

# Pragmatic Acts in Selected Speeches of President Bola Ahmed Tinubu: A Jacob Mey's Pragmatic Act Approach

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*Abstract- Language has a range of purposes beyond providing information; it also serves to persuade, legitimise, ideologise and actively negotiate social realities. In political communication, presidential addresses are strategic moments in which leaders communicate policies to citizens, share with them their vision of the role of government, explain to them what they are doing and encourage them to remain united in the nation. This study considers the pragmatic acts in some of the speeches of Mr President, Bola Ahmed Tinubu using the analytical framework of Pragmatic Act Theory of Jacob Mey (2001). The study uses a qualitative approach with content analysis techniques and focuses on purposively selected speeches, specifically: Presidential Inaugural Address (29 May 2023), 63rd Independence Day Address (1 October 2023), and 2024 Democracy Day Address (12 June 2024) statements, and Nationwide Broadcast on Economic Hardship Protests (4 August 2024). The speeches have been chosen because they touch on essential national matters concerning governance, economic reforms, democracy, national security and social development. The analysis of data is conducted using the Pragmatic Act Theory of Jacob Mey (2001) with the textual and activity components to determine the contextual resources that support the interpretation of data and the pragmatic acts that are realised in the speeches. The findings show that President Tinubu engages in a variety of pragmatic acts such as assuring, informing, directing, appealing, persuading, acknowledging, warning, encouraging, promising and mobilising. The contextual resources include inference, reference, relevance, shared situation knowledge, metaphor and voice, all of which interact with each other to create meaning beyond what is factored in the literal meaning of the utterances. The study also shows that the pragmatic acts are used strategically to legitimise government policies, to gain public trust, to negotiate political authority and to foster national unity. The study finds that the communicative effectiveness of President Tinubu's speech is rooted more in the interplay of language, context, and socio-political realities. Thus, the study contributes to the study of political pragmatics and discourse analysis literature as well as the application of*

*Pragmatic Act Theory of Jacob Meys to the study of presidential discourse in Nigeria.*

*Keywords: Pragmatics, Pragmatic Acts, Political Discourse, Presidential Speeches, Jacob Mey, Bola Ahmed Tinubu, Nigeria*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Language plays a key role in human interaction since it is through language that people are able to communicate their ideas, negotiate their relationships, express their identities and enact their social actions. In addition to its grammatical and structural characteristics, language is a way in which speakers shape attitudes, create realities and achieve communicative objectives in specific social situations.

Therefore, the meaning goes beyond what is linguistically generated; it is also what is generated in the context of the production and interpretation of language. This knowledge is the basis for "pragmatics" which investigates how to understand an utterance and how context influences the interpretation of utterances (Levinson, 1983; Mey, 2001; Yule, 1996).

The field of pragmatics has become one of the most important branches of linguistics as it provides an explanation of the links between language, speaker, hearer, and the context in which language is used. The difference between semantics, which deals mainly with conventional meaning, and pragmatics is that the latter acknowledges that the meanings which speakers transmit may not always be the literal meanings of the words.

The meanings are shaped by mutual background, cultural experiences, institutional contexts, intentions,

and contexts. According to Jacob Mey (2001) language is not a language structure, but language is social action, which means that the meaning of utterances is not exclusively determined by language structures but by the situation of the interaction. Thus, successful communication requires a relationship between language users and his or her socio-cultural background.

One of the most visible fields of language use in which the language is used as social action is political discourse. Political actors use language not only as a means of information but also for persuading audiences, justifying policies, managing power relations, building an ideology and building public support.

Political speeches, thus, are deliberate communicative acts aimed at specific political ends, but reacting to the current national and international political realities of the moment (Chilton, 2004; van Dijk, 1997).

All the lexical, metrical, rhetorical and appellative devices help to achieve the speaker's communication purpose.

Presidential Speeches have an important role in democratic societies as they are official channels of communication between the government and the citizens in a country during national festivities, political changes, economic changes, security threats and changes in the constitution.

The purpose of these speeches is usually to give reassurance to citizens during crisis situations, inform them of the government's policies, accept their concerns, foster a sense of unity among citizens and communicate confidence in the future of the country. Presidential speeches are therefore an important source of pragmatic investigation, as they illustrate the use of language to achieve various communicative purposes in the complex sociopolitical situation.

President Bola Ahmed Tinubu has made many speeches on various national issues since he took the chair of President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria on 29th May 2023.

These speeches address various issues like democratic governance, economic reforms, elimination of subsidy, restructuring of the Nigerian economy, national security, social welfare, youth development, regional cooperation and Nigeria's role in international affairs.

The address speeches employ arguments that appeal, position ideas, refer to history, involve the audience, mention religion, and evoke the sense of responsibility among the audience. In addition to their information, the speeches serve a number of pragmatic purposes, which aim to affect the public perception, consolidate the legitimacy of the government and encourage citizens to action for the sake of national development.

Although there has been an increasing attention of the scholarly discourse on Nigerian political discourse, the existing scholarships have focused mainly on the three following approaches namely; rhetoric, stylistics, Critical Discourse Analysis, and Systemic Functional Linguistics.

There have been relatively less studies that have analyzed President Tinubu's speeches in terms of Pragmatic Act Theory of Jacob Meyer that focuses on the link between the communicative acts and contextual resources.

Pragmatic Act Theory differs from traditional Speech Act Theory which focuses on specific utterances, in that it considers the interaction between the linguistic level, the participants involved, the institutional context, prior knowledge, and socio-cultural factors to create meaning.

From this point of view, it is possible to get a general overview on the way in which political statements carry out actions in specific communication situations.

In this context, the present study examines the pragmatic acts carried out by the President, Bola Ahmed Tinubu in selected speeches through the lens of Pragmatic Act Theory of Jacob Mey (2001).

The study aims to uncover contextual resources which are used in the process of interpreting, analyse

the pragmatic acts manifested in the speeches as well as explain how they are used to achieve political and ideological goals. The study adds to the burgeoning literature on political pragmatics and illustrates the applicability of Jacob Mey's theory to the study of the actual Nigerian presidential discourse of today.

The following research questions formed the guide of the study:

What are the contextual resources that help to explain the meaning of President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's chosen speeches?

2. What are the pragmatic acts carried out in the highlighted speeches by President Bola Ahmed Tinubu?

How do the pragmatic acts play a role in the communicative and ideological purposes of the speeches?

## II. CONCEPTUAL REVIEW

### Pragmatics

Pragmatics is a part of linguistics that deals with the study of language in use and how meaning is negotiated in a particular context of communication. Pragmatics involves the actual or conventional meaning of words and sentences within an interaction, rather than their literal or conventional meaning, and how listeners understand the meaning of the words and sentences in relation to the context.

Meaning is not just a property of languages, but it is constructed by the interaction between language users, their past experiences, the socio-cultural context, and the immediate communicative context (Levinson, 1983; Yule, 1996; Mey, 2001). Pragmatic analysis thus goes beyond a consideration of the structure of the utterances to examine the way in which they are used as purposeful social actions.

The contributions of the philosophers and linguists like Austin (1962), Searle (1969), Grice (1975), Levinson (1983) and Mey (2001) were also instrumental in the rise of pragmatics as a major discipline of language.

Austin's Speech Act Theory has been an important theory that has been developed that has tried to explain that what people say is not just information but also an action like promising, requesting, apologising, and declaring.

Searle went on to further develop this view into the representative, directive, commissive, expressive and declarative types of speech act. Grice observed that interlocutors in communication "presume that they share a common purpose to get the other person to understand what is being said and imply meanings in the communication that are not explicitly stated by the interlocutors, through the introduction of the Cooperative Principle and conversational maxims.

Many of these theoretical frameworks were adopted by Mey (2001) who expanded the theories into Pragmatic Act Theory wherein communicative acts cannot be analyzed unless in conjunction with the social practices, institutional context, and context of the situation. Mey's framework is especially applicable for the analysis of political discourse because of the change in the nature of speech acts to pragmatic acts with meaning in the context.

### Political Discourse

Political discourse is defined as the language which is used by political actors to communicate, to develop policies, negotiations for power, influence public opinion and build an ideological position.

It includes speeches and debates, manifestoes, interviews, campaign speeches, policy documents, inaugural speeches, speeches on democracy day, speeches at the Independence Day, and other official documents that have been created in political institutions (van Dijk, 1997; Chilton, 2004).

Political discourse is a convincing one, as it does not only inform but also convince, legitimise, mobilise, reassure and inspire citizens.

Thus, every language use in political communication is a conscious and strategic one in order to fulfill specific political goals.

Politics and language have been the focus of much scholarly research, due, in part, to the fact that

political leaders are heavily invested in the use of language to wield power and gain legitimacy.

van Dijk (1997) maintains that political discourse expresses the ideological framework that influences the way in which political actors are representing themselves, their opponents and national realities.

Similarly, Fairclough (2001) suggests that political language has the power to shape and recreate social relations through its effects on the perception of institutions, policies and governance by citizens. Hence, language is used as a tool to negotiate, sustain and, sometimes, challenge political power.

Presidential speeches hold a key position in political discourse as they are the official statements of the government's agendas and national aspirations. These types of speeches are made at important occasions such as Independence Day, Democracy Day, Inaugurations, Budgets, National Emergencies and International engagements.

In addition to informing audiences of government policies, presidential speeches are designed to convey messages of assurance, justification, bolstering democracy, fostering unity, and building faith in the future. Thus, these speeches are full of pragmatic phenomena, which are manifested in several communicative intentions, realized in specific socio-political contexts.

There are some features of the language which are distinctive to political discourse. One of the most prominent is persuasion. Political leaders use persuasive language to get people to accept policy and programmes of government. Persuasion happens by means of logical arguments, emotional appeals, repetition, rhetorical questions, metaphoric language and the use of inclusive pronouns which create a sense of solidarity between government and governed.

These phrases—like “we shall overcome,” “our collective responsibility,” and “together we will build a stronger nation”—are not just statements, but also actions that can serve as a call to action for working together and strengthening the sense of national identity.

Ideology is also a crucial aspect. Political discourse is a reflection of the beliefs, values and principles that influence governmental actions and decisions. Ideology will shape the way political actors perceive the national problems, distribute the blame, explain the need for reform, and suggest solutions to the problem.

By using strategic language, political leaders create positive images of their governments and depict government programs as a needed response to the socio-economic issues. Political positioning occurs in the speeches of the president, where the issues of democracy, economic transformation, national unity, security and sustainable development are highlighted.

#### Context

Particularly in politics, context is the major factor in determining the meaning of a text. How the President's words are understood is highly dependent on the political, economic, historical and cultural context in which they were said. For example, during economic difficulties, a call for "patience" has a more than literal meaning.

The appeals are interpreted by citizens in the context of inflation, unemployment, fuel subsidy reforms, security problems and other realities. The same speech act can, therefore, evoke various pragmatic effects in the different socio-political context where it is uttered.

Pragmatic Act Theory is pertinent to political discussion because of the importance of context. Mey (2001) holds that the communicative power of utterances is anchored in contextual resources like inference, reference, relevance, shared situation knowledge, metaphor and voice.

These offer the listener the possibility to "hypothesize" what is not said, yet understood, by relying on collective experiences and institutional knowledge. When Mr Tinubu refers to 'shared sacrifice', 'renewed hope' or 'national rebirth' in his presidential speeches, there is need to have a nuanced understanding of the political and economic reality of the country at the time. So, language becomes

political in making meaning of normal, everyday statements.

Performative is another key feature of political discourse. Political leaders use language to enact actions instead of just stating what has happened. They announce changes, state policies, recognize problems, assure citizens, call for their cooperation, caution them of danger, and rally them to action.

The communicative actions are matched with what Mey refers to as pragmatic acts as the meanings of which are only discovered in the process of engaging with language and context. Thus, the political speech is to be understood as a communicative act that is used to achieve institutional objectives and to influence the public image.

The President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's Pragmatic Attributes

These pragmatic attributes are evident in President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's speeches. His speeches have been on economic recovery, democratic consolidation, national security, social inclusion and sustainable development since his swearing-in in May 2023.

He often uses inclusive pronouns for building solidarity between the government and the citizens, e.g. 'we', 'our', and 'us' in his speeches. In the historical context of Nigeria's democratic movement, religious calls for sacrifice, resonance, and resilience, as well as metaphors, are further evidence of the strategic use of language to meet political ends.

The President's language choices serve as pragmatic tools that he utilizes to communicate with the Nigerian people to inform, persuade, assure, encourage and mobilize them.

Pragmatically, President Tinubu's utterances give an example of how politics can go beyond the meaning of the words said. They are very much context-dependent, have to be understood in the light of common experience and the communicative purpose of each sentence. The speeches are thus suitable materials for an analysis of the interconnection between language, context and politics in the light of the Pragmatic Act Theory of Jacob Mey.

### III. REVIEW OF EMPIRICAL STUDIES

Research on the role of language in political discourse has grown in volume and empirical evidence in recent years has shown how it can be used as a strategic tool to convey ideology, validate government, negotiate for power and shape public opinion. In the field of pragmatics, researchers have investigated communicative tasks that are performed by political speeches that go beyond the literal meanings of linguistic expressions.

These studies indicate that political discourse is effective to a great extent because of its own contextual interpretation, its common knowledge and the communicative intentions that underlie its utterances. Although a lot of focus has been paid to the study of speech act theory, rhetoric and critical discourse analysis, however, few studies have investigated the Nigerian presidential speeches using the theory of Pragmatic Act, suggested by Jacob Mey.

Harris' (1991) work on political interviews is one of the earliest pragmatic studies of political talk, and it set out to demonstrate that politicians use language to manage issues and audiences, to deflect difficult questions, to rationalise policy actions and to create positive public images. According to Harris, the political language is indirect, refers to implications and context-dependent meanings, which makes pragmatic analysis essential to the understanding of the political language.

Likewise, Chilton (2004) explored politics in the light of linguistics and pragmatics, which he believed is inherently persuasive and ideological in nature. Chilton argues that metaphor, deixis, presupposition, modality and strategic lexical selection are among the linguistic devices that political actors employ to influence the public image and to validate the policies of the government.

His study clearly illustrates the need for socio-political context in interpreting political speech as meaning cannot be divorced from the context in which it is produced.

Van Dijk (1997, 2006) has been a major contributor to the research on political discourse using a socio-cognitive perspective. He believes that political discourse is shaped by the ideology that shapes the representation of political actors, their rivals and national realities.

His analyses show that positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation are common political discourse strategies for establishing political legitimacy and sustaining political authority. While the center of Van Dijk's activities is ideology and cognition, his approach offers interesting perspectives on the interpretative context of political discourse.

From the point of view of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), Fairclough (2001, 2003) explored the political language to show that discourse reflects social reality and works to shape it. From his research, he concludes that political speeches are instruments of power that governments use to legitimate their policies, build their social identities and shape public attitudes.

Fairclough stresses that there is no separation between language and institution and between language and society and politics. His framework, though theoretical, is similar in its emphasis on context in meaning construction to Pragmatic Act Theory.

In Pragmatics, Pragmatic Act Theory of Speech Acts was proposed as an extension of Speech Act Theory by Mey (2001). In contrast with Austin (1962) and Searle (1969), whose work was primarily on isolated speech actions, Mey emphasizes that communicative actions are grounded in contextual factors: inference, relevance, reference, shared situation knowledge, metaphor and voice.

He introduces a theory that moves the focus of analysis away from what speakers say and how they interact with others through language to what they do. Mey's theory has been greatly accepted in pragmatic scholarship, but its application in African political discourse is rather limited.

A number of the scholars who have studied political speeches have done so in the Nigerian context, drawing on a variety of approaches to language. Opeibi (2009) studied campaign speeches in Nigeria and discovered that the politicians use rhetorical devices like repetition, metaphor, sloganisation, rhetorical questions and inclusive expressions in their campaign speeches to sway the voters.

The study concludes that political language is not just informative language, but is also a persuasive and ideological language.

In a like manner, Taiwo (2007) studied political speeches using Critical Discourse Analysis and found out that those who are in the political arena carefully manipulate the linguistic resources to project their authority, build their own legitimacy and mobilize citizens. According to Taiwo, political expression reflects prevailing socio-political circumstances and at the same time, it creates public awareness on governance and democracy.

Adegoju (2015) studied some of the presidential speeches in Nigeria and found that language has persuasive, legitimising and identity-creating roles in political communication. The findings suggest that discourse techniques like metaphorical statements, historical allusions, religious language, and pronouns play a major role in the effectiveness of presidential rhetoric.

Pragmatic studies have since been developed by more recent scholars to the current Nigerian presidents. In the case of the speeches of Olusegun Obasanjo, Umaru Musa Yar'Adua, Goodluck Jonathan and Muhammadu Buhari, their studies identified the following communicative acts; promise, appeal, reassure, warn, thank and direct.

The studies all show that presidential speeches serve as rationalisations for policies, as mobilisers for the nation, and as a way to represent ideologies. Most of the above investigations, however, are based on Speech Act Theory or Critical Discourse Analysis, and few studies are focused on the Pragmatic Act Theory of Jacob Mey.

Osisanwo (2017) carried out pioneering research on the first speech of President Muhammadu Buhari with the aid of Pragmatic Act Theory of Mey. The study yielded nineteen pragmatic acts, some of which were proposed, promising, acknowledging, thanking and assuring, each associated with pragmatic means, including shared situation knowledge, relevance, reference and inference.

This study is one of the few applications of Mey's approach to the discourse of the Nigerian President and offers a methodological model for the current study.

The research on President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's speeches has mostly concentrated on rhetorical strategies, governance narratives, Economic reforms and ideology positioning.

Tinubu's first speech was analysed by Owolabi and Sakiru (2024) using the three-dimensional approach of Critical Discourse Analysis, which identified the themes of optimism, unity, peace, development and national cohesion. Matthew (2023) examined the ideological aspects of Tinubu's campaign slogan "Emi lokan, Yoruba lokan," revealing their supremacist, collectivist, welfarist, and ethnocentric perspectives.

Analysing Tinubu's victory speech using the Speech Act Theory, Acheoah, Balogun and Waziri (2023) found that the speech acts were strategically used with emotional appeal and background knowledge.

Notwithstanding these contributions, there is a lack of literature which examined the pragmatic acts which incorporated in Tinubu's speeches comprehensively using the framework of Pragmatic Act Theory of Jacob Mey.

This research study thus differs from previous research studies in a few ways. First, it does not use only Speech Act Theory or the Critical Discourse Analysis but also Pragmatic Act Theory, which is proposed by Jacob Mey.

Second, it explores several speeches given by President Bola Ahmed Tinubu at various national events to develop the perception of his speech style.

Third, the study investigates the relationship of contextual resources and pragmatic acts, and how meaning is built by inference, relevance, reference, voice, metaphor and shared situation knowledge.

Lastly, the study extends the application of Mey's framework to the modern presidential discourse in Nigeria as a part of the growing body of literature on the political pragmatics of Nigeria.

The above review clearly shows that the persuasive and ideological nature of political discourse has been determined in previous studies. However, there is a huge gap in the use of Pragmatic Act Theory by Mey in analysing some selected speeches of President Bola Ahmed Tinubu.

This study addresses that lacuna by exploring how contextual resources support the enacting of pragmatic acts and the role of these acts in the communicative and ideological purpose of presidential discourse in Nigeria.

#### IV. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theory of Pragmatic Act Theory (PAT) which was expounded by Jacob L. Mey (2001) is the basis for this study. The theory evolved from Austin's (1962) Speech Act Theory and Searle's (1969) Speech Act Theory, which deals with the way speech acts like request, promise, apology, declaration and informing are performed. While Speech Act Theory is still at the core of pragmatic studies, Mey (2001) maintains that it does not sufficiently focus on the contextual circumstances in which communication acts take place.

Language, says Mey, cannot be understood by studying it in isolation, as meaning is not separable from the social, cultural, institutional and situational context in which language is used.

Hence, it is suggested that language is used as a social action by means of the concept of pragmatic act (pract) which is suggested by Mey. In contrast to speech acts, which are concerned with mainly the speaker's intention, pragmatic acts highlight the interaction of speaker, hearer, context and socio-cultural environment in creating meaning.

Communicative acts are not only linguistically structured, but also have content within the context of their production, says Mey. Thus, like the content of a speech, the timeliness, place, reason, manner, and source of an utterance are also essential to successful communication.

In this perspective, Pragmatic Act Theory is well suited to the analysis of a political discourse because presidential speech is a communicative event that depends on the context.

Their definitions are affected by political and economic contexts, institutional outlooks, past experiences and common understandings among political leaders and citizens. Therefore, the socio-political context from which President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's speeches emerged is a crucial factor to appreciate them.

This is the Concept of Pragmeme. It's the Concept of Pragmeme.

At the core of the theory is the idea of the pragmeme, the general situational prototype which is the basis of all the communicative events.

A pragmeme is a communicative situation that is socially recognized and facilitates specific actions to be done with language. It is the pragmatic template that is abstract and governs the function of utterances in particular institutional or social contexts.

For example, a speech made by the President at his or her inauguration is a pragmeme, because it falls under a set of existing constitutional rules of assuming political office, announcing government priorities, and assuring citizens.

Likewise, an Independence Day, a Democracy Day or a nationwide emergency are all different pragmeme since each has its own identifiable institutional purpose, participants, expectations, and conventions of communicative behavior.

In this study each of the selected speeches of President Tinubu is an individual pragmeme that is influenced by the political context, the expectations of the audience, and the importance of the nation.

Pract

The communicative action that is actualised in a pragmeme is called the pract. A pract is the action, in the context, of the utterance once all pertinent contextual resources are taken into account. Unlike speech acts, practs are not what sentence structures predict but rather they are an interaction of language expression and contextual variables.

The difficult days are temporary, and brighter days lie ahead, President Tinubu said. For instance, when President Tinubu utters the words, "The difficult days are temporary, and brighter days lie ahead," what it is doing is more than just a statement.

In the context of the current economic environment in Nigeria, it is a sustaining pract, an inspiring pract and a mobilising pract. It is interpreted mostly depending on contextual understanding shared with Nigeria citizens by the President.

Likewise, phrases like "We shall not relent in securing our nation" carry out the acts of assuring, promising, addressing government bodies and inspiring public trust. Therefore, practs are given significance by interpreting them in context, not based on their grammatical form.

Allopract

To address how similar communicative intent can be achieved in a variety of linguistic means, depending on the context, the concept of allopract is introduced by Mey (2001). Allopracts are like allophones in that they are different ways of saying the same pragmatic function instead of the same phoneme.

For example, President Tinubu can appeal to Nigerians via any of the following methods:

- 'Let us hope that.
- "When we come together, we will overcome these challenges.

The future is brighter than our present troubles, -  
"Our troubles are temporary, our joys are eternal.

While linguistically different, these utterances are doing the same encouraging pract. Allopracts show how language (and its communicative functions) can

be adapted to different situations without losing its meaning.

#### Components of Pragmatic Act Theory

The interpretation of pragmatic acts is related to the interaction between two main components: the Activity Part (Interactive Component) and the Textual Part (Contextual Component) (Mey, 2001). Together, these two aspects help to make meaning.

##### 1. The Activity Part

The Activity Part includes things that participants do with their communication while interacting. It can be used to describe how speakers use language to carry out specific social actions. Mey outlines 4 key elements.

###### i. Conversational Acts (CONV)

Conversational Acts are the words that are used to communicate. These are the kinds of things that are used in political speeches, such as informing the people, persuading the audience, making a statement to the public, admitting problems in the country, calling for unity and promising for reforms.

For instance: "My countrymen, we are setting out on a new course of national rejuvenation. This statement conveys information, welcomes and inspires at the same time.

###### ii. Psychological Acts (PSY)

Psychological acts include emotional and mental aspects of communication. Political leaders are looking for the creation of hope, trust, confidence, patriotism, resilience and national pride. The psychological responses that President Tinubu has been invoking with the term 'Renewed Hope' aim to boost the mood and confidence of the populace in the government.

###### iii. Prosodic Acts (PROS)

Prosodic acts include such vocal features as stress, intonation, rhythm, pauses and emphasis. While the aim of this study is to analyse written transcripts, markers like repetition, exclamation and parallel structures are often signs of intended emphasis of the prosodic aspect of a text.

For instance: "We're going to work, we're going to rebuild, we are going to succeed. The repetition emphasizes a rhythmic emphasis, which reinforces determination and confidence.

###### iv. Physical Acts (PHY)

The use of physical acts is matched to the verbal language, by gestures, facial expression, eye contact, applause, posture and body movements. This study concerns speech transcriptions, but mention of the audience reaction, standing ovations, silence, or gestures which accompany the speech can reinforce pragmatic interpretation.

##### The Textual Part

The textual component refers to contextual resources which help listeners to understand an utterance in the right way.

###### i. Inference (INF)

Inference: the meaning that is inferred, not stated. For instance, "The road to go is a road of sacrifice. The President fails to articulate the issue of subsidy removal and economic reforms, but Nigerians understand this from their common experiences.

###### ii. Reference (REF)

Reference is meant to identify a person, institution or event or an object referred to in discourse. These include references to Nigeria, democracy, the Constitution, past governments, government institutions and citizens. The speech is set in a recognizable socio-political context with such references.

###### iii. Relevance (REL)

Relevance: Utterances are relevant to the communicative context. For example, when discussing inflation in an economic broadcast, its discussion has a high context relevance since it directly involves citizens' concerns.

###### iv. Voice (VCE)

Voice is the voice of whom in the discourse. President Tinubu has been seen to switch between the institutional voice, governmental voice, national voice, and personal presidential voice. Personal voice is reflected in expressions like, "I understand your pain," and institutional voice is reflected in expressions like, "Government will continue implementing reforms.

###### Shared Situation Knowledge (SSK) v.

Shared Situation Knowledge are background pieces of information that are shared between speaker and hearer. Some examples are price liberalization, inflation, insecurity, transition to

democracy, and economic reforms. If it were not for this common understanding, much of what the President says would have no pragmatic impact.

vi. Metaphor (M)

Metaphor is a way of imparting political truths via images that are familiar. These include "National Renewal", "the road to prosperity", "economic rebirth", and "Renewed Hope" and "building a stronger Nigeria". Such metaphors make difficult policy matters comprehensible and arouse citizens.

vii. Metapragmatic Joker (MJ)

The Metapragmatic Joker is the resources which are not classified among the above listed but still play a role in the interpretation. These may include the context, culture, religion, media response, audience expectations and conventions of the constitution. In Nigerian political discourse, these aspects play important influence on the perception of presidential speeches.

This would help the applicability of Jacob Mey's Pragmatic Act Theory in the study.

Pragmatic Act Theory is the most suitable theory for this study since it defines language in terms of social action in context.

President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's speeches are not simply linguistic documents; they represent communicative events that address specific realities in the nation, such as reforming the economy, engaging in democratic governance, tackling security issues and nation-building.

Their meanings are thus not only literal readings of the sentence, but also extend beyond.

The contextual resources that may facilitate the interpretation of the speeches in this study are those of inference, relevance, reference, shared situation knowledge, voice, metaphor and metapragmatic joker, which can be identified through the theory. It also offers a systematic approach for analysing the pragmatic acts carried out by the President such as assuring, informing, persuading, directing, warning, acknowledging, encouraging, promising, appealing and mobilising.

In addition, Pragmatic Act Theory is important because it addresses the study's emphasis on political discourse as it acknowledges that communication is influenced by institutional positions, audiences' expectations, and the socio-political context.

The study illustrates this through this framework that the effectiveness of the speeches of President Tinubu is not just in the language, but also in the interplay of language, context, and ideology.

Thus, Pragmatic Act Theory by Jacob Mey provides an all-encompassing explanatory framework for investigating the role of pragmatic acts as instruments of governance, persuasion and mobilisation of the nation in the Nigerian presidential discourse.

## V. METHODOLOGY

### Research Design

The research design used in this research is qualitative research, while the method of investigation used is the main method is a content analysis. The qualitative approach is suitable as it allows a deeper consideration of the linguistic expression in its socio-political aspect and the possibility of interpreting the meanings that lie beyond the literal level of language.

The study focuses on the identification and elucidation of the pragmatic acts in the selected speeches of President Bola Ahmed Tinubu; therefore, the qualitative approach is appropriate in this study to analyse the contextual meaning, communicative intents and discourse functions.

Content analysis is an appropriate method because it can be used to systematically analyze naturally occurring texts. Content analysis is a method that allows researchers to make valid and repeatable inferences from textual information by uncovering themes, patterns of communication and contextual meaning (Krippendorff 2018). The use of content analysis in this study enables the identification of pragmatic acts and the contextual resource that is used to realise the acts in the presidential discourse.

#### Population of the Study

All official speeches made by President Bola Ahmed Tinubu since his swearing in as President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria on 29th May, 2023 were the population in the study.

These speeches are inaugural addresses, speeches on democracy day, speeches on Independence Day, national speeches, international speeches, policy speeches, speeches to the budget and other speeches officially recorded and broadcasted in public. Together, these speeches are an official political discourse of President Tinubu and an abundance of data for pragmatic examination.

This involves sampling, as well as the technique of sampling.

Purposive sampling is used as the number of presidential speeches is a lot that it is necessary to select speeches that are relevant to the objectives of the study. Purposive sampling is suitable because it allows the researcher to choose texts that possess information that is relevant to the communicative phenomena that will be studied (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Based on the purposes the following speeches are purposely selected:

1. The President, Bola Ahmed Tinubu's Inaugural Address (29 May 2023)
2. This is the President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's 63rd Independence Day Message (1 October 2023).
3. President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's Democracy Day Address (12 June 2024)
5. President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's Nationwide Broadcast about the Nigeria Economic Hardship in the wake of the Nationwide Protests (7 August 2024)

The speeches are chosen for its engagement with serious issues arising from the national agenda concerning democratic governance, economic reforms, national security, social cohesion, constitutional democracy and nation-building. They are also various communicative contexts so they are suitable for pragmatic analysis.

#### Sources of Data

The study is based on using secondary data only. The main text sources are the official transcripts of the speeches obtained from:

- The Election Commission of Nigeria (ECN) official website ([www.ecn.gov.ng](http://www.ecn.gov.ng)); and
- Local newspapers reports; and
- published works or materials that have been disseminated through other media.- government publications; and
- Other independently verified Government communication channels.

Official transcripts provide a degree of authenticity, reliability and credibility of the data being analysed.

#### Method of Data Collection

Documentary procedures are used to collect data. Official transcripts of the selected speeches are downloaded, read carefully and sorted by date and communicative events in which they were spoken.

Next, utterances with specific identifiable pragmatic functions are retrieved and coded for analysis.

Special emphasis is placed on utterances which enact actions like informing, assuring, persuading, directing, encouraging, promising, acknowledging, warning, appealing and mobilising.

Both linguistic contexts and the socio-political contexts are investigated for every extract in order to provide a clear pragmatic interpretation.

The method used to analyze data.

The data will be qualitatively analysed in line with the Pragmatic Act Theory of Jacob Mey (2001). There are three stages to the analysis:

First, the socio-political environment of each speech is determined in order to understand the communicative situation in which the speeches were given.

Secondly, the set of text resources proposed by Mey are identified and examined: Inference (INF), Reference (REF), Relevance (REL), Voice (VCE), Shared Situation Knowledge (SSK), Metaphor (M), and Metapragmatic Joker (MJ) are discussed, and contextual meanings are explained.

Third, the pragmatic acts (practs) of each of the utterances is identified and interpreted. These are not exhaustive, but they may include:

- Informing Pract
- Assuring Pract
- Appealing Pract
- Directing Pract
- Persuading Pract
- Encouraging Pract
- Promising Pract
- Warning Pract
- Mobilising Pract
- Acknowledging Pract
- Commending Pract
- Reassuring Pract

The following analytical format is used for each extract that is chosen:

- Speech Extract
- Context
- Contextual Resources (INF, REF, REL, VCE, SSK, M, MJ)
- Pragmatic Act(s)
- Interpretation

The analytical procedure allows for a systematic investigation of the communicative functions of the linguistic expressions in specific socio-political contexts.

The reliability of the study.

The study only examines authentic official transcripts from verified government sources to ensure their credibility and reliability of the findings.

The analytical procedures are clearly grounded in the Pragmatic Act Theory of Jacob Mey, which increases the transparency of the analysis and supports the consistency and replicability of the analysis. Further, interpretations are informed by the socio-political setting of each speech, minimising the potential for a subjective and de-contextualised interpretation.

Ethical Considerations

The study adopts the use of official speeches made by the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria which are easily accessible from the public domain. Therefore, there is no direct involvement of human

subjects, and concerns of informed consent and confidentiality are not a problem.

However, the researcher follows the academic standards outlined by the researcher by accurately representing the original speeches, giving proper credit to all sources of data, and ensuring that the appropriate scholarly work is cited in APA (7th ed.) format.

## VI. RESULTS

The analysis of the selected speeches of President Bola Ahmed Tinubu is done under the rhetorical framework proposed by Pragmatic Act Theory of Jacob Mey (2001). The speeches are analysed in the context of their socio-political space, in order to detect the resources of the context which may facilitate the interpretation of the speeches, as well as the pragmatic acts that are performed by the President.

The discussion illustrates that the communicative effectiveness of the presidential discourse is not determined by a literal linguistic expression but by its contextual meaning.

The analysis is organised according to the research questions.

Underlying Contextual Resources in the Selected Speeches.

In regards to the meaning of utterances, Jacob Mey (2001) states that it comes from the contextual resources, including inference, reference, relevance, shared situation knowledge, voice, metaphor and metapragmatic joker.

Thus, it is observed from the selected speeches that President Tinubu has freely made use of these resources, to convey his government's intentions, explain policy decisions, given assurances to the citizens, and rally national support.

i. Inference (INF)

Listeners use inference to "read between the lines" of an utterance.

Extract 2 (Inaugural Address, 29 May 2023)

Fuel subsidy has been eliminated.

This utterance is easy to structure but many pragmatic inferences. It is not a policy statement—they are starting economic reforms; it is a warning to citizens that they have to deal with the consequences of removing the subsidies. Nigerians hear that transport fares, inflation and the overall economic system are set to undergo changes.

The communicative force of the utterance is not only in the literal meaning, but also in the shared socio-economic experiences.

The speaker acts pragmatically in declaring, informing and legitimising a significant economic policy.

ii. Reference (REF)

Reference links linguistic items to known individuals or institutions, policies, and events.

Extract 2 (Inaugural Address, 29th May 2023)

"My fellow Nigerians..."

The phrase created a clear reference to the whole of the Nigerian populace. In addition to the identification of the audience, it fosters an impression of unity and a sense of societal belonging.

Likewise, "Our democracy" is not just about Nigeria's democratic form of government, rather it's about citizens and government sharing the democratic values. The references are used to build trust and unity between the President and the nation's people in a pragmatic way.

iii. Relevance (REL)

Relevance accounts for the meaning of certain utterances in certain communicative situations.

President Tinubu spent significant time discussing inflation, food security, youth employment, and economic reforms on the nationwide broadcast on economic hardship on 4th August 2024. These issues have a current relevance due to its direct appeal to citizens' concerns amidst the Nigeria's inflation rate reaching a 28-year high in June 2024 (National Bureau of Statistics, 2024). As a result, the speech is contextually suitable, and thus more effective in communicating.

iv. Voice (VCE)

President Tinubu speaks in a variety of voices.

Personal presidential voice, for instance, is reflected in the statement, "I understand your pains. On the other hand, Government shall continue implementing reforms" is government voice.

In the meantime, collective voice among the people of Nigeria is projected through "We shall rebuild Nigeria together" projects. The use of two voices increases authenticity and improves audience engagement.

v. Shared Situation Knowledge (SSK)

Shared national experiences are crucial for many utterances.

For example, the statement "These temporary pains will bring a lasting prosperity" is incomprehensible if one does not know:

- Introduction of Goods and Services Tax (GST) on goods and services (April 2023)
- Inflation surge to 33.24% in 2024 (up from 24.66% in 2023)
- Exchange rate reforms
- Communal violence against people of Indian origin (May 2015)

Shared Situation Knowledge thus helps listeners understand the meaning the speaker tries to convey.

vi. Metaphor (M)

President Tinubu is a proponent of using metaphorical expressions.

Examples include:

- "Renewed Hope"
- "Sustainable development for a stronger Nigeria"
- "Economic rebirth"
- "Road to prosperity"

The journey towards a nation's renewal.

Such metaphors make complex governmental changes easy to understand and speak of, and add hope to the discussion.

i. Metapragmatic Joker (MJ)

There are some contextual factors that are not classified in the above, but play a role in interpretation.

Examples include:

This refers to actions by the public to respond to economic difficulty (August 2024).

- Media management and relations with the public
- Constitutional democracy (25 years since 1999)
- Nigeria's economic recession past.
- International financial realities

Those factors are the metapragmatic situation of the utterances of the president.

In the Selected Speeches, pragmatic acts indicate what is done to make a speech effective.

The analysis shows that President Tinubu carries out a lot of pragmatic actions in the selected speeches.

i. Informing Pract

The President gives out details about Government policies regularly.

Example (Inaugural Address 29 May 2023):

Fundamental reforms are needed in the economy.

The speech not only provides information for citizens, but it also lays the groundwork for policies.

ii. Assuring Pract

When doing a Nationwide Broadcast, use the following example:

“Not I will leave you, not I will forsake you.”

The statement assures people of government's dedication to their wellbeing even in times of economic hardship.

iii. Promising Pract

Example (Inaugural Address, 29 May 2023):

"We will create more employment opportunities."

The President pledges his government to action in the future.

iv. Appealing Pract

Example: Nationwide Broadcast, 4 August 2024:

I call on all Nigerians to be patient, "I say that," he said.

The statement calls for joint effort in the process of economic reform.

v. Encouraging Pract

For example, the Democracy Day Address on 12th June 2024:

“Our Future is Bright”.

The President aims to build up hope in the face of adversity.

vi. Directing Pract

However, the examples are limited to the following (Inaugural Address, 29 May 2023):

"Let's commit ourselves again..."

The uttering calls for national action.

vii. Warning Pract

In this example, the results of the analysis from the Nationwide Broadcast on August 4, 2024, are used.

“Anybody who endangers the peace will be brought to the bar of the law.”

This is a warning to the elements of crime.

viii. Acknowledging Pract

For a nationwide broadcast, use the following example:

I do know the difficulties faced by so many Nigerians.

The President recognises citizens' concerns before introducing policy justifications.

ix. Mobilising Pract

Example (Independence Day Address, 1 October 2023):

“Together, let's create the Nigeria of our dreams.”

The speech activates people to promote the development of the country.

## VII. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The results show that President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's speeches do not just convey information from government but also serve many pragmatic purposes. The communicative effect of the speeches is founded on the relation between the linguistic expression and the contextual resources in line with the Pragmatic Act Theory of Mey (2001).

The use of inference, reference, relevance, voice, shared situation knowledge, metaphor and metapragmatic factors allow listeners to draw

inferences that go beyond the explicit encoding of the linguistic forms.

The study also shows that the dominant pragmatic acts in the selected speeches are informing, assuring, appealing, encouraging, promising, directing, acknowledging, warning and mobilising.

All these acts serve together to give official status to government policies, build trust in the government, unite the Nation, and empower citizens to participate in the Nation's democratic and developmental processes.

The results support Mey's (2001) hypothesis that language is not a literal portrayal of reality, but a social action that is socially situated and not merely a representation of reality. They also agree with Chilton's (2004) description of the nature of political discourse as persuasive and ideological, and van Dijk's (1997, 2006) claim that political language is a strategic device to build legitimacy and influence public opinion.

The study shows that while previous research which mostly relied on Speech Act Theory was able to explain the Nigerian presidential discourse to a certain extent, Pragmatic Act Theory more comprehensively explains Nigerian presidential discourse explaining the dynamic relationship between language, context, institutional roles and shared socio-political knowledge.

President Tinubu's speeches, then, must be read as 'performative' subjects of communication in which the roles of government, policy guidance, and nationhood are all negotiated.

## VIII. CONCLUSION

The Pragmatic Act Theory of Jacob Mey (2001) was used in this study to analyse the pragmatic acts carried out in the selected speeches of President Bola Ahmed Tinubu.

The study was driven by a desire to show that presidential speeches are not only a means for disseminating information but also a communicative performance that is context-specific, within which the

political leader legitimizes policies, manages power, builds a political ideology, and calls the citizens to action for nation-building.

The study employed qualitative content analysis of the selected speeches to identify contextual resources that help to construct meaning and to analyze the pragmatic acts that are present in the President's discourse.

The analysis results show that President Tinubu's ability to communicate effectively depends on the interplay between linguistic means and contextual factors.

Contextual resources like Inference (INF), Reference (REF), Relevance (REL), Voice (VCE), Shared Situation Knowledge (SSK), Metaphor (M), and Metapragmatic Joker (MJ) are used in all the speeches to make the utterances convey meanings beyond what would typically be inferred from them literally. These contextual resources allow the President to present a complicated political and economic message that is understood by the Nigerian audience.

The analysis also reveals the presence of frequent pragmatic acts that are common in the selected speeches such as informing, assuring, appealing, persuading, directing, acknowledging, encouraging, warning, promising and mobilising. The pragmatic acts have meaningful communicative functions in the Nigeria socio-political environment.

The President's informing role helps to communicate government policy and programmes, his assuring and encouraging role builds confidence in the times of economic and security concern, his appealing and mobilising role brings citizens into the process of nation-building, and his promising and directing role strengthens the government's promise and direction. Together these practical gestures demonstrate leadership, legitimacy, hope and a sense of national regeneration.

The study has also shown that the analysis of the presidential discourse is impossible without the analysis of the socio-political background, in which the discourse is created.

Here we focus on the contextual resources that are important and influence the reading of the presidential utterances: fuel subsidy removal, economic reforms, democratic government, national security, inflation, youth unemployment and social cohesion.

The finding confirms that language is social action (Mey 2001) and that communicative acts have meanings that lie outside the linguistic system and are attached to the context in which they are produced.

The study argues that the Pragmatic Act Theory of Jacob Mey has analytical value for the current political discourse in Nigeria, as theory, by implication. Although the literature on the presidential speech in Nigeria has been mainly centered on Speech Act Theory, Critical Discourse Analysis and rhetorical analysis, the current research demonstrates that Pragmatic Act Theory provides a wider explanation of political communication which incorporates linguistic expressions, contextual factors, and socio-cultural factors.

The theory, therefore, offers a good basis for understanding the nature of presidential utterances as pragmatic actions that are sensitive to the context.

In practice, the study adds to the huge body of literature on political pragmatics as it adapts Pragmatic Act Theory to the oration of the President Bola Ahmed Tinubu. It adds to the body of literature on presidential discourse in Nigeria by showing how pragmatic acts are used in a sophisticated manner to convince, comfort, sanction government policies and build national unity.

The study as such, therefore, widens the field of pragmatic studies in the African Political landscape and serves as a reference for further studies about presidential communication.

While this study examines four key speeches, others could be added to this collection in the future, such as other Presidential addresses, speeches delivered abroad, media interviews, and campaign speeches.

The pragmatic patterns and discourse strategies of political communication in different contexts could be traced from comparative studies of the speeches of past Nigerian presidents or other African leaders.

Furthermore, an integration of Pragmatic Act Theory with other complementary theories, like Critical Discourse Analysis or Systemic Functional Linguistics, could provide richer analysis of political discourse.

Finally, it is concluded that President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's chosen speech is a conscious communication where language is employed as a tool for governance, persuasion, ideologization and national mobilization.

They are realized in the interaction between linguistic forms and resources in the context, thus supporting the core thesis of Pragmatic Act Theory, developed by Jacob Mey, that communicativeness is a socially situated activity. The study thus helps to broaden the understanding of the pragmatics of the presidential discourse in Nigeria, as well as the need to look at the context when interpreting what is said in political discourse.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the results of this research, a number of recommendations are offered for academics, political analysts, policy makers and political communication practitioners.

1. At least multimodal approaches should be added to the analytical range of the study of the presidents' speech, which is done by scholars acting in the field of discourse analysis and political pragmatics.
2. Longitudinal designs are also encouraged, in which pragmatic patterns are followed throughout the life of a political administration.
3. Further illumination of unique characteristics of Nigerian presidential discourse could be achieved through comparative studies involving several Nigerian presidents or a cross-national comparison with other political leaders in Africa.
4. Language makers and political communication specialists need to be more mindful of the congruence of language and context.

5. There is also a need to expand the spectrum of pragmatic acts used in presidential speeches.
6. Metaphor use is an area that deserves special attention by speechwriters. The use of phrases like “Renewed Hope” and “journey of national renewal” has worked well to make complex policy matters understandable and to stir public optimism.
7. Policymakers should be aware that speeches by the president are not just words spoken but acts that shape perceptions and have an impact on citizen behavior.
8. Pragmatic approaches should be used by 8. Media practitioners and civil society organisations engaged in political discourse analysis in interpreting presidential speeches.
9. Pragmatic Act Theory should be included in academic programmes of related subject areas such as Academic programmes in English Language, Linguistics, Communication Studies and Political Science in academic institutions.

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