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“SUBSIDY IS GONE”: SPEECH ACTS AS POLICY INDICATORS IN PRESIDENT TINUBU'S EARLY PUBLIC SPEECHES

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ABSTRACT

Presidential speeches serve as strategic governance and policy communication instruments, shaping public perception and administrative priorities. This study investigates the speech acts in President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's (PBAT) early public speeches (May–October 2023), focusing on their performative functions and policy implications. Data were sourced from approximately 4,695 words in his inaugural, Democracy Day, and Independence Day speeches, obtained from reputable news platforms and supplemented with policy documents, press releases, and media reports. These were subjected to speech act analysis, within a qualitative research design. Five categories of speech acts were identified: declaratives, directives, commissives, expressives, and assertives. Declaratives and assertives enforced policy shifts and set policy agendas, while directives steered policy implementations. Commissives functioned as strategic commitments that outlined the administration's long-term vision and policy direction. Expressives sought to humanise the administration, showing empathy and fostering solidarity towards Nigerians amid economic hardships resulting from his administration's reforms. While PBAT's rhetoric projects a vision of economic revitalisation, security, and institutional reform, the effectiveness of these speech acts ultimately depends on their alignment with concrete policy actions and measurable outcomes. This study highlights the critical role of political discourse in shaping governance outcomes, emphasising that public trust and policy credibility are not sustained by rhetoric alone but by its alignment with tangible actions and measurable results.

Keywords: Speech acts, President Bola Ahmed Tinubu, Policy communication, Governance, Public speeches

INTRODUCTION

Leadership in Nigeria has consistently exhibited a persistent inability to deliver quality governance capable of addressing the nation's multifaceted crises. This failure is evidenced in widespread political instability, social unrest, and economic decline, compounded by ongoing ethnic, communal, and religious conflicts that have stifled socio-economic progress. The consequences of these deficiencies, worsened by widespread corruption and a lack of political will, resonate across all sectors, deeply affecting the lives of ordinary Nigerians and perpetuating a cycle of underdevelopment. A critical factor underpinning these challenges is the absence of robust political will, which has consistently hindered the implementation of sustainable reforms and the consolidation of democratic governance (Ugoani, 2017). Without a commitment to prioritise the common good over individual or sectional interests, governance continues to falter, leaving essential sectors such as education, healthcare, and infrastructure in states of neglect.

President Bola Ahmed Tinubu (henceforth, PBAT) is Nigeria's 5th president in the Fourth Republic, who assumed office on May 29, 2023. His administration emerged at a time when Nigeria grapples with a struggling economy, pervasive insecurity, and a profound lack of public trust in governmental institutions. He came into power on the Renewed Hope campaign, aiming to transform Nigeria's diverse sectors, promote sustainable development, and enhance the overall quality of life for its citizens. In alignment with this agenda, his early speeches outlined key economic reforms, including the removal of fuel subsidies and measures to stabilise the foreign exchange market, highlighting his policy direction.

In moments of leadership transition, presidential rhetoric becomes a powerful instrument for signaling policy direction and establishing the tone of governance. It offers insight into a leader's priorities and vision, providing the public and policymakers with a framework for understanding the administration's goals. Through speeches, public addresses, and other communicative acts, leaders convey their vision, reassure citizens, and outline strategies for addressing national concerns. Speech acts—utterances that perform actions and influence behaviour—are particularly significant in this context, as they serve as deliberate tools for shaping public perception and driving policy discourse. This study leverages speech act theory to analyse how

President Tinubu's early public speeches and rhetoric provide insight into his administration's policy trajectory, thus offering a nuanced understanding of his governance strategy.

Political Speeches as Communicative Acts in Governance

Political speeches serve as crucial communicative acts in governance, a vital medium through which leaders communicate their vision, mobilise support, and shape public perception. Far from being mere formalities, these speeches are carefully crafted, communicative acts designed to influence the audience's attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors. Effective political speeches resonate with the values and concerns of their audience, creating a sense of connection and trust between leaders and citizens. Beyond motivating action, political speeches serve as a platform for leaders to assert their authority and legitimacy, often presenting credible solutions to pressing issues to reinforce their positions (Mortensen et al., 2011).

The significance of speeches in politics has been extensively studied to reveal their multifaceted roles in influencing governance outcomes and public engagement. One of the primary functions of political speeches is to articulate the government's agenda and policy priorities. Research by Kennedy et al. highlights the importance of speeches in setting the legislative agenda, which suggests that the promises made in such speeches can significantly impact public expectations and perceptions of government efficacy (Kennedy et al., 2020). This aligns with the broader discourse on political efficacy, where citizens' trust in their government is closely tied to the government's responsiveness to their interests and the fulfilment of its promises.

Moreover, the agenda-setting role of political speeches is underscored by Green-Pedersen and Mortensen, who propose a model of issue competition and agenda-setting in parliamentary contexts. Their findings suggest that political speeches do more than simply mirror existing societal issues; they actively shape the political agenda by prioritising certain topics over others (Green-Pedersen & Mortensen, 2010). This prioritisation allows leaders to direct public attention and resources toward specific issues they deem critical, thereby framing the scope and focus of political and policy discussions. Political speeches often employ rhetorical strategies to highlight the urgency or importance of selected issues, encouraging stakeholders to align their efforts with the speaker's agenda.

Political speeches play a crucial role in shaping public opinion and influencing society. They are instrumental in fostering dialogue between leaders and citizens that impacts the sustainable development of states (Saidolimov & Ulugov, 2024). Political leaders employ various linguistic and pragmatic strategies to craft speeches that influence public perception, considering factors such as the political context, the occasion, and the speaker's personality (Medvid et al., 2022). These elements are strategically integrated to ensure the speech resonates with the audience, aligns with their expectations, and motivates desired actions. Additionally, the structural composition, communicative goals, and language design of political speeches are crucial to their effectiveness (Borsuk, 2020). The deliberate organisation of ideas and the use of persuasive language enable leaders to frame narratives, highlight key issues, and secure public support for their agendas.

In the context of governance, speeches serve as a crucial platform for leaders to convey their values and establish legitimacy. Beyond being vehicles for articulating policies or directives, they play a central role in shaping the political environment and influencing public perception. Through speeches, leaders communicate their visions, core values, and beliefs to their constituents, fostering a sense of connection, inspiration, and trust. Emotional appeal plays a significant role in this process, as research suggests that public perception of a leader's character and emotional connection often outweighs policy specifics in shaping voter attitudes (Westen, 2023). Moreover, speeches provide leaders with the opportunity to demonstrate their leadership capacity and commitment to the nation's well-being. In times of political polarization or public skepticism, effective speeches can help bridge divides and restore faith in government. Transparency and accountability in speech content reassure citizens of their leaders' intentions, fostering trust and reducing political cynicism (Pew Research Center, 2023).

Language, Performativity and Political Will

Language is a crucial instrument in the construction and dissemination of political ideas. In politics, it is not merely descriptive; it is performative – it has the power to enact change, mobilise communities, and legitimise authority. Since political action is largely verbal, language serves as a fundamental instrument for expressing political will and influencing public discourse (Girnth, 2002; Girnth, 2015). Political will, often understood as the determination of leaders or institutions to pursue specific goals, is closely tied to the language used to articulate and justify these objectives. It involves intent and drive. Political will is ultimately manifested through action. Essentially, it reflects the commitment of leaders to take concrete steps toward achieving specific objectives. Meanwhile, the identification of political will often begins with analysing speeches and public statements by key figures, the passage of national legislation, and the ratification of international agreements or treaties (CHR Michelsen Institute, 2010).

Performativity in political communication revolves around the concept that language and actions within political speeches are not just passive descriptions of reality but active forces that shape and construct it. Drawing from J.L. Austin's speech act theory, performativity highlights how spoken words can function as actions, generating consequences that extend beyond their literal meaning (Austin, 1962). Performative utterances do more than describe a reality – they transform it. Austin distinguishes between "constative" utterances, which describe facts and can be judged as true or false, and "performative" utterances, which accomplish an action merely through their articulation (Austin, 1962). He further explains that performative utterances are not subject to truth evaluations; their significance lies in the act of speaking itself, which constitutes the performance of an action. Searle expanded on this by viewing performatives as declarations, suggesting that language originates from the mind's intrinsic intentionality (Searle, 1983).

Judith Butler expands on the concept of performativity by emphasising that it extends beyond language to include repeated actions and behaviours that shape identity and social reality. Butler stresses that performative utterances are deeply connected to power structures, as they have the capacity to either uphold or disrupt prevailing social norms (Butler, 1997). Performativity, in Butler's view, is the repetitive force of discourse in creating and regulating the very realities it seeks to define (Butler, 1993). This perspective highlights how identity is continuously constructed and reinforced through discourse. Performative acts function as authoritative speech, gaining legitimacy through societal norms and legal frameworks.

Political discourse relies heavily on performative language to construct narratives, shape public perception, and mobilise political will. For instance, Edelman (1988) in *Constructing the Political Spectacle* highlights how politicians use performative language to create narratives that shape public perception and political will. Edelman (1988) argues that political language is inherently performative, as it constructs realities rather than merely reflecting them. Similarly, Charteris-Black (2014) examines how metaphors and rhetorical strategies in political speeches performatively influence public sentiment and policy outcomes. For example, the use of war metaphors in political discourse can frame issues in ways that justify specific policy actions (Charteris-Black, 2014).

Furthermore, Maarten Hajer, in *The Politics of Environmental Discourse* (1995), demonstrates how the framing of climate change as an "urgent crisis" performatively generates political will for environmental policies. Hajer's work highlights the role of discourse in shaping policy agendas and mobilising action (Hajer, 1995). In a similar vein, Schmidt (2008) emphasises the role of ideas and discourse in shaping political will. Schmidt argues that political actors use performative language to construct shared understandings and mobilise support for policy initiatives (Schmidt, 2008). Recent studies have further explored the intersection of performative language and political will. Suren Zolyan (2024) discusses how performatives in political practices and discourses can transform the theory of performatives into a theory of social action. This approach emphasises the importance of considering extralinguistic factors in communicative behaviour (Zolyan, 2024). Millward (2005) examines how performative language shapes policy implementation, particularly in housing policies. The study reveals that government policymakers

and local housing authorities use performative language to refine new policy ideas as they are being implemented.

Despite the analytical value of performative language, some scholars critique the overemphasis on discourse at the expense of material conditions. Sjöblom (2024) warns that the pursuit of a "pure" performative risks detaching language from meaningful political contestation in an era where empty rhetorical gestures are prevalent. Bourdieu (1991) argues that performative language derives its efficacy from social and institutional contexts, cautioning that without these considerations, analyses risk becoming overly abstract. Wodak (2009) similarly underscores the need to integrate performative language analysis with institutional and economic factors. She argues that political will emerges from a complex interplay of discursive and non-discursive forces.

President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's Administration and Reforms

The presidential campaign of Bola Ahmed Tinubu in the 2023 election was based on his "Renewed Hope Agenda," which promises to boost national cohesion, strengthen security, and revive the economy. He promised to orchestrate economic growth through job creation, support for small and medium-scale enterprises (SMEs), delivering comprehensive tax reforms and attracting foreign investment Okwelum (2023). He promised to diversify the economy beyond oil, into agriculture, technology, and manufacturing. PBAT also promised to review fuel subsidy, which he claimed could not be sustained. He states his commitment to tackling the root-causes of insecurity, such as poverty and unemployment improve healthcare, education, and infrastructural development.

One of the major reforms undertaken by the administration was the termination of Nigeria's fuel subsidy scheme to free up funding for vital sectors. While this move aimed to stabilize government finances and attract foreign investment, it led to economic hardship for many Nigerians due to rising fuel prices, inflation, and transportation costs (Evans et al, 2023). Palliative measures, including cash transfers, were introduced to cushion the effects, although many Nigerians reported inadequate coverage and low transparency in the distribution process, intensifying public discontent (Ajibola, 2024).

Beyond subsidy removal, the administration has implemented a unified and flexible exchange rate policy and pursued local government autonomy to strengthen governance and service delivery. Tax reforms were also introduced to simplify the tax system and expand the tax net to include the informal sector. In infrastructure, Tinubu's plans focus on modernising road networks, railways, and ports, alongside investments in renewable energy and improving the national grid. Projects like the Lagos-Calabar Coastal Highway and the revitalization of refineries and railways have seen progress, with the 2025 budget allocating significant funds to energy, transport, and public works (BBC, 2025; Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre, 2024). In education, the Nigerian Education Loan Fund (NELFUND) was launched in 2023 and has been reported to have supported 330,000 students in tuition support (Punch, 2024).

The public's opinion on PBAT's policies is mixed, expressing both optimism and disapproval. Some Nigerians view his policies, such as fuel subsidy removal and exchange rate unification, as essential to long-term economic growth and stability (Nairametrics, 2023). The World Bank Group (2024) opines that Nigeria's fiscal reforms will free up resources that can be invested in critical sectors which will improve the lives of the citizens. However, the immediate socio-economic impact, including rising inflation, high cost of transportation and increased fuel prices, has drawn significant criticism, especially from low-income households who are affected most by these changes and make up the majority of the population (Evans et al., 2023; Ewang, 2024).

Recent linguistic studies have explored PBAT's political discourse, with a particular focus on his inaugural speech and campaign rhetoric. For instance, analyses of lexical collocations in Tinubu's inaugural address have identified eight rhetorical functions, including appeals to religiosity, national pride, and unity (Olawe, 2024; Atras Journal, 2024). Similarly, a pragma-stylistic approach has been employed to examine the speech acts, tenses, and tropes in his rhetoric, revealing strategies aimed at restoring trust, persuading audiences, and facilitating effective

communication (Amoussou et al., 2024). Additionally, PBAT's campaign slogan, "Emi lokan, Yoruba lokan," has been analyzed to uncover its expression of supremacist, collectivist, welfarist, and ethnocentric ideologies through specific discursive moves (Ige, 2023). These studies provide valuable insights into PBAT's linguistic strategies, communication style, and ideological positioning. The closest study to this work is Amoussou et al. (2024), which employs a pragma-stylistic approach to analyse Tinubu's inaugural speech. However, its scope is limited to that single speech. The current study expands the analysis to include his other early public speeches, such as his Democracy Day and Independence Day addresses, to investigate how his speech acts signal policy direction and shape governance strategies.

Speech Acts Theory

Speech Act Theory, developed by J.L. Austin and expanded by John Searle, revolutionized the understanding of language by asserting that utterances are actions that shape reality rather than merely describing it. This framework has become foundational in linguistics, philosophy, and communication studies, while also facing critiques about its contextual limitations and evolving through interdisciplinary applications.

Austin (1962) challenged the traditional view of language as purely descriptive by introducing performative utterances—phrases like “I pronounce you married” or “I apologize” that enact the action they describe. He distinguished between the literal meaning of words, the speaker's intent, and the effect on the listener. For instance, saying “It's cold here” can be a literal statement (locutionary act), a request to close a window (illocutionary act), and result in the listener closing the window (perlocutionary act). Kent Bach (1982) opines that nearly every speech act involves performing multiple actions simultaneously, shaped by various dimensions of the speaker's intention: the act of making a statement, the purpose behind the statement (like making a request or a promise), and the effort to influence or impact the audience. This tripartite model emphasized that communication inherently involves doing something with words, not just conveying information.

Speech acts can be analysed on multiple levels. A locutionary act refers to the mere performance of an utterance, encompassing its verbal, syntactic, and semantic aspects, along with its social and rhetorical meanings. A illocutionary act extends beyond the literal meaning of the locutionary act, representing the implied intent or request behind an utterance. For instance, if someone asks, “Is there any salt?”, the illocutionary force might be a polite request to pass the salt or an indication of their desire to add salt to their meal. Under certain conditions, a perlocutionary act emerges, referring to the actual effect of the utterance on the listener, such as persuading, convincing, scaring, or inspiring—whether the speaker intended it or not.

Searle (1983; 2002) further refined Austin's ideas by categorising speech acts into several types, including assertives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declarations. Assertives commit the speaker to the truth of a proposition, and affirm facts or commitments. Directives, on the other hand, attempt to get the hearer to act. Commissives involve promises, vows and commitments that bind the speaker to a future action. Expressives convey psychological states (e.g., gratitude, regret) and presuppose a shared reality, which express emotions without altering facts. Lastly, Declaratives uniquely create new social realities through institutional authority. These acts depend on constitutive rules – social agreements granting authority to enact changes – and uniquely require extra-linguistic institutions to validate their efficacy,

The theory has been applied across various fields, including linguistics, law, and artificial intelligence (Zou & Wu, 2023); however, despite its insights, Speech Act Theory faces criticism for underestimating contextual complexity. Critics argue that while the theory highlights the performative nature of language, it does not fully account for the nuances of context and interpretation. For instance, it often overlooks the impact of non-verbal elements and broader sociocultural factors, which significantly influence how speech acts are understood and responded to (Visser, 2016). There have been calls for a more comprehensive approach that

integrates insights from pragmatics and cognitive science to better understand the dynamics of how meaning is negotiated in dialogue (Ferreira, 2023; Suardi, 2020).

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a qualitative research design, utilising speech act theory (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969) to analyse PBAT's early public speeches (May–October 2023). The dataset consisted of approximately 4,695 words from his inaugural, Democracy Day, and Independence Day speeches, sourced from reputable online newspapers such as *Punch* and *Vanguard*. This was complemented by supplementary contextual data from official policy documents, press releases, and media reports to ensure a comprehensive analysis. The analysis categorised speech acts into declaratives, directives, commissives, expressives, and assertives, examining their performative functions and strategic use within Nigeria's socio-political context. This approach allowed for a nuanced understanding of how PBAT's speech acts reflect his policy priorities and governance strategies.

DATA ANALYSIS

Speech Acts	Functions	Policy Direction	Example Quotes
Declaratives	Making policy pronouncements, changing status quo	Economic reform, fiscal discipline, governance restructuring, economic relief	<p>"Subsidy is gone." (Inaugural Speech)</p> <p>"A new era of governance begins today." (Inaugural Speech)</p> <p>"We are introducing a provisional wage increment to enhance the Federal Government minimum wage." (Independence Day Speech)</p>
Assertives	Stating facts, affirming commitments, making claims	Security, Economic reform, governance priorities	<p>"Subsidy can no longer justify its ever-increasing costs in the wake of drying resources." (Inaugural Speech)</p> <p>We shall defend the nation from terror and all forms of criminality that threaten our peace and stability." (Inaugural Speech)</p> <p>"Electricity will become more accessible and affordable to businesses and homes." (Inaugural Speech)</p>
Directives	Issuing instructions, encouraging action, making requests	Call for unity, economic discipline, tax reform, citizen cooperation	<p>"Let us work together to build a Nigeria that is secure, prosperous, and just." (Inaugural Speech)</p> <p>"I have directed the immediate implementation of measures to stabilize the economy." (Inaugural Speech)</p> <p>"I have inaugurated a committee on tax reforms to improve the efficiency of tax administration." (Independence Day Speech)</p>

Commissives	Promising future actions, making commitments	Security, economic revival, infrastructural development	<p>"Electricity will become more accessible and affordable to businesses and homes." (Inaugural Speech)</p> <p>"We shall defend the nation from terror and all forms of criminality that threaten our peace and stability." (Inaugural Speech)</p> <p>"We shall work tirelessly to ensure food security and economic stability." (Independence Day Speech)</p>
Expressives	Showing appreciation, empathy, solidarity	National unity, recognition of national struggles, acknowledgment of public hardship	<p>"I stand humbled and honored to serve this great nation." (Inaugural Speech)</p> <p>"We recognize the sacrifices of our heroes past." (Democracy Day Speech)</p> <p>"I admit that the decision [to remove fuel subsidies] will impose extra burden on the masses of our people. I feel your pain." (Independence Day Speech)</p>

Declaratives: Enforcing Policy Shifts and Setting Governance Priorities

Declarative speech acts in PBAT's speeches serve as powerful tools to enforce policy shifts, announce new initiatives, and set the tone for governance. Through these declaratives, Tinubu communicates decisive actions, signaling a strong commitment to tackling Nigeria's most pressing issues while laying the groundwork for his administration's long-term priorities. These statements not only reflect policy decisions but also set the framework for the direction of the government, highlighting key areas such as economic reform, infrastructure development, and social welfare.

The declaration "Subsidy is gone" (Inaugural Speech) is perhaps the most striking example of a declarative speech act in PBAT's rhetoric. This bold statement signals a decisive policy shift, marking the end of Nigeria's long-standing fuel subsidy regime. Fuel subsidies have been a contentious issue in Nigeria for decades, with successive governments struggling to balance the economic costs of subsidies with public expectations for affordable fuel. Tinubu's declaration represents a clear break from past policies, emphasizing fiscal discipline and economic reform.

Assertives: Setting Policy Agenda

Assertive speech acts in PBAT's speeches play a significant role in establishing the policy agenda, setting governance priorities, and reflecting the strategic direction of his administration. These statements often serve as declarations of intent, asserting the administration's stance on key issues and providing a clear indication of the steps the government plans to take in addressing national concerns. Tinubu's early speeches asserted his commitment to economic reform, with a clear emphasis on fiscal discipline. In his inaugural address, he asserted, "Subsidy can no longer justify its ever-increasing costs in the wake of drying resources." This statement signals a decisive shift in policy, particularly regarding the controversial issue of fuel subsidies. The removal of subsidies, framed as a necessary step due to diminishing resources, is positioned as part of a broader strategy to stabilize the economy and direct funds to vital sectors such as infrastructure,

healthcare, and education. By making this assertion, Tinubu sets the tone for his administration's economic agenda, emphasizing the need for difficult but essential fiscal measures.

Infrastructure development is another area where assertive speech acts shape the policy narrative. Tinubu's early speeches include strong assertions regarding the need to improve the nation's infrastructure to drive economic growth. He declared, "Electricity will become more accessible and affordable to businesses and homes," signaling a commitment to addressing Nigeria's chronic energy crisis. This assertion ties infrastructure improvements directly to economic growth, highlighting the importance of reliable energy sources for businesses and households alike. In the realm of security, assertive speech acts in Tinubu's rhetoric are employed to communicate a firm stance against insecurity. In his inaugural address, he made a bold assertion: "We shall defend the nation from terror and all forms of criminality that threaten our peace and stability." This statement reaffirms the administration's unwavering commitment to combating terrorism and criminality, serving as a clear policy indicator for national defense, counter-terrorism efforts, and public safety.

Directives: Steering Policy Implementation

Directive speech acts in PBAT's speeches serve as important tools to issue instructions, encourage action, and mobilise citizen cooperation. These directives reflect his administration's focus on national unity, economic discipline, tax reform, and citizen engagement, providing a clear roadmap for governance and policy implementation. One of the most prominent directives is the call for national unity: "Let us work together to build a Nigeria that is secure, prosperous, and just" (Inaugural Speech). Nigeria, having faced significant ethnic, religious, and regional divisions, especially during the last presidential election, requires deliberate efforts to foster unity. This directive directly addresses these divisions by emphasizing the necessity of collective effort to achieve national development. By urging Nigerians to unite, Tinubu highlights the importance of solidarity in confronting the country's most pressing issue.

Another key directive is the announcement of immediate economic stabilisation measures: "I have directed the immediate implementation of measures to stabilise the economy." (Inaugural Speech). Nigeria faces significant economic challenges, including inflation, unemployment, and fiscal deficits, and the removal of fuel subsidies adds urgency to the need for stabilization. This directive underscores the administration's recognition of the pressing economic realities and the necessity for swift intervention. However, the delayed rollout of palliative measures exacerbated hardships for many Nigerians. Following the removal of fuel subsidies, petrol prices surged from approximately N198 to over N500 per liter, leading to widespread increases in the cost of goods and services, including transportation (Punch, 2023).

PBAT's administration's policy thrust also centers on tax reform and administrative efficiency, as evident in the directive: "I have inaugurated a committee on tax reforms to improve the efficiency of tax administration." (Independence Day Speech). Nigeria's tax system has long been criticized for inefficiency, low compliance, and inequity, and this directive signals a commitment to addressing these structural weaknesses. Therefore, the current administration aims to streamline tax collection, widen the tax base, and enhance transparency to boost government revenue and reduce reliance on external borrowing. However, the proposed reforms have faced opposition from various stakeholders, including state governments and business owners, who argue that increased taxation could further strain an already burdened populace and slow economic growth (Vanguard, 2024). Despite the contrary views, the administration sticks with its directive speech act, matched with the political will to implement these reforms and achieve its objectives.

Commissives: Making Policy Commitments

Commissive speech acts in PBAT's rhetoric serve as strategic commitments that outline his administration's long-term vision and policy direction. They reflect his administration's policy focus, and set expectations for governance while also inspiring confidence in the administration's ability to deliver on its promises. The commissive that "Electricity will become more accessible

and affordable to businesses and homes" (Inaugural Speech) highlights the administration's commitment to resolving Nigeria's persistent energy crisis, which has long hindered industrial growth and economic productivity. It also sets the stage for transformative reforms in the energy sector, with the potential to significantly improve the quality of life for Nigerians.

Similarly, the assertion that "We shall defend the nation from terror and all forms of criminality that threaten our peace and stability" (Inaugural Speech) reaffirms national security as a top priority of the administration. Nigeria faces significant security challenges, including terrorism in the northeast, banditry in the northwest, and separatist agitations in the southeast. These issues have undermined national stability and economic growth. Tinubu's promise to defend the nation addresses these challenges directly, signaling a commitment to restoring peace and security.

Furthermore, the commissive "We shall work tirelessly to ensure food security and economic stability." (Independence Day Speech) highlights Tinubu's commitment to economic revival and food security. With Nigeria's economy strained by global economic shocks, inflationary pressures, and the impact of subsidy removal, food insecurity has become an urgent issue, leaving millions of Nigerians struggling with hunger. This commissive responds to the public's growing discontent amid ongoing economic reforms, such as the removal of fuel subsidies and the unification of exchange rate windows. While it aligns with the broader goal of economic recovery, its effectiveness hinges on the implementation of well-structured policies that tackle supply chain disruptions, promote mechanized farming, and improve access to financial resources for local producers.

Expressives: Humanising the Administration

In Tinubu's rhetoric, expressives serve as an essential tool for fostering emotional connections with the public, showing empathy, and fostering solidarity. The speech acts reflect his administration's focus on national unity, recognition of national struggles, and acknowledgment of public hardship, reinforcing trust and shared purpose. For instance, the statement "I stand humbled and honored to serve this great nation" from his Inaugural Speech expresses both humility and recognition of the responsibility that comes with leadership. This speech act positions Tinubu as a leader who is acutely aware of the weight of his office and deeply committed to serving the nation.

Similarly, the expressive "We recognize the sacrifices of our heroes past." (Democracy Day Speech) highlights Tinubu's acknowledgment of Nigeria's historical struggles and the contributions of those who fought for democracy and national unity. This statement serves as a reminder of the nation's resilience and the collective effort needed to overcome challenges. Invoking the memory of past heroes, Tinubu seeks to inspire national pride and foster a collective sense of purpose, framing the struggles of the past as a foundation for addressing present and future challenges.

Perhaps the most poignant expressive is the statement "I admit that the decision [to remove fuel subsidies] will impose extra burden on the masses of our people. I feel your pain." (Independence Day Speech). This locution directly addresses the economic hardships faced by Nigerians due to the administration's bold reforms, such as the removal of fuel subsidies and the unification of exchange rate windows. This candid admission of the public's suffering in response to the removal of fuel subsidies is a powerful example of empathy. The language of shared pain helps to humanise the leader and convey that his actions, while difficult, are made with full awareness of their impact on everyday Nigerians. This expressiveness is crucial for maintaining public trust and diffusing tensions that might arise from the challenging nature of his reforms. These expressive speech acts collectively serve to humanise the administration, build emotional connections with the public, and reinforce a sense of shared purpose.

Implications of Findings for Governance and Policy Communication

The analysis of speech acts in PBAT's speeches reveals important insights into his administration's policy direction and governance strategy. It highlights his strategic use of speech

acts to communicate policy priorities, mobilise action, build public trust, and humanise his administration. Each speech act serves a specific function, contributing to the administration's overall governance strategy.

The declaratives enforced bold policy shifts and set the tone for governance. These speech acts provided clear policy directions, signaling decisive leadership and orienting public expectations with the administration's goals. Similarly, assertive speech acts were abundantly employed to set the administration's policy agenda, leveraging the performative power of political language to shape public perception and mobilise political will (Edelman, 1988). This aligns with leadership theories that advocate for decisiveness as a hallmark of effective governance. Leaders who communicate confidently through assertive language tend to be perceived as more competent, fostering trust and support among constituents (Amoussou et al., 2024). However, the effectiveness of these assertive declarations is contingent upon their congruence with subsequent, tangible actions. Without corresponding policy implementation and tangible results, assertive speech acts risk being perceived as mere rhetoric, further eroding public trust.

This highlights the need for complementary mechanisms that translate rhetoric into concrete policy actions. In this regard, the strategic deployment of directives in Tinubu's speeches appears to serve as a deliberate effort to bridge the gap between policy pronouncements and implementation. By framing these directives as immediate and actionable, the government aims to project a sense of proactive leadership and responsiveness. In Nigeria's context, where widespread skepticism toward government promises stems from a history of unmet commitments, such rhetoric probably sought to reassure citizens that the administration is moving beyond mere words to deliver measurable outcomes. Thus, while the strategic use of directives in political speeches highlights their potential to drive policy implementation and foster public confidence, their effectiveness ultimately hinges on the government's ability to align its rhetoric with actionable and impactful governance outcomes.

PBAT engaged in commissive speech acts at the start of his administration as strategic commitments to outline his administration's long-term vision and policy direction. These commitments were to impact public expectations and perceptions of his administration's efficacy (Kennedy et al., 2020). Assuming office on the Renewed Hope agenda, he communicated his vision to Nigerians as he set the agenda for his administration, which aligns with the agenda-setting function of political speeches (Ya, 2002). However, as the economic policies began to take effect, bringing significant hardship to the populace, Tinubu reinforced his administration's commitment to economic revival through additional commissive acts, aiming to reassure citizens and sustain public confidence. This underscores how commissive speech acts can serve as an effective governance tool to manage public expectations and reinforce political legitimacy.

Lastly, the early speeches of PBAT adroitly employed expressive speech acts to foster solidarity, build public trust, and humanise his administration. At a time when Nigerians were grappling with economic hardships resulting from his administration's reforms, the President Tinubu used expressives to emotionally connect with the people, acknowledging their struggles and demonstrating empathy. However, governments in developing economies often fail to address the immediate needs of vulnerable populations during reforms, leading to public discontent (Andrews, 2013; UNDP, n.d.). In Nigeria, where over 63% of the population lives in multidimensional poverty (National Bureau of Statistics, 2022), such empathetic expressions must be accompanied by concrete measures, such as targeted social safety nets, subsidies for essential goods, or economic relief programs. To its credit, the government has introduced targeted social safety nets, including cash transfer programs and subsidies for essential goods, aimed at mitigating the impact of economic reforms on vulnerable groups. While these measures represent a step in the right direction, challenges such as bureaucratic inefficiencies, limited accessibility, and uneven distribution have hindered their widespread effectiveness.

Conclusion

This study highlights the potency of speech acts in governance and policy communication, offering valuable insights into administrative priorities and strategies. While PBAT's rhetoric projects a vision of economic revitalisation, security, and institutional reform, the effectiveness of these speech acts ultimately depends on their alignment with concrete policy actions and measurable outcomes. The enduring challenge lies in bridging the gap between political discourse and policy execution. Future research could explore how public reception of these speech acts shapes political trust and policy effectiveness, as well as compare Tinubu's rhetorical strategies with those of past Nigerian leaders to identify patterns of continuity and evolution in governance communication.

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