the filthy words nor mitigate the pains of verbal abuse. It betrays the troubled mindset of one struggling in vain to swallow his words. The lion's liver is said to be a vain wish for the dogs. Surely, OBJ's elephantine memory would definitely deny him the luxury of an embrace.

If only IBB had exercised some restraints, he would have adhered strictly to Gricean conversational maxims by limiting his pre-birthday news conference to reliving his heroic exploits when he held the reins of governance in Nigeria as Military President. Perhaps then, he would have avoided stoking the peppery temperament of OBJ, which predisposed the latter to violate Grice's cooperative principles, thus leading to conversational implicature. As culture-embedding and transmission agents, the elder statesmen's verbal exchanges portend grave implications for socialization process and by extension, the macro context of the Nigerian society. All the same, the foolery concept as robustly enunciated by the former Heads of the Nigerian nation, presents a viable option to Nigerians to interrogate the elite class contradictions deriving from instrumental leadership with a view to dismantling it as good riddance to bad rubbish.

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