

A PRAGMATIC STUDY OF BOLA TINUBU'S POLICY STATEMENTS

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Abstract

Bola Ahmed Tinubu, a prominent figure in Nigerian politics and Nigeria's current President, has been renowned for his articulate speeches that address various socio-political issues. His communication style intertwines political rhetoric with pragmatic strategies to effectively convey his intended message. Despite extensive scholarly analysis of his speeches and texts from various perspectives, little attention has been paid to the pragmatic strategies employed in his policy statements. This study aims to fill this gap by studying ten selected policy statements issued by him within his first year in office. We aim to explicate the pragmatic strategies employed by Tinubu in communicating policies and political agendas through an analysis of the language used, with *Speech Act* theory as theoretical framework. In addition, we seek to explore the reception and interpretation of his policy statements among different stakeholders. The findings of this study underscore the importance of pragmatics in decoding the true meaning of political discourse. Tinubu's adept use of pragmatic strategies reflects his keen understanding of the communicative dynamics inherent in political speech.

Key words: policy statement, Speech Act, perspectives, socio-political, stakeholders

Introduction

Leadership and communication are deeply interconnected. Effective leadership relies heavily on the ability to communicate clearly

and consistently. Adequate communication between the leader and the led is essential for fostering trust, understanding, and collaboration (Walkup, 2023). When communication is unclear, misunderstanding arises and leads to communication breakdown. This breakdown can erode trust, thereby making the led feel disconnected and undervalued. Over time, this can result in a loss of loyalty and respect for the leader. This ultimately discredits and undermines his authority. It is, therefore, essential for leaders to prioritize regular communication of thoughts and ideology to maintain strong followership.

The focus of this study is on the rhetoric of Bola Ahmed Tinubu, a prominent political figure in Nigerian politics and Nigeria's current President. He is renowned for his articulate speeches that address various socio-political issues. His communication style intertwines political rhetoric with pragmatic strategies to effectively convey his intended message. Despite extensive scholarly analysis of his speeches and texts from various perspectives, little attention has been paid to the pragmatic strategies employed in his policy statements. This study aims to fill this gap by analysing his policy statements through the lens of *Speech Act Theory*, as propounded by Austin and expanded by Searle.

There are three (3) objectives behind this study. The first one is to identify the different types of illocutionary acts (such as assertives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declarations) utilized in Bola Tinubu's policy statements, so as to examine how these acts convey intentions, commitments, directives, *et cetera* to the public and political stakeholders. The second one is to investigate the specific illocutionary strategies employed by Tinubu and assess how these strategies have enhanced the effectiveness of his communication. The third (and the last) is to ascertain the intended perlocutionary effects of his policy statements on the various sections of the public by analysing their impacts on public opinion, political alignment, and social behaviour.

This study intends to provide a deeper understanding of leadership communicative techniques and their impacts within political discourse, with a focus on Bola Tinubu's policy statements in his first

three hundred and sixty days in office. The study of the illocutionary strategies used and the perlocutionary effects of Bola Tinubu's policy statements also insights into how political leaders use language to shape public perception, influence political behaviour, and achieve their policy objectives. Lastly, this study further enriches the fields of pragmatics and political communication by stating the role of speech acts in political contexts. It therefore provides a framework for analysing the rhetoric of other political figures.

The Concept of Speech Act

Austin (1962) introduced the concept of Speech Acts. He categorized speech acts into three types: Locutionary Acts - the acts of producing sounds and words that make up utterances; Illocutionary Acts, which goes beyond the mere act of speaking and pertain to the intended function of the utterance. For example, when one makes a promise, gives an order, or offers an apology, they are performing an illocutionary act; and then, Perlocutionary Acts, which relate to the effects that utterances have on listeners. For instance, convincing, persuading, scaring, or inspiring someone through speech are examples of perlocutionary acts. Austin further attempts to classify illocutionary acts as verdictives, exercitives, cohabitatives, and expositives.

Searle (1969) built upon Austin (1962). He asserts that speaking is a form of action, and not just merely uttering words, and introduces illocutionary force, which is the intended meaning or force behind any utterance. In furtherance of this, Searle (1976) gives five categories of speech acts as representatives (assertives), directives, commissives, expressives, and declaratives. Each of these is well-defined in the study, contrary to Austin's taxonomy of speech acts which lacks clear criteria for differentiating one kind of illocutionary force from another. Searle (1975) however, introduced the concept of indirect speech acts, where the literal meaning of an utterance differs from its intended meaning. For instance, the question "Can you pass the salt?" is typically understood as a request rather than an inquiry about one's ability to

pass the salt. This concept highlights the complexity and delicateness of everyday language use.

Levinson (1983) further explored how context influences the interpretation of speech acts. He emphasizes the importance of pragmatics—the study of how context and situational factors affect meaning. Levinson's work highlights how inferences and implicature play a crucial role in understanding language use. Thomas (1995), on her part, applied speech act theory to cross-cultural communication. She underscores the necessity of cultural sensitivity and awareness in interpreting speech acts, as different cultures may have varying norms and conventions regarding language use. Sbisa (2002), however, examined the relationship between speech acts and social institutions. She demonstrates how language use can both reinforce and challenge social structures and norms. Her research illustrates the powerful role that language plays in shaping and reflecting societal dynamics.

In summary, Speech Act Theory provides a framework for understanding how language functions not just as a medium of communication, but as a tool for performing a wide range of actions within various contexts. The contributions of Austin (1962), Searle (1969; 1975; 1976), Levinson (1983), Thomas (1995), and Sbisa (2002) have collectively enriched our comprehension of the intricate relationship between language, meaning, and social interaction.

Previous Studies on Bola Tinubu's Political Discourse

Since Bola Tinubu assumed office as the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, numerous studies have been conducted to analyse various aspects of his political discourse. These studies provide valuable insights into the rhetorical strategies he employs, as well as the underlying ideologies in his speeches.

To begin with, Ige (2023) examines Tinubu's expression of ideologies in his "Emi lokan, Yoruba lokan" political speech, which later became his campaign slogan. He used van Dijk's (2006) socio-cognitive model of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to explore how Tinubu's language reflects and reinforces particular ideological stances.

Next is Anyanwu (2023), which carries out a Speech Act analysis of Bola Tinubu's inaugural address. The study aims to uncover the communicative intentions and illocutionary force embedded in the text. She sheds light on how Tinubu uses language to perform various actions, such as promising, declaring, and appealing to the public.

In 2024, barely a year after his assumption of office, four more studies were done on his political rhetoric. Firstly, Alawe (2024) investigates the underlying linguistic intricacies, thematic emphasis, and rhetorical strategies employed by Tinubu in his inaugural address. This study highlights how Tinubu crafts his speech to convey specific messages, engage his audience, and emphasize key issues. Then, Owolabi and Kilani (2024) also focus on the same inaugural speech by conducting a critical discourse analysis to identify the underlying ideologies. Their work examines how Tinubu's language choices reveal his political beliefs and intentions, as well as how they resonate with his audience. In addition to these studies on Tinubu's inaugural speech, Amoudou, Alagbe, and Toboula (2024) perform a pragma-stylistic analysis of the same speech. They examine features such as Speech Acts, tenses, deictic expressions, and tropes, providing a comprehensive understanding of the stylistic and pragmatic aspects of the speech. Finally, Ijebuonwu and Ugoala (2024), however, shift their focus to Tinubu's acceptance speech made at INEC headquarters, Abuja while receiving his Certificate of Return as the elected President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. They stylistically analyse the rhetorical and linguistic strategies in the acceptance speech. The study explores how Tinubu's language functions to achieve specific effects and convey his messages effectively.

This study, however, focuses on his policy statements from a pragmatic perspective to further enrich the existing literature on Bola Tinubu's political discourse. It aims to ascertain the rhetorical strategies recurrently used by Tinubu to drive home his policies and their perlocutionary effects on the public. In other words, this research seeks to provide a deeper understanding of how Tinubu's language

pragmatically influences and persuades his listeners, as well as the wider implications of his rhetorical choices.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study is the *Speech Acts* theory. This theory is used to analyse how utterances convey information and also perform specific actions within various communicative contexts. This marks a significant departure from the traditional view that language primarily serves to describe states of affairs or represent facts.

According to the theory, every speech act consists of three interrelated components: locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts. The locutionary act refers to the actual utterance and its apparent meaning, which involves the articulation of sounds, the construction of sentences, and the assignment of meaning to words and phrases. The illocutionary act discusses the function performed by the act of speaking. This has to do with what the speaker intends to achieve through the utterance. It may be to make a statement, ask a question, issue a command, make a promise, or give an apology. In other words, the illocutionary force is the pragmatic function of the utterance. It emphasizes the speaker's intention and the conventional power that certain utterances have within specific contexts. Searle's taxonomy of the illocutionary acts will be applied in the analysis of the data for this study.

Finally, the perlocutionary act pertains to the effect the utterance has on the listener or the subsequent actions it provokes. This component focuses on the response elicited by the speech act, such as persuading, deterring, frightening, amusing, or inspiring the listener. Unlike the illocutionary act, which is concerned with the speaker's intention, the perlocutionary act is about the actual impact and outcomes of the utterance on the audience. In this study, emphasis is placed on both the illocutionary and perlocutionary acts.

Methodology

The data collected for the study were drawn from Bola Tinubu's official X (formerly Twitter) handle, @officialABAT. Ten policy statements were randomly selected from those he tweeted within his first year as President. The collected data are analysed to ascertain both the illocutionary and perlocutionary effects of his policy statements on his audience. By examining the illocutionary acts, the study seeks to identify the intended communicative purposes behind his statements - whether he intends to persuade, inform, command, or reassure his audience. The perlocutionary analysis focuses on the effects of the statements. The analysis explores how Tinubu's policy declarations influence the audience's attitudes, beliefs, and actions.

This methodology is used to provide an understanding of the communicative impact of Tinubu's policy statements through this dual analysis. The research is not only to reveal the intended messages behind the statements but also to assess their effects on the masses. This approach underscores the dynamic interplay between what is intentionally said and what is ultimately experienced by the audience. It thereby offers insights into the power and influence of political discourse. Each policy statement is analysed as a text.

Data Analysis and Discussion of Findings

The data are analysed and discussed as follows:

Figure 1

"...with this Act (Access to Higher Education Act, 2023), we shall ensure that every deserving student has access to affordable and quality education, irrespective of their financial background."

Source:@officialABAT (tweeted on June 12th, 2023)

The illocutionary act in this text is commissive. Tinubu demonstrates a firm promise to disburse study loans to all deserving students as mandated by the Act irrespective of their financial statuses. This commitment aims to ensure that every student has the opportunity to acquire quality tertiary education without any financial constraints.

The intended perlocutionary effect of Tinubu's statement is to reassure the public, particularly students and their families, about the government's dedication to educational support. This reassurance is aimed at alleviating concerns about access to education funding and fostering trust in Tinubu's leadership and policies. By making such a promise, Tinubu not only shows commitment but also builds confidence and gain the trust of the masses. In turn, students, their families and the public have responded positively by applauding Tinubu's administration for the unprecedented initiative upon hearing the news. Many students across the country have already been enrolled. This has boosted people's confidence in Tinubu's administration because many now believes that he cares much access to tertiary education. The public's response demonstrates that the intended perlocutionary effect of the statement has been achieved.

Figure 2

“My economic reforms are anchored on ease of business, collaboration, and constant performance assessment.”

Source:@officialABAT (tweeted on August 31st, 2023)

The illocutionary act in this statement is assertive. Bola Tinubu makes a definitive statement regarding the policy direction of his administration. This assertion is not just a simple statement of fact but a declaration meant to convey his administration's dedication to improving the economy of Nigeria.

One of the perlocutionary effects of this assertive act is to persuade various stakeholders in Nigeria's economy—including policy-makers, investors, and the general public—to agree with his perspective that his economic reforms are both viable and reliable. The intended perlocutionary effect of the policy statement is to build consensus and support from the various stakeholders in the economy for his economic policies through persuasion. Another one is to reassure the business community about the direction of his economic policy. This reassurance is crucial for fostering a stable and predictable business

environment, which is necessary for economic growth and development. Tinubu's message is designed to instil confidence among business leaders and investors and encourage them to increase their investments in the Nigerian economy. The stakeholders, in turn, are persuaded that his economic policy direction can surely contribute to the overall economic stability and progress of the country. This, therefore, shows that the intended perlocutionary effect has been achieved.

Figure 3

“Nigeria is ready to collaborate with India and the rest of the world for the enhancement of Global South”

Source: @officialABAT (tweeted on September 23rd, 2023)

The illocutionary act in this excerpt of Tinubu's statement at the G20 Summit encompasses both commissive and expressive elements. As a commissive act, it signifies Nigeria's commitment to collaborate with India and the wider international community. Tinubu is also committing Nigeria to future actions and agreements that will foster bilateral and multilateral relationships. This aspect of the statement demonstrates Nigeria's readiness to engage in cooperative ventures and fulfil its promises on the global stage.

The intended perlocutionary effect of this statement is to promote diplomatic and economic engagement between Nigeria and the rest of the world. The statement portrays Nigeria as a cooperative and reliable partner and is intended to attract the interest and willingness of other countries to do business with Nigeria. This, in turn (as a proof of the achievement of the intended perlocutionary effect), has yielded a positive result as more foreign investors have indicated interest to do business with Nigeria. This has bolstered Nigeria's global standing as a cooperative and reliable partner, thereby making Tinubu to achieve his objective of projecting Nigeria as a “fertile land” for investment, bilateral or multilateral deals.

Figure 4

“Under my watch, teachers will get their due rewards.”

Source:@officialABAT (tweeted on October 5th, 2024)

The illocutionary act in this policy statement is a commissive. Tinubu demonstrates a firm commitment to ensuring that teachers receive adequate rewards in terms of financial incentives, professional recognition, and other benefits. This commitment underscores his administration's recognition of the pivotal role of teachers in the educational system.

One of the intended perlocutionary effects of this policy is to garner widespread political support from teachers, parents, and other stakeholders within the education sector. He seeks to build a solid foundation of trust and goodwill, which is essential for the successful implementation of educational reforms. Another perlocutionary effect of the statement is to reassure teachers that their efforts and contributions are genuinely appreciated and valued by his government. This reassurance is meant to build a positive and motivated teaching workforce for the advancement of educational standards and the overall success of the education system. In turn, teachers, parents and other stakeholders within the education sector are happy about such commitment to their well-being. This development has made him win their loyalty, which is an indication of the achievement of the desired perlocutionary effect.

Figure 5

“To our cherished Nigerian youths showcasing their talents in communities across Nigeria, playing football in their local grounds, you too can be our heroes tomorrow. Do not relent. My administration is committed to making dreams come true.”

Source:@officialABAT (tweeted on February 12th, 2024)

The illocutionary act of the speech is to encourage and inspire Nigerian youths who are showcasing their talents in various

communities across the country. Tinubu aims to convey a message of support and appreciation from his administration.

The intended perlocutionary effect is to motivate and empower these young individuals to continue to pursue excellence in their various endeavours. Through this acknowledgment, Tinubu's administration seeks to instil confidence and belief in the youths. It is to make them aware that their hard work and dedication are both recognized and valued. This, in turn, is expected to inspire them to achieve even greater accomplishments with a sense of pride and determination. The youths, in-turn (as a proof of fulfilled perlocutionary effect), have yielded positively to this call by working harder in their various endeavours, as Tinubu's administration continues to roll out programmes that can help them achieve their dreams.

Figure 6

“We will support our farmers with schemes that will help them to cultivate more food for the nation.”

Source:@officialABAT (tweeted on February 15th, 2024)

The illocutionary act here is commissive. Bola Tinubu pledges to support farmers through various schemes designed to significantly increase food cultivation and production. This promise serves as an illocutionary act because it involves a performative utterance that commits him to specific future actions aimed at benefiting the agricultural sector.

The perlocutionary effect is persuasion. Tinubu aims to persuade a wide range of stakeholders—farmers, citizens, policymakers, and other relevant parties—to share his vision on food cultivation and production. He seeks to convince them that any support given to farmers through these proposed schemes will be beneficial not only to the agricultural sector but also to the nation as a whole.

In turn, the audience becomes persuaded to support Tinubu's initiatives, a signal indicating that the desired perlocutionary effect has

been achieved. Farmers are now more hopeful and assured (more than ever) about receiving the necessary assistance on food cultivation and production. The policy statement has boosted the citizens' confidence in his leadership and commitment to agricultural development. Policy-makers have also been swayed to allocate resources or enact policies that align with his vision.

Figure 7

“I have endorsed the training and equipping of forest rangers by sub-national governments to protect human and natural resources in our communities.”

Source: @officialABAT (tweeted on February 15th, 2024)

The illocutionary act of this statement is declarative. It signifies Bola Tinubu's approval and support for the initiative. He advocates for the training and equipping of forest rangers by sub-national governments. This emphasises the importance of strengthening local capacities to manage and protect our forests.

The intended perlocutionary effect of this statement is persuasion. It is meant to motivate others to also support the training and equipping of forest rangers initiated by sub-national governments. His statement is crafted to inspire action and ignite discourse that can eventually lead to concrete actions such as policy advocacy, increased funding, or community initiatives that align with this goal. The desired response from the audience include agreement with his point of view, engagement in further discussion, or proactive steps to advocate for and implement policies that promote the training and equipping of forest rangers by sub-national governments. He seeks a collective effort to enhance forest conservation and management, which will bring about sustainable environmental practices at the local level. In-turn, the relevant stakeholders, based on their reactions, support the initiative. This, thereby, makes him achieve his perlocutionary goal.

Figure 8

“I have approved the creation of a committee that includes state governors and federal government representatives to explore, among other things, the possibility of establishing state police.”

Source: @officialABAT (tweeted on February 15th, 2024)

The illocutionary act in this scenario is a declaration. Bola Tinubu approves the creation of a committee to explore the feasibility of establishing state police. This declaration serves as an official endorsement of the initiative.

One of the perlocutionary effects of this statement is to let the audience know that he has indeed approved the constitution of a committee dedicated to the creation of state police. This acknowledgment is crucial because it informs the public and relevant stakeholders about the steps being taken towards state policing. Another perlocutionary effect is that the declaration might spark a debate on the proposal of establishing state police. This debate could encompass a wide range of perspectives - support for enhanced local security, concerns about likely misuse of power, and discussions on the logistical and financial implications. In turn, the public have started reacting to the policy. It has sparked debates in many quarters, and many are now in support of it, State policing is now being considered for inclusion in any proposed amendment to Nigeria’s current constitution. This development has made him achieve his perlocutionary aim to secure the public’s endorsement to set-up state police,

Figure 9

“If we have assigned someone a task, we must allow him to perform it. If they fail, then we must quickly find a way to remove them from the system.”

Source: @officialABAT (tweeted on February 15th, 2024)

The illocutionary act here is a directive. Tinubu unequivocally states what actions will be taken against any public officer who fails to deliver on his or her responsibilities. It clearly communicates his expectations and the consequences of not meeting them. Having done that, he sets a standard for performance and accountability within the public service.

The intended perlocutionary effect is to instil a sense of diligence among public officers. In other words, it is to make them more conscientious and proactive in their roles since they are aware that they will be held accountable for their actions and any shortcomings. In turn, they are expected to be more studious and trustworthy. This, in turn, has made public servants proactive. This, thereby, paves way for him to achieve the aim of rolling out the policy – to put public servants in check.

Figure 10

“Ten years since Chibok – Nigeria will no longer pay the price.”

Source: @officialABAT (tweeted on April 15th, 2024)

The illocutionary act of this policy statement is commissive. The policy commits Tinubu’s administration to none payment of ransoms to free hostages. This reflects a definitive stance against the practice of paying ransoms.

The intended perlocutionary effect is to deter hostage-takers and their collaborators from engaging in further mass abductions since no more ransoms will be paid by his administration. The administration intends to reduce the occurrence of kidnappings by removing the financial incentive. The policy is also designed to reassure the general public (and probably the international community) about Tinubu administration’s firm stance on handling kidnapping cases. It communicates a commitment to a strong, no-concession policy, intended to project an image of resolute governance. It is also to restore public confidence in the government’s ability to manage and mitigate the kidnapping crisis effectively. In turn, cases of mass – abduction of

school children, like the Chibok's case, have relatively subsided as a result of the policy under his administration, which is the fulfilment of the intended perlocutionary effect.

Conclusion

We can deduce from the analysed data that Bola Tinubu commonly uses the assertive, commissive, and declarative illocutionary acts. These acts serve several purposes for him as follows:

1. Tinubu uses assertive acts to persuade the general public and stakeholders to support his policies and leadership. The acts enable him to present facts and opinions confidently. They make his statements more compelling and convincing.
2. He uses commissive acts to build a strong political image. The acts allow him to show commitment to promises, establish trust and reliability. These thereby enhance his long-lasting political credibility.
3. He uses declarative acts to ensure clear, impactful, and effective communication with the public. The acts make his messages well-understood and taken seriously.

Bola Ahmed Tinubu's skilful use of assertive, commissive, and declarative communicative strategies in the analysed data, and their perlocutionary effects plays a crucial role in shaping the public perception of his policies, building a robust political presence, and accomplishing his political objectives. These communicative strategies bolster Tinubu's leadership and ensure that his policy statements and political messages resonate effectively with the public and key stakeholders. This strategic communication approach allows him to navigate complex political landscapes, rally support, and ultimately achieve his political objectives with greater efficiency and impact.

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