

“A MESSAGE OF HOPE”: UNPACKING RHETORICAL STRATEGIES IN PRESIDENT BOLA AHMED TINUBU’S 2025 INDEPENDENCE DAY SPEECH

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Abstract

This study critically examines ideological and rhetorical strategies in President Bola Ahmed Tinubu (BAT)’s 2025 Independence Day Speech with a view to demonstrating how the speech subtly but pragmatically functions beyond being a yearly ritualistic practice but significantly projecting the Tinubu-led administration’s commitment to its ‘renewed hope’ agenda. The theoretical anchor for this study is situated within the ambit of Speech Act Theory, Austin (1962) John Searle (1969), and relevant excerpts of the speech were purposively selected for analysis in this study. Findings reveal that speech is characterized by four rhetorical strategies: assertives, directives, commissives and expressives. Assertives are deployed to state facts and recount the administration’s success, directives are deployed to make pleads for support from the citizens, commissives are deployed to further make

promises and to plead that the citizens continually remain hopeful about the administration and expressives were employed to show solidarity and a sense of identification with the plight of the citizens. The study recommends that further studies on relevant political leaders in the country be conducted using speech acts to unravel how the speech of other political leaders can be significant in shaping the nation.

Keywords: *discourse, speech acts, ‘renewed hope’ agenda, Bola Ahmed Tinubu, Nigeria*

Introduction

Speech-making is an unavoidable component of politics, which involves perpetual organization and domination of society. Politics and language are not separate entities since political activity are carried out predominantly through linguistic tools and it foregrounds how power, ideology, and persuasion are obtained (Fairclough, 2001; van Dijk, 2006). Politicians utilize speech to establish and sustain social relationships, express emotion, and to convey ideas, policies, and programs to the wider society (Akinwotu, 2021). As in any communicative act, speech making involves a speaker desiring to inform an audience or to elicit the audience to act in certain ways (Akinwotu, 2021).

Presidential speeches represent one of the major instruments of democratic governance, allowing leaders to build legitimacy, direct public meaning from events, and reaffirm core national values. In this way, presidents are framing, reassuring, and symbolically renewing the political community (Tulis, 1987). Bogdanor (1987) states that as an art form, political speechifying confronts the rhetorical use of language. Though not limited to persuasion, public speaking is rhetorical in nature, appealing to the audience through ethos, pathos, and logos (Aristotle, trans. 2007; Charteris-Black, 2005). Successful political speech is successful if language appeals to shared values and mobilizes public opinion at the center of modern democratic rhetoric.

Bormann (1961) goes on to say that as public officials rise in status and workload, the delivery of ghost-written words is not only

appropriate but a requirement under increasing professional and time pressures. Presidents thus typically have available to them staffs of professional speech writers with which to condense thinking and ensure unity and consistency of tone, structure, and ideology (Beard, 2000; Charteris-Black, 2014). Presidential speeches, therefore, are not ritual but strategic discourse actions forming the ideology, priorities, and relationship of a leader to the ruled (van Dijk, 1997; Fairclough, 1992).

Ever since democracy returned to Nigeria in 1999, presidents beginning with Olusegun Obasanjo, the late Umaru Musa Yar'Adua, Goodluck Jonathan, Muhammadu Buhari, and incumbent President Bola Ahmed Tinubu (colloquially referred to as BAT) have seen it fit to address the nation from time to time on special occasions such as New Year celebrations, Democracy Day, Independence Day, and also during crises when the moment is necessary to be stern.

As much as they are needed, little or no language study has analyzed Nigerian presidential speeches' discourse patterns, particularly speech acts, rhetorical style, and ideological framing. Nearest to this line of inquiry is Akinwotu's (2021) critical examination of the EndSARS protest speeches given by Lagos State Governor Babajide Sanwo-Olu and former-President Muhammadu Buhari's which was to address the protest that was fueled by social injustice and police brutality in Nigeria. These loopholes only work to highlight the necessity for more scholarly focus on political rhetoric in Nigeria, contextualizing presidential speeches within broader discourses of power, persuasion, and democratic communication.

The justification for this research is not only restricted to its significant value, but much more is that it will add to scholarship and also add to the national discourse and contribute meaningfully to its social-political exigency in the life of Nigeria today. In a time when the country's domestic issues of economic instability, insecurity, and general hunger have characterized President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's (PBAT) first two years in office, it is important to

examine how he uses language strategically to soothe, persuade, and regain people's trust in his government. Specifically, the study seeks to find out how the president's speech act strategies and rhetorical maneuvering propel legitimation of the ideological vision of his party's political slogan "Renewed Hope." Specifically, the study critically analyzes the Speech Act strategies used by President Tinubu in delivering his Independence Day address read on October 1, 2025, in a bid to find out how presidential rhetoric is used as an instrument of persuasion, government, and nation-building.

Situating the study

Language takes center stage whenever political discourse comes into scrutiny. From the past, scholars have approached this subject from different theoretical and analytical perspectives, discussing how political operators utilize language as a means of persuasion, domination, and ideology control. Some of the relevant works in this vein are those of Ayeomoni (2005), Adeyanju (2006), Eromesele (2012), Akinwotu (2013, 2021), Akinkurolere (2015), Akinrinlola (2015), Emeka-Nwobia (2015), Sharififar and Rahimi (2015), Aremu (2017), Osisanwo (2017), Ajayi (2018a, 2019, 2020), Fowobayi et al. (2018), Balogun and Amodu (2018), and Akinmameji (2020), among others.

Using Fairclough's (1992) framework of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), Ayeomoni (2005) posits that Nigerian inaugural addresses abound with rhetorical devices deployed in opinion creation and used as endorsing ideological hegemony. Similarly, Adeyanju (2006) in a pragmatic analysis of national leaders' speeches such as Tafawa Balewa, Awolowo, Azikiwe, Gowon, Obasanjo, and Babangida illustrates how such political leaders employ strategic linguistic choices in building solidarity and legitimacy with citizens. Eromesele (2012), applying the Speech Act Theory, identifies commissive acts as the general linguistic feature of Goodluck Jonathan's inaugural speech, with a performative commitment to leadership. This is supported by Akinkurolere (2015) and Akinwotu (2013), who opined political rhetoric as

manipulative and persuasive and demonstrate how public figures like Awolowo and Abiola utilized language in demonstrating solidarity and allegiance to ideology. Akinrinlola (2015) is concerned with the inaugural speeches of Buhari, and he draws attention to the utilization of verbal and nominal devices in constructing a collective responsibility ethos. In another study, Akinwotu (2021) analyzes rapport management strategies in the speech of Buhari in 2020 on police brutality to show how linguistic options construct unity and empathy during times of national crisis.

Expanding the scope, Emeka-Nwobia (2015) studies religion and politics in Obasanjo's Democracy Day speeches (1999 and 2003) and concludes that biblical references are used as cohesive devices to promote national unity. Sharififar and Rahimi (2015), in a cross-cultural study of Obama's and Rouhani's 2013 UN speeches, apply Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics to demonstrate how both leaders embed ideology and power in their linguistic structures, albeit through differing registers and tonalities. Aremu (2017) analyzes conceptual mappings in presidential inaugurals, while Balogun and Amodu (2018) investigate discourse markers, highlighting the prevalence of repetition and parallelism as prominent rhetorical devices in Goodluck Jonathan's and Barack Obama's speeches.

Furthermore, Osisanwo (2017), adopting Mey's (2001) Pragmatic Acts Theory, shows how Buhari's inaugural address utilizes pragmatic acts to express appreciation, issue directives, and manage social relations. Ajayi's (2018, 2019, 2020) studies extend the discourse to digital political communication, examining impoliteness strategies, stance-taking, and ideological framing in online discourse surrounding Buhari's administration. It can be seen from this review that whereas much scholarly attention has been given to the rhetorical and linguistic features of political speeches in Nigeria, there is still a gap in research on the employment of speech acts by political leaders in times of national crisis. This study therefore seeks to fill that knowledge gap by examining the linguistic and discursive approaches employed in President Bola

Ahmed Tinubu's October 1, 2025, Independence Day address, in particular to track communicative actions employed to reassure, persuade, and re-align the citizens amid socio-economic hardship. PBAT's Independence Day speech deserves empirical rhetorical attention because it is not a routine ceremonial address but a strategically layered intervention in Nigeria's present socio-economic moment. The speech constitutes a peculiar admixture of nation-building nostalgia-through founding fathers and memories of the civil war-with technocratic legitimation via dense economic statistics, policy milestones, and reform narratives. It responds directly to local exigencies-fuel subsidy removal, volatility of the naira, inflation, youth unemployment, insecurity, and federal-state fiscal relations-and frames hardship as necessary sacrifice. Rhetorically, one speech performs several rhetorical acts: justification reassurance, mobilization, and moral accountability. A rhetorical analysis is needed to unpack how hope, endurance, and legitimacy are discursively constructed to manage public consent in the face of ongoing economic pain.

Theoretical Anchor

Speech Act Theory, first developed by J. L. Austin (1962) and later developed by John Searle (1969), provides an interesting tool for investigating the way language works as action, rather than as communication. In political discourse, the theory has valuable resources to explain how political actors employ language both to convey information and to enact acts such as promising, commanding, persuading, and reassuring, shaping perception and eliciting response. Political speeches, therefore, are not merely text performances but performative events in which political leaders try to construct social reality, legitimize power, and encapsulate public opinion (Chilton, 2004; van Dijk, 2005).

During times of socio-economic crisis, political leaders are put to the double test of rebuilding public trust and maintaining social harmony. By doing the work of governance through language in speech acts such as commissives (commitments and promises),

expressives (empowerment and reassurance), and directives (requests for action), leaders linguistically do the work of governance. For instance, commissive actions are particularly significant during periods of national uncertainty when presidents promise to repair stability or provide economic renewal, what they say goes beyond the level of statement; it is an obligatory speech intended to redefine public demands (Searle, 1979; Wodak, 2009). Similarly, expressive actions such as showing empathy towards suffering humanity develop affective bonding that humanizes leadership and maintains collective endurance (Fairclough, 1992).

Speech Act Theory also helps us reveal the implicit power relations and ideological work underlying political rhetoric. Political speeches are a discursive means of constructing legitimacy and managing dissent, according to van Dijk (2006). By looking at the illocutionary force of speech acts and observing the effect of what leaders make happen by saying something, researchers can observe how political rhetoric enacts authority and mediates social agreement simultaneously. As an example, when a president utters "We will overcome our challenges together," the speech act is expressive (expressing unity) and commissive (promising joint action). The performativity of these speech acts does not just reside in what is uttered, but also in the way it calls upon citizens to co-act in the nation's political and moral endeavor (Charteris-Black, 2014).

Further, speech act analysis bridges the chasm between micro-level linguistic features and macro-level socio-political environments. It describes how seemingly harmless linguistic structures such as modality ("we must"), pronouns ("we" as opposed to "they"), and metaphors ("rebuilding the nation") function as rhetorical devices to place citizens into alignment with government politics. They are no innocent tricks; they function as acts of persuasion that refract socio-economic crises into common causes calling for cooperation and patience. Hence, speech acts exhibit how rhetoric are cognitive and performative political means of control and reassurance (Chilton & Schäffner, 2002; Wodak, 2015).

In a nutshell, through Speech Act Theory in political speech analysis, scholars can bare the intersection of ideology, power, and language. It untangles the way political leaders routinely use speech acts tactically as an attempt to persuade legitimate policy proposals and try to restore public confidence during crises. Through the focus on the performative nature of political language, the theory explains that political language is always performative most certainly never passive but instead an active instrument of governance, persuasion, and social reorientation.

Data and Analytical Procedure

This study employs qualitative research design to interrogate the meaning, rhetoric, and pragmatic aspect of politics in discourse. Data employed in the examination were sourced from the Independence Day Address by the Nigerian President, Bola Ahmed Tinubu, delivered on the 1st of October, 2025, broken down into 23 thematic chapters that span around 120 sentences. In all, the data that make up the population comprise all the speeches, with a purposive sampling method employed to pick out pragmatically relevant statements. These statements were picked based on relevance in Nigeria’s socio-economic life as well as pragmatic effectiveness in a speech act analytical framework involving Searle’s typologies for Acts in Speech: Assertives, Directives, Commisives, and Expressives, which were employed to examine Acts of Legitimization, Reassurance, Mobilization, and Commitments. Speech Acts were broken down for pragmatic relevance in managing public acceptance towards the coverage of hope.

Data analysis

Assertives

Assertives are speech acts through which speakers communicate beliefs, report states of affairs, or assert facts about the world. Assertives commit the speaker to the truth of the proposition expressed (Searle, 1979). Examples include statements, descriptions,

and claims reporting information or taking a stance (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1979).

Excerpt 1:

...**This is the third time** I will address you on our independence anniversary since I assumed office as your President on May 29, 2023. **In the last 28 months** of my administration, like our founding fathers and leaders who came before me, I have committed myself irrevocably to the unfinished nation-building business...

This excerpt is from President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's Independence Day address delivered on 1 October 2025. The President, holding institutional and symbolic authority; Nigerian citizens, constituting the collective audience for this excerpt. Power relations are asymmetrical but negotiable, whereas the President holds constitutional power, public trust and consent need to be discursively secured. The speech therefore functions as a site of power negotiation through legitimation and reassurance.

Excerpt 1 foregrounds the leadership theme of legitimacy and continuity in nation-building. It also comes at a time when this extract is produced within a nationally significant commemorative context that conventionally requires political leaders to account for governance, justify policy choices, and renew the social contract, especially in times of socio-economic strain. Where the President seeks, above all else, to legitimize his leadership and reassure citizenship and align his administration with the founding ideals of Nigeria, the implicit purpose of the audience is one of assessing credibility and competence. These are negotiated through rhetorical and pragmatic devices, in particular assertive constructions based on verifiable facts and ethical stance. *“This is the third time that I would be speaking to you on the anniversary of our independence since I assumed office as your President on May 29, 2023, last.”* This is an example of an assertive speech act (Searle, 1979). Locutionarily, it makes a statement of fact, but illocutionarily, it builds ethos on the themes of time, office, and continuity. Perlocutionarily, its effect is reassuring and strengthening leadership

continuity. “*I have irrevocably committed myself to the uncompleted business of nation-building.*” This is an example of an assertive-infected commissive speech act that carries out both the locutionary and illocutionary acts. Such speech acts allow the leadership to appear sincere, determined, and morally sound.

These speech acts are felicitous because the speaker has the authority to carry them out, the Independence Day ceremony is a context where evaluative and predictive speech is appropriate, and all members recognize the speaker's right to do so. The felicity conditions are therefore met. What is implicitly not being said in the text is an acknowledgement of failure of policies and/or public dissatisfaction. But the readers/ audience are encouraged to deduce that the message of continuity and commitment serves to meet the existing public concerns about the effectiveness of the governing and leadership process.

The employment of assertive speech acts bears out that power is constructed discursively, rather than being imposed, and depends on credibility, historical alignment, and reassurance. This observation corroborates current literature (see, Akpan & Nwankpa, 2020) that has shown political leaders use speech acts in efforts to legitimize, sustain hopes, and stabilize public perception during times of uncertainty.

Excerpt 2:

...**The second quarter 2025 Gross Domestic Product grew by 4.23%**—Nigeria’s fastest pace in four years—and **outpaced the 3.4 per cent projected by the International Monetary Fund.** Inflation declined **to 20.12% in August 2025**, the lowest level in three years...

At the time of the 2025 Independence Day address, Nigeria had been gradually transitioning from a period of economic stress that characterized high inflation rates, weak local currency value in relation to foreign currencies, removal of the fuel subsidy regime, as well as a reduction in purchasing power. Between 2023 and the early months of 2024, inflation reached a record high of 28.92% (NBS, November 2023). This is when PBAT mention of economics

gains considerable rhetorical and practical importance. “*The second quarter 2025 Gross Domestic Product grew by 4.23%—Nigeria’s fastest pace in four years—and outpaced the 3.4 per cent projected by the International Monetary Fund*” is an assertive speech act in Searle’s (1979) terminology, whereby the speaker puts himself or herself at risk in regard to the truth of the claim, which is quantifiable and pertains to economic performance. The use of a comparative approach, whereby Nigerian data is juxtaposed with IMF estimation, facilitates the discursive shift from vulnerability to relative resilience.

In a similar vein, the claim “*Inflation eased to 20.12% in August 2025, marking the lowest in three years*” becomes more credible in the context of the previous high inflation rate of 28.92%. While the rate is still high, the trend is positive, which is what PBAT relies on to shift the narrative away from suffering towards recovery. In a situation where Nigerians who are less than the poverty rate (according to the World Bank), any slight reduction in the rate becomes a cause for celebrations.

In pragmatic terms, these assertives have functions as legitimizers and comforters. These economic facts are presented as objective facts while strategically pointing toward optimism through these assertives. According to Olayiwola (2019), Nigerian Presidents have found these economic facts of GDP and inflation rates as apt tools for reassuring Nigerians during economic challenges. In this felicity of acts, its aptness is found in the office of the President, the Independence Day news backdrop, and recognition of economic facts as appropriate governance indicators. At an ideological level, it is clear that “the assertives” have ideological work to do, in that it frames economic management in a positive way—stabilizing public opinion—often through projecting images of national resilience. It is within these acts of speaking that data is transformed into proof through rhetoric.

Excerpt 3:

...Peace has returned to hundreds of our liberated communities in North-West and North-East, and thousands of our people have returned safely to their homes...

In this excerpt “*Peace has returned to hundreds of our liberated communities in the North-West and North-East, and thousands of our people have returned safely to their homes*” is relevant to the topic of restoring security and recovering from the effects of the conflict. It is created in the context of insurgency, banditry, and displacement that has persisted and insecurity has been a prominent measure of the effectiveness of the government.

The discourses are exercised/are carried out between the President as a symbol of power as well as success and the citizens of Nigeria as the recipients of power’s delivery. The President will want to reassure the citizens, and the citizens will want to gain security and stability.

It is at the heart of these pragmatic devices in negotiating these goals. The lexical choice “peace” presupposes prior conflict, whereas “liberated” ideologically frames military operations as morally justified victories. The possessive phrase “our communities” constructs solidarity and shared national ownership, reinforcing affiliation between leader and citizens. Quantification through “hundreds” and “thousands” amplifies impact, suggesting widespread success rather than isolated incidents. The verbs “returned” and the adverb “safely” imply prior displacement and foreground the government’s protective role, while “their homes” invokes emotional attachment and restored normalcy.

The proposition is an assertive speech act (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1979) since it commits the speaker to the veracity of a reported situation. Its felicity conditions are met: the President has the institutional authority to make security claims, the Independence Day context legitimises evaluative reporting, and the audience recognises the speaker’s right to such declarations. The act is therefore felicitous.

What is left implicit is the aftermath of insecurity in certain locations and the cost of violence that happened in the past. Inclusionally, PBAT states the reality of peace and resettlement; perlocutionarily, the act reassures the nation, inspires renewed confidence in the power of the state, and translates insecurity into a conquered threat. These assertive acts are pivotal in bringing power into play as restorative and protector or to confirm the power of the President as a holder of power to protect the nation. As asserted by Akam and Onu (2024), security is stated as the fundamental responsibility that rests with the powers that be and that any nation that cannot secure the citizenry is basically challenged in its governance responsibilities.

Excerpt 4:

...We created NELFUND to support students with loans for their educational pursuits. Approximately 510,000 students across 36 states and the FCT have benefited from this initiative, covering 228 higher institutions. As of September 10, the total loan disbursed was N99.5 billion, while the upkeep allowance stood at N44.7 billion...

The accessibility of education in Nigeria has largely been impacted by the tough economic reality situations faced by the country, such as high inflation rates, poverty, unemployment, and rising tuition fees, accommodation, and learning resources. For most students in Nigeria, this means postponing graduation, dropping out, or being completely shut out from post-primary education Ifezue (2025). It is within this economically precarious background that the meaning of a comment by the President on students' loans assumes practical significance.

In the given excerpt, the major actor appears to be the President and the federal government, using collective pronouns 'we,' and the Nigerian students, who are placed in a beneficiary role. The use of 'we' in the excerpt promotes the idea of a collective approach in decision-making, through the attempt to integrate presidential power into collective power. This gives the impression

of inclusiveness and a sense of shared responsibility for the outcomes.

This lexical selection "created" entails innovation and a departure from previous inadequacies, establishing NELFUND as an innovative venture rather than a mere change in policy. NELFUND is placed in capital, which draws the establishment into the spotlight, portraying NELFUND as an official, permanent channel of government dedication to education. From a practical perspective, this upgrade changes the initiative from a temporary solution to a symbol for transformation.

The use of exact numbers, such as "510,000 students," "36 states and FCT," "228 higher institutions," "~~N~~99.5 billion," and "~~N~~44.7 billion," carries performatives (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1979), and these numbers commit the speaker to truth, displaying transparency and a commitment to accountability. They also display indirect perlocutions of reassurance and trust.

Discursively, the aggressive speeches work to reinterpret issues surrounding education access as a responsive field of governance during times of economic hardship. Using the numbers that quantify levels and rates of intervention, the President discursively mediates issues around education as a project that is developmentally important, echoing Oredien's (2012) argument that education is fundamental to the development process.

Excerpt 5:

...In the last two years of our administration, we have achieved 12 remarkable economic milestones as a result of the implementation of our sound fiscal and monetary policies...

The act of saying, "During the last two years of our administration, we have achieved 12 remarkable economic milestones resulting from the implementation of our wise fiscal and monetary policies," is a good example of the use of assertive speaking acts to create a discourse of competence, legitimacy, and ideology efficacy. According to Austin (1962) and Searle (1979), assertives are speaking acts where the speaker is committing himself or herself to the truth of the words, which are usually statements of fact, states of

affair, or outcomes of actions or decisions, and so on, and in this case, the speaker is committing himself or herself to the reality of the achievements, which are positive outcomes of actions or decisions taken by his or her administration. Good economic indices and positive financial outlook are instrumental to ascertaining and rating good governance (Adenuga, 2023).

“We” is the inclusive form of the pronoun and represents the introduction of collectivism, where the power of the president and the government is encompassed within the collective identity of the nation itself. For instance, the use of the pronoun helps to create a sense of cohesion and directs the citizens towards the results of the policies initiated by the administration. The evaluative phrase “*sound fiscal and monetary policies*” reinforces ideological labor. It is implicit comparison between the performance of the administration and the performance of former leaders that reinforces the illocutionary force of the claim to encourage the listener to recognize the corrective role of the administration. The numerical quantification “12 remarkable economic milestones” has a dual role: it brings to the fore hard evidence of performance as well as rhetorical proof of its efficacy.

On the level of discursive practices, the speech goes beyond the act of information transfer. It is an act of governance by speech, in which the achievements of the policy agenda serve as the vehicle for legitimation, relocation of fear, and ideological mobilization and alignment. This speech act is for information, persuasion, and the construction of the story of resurgent nationality and visionariness that characterizes the act of governance through language. It is through the options chosen in the language frame options, pronoun options, adjective options, and numeral options that the economic realities are transmuted into the rhetorical act of state capability and public accountability through economic realities.

Directives

Directives are speech acts through which a speaker attempts to get the hearer to do something. They express the speaker's intentions,

desires, or wishes and attempt to have an influence on behavior (Searle, 1979). Examples include commands, requests, advice, and instructions, where language is used to prompt or elicit action.

Excerpt 6:

...The federal government will continue to do its part to fix the plumbing in our economy. Now, we must all turn on the taps of productivity, innovation, and enterprise, just like the Ministry of Interior has done with our travel passports, by quickening the processing...

The statement, "The federal government will do its part in unlogging the plumbing in our economy. Now we must all turn on the taps of productivity, innovation, and enterprise, just as the Ministry of Interior has been doing with our travel passports, by expediting the processing," is an excellent illustration of how directive speech acts are used by political leaders to mobilize, guide, and inspire collective action. Directives, to Searle (1979), are speech acts in which the speaker attempts to get the hearer to do something. They include commands, requests, advice, and appeals utterances through which leaders use language to influence behavior. In this text, the President's directive is motivational and participatory in nature, summoning citizens to be involved in the government's efforts at national economic recovery.

The figurative language "repair the plumbing in our economy" and "open the taps of productivity, innovation, and enterprise" is a rhetorical and practical device. Metaphor deflects the imperative's force while enhancing intelligibility, reframing a policy directive as a comprehensible image of collective responsibility. "We must all" reiterates inclusiveness and collective agency, transforming a political directive into a collective call to action. Akpan and Nwankpa (2020) opine that speeches from political leaders serve as a tool of reassurance to maintain public trust, foster hope and reduce panic.

Pragmatically, this model falls under what Austin (1962) defines as the illocutionary force a covert but imperative appeal that

citizens join in constructing the nation through productive engagement.

Discursively, the President constructs a *we*-centric narrative that aligns leadership and citizenry. By collapsing governmental responsibility ("the federal government will continue to do its part") and civic duty ("we must all turn on the taps"), he achieves a balance between accountability and mobilization through a double positioning that renders the directive a two-way collaboration in governance instead of a one-way command.

The reference to the productivity of the Ministry of Interior "by speeding up the processing" is a paradigmatic directive or performative model. It not only commends institutional performance, but also implicitly encourages other ministries and sectors to emulate such productivity. The directive act here transcends oral instruction; it models preferred behavior, reinforcing governmental ethos and creating administrative norms. Effectively, then, in this directive speech act, the President synthesizes persuasion, inspiration, and instruction. The speech act is a pragmatic tool of leadership inviting citizens to act, ideologically identifying them with governmental goals, and linguistically performing the cooperative ethos required for national progress.

Excerpt 7:

...I have a message for our young people. You are the future and the greatest assets of this blessed country. You must continue to dream big, innovate, and conquer more territories in your various fields of science, technology, sports, and the art and creative sector...

"I have a message for our youth. You are the future and the best assets of this blessed nation... You need to keep dreaming big, innovating, and conquering more grounds in your different areas of science, technology, sport, and the art and creative industry" is a demonstration of the utilization of directive speech acts in motivating people for nation-building. According to Austin (1962) and Searle (1979), directives are a way of expressing what the speaker wants done by the hearer, which can be a command, advice,

appeal, or exhortation. In this instance, the President's speech can be viewed as a motivational directive that urges the youth to productively contribute to nation-building.

The expression "You have to continue to dream big, innovate, and conquer more space" has a very strong illocutionary force. The use of "have to" is an indication of obligation, and it elevates dreaming and inventiveness to a responsibility for all people. From a practical perspective, it is an empowering act that aligns youthful exuberance with collective national vision and is consistent with Olowookere and Adekeye (2016), who state that verbal affirmations in leaders' speeches enhance productivity. Discursively, the President uses youth as symbolic as well as pragmatic tools for development in the country. "You are the future and the best assets of this blessed nation" is not only an appreciation of youth, but it also provides moral justification for the call, thereby adding to the perlocutionary force of hope, identification, and preparedness to act. Ideology-wise, the quote has used patriotism and joint efforts for development as its tools.

In conclusion, this paragraph illustrates how directive speech acts blend obligation and motivation. Rather than being merely advisory, the speech of the President is leading linguistically, action initiating, identity constituting, and national rebirth reconciling with personal drive.

Excerpt 8:

...Finally, let all hands be on deck. Let us believe, once more, in the boundless potential of our great nation...

The expression, "Finally, let all hands be on deck. Let us believe, once more, in the boundless potential of our great nation," illustrates the use of directive speech acts as instruments of national rejuvenation and collective mobilization. Directives are speech acts in which the speaker seeks to get the hearer to do something specific either through appeals, commands, or encouragement, as argued by Austin (1962) and Searle (1979). Here, the President's command is given inclusively and motivationally. The directives "let all hands be on deck" and "let us believe" are made as inclusive calls, inviting

citizens to come together and have national optimism again. The imperative "let" softens the command tone without diminishing a powerful illocutionary force of exhortation, transforming the declaration into a cooperative call to action rather than an authoritarian command.

Discursively, the assertion serves both motivational and ideological functions. It constructs a narrative of shared responsibility and hope, presenting belief in the nation's potential as civic duty. Pragmatically, this mandate reinforces solidarity and future-oriented hope, enabling the President to enact leadership linguistically by inviting co-engagement in the project of nation-building.

Commissives

Commissives are speech acts through which the speaker commits to a future action or responsibility. They express intention, promise, or resolution to undertake some action (Searle, 1979). Promises, pledges, and vows are some instances where the speaker's words bind them to a future action or duty, maintaining trustworthiness and reliability.

Excerpt 9:

...I will continue to work for you and justify the confidence you reposed in me to steer the ship of our nation to a safe harbour...

The sentence, "I will continue serving you and justify the confidence you had in me to steer the ship of our nation to a port of security," is a typical instance of strategic use of commissive speech acts in politics. Austin (1962) and Searle (1979) state that commissives are speech acts through which the speaker commits him/herself to doing something at some future point in time. They also include promises, vows, pledges, and undertakings, where speakers pledge themselves to specific duties or goals. In this instance, PBAT makes a commissive act of commitment and reaffirmation, reiterating his commitment to responsibility and leadership. The use of the modal form "I will continue" has strong illocutionary force, symbolizing continuity and determination. Pragmatically, it expresses

dependability and leadership stability, enhancing citizens' trust in the government. The metaphor "to pilot the ship of our nation into a harbour of safety" contributes to perlocutionary effect by looking at governance as navigation requiring guidance, prudence, and commitment.

Discursively, the statement is both a subjective vow and symbolic re-covenanting of social contract between the ruler and the ruled. In committing to "justify the confidence" of the people, the President places his personal integrity into alignment with popular trust, thereby enacting an ideological act of responsibility. The commissive thus goes beyond simple promise it constructs a moral discourse of duty, accountability, and mutual destiny. Lastly, the speech act has a double duty: it guarantees the citizenry continuity and moral leadership, and by-word commitment, recovers the legitimacy of authority. By this commissive, language is a political binder words perform governance by promising service, stability, and hope. This is in consonance with the findings of Olowookere and Adekeye (2016), who state that verbal affirmations in leaders' speeches enhance productivity.

Excerpt 10:

...We have to plan for the generations that will come after us...

Here, the statement of the President constitutes a collective commissive, expressed in the inclusive pronoun "we." The use of this language converts personal commitment into a national duty, enforcing responsibility for generations to come. Both morally binding and forward-looking is the modal expression "have to," which emphasizes the responsibility to act decisively for the good of the future generation. Pragmatically speaking, the speech act calls citizens to an appeal to their sense of continuity, stewardship, and intergenerational responsibility, cementing the government's reputation as visionary and morally just.

Discursively, the statement also plays an ideological role. It positions governance in the context of sustainability and legacy creation, which implies that current choices must be for the long-term interests of the country. By citing "the generations that will

come after us," the President invokes national conscience, which calls upon shared values of responsibility, sacrifice, and vision. Mansuri and Rao (2013) suggest that active participation of citizens in nation building fosters development and empowers the essence of local and national institutions. This commissivity therefore operates on two planes: it is performative, binding the leadership to a vision grounded in the long term, and convincing, enrolling citizens to a shared moral responsibility. With this, the President performatively establishes leadership by topically rendering a promise into an expansive moral appeal to action, a call that bridges present rule to the envisioned national future.

Excerpt 11:

...We are working diligently to enhance national security, ensuring our economy experiences improved growth and performance...

Governments have the first responsibility for security and economic stability, key functions that are at the base of legitimacy, social order, and development, according to core indicators described by Rotberg (2004). The statement, "We are working hard to promote national security, making our economy enjoy better growth and performance," is a fine illustration of the application of commissive speech acts as a tool of declaration of governmental intention, responsibility, and reassurance. According to Austin (1962) and Searle (1979), commissives are speech acts in which the speaker makes a promise of a future performance or obligation. They are promises, guarantees, vows, and commitments where the speaker promises themselves or in the instance of an administration to do or accomplish something.

Utilization of the present continuous tense "We are working hard" implies immediacy and long-term commitment, implying continuity of action, not a vow at some future point. In practical terms, this utilization of language bridges the gap between words and action, reiterating the notion of an active and responsible government. The phrase "to improve national security" refers to one of the nation's most imperative issues, playing a soothing act that

resuscitates public confidence in state protection and authority. The second, "ensuring our economy enjoys increased growth and performance," fills out the first by pairing security with economic solidity. The connection is a discursive strategy for describing government actions as all-embracing and cross-supportive. By so doing, the President not just makes a commitment towards improving national welfare but also articulates an integrated vision of development. The commissive speech act therefore performs both informative and persuader functions asserting improvement in conjunction with extending public faith in the administration's capability to deliver.

Ideologically, the statement constructs a vision of competence and renewal. In invoking collective agency through "we," the President reaffirms governance as a shared endeavor, transmuting the hierarchy between government and people. The commissive speech act is therefore a performative promise based on ethics of responsibility and future-looking leadership. In effect, this phrase shows the ways in which commissive acts in political discourse not only assert intention but carry out governance in language, vowing citizens extended commitment to safety, economic growth, and national security.

Expressives

Expressives are speech acts where speakers reveal their psychological or emotional state about a situation, event, or listener (Searle, 1979). They convey gratitude, apology, joy, regret, or appreciation. Expressives handle emotion rather than fact or future commitment, as compared to assertives or commissives.

Excerpt 12:

...The biting effects of inflation and the rising cost of living remain a significant concern to our government...

The statement, "...The biting effects of inflation and the cost of living continue to be an important issue to our government..." illustrates the use of expressive speech acts as a political device of empathy and emotional congruence, the statement by the president

is buttressed by Olaopa (2011) when he opines that expression of emotional attachment from the ruler to the ruled helps encourage citizens engagement and it serves as a motivation to the ruled. Expressives are speech acts through which speakers convey their psychological or emotional situation towards an event or situation, according to Austin (1962) and Searle (1979). They include utterances that express concern, regret, gratitude, or sympathy. Unlike assertives or commissives, expressives do not describe facts or promise future actions; rather, they reveal attitudes and emotions, thereby humanizing the speaker and fostering connection with the audience.

In this utterance, the President's acknowledgement of "the biting effects of inflation and the rising cost of living" is an act of concern. Practically, the utterance is an affective bridge between citizens and the government, one that is compassionate and attuned to the ordeal of citizens. The words "remain a significant concern to our government" are expressive of worry and sense of moral responsibility without shame, posing leadership as responsible and attuned to socio-economic situations. Discursively, the President constructs a solidarity frame, positioning himself and his regime alongside the people, rather than above them. This positioning de-escalates potential criticism by showing sensitivity to harm while implicitly sanctioning existing or imminent government action. The affective act therefore has both emotional and political functions: it ensures the public that the government feels with them and moderates the discourse of power through emotion.

Moreover, the use of affective adjectives such as "biting effects" increases the experiential quality of the speech act, verifying sincerity and shared agony. Through this expressive gesture, the President does not only convey empathy but also performs leadership by feeling balancing power and sensitivity and confirming the government's moral obligation towards the people. In effect, this observation describes the way expressive speech acts in political discourse function as instruments of emotional appeal, evoking trust and solidarity by the rhetoric of shared concern.

Excerpt 13:

... We fought a bitter and avoidable civil war, experienced military dictatorships, and lived through major political crises. In all these, we weathered every storm and overcame every challenge with courage, grit, and uncommon determination...

The statement, "We fought a bitter and avoidable civil war, suffered military dictatorships, and endured great political crises. Through all these, we rode every storm and surmounted every test with courage, grit, and rare determination," demonstrates the expressive nature of speech acts as rhetorical and affective tools in the construction of national identity, solidarity, and resilience. On Austin's (1962) and Searle's (1979) view, expressives are speech acts whose function is to convey the psychological or emotional attitude of the speaker towards a situation or event. Expressives introduce feelings such as pride, regret, gratitude, or admiration and are pivotal in constructing relational meaning between speaker and hearer.

Here, the President employs expressive acts of admiration and pride in creating collective memory and emotional solidarity. The reference to past calamities "civil war," "military dictatorships," "political crises" is made to acknowledge Nigeria's chequered past, and the next clause "we weathered every storm and overcame every challenge with courage, grit, and uncommon determination" is a rhetorical movement that is upholding national strength of toughness and resilience. Practically, such acknowledgement is serving as an emotional call for cohesion, supplanting past suffering as a source of collective pride.

Discursively, the President uses collective pronouns ("we," "our") to superimpose his voice onto the people's, creating shared emotional identity. Olayiwola (2019) agrees that Nigerian presidents often deploy the use of collective pronouns "we and our" to establish a sense common responsibility and national identity. This discourse of inclusivity lends power to the perlocutionary force of the expressive act not only respects the hardship of the nation but also rekindles patriotic passion. The expressive here transcends description; it performs collective commemoration, in which the

leader emotionally re-professes faith in the people's resistance and strength.

Furthermore, by redefining previous suffering as triumph, the performative act is ideologically valuable; it reconstitutes adversity as proof of national character and cohesiveness. By doing so, the President performs healing and continuity rhetorically, reminding citizens that the same courage that saw them through previously can assure their future. Fundamentally, this observation describes the function that political rhetoric's expressive speech acts perform to humanize leadership, consolidate collective power, and plant the nation's identity emotionally in terms of narratives of endurance and shared victory.

Findings

Using Speech Act Theory, this paper concludes that President Tinubu's 2025 speech on Independence Day employed four strategic rhetorical devices that effectively propelled his administration's "Renewed Hope" agenda well beyond simple ritual.

The analysis found that assertives were used to state facts and enumerate governmental achievements, thus keeping a record of success; directives had the function of appeal, to request from the citizens their support and collaboration; commissives were used to make more promises and to plead for sustained public hope in the administration's future plans; and, finally, expressives demonstrated solidarity with citizens and shared in the struggles of the people, building a sense of shared experience and empathy.

Put together, these speech acts pragmatically shaped the address into a tool for political persuasion and nation-building. The study concludes that the speech was a calculated performance in terms of reinforcing commitment to the administration's agenda and the management of public perception. It recommends an extension of this kind of speech act analysis to other Nigerian political leaders to improve the understanding of how rhetoric shapes national discourse and political reality.

Conclusion

This study sought to critically examine the ideological and rhetorical moves that are embedded in President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's (PBAT) 2025 Independence Day Speech through the resources of Speech Act Theory as outlined by Austin (1962) and Searle (1969). Analysis shows that the speech exceeds the traditionally well-defined boundaries of a ceremonial speech and instead operates as a calculated communicative instrument meant to bolster the "Renewed Hope" agenda of the Tinubu administration. Through its strategic employment of speech acts, the President's speech is a performative and persuasive speech act, and seeks to construct public opinion, create confidence, and legitimize powers of government.

The study discovers that the President's claim primarily serves to create credibility and authority by reporting success and claiming progress across all fields. Through the appeal to statistical facts and developmental milestones, the President performs the illocutionary act of witnessing truth and reliability, thereby witnessing his administration's ability. Directives, on the other hand, are employed in a bid to rally citizens towards shared responsibility and participation in nation-building. The statements serve as indirect calls towards unity and productivity with the government's achievement made to hang in the balance of citizens' collaboration and cooperation.

Furthermore, commissives then serve as significant markers of responsibility and reassurance. Through commitments and promises, the President semantically binds himself and his administration to the achievement of people's welfare, sustaining the people's hopes when confronted with economic and social challenges. Not only does this speech act strive to say but so does the very act of political reassurance itself, thereby linking leadership ethos to moral accountability. Expressives are also employed to convey empathy, pride, and solidarity. By evoking the suffering of the people and recognizing their resilience, the President situates himself in the collective national emotional experience, humanizing his leadership and bolstering the moral legitimacy of his leadership.

By and large, the pragma-discursive analysis of the 2025 Independence Day Speech emphasizes that such presidential rhetoric is not merely ceremonial but an intentional act of governance. The interaction of assertives, directives, commissives, and expressives demonstrates how language operates both as ideology and action building, shaping perception, and maintaining the moral compact between the ruler and the ruled. Thus, President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's speech symbolically exercises governance through language: asserting to hope, calling for unity, and casting a vision of national rebirth that is lasting.

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