

A Pragmatic Analysis of Nigeria's President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's Acceptance Speech as his Party's Presidential Candidate, 2023

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Abstract

Language is an indispensable tool in political discourse and the manner in which politicians make use of it to frame ideological representations is of immense interest to linguists. This study undertakes a pragmatic analysis of Ahmed Tinubu's acceptance speech as the APC presidential candidate in the 2023 General Elections in Nigeria. The data is Tinubu's Acceptance Speech downloaded from the internet. The Acceptance Speech is made up of fifty-four sentences or locutionary acts with over a hundred illocutionary acts. The findings of the study show that Tinubu majorly used expressive and assertive acts to appreciate his supporters as well as affirm himself into the leadership position given him as presidential flagbearer of his political party. He also used commissive, directive, and declarative acts to inform, persuade, state and direct the audience on what he intended them to do. The study concludes that the identified speech act types were instrumental in conveying meaning in Bola Ahmad Tinubu's acceptance speech. The acts bring to fore the ideological message of the presidential candidate to the electorate who would later vote him into office.

Key Words: Acceptance Speech, Context, Political Discourse, Pragmatics, Speech Acts,

Introduction

Nigeria is a democratic nation. Thus, like many other countries that practise democracy around the world, Nigeria conducts her elections through party system. The country operates a multi-party system, usually with two or more dominant parties. The President who superintends the affairs of the nation is elected after every four years through a general election that is opened to candidates of various registered political parties in the country. The country has conducted several presidential elections since her Independence in 1960. Thus, 2023 was another year to elect a new president that would take over from Muhammadu Buhari who was to complete his second tenure as President of Nigeria.

Expectedly, 2022 was an electioneering year for political parties in the country. The presidential campaigns were dominated by the ruling All Progressives Congress (APC), People's Democratic Party (PDP), Labour Party (LP), New Nigeria People's Party (NNPP) and several other minor opposition parties. All political parties contesting for the office of the president were expected by electoral laws to nominate their presidential standard bearers at national conventions specifically conveyed for such purposes.

Pursuant to the above, the APC in her National Convention held at Eagle's Square, Abuja, Nigeria, from 6th to 7th June 2022, nominated Bola Ahmed Tinubu as the presidential standard flag bearer of the party. Ahmed Tinubu previously served as Senator representing Lagos West Constituency in the short-lived Nigeria's Third Republic in 1992. He was later elected as the Executive Governor of Lagos State for a two-term tenure from 1999 to 2007. Tinubu is said to have implemented several impactful policies when he served as Governor of Lagos State. He is a successful

businessman with several multibillion companies within and outside Nigerian. Tinubu is firmly rooted in the Nigerian political landscape and was instrumental in the emergence of Muhammadu Buhari as Nigerian President. Thus, as at the time Tinubu sought the presidential nomination, he had acquired relevant experiential, political, and financial acumen above many of his co-contestants in APC and other political parties. Also, his long socio-economic and political exposure to America and Europe have given him firm mastery of English language in particular and public speaking in general. He is shrewd, penetrating and bold while speaking.

Speech making is one of the critical facets of political engagements at all levels in a democratic nation like Nigeria. It bridges the gap between political gladiators and the masses. It is a common practice globally for a candidate upon been selected to become the flag bearer of a political party to immediately assume such a responsibility through acceptance speech.

Thus, it became a matter of necessity for Ahmed Tinubu to present his acceptance speech immediately after the election. Speeches of this kind, generally, have causative implications: they can make or mar the chances of the flagbearer to win or lose an election. This is where the effective use of language is of paramount importance. Tinubu deployed the utilitarian nature of language to deepen political empathy and cultivate a following among the Nigerian citizenry who would later vote for him in the presidential election.

Language is the most veritable means through which humans communicate. This is why Azikiwe (1998), Sapir (1961) and Brumfit (1985) agree that language is the means by which humans express themselves. It is used to communicate thoughts, ideas, and beliefs and it applies to all facets of human existence. As a result, language is used effectively in politics. It is an essential device employed by politicians to carry out political activities. Opeibi (2009) refers to the relationship that exists between language and politics as symbiotic. It is symbiotic since both language and politics depend on each other. Childs (2003), Osisanwo (2017), Yina (2011), Agantien and Aongo (2022) all assert that language is the key to the heart of human beings. One can speak directly to the mind of a people through effect use of language. It can be used to unite people to champion a particular cause. Taiwo (2009) opines that language is a vehicle of power, it initiates debate, incites support, or revolt. Politicians through language gain political power and maintain relationships with the electorate who give them this power. This means that language is indispensable in political discourse.

It follows then that in any communication event of the above magnitude, politicians supposedly choose their words carefully because they believe in the power of language and how language can be used to control others. By so doing, they perform different speech acts which could be direct or indirect to convey overt or covert meanings that may not be easily deciphered without conscientious linguistic investigation. That is the case with Tinubu's speech under investigation. He intentionally deployed certain acts to thank party members for the nomination; to accept the nomination, to address critical national issues; as well as to canvass for votes. Accordingly, the paper aims at identifying the specific illocutionary acts in Tinubu's Acceptance Speech as well as how Tinubu effectively used such acts to perform different perlocutionary effects, thereby, implanting new ideological realities in the political cognition of the audience to vote him into office.

Literature Review

This section identifies and clarifies relevant research concepts and delineates their usage based on the present paper. Concepts under review include pragmatics, context, politics, acceptance speech, as well as political discourse. Yule (2006:112) defines pragmatics as the study of 'invisible meaning', or how we know what is meant even when it is not actually said or written. Mey (2004) avers that pragmatics deals with the use of language in a real-life situation, and the conditions that enable the users to employ linguistic techniques and materials effectively and appropriately. Mey (2006) cited Morris (1938) states that traditionally, pragmatic has been considered as forming a triad with syntax and semantics. He explains that syntax deals with the study of the formal relations of one linguistic sign to another, while semantics looks at the relations of signs to object in the outside world and lastly, pragmatics examines the relation of signs to those who interpret the signs, the users of language. This means that pragmatics focuses more attention on the language user. Wilson (2006) views pragmatics as the study of meaning in context of language use. This view implies that that context is an important element in pragmatic studies. Upholding the argument, Ibileye (2021, p.55) posits that context is very crucial in deciphering the meaning of utterances as well as the intentions of language users. The scholar avers further that context determines both what one can say and what one cannot say. As such, for a better analysis of a speech, its contextual background should be taken into consideration.

Wodak (2001) and Fetzer (2015) present four main types of context i.e. linguistic, social, socio-cultural and cognitive contexts. 'Linguistic context' refers to linguistic material that surrounds the linguistic unit under investigation namely: clauses, phrases, and constructions in syntax and morphology, propositions in semantics, and phonemes in phonology. 'Social context' comprises the extra-linguistic context of a speech situation and its constitutive parts namely: participants (e.g., speaker and audience) and their interactional roles, such as animator, principal, strategist, the immediate concrete physical surrounding including setting and time, and the global concrete surroundings including institutional domains. 'Sociocultural context' represents a culture-specific configuration and interpretation of social context and its basic parameters, such as time, space and institution. 'Cognitive context' refers to a psychological construct, as it relates to the mind comprising mental representations, propositions and assumptions, for instance.

It follows that speakers and writers may mean much more than what they say/write through direct acts or indirect acts and they expect the hearers/listeners to understand what they mean. This is possible because there is the general belief that some aspects of meanings that are not obvious can be deciphered from the context. This assumption is based on the shared environment, knowledge, background or world view of the communicators which give them link to interpret meanings beyond words or grammatical structures. The ultimate goal in pragmatics is to rightly interpret the speaker's intended meaning with the help of context.

Politics is primarily concerned with the capture, control and retention of power (Odogwu & Akpojisher 2017, Wilson 2001, Abdullahi 2018). Discourse refers to any instance of language use that is above or beyond the level of a sentence. Political discourse therefore, means the use of language to carry out political

discussions. As simple as the above definition appears, political discourse is however, an ambiguous term with fuzzy boundaries. However, this study, as Wilson (2001, p.399) recommends, limits political discourse to campaign communications conducted by politicians with the major intention of winning an election. In effect, Tinubu's acceptance speech as presidential candidate of APC with the aim of winning the 2023 President Election qualifies for categorisation and analysis as a sub-genre of political discourse.

Specifically speaking, Ayemoni and Akinkuolere (2012) aver that political speech generally dwells on matters concerning the people or state, which is intended to influence, incite, educate, inform or even persuade them. Political speeches are delivered at public symposia, rallies, campaigns, debates, on radios, televisions, newspapers, interviews etc. Political speech of any kind is aimed at convincing the masses logically or emotionally to act in a particular manner. Such speeches may be delivered before elections (pre-election speeches); or after elections (post-election speeches). An acceptance speech is a post-election speech. Hoffman and Howard (2009) describe an "acceptance speech" as a candidate's nomination speech which signals the launch of the general election. The scholars explain further that up to the point of the party convention, most of the activities in the presidential contest have been primarily partisan and the general electorate has not been engaged. From these speeches, the public can judge what kind of a president the candidate might be.

Scholars like Abdullahi (2018), van Dijk (2001), and Baylon (1991) are of the view that since political discourse is produced by a politician, it must be produced within the context of an institution and must have a purpose to serve that institution. Meridji (2003, p.177) agrees that a political discourse must be enacted by a professional politician and produced in an institution. Moving a step further, Meridji argues strongly that any political discourse must achieve a result. Bola Ahmed Tinubu's victory speech firmly fits into the above criteria in the sense that it was delivered by the speaker himself (politician) at APC National Convention (institution) with the intention of winning election (intended result).

Abdullahi (2018, p.84) aptly notes that such a genre of political discourse could be studied from different points of view namely, from pragmatic, syntactic, semantic, lexical, sociolinguistic or critical discourse analytic perspectives. The present study adopts a pragmatic approach using Speech Act Theory.

Speech Act Theory

Speech Act Theory is historically attributed to the Austrian philosopher, Ludwig Wittgenstein, but was given prominence by the British philosopher, John Langshaw Austin, in his William James' Lectures at Harvard in 1955. Austin's ideas, however, were refined and systemised by his pupil, John R. Searle, the American philosopher. Griffiths (2006) defines speech acts as the "basic units of linguistic interaction" while Yule (1996) and Osisanwo (2003) submit that an utterance that is used to perform a particular function is a speech act. The scholars further describe speech act as a process in which a person uses an utterance to perform an act such as stating a fact, stating an opinion, confirming or denying something, making a prediction or a request, asking a question, issuing an order, giving a permission, giving a piece of advice, making an offer, making a promise, thanking somebody or condoling somebody. The implication is that in any statement a person makes, an act is performed. This,

therefore, means that a political speech like Bola Ahmed Tinubu's acceptance speech is not just a speech act but a succession or series of speech acts with different functions.

Austin (1962) states that whenever utterances are made, three things are done at the same time, namely:

- i. The locutionary act: The production of the utterance either in spoken or written language form.
- ii. The illocutionary act: The speaker's purpose or intent in producing the utterance (e.g. to state a fact, apologise, issue a command, etc. Illocutionary aspects of utterances are generally referred to as their illocutionary force.
- iii. The perlocutionary act: The actual effect of the utterance on the hearer whether the effect is intentional or non-intentional

Under Searle's (1975a) taxonomy, speech acts can be broadly grouped into five categories. These include:

- i. **Assertives:** To convey information, make a statement, or express a belief.
- ii. **Commissives:** To commit to a future course of action (e.g. promise, threat).
- iii. **Directives:** To cause someone to do something (e.g. command, request, advice)
- iv. **Expressives:** To express emotion, attitude, and mental state.
- v. **Declarations:** To make announcement or pronouncement about something.

Searle makes remarkable contributions to the speech act theory and one of such notable contributions is the introduction of indirect speech act which he defines as a case in which one illocutionary act is performed indirectly by way of doing another (1975, 60). It is without doubt that people perform more than one act through a single utterance. For instance, a person might say, *I cannot hear you*; this utterance can be understood as a request to be audible or a complaint that the speaker is not loud. The inclusion of indirect speech act by Searle into speech act theory gives way for another aspect of analysis that shows how people use language to accomplish certain tasks.

This implies that speech act can be a direct act or an indirect act. For instance, the sentence, 'Close the door' is a direct act while 'Please, the door is opened' is an indirect act requesting the addressee to either close the door or vacate the room depending on the context. Ahmed Tinubu deliberately makes use of both direct and indirect acts in his speech. While the direct acts convey superficial and first-value meaning of the utterances, the indirect acts convey hidden and deeper meanings of intended messages.

Methodology

The primary source of data for this study is Bola Ahmad Tinubu's 2023 Acceptance Speech as Presidential Candidate of the APC retrieved from the Internet. The secondary sources of data used for conceptual clarifications were obtained from books, journals, articles in the library. The Acceptance Speech contains a total of fifty-four (54) sentences or locutionary acts with more than a hundred illocutionary acts depending on one's analytical viewpoint. This is because almost each of the

illocutionary act has a direct act and an indirect act. This phenomenon is typical of political speeches where politicians use one act to perform several communicative functions. 'Content analysis' is used for data analysis due to the nature of the research. Hancock (1998, p.429) submits that "content analysis is a procedure for the categorisation of verbal or behavioural data, for purposes of classification, summarisation and tabulation". The raw material for content analysis may be any form of communication, usually written materials like textbooks, novels, newspapers; or other forms of communication such as songs, pictures/images, or political speeches. Thus, content analytical approach is suitable for the research because the sources of data for the paper provided all the needed raw materials for analysis.

For ease of analysis, the Acceptance Speech is broadly categorised into three main parts namely, Part One: 'Acceptance of Nomination/Appreciation' where Tinubu accepts and appreciates all APC stakeholders for nominating him as the party's presidential standard-bearer; Part Two: 'Address to the Nation' where he engages the general Nigerian electorate on topical economic and socio-political issues and promises them radical changes; Part Three: 'Appeal for Votes' where Tinubu solicits votes from the audience and tasks them to make sure that candidates of opposition parties were defeated in the presidential election that would hold in 2023.

Data Analysis

Part One: Acceptance of Nomination/Appreciation

The first part of the Acceptance Speech which can be rightfully referred to as introduction majorly contains expressive acts where Tinubu conveys his vote of thanks and appreciation to everybody that contributed in one way or the other for the success of his nomination. The appreciation is presented in an anti-climax format beginning from top to bottom. He opens the speech with a breathtaking personification "We have been at historic Eagle Square for many hours such that day has turned into night and night back into day" to remind the audience how tough the battle for the nomination became as well as commend party members for their perseverance and commitment. Tinubu then thanks President Buhari and specifically commends him for his calm and prudent leadership throughout this process and also, for his steadfast determination to ensure a level playing field and a free and fair primary process for every aspirant. This is an instance of indirect representative act which shows that Buhari had no 'anointed' presidential candidate in the contest. If this was the case, the Presidency would have deployed the state apparatus of incumbency to ensure that such a candidate won the nomination. The then Vice President, Prof. Yemi Osinbanjo was also in the contest. Given Nigerian political antecedence, such a candidate might have been preferred above others but that was not the case hence the nomination of Tinubu.

Tinubu then "thanks the governors for their invaluable contribution to internal democracy and unity." Apart from the superficial import of the utterance which simply conveys Tinubu's appreciation to the governors, the speaker is indirectly commending the APC Northern Governors Forum who stood by him to honour APC's agreement to zone the 2023 presidential election to the South. Several untoward happenings occurred within the ranks of the party and if not for common

resolve of the said Governors, peace and harmonious existence of the party would have been threatened.

As expected, Tinubu is very brief in commending the leadership of the APC. He appears to be holding a grudge against the party leadership due to what played out in the buildup to the National Convention. The National Chairman of the party allegedly announced that Ahmed Lawan, the then Senate President, was endorsed by Buhari as the preferred presidential candidate of the APC. However, as stated above, the APC Northern Governors Forum averted this political mishap. This confirms why Tinubu selects befitting lexicon to thank the Governors but he is very brief why thanking the leadership of APC.

Tinubu then commends the party delegates for making a wise choice by nominating him and deploys commissive acts to commit himself to serving them the best hence, “I will prove that your choice was a wise one” and “On your mandate I shall stand.” This commendation of party delegates for voting Tinubu as well as his commitment to serve their interest have future implications. On the one hand, Tinubu would be needing the votes of the same party delegates and other electorate in the scheduled presidential election of 2023; on the other hand, the delegates and the Eagle Square and Tinubu’s future voters would respond more if they have firm belief that Tinubu would serve people’s interest if elected as president.

Tinubu then commends his co-contestants, “I commend my fellow aspirants” for making the contest a serious challenge, “The stiff and bold competition you offered made our party stronger and made me better.” Here, Tinubu appears to be more impressed with the seven contestants that stepped down their presidential ambitions for him. As a mark of honour, he mentions their individual names: (Alhaji Badaru Abubakar; Sen.; Ibikunle Amosun; Sen. Ajayi Borrofige; Rt. Hon. Dimeji Bankole; Sen. Godswill Akpabio; Dr. Kayode Fayemi; and Barr. (Mrs.) Uju Kennedy). The list is in no particular order save the fact that the only female in the list comes last. This is reminiscent of the patriarchal rootedness of African cultural worldview. However, the manner of presentation does not in any way implicate the female folks as mere appendages to their male counterparts. This is because Tinubu would later in the same speech thank his own wife, Oluremi by addressing her as being beautiful, patient, and having wise counsel and stating categorically that the benign attributes of the wife makes Tinubu a fortunate man, indeed.

To close his vote of thanks, Tinubu announces that the contest is over and he holds no grudges against anyone, “Those who did not support me, you have nothing to fear. I hold no grudges or grievances.” Tinubu appears to be once more, indirectly making reference to the leadership of the APC who attempted to truncate his presidential ambition. He encourages all to work with him. The enemies are not within the APC party. The real enemies of the state that must be fought and defeated are the People’s Democratic Party (PDP) as well as societal ills bedeviling Nigeria hence, “Let us each agree to join hands in defeating the PDP and beating back our common foes of poverty, terror and violence”. The battle to fight and defeat enemies of the state is framed through war metaphor, “We now have a date with destiny in February 2023. Let us win so Nigeria can become the nation it is intended to be.” This is a very critical feature of political campaigns in Nigeria where campaigners implant ideological narratives in the minds of voters through war frames. Studies have shown that war metaphor frames call to mind an adversarial

relationship between two sides (Flusberg, Matlock and Thibodeau). They can evoke emotional threats: which could be fear, uncertainty, trauma, anger, and terror etc., that can motivate people to pay attention, change their beliefs, and take action on the prevailing political discourse (Coleman, 2013; George, Whitehouse, & Whitehouse, 2016).

Part Two: Address to the Nation

Nigeria is a plural nation in terms of her people, culture, political leanings, religion, mineral deposits, and language etc. Owing to these multiple divides and bad leadership of the political elite, the country has been plagued by hunger, insecurity, unemployment, religious intolerance, heightened corruption, ethnic animosity, bad governance, nepotism etc. The masses always look forward to leaders that would fix those anomalies. Expectedly, politicians seeking elective positions usually harness these development gaps to appeal for votes during electioneering campaigns. Tinubu through the use of various speech acts in his acceptance speech, effectively addressed those issues.

The declarative act, “Now, permit me to address the nation” marks a paradigmatic shift from the preceding vote of thanks to more serious discourse on national issues. It is a compelling injunction act to get the attention of not only APC members present at the Eagle Square but the entire nation. As Tinubu gets the attention of the audience, he begins with an affirmative act, “Yes, we face serious problems” but the Buhari led government had laid a foundation for surmounting those problems and if Nigeria unites as a people with a common resolve, God shall surely help them to have the country that they yearn for. Through rhetoric narrative, Tinubu engages the youth, the most energetic population of the country with persuasive affirmative acts that greater prosperity lays ahead of them given the rich mineral deposits found across the length and breadth of the country.

“Do we dare reform our national economy such that prosperity grows as poverty vanishes? Yes, we dare.”

“Do we dare provide meaningful education and jobs for our youths so that they may strive for a better future? Yes, we dare. Our teeming youth population is our nation’s greatest asset.”

“Do we dare construct a society where the vulnerable, the weak, the disadvantaged and the elderly are attended to and loved? Yes, for we must care for those who cannot care for themselves.”

“Do we dare muster our collective strength to conquer terrorism, kidnapping, and violent evil of any form? Yes, we dare.”

He metaphorically represents this analogy using Zamfara from the far northern part of Nigeria to Osun, which is in the far South. These could be achieved with the ease of modern technology and digital skills that his government would provide. He would counter insecurity and restore economy. He stretches the welfare narrative to accommodate the cravings of the vulnerable, the weak, the disadvantaged, and the elderly population of the country thereby sealing a comprehensive social contract with all the eligible Nigerian electorate.

Part Three: Appeal for Votes

This is the Achilles heel of the speech. Though, acceptance speech is not a typical campaign manifesto per se, it is nonetheless, the right time for Tinubu to persuasively indoctrinate his audience with a resonating message before they disperse. Tinubu's nomination at the APC National Convention is not the end of the journey. In fact, it is just the beginning. A major opposition party, PDP also nominated a flag-bearer, Alhaji Atiku Abubakar. Other opposition parties such as LP and NNPC, though, not explicitly mentioned in the speech, have done the same thing. However, Atiku particularly would be a major opponent and Tinubu acknowledges this fact by stating that there would be a fierce contest between the two of them: "one of competing visions." He however, quickly defrays the fears in the audience by assailing PDP's vision and referring to it as 'reactionary' and as such redundant whereas, the APC's vision is progressive and futuristic. The directive act: "We must defeat the PDP's reactionary ideals" is what van Dijk (2001) refers to as representation of Us/Good and Them/Bad dichotomy where the actions of the in-group are represented as positive while the actions of the out-group are represented as negative. Through this schema, Tinubu persuades the audience to vote against Atiku and PDP in the presidential election.

In this segment of the speech which also serves as conclusion, Tinubu deploys assertive acts predominately to affirm his authority and that of the APC over and above other presidential candidates and their political parties. This is done to imbue the air of superiority into the minds of his supporters. This hegemonic ideological representation gives the electorate the hope that with Tinubu as the captain of the ship, Nigeria would have a good sail. He finally deploys directive acts to show his supporters what to do to ensure victory in the 2023 presidential election.

Conclusion

Language plays vital role in politics. It portrays politicians because it is language that is used to sell the personality and the programme of a candidate to the electorate in order to gain their support and organise them to take part in the process of securing and controlling power. The ideological standpoints of politicians are conceptualised and inculcated into the masses through the instrumentality of language. Political actors, through the effective use of language, make the general public behave in particular ways so that the former can further assert political dominance over the latter. It is therefore, very difficult to imagine the existence of political activities without speeches like the one under review. This is because no matter how good a candidate's manifesto is or; no matter how superior political thoughts and ideologies of a political party may be, these can only be expressed and further translated into social actions for social change and social continuity through the facilities provided by language. Bola Ahmed Tinubu Acceptance Speech is full of assertive, expressive, declarative, commissive and directive acts. He used specific acts at different stages of his speech to either inform, direct, affirm, convince, or direct his audience on particular issues. Some utterances in his speech are direct acts while some are indirect acts with various communication intents, all geared towards mobilising the electorate ahead of the 2023 presidential election.

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