

A Pragma-Stylistic Study of President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's Acceptance and Inaugural Speeches

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Abstract

This study investigates the pragma-stylistic features of President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's acceptance speech of March 1, 2023 and inaugural speech of May 29, 2023, from the perspectives of Searle's (1969,1975) Speech Acts Theory, Brown and Levinson's (1978,1987) Politeness Theory and Levinson's (1983) Deixis. A close analysis of the speeches reveals that President Bola Tinubu employs distinct pragma-linguistic strategies in line with context and purpose, whereas the acceptance speech emphasises positive politeness, inclusive deixis, expressive and commissive acts towards fostering solidarity and legitimacy among the citizenry. The inaugural speech prioritizes directive acts and authoritative deixis to assert institutional power. The study further observes that Tinubu's commissive acts generate high public expectations, highlighting a critical tension between rhetorical promises and governance outcomes. The findings underscore the context-sensitive nature of politeness and deixis in political discourse and suggest that pragmatic competence, while evident in the speeches, must be evaluated against actual policy implementation.

Keywords: *Language, Pragma-Stylistics, Linguistic Politeness Strategies, Politeness Markers.*

Introduction

The import of language as medium of communication is not in any sense disputable. Its usefulness extends to cover every aspect of human existence such as governance, religion, education, commerce, politics, etc. It is unarguably true that language is a means of expressing ideas, aspirations and actions. The society utilises it to express its norms and cultural values for the purpose of strengthening social relationships. Emeke-Nwobia (2016, p.13) avers that language is the central focus of human existence and the paradigm of expression of intents, thoughts and actions. The above lends credence to the fact that language has assumed a pride of place in the social, economic, religious and political fabric of man as a veritable

tool used in every form of discourse. For instance, in the religious circle, leaders utilise the manipulative tools of language to influence the behaviours of their members, impacting core moral values and virtues which help to maintain the practices and traditions of their religion. Similarly, government also deploys language to make policy decisions, influence public opinion, build connections, mutual trust and confidence between the government and the governed.

Language also enables the government to communicate with the citizens, provide information and solicit feedback which is essential for effective governance. As a primary medium of communication, language plays a major role in diplomacy and international relations: it is a means of transmitting ideas and negotiation of interest in the comity of nations. It is also used to foster mutual coexistence, enhance understanding as well as create mutual bonding in the committee of nations. The resources of language are also effectively utilised in conflict resolutions among communities and nations. In fact, our perceptions and the definitions of the world around us have been influenced and reshaped by the power of language. In other words, man is ruled and governed by language.

Drawing from the inestimable value and role language has in all aspects of human existence, political leaders, like other language users, also make choices from the vast resources of language which are available in their reservoir to express their intents, ideologies and manipulate the emotions and feelings of their audience. This lends credence to Wales' (2001, p.54) postulations that language users tend to select features from available resources of language at their disposition. Political discourse, like other discourse forms, has the tendency of multiple meanings, intentions and strategies. This has drawn the attention of linguistic scholars to the study of political discourse with the aim of investigating the nature and functions of the vocabulary used as well as the different strategies and techniques deployed by speakers to convey their messages.

The data selected for this study are the Acceptance and Inaugural speeches presented by President Bola Ahmed Tinubu on March 1, 2023 and May 29, 2023 respectively, as the current President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, who defeated his opponents with the total votes of 8,794,726 as was officially declared by the INEC Chairman, Prof Mahmood Yakubu. These post-election speeches were thoughtfully selected for this study because they serve as the political compass for the administration's governance and policy implementation. By reflecting on the speeches, Nigerians and other interested nationals will have the advantage of evaluating the President's style of governance, policy implementation and score card in line with his promises and agenda which he had set for his administration in these speeches. Besides, his tone and choice of language in conveying his messages (as contained in his speeches) pragma-stylistically served to tone down or cushion the nation's post-election challenges and controversies which greeted his emergence as the 7th elected President of Nigeria. Other elected Presidents of the country before him were: Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe (1963-1966- First Republic), Alhaji Shehu Shagari (1979-1983- Second Republic), Chief Olusegun Obasanjo (1999-

2007- Fourth Republic), Alhaji Umaru Musa Yar'Adua (2007-2010), Dr Goodluck Ebele Jonathan (2010- 2015) and Major General Muhammadu Buhari (rtd) (2015-2023).

It is not uncommon in Nigeria that different opposing factions and interest groups often emerge to challenge the outcome of elections including the presidential election that are rocked in violence and other misconducts. On May 29, 2023, the political situation in Nigeria was tensed following the inauguration of the elected President from the ruling All Progressives Congress to take over the mantle of leadership from President Muhammadu Buhari who was left office after his eight-year tenure. The 2023 presidential election which declared Tinubu the winner and the choice of Nigerians to occupy the highest political seat of the country was drenched in controversies owing to several noticeable shortcomings of the election umpire. The presidential election was contested by eighteen political parties and was conducted within the ambience of the new electoral framework, the Electoral Act 2022, which allows the electoral umpire, the Independent Electoral Commission (INEC), the use of technology such as the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAs) for fingerprints and facial biometric identification and authentication of the voters. The new Act also empowers the commission to transmit election results electronically from the collation centres to INEC servers and result viewing portal immediately after the counting of votes.

Several other steps were taken by the INEC to ensure peaceful, free and fair conduct of the 2023 presidential and other elections, including: activation of additional voters' card registration, sensitization of voters ahead of the election, etc. Despite these mechanisms and measures put in place by the commission ahead of the elections, there were still some major challenges encountered by the commission which militated against the smooth conduct of the presidential elections in Nigeria. Some of the challenges included attacks on INEC personnel and facilities in some parts of the country by armed thugs, which resulted in the destruction of some polling materials and disruption of voting, vote buying and selling during the election, the malfunctioning of the BVAs machine in the transmission of election results during the presidential election which resulted in the manipulation and mutilation of results, electoral misconducts by some INEC staff. Regardless of all these challenges, the elections were still declared free, fair and generally peaceful and winners announced and sworn into office while the losers were left with the option of seeking redress in the Special Tribunal set up by the government to challenge the outcome of the elections.

It is germane to mention that the shortcomings in the conduct of the elections and collation of results had led to several legal challenges by the opposition parties, notably the People's Democratic Party and the Labour Party whose presidential candidates were Alhaji Atiku Abubakar and Mr Peter Gregory Obi respectively. The legal battle staged against Tinubu by the opposition parties, among others, were suits challenging his educational qualification, his eligibility to contest the election as well as his being declared the winner of the election when he did not

secure the 25 percent votes cast in two third of the 36 states and the FCT as enshrined in the constitution. The above scenario suggests why President Tinubu meticulously toned down his rhetoric and avoided hate speech in both his Acceptance and Inaugural Speeches.

Pragma-Stylistics

Pragma-Stylistics or Pragmatics Stylistics as a branch of stylistics originated in the sixteenth century, but was popular in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It combines the approaches of pragmatics and stylistics in its analysis of language. Allan (2016, p.217) defines pragma-stylistics as a technique which applies the findings and methodology of pragmatics to the study of style in language use. This implies the variation in the use of both written and spoken language such as analysing the language of literary texts of different writers according to genres and period. Also, Sell (1991, p.99) opines that the goal of pragma-stylistics is to show the relationship between the writing and reading of text and the linguistics and sociocultural context in which those processes have taken place. Here, emphasis is on the context of language use. Hickey (1993, p.578) and Davies (2007, p.106) believe that pragma- stylistics involves pragmatic components in the analysis of a text. It utilises pragmatic concepts and components in textual interpretation and analysis. The preoccupation of pragma-stylistic approach to meaning is on the intended meaning of the speaker and his or her characteristic style. Black, (2006, p.2) opines that since “pragmatics” is known as the study of language in use, stylistic has then become increasingly concerned in using the insight it presents. Also, Bex *et al.* (2010, p.37) state that pragmatics supports stylistics as a discipline and provides it with techniques and procedures for proper investigation of effect and methodology for the study of style in language or meaning.

Pragmatics Stylistics, as a branch of stylistics, studies how pragmatic features make up stylistic devices, and how those devices aid the appropriateness of speeches in a given context. In pragmatics stylistics, how pragmatics elements are deployed in textual analysis is the purview of the pragma- stylistician. In this study, the researchers relied heavily on the relevant pragmatic theories such as Searle's (1969, 1975) Speech Acts Theory which sees language as action and not merely structure. Building on Austin's (1962) theory, Searle in his speech acts classifies illocutionary acts into five types – Assertives, Directives, Commissive, Expressives and Declaratives. He further distinguishes among sub acts as locutionary acts (utterances), illocutionary acts (speaker's intentions or functional orientations) and perlocutionary acts (effects as intended by the speaker).

The study further benefits from Brown and Levinson's (1978, 1987) Politeness Theory, which conceptualises politeness as the linguistic and social strategies which speakers deploy in managing both their own “face” (i.e the public self- image that every individual wants to maintain or protect) as well the face of others during social interactions. According to these scholars, and as explicated by

Aboh and Umoekah (2017), positive face defines the desire to be liked, approved and appreciated, while negative face is the desire for autonomy and freedom from imposition. Interactants often get involved in the strategic mitigation of Face - Threatening Acts (FTAs) to preserve social harmony. Such strategies would cut across bald -on-record (direct, no mitigation), positive politeness (emphasising friendliness and solidarity), negative politeness (respecting autonomy, hedging imposition), off -record (indirect, allowing the listener to interpret). In essence, politeness depends on social distance, relative power asymmetry and the weight of imposition.

Since political discourse is highly context -dependent and often capitalises on deictic linguistics and in which political actors are fond of anchoring their utterances to participants, time and space, it became necessary to further draw from the pragmatic postulations of Levinson's (1983) on Deixis which emphasises meaning of a discourse or text as context -dependent, the role of deixis in interpreting political, conversational and narrative texts as well as interpreting the various types of deixis – person, place (spatial), time (temporal), discourse and social deixis.

On the whole, the interpretation or analysis of a text using pragma-stylistics often amounts to giving that text a special effect which results in a special meaning, such that language is considered to be much more than a neutral objective description of the world, aiming at explicating “social situatedness” as relevant in the text (Fowler 1986). According to Fowler, doing pragma-stylistic analysis involves the use of any of the following levels of Stylistic analysis: phonetics, morphology, syntax, lexico- semantics. This study analyses President Tinubu's inaugural and acceptance speeches using the lexico- semantic level of pragma-stylistic analysis as a tool to uncover the unsaid meanings of his message.

Statement of Research Problem

In recent time, several studies have been carried out by linguists on the discursive forms and language of politics in Nigeria. Most of the studies adopt Speech Acts Theory in the analysis of political discourse including the inaugural speech of the current President of Nigeria, Bola Ahmed Tinubu. It is observed from the survey that not many studies have been carried out on the President's acceptance and inaugural speeches from the perspective of pragma-stylistics. Consequently, this study intends to bridge the existing gap in the extant literature by focusing on the pragmatics' politeness strategies as well as the pragma-stylistic features embedded in the texts with the goal of discovering the functionality of language use in relation to the President's ideological perspective.

Purpose of the Study

The study aims at achieving the following objectives:

- (I) identifying the different pragmatic features employed by the President in

- his Inaugural and Acceptance Speeches;
- (ii) examining the pragma-stylistic impact on conveying his ideology;
 - (iii) identifying the politeness strategies used by the President to convey his message, and
 - (iv) analysing the functionality of the politeness markers in the speeches.

Methodology

A case study research design is adopted for this study. This design is suitable to the study because it allows for an intensive qualitative analysis of data and for an in-depth study of a particular research problem. It is also used to test whether a specific theory or model actually applies to a phenomenon in real life. In this study, the researcher makes use of observation and document analysis in the qualitative study of President Tinubu's Acceptance and Inaugural Speeches using the theoretical framework of pragma-stylistics.

The research instruments used in this research are observation and document analysis. The primary documents for this study are the printed acceptance and inaugural speeches of President Bola Ahmed Tinubu. The researchers relied on observation and analysis of the document. They marked the relevant portions of the document for analysis as excerpts. For ease of referencing and identification of pragmatic and stylistic elements, the researchers grouped the speeches as excerpts. The researchers selected the excerpts not according to numbering, but to reflect the politeness strategies understudied at a time. The qualitative research approach utilizes the pragmatic as well as stylistic levels of linguistic analysis to investigate the data.

Results:

Analysis of the positive politeness strategies in the acceptance speech

Excerpt 1

“**My fellow Nigerians**, I am profoundly humbled that you have elected me to serve as the 16th president of our beloved Republic...”(emphasis ours).

The speaker commences his acceptance speech with the positive politeness strategy of in-group identity maker - “**My fellow Nigerians**”. This serves as a greeting to his esteemed audience and as a bridge in the gap between him and his hearers. It also portrays him as a citizen of the same country by making him to have equal identity with his hearers. This in-group identity marker serves the function of awakening the consciousness and interest of the hearers to the message of the speaker. The clause, “**I am profoundly humbled**” is an expression of gratitude to Nigerians for the opportunity given him to serve as the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. The implication of the above is that he feels loved, respected

and trusted by Nigerians for giving him the mandate to hold the highest political position in Nigeria and to lead the nation as its number one citizen.

Excerpt 3

“You decided to **place your trust in the democratic vision of a Nigeria** founded on shared prosperity and nurtured by ... Renewed hope has dawned in Nigeria”.

In this excerpt, the speaker acknowledges that every Nigerian supports and promotes the existence of democracy in the nation. This is what informs their unreserved participation in the just concluded election which has given birth to his emergence as their 16th president. In the statement, “**Renewed hope has dawned in Nigeria**”. The speaker employs the “the optimistic” strategy to emphasize his administration's commitment to effective governance and to inspire the people and make them believe that Nigeria is going to change for better in this period of his administration.

Excerpt 5

“Today, Nigeria **stands tall as the giant of Africa**. It shines even brighter as the continent's biggest democracy”. (emphasis ours).

The speaker employs the positive politeness strategy of intensifying interest to the hearer by portraying Nigeria as the giant of Africa: “**It shines even brighter as the continent's biggest democracy**”.

The speaker uses the politeness strategy of intensifying interest to the hearer to raise the hope of Nigerians and inspire them as a people with the biggest democracy in the continent of Africa. The implication of this statement is to make Nigerians feel satisfied and appreciated for upholding the tenet and spirit of democracy. The word, “today” as used indicates the present time or moment of his election as the president of the country, as opposed to yesterday or tomorrow when he was not or will no more be in government. By implication, it means the present era of his administration as the elected President of Nigeria.

Excerpt 10

“... **I shall be a fair leader to all Nigerians**. I will be in tune with your aspirations, charge up your energies and...” (emphasis ours)

In this excerpt, the speaker deploys the positive politeness strategy of promising. He promises to run his administration with fairness and equity. This implies that his leadership will be devoid of nepotism, ethnic, religious or party prejudice.

“I will be in tune with your aspirations”

The above statement points to his readiness to reason in the same perspective with his fellow citizens in line with their aspirations and to work towards achieving them. This politeness strategy threatens the face of the speaker by committing him to future actions. It also threatens the face of his hearers by making them owe the president debt of gratitude.

“During the election, you may have been my opponent but you were never my enemy. In my heart, you are my brothers”.

In this excerpt, the speaker uses the positive politeness strategy of seeking agreement. He also exhibits the spirit of sportsmanship by acknowledging that his political rivals were merely opponents during the election, but were never his enemies. The statement also portrays him as being magnanimous in victory and ready to work even with his opponents for the progress of the nation.

“In my heart, you are my brothers”,

This assertion portrays the speaker's magnanimity in victory, thus declaring his political opponents and detractors as his brothers. This statement lends credence to the popular saying by politicians that in politics, “there is no permanent enemy, but permanent interest”.

Excerpts 13

“Still, I know some candidates will be hard put to accept the election result. **It is your right to seek legal recourse...**” (emphasis ours).

The speaker further employs the positive politeness strategy of seeking agreement in the above statement. He is in total agreement with any candidate who is not satisfied with the election result and intending to seek redress in court, recognizing same as the constitutional right of the candidate. He also admonishes that it is not right and not also defensible for any candidate to resort to violence, instead of pursuing legal redress. This statement presupposes that the election that brought him to power as the President and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of the Federal Republic of Nigeria was rocked with series of controversies; hence, the admonition that candidates who are not satisfied with the result should seek redress in court.

Excerpt 16

“...I hear you loud and clear. I understand your pains, your yearnings for good governance, a functional economy and a safe nation that protects you and your future...”.

In this statement, the speaker asserts and presupposes knowledge of hearer's concern.

“I hear you loud and clear”.

This statement portrays him as a listening President and a man who has the interest of the youths at heart; thus, noticing their outcry and yearnings for good governance, a functional economy and a safe nation in order to work towards fixing them. This implies that the speaker has a robust and cordial relationship with his fellow citizens to be able to hear them clearly. The statement also underscores the notion that Nigeria was experiencing bad governance, economic downturn, and insecurity under President Buhari's administration which the new President promises to correct.

“I am aware that for many of you Nigeria has become a place of abiding challenges limiting your ability to see a bright future for yourselves”.

In this statement, the speaker uses the positive politeness strategy of asserting a common ground with the Nigerian youths by expressing his knowledge of the fact that Nigeria is fraught with issues of unemployment, economic downturn, insurgency, kidnapping, etc. All these contribute to making Nigeria become a place of abiding challenges that limit the potentials of the youths and denying them their opportunities of having a bright future. The implication of the above is that the speaker who is a bonafide fellow citizen of Nigeria understands where these challenges are coming from and is resolved to work to reverse it for the realization of a better Nigeria.

“When you gaze upon what we shall accomplish in the coming years, you shall speak with pride at being a Nigerian”.

In this statement, the speaker utilizes the politeness strategy of optimism to persuade the Nigerian citizens to remain calm, patient, resilient and to also inspire them to be hopeful to have the Nigeria of their dream in the coming years of his administration.

Analysis of Negative Politeness Strategies in the acceptance speech.**Excerpt 1****“...From my heart, I say thank you”.**

In this statement, the speaker shows deference to his addressees. This is an expression of gratitude, acknowledgement, expressive of a sense of favour and kindness he received from his fellow Nigerians. This strategy threatens the face of the speaker, thus leaving him with the feeling of obligation.

Excerpt 4**“We commend INEC for running a free and fair election...”**

In this excerpt, the speaker shows deference to the independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), the election umpire in Nigeria for conducting a credible election that gives birth to his emergence as the President of Nigeria. This is in

recognition of the fact that over the years, elections in Nigeria were always characterized by violence, thuggery, disruption of voting and distortion of election results. Despite the malfunctioning of the BVAs machines, the introduction of electronic voting by INEC has made election atmosphere in Nigeria to be relatively calm, thus, giving room for the conduct of more credibly free and fair elections. This politeness strategy threatens the positive face of the speaker by giving him the feelings of obligation while preserving the face of the INEC officials and make them feel good.

Analysis of Linguistic Politeness Markers.

(a) “My fellow Nigerians”, “My fellow candidates”

These phrases are linguistic politeness markers used by the speaker. They serve the functions of greetings in the speech and also make the speaker to share in the Nigerian identity. This greeting and in-group identity marker deployed by the speaker enables him to capture the minds and the attention of his audience during his speech making.

Analysis of Positive Politeness Strategies in the Inaugural Speech

Excerpt 1

“My fellow citizens: I stand before you honoured to assume **the sacred mandate** you have given me. My love for this nation is abiding, ... God Almighty, absolute.

The speaker commences his address with the positive politeness strategy of in-group identity marker'. My fellow citizens, this also serves as a salutation to connect and bridge the gap between him and his esteemed audience. It is a show of mutual relationship which exists between the speaker and his hearers. This greeting awakens the consciousness of the hearers to the message of the speaker. The clause, **“I stand before you honoured”** as used by the speaker is an expression of his appreciation and respect for his fellow citizens for the opportunity given him to serve as a president. This implies that he feels privileged and deeply respectful to be given such a rare opportunity to occupy the highest political position in the nation. The speaker in the above clause deploys the strategy of seeking agreement by acknowledging and confessing that his assumption of office at the presidency which he metaphorically portrayed as the **'sacred mandate'** was orchestrated by the Nigeria citizens (his esteemed audience) by voting. The import of this strategy is that it enables the speaker to gain an undivided attention from his audience for effective message delivery.

“My love for this nation is abiding.... My faith in God Almighty, absolute'

In the above utterance, the speaker exaggerates in describing his love for the nation, his unwavering confidence in the citizens of Nigeria and his absolute faith in God Almighty.

In excerpts 2, 5 and 6, the speaker uses the linguistic inclusion markers 'we', 'our' and 'us' to indicate his in-group identity and membership, thereby bringing himself closer to his audience in agreement with their aspirations and yearning for a renewed national hope, a hope for a better Nigeria.

In excerpt 2 “... as a nation, we have long ago decided to march beyond the dimness of night into the open day of renewed national hope”, the positive politeness strategy of seeking agreement with the hearers is deployed. The speaker employs the use of safe topic such as the desire and aspiration of the Nigerians for renewed national hope. The above allows the speaker to have a corroborative opinion with his hearers.

Excerpt 5

“**Our** burdens may make **us** bend at times, but they shall never break **us**.

Instead, **we** stand forth as Africa's most populous nation and ...”.

The speaker consistently uses linguistic inclusion markers 'we' 'our' and 'us' to indicate that he shares in the experience of pains and agony Nigerians are going through. “**But they will never break us**” is an expression of courage, faith and optimism. The speaker deploys this 'politeness strategy to bolster the hope of Nigeria citizens to his avowed commitment to good governance that will change their narratives.

Excerpt 6

“As citizens, we declare as a unified people devoted to one unified national cause, that as long as this world exists, Nigeria shall exist.”

In this excerpt, the speaker re-affirms the strength of unity in culturally diversified country as Nigeria, noting that Nigeria citizens, irrespective of their ethnic differences are pursuing a unified national cause. In the clause 'we declare as a unified people', the linguistic inclusion marker “**we**” as used by the speaker includes both the speaker and his hearers in the activity of declaring for a unified national cause. The word '**declare**' as used by the speaker is to proclaim. It is to make public an announcement. It functions like a decree that is passed by a people of the same belief. It is a word that puts a piece of information or decision in the public domain. “**As a unified people...**” refers to the Nigerian citizens drawn from different ethnic groups and belief systems who are bonded in unity to achieve a

common purpose. “**As this world exists, NIGERIA SHALL EXIST**” presupposes that other nations of the world are also plagued of one form of social ills or the other. In this statement, the speaker tries to let Nigerians know that they have both the material and human resources to solve the problems of country as other countries do theirs. In the clause, “**NIGERIA SHALL EXIST**” the speaker's use of emphasis is an expression of rugged determination, affirmation, resilience, faith and optimism that the existence of Nigeria in the comity of nations remains certain and unshakable even in the face of multiple challenges facing Nigeria.

Excerpt 8.

“... We are here to further **mend and heal the nation**, not **tear and injure it**”.
“Our administration shall govern on your behalf but never rule over you””.

In this statement, the speaker employs the positive politeness strategy of promising which threatens his face by committing him to future actions and also threatens his hearers' face by making them owe him debt of gratitude. This strategy is utilized to emphasise his inclusive and participatory governance and to contrast between **governing and ruling**”.

The speaker in this excerpt, declares his commitment to good governance. The linguistic inclusion marker 'we' as used by the speaker excludes the hearers but rather includes other members of his cabinet. He adopts the politeness strategy of assertiveness to presuppose the knowledge of hearer's concern. To “**mend and heal this nation**” presupposes that the nation is sick of bad governance, corruption, insurgence, bad economy and other social ills which threaten her existence as a country. The speaker in collaboration with members of his cabinet are promising to work in synergy resolve. The expression, “**not tear and injure it**” implies that the speaker is not intending to support the existence of these social ills that are plaguing the country or perpetrate new ones.

Excerpt 9.

“In this vein, **may I** offer a few comments regarding the election that brought us to this juncture. It was a hard- fought contest. And it was also fairly won”.

The speaker deploys the linguistic politeness markers “**may**” to begin his comments regarding the just concluded general election in Nigeria.

The word “**may**” as used by the speaker is used to express permission. It is a polite way of seeking for the permission to air out one's views or to perform an action. It is a linguistic means to intensify the interest of the hearers on a discourse. In the excerpt, the speaker utilizes the politeness strategy of seeking agreement with his hearers that the just concluded election was a hard-fought contest and fairly won. The speaker tagged it “a hard-fought contest” because of the popularity of his fellow contestants and how they close marked him in terms of votes, and “fairly

won” because the 2023 general election recorded less fatalities compared to previous years' elections which were always fraught with violence and rigging.

Analysis of the negative politeness strategies in the Inaugural Speech.

\Excerpt 3

“The question we now ask ourselves is whether to remain faithful to the work inherent in building a better society or For me, there is but one answer. We are too great a nation and too grounded as a people to rob ourselves of our finest destiny”.

In this excerpt, the speaker uses a question as a strategy of negative politeness to establish a proposition that everyone should remain faithful to the work of building a better Nigeria without impeding or imposing on the face want of his hearers. Question is a subtle way to establish an assertion without imposing on the face needs of the hearers. Beginning a proposition or assertion with a rhetorical question makes it stronger and more forceful than a direct statement. The rhetorical question properly situates the message of building a better Nigeria in a way that gives respect to the public self-image of the hearers.

Excerpt 4

“Here permit me to say a few words to my predecessor, President Muhammadu Buhari. Mr. President, you have been an honest, patriotic leader who has done his best for the nation you love. On a more personal note, you are a worthy partner, and friend. May history be kind to you”.

In this statement, the speaker deploys the negative politeness strategy of “giving deference” to the immediate past administration. This implies that the immediate past administration had govern well according to the constitution and the rule of law. The speaker here humbles and abases himself to present and preserve the positive face of his predecessor, President Muhammadu Buhari. The speaker commends and shows gratitude to him for his good work. Hence, portrays him as honest and a patriotic leader. The clause “**may history be kind to you**” is a fervent prayer by the speaker wishing that the legacies of the past president and by extension, his administration, be printed on the sands of time to remain memorable from generation to generation.

Excerpt 7

“Today, fate and destiny join together to place the torch of human progress in our hand; **we dare not let it slip**”.

In this statement, the speaker uses the negative face threatening act which threatens both the speaker and the hearers. The statement, “**we dare not let it slip**” warns and advises the speaker and the hearers who happen to be Nigerian citizens, never to allow the torch of human progress slip off their hands as there may be unimaginable consequence. The linguistic inclusion markers '**we**' and '**our**' are deployed by the speaker to indicate his inclusion in the task of holding firmly this proverbial torch, and bearing the consequence of letting it slip.

Excerpt 11

“... We must never allow the labour of those who came before us to wither in vain but to blossom and bring forth a better reality.

In this statement, the speaker uses the negative politeness strategies of warning, suggesting and advising. These strategies threaten the negative face of both the speaker and the hearers. This also commits both the speaker and the hearers to future actions which are tailored toward achieving a better Nigeria that our founding fathers had longed for. The word “**must**” perform the function of ordering, making it compulsory for both the speaker and the hearers to work to promote the work of the past heroes.

Excerpt 22

“We shall continue the efforts of the Buhari administration on infrastructure, progress toward national networks of roads, rail and ports shall get priority attention.”

In this statement, the Speaker gives deference to Buhari administration. This statement also presupposes that Buhari administration did well in the area of infrastructural development which effort, the Speaker promises to continue. The first-person plural pronoun “**we**” as used by the Speaker only inclusive of his cabinet members. The word '**continue**' implies the speaker's commitment to sustain the developmental strides of the past administration as well as its programmes and policies.

Excerpt 23

“We commend the decision of the outgoing administration in phasing out the petrol subsidy regime which has increasingly favored the rich than the poor...”

The Speaker employs the negative politeness strategy of giving deference to the immediate past administration. The Speaker commends them for the subsidy removal. This implies that the Speaker out of respect, yields and submits to the

decision of the outgoing administration on subsidy removal. This strategy in a way is used to avoid conflict of interest and to promote cooperation between the speaker who happens to be the leader of the present administration and the immediate past administration led by President Muhammadu Buhari.

Analysis of Linguistic politeness markers.

(a) “My fellow citizens”, “My fellow compatriots”

These phrases are linguistic politeness markers which the speaker consistently utilises as a manner of greetings to court the attention of his hearers. These expressions also connect and close the gap between him (speaker) and his audience, portraying him a citizen of the same country with his audience. This strategy awakens the consciousness of the Nigerians to the message of his speech.

(b) “Permit me”

This phrase is used twice in the speech to request the audience's attention. This arouses the interest of his hearers and makes them eager to listen to him.

(c) “Please”

This is a linguistic politeness marker which is usually attached to a request. This is employed to gain maximum attention from his hearers to enable him enumerate his government policies and initiatives as well as seek their cooperation and support to achieve them.

(d) “May I”

The speaker utilizes this linguistic politeness marker to gain the attention of his hearers. Conventionally, when the phrase “may I” is used, a reply is expected from the receiver. The President uses it to soften his imperative statement to effectively convey his message to his esteemed audience.

Discussion of Findings

This study examined President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's acceptance and inaugural speeches using Searle's Speech Act Theory, Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory and Levinson's Deixis framework. The findings reveal that the pragmatic and stylistic choices made by the President are not random but are pragma- stylistically tied to the communicative acts, purposes, institutional roles and genre-specific expectations of the two speeches. The integration of politeness strategies and deictic expressions plays a crucial role in negotiating solidarity, authority and ideologically positioning in both speeches. The findings, therefore, are consistent with, and further supported by, contemporary pragma-stylistic research on political discourse.

The findings in the acceptance speech reveal that the speaker utilises only two out

of the four types of politeness strategies outlined by Brown and Levinson: positive politeness and negative politeness strategies. In the acceptance speech, the President predominantly employs positive politeness strategies, particularly questioning and hedging, giving deference, warning and advising as well as requesting. According to Brown and Levinson (1987), positive politeness functions to attend to the hearer's positive face by emphasising shared goals, approval and group membership. This explains the preponderance of inclusive and audience-oriented strategies in the acceptance speech, which is primarily designed to consolidate legitimacy and express gratitude. Similar observations are made by Fetzer and Bull (2020), who argue that political speakers rely heavily on face-enhancing strategies when audience alignment and approval are rhetorically central.

From a speech act perspective, these positive politeness strategies co-occur largely with expressive and commissive acts, such as thanking, appreciating, reassuring and promising. Searle (1976, 1979) explains that expressives inherently perform social bonding functions, while commissives project commitment to shared future actions. Adegoju (2021), in his study of Nigerian presidential discourse, similarly demonstrates that expressives and commissives are often linguistically softened through politeness strategies in order to enhance public acceptance and trust. Thus, Tinubu's acceptance speech pragmatically aligns with established patterns of political persuasion through solidarity.

Besides, these strategies are pragmatically reinforced by the frequent use of inclusive deixis, particularly the pronoun "We". Levinson (1983) notes that personal deixis functions as a powerful linguistic tool for indexing social relationships; in political discourse, inclusive "We" constructs a collective identity that minimizes power asymmetry between speaker and audience. This strategic use of inclusive deixis supports the dominance of expressive and commissive speech acts in the acceptance speech. According to Searle (1976, 1979), expressives such as thanking and appreciating, as well as commissives like promising and assuring are inherently relational acts. Adegoju (2021) demonstrates that Nigerian Presidents frequently combine inclusive pronouns with positive politeness to foster trust and legitimacy. In Tinubu's acceptance speech, the co-occurrence of "We" with hedging and questioning allows the speaker to present commitments as jointly owned rather than unilaterally imposed, thereby enhancing audience alignment.

The use of temporal deixis in the acceptance speech further reinforces this solidarity-building function. References to the immediate past ("today", "this moment") and shared future ("together", "ahead of us") situate the speech within a collective political journey. Levinson (2004) argues that temporal deixis helps speakers frame events ideologically, and Fetzer and Bull (2020) show that politicians often use future-oriented temporal deixis to soften commitments while projecting politeness by presenting political change as a shared, gradual process.

The use of questioning and hedging in the acceptance speech further reflects what Haugh (2015) describes as interracial politeness, where speakers

create room for alignment and avoid imposing absolute authority. Such strategies allow the speaker to appear consultative rather than coercive. Al-Hindawi and Al-Rashidi (2022) also note that political leaders strategically hedge commitments during moments of public engagement to manage expectations and protect face. These findings reinforce the view that positive politeness in the acceptance speech functions as a persuasive, defensive and stylistic rhetorical tool.

In contrast, the inaugural speech demonstrates a marked reduction in politeness strategies, with minimal use of negative politeness, particularly through instance of ordering. In the inaugural speech, the speaker, very minimally, uses negative politeness strategies of “ordering” which both threatens the face of the hearer and commits the hearer to future actions. Thus, the inaugural speech, through the speaker's linguistic choices, reflects a pragma-stylistic shift from solidarity to authority. Brown and Levinson (1987) identify orders as inherently face-threatening acts because they restrict the hearer's freedom of action. However, within institutional political contexts, such face threats are often pragmatically justified. Ilie (2021) argues that inaugurals function as institutional discourse, where authority must be linguistically performed rather than negotiated.

Thus, the use of ordering in the inaugural speech aligns with directive speech acts as outlined by Searle (1976), which aim to get the hearer to perform future actions. Mohammed and Ali (2023) observe that presidential inaugural speeches often reduce politeness mitigation when leaders seek to protect decisiveness, control and governance readiness. In the same vein, Nur and Haryanto (2023) show that directives in political speeches frequently override politeness concerns when institutional power has already been secured.

From a pragma-stylistic perspective, this shift in deictic and politeness patterns reflects what van Dijk (2014) describes as the relationship between discourse and power, where linguistic choices index social authority and ideological positioning. By reducing politeness mitigation and increasing authoritative deixis, the President linguistically performs governance. Therefore, the President's limited use of negative politeness in the inaugural speech signals a transition from electoral legitimacy to executive authority. Taiwo (2017) further supports this view in Nigerian political discourse that leadership rhetoric often combines directive force with ideological framing to assert control and mobilize compliance. This shift is accompanied by a noticeable change in personal deixis, particularly an increased use of the personal pronoun “I”. Levinson (1983) explains that *I*-deixis foregrounds the speaker's authority and responsibility; in institutional discourse, it marks the assumption of power rather than its negotiation.

The predominance of the personal pronoun, *I*, in the inaugural speech aligns with directive and declarative speech acts, which Searle (1979) identifies as instruments for shaping future action and institutional reality. Mohammed and Ali (2023) observe that presidential inaugural speeches often employ self-referential deixis to assert leadership and decisiveness. The reduced use of inclusive “we” in such contexts signals a deliberate distancing from electoral solidarity and an

embrace of executive authority.

In addition, spatial deixis also plays a role in reinforcing this authority. References to abstract national space (“this nation”, “our country”), rather than interpersonal proximity emphasise institutional scope over personal connection. Ile (2021) argues that inaugurals are characterised by decontextualised spatial deixis, which elevates the discourse from personal interaction to statecraft. In Tinubu's inaugural speech, spatial deixis thus contributes to the formalisation and legitimisation of directive language.

However, although Brown and Levinson's politeness model provides a useful analytical framework, its universality has been critically questioned. Eelen (2014) and Kadar and Haugh (2013) caution that politeness must be interpreted within given socio-cultural and institutional contexts. This study responds to that critique by demonstrating that politeness strategies in President Tinubu's speeches are not absent but strategically redistributed according to genre, power relations and communicative goals. Thus, politeness in political discourse is shown to be dynamic, context-sensitive and pragmatically motivated rather than mechanically applied.

The findings of this study further reveal that the speaker's choice of the positive politeness strategy over other strategies stems from the fact that listeners get emotionally attached to polite speeches and practically resent impoliteness or speeches that sound rude or insulting. Being that the inaugural speech of any elected office holder serves as a compass that steers the course of leadership or administration of such office, the speaker chooses to be polite in order to rally for support and cooperation from his fellow citizens. The speaker chooses to rather incur threat to his public face by consistently making promises which commit him to future actions. The application of the negative politeness strategy is relatively few since he only deploys the sub strategies of showing deference to his teeming supporters and his predecessor, and for making request for the purpose of appealing for support and to advocate for inclusive governance from his supporters.

Another finding of this study is that the speaker utilises the linguistic politeness markers such as '**My fellow Nigerians**' in both the acceptance and inaugural speeches and “**My fellow Citizens**”, “**my fellow compatriots**”, “**permit me**”, “**please**” and “**may I**” in the inaugural speech to make his speech more polite and to establish cordiality with his audience as fellow citizen of the country he has been elected to lead. These are linguistic entities whose presence in the speeches make them more polite. He deploys this strategy to connect with his audience and to gain their attention. Like other political leaders, his speeches are replete with inundated promises which trigger and inspire the hope of his hearers for effective and progressive good governance.

Conclusion

This study examined President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's acceptance and inaugural speeches using a pragma-stylistic framework that integrates Speech Act

Theory, Politeness Theory and Deixis. The findings reveal a strategic shift in linguistic choices across the two speeches: the acceptance speech relies heavily on positive politeness, inclusive deixis and expressive and commissive acts to build solidarity and legitimacy, while the inaugural speech minimizes politeness mitigation and foregrounds directive acts and authoritative deixis to assert institutional power. It is also discovered that the speaker intentionally employs positive politeness strategies of making promises, giving assurances, seeking in-group membership, optimism, etc., to persuasively articulate the policies and programmes of his administration. Other politeness strategies employed are the negative politeness strategies showing deference, questioning and hedging and the baldness on record strategy. It is also uncovered from the findings that he also employs linguistic politeness markers and rhetorical strategies to emotionally influence his audience. This work establishes the importance of studying political discourse to understand the strategies and techniques deployed by the speakers so as to unravel their intentions that might be hidden in their choice of language. This confirms that politeness and deixis in political discourse are context-sensitive resources shaped by genre, power and communicative purposes.

The study thus concludes that while the President's speeches demonstrate high pragmatic competence, the ultimate evaluation of his leadership of the nation lies in the alignment between rhetorical commitments and concrete governance outcomes. In any case, an objective assessment of President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's performance will be effectively carried out at the end of his tenure in 2027. Nigerians must wait patiently till then.

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