

Pragmatic Act Analysis of President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's Speech at the Windsor Castle State Banquet on March 18 2026

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ABSTRACT

This study is a pragmatic discourse analysis of speech of president bola ahmed tinubu at the windsor castle state banquet on march 18 2026 in his honour by his majesty king charles. Drawing on jacob mey's pragmatic acts theory (2001) as an established framework of political analysis, the study scrutinizes how illocutionary and perlocutionary forces are organised and situated within a given context to construct political commitment, regulate bilateral identity, project national pride and legitimize authority in a high-stake diplomatic setting. We employed statistical details for quantitative analysis. The practs used in the speech are itemized and grouped in the order of their frequency. The analysis reveals judicious deployment of practs such as ceremonial honour and gratitude 12.82%, historical affirmation 10.25%, commissive commitment 15.38%, legitimization and identity 7.69%, and bilateral and historical bonds 5.12 %. It is also observed that president bola ahmed tinubu's ideology is that of a person filled with so much love, appreciation, commitment and determination through collaborative efforts to provide a better life for nigerians home and abroad.

Keywords: Pragmatic Acts, Political Commitment, Political Discourse, Tinubu, Windsor Castle

INTRODUCTION

Political discourse in relation to language use is a fertile ground for linguistic inquiry by scholars in the field of linguistics. This is done with the view of making critical and deep insights into power dynamics, persuasion, and the construction of national identity. The major intention of this academic exercise is to attempt a pragmatic acts analysis of the speech of President Bola Ahmed Tinubu. It is important to state that in contemporary political landscapes, speeches of our political leaders are not ordinary utterances, such speeches carry a lot of situated messages. The utterances of political leaders are not merely informative but are performative acts designed to achieve specific social and political goals (Austin, 1962 and Searle, 1969). This highlights what speakers do with words in the course of speaking to their followers and listeners, whenever the opportunity presents itself.

On March 18, 2026, President Bola Ahmed Tinubu of the Federal Republic of Nigeria delivered a speech at the State Banquet held in his honour at Windsor Castle, United Kingdom, hosted by His Majesty King Charles III. This occasion was historically significant on multiple levels. It was the first time a Nigerian head of state addressed a State Banquet at Windsor Castle. The speech, therefore, offers a rich site for pragmatic analysis. Reasons for such political speech often include but not limited to persuasion, legitimation of power, ideological projection, assurance and projection of government policy.

Language and Politics

Language is a system for transmitting ideas, emotions and intentions through an agreed set of symbols, sounds and or gestures that share meanings (Abolarin-Egbebiola and Dada, 2025). Language is a distinctive human phenomenon in a speech community. Each society at large depends so much on language for its existence. This underscores the fact that the survival of an individual will be hindered without language.

Language is a powerful tool in the hands of political leaders. Ayeni (2025) noted that politicians use language to drive their messages home to the intended audience, making language use in politics an outright necessity. Likewise, Enemu (2025) postulated that language is an integral part of political discourse because language is the universal capacity of humans in all societies to communicate while politics is the art of governance. Abdulkadir (2023) captured the essence of language use in politics that language is the concretization of political actions. Political actors bring language to service in all they do. In essence, he opines that there would be no politics without language.

Statement of the problem

Despite the growing body of scholarship applying pragmatic theories to African political discourses, most existing studies on Nigerian presidential speeches have concentrated on domestic addresses with little attention to speeches delivered in diplomatic settings. This obviously create a gap in understanding how Nigerian political leaders deploy pragmatic acts when speaking to foreign audience. This study therefore seeks to fill this gap by undertaking a Pragmatic Acts analysis of President Tinubu's Windsor Castle State Banquet speech.

Objectives of the Study

This study identifies various pragmatic act features in the speech, analyses the pragmatic features as well as determines how the features project the messages in context in which the speech was delivered.

Research Questions

The research questions which are logically formulated based on the objectives guiding the study, these are; what are the pragmatic acts features in the speech of President Bola Ahmed Tinubu? How the pragmatic features in the speech be analysed? How pragmatic features project the message of the speech as situated within the context of its delivery?

Methodology

The data for this study were sourced from two Nigerian newspapers, Daily Post and Premium Times, which enjoy a relatively wide coverage in the country. The data were downloaded on 1ST May 2026. The data consist of speech of President Bola Ahmed Tinubu at the Windsor Castle State Banquet on March 18 2026. It is numbered U1 to U39. The speech is subjected to a pragmatic analysis, using aspects of Jacob Mey's Pragmatic Act Theory as a tool for descriptive analysis. We employed statistical details for quantitative analysis. Example; Tinubu's reference (REFR) to "In Nigeria, elements of these traditions continue to inform the institutional foundations of our own republic." implies (INFR) he would cherish the long existing relationship between the two countries. The practs used in the speech are itemised and grouped in the order of their frequency. In addition, the practs are grouped according to the goal they are used to achieve.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Researchers at different times have explored pragmatic, stylistic, socio-stylistic, pragma-stylistic and semantic aspects of political discourse. There are several scholarly works which employ the tools of pragmatics to analyse speeches of various personalities.

Acheoah et al (2024) investigated speech acts elements in Bola Tinubu's election victory speech, using the combined theoretical frameworks of Speech Act Theory and Stance and Engagement Theory. Their work concluded that language use goes beyond ordinary communication purpose, but includes systematic representation and perception in political discourses in Nigeria. Kayode-Iyasare and Ogidan (2023) investigated speech act features of the nomination acceptance speech of Asiwaju Bola Ahmed Tinubu, using the theoretical framework of Speech Act Theory. The work revealed that those identified speech acts foster political interest and show commitment to the affairs and welfares of Nigerians.

Ochulor and Onuoha (2025) also explored pragma-discourse features used in the manifesto of the APC candidates, focusing on sentence types, transitivity processes, cohesive relations and deixis. The work's findings revealed among others that the APC candidates used obvious and subtle means to showcase the shortcomings of his opponents in the contest. Their study is similar to this recent work on the strength of political discourse. However, while their study employed Speech Acts Theory for its analysis, this work uses Pragmatic Acts Theory as its linguistic model for the analysis.

Related to political analysis of speeches of President Bola Ahmed Tinubu is the work of Akinseye (2023). The work prodded persuasion and connection of words, discursive strategies in the inaugural speech of Mr. President, using the Systemic Functional Linguistics as a model for its analysis. The findings included but not limited to, demonstration of the strategic use of topicalization and actor description, highlighting important themes such as national unity, governance, security, economic development. He employed Systemic Functional Linguistic while we employ Pragmatic Acts Theory as our theoretical model.

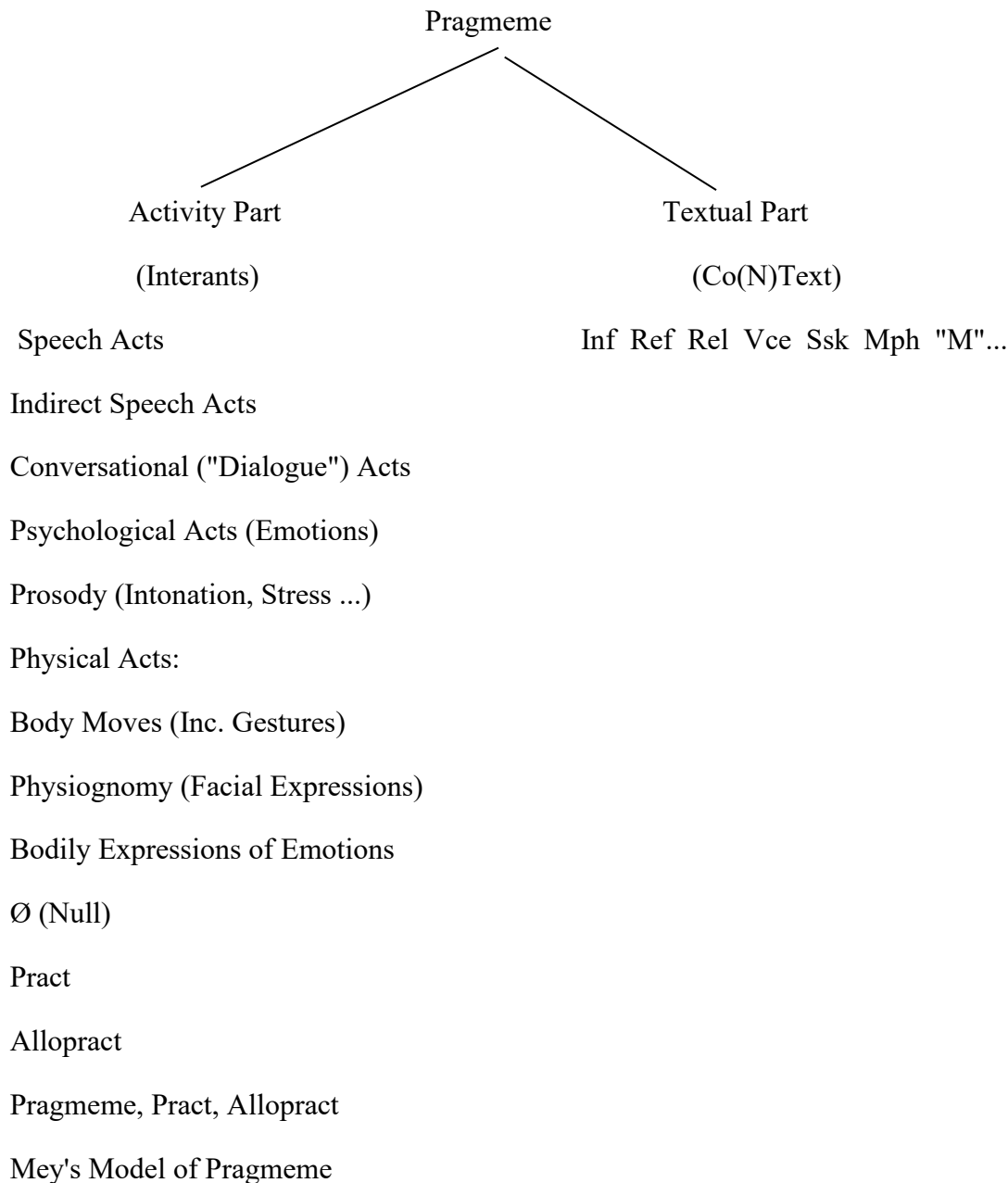
Also, Okunade et al (2025) did a syntactic analysis of President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's inaugural speech, using the theoretical framework of Halliday's Systemic functional grammar. Findings revealed the predominance of simple sentences for clarity and easy understanding, the use of ellipsis, appositions and substitutions. Their work is similar to this study with regards to political discourse of speeches of President Bola Ahmed Tinubu. They employed Systemic Functional Linguistic for their study while this work employs pragmatic Acts Theory.

Still on political discourse, Umeh (2023) carried out speech acts analysis of President Obasanjo endorsement letter of Mr. Peter Obi's presidential candidacy using the Speech Acts Theory by J.L. Austin (1962). The findings among others revealed that a preponderance of representatives that the speech act features in the letter showed that Peter Obi is committed to the future actions of working so hard to change the present leadership in Nigeria through directives. He concluded that through speech acts, it was proven Obasanjo used language as an elder to call on young people to rise to the occasion of changing the leadership of the nation.

Theoretical Framework

According to Adeoti (2023), Mey's (2001) Pragmatic Acts Theory is in an action theory that was necessitated by the puncture made in the Speech Acts Theory. One of the main criticisms according to Mey is that the Speech Acts Theory concentrates on "speech" to the exclusion of other phenomena such as writing. Oluseyi et al (2023) opine that in the opinion of Mey (2001), Austin's viewpoint in *How to do things with Words* focuses only on reference. The Speech Acts Theory was founded on the belief that we can explain our use of "words in action" by referring to individual speech acts with well-defined physical properties assigned in accordance with certain philosophical and linguistic criteria. Mey argues that while Austin's theory focuses on reference, context is more than just reference, as it determines what can and cannot be said. 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 analysed 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. In the pragmatic act theory, there are two components involved in the realization of a pragmeme: the textual part and the activity part.

Fafiyebi and Dada (2024) argued that the textual part is situated on the right hand side while the activity part is situated on the left hand side. Hence, a piece of discourse or a pragmeme is made up of activity, text and context. It is possible to have only one of these components and not the other(s). Again, the textual part includes, Inference (INF), Reference (REF), Relevance (REL), Voice (VCE), Shared Situation Knowledge (SSK), Metaphor (MPH) and Metapragmatics ('M'). While the activity part covers speech acts, indirect speech acts, conversational "dialogue" acts, psychological acts, prosodic acts, and physical acts. The textual part pertains to contextual factors (Osisanwo et al, 2024). In Pragmatic Acts Theory, a speaker may coopt others, set them up, influence them through conversations, and deny certain claims without betraying such acts through lexical choices (Adeoti, 2024). Mey's (2001) model of pragmatic acts is represented graphically and captured below.



DATA ANALYSIS

A. Practs Of Ceremonial Honour And Gratitude

To attain ceremonial honour, President Tinubu deploys the pragmatic tools of shared situational knowledge (SSK) and inference (INFR) to pract thanking and appreciation of his host with “It is a profound honour to stand before you today, representing the people of Nigeria”. One strategic way of showing gratitude is that Tinubu deploys the pragmatic tools of inference (INFR), shared situational knowledge (SSK), reference (REFR) and voice (VCE) to pract gratitude “Allow me first to express my sincere appreciation to Your Majesty and to Her Majesty.” With this remark, Tinubu appeals to the psyche of his audience to get them focused and look forward to better days. Emphasizing that “Despite these challenges, Nigeria approaches the future with hope and confidence. We are a nation of vibrant and hopeful people determined to realize their full potential”. With the utterance “As the first Nigerian leader to speak here at Windsor Castle, which has served the British Crown for nearly a millennium, is particularly historic”. Tinubu employed the pragmatic tool of (REFR) about the historic edifice. Similarly, he attempted to further persuade his audience using the pragmatic tool of voice (VCE). The expression “It is a profound honour to stand before you today” is imbued with an authoritative tone that is expected to boost the audience’s trust and conviction in the speaker.

B. Practs Of Historical Affirmation

A substantial portion of the speech is devoted to what we may call practs of historical affirmation utterances that invoke shared situational knowledge (SSK) or parallel histories to construct a sense of common identity and legitimize the bilateral relationship. Tinubu's reference (REFR) to "In Nigeria, elements of these traditions continue to inform the institutional foundations of our own republic." implies (INFR) he would cherish the long existing relationship between the two countries. The utterance "Nigeria and the United Kingdom have shared more than just history; our two nations share a vision of progress and resilience" is carefully managed through textual part of the pragmatic tool of voice (VCE). Tinubu's reference (REFR) to the Magna Carta of 1215 as "the early foundations for the rule of law and the development of parliamentary democracy" is a pract of affiliation. This appeal becomes relevant (REL) as a prestigious element of British history and incorporates it into a narrative of Nigerian institutional development. The reference (REFR) to British intellectual figures like Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, Edmund Burke, William Shakespeare, Charles Dickens functions as a pract of cultural recognition. Again, the acknowledgment of the Nigerian diaspora constitutes another significant cluster of pragmatic tool of direct reference (REFR) and specific naming of figures such as Maro Itoje, Bukayo Saka, Eberechi Eze, and Anthony Joshua performs several shared situational knowledge (SSK). It is an act of national pride, celebrating Nigerian achievement in the British context. Tinubu's persuasive goal is expressed with the pragmatic tools of shared situational knowledge (SSK) and inference (INFR) to pract historical affirmation. Given the multi ethnicity composition of Nigeria which is common knowledge to the audience (SSK). Tinubu projects himself to the audience as a detribalized and undiscriminating leader, who possesses the capacity to unite Africa. The emphasis on restoring unity "Nigeria carries an enormous responsibility to help safeguard regional stability." implies (INFR) the existence of division among different nations in the continent.

C. Practs of Commissive Commitment

Given the shared situational knowledge (SSK) of Nigerian recurrent socio-economic and political crises which are common knowledge to the audience, Tinubu practs committing himself as well as informing the audience. He uses direct reference (REFR) as identity marker in order to project a good public image of himself and Nigeria. President Tinubu's reference (REFR) to meeting "with Prime Minister Keir Starmer tomorrow" functions as a commissive action in a public declaration of intent that creates a form of accountability, using the pragmatic tools of (SSK), (REFR), (INFR) and (REL). Given the shared situational knowledge (SSK) of insecurity in West Africa which is common knowledge to the audience, he emphasizes on insecurity is a direct reference (REFR) to some socio-economic crises in Africa. It is relevant (REL) to draw an inference (INFR) here that insecurity has not allowed the West Africa region to see any sense in being patriotic. "Our West African region faces complex terrorism challenges with roots in the Sahel." Therefore, he uses the text to convince his audience of his ability of turning things around by providing good leadership. Again, the most personally and politically significant commissive pract is Tinubu's closing toast, "I invite you all to raise a glass with me: to the special bond between Nigeria and the United Kingdom, and to the bright future that we shall build together." The grammatical form "we shall build" is a first-person plural future tense with strong commissive force. The use of "shall" rather than "will" invokes a direct reference (REFR) more formal, solemn register of oaths, declarations, and binding commitments.

D. Practs of Legitimation and Identity

A significant and strategically important set of pragmatic acts in the speech concern the legitimation of Tinubu's own authority and political identity. This is achieved through what we may call autobiographical practs. These utterances draw on personal history to construct a trustworthy, democratically credible, and personally invested political self. Tinubu uses the pragmatic tools of (SSK), (REFR), (INFR) and (MET). The utterances "I wish to express Nigeria's deep gratitude to this great nation for the refuge and support it extended during the dark years of military dictatorship. Like many Nigerians involved in the pro-democracy struggle, I found safety here, and I recall that my residence was placed under Metropolitan Police surveillance for protection following threats from agents of the junta." This is a complex pragmatic act that operates on multiple levels. As an expressive, it is an act of gratitude, both personal and national. As an assertive, it is a first-person testimonial that grounds Tinubu's commitment to democracy in lived experience rather than mere political rhetoric. As a legitimation act, it constructs a political identity rooted in sacrifice and democratic struggle, positioning him as

a man who suffered for the values he now embodies in office. This show of gratitude is relevant (REL) as it foregrounds the vital roles being played by Britain. He explicitly refers (REFR) to the period as "dark years of military dictatorship" Darkness is used metaphorically to represent a period of oppression, danger, and moral bleakness, contrasting implicitly with the "light" of democracy. This figurative usage is a metaphor (MET) that strongly underscores the importance of democracy. The utterance "That solidarity remains etched in our collective memory" extends from personal to the national, folding individual biography into collective political legitimisation. By presenting himself as a democracy activist who once sheltered in Britain, President Tinubu implicitly deploys the pragmatic tools of reference (REFR), shared situational knowledge (SSK) and inference (INFR) to argue that Nigeria's current democracy is personal to him, not merely institutional.

E. Practs of Bilateral and Historical Bonds

Throughout the speech, President Tinubu deploys what we may term practs of confident assertion and declarative statements that project strength, optimism, and clear-sightedness about Nigeria's future. The figurative usage is a metaphor (MET) "bright future" is given the quality of light and luminosity to convey hope, promise, and optimism. This pract serves the dual purpose of reassuring British diplomatic partners about Nigeria's stability and trajectory, and projecting an image of confident leadership to domestic and international audiences. Tinubu deploys the pragmatic tools of inference (INFR), shared situational knowledge (SSK), reference (REFR) and voice (VCE) to pract historical bonds. President Tinubu's reference (REFR) to Nigeria as "a nation of diverse and vibrant people, of young people dreaming big, of entrepreneurs with a global outlook, and of a hopeful people determined to realise their full potential" This presents Nigeria not as a problem to be managed (as it is sometimes framed in Western discourse) but as a dynamic partner full of potential. To get his audience further persuaded, Tinubu deploys the pragmatic tools of reference (REFR), shared situational knowledge (SSK) and inference (INFR) to pract historical bonds. Also, President Tinubu's explicit use of Pragmatic tool of Metaphor, (M), such as "bonds of friendship" and "bridge between our two countries" further shows that the bond between Nigeria and the UK is rendered as physical chains or ties that bind the two nations together. The reference (REFR) to "several centuries" of shared bonds in the opening line sets a temporal frame that transcends individual governments or political moments. Tinubu uses the pragmatic tools of (SSK), (REFR) and (INFR) to refer to Britain's contribution to "modern democratic governance worldwide" while situating Nigeria within that tradition constructs a specific type of bilateral relationship. This narrative is politically useful for President Tinubu because it positions Nigeria as a success story of democratisation.

Table 1. Summary of the Pragmatic Acts and Goals

Pragmatic Goals	Utterances No	Frequency	Percentages
Practs of Ceremonial Honour and Gratitude	U1, U36, U37, U38, U39	05	12.82%
a. Praising			
b. Thanking	U3, U2, U31, U32, U34	05	12.82%
Practs of Historical Affirmation	U13, U14, U15, U16	04	10.25%
a. Reminiscing			
b. Asserting	U6, U7, U8, U9,	04	10.25%
Practs of Commissive Commitment	U28, U26, U27, U17, U18, U21	06	15:38%
a. Assuring			
b. Pledging Vowing	U20, U24	02	5.12%
Practs of Legitimization and Identity	U19, U22, U23	03	7.69%
a. Describing			
b. Stating	U4, U5, U10 U11, U29, U33	06	15-38

Practs of Bilateral and Historical Bonds		U12, U25	02	5.12%
a. Soliciting				
b. Calling for action		U30, U35	02	5.12%
Total	10	39	39	100 %

CONCLUSION

This analysis has demonstrated that President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's speech at the State Banquet, Windsor Castle, on March 18, 2026, is a rhetorically sophisticated and pragmatically rich diplomatic text. Drawing on Mey's Pragmatic Acts Theory, this study has identified and analysed multiple categories of pragmatic acts in the speech such as practs of honour and gratitude, historical affirmation, commissive commitment, legitimation, and bilateral bonds.

The diplomatic goal of the speech is to construct political commitment at multiple levels simultaneously, such as bilateral commitment to the Nigeria-UK relationship, multilateral commitment to the Commonwealth, regional commitment to African security. It is believed that future researches and Scholars might fruitfully compare this speech with others to identify common strategies and distinctive features in the field of pragmatics.

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