

A Pragmatic Analysis of Practs in Nigeria's 2023 Presidential Primary Election Acceptance Speeches

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Abstract

This paper engages in pragmatic analysis of Nigeria's 2023 presidential primary election acceptance speeches. Twenty-one texts were randomly sampled from the three speeches delivered by the standard-bearers. Fourteen thematically-related texts were selected for analysis leaving out others that have the same features to avoid repetition. The analysis of data was guided by Mey's (2001) pragmatic acts theory. The result of the study has shown that presidential primary acceptance speeches contain some practs or pragmatic acts that are used for persuasion. Hence, the study reveals speakers' judicious deployment of practs such as thanking/commending, promising/pledging, pleading/appealing, revealing/stating, assuring, sensitizing/mobilizing, indicting/criticizing and apologizing, as mobilization strategies through which their persuasive intentions were communicated to their audience.

Keywords: Acceptance speech, Practs, Pragmatics, Pragmeme, 2023 Presidential general elections.

Introduction

Language is a vital tool of communication. (van Dijk 1997; Fairclough, 2001; Stevanant and Carreon, 2017) submit that language use is a form of social practice as it relates to how it is employed in different communicative events and situations. In politics, especially during the electioneering period, politicians use language to their own advantage in the various speeches they make. They use their speeches as platforms to establish and maintain social relationships, expressing feelings, and selling of ideas, policies and programmes in any society. Speeches are made from time to time, depending on situations and events. Pre-election speeches are made to address the people, especially during campaigns and rallies. After the election, acceptance or victory speech is given by any candidate that emerges as a winner.

Therefore, presidential acceptance speech is a celebratory kind of political discourse that affords political actors to persuade and convince the electorates by reaffirming their commitment to serve the people. They do this by emphasizing the programmes of their party and electioneering campaign promises. Accordingly, Beard (2000:57), cited in Akinwotu, (2015) avers that "all the written and spoken texts that are produced during an election campaign are designed to persuade people to do one thing: to vote in a certain way". Hence, in the speeches for this study, aspirants attempt to use persuasion as a linguistic and persuasive

strategy to change the attitude of their audience in order to affect their belief and degree of agreement with their own viewpoints.

Although presidential acceptance speech is celebratory in nature, the political climate, the existing political structures and the whole electioneering processes around Nigeria's 2023 polls posed a great challenge to the victory of the aspirants, considering some paradigms such as credibility and popularity of the aspirants, availability of resources like money and other logistics connected to the candidate's party affiliation. So, in the build-up to Nigeria's 2023 general elections, the party standard-bearers, with the instrumentation of language, used their speeches as campaign platforms by using various persuasive and pragmatic strategies to persuade their audience, assuring them about their ability and credibility for good governance. They also wielded the instrumentation of language to tone down the apparent criticisms against their nomination in order to get the electorates' votes in the general elections. Supporting this point, (Azuma, 2012) cited in Amale et al (2022) submits that politicians do not only present themselves and declare their interests for different political offices they are vying for, they also engage the public, through language, on different issues of public concerns, especially those on wellbeing and welfare that tickle the interest of the electorate with the view to gaining their votes. So, with the weapon and politics of language, the aspirants used persuasion as a linguistic strategy to change the attitude and belief of the audience to a degree of agreement with their own viewpoints. Osisanwo, (2017) cited in Ashindorbe and Chinaguh, (2020), submits that politics, which is a public phenomenon, is enabled by language" that functions as "a very strong political weapon" used "to accomplish the control of power". Consequently, political actors have tapped into the importance of language in setting their personality in order to gain the support of the people (Opeibi, 2009). Given this central role of language in communication of intentions vis-à-vis the significance of presidential speech, political actors employ various persuasive and pragmatic strategies in their acceptance speeches to persuade and assure their audience of good governance.

Benoit, (1999) states that nomination acceptance speeches are celebratory; they also serve to unify the party, to provide a climatic moment for the convention, and to outline the platform on which the candidate will run. A presidential acceptance speech signals the launch of the general election campaign and provides each party's candidate with a significant rhetorical opportunity. From the speeches they make, the public can gauge what kind of a president the candidate might be. Galston (2021) posits that successful acceptance speeches at the national party conventions accomplish two tasks, namely: they lay out what is at stake in the forthcoming election in clear, unmistakable terms; secondly, they do what is necessary in the circumstances of the times to build majority support.

Problem Statement

Several studies have been carried out on different aspects of political speeches in Nigeria. While the majority concentrate on presidential inaugural speeches (Abuya, 2012, Ayeomoni & Akinkuolere, 2012, Bani-Khaled & Azzam, 2021), others are based on Independence Day broadcasts (Olaniyan, 2012 & 2014); presidential speeches motivated by political crises (Oha,

1994, Adegaju, 2005) and so on. Presidential primary acceptance speech, as a genre of political discourse, is scarcely studied in the literature. The only existing work, known to the authors, is Akinwotu's (2013) work on the acceptance speeches of Chief Obafemi Awolowo and Chief MKO Abiola which submits that the acceptance of nomination speeches are loaded with illocutionary acts that are used to achieve persuasion in political campaigns. The present study, which differs in theoretical orientation and emphasis from the previous ones, is motivated by the necessity to fill the scholarship gap by analyzing the Nigeria's 2023 presidential primary election acceptance speeches and see how the standard-bearers used their speeches to project a good image of themselves and their parties with a view to gaining the electorates' votes.

Objectives of the Study

Therefore, this paper engages in the analysis of the Nigeria's 2023 presidential primary election acceptance speeches in order to see how the standard-bearers used their speeches to express their intentions. Also, it attempts to identify the various persuasive strategies used to mobilize for electorates' support as well as to explore how the speakers use language to tactically tone down the apparent criticisms against their nomination or credibility.

Review of Literature

There have been many studies on political speeches to express persuasive and pragmatic intentions. Persuasive strategies are deployed mainly in political discourse. Ayoola, K. (2005) cited in Saratu, S.A. (2020) examines the declaration speech of President Olusegun Obasanjo that was delivered amidst great suspicion from many opposition groups that the president was contemplating going for an unconstitutional third term in office. In the study, the author is able to show the importance of critical discourse analysis in unraveling political meaning in the use of English. Ayoola's work is similar to this study in that it is based on the analysis of a political campaign speech. However, it differs from this because the present study focuses on presidential acceptance speech in the primaries with the objective of showing how the speakers used their speeches to tone down the apparent criticism against their nomination, revealing the persuasive strategies used by the speakers to project a good public image of themselves and their parties, especially on welfare programmes that tickle the interest of the electorates with a view to getting their votes.

Kamalu and Agangan (2015) is a text of President Goodluck Jonathan's declaration speech of his candidacy for PDP presidential primaries. With critical discourse analysis (CDA) analytical framework, the authors are able to reveal the underlining ideology and persuasive strategies used in the speech. The study reveals Jonathan's deployment of diverse rhetorical strategies to depict his political ideology; the use of persuasive strategies to appeal to ethno-religious sentiments as well as aligning with the suffering of the masses. Apart from the fact that the studies are similar in terms of their interests in persuasion, the preoccupation of the present study is on presidential acceptance speech in the primaries with the objective of showing how the speakers used their speeches to tone down the apparent criticism against their nomination, by projecting a good image of themselves and their parties with a view to getting the electorates' votes.

“Tear Down this Wall” was a speech delivered by American President – Ronald Regan. Skoniechi & College (2004) reveal that this address mainly aroused action against communism among the people of West Berlin and the world at large. In the final analysis, the study reveals that Regan’s effective and persuasive use of language led to the opening of the Berlin wall.

In a more recent study, Bani-Khaled & Azzam (2021) carry out a linguistic study of President Joe Biden’s inauguration speech. Using theme analysis framework, the study analyses both the verbal and non-verbal linguistic features of the speech to bring out the recurring theme of unity in the speech. The study reveals the speaker’s use of religion and history as sources of his rhetorical persuasion and the overall tone of the speech is confident, reconciliatory and hopeful.

A closely related paper to this study is Akinwotu’s (2013). It examines the role of language in communication and interpretation of the intentions of the speakers in the acceptance of nomination speeches of presidential candidates in Nigeria. The author identifies some illocutionary acts (in the speeches) like assertive, expressive and commissive that are used as mobilization strategies, to persuade listeners in order to win elections. However, the current study differs from Akinwotu’s work in its theoretical preoccupation using Mey’s Pragmatic Act Theory (PAT) which objectively brings to the fore the various pragmatic acts performed by each speaker to project a good image of themselves and their parties, to tone down apparent criticisms against their nomination and the use of various pragmatic acts and persuasive strategies to solicit the support of the audience in the coming 2023 general elections.

Ojukwu and Osuchukwu (2019) cited in Khaled, T.B. and Azzam, S. (2021) is a pragmatic study of some select speeches of Nelson Mandela. The study, which focuses on the illocutionary acts in the speeches, reveals that Nelson Mandela’s speeches satisfied Austin’s felicity conditions. The study concludes that Mandela’s linguistic tact and craft contributed immensely to South African’s freedom from apartheid.

Osobe’s (2012) research is on the central role which language plays in resolving the Niger-Delta crisis. The study reveals how (mis)use of language served as a catalyst that fueled up and worsened the Niger-Delta crisis. The study concludes that language is a powerful tool for promotion of peace or propagation of war.

Adegoju (2005) cited in Akinwotu (2013) explores style in political conflicts in the June 12, 1993 crisis in Nigeria. The study reports the various ways the instrumentation of language is used to promote and defend individual and group interests as well as frustrating the goals of the opponent.

Further still, Alavidze (2018) examines the use of politeness by politicians to maintain their public image. The paper examines some selected speeches of President Donald Trump. The study reveals the various politeness strategies used by politicians whenever their public image is threatened. The paper further reveals Trump’s use of local dialect which his audience is

familiar with by identifying with them as members of a social group in order to project a good public image or perception of himself.

From the foregoing, as abundant as studies on political speeches appear to be, not much has been done on primary acceptance speeches in Nigeria except Akinwotu's (2013) work which focuses on presidential acceptance speech. However, the current study differs from Akinwotu's (2013) work in analytical approach. The current study engages in analysis of Nigeria's 2023 primary elections' speeches, using Mey's (2001) pragmatic acts theory to identify the various pragmatic acts like thanking, assuring, pleading, pledging/promising, and so on used to mobilize for electorates' support. The study also focuses on the speaker's effective and persuasive language use to reduce/mitigate the apparent criticism against their nomination as their party's standard-bearers.

Therefore, this study is significant because 2023 general elections will be an election year that will not feature the incumbent President (be it from the ruling party or the opposition) as an aspirant/contestant. This will automatically rule out the notion that election is rigged in favour of the ruling party. Similarly, this study is significant because the three presidential aspirants, as ex-Governors and former Vice President, are presumed to have been familiar with the socio-economic and political crises in Nigeria and should be able to proffer solutions to them when they come to power. The study is also significant as the contents of their speeches will be a portrayal of the reality or the future that lies ahead of Nigeria as a country.

Methodology

Three speeches delivered by Bola Ahmed Tinubu (BAT), Atiku Abubakar and Peter Obi of All Progressives Congress, Peoples Democratic Party, and Labour Party were purposively selected for this study. The speeches were those that featured the three prominent presidential standard-bearers for the 2023 presidential elections. The speeches delivered orally in English and transmitted through the electronic media, including the internet. The speech transcripts were collected from www.channelstv.com and www.dailypost.ng of May 30th, 2022 and were analyzed descriptively using Mey's (2001) Pragmatic Acts Theory. While Obi's speech contains thirteen paragraphs, BAT and Atiku's speeches both contain fifteen paragraphs each. In line with the variation in paragraphs and number of words, we purposefully chose fourteen texts in all, (i.e. six from Obi, four from BAT, and four from Atiku) to ensure a thorough analysis of data. The study adopted a thematic analysis based on information available on each speech by classifying each thematically-related practs under each pragmatic goal. This is done with a view to accounting for the persuasive elements and pragmatic strategies used in achieving the speaker's communicative goals.

Theoretical Orientation

Pragmatic acts theory emphasizes a user and situation based approach. Mey (2001, p. 228) defines pragmatic acts as follows:

Pragmatic acts are pragmatic because they base themselves on language as constrained by the situation, not as defined by syntactic rules or by semantic selections and conceptual restrictions. Pragmatic acts are situation-derived and situation-constrained. In the final analysis, they are determined by the broader social context in which they happen, and they realize their goals in the conditions placed upon human action by that context.

The pragmatic act theory is a response to some inadequacies of Austin's (1962) Speech Act Theory (SAT). The argument against speech act theory is that, it does not account for theory of context; it does not have a theory of action, and speeches are analyzed as an individual entity (sentences) and not as a whole. Pragmatic act theory is a context based theory. Context is about understanding what things are for; it gives our utterances their true pragmatic meaning and allows them to be counted as true pragmatic act.

Mey (2001, p203) states that "pragmatics studies language as it is used by people, for their own purposes and within their own respective limitations and affordances". In the pragmatic acts theory, a speaker may co-opt others, set them up, influence them through conversations, and deny certain claims without betraying such acts through lexical choices (Mey, 2001, p. 216). Put in another words, no specific word determines a particular act except for a consideration of the discourse context. This exactly is the goal of the candidates in their acceptance speeches; they try to influence the views of the audience by projecting a good public image of themselves in their speeches.

Mey (2001, p. 221), posits that a pragmatic act is instantiated through an "ipra" or "a pract", which realizes a "pragmeme" as "every pract is at the same time an allopract, that is, a concrete instantiation of a particular pragmeme". Therefore, what determines a pract are solely participants' knowledge of interactional situation and the potential effect of a pract in a particular context, which is the reason, Odebunmi (2006) submits, that "practing resolves the problem of telling illocutionary force from perlocutionary force". Hence, it will be out of context for candidates in this study not to factor into their speeches the various persuasive strategies they intend to use in arresting and solving the socio-economic and political problems confronting Nigeria if they actually want to mobilize for electorates' support and get their votes in the Nigeria's 2023 polls.

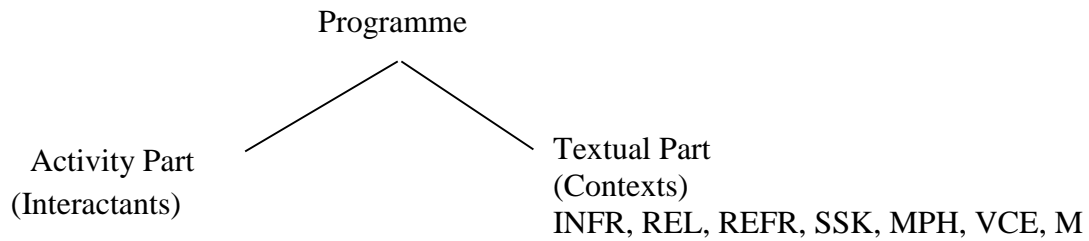
Considering the centrality of context in pragmatic acting, this study adopts pragmatic acts theory because it helps to unfold the political situation or atmosphere in the build up to Nigeria 2023 presidential election. The presidential speeches, delivered by each candidate (as monologue) were targeted at the Nigerian audience who were expected to take actions (now as dialogue – responding to) vote them in during the election. The speeches were expected to spur the listeners into action. This theory is significant /relevant as it reveals the pragmatic acts through which the candidates connect with the audience.

Pragmatic acting centres on the interactional situation in which both speakers and hearers realize their aims. “The explanatory movement is from the outside in, rather than from the inside out: Instead of starting with what is said, and looking for what the words could mean, the situation in which the words fit is invoked to explain what can be (and is actually being) said” (Mey, 2011:751). Specifically, “implied identification” is central to Mey’s pragmatic acts, such that, the importance is not on the “said” but the “unsaid”.

In the pragmatic act theory, there are two components involved in the realization of a pragmeme: the textual part and the activity part. The activity part represents the options such as speech acts, indirect speech acts, conversational (‘dialogue’) acts, psychological acts (emotions), prosody (intonation, stress,) physical acts, etc. that are available to the speaker to perform the various pragmatic functions he likes. The realization of the pragmatic function in a given communicative event relies on the textual parts, especially in the communication of the speaker’s intention; in which case, he may employ the ‘inf’ which stands for inference, the “ref” for reference, “rel” for relevance, “vce” for voice, “ssk” for shared situational knowledge, “mph”, metaphor, or “m” for metapragmatic joker. Both categories depend on context for the meaning realization of the discourse of interactants.

The figure below is Mey’s (2001) model or schema of a true pragmatic use of language for communication, incorporating the significance of the entire context as follows:

Figure 1: Mey's (2001, p. 222) Model of Pragmatic Acts



- Speech acts
- Indirect speech acts
- Conversational / dialogue acts
- Psychological acts (Emotion)
- Prosody (Intonation, stress)
- Physical act
- Body moves (Gesture)
- Physiognomy (Facial Expression)
- (Bodily Expression of) emotion
- ϕ NULL

PRACT
ALLOPRACT
PRAGMEME, PRACT, ALLOPRACT

Data Analysis

This part of the paper accounts for the various persuasive strategies employed by the speakers in their speeches. The speakers' communicative goals of mobilizing supports of the electorates in the 2023 elections as reflected in the speeches are analyzed under the following contexts: pleading/appealing; promising/pledging; revealing/stating; thanking/commending, and indicting/blaming.

(a) Pleading/Appealing

In primary acceptance speeches of this nature, speakers usually deploy various persuasive strategies to project a good image of themselves using some manipulative/linguistic codes that leave the psyche of their audience enthralled. Pleading/appealing is deployed by the speakers to achieve various pragmatic intentions such as assuring, mobilizing for support of the electorates, apologizing and crisis resolution.

Text 1. “I therefore thank all of you and call for your sustained support towards returning Nigeria to Nigerians from forces of bad leadership and retrogression” – **OBI**

In text 1, Obi appeals to the psyche of his audience in order to persuade them by painting the horror of retrogression which bad leadership has brought upon Nigeria. Riding on the shared situational knowledge (SSK) that hijackers or cabals have taken over the government, rendering the leadership ineffective and inefficient, insensitive to the plight of citizens; the speaker canvasses for support of his audience for returning Nigeria to Nigerians. This emphasis is relevant (REL) and significantly imperative because the audience’s interests are intentionally sustained with the hope that whatever commitment they make is an investment towards their future. The speaker’s reference (REFR) to “forces of bad leadership and retrogression” implies (INFR) he would, unlike them, be focused, entrench good governance and ensure Nigerians enjoy the dividends of democracy and are happy that they are being ruled by their elected leader. These emphases are simply persuasive strategies deployed by the speaker to ensure that the audience repose some trust in his credibility and ability to do what previous governments could not achieve. The speaker’s use of the action verb ‘call’ denotes immediate action must be taken by the audience – their support or votes must be given to the speaker in the next polls.

Text 2. “... Let us join hands to beat the PDP and beat back their retrogressive understanding of Nigeria, They had 16 years; they depleted our resources and left us with hunger ... because they are the agents of poverty, terror, violence and lying”. – **BAT**

BAT’s persuasive goal is communicated through pragmatic tools of INFR, SSK and REFR as contained in text 2 above. Guided by the shared situational knowledge (SSK) of 16 years PDP’s led administration of 1999-2015 and the current socio-economic crises in Nigeria, the speaker makes an explicit and direct reference (REFR) to PDP as the cause of these woes: poverty, terrorism, violence, and so on. This vituperative and defamatory remarks become relevant (REL) or is of essence to the speaker because it is a way of presenting himself in a positive light (positive-self presentation) and others in a negative way (negative others presentation). The inference (INFR) in this overt criticism of the opposition party (PDP) is a persuasive means adopted by the speaker to project a good public image or perception of himself while others are presented in bad light. The ‘us’ in “Let us join hand to beat PDP...” is another persuasive strategy deployed by the speaker to emphasize the importance of the audience’s collaboration hence, his solidarity call for their support.

Text 3. “Atiku also appealed to aggrieved party members to use internal party mechanisms to resolve crises instead of resorting to all kinds of court cases as it is not in the best interest of the party” – **ATIKU**

Atiku’s persuasive goal is captured in this text 3 with the pragmatic tools of SSK, REFR, INFR, and REL. Given the shared situational knowledge (SSK) of some aggrieved party members (the

G 5), the speaker seizes the opportunity to plead with them so that the current crises in the party (REFR) could be resolved amicably without the intervention of any law court (REFR) as it happened in some parties. This appeal becomes relevant (REL) or is imperative, as resorting to court cases will further decimate the party. The speaker practs pleading/appealing here. Atiku's engagement in this direction is presumed to be a persuasive strategy of boosting the audience's confidence in his human managerial capability if elected a president in 2023 polls. As a result, he solicits for their support.

(b) Promising/Pledging

Text 4. "I assure you that no region; state, local government, or communities will be left behind" - **OBI**

One of the strategic ways of persuading an audience is by assuring them and boosting their confidence about the bright future that lies ahead of them. To achieve this, Obi deploys the pragmatic tools of inference (INFR), shared situational knowledge (SSK), reference (REFR) and voice (VCE) to pract assurance. With this remark, Obi appeals to the psyche of his audience to get them focused and look forward to better days. Emphasizing that "no region, state, local government or communities will be left behind", the speaker presupposes that cases of neglect and sideline which characterized previous administrations (REFR) will never feature again. As a persuasive mechanism, Obi uses this expression to his credit that his government will be an inclusive one if elected to power. Similarly, the speaker attempts to further persuade his audience using the pragmatic tool of voice (VCE). The expression "I assure you" is imbued with an authoritative tone that is expected to boost the audience's trust and conviction in the speaker.

Text 5. "... And I pledge to work with a sense of unity and sense of belonging with all Nigerians irrespective of their area of origin" – **ATIKU**

In text 5, Atiku's persuasive goal is expressed with the pragmatic tools of shared situational knowledge (SSK) and inference (INFR) to pract pledging or promising. Given the multi-ethnicity composition of Nigeria which is common knowledge to the audience (SSK), the speaker projects himself to his audience as a detribalized and undiscriminating leader, who possesses the capacity to unite the regionally-polarized country. The emphasis on restoring unity implies (INFR) the existence of division among different ethnic groups in the country. Thus, the speaker adopts this persuasive strategy in order to project a good public image of himself as well as boosting his audience's confidence in his ability to deliver on his promise of uniting the nation.

(c) Revealing/Stating/Informing

Text 6. "Our governance mission will be twin-tracked. Secure Nigeria in every ramification: national security, human security, food security and tackling

insecurity created by unemployment. We will also seek to unite our nation by pulling our people out of poverty, and creating a new sense of nationalism and patriotism” - **OBI**

The pragmatic act in this text 6 is encoded with the verbs “secure” and “unite”. The speaker performs this pragmatic act of stating or promising in order to positively influence his audience to accepting him as a candidate who has good intentions for them. Using the pragmatic tools of SSK, REFR, INFR and REL, the speaker practs informing, promising and stating. Given the shared situational knowledge (SSK) of insecurity in Nigeria which is common knowledge to the audience, the speaker emphasizes that arresting insecurity in all its ramifications will be the top priority of his government. The speaker’s emphasis on insecurity and unification of Nigeria is a direct reference (REFR) to some socio-economic crises in the country. It is relevant (REL) to draw an inference (INFR) here that insecurity and disunity have not allowed Nigerians to see any sense in being patriotic to their country as this will not benefit them in anyway. Therefore, the speaker uses the text to convince his audience of his ability of turning things around in their favour by providing good leadership if given the opportunity by electing him president in the next polls.

Text 7. “We are progressives, we are nation builders. We are not destroyers”. **BAT**

Given the shared situational knowledge (SSK) of Nigerian recurrent socio-economic and political crises which are common knowledge to the audience, the speaker practs stating or informing as well as indicting. The speaker uses direct reference (REFR) as identity marker in order to project a good public image of himself and his party and indirectly (INFR) refers to others as destroyers. The intention of the speaker in this text is to convince the listeners of his ability of turning things around in their favour by providing them with good leadership.

(d) Thanking/Commending

Text 8. “I thank Nigerians; especially members of the Labour Party who have gathered here since yesterday to partake in the primaries to choose the person that will fly the Labour flag in the forthcoming National election to choose the President of Nigeria.” **OBI**

Text 9. “I therefore thank all of you and call for your sustained support towards returning Nigeria to Nigerians from forces of bad leadership and retrogression.” **OBI**

Obi’s speech begins by showing appreciation to Nigerians, and especially members of the Labour Party whose supports and votes resulted in his nomination as the party’s standard-bearer in the 2023 presidential general elections. To achieve persuasion, the speaker deploys the pragmatic tools of shared situational knowledge (SSK) and inference (INFR) to pract thanking and appreciation of his audience. As a discourse holder, the speaker, in text 9 repeats the same

expression of appreciation “I therefore thank all of you” to show gratitude to his audience and solicit their support in order to bring Nigeria back on track again. In texts 8 & 9, Obi practs thanking and appreciation using shared situational knowledge (SSK) and inference (INFR) in order to persuade and canvass for the support of Nigerians and Labour Party members. The expression of gratitude in these texts signals the recognition Obi gives to Nigerians.

Text 10. “The V.P., a very good and supportive pillar, a good assistant to the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, “Prof. Yemi Osinbajo GCON, we thank you for this steady and good support to our president”. **BAT**

BAT’s persuasive intention is expressed in this appreciative remark using the pragmatic tools of SSK, REFR, INFR and MET. Cognizant of the context-dependent nature of pragmatic acting, the speaker does not take for granted expression of gratitude to the VP – Prof. Yemi Osinbajo, whom reference (REFR) is explicitly made to as good and supportive pillar and an assistant to the president. This show of gratitude is relevant (REL) as it foregrounds the vital roles being played by the VP in making the presidency functional and stable. Since the speaker’s emergence as the party’s standard-bearer is anchored or premised on the vital roles played by the presidency and the speaker has thanked the president for this, we assume that the speaker extends same gratitude to the VP as a persuasive strategy to mobilize for more support in the general elections. The speaker explicitly refers (REFR) to the VP as “a supportive pillar”. This figurative usage is a metaphor (MET) that strongly underscores the indispensability of the VP in the smooth running of the government. This expression is imbued with a persuasive goal of getting the V.P’s endorsement which will further reinforce the support of the electorates in the next general elections.

Text 11. “ the PDP government created one of the best economy in the country”
ATIKU

To get his audience further persuaded, Atiku deploys the pragmatic tools of reference (REFR), shared situational knowledge (SSK) and inference (INFR) to pract boasting or praising. Given the SSK of successive Peoples Democratic Party’s (PDP) administrations of 1999-2015 which, in the speaker’s opinion, afforded the leadership of the party to build a strong economy for Nigeria, the speaker can do no less than praise his party for this achievement. Also, the speaker’s explicit reference (REFR) to PDP and not himself is attitudinal; it is presumed to be a portrayal of his humble and servant-leadership lifestyle. This disposition becomes relevant (REL) as it orients the audience toward evaluating the inherent quality of managing national resources in the speaker. By implication (INFR) the speaker devises this persuasive strategy to boost the audience’s confidence in his credibility and capability for good government, as well as mobilizing for their support in the 2023 polls.

(e) Blaming/Criticizing/Attacking

Text 12. “Painfully, our current dysfunctional system rewards unearned income and conspicuous consumption, allows university lecturers to remain on strike for months, keeps our youths at home, and owes pensioners, who gave their patriotic sweat and their youthful energy to serve this country” – **OBI**

To persuade his audience further, Obi appeals to their psyche by portraying the appalling socio-economic and political situations which cumulative leadership failure has brought on Nigeria. Obi subtly frowns at and criticizes the government for failure to pay workers salaries, prolong strike by lecturers, nepotism and favouritism. Given this background, the speaker deploys the pragmatic tools of shared situational knowledge (SSK), inference (INFR), reference (REFR), voice (VCE) and relevance (REL) to pract criticizing, blaming, condemning in order to mould a good public perception of himself and his party as a solution provider to their problems. The speaker’s choice of linguistic lexical items such as “strike, pensioners, unearned income, and so on is a reference (REFR), which points to the negligence of previous governments, inability to deliver on their promises as well as their insensitivity to the plight of the citizens. This emphasis becomes relevant (REL) and imperative as it serves the purpose of boosting the audience’s confidence, trust and believability in the speaker. This implies that this government and previous ones approve of incompetence, favouritism and nepotism. Frowning at vices like these is a persuasive strategy deployed by the speaker to foreground his ability to perform better, if elected president in the next polls.

Text 13. “We are not the barbaric blind human beings they think we are. They are setting us against one another” **BAT**

Furthermore, the speaker’s intention to persuade and convince his audience about his credibility and the ability of APC to entrench good government is achieved with the deployment of pragmatic tool of inference (INFR). This is contained in the expression “*We are not the barbaric blind human beings they think we are*”. From “barbaric blind human beings” can be drawn inference (INFR) of visionless leadership, a government that is plagued with many disabilities. Hence, BAT persuades his audience to believing his credibility and ability to bring better government if elected president in 2023 polls. In text 13, the speaker tries to de-emphasize people’s opinions and criticisms about him and his party by projecting a good public image of himself. This is a persuasive mechanism aimed at getting the audience’s support as well as mobilizing them for the next 2023 polls.

Text 14. “... the reason I feel that unity is very important for us is that the APC had disunited Nigeria completely between North and South, East and West, Muslims and Christians” **ATIKU**

To further persuade his audience, the speaker emphasizes disunity and the factors responsible for it. Guided by the shared situational knowledge (SSK) of disunity in Nigeria, leading to ethno-religious violence, terrorism and so on, the speaker refers (REFR) to unity as the only strong factor that can eradicate the plague of disunity in Nigeria. This remark is significantly

imperative and relevant (REL) because it is presumed to impress the audience, boost their confidence in the speaker's ability to entrench good governance if elected president. It is a remark made to mobilize for the audience's support in the forthcoming 2023 polls.

Discussion and Result

From the analysis so far, fourteen texts have been carefully analyzed from the speeches of the speakers: six from Obi, four from BAT, and four from Atiku. Each of the speakers adopted various persuasive strategies to communicate their intentions to the audience. In a bid to fulfil this persuasive intention therefore, the speakers deployed various pragmatic strategies to practice thanking, assuring, apologizing, blaming/criticizing, encouraging/motivating, mobilizing for support, resolving crises and so on.

BAT's speech reveals abundance of thanks and commendation of certain individuals and groups presumed to have been instrumental in the realization of his dream or emergence as the standard-bearer of his party. Secondly, the speech shows abundance of criticism and indictment of certain individuals or groups presumed to be anti- the speaker. From the analysis, BAT deploys more of revealing/stating practices in his speech to acquaint the audience with the various governmental programmes and policies that will be beneficial to them. BAT utilizes this persuasive strategy by assuring the audience about government's commitment to rebuilding the nation which is at the verge of collapse at the moment. By revealing the various socio-economic problems or realities of Nigeria which he will fix when he comes to power, BAT uses this as a persuasive means to draw the audience's attention to his side.

Obi projects a good image of himself and what his government intends to achieve in office by revealing the various plans and programmes the government will embark upon. Obi's speech is highly expressive and persuasive. This persuasive goal is realized with the deployment of pragmatic strategies such as promising, assuring, pleading/appealing, mobilizing for support, and criticizing/indicting. The speech is highly persuasive as it promises economic and national rebirths, entrenchment of true democracy and emancipation from cumulative leadership failure.

However, Atiku's speech is less expressive and persuasive as many vague terms are used to project what his government will offer the country in terms of programmes and policy, if he wins the 2023 election. His emphasis on "fundamental changes" without specific mention of what those changes entail is a manifestation of indefiniteness of purpose. Atiku employs practices such as pledging/promising, assuring, praising, resolving crises and blaming/indicting to project a good image of himself in order to get his audience persuaded.

On the note of similarity, all of them deploy practices such as pleading/appealing to galvanize audience's support, stating and informing the audience about governmental policies, and programmes; promising and pledging good governance. These are all persuasive mechanisms geared towards mobilizing for the audience's support in the forthcoming 2023 polls. Apart from the similar practices in their speeches, there are also dissimilar practices. Atiku starts his own speech, noting that his victory in the election will bring fundamental changes to Nigeria as he has

already pledged to form an inclusive government if his party wins the 2023 elections. BAT, on the other hand, emphasizes on the day being historic and memorable thus, appreciates God as well as acknowledges the President. However, Obi starts his own speech by thanking Nigerians, especially his party members. In short, both Obi and BAT deploy practs like thanking/commending as persuasive strategy; this is not strongly stressed in Atiku's speech. While BAT and Atiku's speeches fail to acknowledge the presence of Nigerians directly, by greeting or thanking in their opening remarks (opening vocative), Obi's speech specifically shows appreciation. Moreover, while BAT and Atiku's speeches engage in direct criticism, blaming and indicting individuals and previous governments, Obi does not do this. Where it appears to have done this, he uses the device of indirection, without mentioning any specific name or party as being responsible for the mess.

Conclusion

In this study, we have examined presidential primary election acceptance speech as a genre of discourse and how it affords the standard-bearers the opportunity to project a good public image of themselves and that of their parties. The study has shown how pragmatic acting can be used as a persuasive strategy and platform for the analysis of any speech, especially primary acceptance speech. Equally, the study has shown that presidential primary acceptance speeches are loaded with pragmatic acts that are used for persuasion. As revealed in the analysis, five persuasive goals of pleading/appealing, promising/pledging, revealing/stating, thanking/commending, and indicting/blaming were realized with the deployment of pragmatic strategies such as assuring, commending, motivating, mobilizing for support, sensitizing, criticizing, encouraging and indicting. This study has revealed that all the practs in the speeches, although vary in their degrees of emphasis, are similar as they point to both economic and national rebirths for Nigeria. Drawing from this fact, we conclude that politicians use acceptance speeches as mobilization strategies in order to get the votes of the electorates in any election. At the same time, this study has revealed that politicians can use some unsavory remarks that are capable of undermining the persuasive goal of their speech in order to outsmart their rivals, as is the case with BAT. However, he employs some pragmatic strategies like eulogizing, apologizing, assuring and commending to tone down the biting effects of the remarks. For Atiku, his speech seems to be loaded with some linguistic deficits, making the speech less expressive and persuasive as others.

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