

Pragmatic Functions in the 58th Independence Anniversary Broadcast of President Muhammadu Buhari

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Abstract

Political discourse has long been recognized as a powerful tool for shaping public opinion, consolidating authority, and articulating national identity. While numerous studies have examined political speeches from rhetorical and stylistic perspectives, relatively few have focused on the pragmatic functions of Nigerian presidential independence broadcasts. This study addresses that gap by investigating the pragmatic functions embedded in President Muhammadu Buhari's 58th Independence Anniversary broadcast of October 1, 2018, with a particular focus on the enactment of commitment acts. Data for the study were obtained from a publicly available transcript of the speech, which was downloaded and carefully cross-verified for accuracy. The analysis was guided by Pragmatic Act Theory, a framework that emphasizes the situated and interactional nature of communicative action. A qualitative approach was employed, in which pragmatic acts were identified, coded, and interpreted alongside their corresponding allopracts and linguistic markers. Findings revealed four major categories of commitment acts. These include unity, realized through reflecting and appreciating; peace and security, instantiated by informing, eulogizing, and assuring; prosperity, marked by informing and assuring; and general matters, such as election integrity and foreign affairs, indexed through assuring and informing. Each act was reinforced by specific linguistic forms—such as pronouns, verb groups, and evaluative lexical items—that functioned as pragmatic resources for projecting authority, building trust, and legitimizing governance. The study concludes that Buhari's 58th Independence broadcast illustrates how presidential discourse in Nigeria operates as situated pragmatic action. By highlighting the functions of commitment acts, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of political communication in Africa and demonstrates the analytical utility of Pragmatic Act Theory.

Keywords: Pragmatic Function, Commitment Acts, Muhammadu Buhari, Allopracts, Political Discourse

Introduction

Political discourse, broadly conceived, encompasses all communicative practices—spoken or written—employed by public officials such as presidents, governors, ministers, and commissioners in diverse sociopolitical contexts (van Dijk, 2006; Chilton, 2004). One illustrative instance is President Muhammadu Buhari's Independence Day broadcast delivered on October 1, 2018, marking Nigeria's 58th anniversary as a sovereign nation. Since independence on October 1, 1960, successive Nigerian governments have consistently used commemorative addresses as opportunities to reflect on national progress and articulate policy directions. Such speeches, beyond their ceremonial function, serve as performative acts of nationhood that reinforce political legitimacy and collective identity (Fairclough, 2010; Wodak, 2009).

Given the significance of these national addresses, a considerable body of scholarship has emerged on political speeches in both global and African contexts. Existing works include Makoro (2018) on political rhetoric in selected speeches, Sharndama (2016) on discursive strategies in Nigerian gubernatorial inaugurals, Oyewole (2023) on power dynamics in political discourse, and Harutyunyan (2021) on theoretical approaches to political speeches. Others, such as Khaemba (2024), Sikanku (2022), and Badmus and Kilani (2024), examine the rhetorical construction of authority, recurring thematic patterns, and ideological dimensions of presidential discourse. While these contributions are insightful, none of them directly investigates the pragmatic functions in Buhari's 58th Independence Day broadcast.

Moreover, most of the aforementioned studies adopt frameworks such as Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) or Speech Act Theory, which, though valuable, can be limiting in capturing the interactive, context-sensitive nature of live political addresses (Searle, 1979; Mey, 2001). By contrast, Pragmatic Act Theory offers a more holistic account of meaning-making, as it foregrounds the interplay between linguistic form, situational context, and communicative intention. This theoretical choice enables a nuanced interpretation of Buhari's broadcast, beyond the atomistic categorization typical of classical speech act analysis.

Accordingly, this study seeks to fill the identified gap by exploring the pragmatic functions of Buhari's 2018 Independence broadcast. Specifically, it aims to: 1. Identify the pragmatic acts performed in the speech. 2. Examine the allopracts that characterize these acts. 3. Analyze the linguistic forms through which the acts are indexed. Through this approach, the study contributes to the broader understanding of how political discourse functions not only as rhetoric but also as situated pragmatic action, thereby offering fresh insights into the communicative strategies of presidential addresses in Nigeria.

Life History of General Muhammadu Buhari

Muhammadu Buhari was born on December 17, 1942, into a Fulani family in Daura, Katsina State. His father, Mallam Hardo Adamu, was a Fulani chieftain from Dumurkul in Mai'Adua, while his mother, Zulaihat, traced her ancestry to Hausa and Kanuri lineages (Marcus, 2023). This multi-ethnic heritage is significant, as it reflects the complex cultural intersections that often shape the identities of Nigerian leaders. Buhari attended primary school in Daura and Mai'Adua, completing his studies in 1953. He subsequently enrolled at Katsina Provincial Secondary School from 1956 to 1961, where he obtained his West African School Certificate. This early education laid

the foundation for his subsequent career in the Nigerian military, which began shortly after.

In 1962, at the age of nineteen, Buhari entered the Nigerian Military Training College in Kaduna. He later pursued officer cadet training at the Mons Officer Cadet School in Aldershot, England, between 1962 and 1963. Upon completion, he was commissioned as a second lieutenant in January 1963 and assigned as Platoon Commander of the Second Infantry Battalion in Abeokuta. His military career advanced rapidly, particularly during and after the Nigerian Civil War (1967–1970), when he served under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Mohammed Shuwa in the 1st Division. Following the war, Buhari held several key positions, including Brigade Major/Commandant of the 31 Infantry Brigade (1970–1971) and Assistant Adjutant-General at the First Infantry Division Headquarters (1971–1972). His military training was further enhanced by his participation in the Defence Services Staff College in Wellington, India, in 1973.

Buhari's political significance began to crystallize during the 1975 coup d'état, in which he was among the officers who brought General Murtala Mohammed to power. In recognition of his loyalty and competence, he was appointed Governor of the North-Eastern State on August 1, 1975, serving until February 3, 1976. Following the reorganization of the North-Eastern State into Bauchi, Borno, and Gongola States, Buhari became the first Governor of the newly created Borno State (February–March 1976). His later appointments included serving as General Officer Commanding (GOC) of the 4th Infantry Division (1980–1981), the 2nd Mechanised Infantry Division (1981), and the 3rd Armoured Division (1981–1983). These roles positioned him at the heart of Nigeria's military hierarchy in the turbulent years preceding the country's second military coup of the 1980s.

The December 1983 coup, which overthrew the Second Republic, further consolidated Buhari's prominence. At the time, he was GOC of the 3rd Armoured Division, Jos, and played a central role in the takeover. Following the coup, Buhari became Head of State, with Major-General Tunde Idiagbon as his Chief of General Staff. His military regime (1983–1985) was noted for its emphasis on anti-corruption measures, strict discipline, and the controversial "War Against Indiscipline" campaign. While some commentators have lauded his uncompromising stance against corruption, others have critiqued the authoritarian dimensions of his leadership, particularly regarding human rights and press freedoms (Falola & Heaton, 2008).

After several decades of political visibility, Buhari transitioned to democratic politics. He contested unsuccessfully for the presidency in 2003, 2007, and 2011 before finally winning the 2015 elections under the All Progressives Congress (APC). His victory was widely celebrated as a milestone for Nigerian democracy, particularly because the incumbent president, Goodluck Jonathan, conceded defeat—a rare occurrence in Nigerian electoral politics (Diamond, 2015). Buhari's campaign emphasized his reputation as an incorruptible leader, a narrative that resonated strongly with voters fatigued by decades of perceived misgovernance. He was inaugurated on May 29, 2015, in a ceremony attended by leaders from across Africa and beyond, symbolizing his legitimacy on both national and international fronts.

Buhari secured re-election in 2019, commencing his second and final constitutional term on May 29 of that year. His second administration, with Vice President Yemi Osinbajo as deputy, was framed as a continuation of his "Next Level" agenda, which emphasized security, economic diversification, and anti-corruption reforms. The inauguration was not only the eighth presidential inauguration in Nigeria's history

but also the sixth within the Fourth Republic, underlining the relative consolidation of Nigeria's democratic order. Buhari's political trajectory, from military officer to head of state and later elected president, thus represents a rare blend of authoritarian and democratic leadership within Africa's political landscape (Suberu, 2021).

Empirical Studies

A considerable number of studies have examined political discourse from different analytical standpoints. However, as this review shows, few have concentrated specifically on the pragmatic functions of political speeches, particularly those delivered in the Nigerian context. Makoro (2018), for example, conducted a stylistic analysis of selected political speeches—including those by Barack Obama, Nelson Mandela, Thabo Mbeki, Muhammadu Buhari, and Mmusi Maimane—and identified rhetorical devices such as plural pronouns, repetition, allusion, rhetorical questions, and hyperbole. These devices were found to be instrumental in persuading audiences and consolidating political authority. While useful in highlighting rhetorical strategies, the study remains limited in its focus on style rather than pragmatic functions. This gap underscores the need for scholarship that goes beyond surface-level rhetorical devices to probe how language enacts commitment, persuasion, and social action.

Building on related concerns, Dylgjeri (2017) explored the role of speech acts in political discourse, using Rama's victory speech following the Albanian general elections of 2013. Deploying Speech Act Theory, the study identified significant illocutionary acts that revealed the intentions of the speaker and how they were received by the audience. Similarly, Safwat (2015) analyzed speech acts in the campaign speeches of John Kerry (2004) and George Bush (2001), revealing that commissives and assertives were dominant strategies. These findings align with the observation that political speeches often commit leaders to future actions while simultaneously asserting credibility (Searle, 1979; Wodak, 2009). Nonetheless, such works remain anchored in traditional speech act analysis, which, though valuable, does not fully capture the contextual dynamics and interactive dimensions foregrounded in Mey's (2001) Pragmatic Act Theory.

Other scholars have employed Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to highlight the ideological and power-laden aspects of political communication. Sharndama (2016), for instance, examined the inaugural speeches of six Nigerian governors in 2015, adopting Fairclough's three-dimensional model. The study found recurring macrostructures such as opening remarks, content, and closing statements, all embedded with persuasive messages designed to shape audience attitudes. Likewise, Oyewole (2023) interrogated the dynamics of power in political discourse, arguing that linguistic choices are central to the construction, negotiation, and contestation of authority. These CDA-oriented studies emphasize how political actors embed ideological positions in their speeches, yet they tend to foreground power relations rather than pragmatic strategies of commitment and assurance (Fairclough, 2010; van Dijk, 2006).

The theoretical orientations of other studies have been equally diverse. Harutyunyan (2021) reviewed various approaches to the study of political speeches, underscoring their essential role in constructing cooperation, conflict, and political identity. Khaemba (2024) similarly examined campaign discourse in Kenya, revealing how politicians exploit rhetorical resources to persuade voters, often with significant media amplification. Sikanku (2022) provided a political communication analysis of Ghana's 2019 State of the Nation Address, identifying thematic emphases on sanitation, housing, and bipartisanship. While these works contribute to the comparative

literature on African political discourse, their primary focus lies in discourse strategies and thematic construction, leaving pragmatic dimensions relatively unexplored.

More recent studies have directed attention to Nigerian presidential inaugurals. Badmus and Kilani (2024), through Fairclough's CDA framework, analyzed Bola Ahmed Tinubu's inaugural speech, finding dominant themes of optimism, unity, and developmental ideology. Similarly, Akinwotu (2018) examined Governor Olusegun Mimiko's inaugural speeches using a combination of stylistics and Systemic Functional Grammar. The analysis showed how lexical items, declarative structures, and testimonial arguments were deployed to construct the governor's ethos as a responsible and committed leader. These findings reinforce the observation that Nigerian political leaders often rely on linguistic forms that index sincerity, unity, and commitment. Yet, once again, the pragmatic dimensions—how such acts function interactively in context—remain under-theorized (Mey, 2001; Odebunmi, 2008).

Finally, comparative studies in West Africa further demonstrate the potential of pragmatic inquiry. Israel and Botchwey (2017) analyzed inaugural addresses by Ghanaian presidents Mills (2009) and Mahama (2013), finding that assertives and commissives were the most dominant speech acts. Similarly, Amoussou, Allagbe, and Toboula (2024) used pragma-stylistics to examine Tinubu's inaugural speech, showing that representatives, expressives, commissives, and directives were deployed with varied tense forms to convey political intention. These studies, while relevant, do not apply Mey's Pragmatic Act framework, which offers a broader, context-sensitive lens for analyzing commitment acts. It is precisely this theoretical and empirical gap that the present study seeks to address by applying Pragmatic Act Theory to Buhari's 58th Independence Day broadcast.

Methodology

This study employed a purposive sampling technique, selecting as its primary data the broadcast delivered by President Muhammadu Buhari during Nigeria's 58th Independence Anniversary on October 1, 2018. Purposive sampling was adopted because the speech represents a significant instance of national political discourse, situated at the intersection of commemoration and policy projection (Etikan et al., 2016). As an Independence Day broadcast, it is both ceremonial and performative, making it particularly relevant for examining pragmatic functions such as commitment acts. The purposive choice of this speech thus allows for a focused analysis of how language is used strategically to reinforce unity, assure citizens, and project governance priorities.

The data were retrieved from publicly available online sources using electronic devices, including a mobile phone and a computer. The transcript of the speech was downloaded, cross-checked for accuracy, and formatted for analysis. This method of data acquisition aligns with best practices in political discourse research, where official speeches are often accessed through government archives, digital platforms, or media outlets (Bhatia, 2006). Given that political addresses are widely disseminated and often transcribed verbatim, the reliability of the textual data was considered high. Nevertheless, the analysis remained sensitive to the possibility of minor transcriptional variations, which were cross-referenced against multiple sources to ensure consistency.

The analytical process followed a qualitative design, guided by Mey's (2001) Pragmatic Act Theory. The transcript was read and reread carefully, with particular attention given to identifying instances of commitment acts. These instances were then

coded alongside their corresponding allopracts (such as informing, assuring, eulogizing, and reflecting) and examined for the linguistic forms that indexed them. The coding process was iterative, moving from initial identification to refinement, ensuring that pragmatic functions were not only described but also contextualized within the broader goals of the speech (Silverman, 2014).

The emphasis on qualitative analysis was deliberate, as it allowed for a context-sensitive exploration of Buhari's discourse. Quantitative coding of speech acts, though valuable in some traditions, was deemed insufficient for capturing the situated and interactive nature of pragmatic acts in this case. Instead, qualitative coding was complemented by interpretive analysis, enabling the study to examine how specific linguistic markers—such as noun groups, verb groups, and adverbials—indexed the president's communicative intentions. This dual emphasis on linguistic form and pragmatic function ensured a holistic understanding of the broadcast.

Furthermore, the study adhered to established practices of discourse-analytic rigor, including transparency in data selection, consistency in analytic procedures, and reflexivity in interpretation (Gee & Handford, 2012). The validity of the analysis was strengthened by grounding interpretations in textual evidence and aligning them with the theoretical framework. This methodological approach ensured that findings were not only descriptively accurate but also theoretically meaningful, offering insights into how commitment acts function as integral features of presidential communication in Nigeria.

Theoretical Framework

The analytical lens adopted for this study is Jacob Mey's (2001) Pragmatic Act Theory, which offers a more context-sensitive and interactive approach to speech analysis than classical Speech Act Theory. Unlike J. L. Austin's (1962) tripartite model of locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts, or Searle's (1979) categorization of illocutionary force, Mey's framework emphasizes the situatedness of communicative action. Meaning, from this perspective, does not reside solely in linguistic form but emerges through the interplay between language, speaker, hearer, and the socio-political context of interaction (Hanks, 1996). This makes it particularly suitable for the analysis of political discourse, where speeches are embedded in historically and ideologically charged contexts.

One of the key concepts in Pragmatic Act Theory is the *pragmeme*, which Mey (2001) defines as a generalized pragmatic construct that captures the interactional goals of language users. Pragmemes are instantiated in practice through *practs* and their variants, known as *allopracts*. This theoretical orientation shifts attention from rigid categories of speech acts to the more fluid and situationally dependent ways in which language performs social action. In political communication, such an approach allows the researcher to uncover how leaders signal commitments, reassure audiences, or project unity through contextually embedded linguistic strategies (Odebunmi, 2008).

In applying Mey's model, the study foregrounds the interactive nature of Buhari's broadcast. As Hanks (1996) argues, meaning arises not from the semantic code alone but from its alignment with the circumstances of use. In this sense, Buhari's speech can be seen as a site of *situated action*, in which pragmatic acts reflect both the intentions of the speaker and the affordances of the political moment. For instance, the president's assurances about security and unity gain meaning not only from their propositional content but also from the socio-political anxieties of the Nigerian public

in 2018. Pragmatic Act Theory thus enables a layered interpretation of such utterances, accounting for both their linguistic markers and their contextual resonances.

Mey's model, as adapted in this study, integrates several layers of action: direct and indirect speech acts, conversational or dialogue acts, psychological acts (such as prosody, intonation, and emotional tone), and physical or embodied acts (gestures, facial expressions). These layers are analytically linked to textual features such as inferencing (INF), reference (REF), relevance (REL), voice (VCE), shared situation knowledge (SSK), and metaphor (MPH). Collectively, these dimensions highlight the multimodal character of communication, even within ostensibly textualized speeches (Jaworski, 1997; Kurzon, 1997). Such an inclusive framework is especially important in political broadcasts, which often rely on both verbal and paralinguistic resources to project authority and connect with audiences.

The choice of this framework also responds to some of the limitations identified in earlier models. While Austin (1962) and Searle (1979) remain foundational, their frameworks tend to privilege canonical, decontextualized speech acts, often abstracted from the dynamics of real-world interaction. Pragmatic Act Theory, by contrast, re-centers context and interaction, emphasizing what Mey (2001, p. 219) describes as "situated action"—action afforded by and made possible in specific circumstances. This situational orientation resonates strongly with the study's objectives, since Buhari's 58th Independence Anniversary broadcast is not simply a string of declaratives but a complex communicative event situated in Nigeria's socio-political realities.

In summary, Pragmatic Act Theory provides the analytical flexibility required for this study. It allows for the categorization of Buhari's speech into commitment acts of unity, peace and security, prosperity, and general matters, while simultaneously situating these acts within their broader socio-political and interactive contexts. By adopting this framework, the study advances beyond descriptive or stylistic accounts of political rhetoric to offer a nuanced understanding of how pragmatic strategies function in shaping public perception and consolidating political legitimacy.

Analysis and Findings

Pragmatic functions, as used in this study, refer to the communicative goals and intentions conveyed through Buhari's speech (Ogundele, 2015). These functions are identified by examining the instantiated pragmatic acts performed in the broadcast, using Mey's (2001) Pragmatic Act Theory as a guide. A close analysis of the data revealed that Buhari's speech is dominated by *commitment acts*—linguistic pledges or undertakings by which the speaker signals dedication to particular policies, values, or ideals. These acts are not merely declarative but are deeply embedded in Nigeria's socio-political realities at the time of the 58th anniversary. Four categories of commitment acts were identified: unity, peace and security, prosperity, and general matters (including elections and foreign affairs). Each type of act was linguistically marked by specific allopracts, which function as the instantiations of broader pragmatic goals.

Commitment Act of Unity

The commitment act of unity refers to instances in which the president pledges to safeguard and reinforce Nigeria's cohesion. In a country often destabilized by ethnic, religious, and regional tensions, the projection of unity in presidential discourse functions as both reassurance and ideological reinforcement (Adegbite, 2019; Chilton,

2004). This act was realized in Buhari's speech through allopracts of reflecting and appreciating. For example, he declared: *"Today is a day of celebration and solemn reflection. It is the anniversary of the day Nigerians realized one of the most cherished of human desires – the desire for freedom. We, therefore, give thanks to and remember our founding fathers who laboured so hard and sacrificed so much to build and bequeath to us this wonderful nation. It is our duty to consolidate this great legacy."*

The president's choice of "celebration and solemn reflection" signals both joy and responsibility, striking a balance between commemoration and forward-looking commitment. His invocation of "founding fathers" and the collective pronoun "we" situates unity as a shared inheritance that requires ongoing effort. Such linguistic choices reflect the dual allopracts of appreciating and reflecting, reinforcing the pragmatic function of national solidarity. As Fairclough (2010) notes, political leaders often mobilize national history and collective memory as rhetorical resources to legitimize their present commitments. Buhari's framing of independence as the "most cherished of human desires" situates freedom as a universal aspiration while simultaneously appealing to Nigerian exceptionalism.

In another segment, Buhari remarked: *"On this first October date and on the eve of the start of the general election cycle, we should do well to reflect on what binds us together and the great strength our diversity bestows on us. Ours is an ambitious nation, and, as citizens, we have every right to look forward to the future with confidence and optimism, which are well-founded considering where we find ourselves today."* Here, the metaphor of "binding" underscores unity as a form of social cohesion, while "diversity" is framed not as a threat but as a source of collective strength. By urging Nigerians to "reflect on what binds us together," Buhari enacts a pragmatic commitment to unity, situating it within the broader democratic process of an approaching election.

This rhetorical strategy also illustrates what van Dijk (2006) describes as the "politics of inclusion," whereby leaders deploy pronouns and shared values to bridge divides. The choice of terms such as "confidence" and "optimism" indexes forward-looking assurance, reinforcing the commitment act. Importantly, Buhari situates unity not as an abstract value but as a practical necessity for confronting Nigeria's "economic, security, and political" challenges. The pragmatic force of this unity act, therefore, lies in its dual orientation: it commemorates past sacrifices while projecting future resilience.

In sum, the commitment act of unity in Buhari's broadcast is achieved through a careful interplay of reflection, appreciation, and forward projection. By invoking history, recognizing diversity, and framing optimism as a national duty, Buhari not only reassures his audience but also embeds himself within a legacy of custodianship. This layered approach reflects Mey's (2001) assertion that pragmatic acts are best understood as situated actions—responses shaped by both linguistic choice and socio-political context.

Commitment Act of Peace and Security

Another dominant pragmatic act in Buhari's 58th Independence Anniversary broadcast is the commitment to peace and security. In a national context marked by insurgency, terrorism, and inter-communal conflict, the president's repeated assurances of safety and stability function as speech acts of reassurance and legitimacy. Such commitments were indexed through allopracts of informing, assuring, and eulogizing. For instance, Buhari declared: *"There has been a steady improvement in the security situation in the North East. We remain committed to ending the crisis and make the*

North East safe for all." Here, the pragmatic function of *informing* is evident in the acknowledgment of progress, while the subsequent *assuring* act conveys determination to bring closure to the crisis. By using the inclusive pronoun "we," the president constructs security as a collective responsibility, while simultaneously positioning himself as guarantor of peace.

The president's assurances are reinforced by his explicit reference to Boko Haram: *"Our thoughts and prayers are always with the victims of the Boko Haram's atrocities and their families. Beyond that, we know that the goals of the Boko Haram terrorists include capturing territories, destroying our democracy... We will not allow them to succeed."* This excerpt illustrates the pragmatic act of assuring through the performative pledge, *"We will not allow them to succeed."* By naming the insurgents and articulating their aims, Buhari frames the threat in stark terms, thereby legitimizing the government's counterterrorism agenda. Scholars of security discourse argue that such explicit delineations of threat and promise serve both to reassure citizens and to consolidate state authority in times of crisis (Buzan, Wæver, & de Wilde, 1998; Wodak, 2015).

In addition to assurances, Buhari employed eulogizing as a rhetorical strategy, praising the sacrifices of security personnel: *"I want at this point to pay tribute to the men and women of our armed forces, the Police and other security and law enforcement agencies..., who have been working under the most difficult conditions to keep the country safe. In the process, many have made the supreme sacrifice."* This tribute not only acknowledges the costs borne by the military but also functions as a commitment act. By positioning himself as Commander-in-Chief who will "continue to empower them by deepening their professionalism and providing all the necessary force multipliers," Buhari performs the speech act of assuring both security personnel and the public that their sacrifices will not be in vain. As Chilton (2004) observes, the eulogizing of military service often functions pragmatically to bolster state legitimacy and encourage continued loyalty.

Beyond terrorism, Buhari extended his commitment acts to long-standing communal conflicts, particularly between herders and farmers. He stated: *"The age-long conflict between herders and farmers that was being exploited by those seeking to plant the seeds of discord and disunity amongst our people, is being addressed decisively. We will sustain and continue to support the commendable efforts by all, including civil society organisations... in finding durable solution to this problem."* Here, the pragmatic act of assuring is reinforced by the adverb "decisively," signaling firmness of intent. Framing the conflict as "age-long" situates it within Nigeria's historical experience, while the pledge to sustain solutions projects the government's commitment into the future. This aligns with Adebawu and Obadare's (2010) observation that political leaders often invoke conflict resolution as a legitimizing discourse in fragile democracies.

The president also deployed the pragmatic act of warning, which strengthens the force of his commitment: *"In this context, I must warn that the perpetrators of murder and general mayhem in the name of defending or protecting herders or farmers will face the full wrath of the law."* The modal "must" and the phrase "full wrath of the law" exemplify a speech act of threat, which, as Mey (2001) suggests, still qualifies as a form of commitment act. By issuing this warning, Buhari communicates the government's resolve to enforce order, while simultaneously reassuring law-abiding citizens of state protection. Such warnings, however, may also be read as hedged assurances, since their effectiveness depends not merely on linguistic expression but on institutional capacity to deliver security.

In sum, the commitment act of peace and security in Buhari's broadcast is instantiated through informing the public of progress, assuring them of government resolve, eulogizing the sacrifices of security personnel, and issuing warnings to offenders. Collectively, these pragmatic acts work to portray the state as responsive, protective, and authoritative. Yet, they also reveal the delicate balance between reassurance and threat in political security discourse, a balance that is essential in contexts of protracted insecurity such as Nigeria (Hansen, 2011).

Commitment Act of Prosperity

A further pragmatic act identified in Buhari's broadcast is the commitment to prosperity. This act reflects the government's pledge to improve the material well-being of citizens, particularly through economic diversification and sustainable development. In a country historically dependent on oil revenues, such diversification is not merely economic policy but also a political act of reassurance, signaling resilience against fluctuations in global oil prices (Suberu, 2021). The president's words, *"We are diversifying away from reliance on oil to increased manufacturing capacity, solid minerals development, and agriculture,"* illustrate the pragmatic act of *assuring*, reinforced by the inclusive pronoun "we." By framing diversification as a collective national project, Buhari seeks to embed his economic vision within a shared responsibility framework, consistent with Chilton's (2004) notion of "strategic collectivization" in political discourse.

The prosperity act was also instantiated through informing, particularly in reference to specific policy efforts. For example, Buhari stated: *"Efforts are on course in the Niger Delta to clean up polluted lands, restore hopes of the youths in the region and re-establish livelihoods, and strengthen their capacity to guarantee for themselves and for our country a brighter future."* Here, the president's speech foregrounds both environmental and socio-economic dimensions of prosperity. The reference to "youths in the region" is strategically significant, given that the Niger Delta has historically been a hotbed of resource-based agitation and militancy (Watts, 2008). By informing citizens of concrete interventions—land restoration, livelihood re-establishment, and youth empowerment—Buhari instantiates pragmatic acts of both informing and assuring, thereby reinforcing government credibility.

The choice of lexical items such as "restore," "strengthen," and "brighter future" reveals the persuasive undercurrent of this prosperity act. These terms not only inform but also inspire optimism, aligning with what Fairclough (2010) identifies as the "discourse of hope" in political communication. Such lexicalization is crucial for projecting developmental commitment, particularly in contexts where economic realities may not yet reflect rhetorical promises. Pragmatically, Buhari's framing functions as an assurance act, pledging not only government action but also anticipated positive outcomes for citizens. In this way, language serves as both a symbolic and performative vehicle of governance.

At a broader level, the prosperity-related commitments in Buhari's speech reflect what Wodak (2015) terms the "politics of the future," where leaders use discourse to project imagined trajectories of development. By pledging to diversify the economy and support regional empowerment, Buhari situates himself within a larger narrative of renewal and transformation. Yet, as scholars of African governance have noted, such prosperity rhetoric often functions simultaneously as a pragmatic act of reassurance and as a strategy for deflecting attention from structural economic constraints (Mkandawire, 2015). The pragmatic significance of Buhari's prosperity commitments

thus lies not only in their propositional content but also in their contextual resonance as political assurances in a resource-dependent state.

In summary, the commitment act of prosperity in Buhari's broadcast is expressed through informing citizens of policy measures and assuring them of economic diversification and sustainability. The Niger Delta interventions serve as emblematic illustrations of this pragmatic function, reinforcing the president's role as a guarantor of development. While such prosperity commitments are powerful in rhetorical force, their effectiveness ultimately hinges on the government's ability to translate them into tangible outcomes. This interplay between discourse and delivery underscores the dual nature of prosperity acts as both pragmatic assurances and political performances.

Commitment Acts Associated with General Matters

In addition to unity, peace and security, and prosperity, Buhari's broadcast also contained commitment acts that can be classified under *general matters*. These include election-related commitments and pledges regarding Nigeria's role in international affairs. While less extensive than other categories, these acts are nevertheless significant because they address concerns of democratic legitimacy and Nigeria's global positioning. As Mey (2001) notes, pragmatic acts are often realized in subtle, situationally specific forms; in this case, Buhari's general commitments reinforce the broader ethos of responsibility and credibility.

The election-related commitment was articulated in Buhari's assertion: *"I have committed myself many times to ensure that elections are fully participatory, free and fair and that the Independent National Electoral Commission will be exactly INDEPENDENT and properly staffed and resourced."* The pragmatic act of *assuring* is central here, as the president not only pledges to safeguard electoral integrity but also emphasizes institutional independence. The deliberate capitalization of the word "INDEPENDENT" reinforces the rhetorical weight of this assurance, highlighting the centrality of credible elections in democratic consolidation. As Diamond (2015) and Suberu (2021) argue, electoral credibility is a cornerstone of democratic legitimacy in Nigeria, where contested elections have often sparked political instability. Buhari's reiteration—"many times"—further indexes commitment, embedding the speech act within a pattern of repeated assurances.

Foreign affairs commitments were also pronounced, particularly through Buhari's declaration: *"At the international level, we remain a responsible and respected member of the international community, playing active positive roles within ECOWAS, the African Union and the United Nations as well as all other regional and international organisations and institutions of which we are members."* Here, the pragmatic act of *informing* is evident, as the president highlights Nigeria's ongoing participation in global and regional institutions. At the same time, this is also an *assuring* act, since it reassures citizens of Nigeria's respected standing in the world. According to Wodak (2015), such references to international legitimacy are not merely descriptive but serve pragmatic functions of reinforcing national pride and projecting credibility in the global arena.

Buhari extended this foreign policy commitment in another segment: *"We will continue to support initiatives aimed at addressing the challenges of our times: global and regional crises and conflicts, terrorism, trans-border crime, climate change, human rights, gender equality, development, poverty and inequality within and between nations, etc. In this context, we are working hard to achieve both the AU 2063 Agenda for socio-economic transformation of our continent; and the UN 2030 Agenda for sustainable development."* This passage illustrates

what Chilton (2004) describes as the “politics of scale,” where leaders situate domestic priorities within global frameworks. By aligning Nigeria with Agenda 2063 and the UN’s 2030 Agenda, Buhari performs a pragmatic act of *assuring*, signaling not only alignment with international norms but also commitment to global development goals.

The pragmatic significance of these general matters lies in their ability to bridge the domestic and international dimensions of governance. On one hand, electoral assurances reinforce internal democratic legitimacy, while on the other, foreign policy commitments project Nigeria’s image as a responsible actor in global politics. Both are strategically intertwined, as domestic legitimacy often shapes international credibility and vice versa. This dual orientation underscores Mey’s (2001) emphasis on the situatedness of pragmatic acts: Buhari’s commitments are intelligible only within Nigeria’s internal democratic struggles and its external role as a regional power.

In summary, the commitment acts associated with general matters reveal Buhari’s pragmatic strategy of extending assurances beyond immediate socio-economic and security concerns. By pledging free and fair elections and affirming Nigeria’s global responsibilities, the president positions himself as both a custodian of democracy and a representative of international order. These commitments, while rhetorically powerful, also invite scrutiny, as their realization depends on institutional capacity and political will. The pragmatic force of these acts therefore lies as much in their performative projection as in their potential to shape public expectations at both domestic and international levels.

Conclusion

This study has examined the pragmatic functions embedded in President Muhammadu Buhari’s 58th Independence Anniversary broadcast, using Mey’s (2001) Pragmatic Act Theory as its analytical framework. The findings revealed four dominant categories of commitment acts: unity, peace and security, prosperity, and general matters. Each of these was instantiated through specific allopracts—such as reflecting, appreciating, assuring, informing, eulogizing, and even warning—which served to reinforce Buhari’s communicative intentions. The analysis has shown that these pragmatic functions are not random linguistic choices but context-sensitive acts that reflect Nigeria’s socio-political realities in 2018. By examining both the linguistic markers and the contextual embedding of these acts, the study demonstrates the value of pragmatic analysis for uncovering the deeper meanings of political discourse.

The commitment act of unity was achieved through appeals to history, collective identity, and national resilience. Peace and security were foregrounded as urgent priorities, with Buhari both assuring citizens and warning potential perpetrators of violence. Prosperity-related commitments were framed around economic diversification and regional empowerment, particularly in the Niger Delta, while general commitments addressed democratic consolidation and international engagement. Collectively, these findings underscore that presidential addresses function not only as ceremonial rituals but also as strategic sites of pragmatic action, where leaders pledge, assure, and align themselves with both national and global expectations (Chilton, 2004; Fairclough, 2010; Wodak, 2015).

One key contribution of this study lies in its demonstration that Pragmatic Act Theory offers analytical advantages over traditional Speech Act Theory and Critical Discourse Analysis when applied to political broadcasts. While CDA is valuable in revealing ideology and power relations, and Speech Act Theory identifies illocutionary categories, Pragmatic Act Theory provides a more dynamic, situated account of how

discourse functions in real political contexts. It highlights the interactional goals of language use, making visible the ways leaders enact commitments and seek legitimacy in moments of national reflection. In this respect, the study adds to the growing scholarship on political pragmatics in Africa, a field that remains relatively underdeveloped compared to Western contexts (Adegbite, 2019; Odebunmi, 2008).

That said, it is important to note the limitations of this research. The analysis was based on a single speech, which, while significant, may not capture the full range of Buhari's rhetorical strategies across different occasions. Future studies could expand the scope by comparing multiple broadcasts across different years or contrasting Buhari's speeches with those of other Nigerian presidents. Comparative studies across African contexts may also yield insights into how pragmatic acts vary according to cultural and political traditions. In addition, integrating multimodal analysis—examining tone, gesture, and prosody—could further enrich the understanding of pragmatic acts in political discourse (Jaworski, 1997; Kurzon, 1997).

In conclusion, the findings of this study suggest that political broadcasts should be understood as more than symbolic rituals; they are pragmatic acts through which leaders commit, assure, and project authority. Buhari's 58th Independence Day broadcast illustrates how unity, security, prosperity, and international credibility are discursively constructed through situated pragmatic strategies. These insights not only deepen our understanding of Nigerian political communication but also demonstrate the broader utility of Pragmatic Act Theory in discourse analysis. By foregrounding the situatedness of action, this study contributes to the growing body of scholarship that bridges linguistics, politics, and pragmatics, while opening avenues for future research on how language functions as action in political life.

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