Pragmatic Acts in a Political Media Interview on Nigeria's 2023 Presidential Election

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Abstract

This study investigates the use of pragmatic acts in political media interviews conducted during Nigeria's 2023 presidential election. The study examines how three major opposition candidates; Atiku Abubakar, Peter Obi, and Rabiu Musa Kwankwaso strategically deployed pragmatic acts to project ideology, construct identity, and persuade the electorate. Drawing data from televised interviews on Politics Today (Channels Television), the research adopts a qualitative pragma-discursive approach anchored on Mey's (2001) Pragmatic Act Theory. The theory provides a comprehensive framework for analysing language as a socially situated action that performs ideological and persuasive functions beyond literal meaning. The findings reveal that assertive/informative, directive/requestive, and persuasive pragmemes dominate the candidates' utterances, serving to legitimise policy positions, criticise opponents, and align with popular sentiments. Contextualisation, presupposition, deixis, and hedging emerged as key pragmatic strategies through which politicians negotiated face, maintained credibility, and mitigated confrontation. The study concludes that pragmatic acts in Nigerian political interviews function as powerful ideological instruments, allowing candidates to perform social, persuasive, and relational actions simultaneously. It recommends that further research should explore cross-platform variations in political interviews to deepen understanding of pragmatics in multimodal political discourse.
Keywords: Pragmatic acts, political communication, ideology, media interviews, Nigeria, Mey (2001)

Introduction

Language functions not only as a vehicle of communication but also as an instrument of power, persuasion, and ideology. In political contexts, language plays a decisive role in shaping public opinion, constructing social identities, and legitimising authority. Within Nigeria's vibrant democratic space, political actors exploit the resources of language to mobilise support, rationalise policies, and contest opposing narratives. Media interviews, especially those broadcast on national television, have become prominent platforms through which politicians perform these communicative acts. Unlike prepared campaign speeches or manifestos, televised interviews demand spontaneity, negotiation, and real-time interaction, thereby offering rich material for pragmatic investigation.

Political interviews in Nigeria are highly consequential. They allow politicians to explain their manifestos, defend policy failures, and react to controversies while being interrogated by journalists and viewed by millions of citizens. During the 2023 presidential election, such interactions became especially influential because of their immediacy and accessibility through traditional and digital media. The televised interviews of Atiku Abubakar (People's Democratic Party), Peter Obi (Labour Party), and Rabiu Musa Kwankwaso (New Nigeria People's Party) on Channels Television's Politics Today represent moments where linguistic performance intersected

with political strategy. Each candidate used language not merely to inform but to perform complex pragmatic acts of persuasion, accusation, justification, and self-presentation.

The present study situates itself within the field of pragmatics, specifically within the framework of Mey's (2001) Pragmatic Act Theory, which conceives meaning as contextually situated action. Rather than treating political communication as a collection of isolated speech acts, this theory recognises the dynamic interplay between linguistic form, speaker intention, socio-political context, and the listener's interpretation. By analysing pragmatic acts in these media interviews, this study seeks to uncover how Nigerian presidential candidates used language to project ideological stances and engage in acts of persuasion and power negotiation.

The motivation for this research arises from the limited scholarly attention given to pragmatic acts in Nigerian political interviews. While previous studies have focused on campaign speeches, slogans, and debates, less emphasis has been placed on the interactive discourse of televised interviews where both journalists and politicians jointly construct meaning. This paper fills that gap by examining how pragmatic acts such as asserting, defending, accusing, and persuading are realised and how they reflect the candidates' ideological orientations within the political contest of 2023. The study argues that political interviews constitute an arena of ideological performance, where language becomes a means of constructing political identity and negotiating power relations.

Consequently, this paper identifies the dominant pragmatic acts employed by selected presidential candidates during the 2023 election interviews, analyze how these acts are deployed to project ideological positions and persuasive intent, and examine the pragmatic strategies that enhance credibility, mitigate conflict, and manage public perception. By addressing these objectives, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of the intersection between pragmatics and political discourse in Nigeria. It further offers insights into how linguistic choices in mediated political communication shape voter perception and promote democratic engagement.

Indirect Speech Act

Indirect Speech Acts (ISAs) refer to utterances in which the speaker's intended meaning differs from the literal interpretation of the sentence. The concept was introduced by Searle (1975) as an extension of Austin's (1962) Speech Act Theory, highlighting how speakers often perform one act through the performance of another. For instance, the utterance "Can you open the window?" literally asks about ability but pragmatically functions as a request. Indirectness thus reflects the interaction between semantic form and pragmatic function, where meaning is inferred rather than explicitly stated (Levinson, 1983).

The use of indirect speech acts is largely governed by contextual and social factors. According to Thomas (1995), speakers employ indirectness to maintain politeness, manage face wants, or mitigate potential conflict. This aligns with Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory, which posits that indirectness serves as a strategy to preserve the interlocutor's positive or negative face. Consequently, ISAs are not mere linguistic embellishments but crucial tools for achieving social harmony and communicative efficiency, particularly in cultures that value respect and decorum.

In political and institutional discourse, ISAs often perform persuasive, evasive, or face-saving functions. As Mey (2001) observes, speech acts are contextually bound actions that derive

meaning from their pragmatic setting. Politicians, for example, may use indirect forms to avoid direct commitment or to express criticism tactfully. Thus, indirect speech acts demonstrate the pragmatic flexibility of language, revealing how interlocutors skilfully balance truth, intention, and social appropriateness to achieve communicative goals.

Pragmatic Act Theory
Mey (2001) conceptualises pragmatics as the study of how language users "act through words" in socially situated contexts. His Pragmatic Act Theory proposes that every utterance performs a pragmatic act (pract), realised within a specific socio-cultural and physical environment known as the pragmeme. A pragmeme is a generalised pragmatic act type (e.g., request, accusation, apology), while a pract is its specific, contextual realisation in discourse. This distinction enables analysts to consider both the linguistic and extralinguistic dimensions of meaning.

Unlike Austin's and Searle's Speech Act Theory, which focuses mainly on illocutionary force, Mey's theory integrates situational, psychological, and sociological parameters into meaning-making. It advances an "outside-in" analytical approach, beginning with contextual realities before examining linguistic structures. Meaning, therefore, is not fixed but co-constructed through dynamic interaction among interlocutors within an enabling context (Mey, 2001; Odebunmi, 2015).

Pragmatic acts are realized through activity types, pragmeme parameters, and pract features that shape meaning and interactional intent in discourse. These include inferrables, which refer to background knowledge shared by participants (Mey, 2001); mutual contextual beliefs (MCBs), the assumptions jointly held by speaker and hearer that guide interpretation (Adegbija, 1999); pragmatic acts (practs), the specific speech or communicative actions performed within context (Mey, 2001); and pragmatic strategies, which involve linguistic devices such as presupposition, deixis, implicature, and hedging used to modulate communicative force and meaning (Levinson, 1983; Yule, 1996)

In political discourse, these features become tools for performing socially and ideologically loaded functions such as justification, accusation, denial, persuasion, and evasion. Thus, PAT accounts for both what is said and what is done through language within a given institutional or ideological framework.

Relationship Between Indirect Speech Act and Pragmatic Acts
The relationship between Indirect Speech Acts (ISAs) **and** Pragmatic Acts lies in their shared emphasis on context, intention, and meaning beyond literal linguistic form. While Searle's (1975) theory of indirectness explains how one speech act is performed through another (for instance, making a request through a question), Mey's (2001) Pragmatic Act Theory (PAT) extends this by situating meaning within the broader socio-cultural and situational context. Thus, both frameworks converge on the idea that language use transcends structural form; interpretation depends on the interaction between linguistic expression, speaker intention, and contextual variables.

Indirect Speech Acts typically highlight the inferential aspect of communication, where hearers must interpret meaning from contextual clues. Pragmatic Acts, on the other hand, foreground the social and environmental factors that enable such inference. As Mey (2001) notes, a pragmatic act (or *pract*) emerges from the dynamic interplay between text and context,

encompassing both linguistic and non-linguistic cues. Hence, while ISAs are primarily concerned with the cognitive mechanism of understanding implicit meaning, pragmatic acts account for how such meanings are realised, negotiated, and legitimised within a given socio-pragmatic environment **(**Thomas, 1995; Levinson, 1983**)**.

In essence, the Pragmatic Act Theory provides a broader and more socially grounded framework within which Indirect Speech Acts operate. Every indirect speech act can be understood as a specific instance of a pragmatic act, since both depend on contextual interpretation and social appropriateness. For example, when a politician says, *"We can do better as a nation,"* the utterance functions indirectly as a criticism and directly as a pragmatic act of persuasion or alignment. Therefore, ISAs represent the inferential component of communication, while pragmatic acts embody the situational and ideological dimensions that give those inferences meaning (Mey, 2001; Osisanwo, 2012**)**

Relevance to Political Communication

Mey's (2001) Pragmatic Act Theory (PAT) is particularly appropriate for analysing political interviews because such interactions involve power asymmetry, face negotiation, and ideological contestation (Fairclough, 1995; van Dijk, 1997). Politicians, as strategic speakers, manipulate pragmatic acts to control narratives, resist unfavourable framing, and project credibility (Chilton & Schäffner, 2002). As Ayoola (2013) and Osisanwo (2016) observe, political discourse in Nigeria is characterised by implicitness, presupposition, and indirectness; all elements central to pragmatic act analysis. These features enable politicians to maintain politeness, avoid direct confrontation, and strategically shape public perception through linguistic choices (Leech, 1983).

Through PAT, this study examines how political actors' utterances on Politics Today function as socially situated actions (Mey, 2001; Adegbija, 1999; Thomas, 1995). Each statement is interpreted in relation to contextual variables such as participants' roles (journalist versus politician), the institutional setting (televised interview), and the prevailing socio-political climate (pre-election tension) (van Dijk, 2006). The interactional context provides cues for decoding pragmatic intentions, revealing how meaning extends beyond literal expressions to reflect social power and ideological positioning (Fairclough, 2001; Wodak, 2009).

The framework further exposes how pragmatic acts serve ideological purposes, such as constructing moral superiority, emphasising competence, or delegitimising opponents (van Dijk, 1998; Chilton, 2004; Opeibi, 2009). By applying PAT, the study uncovers how politicians perform communicative actions such as asserting authority, managing image, or appealing to shared beliefs to influence voter perception and sustain credibility (Ayoola, 2013; Osisanwo, 2016; Taiwo, 2007). Thus, PAT offers a comprehensive lens for explaining the subtle ways language functions as action in political discourse (Mey, 2001; Adegbite, 2018; Wodak, 2011)

Ideology and Pragmatics

Ideology, within the context of political communication, represents the network of beliefs, values, and assumptions that guide how individuals and institutions perceive and articulate social realities (Fairclough, 1992; van Dijk, 1998). It shapes how political actors construct meaning, justify actions, and influence public opinion through language. In discourse, ideology operates subtly— embedded in word choice, framing, and evaluative tone to sustain dominance, challenge authority,

or reinforce collective identity (Wodak, 2009). Thus, ideology is not merely a set of abstract ideas but a pragmatic resource through which political actors negotiate legitimacy and align themselves with the moral and emotional sentiments of their audience.

From a pragmatic perspective, ideology finds expression in the ways speakers perform communicative acts that both reflect and reproduce social power relations (Mey, 2001; Fairclough, 1995). Pragmatic acts such as assertion, persuasion, or accusation are not ideologically neutral; rather, they are strategic actions aimed at legitimising political agendas and constructing preferred versions of reality (van Dijk, 2006). For example, when a politician claims, "We will rescue Nigeria from corruption," the utterance performs both an informative and ideological act. It conveys commitment to reform while implicitly positioning the speaker as morally superior to opponents. This dual function illustrates how pragmatic acts encode ideological meanings that extend beyond the surface structure of language.

Consequently, pragmatic acts serve as vehicles for the performance of ideology in political discourse. They transform abstract beliefs into situated actions that influence perception and reinforce social hierarchies (Chilton, 2004; Wodak, 2011). Each utterance, shaped by context and intention, becomes a means of enacting values, constructing identity, and legitimising authority. In this sense, ideology and pragmatics intersect as mutually reinforcing dimensions of discourse while ideology provides the motivational framework for communication, pragmatic acts operationalise it through context-sensitive linguistic behaviour

Theoretical Perspectives

While Pragmatic Act Theory (PAT) forms the core theoretical framework, the study also draws on supporting insights from complementary pragmatic and discourse theories. Grice's (1975) Cooperative Principle explains how implicature and indirectness shape inference and interpretation during political interviews (Levinson, 1983; Yule, 1996). Politicians often flout conversational maxims to imply meanings beyond what is explicitly stated, thereby influencing audience perception and controlling ideological framing.

Similarly, Brown and Levinson's (1987) Politeness Theory elucidates how politicians employ face-saving strategies to maintain rapport, manage interpersonal relations, and project a favourable public image (Goffman, 1967; Fraser, 1990). In political discourse, such strategies are crucial for mitigating threats to face during contentious discussions, avoiding direct confrontation, and preserving credibility before a national audience.

Finally, Fairclough's (1995) Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) offers a broader lens for examining how language enacts power, ideology, and social control in institutional contexts (van Dijk, 1998; Wodak, 2009). CDA situates political talk within its socio-political structures, linking micro-level linguistic choices to macro-level ideological functions. Together, these complementary perspectives enrich the analytical scope of the study, enabling a more comprehensive understanding of pragmatic strategies and ideological construction in Nigerian political communication

Methodology

The study employed a qualitative research design using pragma-discursive analysis to examine pragmatic acts in Nigerian political media interviews. This design was chosen because it allows

for a detailed exploration of meaning, speaker intention, and ideological positioning within natural discourse. Data were drawn from televised interviews on Politics Today featuring Atiku Abubakar, Peter Obi, and Rabiu Musa Kwankwaso during the 2023 presidential election. These interviews, broadcast between October 2022 and February 2023, were purposively selected for their political significance and ideological richness. Each interview was obtained from Channels Television's verified YouTube channel and transcribed verbatim, producing about 12,000 words of discourse. Transcription captured pauses, emphasis, and paralinguistic cues, while unintelligible portions were marked as [inaudible]. Data analysis was conducted using Mey's (2001) Pragmatic Act Theory, focusing on assertive, directive, persuasive, and accusatory acts. Pragmatic strategies such as presupposition, deixis, implicature, and hedging were identified to interpret ideological and persuasive intent. Each interview was manually coded, compared, and interpreted to reveal recurring pragmatic patterns and ideological undertones. The study ensured reliability through triangulation and upheld ethical standards by using publicly available data and maintaining academic integrity.

Theoretical Framework
This study is anchored on Mey's (2001) Pragmatic Act Theory (PAT), which views language as a form of socially situated action rather than a mere structure of symbols. The theory extends beyond Austin's and Searle's Speech Act Theory by incorporating contextual, social, and cultural factors that shape meaning in discourse. According to Mey, every utterance performs a pragmatic act (pract) that is realised within a broader pragmeme; a generalised communicative action shaped by context. Meaning, therefore, is co-constructed between speaker and hearer through mutual contextual beliefs and shared socio-cultural experiences. This theory is particularly relevant to political discourse, where utterances are designed to persuade, justify, and project ideology. By applying PAT, the study interprets political interviews as sites of pragmatic performance, revealing how politicians use language strategically to achieve ideological and persuasive goals.

Data Analysis and Discussion
The analysis focuses on the pragmatic acts employed by three major Nigerian presidential candidates Atiku Abubakar, Peter Obi, and Rabiu Musa Kwankwaso during their televised interviews on Politics Today between October 2022 and February 2023. Each interview provided a rich communicative context for examining how these political actors strategically deployed language to perform social, persuasive, and ideological functions. As Mey (2001) notes, pragmatic acts are contextually grounded actions through which speakers achieve communicative goals, and in political interviews, such acts are deliberately used to influence public perception and sustain political credibility (Ayoola, 2013; Osisanwo, 2016).

The data analysis reveals that four broad pragmatic acts dominate the interactions, namely assertive/informative,directive/requestive,persuasive/commissive, and accusatory/confrontational acts. Each of these acts serves a distinctive rhetorical purpose in the negotiation of meaning and power (Leech, 1983; Levinson, 1983). Assertive or informative acts are used to present facts, opinions, or ideological positions, while directive or requestive acts involve urging, suggesting, or challenging the interviewer or political opponents. These acts reflect the candidates' efforts to

control narratives and demonstrate mastery of issues, thereby enhancing their perceived competence (Fairclough, 1995).

The persuasive or commissive acts function primarily to promise, assure, or justify, aligning with the performative dimension of political discourse. Through these acts, politicians engage in commitment-making speech that appeals to voters' emotions and expectations (Chilton, 2004; van Dijk, 1997). They often invoke shared values and national ideals to build trust, legitimise intentions, and signal accountability. Such acts are reinforced by pragmatic strategies that underscore sincerity and moral authority, positioning the candidates as trustworthy and visionary leaders.

Conversely, accusatory or confrontational acts are used to criticise opponents, shift blame, or discredit existing administrations, often couched in mitigated language to avoid overt impoliteness (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Taiwo, 2007). These acts highlight the adversarial nature of political interviews, where candidates balance aggression with politeness to maintain public decorum while advancing their ideological stance. Such acts are often realised through implicature and presupposition, allowing politicians to make strong claims indirectly without violating conversational norms (Grice, 1975; Adegbija, 1999).

These four dominant acts operate in conjunction with pragmatic strategies such as presupposition, implicature, deixis, and hedging, which modulate meaning, manage face, and project credibility (Mey, 2001; Yule, 1996; Wodak, 2009). The integration of these strategies reveals how political actors navigate the tension between persuasion and politeness, truth and impression management. Overall, the findings are presented according to the major pragmatic acts and their ideological implications, demonstrating how political discourse functions as a site for constructing identity, asserting legitimacy, and contesting power in Nigeria's 2023 presidential election debates

Assertive and Informative Acts

Assertive acts emerged as the most dominant pragmatic feature across the interviews, functioning as key instruments for expressing conviction, legitimising political vision, and constructing ideological authority. In Mey's (2001) terms, these acts correspond to the assertive pragmeme, realised through practs of explanation, justification, and narration. They are central to political communication because they enable candidates to project confidence, expertise, and commitment while shaping public perception through controlled linguistic choices (Ayoola, 2013; Osisanwo, 2016). By performing assertive acts, politicians align their utterances with ideological goals and use discourse to assert moral or professional superiority (Fairclough, 1995). For instance, Atiku Abubakar frequently employed assertive acts to project experience and authority. When asked about his repeated presidential bids, he responded:

> "I have the experience, the contacts, and the understanding of how to move this country forward."

This utterance performs multiple pragmatic acts—it informs, reassures, and asserts legitimacy. Through the use of the first-person pronoun "I," the speaker constructs a persona of competence and reliability, aligning himself with technocratic ideology and a discourse of capability (van Dijk,

1998; Chilton, 2004). The pragmatic effect lies in asserting authority without appearing confrontational, thus fulfilling both assertive and face-maintaining functions (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Similarly, Peter Obi used assertive acts to reinforce moral and reformist ideology. In response to questions about corruption, he stated:

> "We cannot continue wasting public resources while people are hungry. Leadership is about accountability."

Here, the assertion performs an ideological act of moral positioning, distinguishing his campaign from entrenched traditions of corruption (Fairclough, 2001; Opeibi, 2009). The pragmatic act blends ethical conviction with populist appeal, constructing Obi's identity as a morally upright and reform-driven leader. Through such assertive acts, the speaker not only conveys belief but also shapes public morality, using language as an instrument of ideological renewal (Wodak, 2011). In contrast, Rabiu Musa Kwankwaso employed assertive acts to highlight inclusivity and national unity, often realised through deictic expressions such as "we" and "our people." For instance, he declared:

> "We are building a new Nigeria that works for everyone."

This use of inclusive deixis creates an ideological pract of solidarity, evoking shared identity and collective responsibility (Levinson, 1983; Adegbija, 1999). The pragmatic act positions the speaker as a bridge-builder, appealing to both ethnic and regional sentiments in a nation marked by diversity and division. Hence, across the three candidates, assertive acts operate as strategic tools of ideological construction and political branding, enabling them to communicate competence, morality, and unity in distinctive yet contextually grounded ways.

Directive and Requestive Acts

Directive acts were used strategically by the presidential candidates to issue calls to action, challenge the interviewer's assumptions, or appeal directly to the electorate. Such acts reveal the intersection between persuasion and control, illustrating the speakers' intent to guide discourse direction and influence audience behaviour. In Mey's (2001) framework, directives constitute activity types through which social goals are achieved, embodying both the pragmeme of persuasion and the pract of instruction (Adegbija, 1999; Thomas, 1995). They are particularly salient in political communication, where language functions as a tool for mobilising citizens and legitimising leadership (Chilton, 2004; van Dijk, 1997). Peter Obi's recurrent directive acts sought to reposition public responsibility and awaken civic consciousness. For instance, he urged:

> "Let Nigerians ask questions about how their money is spent."

Here, the imperative "ask questions" directs citizens toward civic engagement, transforming political discourse into an act of public enlightenment. The pragmatic force of the utterance transcends mere instruction. It performs ideological empowerment by reframing the electorate as active participants rather than passive subjects (Fairclough, 1995; Osisanwo, 2016). This aligns

with the populist rhetoric often observed in reformist discourse, where directives serve as instruments for collective moral awakening and accountability (Wodak, 2009). In contrast, Atiku Abubakar employed mild directives expressed through modal constructions such as "we should" and "we must." For example, he asserted:

"We must restructure this country to make it work."

The modal verb "must" signals urgency and obligation, reinforcing a sense of national duty and aligning him with reform-oriented ideology (Levinson, 1983; Fairclough, 2001). The pragmeme realised here is directive-assertive, combining an act of leadership with persuasion. By framing policy positions as shared imperatives, Atiku simultaneously enacts solidarity and authority, performing a pragmatic act that encourages compliance while maintaining cooperative tone (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Rabiu Musa Kwankwaso's directives, however, were frequently mitigated through politeness and hedging strategies. When responding to questions on national security, he stated:

"I think we need to involve local communities in intelligence gathering."

The hedge "I think" softens the force of the directive, transforming it into a suggestive rather than commanding act. This reflects a face-saving strategy that prioritises cooperation and inclusivity over confrontation (Goffman, 1967; Fraser, 1990). The utterance exemplifies Mey's (2001) principle that pragmatic acts are socially situated, reflecting the speaker's sensitivity to context and audience expectations. In this sense, Kwankwaso's directive acts reveal a nuanced balance between authority and humility, illustrating how Nigerian politicians adapt language to maintain credibility, politeness, and ideological coherence within mediated political interaction

Persuasive and Commissive Acts
Persuasive acts in the data involve assurances, promises, and commitments—key components of electoral discourse. They demonstrate the commissive dimension of pragmatic acts, where the speaker undertakes future-oriented obligations. Atiku Abubakar's persuasive acts often foregrounded continuity and stability:

"I will unify this country and restore investor confidence."

This promise combines ideological pragmeme (national unity) with performative intent (commitment). The future tense "will" realises a commissive act that seeks to inspire trust. Peter Obi frequently used persuasive acts grounded in moral reform:

"I am not desperate to be president; I am desperate to see Nigeria work."

The juxtaposition of "not desperate" and "desperate" performs an ideological inversion—he rejects power hunger while reinforcing patriotism. The pragmatic act here merges ethos and persuasion,

positioning the speaker as selfless. Kwankwaso's persuasive acts were pragmatic appeals to inclusivity:

> "We will make education free and accessible to every child."

This promise functions as both policy commitment and ideological projection of egalitarianism. Through repetition of "every," the utterance strengthens solidarity and emotional appeal.

Accusatory and Confrontational Acts

Accusatory acts emerged prominently when candidates reacted to criticisms or sought to distance themselves from political opponents. These acts often combined assertive and defensive pragmemes to construct ideological contrast and manage face-threatening situations. In political interviews, such acts serve dual purposes: they project self-justification while delegitimising rival narratives (Mey, 2001; Fairclough, 1995; van Dijk, 1997). The interplay of accusation and defence highlights how politicians manipulate pragmatic choices to maintain credibility under scrutiny, aligning linguistic behaviour with ideological self-presentation (Ayoola, 2013; Osisanwo, 2016).

Peter Obi, for example, frequently employed implicit accusations through presupposition and contrastive framing. His statement:

> "If others had managed our resources well, we wouldn't be here today."

…diplomatically avoids explicit naming but presupposes governmental failure and implicates ruling elites. The utterance performs both criticism and moral elevation, allowing Obi to project himself as ethically superior without breaching norms of politeness (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Levinson, 1983). The pragmatic act thus realises an accusatory pragmeme intertwined with moral ideology, reinforcing his reformist image and populist appeal (Wodak, 2009; Chilton, 2004). Through indirect accusation, Obi leverages pragmatic subtlety to critique governance failures while positioning himself as a credible alternative. Atiku Abubakar's accusatory acts, by contrast, were typically mitigated through collective deixis and shared responsibility frames. For instance, he remarked:

> "We all know what has gone wrong in the last eight years."

The inclusive pronoun "we" softens direct confrontation, performing a collective act of critique that distributes blame across political actors (Fairclough, 2001; van Dijk, 1998). This strategy allows Atiku to criticise governance without appearing vindictive or partisan. Pragmatically, the utterance realises a defensive-assertive pract, balancing the need to criticise while maintaining diplomatic tone (Leech, 1983; Adegbija, 1999). Such collective deixis aligns with his campaign rhetoric of national reconciliation and inclusivity, framing critique as an act of shared responsibility rather than individual attack.

In contrast, Rabiu Musa Kwankwaso engaged in more defensive confrontation, particularly when addressing rumours of political alliances. For example, he stated:

"I respect Peter Obi, but our ideologies are different."

Here, the conjunction "but" introduces contrast, performing both politeness and ideological demarcation (Fraser, 1990; Goffman, 1967). Pragmatically, the utterance combines respect with differentiation, achieving relational diplomacy while asserting ideological independence (Taiwo, 2007; Osisanwo, 2016). This dual function exemplifies how politicians in mediated contexts manage competing goals of solidarity and self-definition. Thus, across the interviews, accusatory acts function as strategic discursive tools for balancing criticism, defence, and identity construction within Nigeria's evolving political landscape

Ideological Implications

Across all the interviews, pragmatic acts functioned as crucial instruments for ideological positioning, reflecting how language operates as a site of political identity construction and persuasion. Each candidate employed distinctive communicative strategies that linked linguistic performance with broader ideological narratives (Mey, 2001; Fairclough, 1995; van Dijk, 1998). Through assertive, directive, and accusatory acts, they not only conveyed political messages but also enacted specific social roles, values, and visions that shaped their public personas (Ayoola, 2013; Osisanwo, 2016).

Atiku Abubakar projected experience and continuity, aligning his discourse with technocratic ideology. His assertive and commissive acts often foregrounded competence, stability, and national reform, echoing a managerial style of governance (Chilton, 2004; Fairclough, 2001). The pragmatic strategies of modal emphasise expressions like "we must" and "we should" reinforced his persona as a pragmatic reformer and policy-driven leader. Through these linguistic choices, Atiku positioned himself as a custodian of institutional knowledge, appealing to voters who valued administrative experience and political continuity (van Dijk, 1997; Wodak, 2009).

In contrast, Peter Obi constructed an ideology of moral populism, embodying transparency, accountability, and reformist zeal. His pragmatic acts were marked by moral evaluation and collective appeal, as seen in statements like "Let Nigerians ask questions about how their money is spent." Such utterances functioned as moral imperatives and acts of ideological empowerment, reframing citizens as active participants in governance (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Wodak, 2011). Obi's reliance on implicature and presupposition allowed him to critique corruption implicitly while maintaining politeness, blending moral integrity with populist rhetoric (Adegbija, 1999; Osisanwo, 2016).

Rabiu Musa Kwankwaso, meanwhile, conveyed inclusive nationalism, emphasising unity, cooperation, and equity. His frequent use of inclusive deixis "we," "our," "our people" created a pragmatic act of solidarity, reinforcing an ideology of collective belonging (Levinson, 1983; Taiwo, 2007). By employing hedges such as "I think" and "we need to", Kwankwaso mitigated assertiveness, performing humility while still guiding public interpretation. These linguistic strategies reveal an orientation toward participatory politics grounded in social cohesion and empathy (Fairclough, 1995; Wodak, 2009).

Through pragmatic choices such as assertion, persuasion, hedging, and deixis, each candidate effectively aligned language with ideology, transforming political talk into a

performance of identity and belief. The findings affirm that Nigerian political discourse operates less as a neutral exchange of information and more as a symbolic performance through which politicians negotiate legitimacy, morality, and national belonging (Mey, 2001; van Dijk, 1998; Chilton, 2004)

Discussion of Findings
The findings validate Mey's (2001) claim that pragmatic acts are context-bound and socially motivated. Each utterance in the interviews functioned not as an isolated linguistic structure but as a situated action responding to political expectations and audience perception. The analysis demonstrates that meaning in political discourse is constructed through socially situated interaction rather than mere grammatical arrangement. Assertive acts established authority; directives mobilised collective responsibility; persuasive acts built trust; and accusatory acts defined ideological boundaries. Collectively, these acts illustrate that Nigerian political interviews are arenas of ideological negotiation rather than neutral dialogue. The politicians' pragmatic performances were strategically aligned with their public images and ideological leanings, reinforcing Leech's (1983) assertion that pragmatic choices often serve rhetorical and interpersonal goals. Furthermore, pragmatic strategies such as hedging, presupposition, and deixis demonstrate the delicate balance between truth-claim and face management in political communication. By embedding ideology within pragmemes, politicians performed acts that simultaneously informed, persuaded, and legitimised. This aligns with Thomas (1995) and Levinson (1983), who observe that pragmatic meaning arises from speaker intention and contextual inference rather than surface linguistic form.

The findings also resonate with the arguments of Osisanwo (2012), Ayoola (2013), and Odebunmi (2015), who contend that pragmatics in Nigerian political discourse functions as a vehicle for social control and ideological reproduction. The interview data further affirm that pragmatic acts, especially those combining assertive and directive forces, are mechanisms of power performance in political communication. In essence, this study extends earlier insights by demonstrating that pragmatic acts, as realised in media interviews, are not merely communicative but performative of power. Through their strategic use of language, the candidates enacted ideological positions and negotiated public legitimacy. Thus, political interviews in Nigeria emerge as pragmatic theatres where discourse functions as both message and instrument of influence.

Conclusion
This study has examined the deployment of pragmatic acts and ideological positioning in selected political media interviews of Nigeria's 2023 presidential election. Drawing insights from Mey's (2001) Pragmatic Act Theory, the analysis revealed that political communication in televised interviews is not a neutral exchange of information but a complex interactional event where politicians perform socially situated acts to achieve persuasive, ideological, and relational goals. Each act served a distinctive ideological purpose: assertives legitimised authority and projected competence; directives mobilised collective responsibility and redefined civic duty; persuasive acts promised reform and moral renewal; and accusatory acts delineated ideological boundaries by

contrasting self with opponents. These acts illustrate how language operates as a tool for political identity construction and ideological performance in Nigeria's media space.

The findings also highlight that pragmatic strategies such as presupposition, implicature, deixis, and hedging enable politicians to manage face, negotiate credibility, and align discourse with public sentiment. For instance, the use of inclusive deixis ("we," "our people") fostered solidarity, while hedging expressions ("I think," "perhaps") softened directives and mitigated potential confrontation. Such strategies underscore Mey's argument that pragmatic acts are deeply context-dependent and socially motivated actions. From a theoretical perspective, the study demonstrates the relevance of Pragmatic Act Theory to political discourse analysis. It provides a flexible framework that accommodates the socio-political, institutional, and interpersonal dimensions of meaning-making in televised communication. By integrating context, ideology, and action, PAT offers a more comprehensive understanding of how political actors use language to influence perception and maintain power relations. Academically, it enriches pragmatic scholarship by extending Mey's framework to contemporary Nigerian political discourse, illustrating how pragmatic acts function within mediated interactions. It also suggests that future studies may explore comparative analyses between political interviews, campaign rallies, and online engagements to capture multimodal pragmatic variation.

Societally, the study contributes to political literacy and democratic accountability. Understanding the pragmatic and ideological dimensions of political communication can empower citizens to interpret political statements critically rather than passively consuming them. By decoding the subtle acts embedded in political discourse, voters can better evaluate the authenticity and ideological consistency of candidates. In conclusion, pragmatic acts in Nigerian political interviews are not mere linguistic expressions but performative enactments of ideology, persuasion, and power. Through language, politicians negotiate legitimacy, construct moral identities, and shape public consciousness. The study affirms that the pragmatics of political communication remains a vital lens for understanding how discourse sustains democracy, contests hegemony, and reflects the dynamic interplay between language and society.

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