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A Pragmatic Analysis of President Tinubu's Condolence Speech on President Buhari's Passing

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Abstract:

This study is a pragmatic analysis of President Tinubu's condolence speech on president Buhari's passing. With a focus on President Tinubu's speech, the study identifies, examines, and analyzes pragmatic features of condolence speech acts within political discourse. Using the Speech Act theory developed by J.L. Austin and further expounded by John Searle, the study analyzes how language is used not only to convey information but also to perform actions such as expressing sympathy, offering comfort, and unifying a nation in mourning on the death of an honorable person. The study adopts a qualitative approach, with the manuscript of the speech serving as the primary source of data. The analysis of the study identifies crucial condolence strategies employed by President Tinubu to sympathize with the family of the deceased and the nation in general, to give some specific directives on the account of the event, and solicit for national prayers on the well-being of the deceased in the after-life. Results from the research reveal that political condolence speeches play a crucial role in maintaining respect for the deceased. It promotes a sense of community resilience and continuity. The study contributes to a deeper understanding of the connection between language, politics, and social interaction within Nigerian political culture.

Keywords: pragmatic Analysis, condolence, speech Acts, Buhari's Passing, Discourse Analysis

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1. INTRODUCTION

Death is a natural phenomenon with many causes. Although death is obviously inevitable, the families and the loved ones to the deceased person feel and lament the pains and their grief about the death. They mostly find themselves in a sorrowful and confused situation, and so, other people need to condole and comfort them to calm and soothe their sorrow. Language is used for various functions among which condolence; extending sympathy and support to the relatives of the deceased during the time of the loss and mourning is included. Condolence messages are very key to comforting the deceased's family for Condolences have the phatic communication feature in the way they are used in our everyday (Mwihaki, 2004: 134), and it has the main aim of showing sympathy and offering support to someone who lost a loved one (Yahya, 2010; 620).

Buhari's death Sunday, July 13, 2025, at a clinic in the United Kingdom is such an event that stirred up Nigeria, and in particular the Federal Government and Buhari's family. The event was lamented by the citizens both in oral and written forms on media. This paper, however, explores condolence speech acts in political context with a focus on President Tinubu's speech on president Buhari's death. The paper identifies and analyses those linguistic elements employed by President Tinubu in his condolence speech to express his grief, condole the deceased's family and the nation in general. The papers examines his wordings on the deceased and actions taken in relation to the event, how he describes the deceased to the nation, and how the loss affects the country. The paper applies qualitative research approach to identify, examine, and analyse pragmatic elements that shape the condolence message uttered by President Tinubu. The significance of this

study lies in its contribution to the understanding of political discourse from a pragmatic perspective. It portrays how language is used strategically during the periods of national mourning by political leaders. It also guides other writers and political leaders on how to construct condolence speeches, and in understanding elements used in such a speech.

2. Literature Review

This section reviews literatures that are relevant to the study.

2.1 Conceptual Review

This section reviews relevant literature and element surrounding the topic of the research. This review provides a deeper understanding of the work by offering information about aspects that are encompassed in the topic of the research. This will help in providing a more nuanced understanding of the work's context.

Discourse Analysis

Discourse analysis has been widely defined as an investigation of language in use and which is fundamentally interested in the extra-sentential levels, is all in all regarded as a recent field of linguistics (Brown & Yule, 1983). More specifically, Van Dijk (2006) assumes that discourse analysis is best depicted in the so-called relationship between the text and context in which that text is introduced or generated. Elaborating on this point, he adds that the word “discourse” is understood as a text within context in which data are subjected to

empirical investigation. Besides, Fairclough (1989) defines the discourse as a term referring to the whole process of the social interaction of which a text is just part or segment affected by other super-linguistic components such as the speaker, audience, and occasion. Discourse, as such, is a broad term with many definitions.

Political Discourse

Politicians utilise language as the most vital instrument through which they communicate their ideologies to the people. So language has a crucial role to play in politics (Sarah & Oladayo, 2018). According to Fairclough (1989) the term refers to “the whole process of interaction of which a text is just a part” (Fairclough, 1989, p. 24). Beard (2000) observes that political discourse, language use in politics, helps to know how political office holders use language. Politicians, especially presidents and governors, use language skillfully in their speeches to persuade the people.

Political discourse therefore, can be seen as any talented or polished use of language by politicians in any political settings or discussions to present their intents or ideologies in an impressive manner to persuade people.

Condolence:

According to Bromberg, (2000:337) ‘Condolences are words that are used to express one's sympathy. They are formal professions of regret or sadness for persons who have lost a loved one.’ Searle and Vanderveken, (1985: 212) posit that ‘Condolence expressions convey sympathy for the listener's

distress'. Condolences are more than just words of compassion; they are active, purposeful gestures of support and encouragement in the face of misfortune. They alleviate the suffering of those affected. Condolences are "communicative" speech acts, as opposed to "conventional" speech acts (such as sentencing, and appointing), which are not essentially acts of communication and have the function of influencing institutional conditions of affairs rather than communication (Bach, 2012:27).

According to Elwood (2004:49-74), there are five kinds of strategies of condolence utterances: an Expression of Sympathy, an Acknowledgement of Death, an Offer of Assistance, a Future Oriented Remark, and an Expression of Concern

2.2 Empirical Review

This section analyses and evaluates the empirical evidence presented in some particular works of literature.

Eiloghosa's research titled, "Pragmatic Analysis of Peter Obi's Speech at Chatham House, London" provides analysis of Obi's political campaign speech. It highlights about ten pragmatic elements, examines and analyses some sentence structures that serve as persuasive, assertive, and directive tools which allow the speaker to connect closely to the audience. The study focuses heavily in analyzing words and sentences used by the speaker to convince, shape opinion, and probably control the audience. Al-Hussein and Al-Amedi's paper "A Pragmatic Analysis of Selected Condolence Messages by Obama" investigates the concept of condolences in certain messages given by the American president Barrack Obama. It reveals the most frequent syntactic

structure of expressive speech act used in the condolence messages, and identifies Elwood's strategies used by Obama the study identifies that declarative sentence is the most common and frequent syntactic structure of expressive speech act used in the condolences, and that the speaker uses Elwood's methods as the most common techniques to convey his messages. A paper titled: "A Pragmatic Analysis of Nigeria's President Muhammadu Buhari's Inaugural Speech" written by Ibrahim, conducts a pragmatic analysis and identifies various speech acts, with the performative act as the most common act Buhari relied on to address the nation. Through analyzing locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts, the speech identifies and reveals the intricate relationships that exist between language, power, and ideology. The analysis also presents the frequency of elements identified, along with their respective percentages within the speech.

The researches above analysed linguistic elements from different angles. Each comes out with a different analysis and different results. However, the research dwelled much on analyzing frequencies of elements and syntactic elements employed by the speakers. They were not able to detail the elements used by a speaker to sympathize, express his grief about a deceased person, support the bereaved, condole and comfort the family, how the speaker describes the deceased, what action was taken by the speaker, or how the speaker acknowledges the death. Furthermore, the papers did not also present politeness and face-work in their analyses. They also failed to discuss appeals to shared values and future-oriented remarks by the speaker. This paper, however, aims to fill these gaps.

3. Theoretical Framework

3.1 This study adopts Austin and Searle's Speech Act theory. The theory was originally developed by the Oxford philosopher J.L. Austin in the 1930s. He further expounded the theory in a series of lectures at Harvard in 1955, which were posthumously published in 1962 in the book "How to Do Things with Words." His seminal Oxford lectures on the subject were delivered from 1952 to 1954. Austin introduced the idea that utterances do more than just convey information; they perform actions, such as promising or apologizing, emphasizing that language is a form of action as well as communication. The theory proposes that language is not just used to convey information but to perform actions through speech. Austin identified three types of acts involved in communication: the locutionary act (the actual utterance and its meaning), the illocutionary act (the speaker's intention, such as requesting or commanding), and the perlocutionary act (the effect the utterance has on the listener, like persuading or scaring) John Searle expanded on Austin's theory by categorizing speech acts into five types: assertives (stating facts), directives (attempting to get the listener to do something), commissives (committing the speaker to future actions), expressives (expressing feelings), and declaratives (changing the status or reality by the utterance, e.g., pronouncing a couple married). He also developed rules, called felicity conditions that must be met for speech acts to be successful, such as sincerity and appropriateness of context.

3.2 Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative approach, which is a research method that uses descriptive data to gather information. To specifically employ descriptive analysis of President Tinubu's condolence speech, the speech was studied as the main source of data in the research where the researcher analysed the speech, identified pragmatic elements used for condolences in the speech.

Research Instruments

Since it is a qualitative research, the primary instrument is the researcher himself. In qualitative research, a researcher is a planner, data collector, analyst, data interpreter, and reporter of the research result. It can be inferred from the above statement that the researcher in qualitative research is the human instrument. Secondary instrument used in this study to help the researcher in collecting and analyzing data is the manuscript of President Tinubu's condolence speech.

Technique for Data Collection

The data for this study was collected from the internet after which the researcher did a close analysis of language as used in President Tinubu's condolence speech with focus on identifying pragmatic elements, and the context in which it was delivered.

Method of Data Analysis

The research is a textual analysis. This is because the study examined and analysed a text, which is President Tinubu's condolence speech. The researcher conducted a qualitative analysis to explore different

pragmatic elements and strategies employed by President Tinubu in his condolence speech on the occasion of President Buhari's passing.

Source of Data:

This study adopts a qualitative approach. The data for this study is specifically the structures which form the manuscript of President Tinubu's condolence speech. This manuscript was obtained from statehouse.gov.ng, published online (internet) July 13, 2025.

Table 1. Data Analysis and Presentation

President Tinubu condolence speech contains multiple effective terms for sympathy and elements that embody compassion, respect, and shared national grief. These elements work together to express sorrow, honour the deceased. They offer comfort to the bereaved, and unify the audience in mourning. Pragmatic elements identified and analysed by this study include the following:

1. Condolence and Sympathy

President Tinubu expresses his condolences and utters terminologies that convey his grief and sorrow to the family and the loved ones of the deceased, President Muhammadu Buhari. Tinubu uses words that evoke comfort, sympathy, and kindness in his speech. This can be seen below:

i President Tinubu began his speech with expressions that indicate how sorrowful he was about the death. He expresses his personal grief. He says: "It is with profound sorrow and a heavy heart that I received the



news of the passing of His Excellency, President Muhammadu Buhari...". This signals respect for the dead. It also explicitly mourns the dead of a prominent personality that has formal titles "His Excellency"

ii. President Tinubu recognizes the deceased's legacy and honours. He mentions Buhari's qualities such as patriotism, sacrifice, integrity, and dedication. This uplifts and praises the memory of Buhari and shows respect.

iii. President Tinubu addresses the key mourners directly "I extend my deepest condolences to his beloved wife, Aisha, with whom I have been in constant touch, his children", and Katsina State and Daura Emirate. This displays empathy and solidarity with those most deeply affected by the death. In addition to this, President Tinubu also emphasizes collective national mourning by directing all national flags to fly at half-staff for seven days, and dedicates Federal Executive Council session.

iv. President Tinubu also solicits for prayers and religious sympathy in his wordings such as "We pray for the peaceful repose of his soul" and "May Allah forgive his shortcomings and grant him Al-Jannah Firdaus," such statements serve to comfort the believers of the shared religion, and expresses cultural respect for Muslim funeral traditions.

2. Commemorative Acts

Commemorative acts are ceremonies, observances, or monuments intended to call to remembrance of a person, group, or event. They serve to sustain collective memory socially and publicly, often producing a

visible or symbolic reminder of the past. President Tinubu uses acts in his speech:

- i. One vivid commemorative acts in the speech is the directive for “all national flags to fly at half-staff across the country for seven days” This visual symbol indicates publicly mourning and respect for the deceased leader. The speech also presents a formal governmental commemoration when President Tinubu gives directives for emergency Federal Executive Council session dedicated to the deceased’s honour. This reflects how significant the mourning period is to the government.
- ii. President Tinubu also clearly promises ceremonial recognition that suits the decesses’s status and contributions to Nigeria. This shows the Federal Government commitment to accord Buhari with full state honour.
- iii. President Tinubu also uses verbal commemorative acts in his condolence speech statement such as “His legacy of service and sacrifice endures. He served Nigeria with unwavering dedication...” reflects publically on Buhari’s legacy and service are verbal commemorative act. Such a statement suggests preserving Buhari’s memory in the national consciousness. Additional to this is spiritual commemoration. President Tinubu’s expressions that solicit prayer for “the peaceful repose of Buhari’s soul and to ask for forgiveness and paradise” portray spiritual commemoration based on religious practice’

3. Declarative Acts

Declarative acts are a type of speech act where the utterance brings about a change in reality or the social world simply by being spoken. They have the power to alter the external situation or status. The speaker uses such acts in his speech as can be seen below:

- i. President Tinubu 's statement "I received the news of the passing of His Excellency, President Muhammadu Buhari," is a sentence that declares of Buhari's death. This statement is the official announcement of the event by the government, and it sets the context for the speech. Also, President Tinubu's order to "fly all national flags at half-staff for seven days..." is a formal government directive. It establishes official protocols for mourning.
- ii. The government's immediately response to the event shows its commitment dedicated to the dead President Tinubu says: "I have also summoned an emergency Federal Executive Council session on Tuesday, dedicated to his honour" and "Federal Government will accord full state honours". These are promises, declaration by the government.
- iii. President Tinubu 's solicitation of prayers for forgiveness and paradise for the decease, and words such as "May Allah forgive his shortcomings and grant him Al-Jannah Firdaus", are declarative acts. They function as sincere spiritual declaration of goodwill and hope for decease afterlife.

4. Acknowledgement of Death

This refers to announcing, recognizing, or accepting the fact that someone has died. The speech presents the speaker first acknowledging the death of his predecessor, President Buhari:

- i. President Tinubu's speech opens with a direct and formal acknowledgment of Buhari's death. He says: "It is with profound sorrow and a heavy heart that I received the news of the passing of His Excellency, President Muhammadu Buhari, GCFR, my predecessor." To add to this, he also utters a phrase as "departed this life" on Buhari, a euphemism to announce the death, and provides the nation with the actual and precise time and the location of the death in his condolence speech. This signifies his formal acknowledgement of the death.

5. Expressions of Sympathy and Concern

These are expressions, statements, or messages that used to show kindness, compassion, or care for someone in a pain, grief, or hardship. They are meant to communicate emotional support and understanding. President Tinubu uses much of these expressions in his speech:

- i. President Tinubu conveys his sympathy and concern, and that of the nation when he opens his condolence speech with the phrase "It is with profound sorrow and a heavy heart,". This expresses him being sympathetic to the death of Buhari. He also extends his sympathy not



only to the family of the decease when he says "I extend my deepest condolences to his beloved wife, Aisha... his children, the entire Buhari family," but also to the government and the people of Katsina state in general. This indicates President Tinubu's grief about the death, and positions him as being too much concerned on the sudden death of Buhari.

ii. Acknowledging the decease services to the nation, and his legacy "We honour his service. We reflect on his legacy" gives the audience a sense of spiritual concern from the speaker. So also, President Tinubu's invocation that solicits Allah's forgiveness on the decease, which is very significant especially in religious context, shows his sincere concern for Buhari's spiritual well-being

6. Appeals to Shared Values

An appeal to shared values is a rhetorical strategy that connects with an audience or listeners by referencing values or ideologies held in common by the speaker and the audience. such appeals are found in President Tinubu's condolence speech:

i. The speech presents the deceased, Buhari as "a patriot, a soldier, a statesman" who dedicated his life to the unity and progress of the nation.

ii. The speech also presents Buhari's values of "duty, honour, and commitment" these values are stressed in the speech as things that give definitions to what Buhari's life and leadership are. In addition, it praises Buhari's such as "profound integrity and discipline in public

service” this shows Buhari’s impact on the national development and his good leadership.

iii. Describing Buhari as A strong stance against “corruption”, and his prioritization of the nation over anything personal, reflects widely shared desires for ethical governance. In addition, President Tinubu’s directives for council session, national mourning and respect, appeal to a sense of community and national solidarity. Also, President Tinubu speaks to appeal to the long-term values of selfless public service of the deceased as a national figure when he says in the speech “May his life continue to inspire generations of Nigerians to serve with courage, conviction, and selflessness”. This appeal portrays Buhari as perfect role model and an epitome of progress.

7. Politeness and Face-Work

Politeness is the use of language to maintain social harmony and avoid offense, whereas, Face-work refers to how speakers manage their own and others' "face"; the positive social value or public self-image one claims in interaction. Politeness strategies serve to protect or enhance face, thereby facilitating cooperative and respectful social communication. Such linguistic use of politeness and Face-work are identified in the speech.

i. Although the formal, respectful tone President Tinubu opens his speech with indicates profound sorrow in one hand, it also maintains and portrays the decease’s dignity and decorum. The use of great titles such as “His Excellency, President Muhammadu Buhari, GCFR”



affirms Buhari's high status in the nation, and so, this shows positive face, that the deceased is no ordinary citizen but a respected personality with titles. Again, his words such as "I have been in constant touch," regarding support to Buhari's wife, shows concern for her positive face. Also the speech's description of Buhari's patriotism, integrity and legacy shows him as a personality that is worthy of respect and admiration. This is also a positive face work

ii. President Tinubu's use of respectful euphemism, "departed this life," softens the harsh reality of death. This serves as a politeness strategy to mitigate potential distress.

iii. The use of religious invocations in many places in the speech, and cultural and religious solicitation, lines up with community expectations. This promotes face-support.

iv. The speech also displays institutional face. This is seen in the government's immediate responses to the event such as formal announcement as (flag half-staff) and council session) etc.

8. Future-Oriented Remarks

These are statements that focus and pay attention to the future plans and decisions. They are used to motivate people on what to come. In his speech, President Tinubu uses such statements to offer hope for the deceased's family, and presents the government's positive thoughts and views about the deceased:

- i. President Tinubu's directives to fly national flags at half-staff for seven days indicates future-oriented remark. This is because such directive establishes a time-based context for the mourning, but it also implies that normalcy will return after the mourning period. In addition to this, his action of calling for an emergency federal executive council session points at government's immediate action, but yet there will be continuity of the governance afterward.
- ii. The speaker's promise, President Tinubu that Buhari, the deceased, will be accorded "full state honours" shows the government continuous official recognition and respect for the deceased. It also projects stability in national rituals. Also, President Tinubu closing his speech with a prayer that Buhari's life may continue "...to inspire generations of Nigerians to serve with courage, conviction, and selflessness," stresses on a progressive and "forward-looking legacy" that that inspires and encourages the future public services in the country.

4. CONCLUSION

This paper conducts a pragmatic analysis of President Tinubu's condolence speech on President Buhari's passing. The paper reveals the diversified roles language plays in political mourning rituals. Through employing various condolence strategies, the speech serves not only to honor the legacy of the deceased, late President Buhari but also to comfort the family and loved ones, and the nation in general. The use of Speech Act theory clarifies how these utterances function as performative acts that carry social and political weight beyond their literal meaning. The study describes political condolence speeches as



instrumental in maintaining institutional dignity, promoting shared cultural and religious values, and ensuring continuity in governance. Through careful choice of words and terms linguistically, the speech supports national resilience and collective identity at a time of grief. The study guides future researches to further on the findings of this study to study and compare condolence practices in different political cultures, and to investigate and analyse other speech act categories in political communication.

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