

A PRAGMATIC STUDY OF CONVERSATIONAL IMPLICATURES IN PRESIDENT TINUBU'S SPEECHES ON NATIONAL SECURITY AND GOVERNANCE

Olachi Enemuo

Department of English Language and Literature
Nwafor Orizu College of Education, Nsugbe
olachionyeubi@gmail.com
08063597441

Abstract

The essence of political speeches lies in their powerful ability to shape public perception, unify diverse groups and drive political action. These speeches serve as a vital communication tool for leaders to articulate their visions, justify decisions and more especially to manage conflicts and respond to crisis. This study investigates the conversational implicatures embedded in President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's speech, through the lens of Grice's Cooperative principles. Employing a qualitative research approach, it analyzes and interprets selected speeches to uncover the implied meanings shaped by context and pragmatic cues. The findings reveal that Tinubu often conveyed meanings indirectly, relying on the interpretative efforts of his audience to grasp the intended message. However, the analysis indicates that the selected speeches deviated from the issues it ought to have addressed, they failed to respond to the pressing needs and the concerns of his constituents, instead it focused on assigning blames, displaying ethnic bias and engaging in self-promotion. The study further demonstrates that Tinubu's rhetoric is better understood only when interpreted pragmatically, through the theory of conversational implicature. The frequent flouting of the Gricean maxims as observed in the speeches, contributed to ambiguity and obscurity, especially for readers who lack critical reading skills. The paper concludes by emphasizing the importance of clarity and pragmatism in political communication, urging public figures to adopt more direct and responsive language when addressing their audience.

Keywords: Conversational implicature, Crisis, Cooperative principles, Political speeches.

Introduction

Various scholars have defined language in terms of its communicative function. Madu and Okpala (2020) view language as "a conventional symbol either spoken or written through which human beings as members of a speech community communicate". Similarly, Obiorah and Akabuike (2023) see language as a powerful tool employed by human beings to communicate their thoughts, values, culture and opinions. Language goes beyond being a communication tool, it shares a strong link with politics as it is a powerful instrument of influence, power and control (Baym, 2007).

Language is integral in political discourse because it is a tool used to push certain political narratives, unravel political intentions and thoughts as well as consolidate power. This is evident in political speeches. Political speeches are typical forms of political communication peculiar to governance and leadership across the world. They are strategic acts of communication employed by political actors to manage public perception and project power, without these speeches from time to time, the polity will be in tension and chaos.

Asides all the functions of political speeches earlier stated, one of the roles it plays that has received lesser attention is its role in crisis rhetoric. Political speeches can be used as an instrument to manage crisis situations. In times of national crisis, like social/political unrest and security challenges, politicians resort to the use of speeches as an intervention mechanism. These speeches become vital tools of leadership used for shaping public perceptions, offering reassurance and guiding collective action during turbulent times like natural disasters or political unrest. Political speeches are not mere words, they are carefully articulated messages that are used to stabilize society and reinforce the authority of those in power. Therefore, it is important to critically carry out a pragmatic investigation on President Tinubu's speeches especially those speeches delivered during a looming crisis moment in order to explore the conversational implicatures used for issues bothering governance and national security.

Statement of problem

In periods of national unrest and public dissatisfaction, political leaders always rely on language as a major instrument for managing public sentiment, restoring order and asserting control. President Bola Ahmed Tinubu happens to be one president that has constantly used this tool to his own advantage. While these speeches are well seasoned and strategically constructed, they have not been sufficiently examined especially from a pragmatic point of view. Particularly, the extent to which Tinubu adheres or violates the principles put forward by Grice remains under explored. As a result, understanding the communicative techniques employed during crisis mediation and its effect on the populace becomes quite challenging.

Therefore, this paper seeks to investigate selected crisis speeches of Bola Ahmed Tinubu from Grice's Cooperative principles perspective in order to explore how pragmatic choices employed in crisis rhetoric within the Nigerian socio-political context. To achieve this, this paper sets out to address the following research questions:

- a. How are the maxims of conversations flouted in the speeches of President Bola Ahmed Tinubu?
- b. What conversational implicatures arise from the flouting of maxims in representations of national governance and security?

Conceptual Framework

Language and Politics

Language and politics share a very strong relationship so much so that language remains an indispensable tool in politics. An inquiry of the language of politics helps us to gain insight into how language is used by those who wish to gain power, those who wish to exercise power and those who wish to keep power. One of the ways language is used to assert power is in political speeches of political leaders in authority. With language, these leaders are able to control the people.

This appears to be in consonance with the claim that language is a vital process of setting the personality and the programme of the candidates to the public with the primary aim of gaining their support and mobilising them to participate in the process of securing and controlling power (Opeibi, 2003). No doubt that politics has become a linguistic issue while language has become a political issue. Language is the universal capacity of humans in all societies to communicate, while by politics he means 'the art of governance' Thus this inquiry views language as an instrument to interact or transact in political leadership. It is generally accepted that the strategy that a group of people in power take to make the others do what it intends to be done is known as a linguistic strategy. It involves manipulative application of the language. Therefore, linguistic manipulation is the conscious use of language in a devious way to control others (Fairclough, 1989).

Political Discourse

Political discourse refers to the language used in political contexts especially by those in power. For Sharndama (2015), it is an umbrella term for various political talks made at different political forums such as political campaign rallies, party manifestos, inaugural speeches, bills deliberations, among others. Obitube and Ezebuilo (2023) note that, political discourse serves different purposes depending on the political activities involved, functioning effectively when it fulfills various roles within those activities. With this it is safe to say that crisis speeches are political speeches made during crisis situations. It is a form of institutional discourse shaped by ideology, power relations and persuasive motive. Chilton (2004) and Van Dijk (1997) note that political discourse employ strategic and manipulative approaches and often rely on indirectness and rhetorical devices to influence public opinion and justify their actions.

Theoretical framework

Conversational Implicature

This study adopts Paul Grice's (1975) Conversational Implicature and its attendant conversational maxims. Grice's theory is built on the philosophy of ordinary language use, logic and the need to account for how listeners infer implied meanings. In trying to describe how people communicate, Grice introduced the concept that conversational language often carries implied meanings beyond the literal interpretation of words. He further emphasizes that effective communication is dependent on a cooperation or mutual understanding between interlocutors, hence the reason most speakers imply something rather than state it explicitly with the belief that the listener(s) will understand it.

The core aim for introducing the concept of implicature was to build a framework that explains speakers express more than what they actually say in a conversational exchange. The theory of conversational implicatures by Grice (1975), observes that in conversations what is meant often goes beyond what is said and that this additional meaning is inferred and predictable (Madu and Okpala, 2020).

In order to better apply Conversational Implicature Theory to life, Grice also proposed the Cooperative Principle, to serve as rules of conversational implicature. Gricean cooperative principle proposes that every conversation has a way in which it has to follow in order to be successful. Since the cooperative principle is the fundamental conversational principle that directs the course for successful interlocution between interlocutors, Leech believes that "the CP enables one participant in a conversation to communicate on the assumption that the other participant is being cooperative" (1989). These principles are also known as maxims and they include:

Maxim of Quality: this suggests being sincere in what you bring to a conversation. Here, speakers should refrain from stating things they don't think to be true or for which there is insufficient evidence.

Maxim of Quantity: this maxim stipulates that just the precise or appropriate amount of information is required for a linguistic exchange, rather than too much or too little. If that which is given becomes too much or so little, such maxim has been violated.

Maxim of Relevance: This maxim suggests that a participant in a discourse should offer information that is relevant to the topic or subject matter under discussion.

Maxim of manner: This maxim states that contributions to any discourse should be concise, clear and well-organized. As such, the information offered ought to be characterised by its brevity, order, and clarity.

The theory of conversational implicature proposed by Paul Grice provides a powerful framework for analyzing how meaning is communicated implicitly in spoken discourse, more especially political crisis situations. Leaders often rely on indirectness, persuasive language and strategic ambiguity. Analyzing President Tinubu's crisis speeches through this framework is deemed appropriate because, political speeches in crisis situations are saddled with implied meanings and the conversational implicature framework enables a deeper understanding of these embedded meanings. This is achieved by focusing on what is suggested, rather than what is said.

It further enables us to unravel the manipulative strategies employed in such speeches that shape national narratives. Lastly, since context and shared knowledge are key in examining implicatures, this framework accounts for how different people may interpret the same speech differently, this is useful in a country like Nigeria that is both culturally and politically diverse.

Methodology

A qualitative approach was adopted for this study Greenhalgh and Taylor in Mbanusi and Ezeifeke (2021) are of the opinion that that researchers who delve into a qualitative research are in a quest to present an undiluted investigation, therefore, they aim to "study things in their natural setting, attempting to make sense of, or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people attribute to them, and they use a holistic perspective which preserves the complexities of human behaviour". This study therefore presents a subjective interpretation of data in its original context, aligning with the foundational principles of qualitative research. It also employs a textual approach for both data presentation and analysis while a descriptive research design was employed in order to carry out a well detailed analysis of the work. Craswell (2002) defines a qualitative research as a process of collecting, analysing, interpreting, and writing the result of study. This work, therefore, takes a look at the political speeches of president Tinubu following a qualitative design.

The researcher opted for President Tinubu's crisis reaction speech because the speech was delivered when the country was facing a challenging time and the researcher thought to explore the speech patterns of the President especially in crisis situations. Of all the speeches made by President Tinubu since he assumed office, the "End Hardship" crisis reaction speech was selected purposely because of the context for which it was made. The official social media platforms of the President (Youtube and Facebook) served as sources for data collection of the videos. Afterwards, the speech was transcribed by the researcher to achieve a detailed data for analysis.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Research Question 1:

Data 1

My fellow Nigerians,
I speak to you today with a heavy heart and a sense of responsibility, aware of the turmoil and violent protests unleashed in some of our states. Notably among the protesters were young Nigerians who desired a better and more progressive country where their dreams, hopes, and personal aspirations would be fulfilled.

The excerpt above was culled from President Tinubu's speech while responding to the hardship protest by the Nigerian masses. On the 29th May, 2023, when President Tinubu was sworn in, he immediately put an end to subsidy removal. As a result, fuel prices tripled leading to high transportation cost, inflation in the prices of commodities and general economic hardship.

Subsequently, a nationwide protest began, championed by the Labour Unions and civic society groups. However, there were areas that experienced the destruction of goods and property and in response to all these, the President gave this speech.

Analysis

In the excerpt above, the President flouts the **Maxim of Quantity**. As noted by Grice, this maxim states that "much information is needed, not more; not less". From the speech above, the President acknowledges that he is aware of the ongoing protest but fails to provide adequate details about the cause of the protest. Providing possible insights to the reason for the protest, would have helped to provide clarity to why the protest was held in the first place. The fact that the President indicates that he is aware of the "turmoil and violent protests" without mentioning the main cause of such reactions which include: economic hardship, hunger and poverty suggests that the speaker withheld the necessary information for a reason, thereby flouting the maxim of quantity.

Again, some issues highlighted in the speech are over generalized. The President observed that the unrest in some part of the country due to the protest, however, the phrase is not specific as it lacks no exact details or numbers mentioned, thereby flouting the maxim of quantity

Another maxim noted to be flouted here is the **Maxim of Relevance**.

I am especially pained by the loss of lives in Borno, Jigawa, Kano, Kaduna and other states, the destruction of public facilities in some states, and the wanton looting of supermarkets and shops, contrary to the promise of protest organisers that the protest would be peaceful across the country. The destruction of properties sets us back as a nation, as scarce resources will be again used to restore them

The paragraph above suggests that the President is aware of the protests and unrest in some parts of the country. However, he immediately deviates to acknowledging the youths rather than acknowledging the reason for the protest. He also failed to mention the plans the government has to cushion the effects of the decision made by government. One can see that there is a disconnection between acknowledging the protest and taking full responsibility towards solving it.

Similarly, the Maxim of Quality is also observed to have been flouted. In the paragraph, the President tries to outline the damages caused by the protest in some states, he however failed to provide specific details, perhaps mentioning specific properties that were destroyed. He goes ahead to state that “scarce resources will be used to fix the damaged structures. The statement lacks adequate details even though it is structured enough to evoke emotions, it still leaves out some key information that will be beneficial to the public thereby flouting the maxim of quality which states that we should make our expression true by not saying that which we lack adequate evidence (Grice, 1991)

Research Question 2: What conversational implicatures arise from the flouting of maxims in representations of national governance and security?

S/N	UTTERANCE	IMPLICATURE	ISSUE
1.	I speak to you today with a heavy heart and a sense of responsibility, aware of the turmoil and violent protests unleashed in some of our states. Notably among the protesters were young Nigerians who desired a better and more progressive country where their dreams, hopes, and personal aspirations would be fulfilled.	The speaker affirms that ongoing protests in some parts of the country are being championed by youths “young Nigerians” who are meant to be peaceful since they have a lot of dreams and aspirations to achieve in life. It also suggests that the protest is violent	Blame Shifting
2.	I am especially pained by the loss of lives in Borno, Jigawa, Kano, Kaduna and other states, the destruction of public facilities in some states, and the wanton looting of supermarkets and shops, contrary to the promise of protest organisers that the protest would be peaceful across the country. The destruction of properties sets us back as a nation, as scarce resources will be again used to restore them.	There was no peaceful protest, contrary to what the protest organizers promised, hence the destruction of lives and property. The protest organizers are to be blamed	Blame Shifting
3.	Under the circumstances, I hereby enjoin protesters and the organisers to suspend any further protest and create room for dialogue, which I have always acceded to at the slightest opportunity. Nigeria requires all hands on deck and needs us all – regardless of age, party, tribe, religion or other divides, to work together in reshaping our destiny as a nation.	The country is disunited, hence the need for dialogue and oneness	Unity

4	To those who have taken undue advantage of this situation to threaten any section of this country, be warned: The law will catch up with you. There is no place for ethnic bigotry or such threats in the Nigeria we seek to build.	Ethnicity is existent in the country	Acknowledgement of national tension, Ethnic fanaticism and authority and control
5.	For decades, our economy has remained anaemic and taken a dip because of many misalignments that have stunted our growth. Just over a year ago, our dear country, Nigeria, reached a point where we couldn't afford to continue the use of temporary solutions to solve long-term problems for the sake of now and our unborn generations. I therefore took the painful yet necessary decision to remove fuel subsidies and abolish multiple foreign exchange systems which had constituted a noose around the economic jugular of our Nation and impeded our economic development and progress.	The present administration inherited a crippled economy and setback from the previous administration, hence the reason for the current situation of things	Blame Shifting
5	For decades, our economy has remained anaemic and taken a dip because of many misalignments that have stunted our growth. Just over a year ago, our dear country, Nigeria, reached a point where we couldn't afford to continue the use of temporary solutions to solve long-term problems for the sake of now and our unborn generations. I therefore took the painful yet necessary decision to remove fuel subsidies and abolish multiple foreign exchange systems which had constituted a noose around the economic jugular of our Nation and impeded our economic development and progress. These actions blocked the greed and the profits that smugglers and rent-seekers made	The speaker attributes the current economic crisis faced by the nation to bad leadership decisions and corruption of previous political leaders	Bad Governance and corruption
6.	In the past 14 months, our government has made significant strides in rebuilding the foundation of our economy to carry us into a future of plenty and abundance. On the fiscal side, aggregate government revenues have more than doubled, hitting over 9.1 trillion Naira in the first half of 2024 compared to the first half of 2023 due to our efforts at blocking leakages, introducing automation, and mobilising funding creatively without additional burden on the people. Productivity is gradually increasing in the non-oil sector, reaching new levels and taking advantage of the opportunities in the current economic ambience	The current administration and leadership is making significant economic progress	Self Glorification

The implicatures outlined above are grouped on the basis of the issues they focus on. They include: blame-shifting, self-glorification, bad governance, unity and ethnic fanaticism. These implicatures are discussed using the context in deriving their pragmatic import.

The main issue raised in the speech and kept reoccurring is blame shifting in sample 1, 2 and 4. The first utterance suggests that the speaker is aware of the ongoing non- peaceful protest championed by the youths. It also implies that since the youths form the majority of the protesters, then they are responsible for the damage of life and property during the protest.

The second sample still emphasizes the damages caused by the protest, the utterance of the president suggests that the protesters should be blamed for any damage caused by the protest. He further suggests that it was an intentional attempt by certain groups of people to sabotage the efforts of government, hence, the statement “there is no place for ethnic bigotry or such threats in the Nigeria we seek to build”. The reoccurring blame shifting strategy identified in the speech of President Tinubu is an intentional attempt to divert the attention of the public from pressing issues the government may be unable to resolve at that time. It also serves as a tool to control public opinion and evoke certain reactions like sympathy and urgency (Wodak, 2001).

In example 3, the utterance by the President implies that there is disunity in the country, hence the call for unity by the President. By this utterance it may also be implied that the progress of any nation can be achieved with citizen cooperation, this justifies the reason the president tries to shift/ transfer the burden of the nation’s progress on the masses.

The President through his utterance in Example 3 admits that the national tension and unrest could have some religious/ political undertones. Although he was not specific, the utterance suggests actions are in existence. He implies that there are existing groups sabotaging the efforts of government through the constant agitations.

In example 5, the President blames the current hardship on the incompetence of the previous administration, by shifting blames the speech flouts the maxim of quantity that is saying more than necessary. This strategy is aimed at saving the face/ protecting the image of the administration. Lastly, the President’s utterance is saddled with self glorification even amidst the crisis, this implies that the critics are not observant enough to notice the success the administration had made, it further implies that more could have been put in place if not for the inherited damages from the previous administration.

Findings

The findings from this research reveal that crisis-response speeches as forms of political speeches are laden with implicatures. Furthermore, the speeches have the capacity to flout most of the maxims as shown in the analysis. The major strategies that characterize the speech as seen in the outline include: blame-shifting, self-glorification and a call to unity. Most of these strategies were deliberately employed in a bid to maintain good governance and national security in crisis moments.

Conclusion

The study analyzed the crisis reaction speech of President Tinubu in 2024. Based on findings of this study, the researcher concludes that the cooperative principles as propounded by Grice (1991) are constantly flouted in political speeches, all in a bid to conceal or exaggerate certain information.

The study identified six instances of implicatures used in the speech. The implicatures were grouped based on the issues highlighted in the speech. A total of five (5) issues were raised and discussed under which the implicatures were identified and discussed. The study concluded that the implicatures identified are a reflection of some of the strategies employed by political figures in governance and national security. The implicatures were both consciously and unconsciously.

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