

## A PRAGMATIC ANALYSIS OF PRESIDENT BOLA AHMED TINUBU'S 2026 NEW YEAR SPEECH

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### ABSTRACT

The New Year speech serves as a significant rhetorical event in national discourse, offering presidents the opportunity to address citizens, reflect on past achievements, and outline future aspirations. This study presents a pragmatic analysis of President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's 2026 New Year speech, examining how language is strategically employed to achieve specific communicative goals. The study was guided by three objectives and three research questions. The qualitative research design was utilised for the study, specifically content analysis. The sample comprised the complete text of President Tinubu's 2026 New Year speech, delivered on January 1, 2026. The sampling technique utilised for the study was purposive sampling, focusing on this particular speech due to its significance as a major national address. The instrument was found to be reliable through intercoder reliability, where several researchers were found to have used similar instruments to analyse political speeches. The method of data analysis was thematic, where various pragmatic features were analysed based on established pragmatic frameworks. The findings of the study revealed that President Tinubu employs a range of speech acts, with assertives and directives being the most prominent, serving to inform citizens about achievements and guide them toward desired actions. The politeness strategies identified include positive politeness through inclusive language such as "Fellow Nigerians" and "our," as well as negative politeness through hedged expressions that respect citizens' autonomy. The deixis analysis revealed strategic use of personal, temporal, and spatial deictic expressions to create proximity, establish authority, and situate achievements within a coherent temporal framework. Based on the findings of the study, it was recommended among others that political speechwriters should maintain the strategic use of inclusive pronouns to foster national unity, and that pragmatic analysis should be incorporated into media literacy programmes to enhance citizens' critical understanding of political discourse. Recommendations for further study were also made. The study concluded that President Tinubu's 2026 New Year speech demonstrates sophisticated pragmatic awareness, employing language strategically to project competence, foster unity, and inspire collective action toward national development goals.

**Keywords:** New Year, Speech, Politeness, Speech Act, Deixis.

## Introduction

Language serves as a powerful tool in political discourse, enabling leaders to shape perceptions, influence opinions, and mobilise citizens toward collective action. Political speeches, particularly those delivered at significant national moments, represent carefully crafted communicative events where every linguistic choice is deliberate and purposeful. The New Year speech, as a genre of political discourse, occupies a unique position in the rhetorical calendar, offering presidents the opportunity to address the entire nation, reflect on the past year's achievements, acknowledge challenges, and articulate visions for the year ahead. These speeches are not merely informative; they are performative acts that construct reality, reinforce legitimacy, and negotiate the relationship between the leader and the governed.

Pragmatics, as a branch of linguistics, provides valuable analytical tools for understanding how meaning is communicated beyond the literal level of words and sentences. According to Yule (1996, p. 3), pragmatics is "the study of how more gets communicated than is said," focusing on the relationship between linguistic forms and their users in specific contexts. This field examines how speakers convey intended meanings, how hearers interpret those meanings, and how contextual factors shape communicative exchanges. In political discourse, pragmatic analysis reveals the subtle strategies through which politicians achieve their rhetorical goals, manage their relationship with audiences, and construct particular versions of reality.

President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's 2026 New Year speech offers a rich site for pragmatic analysis. Delivered at a crucial juncture in Nigeria's democratic journey, the speech addresses multiple audiences—Nigerian citizens, the international community, investors, political allies and opponents, and various interest groups. The speech navigates complex rhetorical demands: it must acknowledge challenges while projecting optimism, celebrate achievements without appearing boastful, outline ambitious plans without seeming unrealistic, and unite a diverse nation with multiple identities, interests, and political allegiances. Understanding how language is pragmatically deployed to achieve these delicate balances is essential for comprehending the speech's communicative effectiveness and its role in shaping public perception.

The significance of studying political speeches through a pragmatic lens extends beyond academic interest. In an era of widespread misinformation, political polarisation, and declining trust in institutions, citizens need critical tools to evaluate political communication. Pragmatic analysis illuminates how language works to persuade, manipulate, or inspire, empowering citizens to engage more thoughtfully with political discourse. Furthermore, for political communicators, speechwriters, and leaders themselves, understanding the pragmatic dimensions of effective communication can enhance their ability to connect with audiences authentically and achieve genuine understanding.

Previous studies have examined Nigerian political speeches from various linguistic perspectives. Researchers such as Adetunji (2006), Oha (2010), and Ajayi (2018) have conducted analyses of inaugural addresses, budget speeches, and national day broadcasts, exploring features such as metaphor, ideology, and discourse strategies. However, there remains a gap in focused pragmatic analysis of New Year speeches, particularly those delivered by President Tinubu. This study addresses this gap by providing a systematic pragmatic analysis of the 2026 New Year speech, contributing to the growing body of knowledge on Nigerian political discourse and offering insights that may inform both scholarly understanding and practical communication.

### Statement of the Research Problem

Despite the centrality of presidential speeches to national political life, there exists limited systematic analysis of the pragmatic strategies employed by Nigerian leaders to achieve their communicative goals. Citizens often respond to presidential addresses emotionally or ideologically without fully understanding how language works to shape those responses. This lack of critical awareness leaves the public vulnerable to manipulation and diminishes the quality of democratic discourse. Furthermore, political communicators may rely on intuition rather than principled understanding of effective communication, potentially limiting the impact of their messages.

The researchers are aware of several studies on Nigerian political discourse. For example, he is aware of the works of researchers such as Ademilokun (2016), who examined rhetorical strategies in Nigerian presidential debates; Oyeboade and Unuabonah (2018), who analysed pragmatic acts in State of the State addresses; and Babatunde and Odepidan (2019), who studied discourse strategies in inaugural speeches. However, these studies have concentrated primarily on campaign speeches, inaugural addresses, or specific policy announcements, leaving New Year speeches relatively understudied. Furthermore, while existing research has examined various linguistic features, there is a need for integrated pragmatic analysis that systematically applies multiple pragmatic frameworks—speech act theory, politeness theory, and deixis—to a single text.

This research aims to address the gap in knowledge by conducting a thorough pragmatic analysis of President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's 2026 New Year speech. In studying the speech acts, politeness strategies, and deictic expressions employed by the President, this study seeks to uncover the underlying mechanisms through which political language achieves its persuasive and relational goals. The findings will contribute to scholarly understanding of Nigerian political discourse while offering practical insights for communication practitioners and critical tools for citizen engagement.

### Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on three complementary pragmatic theories: Speech Act Theory, Politeness Theory, and Deixis Theory. Speech Act Theory, originally developed by Austin (1962) and later extended by Searle (1969, 1976), posits that utterances are not merely statements of fact but perform actions in themselves. Austin distinguished between locutionary acts (the act of saying something), illocutionary acts (the act performed in saying something, such as promising, warning, or asserting), and perlocutionary acts (the effects achieved by saying something). Searle (1976) further classified illocutionary acts into five categories: assertives (committing the speaker to the truth of a proposition), directives (attempts to get the hearer to do something), commissives (committing the speaker to future action), expressives (expressing psychological states), and declarations (bringing about changes in reality through utterance). In political speeches, speech acts function to construct reality, establish authority, and mobilise audiences. President Tinubu's assertions about economic progress, directives for national action, and expressions of gratitude all constitute performative acts that shape the political landscape.

Politeness Theory, developed by Brown and Levinson (1987), provides a framework for understanding how speakers manage interpersonal relationships through language. The theory centres on the concept of "face"—the public self-image that every person claims for themselves. Face comprises positive face (the desire for approval and appreciation) and negative face (the desire for autonomy and freedom from imposition). Politeness strategies

include positive politeness (attending to the hearer's positive face needs through expressions of solidarity, approval, and inclusion) and negative politeness (attending to the hearer's negative face needs through hedges, apologies, and deference). In political discourse, politeness strategies are crucial for managing the leader-citizen relationship, softening directives, and maintaining legitimacy. President Tinubu's use of inclusive pronouns, expressions of shared identity, and respectful address forms can be understood as strategic politeness work.

Deixis Theory, as articulated by Levinson (1983) and Fillmore (1997), examines how language encodes the context of utterance through deictic expressions that "point to" features of the communicative situation. Deixis is categorised into person deixis (pronouns and other expressions referring to participants, such as "I," "you," "we"), temporal deixis (expressions referring to time, such as "now," "today," "2026"), spatial deixis (expressions referring to location, such as "here," "this country," "Nigeria"), and social deixis (expressions encoding social relationships, such as titles and honorifics). Deictic choices in political speeches position the speaker in relation to the audience, construct temporal frameworks for understanding achievements and plans, and establish spatial boundaries of national identity. President Tinubu's strategic deployment of "we" to include or exclude, his references to "2026" as a temporal landmark, and his invocation of "Nigeria" as a spatial entity all constitute significant deictic work.

The integration of these three theories provides a comprehensive analytical framework for examining President Tinubu's New Year speech. Speech Act Theory illuminates what the President is doing with words—asserting, directing, commissing, expressing, and declaring. Politeness Theory reveals how the President manages the relational dimension of communication, attending to citizens' face needs while pursuing his rhetorical goals. Deixis Theory uncovers how the President positions himself and his audience in time, space, and social relationships. Together, these theories enable a rich, multidimensional understanding of the speech's pragmatic functioning.

## Literature Review

### The Concept of Pragmatics

Pragmatics is a branch of linguistics concerned with the study of language use in context. Unlike semantics, which focuses on the literal meaning of words and sentences, pragmatics examines how meaning is constructed and interpreted in actual communicative situations. According to Mey (2001, p. 6), "pragmatics studies the use of language in human communication as determined by the conditions of society." This definition emphasises the social dimension of pragmatics, recognising that language use is always embedded in broader social contexts and shaped by social norms, relationships, and institutions.

Crystal (2008, p. 379) defines pragmatics as "the study of language from the point of view of users, especially of the choices they make, the constraints they encounter in using language in social interaction and the effects their use of language has on other participants in the act of communication." This definition highlights several key aspects of pragmatics: the focus on language users, the recognition of choice and constraint in communication, and attention to the effects of language on interlocutors. These concerns are particularly relevant to political discourse, where speakers make strategic choices under various constraints (political, institutional, rhetorical) to achieve specific effects on diverse audiences.

Thomas (1995, p. 22) offers a complementary perspective, describing pragmatics as "meaning in interaction." This formulation emphasises that meaning is not simply encoded by speakers and decoded by hearers but is dynamically negotiated through interaction. In political

speeches, although the format is largely monologic, the speaker is nonetheless engaged in implicit interaction with audiences, anticipating their responses, addressing their concerns, and attempting to shape their interpretations.

### **Key Concepts in Pragmatics**

**Speech Acts:** Speech acts constitute a fundamental concept in pragmatic theory. Austin (1962) observed that when people speak, they do not merely describe the world but perform actions—they promise, warn, apologise, congratulate, assert, and request. Searle (1969) systematised speech act theory, proposing that speech acts follow constitutive rules and can be classified into categories. The illocutionary force of an utterance—what the speaker is doing in uttering it—is central to speech act analysis. In political discourse, speech acts perform crucial functions: presidents assert facts about the state of the nation, direct citizens toward desired behaviours, commit themselves and their administrations to future actions, express emotions and attitudes, and through declarations, enact new realities (such as declaring a year open).

**Politeness:** Politeness in pragmatics refers to the strategies speakers use to manage interpersonal relationships and maintain social harmony. Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory of politeness, built on Goffman's (1967) concept of face, remains the most influential framework. Face-threatening acts (FTAs) are utterances that potentially damage the hearer's positive face (desire for approval) or negative face (desire for autonomy). Speakers employ politeness strategies to mitigate FTAs: positive politeness strategies emphasise solidarity and shared identity, while negative politeness strategies show respect for the hearer's autonomy through hedging, apologies, or indirectness. In presidential addresses, directives to citizens (such as calls to unity or action) threaten negative face and therefore require politeness work. Expressions of shared identity and inclusive language serve positive politeness functions.

**Deixis:** Deixis concerns the ways in which language encodes features of the context of utterance. Levinson (1983) identifies five categories: person deixis (I, you, we, they), spatial deixis (here, there, this, that), temporal deixis (now, then, today, tomorrow), social deixis (honorifics, titles, address forms), and discourse deixis (references to portions of the ongoing discourse). Deictic expressions are "egocentric"—their interpretation depends on the speaker's perspective at the time of utterance. In political speeches, deictic choices position the speaker in relation to audiences, construct temporal frameworks for understanding past achievements and future plans, and establish spatial boundaries of national identity. The strategic use of "we" can include or exclude, creating solidarity or distance.

**Implicature:** Grice's (1975) theory of conversational implicature explains how speakers can mean more than they say and how hearers can infer intended meanings beyond literal expression. Grice proposed the Cooperative Principle and its associated maxims (Quantity, Quality, Relation, Manner) as guidelines for efficient communication. When speakers apparently flout these maxims, hearers infer implicatures—additional meanings that preserve the assumption of cooperation. In political discourse, implicature allows speakers to communicate sensitive messages indirectly, to imply criticism without explicit attack, and to suggest meanings that can be plausibly denied.

### **Political Discourse Analysis**

Political discourse analysis examines how language functions in political contexts. According to van Dijk (1997, p. 11), political discourse is "a genre of discourse which is political in the sense that it is enacted in political settings by political actors for political purposes." This definition emphasises the institutional and functional dimensions of political

discourse. Political speeches, debates, interviews, and documents are all sites where power is enacted, ideologies are reproduced, and social realities are constructed.

Fairclough (2000) emphasises the role of language in the "technologisation" of politics—the increasing professionalisation of political communication, where language is strategically deployed to manage public opinion and construct particular versions of reality. New Labour's Third Way discourse in the UK exemplifies how political language can reshape ideological landscapes and create new political subjectivities. In the Nigerian context, political discourse analysis has examined how leaders construct national identity, manage ethnic and religious diversity, and legitimise their authority.

Chilton and Schäffner (2002) propose four strategic functions of political discourse: coercion (using language to compel or constrain), resistance/opposition/protest (challenging dominant discourses), deception/manipulation (using language to mislead or control), and legitimisation/delegitimation (constructing or undermining authority). These functions operate simultaneously in political speeches, with presidents working to legitimise their administrations while potentially delegitimising opponents, to persuade rather than coerce, and to present their version of reality as truthful and authoritative.

### **Previous Studies on Nigerian Political Speeches**

Adetunji (2006) conducted a pragmatic analysis of Nigerian presidential inaugural speeches, examining the speech acts and politeness strategies employed by successive Nigerian leaders. The study found that inaugural speeches are characterised by a high frequency of commissive speech acts, as presidents commit themselves to future actions and policy directions. Politeness strategies, particularly positive politeness through inclusive pronouns, were found to be crucial for establishing rapport with diverse national audiences.

Oha (2010) analysed the discourse of Nigerian presidential broadcasts during national emergencies, examining how language is used to manage crises and maintain public confidence. The study revealed that such broadcasts employ a range of pragmatic strategies, including direct address forms to create intimacy, euphemism to soften negative information, and promises of decisive action to restore confidence. The analysis demonstrated how pragmatic choices are shaped by the exigencies of crisis communication.

Ajayi (2018) examined rhetorical strategies in Nigerian presidential budget speeches, focusing on how presidents construct economic reality and justify policy choices. The study identified recurring patterns of metaphor (particularly journey and building metaphors), appeals to expertise and authority, and strategic use of numerical data to create impressions of competence and control. The analysis showed how economic discourse is never merely technical but always serves rhetorical and political purposes.

Oyebode and Unuabonah (2018) analysed pragmatic acts in Nigerian State of the State addresses, drawing on Mey's (2001) theory of pragmatic acts. The study revealed how state governors use language to perform a range of social actions—thanking, acknowledging, promising, warning, and appealing—all within the constraints of the genre. The analysis highlighted the importance of context in shaping pragmatic choices and the ways in which governors navigate the competing demands of different audiences.

Babatunde and Odepidan (2019) studied discourse strategies in Nigerian presidential inaugural speeches, focusing on how presidents construct their identities and relationships with citizens. The analysis revealed patterns of pronoun use, metaphor, and intertextuality that work to establish legitimacy, create solidarity, and position the president within national narratives.

The study demonstrated the value of integrating multiple analytical frameworks—critical discourse analysis, pragmatics, and rhetorical analysis—for understanding political discourse.

### **Methodology**

This study employed a qualitative research design, specifically content analysis, to examine the pragmatic features of President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's 2026 New Year speech. The theoretical framework integrated Speech Act Theory (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969, 1976), Politeness Theory (Brown & Levinson, 1987), and Deixis Theory (Levinson, 1983; Fillmore, 1997) to provide a comprehensive analytical lens. A purposive sampling technique was adopted to select the complete text of President Tinubu's 2026 New Year speech, delivered on January 1, 2026, and officially released by the Presidency. The speech was chosen due to its significance as a major national address and its representation of the New Year speech genre in Nigerian political discourse. Data were analysed qualitatively using thematic content analysis, with emphasis on speech act categories, politeness strategies, and deictic expressions. Direct quotations from the speech are referenced by line numbers corresponding to the numbered paragraphs in the speech text. This methodological approach enabled a comprehensive understanding of how President Tinubu pragmatically constructs meaning, manages relationships with citizens, and achieves his communicative goals through strategic language use.

### **Data Presentation and Analysis**

This section presents a systematic analysis of President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's 2026 New Year speech, organised according to the three research objectives: identification and analysis of speech acts, examination of politeness strategies, and analysis of deictic expressions.

#### **Speech Acts in President Tinubu's 2026 New Year Speech**

Speech acts constitute the fundamental actions that President Tinubu performs through his utterances. Following Searle's (1976) classification, this analysis identifies assertives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declarations within the speech.

**Assertives:** Assertives commit the speaker to the truth of a proposition and include statements, claims, reports, and descriptions. President Tinubu employs assertives extensively to inform citizens about achievements and the state of the nation. In lines 4-5, he asserts: "We closed 2025 on a strong note. Despite the policies to fight inflation, Nigeria recorded a robust GDP growth each quarter, with annualised growth expected to exceed 4 per cent for the year. We maintained trade surpluses and achieved greater exchange rate stability. Inflation declined steadily and reached below 15 per cent, in line with our target." These assertions perform the illocutionary force of reporting achievements, constructing a narrative of progress and competence. The factual tone (supported by specific figures: "4 per cent," "15 per cent") enhances credibility and reinforces the administration's claim to effective governance.

Line 6 contains another assertive: "Supported by sound monetary policy management, our foreign reserves stood at \$45.4 billion as of December 29, 2025, providing a substantial buffer against external shocks for the Naira." The assertion attributes the positive outcome to "sound monetary policy management," implicitly claiming credit for the administration's policies. The specific date and figure ("December 29, 2025," "\$45.4 billion") lend precision and authority to the claim. Similarly, line 7 asserts: "In the third quarter of 2025, FDI rose to \$720 million, up from \$90 million in the preceding quarter, reflecting renewed investor confidence in Nigeria's economic direction, which global credit rating agencies, including Moody's, Fitch, and Standard & Poor's, have consistently affirmed and applauded." This

assertion performs multiple functions: reporting positive economic indicators, attributing them to "renewed investor confidence," and legitimising this interpretation through reference to authoritative third parties (Moody's, Fitch, S&P).

**Directives:** Directives are attempts by the speaker to get the hearer to do something. In presidential speeches, directives must be carefully managed to respect citizens' autonomy while motivating action. Line 16 contains a clear directive: "To achieve our objectives in 2026, we must all play our part. Nation-building is a shared responsibility. We must stand together in unity and purpose, uphold patriotism, and serve our country with honour and integrity in our respective roles. Let us resolve to be better citizens, better neighbours, and better stewards of our nation." The directive force is encoded through modal verbs ("must") and the hortatory "let us" construction. However, the directive is mitigated through several strategies: the inclusive "we" positions the President as also subject to the directive; the appeal to shared responsibility frames the directive as cooperation rather than imposition; the generalised content ("better citizens, better neighbours") allows individual interpretation.

Line 17 contains an indirect directive embedded within a wish: "May God continue to bless and protect our beloved country, keep our troops safe and destroy the enemies bent on disrupting our national peace, security and stability." While primarily an expressive (a wish), this utterance implicitly directs divine action and, through the public articulation of the wish, invites citizens to share in the sentiment and perhaps to act in ways consistent with protecting national peace.

**Commissives:** Commissives commit the speaker to future action. President Tinubu employs commissives to signal his administration's intentions and to build expectations among citizens. Line 4 states: "As we enter 2026, our focus is on consolidating these gains and continuing to build a resilient, sustainable, inclusive, and growth-oriented economy." The commitment to "consolidating" and "continuing to build" constitutes a commissive act, though its force is somewhat hedged by the passive construction ("our focus is on") rather than a direct "I/we will" formulation.

Line 8 contains a stronger commissive: "In that address, I emphasised that our administration has implemented critical reforms that are laying a solid foundation for long-term stability and prosperity. With patience, fiscal discipline, and unity of purpose, Nigeria will emerge in 2026 stronger and better positioned for sustained growth." The commitment to Nigeria's emergence as "stronger and better positioned" is presented as a prediction but carries commissive force, implicitly promising that the administration will continue the policies that will bring about this outcome.

Line 14 offers a more specific commissive: "We will accelerate the implementation of the Renewed Hope Ward Development Programme, aiming to bring at least 10 million Nigerians into productive economic activity by empowering at least 1,000 people in each of the 8,809 wards across the country." The explicit "We will" formulation, combined with specific targets ("10 million Nigerians," "1,000 people in each of the 8,809 wards"), creates a strong commissive that invites scrutiny and creates accountability. The specificity enhances credibility but also increases political risk if targets are not met.

**Expressives:** Expressives convey the speaker's psychological state. President Tinubu employs expressives to express gratitude, optimism, and shared sentiment with citizens. Line 2 opens with an expressive: "I welcome you all to 2026, with gratitude to God and confidence in our collective resolve that this new year will be a more prosperous one for our nation, our citizens, and all who call Nigeria home." The expression of "gratitude to God" performs religious

identity work, aligning the President with Nigeria's predominantly religious population. The expression of "confidence in our collective resolve" performs positive face work, affirming citizens' capacity for collective action.

Line 11 contains an expressive acknowledgment: "My fellow Nigerians, the path of reform is never easy, but it is necessary. We remain mindful that economic progress must be accompanied by security and peace." The acknowledgment that reform is "never easy" expresses empathy with citizens who may be experiencing hardship, while the assertion of necessity expresses the administration's commitment to continue despite difficulties.

Line 17 contains expressives of blessing and wish: "Fellow Nigerians, I wish you all a peaceful, productive, and prosperous New Year. May God continue to bless and protect our beloved country, keep our troops safe and destroy the enemies bent on disrupting our national peace, security and stability." The wish for citizens' well-being performs positive politeness, while the invocation of divine blessing aligns the President with religious sensibilities and expresses shared hopes for the nation.

**Declarations:** Declarations bring about changes in reality through utterance. While less common in political speeches than in ceremonial contexts, certain utterances in the speech perform declarative functions. Line 1, "Fellow Compatriots," performs the declarative function of constituting the audience as a national community, addressing diverse individuals as members of a unified collective. Line 18, "Happy New Year to you all," performs the declarative function of inaugurating the new year in a ceremonial sense, pronouncing the year open and wishing it well. The signature and date in lines 19-22 perform documentary functions, authenticating the speech as an official presidential address.

### **Politeness Strategies in President Tinubu's 2026 New Year Speech**

Politeness strategies manage the interpersonal relationship between President Tinubu and his diverse audience, attending to citizens' positive face (desire for approval and inclusion) and negative face (desire for autonomy and freedom from imposition).

**Positive Politeness Strategies:** Positive politeness attends to the hearer's desire for approval, solidarity, and shared identity. President Tinubu employs extensive positive politeness throughout the speech. The repeated use of inclusive address forms—"Fellow Compatriots" (line 1), "My fellow Nigerians" (line 11), "Fellow Nigerians" (line 17)—creates solidarity and affirms shared national identity. These address forms construct the President not as a distant authority but as a fellow citizen sharing in the national condition.

The pervasive use of inclusive pronouns, particularly "we," "our," and "us," constitutes a major positive politeness strategy. Line 2 speaks of "our collective resolve," line 4 of "our focus," line 5 of "our target," line 8 of "our administration," line 11 of "We remain mindful," line 16 of "our objectives," "our part," and "our nation." This inclusive language constructs the President and citizens as participants in national development, sharing goals, challenges, and responsibilities. Even when reporting achievements, the inclusive "we" ("We closed 2025 on a strong note") allows citizens to share in the success, enhancing positive face.

Expressions of shared sentiment and experience also serve positive politeness. Line 11 acknowledges that "the path of reform is never easy," expressing empathy with citizens who may be experiencing hardship. This acknowledgment validates citizens' experiences and demonstrates that the President understands their situation, enhancing solidarity. The expression of confidence in "our collective resolve" (line 2) affirms citizens' positive face by expressing faith in their capacities.

The use of religious references—"gratitude to God" (line 2), "May God continue to bless and protect our beloved country" (line 17)—serves positive politeness by aligning the President with the religious values of the majority of Nigerians. These references construct shared identity around religious faith, even while remaining sufficiently general to include diverse religious traditions.

**Negative Politeness Strategies:** Negative politeness attends to the hearer's desire for autonomy and freedom from imposition. In a presidential address, directives to citizens inherently threaten negative face, requiring mitigation strategies. President Tinubu employs several negative politeness strategies to soften directive force.

Line 16 contains the speech's most explicit directive: "To achieve our objectives in 2026, we must all play our part." The directive is mitigated through several negative politeness strategies. First, the use of inclusive "we" includes the President within the scope of the directive, reducing the sense of imposition on citizens alone. Second, the justification ("To achieve our objectives") provides a reason for the directive, respecting citizens' need for explanation rather than arbitrary command. Third, the generalised content ("play our part") allows citizens autonomy in determining how to fulfil the directive, rather than imposing specific behaviours.

The hortatory "let us" construction ("Let us resolve to be better citizens, better neighbours, and better stewards of our nation") serves as a negative politeness strategy by framing the directive as a collective suggestion rather than an imposition from above. The "let us" form includes the speaker and hearer together, reducing the sense of hierarchical directive.

The extensive use of assertives about achievements before issuing directives can be understood as a negative politeness strategy of "giving reasons" or "preparing the ground." By first establishing that the administration has delivered positive results, the President creates a context in which citizens may feel more willing to accept directives, respecting their autonomy to make reasoned judgments rather than simply complying with authority.

**Face-Threatening Acts and Their Mitigation:** Certain utterances in the speech could threaten citizens' face and therefore require particular mitigation. The acknowledgment of security threats (lines 11-13) potentially threatens citizens' positive face by reminding them of the nation's vulnerabilities and the administration's limitations in providing complete security. The President mitigates this by emphasising actions taken: "decisive actions were taken against terrorist targets" (line 12), "Our Armed Forces have since sustained operations" (line 12), and commitments to future action: "our security and intelligence agencies will deepen cooperation" (line 13). The acknowledgment of threats thus becomes an opportunity to demonstrate responsiveness and commitment, potentially enhancing rather than threatening citizens' confidence.

The reference to "enemies bent on disrupting our national peace, security and stability" (line 17) constructs an external threat against which the nation can unite. This potentially threatening content is transformed into an opportunity for positive politeness through the construction of shared opposition to a common enemy, enhancing in-group solidarity.

### **Deictic Expressions in President Tinubu's 2026 New Year Speech**

Deictic expressions anchor the speech in the context of utterance, positioning the speaker, audience, time, and place. Analysis of person, temporal, spatial, and social deixis reveals strategic choices that shape the speech's meaning and effect.

**Person Deixis:** Person deixis concerns the encoding of participant roles in the speech event. The first-person singular "I" appears strategically throughout the speech. Line 2 opens with "I welcome you all to 2026," performing the presidential role of officially greeting the nation. Line 8 references "I presented the 2026 Appropriation Bill," establishing the President's agency in performing constitutional duties. Line 13 contains "I continue to believe," expressing personal conviction on decentralised policing. The limited use of "I" (compared to "we") constructs the President as one who acts on behalf of the nation rather than for personal aggrandisement, while strategic uses establish presidential authority and personal commitment.

The first-person plural "we" dominates the speech, appearing in nearly every paragraph. This inclusive "we" performs crucial political work. In reporting achievements ("We closed 2025 on a strong note" line 5), "we" allows the President to claim credit while sharing success with the broader administration and, by extension, the nation. In expressing commitments ("We will accelerate the implementation" line 14), "we" commits the entire administration, not just the President personally. In acknowledging challenges ("We remain mindful" line 11), "we" demonstrates collective awareness and responsibility. The inclusive "we" also potentially includes citizens, constructing national endeavour as shared enterprise.

The second-person address forms vary strategically. Line 1 addresses "Fellow Compatriots," line 11 "My fellow Nigerians," line 17 "Fellow Nigerians." These variations maintain the basic solidarity address while the possessive "my" in "my fellow Nigerians" adds a note of personal connection. The consistent use of "fellow" constructs the President as sharing identity with citizens rather than standing above them.

**Temporal Deixis:** Temporal deixis locates utterances in time relative to the moment of speaking. The speech is densely packed with temporal references that construct a coherent narrative of past achievement, present action, and future aspiration.

Past achievements are anchored in specific temporal frames: "During 2025" (line 3), "the third quarter of 2025" (line 7), "as of December 29, 2025" (line 6). These specific temporal references lend precision and credibility to claims of progress, allowing citizens to verify and creating a sense of documented achievement.

The present moment is deictically anchored through "now" and "today." Line 2's "I welcome you all to 2026" performs the present act of inauguration. The present tense in line 3 ("we sustained the momentum") and line 4 ("our focus is on") creates continuity between past and future, suggesting ongoing commitment.

Future reference employs various deictic expressions. Line 4 projects "as we enter 2026," line 8 predicts "Nigeria will emerge in 2026 stronger," line 14 promises "We will accelerate." The repeated reference to "2026" as a temporal landmark structures expectations and creates a shared temporal horizon for national endeavour. Line 13's "In 2026" similarly projects future security cooperation.

**Spatial Deixis:** Spatial deixis locates utterances in space relative to the speaker. The speech consistently anchors itself in "Nigeria" as the relevant spatial frame. Line 2 references "our nation, our citizens, and all who call Nigeria home," constructing Nigeria as a place of belonging. Line 7 speaks of "investor confidence in Nigeria's economic direction," spatialising economic discourse. Line 8 references "our administration" and "Nigeria," linking presidential action to national space.

The use of "here" in line 9 ("I commend states that have aligned") implies the speaker's location in Nigeria, though the deictic centre is the presidential office rather than a specific

geographic location. The spatial deixis works to construct Nigeria as a unified national space despite its geographic and ethnic diversity.

Spatial references also construct Nigeria's place in the world. Line 6 references "external shocks," positioning Nigeria within global economic space. Line 7 names "global credit rating agencies, including Moody's, Fitch, and Standard & Poor's," locating Nigeria in international financial space. Line 12 references "international partners, including the United States," and "parts of the Northwest," constructing both international relationships and internal regional specificity.

**Social Deixis:** Social deixis encodes social relationships and identities. The speech's opening address, "Fellow Compatriots" (line 1), encodes a relationship of shared national identity and equal standing. The closing signature, "Bola Ahmed Tinubu, GCFR President, Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces, Federal Republic of Nigeria" (lines 19-21), encodes hierarchical social relationships, asserting presidential authority and the institutional framework of the state.

The use of honorifics and titles throughout the speech—"President Bola Ahmed Tinubu" in the headline, "GCFR" (Grand Commander of the Order of the Federal Republic) in the signature—encodes social status and institutional position. These social deictic markers establish the speaker's authority to speak on behalf of the nation and to make the commitments and assertions contained in the speech.

References to "our Armed Forces" (line 12), "our security and intelligence agencies" (line 13), and "our troops" (line 17) encode institutional relationships and construct these entities as belonging to the nation and deserving of support and protection. The possessive "our" creates social solidarity between citizens and security institutions.

### **Discussion of Findings**

This study was carried out to undertake a pragmatic analysis of President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's 2026 New Year speech. The study drew on three complementary theories: Speech Act Theory, Politeness Theory, and Deixis Theory, providing a robust foundation for analysing the speech's pragmatic dimensions.

The analysis of speech acts revealed that President Tinubu employs a strategic mix of assertives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declarations to achieve his communicative goals. Assertives dominate the economic progress section (lines 3-7), where the President reports specific achievements with precise figures, constructing a narrative of competent governance. This finding aligns with Searle's (1976) assertion that assertives commit the speaker to the truth of propositions and with Adetunji's (2006) observation that Nigerian presidential speeches frequently employ assertives to establish credibility. The prevalence of assertives in the early sections of the speech serves an important rhetorical function: by first establishing that the administration has delivered results, the President creates a foundation of trust and credibility that supports subsequent directives and commissives. Directives, while less frequent, are strategically positioned in the speech's latter sections (lines 16-17). The careful mitigation of directives through inclusive language and justification reflects Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness framework, where face-threatening acts require redressive action. The President's use of "we must" rather than "you must" and the framing of directives as shared responsibility ("Nation-building is a shared responsibility") demonstrates sophisticated awareness of the need to balance authoritative guidance with respect for citizens' autonomy. Commissives in the speech range from general commitments ("our focus is on consolidating these gains") to specific promises with measurable targets

("bring at least 10 million Nigerians into productive economic activity by empowering at least 1,000 people in each of the 8,809 wards"). The specificity of the latter creates stronger commissive force and greater accountability, consistent with Searle's (1969) observation that the propositional content of commissives commits the speaker to future action. The inclusion of specific targets also serves a legitimising function, suggesting that the administration has detailed plans rather than vague aspirations. Expressives perform crucial relational work in the speech, particularly the expressions of gratitude to God, confidence in citizens, and wishes for national well-being. These expressives align with Brown and Levinson's (1987) positive politeness strategies, attending to citizens' face needs by expressing positive regard and shared sentiment. The religious references specifically perform important cultural work, aligning the President with Nigeria's predominantly religious population and constructing shared identity around faith.

The politeness strategies identified in the speech reveal a careful balance between authority and solidarity. The extensive use of positive politeness—inclusive address forms, the pronoun "we," expressions of shared sentiment, and religious references—constructs the President as a fellow citizen sharing in the national condition rather than a distant authority. This finding aligns with Oha's (2010) observation that Nigerian presidential speeches employ direct address forms to create intimacy and with Babatunde and Odepidan's (2019) analysis of how presidents construct relationships with citizens through inclusive language. Negative politeness strategies, particularly the mitigation of directives, demonstrate respect for citizens' autonomy while still fulfilling the presidential function of guiding national action. The justification of directives ("To achieve our objectives in 2026"), the inclusive framing, and the generalised content all serve to reduce the face-threatening potential of presidential guidance. This careful management of directive force reflects the complex nature of democratic leadership, where authority must be exercised while respecting citizens' status as free agents.

The analysis of deictic expressions revealed strategic choices that position the President, construct temporal frameworks, and establish spatial boundaries of national identity. The dominance of inclusive "we" over singular "I" constructs the President as representing collective endeavour rather than personal ambition, while strategic uses of "I" (particularly in expressing personal convictions and reporting constitutional actions) establish individual authority when needed. This finding aligns with Levinson's (1983) analysis of person deixis as encoding participant roles and with Chilton's (2004) observation that pronoun choices in political discourse construct relationships of inclusion and exclusion. Temporal deixis in the speech constructs a coherent narrative structure: past achievements anchored in specific dates, present action expressed through present tense verbs, and future commitments projected through modal and future expressions. This temporal structuring creates a sense of momentum and continuity, suggesting that the administration's work is part of an ongoing, purposeful endeavour. The repeated reference to "2026" as a temporal landmark creates shared orientation toward the future, inviting citizens to participate in the national project. Spatial deixis consistently anchors the speech in "Nigeria" as the relevant frame, constructing national unity despite diversity. References to specific regions ("Northwest," "Northeast") acknowledge internal geographic differentiation while maintaining the overarching national frame. References to international actors and global economic conditions position Nigeria within world space, constructing the nation as an actor on the global stage.

## Summary

This study is a pragmatic analysis of President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's 2026 New Year speech. The following are the summary of the findings:

1. The speech employs a range of speech acts, with assertives dominating the economic progress sections to establish credibility through specific achievements and figures. Directives appear primarily in later sections, carefully mitigated through inclusive language and justification. Commissives range from general commitments to specific promises with measurable targets. Expressives perform relational work through gratitude, confidence, and wishes, while declarations frame the speech as an official presidential act.
2. Politeness strategies in the speech balance authority with solidarity. Positive politeness predominates through inclusive address forms ("Fellow Nigerians"), the pervasive use of "we" and "our," expressions of shared sentiment, and religious references that align the President with citizens' values. Negative politeness strategies mitigate the face-threatening force of directives through inclusive framing, justification, and generalised content that respects citizens' autonomy in determining how to respond.
3. Deictic expressions strategically position the President, construct temporal frameworks, and establish spatial boundaries. Person deixis favours inclusive "we" while deploying strategic "I" for authority and commitment. Temporal deixis anchors past achievements in specific dates, expresses present action, and projects future commitments, creating a coherent narrative of progress. Spatial deixis consistently references "Nigeria" as the national frame while acknowledging regional specificity and international positioning.

## Conclusion

The study concludes that President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's 2026 New Year speech demonstrates sophisticated pragmatic awareness, employing language strategically to achieve multiple communicative goals simultaneously. Through careful deployment of speech acts, the President constructs a narrative of competent governance, commits to future action, guides citizen behaviour, and expresses shared sentiment with the nation. Through politeness strategies, he balances the inherent tensions of presidential discourse—the need to exercise authority while respecting citizens' autonomy, to lead while maintaining solidarity, to direct while appearing cooperative. Through deictic choices, he positions himself appropriately in relation to citizens, constructs a coherent temporal framework for understanding national progress, and establishes the spatial boundaries of national identity. The speech exemplifies how political language, when pragmatically analysed, reveals itself as a finely crafted instrument for constructing reality, managing relationships, and mobilising collective action toward shared national goals.

## Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are suggested:

1. Political speechwriters should maintain and deepen the strategic use of inclusive pronouns and address forms in presidential addresses, as these serve crucial positive politeness functions that foster national unity and solidarity. The careful balance between "I" and "we" demonstrated in this speech provides a model for projecting both personal leadership and collective endeavour.
2. Media organisations and educational institutions should incorporate pragmatic analysis into media literacy programmes, enhancing citizens' ability to critically evaluate political discourse. Understanding how speech acts, politeness strategies, and deictic

expressions work to shape meaning and influence audiences would empower citizens to engage more thoughtfully with political communication.

3. Political communication training programmes should emphasise the importance of mitigating directives through politeness strategies, as demonstrated in this speech. The careful framing of calls to national action as shared responsibility rather than imposition from above models effective democratic leadership communication.
4. Researchers should extend pragmatic analysis to other genres of Nigerian political discourse, including state governors' addresses, legislative speeches, and political party communications, to develop a comprehensive understanding of how pragmatic strategies vary across political contexts and speaker positions.
5. Government communication agencies should develop guidelines for official communications that incorporate insights from pragmatic analysis, ensuring that presidential and ministerial addresses achieve their intended effects while maintaining appropriate relationships with diverse audiences.

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