

Sociopragmatic Orientations of Politeness Strategies in Chatham House Interviews of Selected Nigerian 2023 Presidential Election Candidates

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Abstract

This article examines politeness strategies deployed by Peter Obi and Bola Ahmed Tinubu in 2023 Chatham House interviews from a pragmatic perspective. Most of the extant engagements of these interviews tended towards general features of political communication, such as rhetorical strategies, framing, and issue positioning, without an in-depth examination of sociopragmatic orientations in which the political actors employ politeness strategically to achieve their communicative objectives. Geoffrey Leech's Politeness Principle and other pragmatic concepts served as the framework. Data were purposively gathered from the Chatham House interviews of Bola Ahmed Tinubu (December 22nd, 2022) and Peter Obi (January 16th, 2023), aired on YouTube (Arise TV). Findings of the study reveal four sociopragmatically constructed politeness maxims deployed by Obi and Tinubu. These are tact, generosity, modesty, and dere-responsibilisation-oriented maxim, deployed to convince Nigerians of their abilities to deliver unifying governance and adhere to the rule of law if elected as president of Nigeria. The two presidential candidates reveal specific areas of divergence and convergence in their linguistic choices while responding to questions during the Chatham House interviews to mitigate their face and that of the audience. Sociopragmatically oriented strategies of politeness offer a great privilege to political actors' identity. The study therefore recommends that public figures should equip themselves with politeness tactics to foreground their desired identity and project themselves as acceptable leaders in society.

Keywords: Sociopragmatics, Politeness strategies, Dere-responsibilisation, Chatham House Interviews, Peter Obi and Ahmed Tinubu

Background of the Study

Social-pragmatic orientations of politeness strategies encompass how speakers adjust their language based on social context, power dynamics and cultural norms to manage interpersonal relationships and "face" (self-esteem). These strategies, which are often classified into positive, negative, bald on-record, or off-record techniques, are chosen based on social distance, relative

power and the weight of the imposition, aiming to minimise conflict or show respect. Brown & Levinson (1987, p. 55).

Language is a phenomenon which continues to occupy a pride of place in the affairs of men. It can be rightly argued that the ability to sustain or threaten the peace, unity and stability of human society depends largely on the adequate or inadequate deployment of this divine linguistic ability. Human language operates in two important forms of usage: the spoken and written, with each form possessing different characteristics. According to Lemke (2005:7), communication is described as the social activity of making meaning with language and other symbolic systems in some particular kind of situation or setting. Lemke's view immediately raises the consciousness that language is one of the many ingredients required for effective communication. While the foregoing describes communication in relation to the context of usage, Lemke (2010:21) explained communication as a process which transfers information, messages, thoughts and ideas from a sender through a channel to a receiver. Thus, in a communicative act, the speaker considers the receiver in crafting his/her message. This viewpoint underlies the fact that humans have the unique ability to spice a communicative act with the necessary linguistic ingredients to ensure the success of the communicative activity.

One important question that has continually triggered academic interest among language scholars is the need to unravel the different underlying motives behind our use of language. In other words, language scholars have not only identified the creative tendencies of human language but have gone steps further by identifying and unraveling the pattern of usage and the attendant variables that contribute to the so-called linguistic creativity in a particular discourse genre. Focusing on the importance of language in political communication, Teng (2015) argued that every political objective- the articulation of a candidate's ideology as well as the superiority of his/her political arguments can only be expressed through the instrumentality of language. It is therefore apt to claim that in politics, language is actually deployed beyond its primary objectives of describing and explaining events. Its application extends to the secondary level, where political views and ideas are created. Political activities can be viewed as covering a wide range of communicative events.

Politeness, as conceptualised by Geoffrey Leech, plays a pivotal role in maintaining social harmony and navigating sensitive interactions. The Politeness Theory, which centres on the concept of "face," offers a framework for understanding how individuals mitigate Face-

Threatening Acts (FTAs) through strategies. This is particularly relevant in politics, where contentious topics risk damaging public faces.

Despite the extensive research on rhetorical strategies in political communication, there is limited exploration into how politeness strategies are deployed by political actors to navigate challenging questions and preserve their public persona. In high-stakes settings like international interviews, such as those conducted at the Chatham House, these strategies are even more critical as they shape not only domestic but also global perceptions.

The 2023 Nigerian presidential election highlighted the importance of effective political discourse. Two prominent candidates, Bola Ahmed Tinubu and Peter Obi, drew international attention for their distinct leadership styles and policies. Tinubu, noted for his economic reforms in Lagos State and strong political base, faced allegations of corruption and questions about his qualifications. Obi, on the other hand, earned recognition for his pragmatic approach and appeal among the youths, challenging the status quo as a Labour Party candidate.

Their interviews at Chatham House, a global platform known for candid discourse on pressing issues, provided a unique opportunity to analyse how both candidates employed politeness strategies to articulate their policies and manage face threatening acts, FTAs. These interviews presented both opportunities to connect with a global audience and challenges in navigating tough questions while preserving their political narratives.

This study, therefore, seeks to fill a gap in the literature by critically and pragmatically examining the sociopragmatics of politeness strategies employed by the two political actors during their Chatham House interviews. The study draws its resources from the frameworks of Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory and Leech's principles of politeness as it aims to provide insights into how politeness functions in Nigerian political discourse within a high-stakes, culturally diverse context.

Statement of the Problem

Nigeria has witnessed continuous democratic governance since 1994, after the return of Democracy from military rule. During that period, different governments were brought into power through elections and electioneering campaigns. However, thus far, violence usually erupts while politicians engage in political campaigns, as a result of which private and public properties are wasted, people's self-worth is compromised, long-established relationships are broken, and

sometimes even lives are lost. These occurred as a result of the use of provocative language that stirred violent and unlawful behaviour for political reasons.

Over the years, existing literature (Adegbija; 2004: Ayoola, 2019: Eiloghosa, 2024: Lydia & Mowarin, 2024; Oduola and Oshin, 2024) have tended to focus on more general features of political communication, such as rhetorical strategies, framing, and issue positioning, without delving deeply into the sociopragmatic orientations in which the political actors employ politeness strategically to achieve their communicative objectives.

Despite the influx of scholarly works on politeness in political interviews, as examined above, there is a conspicuous gap in the interrogation of the socio-pragmatic import of these politeness strategies in Chatham House interviews on presidential aspirants in Nigeria, just as this current study is devoted to doing. This study therefore explores the socio-pragmatic orientations of politeness strategies in Chatham House interviews of two selected Nigerian 2023 presidential election candidates, Peter Obi and Ahmed Tinubu.

Aim and Objectives

This study focuses on the sociopragmatic orientations of politeness strategies in Chatham House interviews of selected Nigerian 2023 presidential candidates. The following objectives of the study are set to:

- i. Identify and discuss sociopragmatic strategies of politeness in the interviews.
- ii. Compare and contrast the deployment of these strategies by the candidates; and
- iii. Evaluate the pragmatic implications of these strategies for political discourse.

Scope of the study

This study focuses on two selected Nigerian political candidates who were interviewed at the Chatham House in London in the buildup to the Presidential elections of 2023, namely Peter Obi and Ahmed Tinubu. The choice of these selections was hinged on the unique political ideologies. Tinubu represents traditional politics that believes in the spirit of teamwork, while Peter Obi represents the voice of the youths; they both have conflicting political ideologies. The interviews span 2022 and 2023. This study is designed to examine the sociopragmatic orientations of politeness strategies in Chatham House interviews of selected Nigerian 2023 presidential election candidates because of the heightened political atmosphere as well as the evident deployment of

pragmatic strategies of politeness, which the two political actors (Obi and Tinubu) utilised in their interviews.

Significance of the study

The study valuably contributes to the pragmatic approach in the examination of orientations of politeness strategies used among the political actors during electioneering campaigns and interviews, as can be seen in the Chatham House 2023 presidential interviews. Political candidates usually orient their communication with politeness either consciously or unconsciously by deploying certain pragmatic strategies of politeness with the intention of gaining the interest of their electorate, especially among the international communities who become interested in the political leadership of Nigeria due to its place on the continent. The research essentially contributes to the existing literature on effective communication in political campaigns and how political actors deploy linguistic choices during interviews to protect their self-image.

Literature review

Studies on political communication, particularly media interviews (Daramola, 2008; Odebunmi, 2009; Friedman, 2022; Udoumoh, 2022; Abdulkabir, 2023; Oduola and Oshin, 2024; Agho, 2025), have been deeply examined from various perspectives. Daramola (2008), for example, took a general perspective on the political discourse in Nigeria, paying attention to the functional-semiotic investigation of the statements, responses and comments on national events and political changes. While this study concentrates on the inaugural speech of former military Head of State, Chief Ernest Shonekan, it helps to capture the essence of powerful speeches made in specific political contexts in response to political changes. Odebunmi (2009), which closely relates to this current research, undertakes an analysis of print media political interviews, dwelling on how linguistic politeness is exhibited in Independence Day speeches of past Nigerian Heads of State. Odebunmi's work, like this current study, deployed a combination of Leech's and Brown and Levinson's theories but did not engage live interviews as recorded in the case of Chatham House. Odoumoh's (2022) study focused on campaign speeches not interviews. The work, however, examines politeness manifestations in these campaigns. The difference between Odoumoh's research and this current work is hinged on the mode of the political discourses being campaigns and interviews, respectively. While Oduola and Oshin's (2024) recent paper examines Chatham House interviews, unveiling the construction of interest in Peter Obi's political expressions in pre-

election speeches, the question of politeness was never the focus of their study. Similarly, Agho's (2025) perspective on political discourse is distinct in considering voter behaviour underlined by ideologies projected in campaign speeches. This also further stresses the constant strategic use of language as a tool for navigating their way in public spaces.

Ayodabo (2007&2021) thinks that "hedging and politeness are discussed as essential aspects of the pragmatics of English usage." The paper concludes on the notes that hedging, as an aspect of politeness, can be successful to the extent that the textual and non-textual linguistic contexts offer substantial information to English language users.

From both the studies on political interviews and politeness, there seem to be an overly established lacuna in reconciling these areas in order to bring out how politeness is sociopragmatically oriented. This paper is therefore aimed at addressing the sociopragmatic orientations of politeness strategies in Chatham House interviews of Nigeria's 2023 presidential election candidates, Peter Obi and Bola Ahmed Tinubu, respectively.

Theoretical framework

The study principally leans on Geoffrey Leech's (1983) politeness maxims: Tact, Generosity, Approbation, Modesty, Agreement, and Sympathy. These maxims ensure the management of face in interaction. For instance, tact ensures the minimisation of cost to others while at the same time maximising benefits to others. Generosity minimises benefit to self while maximising cost to self, that is, taking responsibility. Approbation minimises dispraise to others while maximising the praise of others. Modesty maximises praise of self (self-praise) while minimising dispraise of self. Agreement maxim minimises disagreement between self and others, while maximising agreement. Finally, sympathy maxim minimises antipathy while maximising sympathy. Political communication revolves around compliance with these maxims in promoting and validating identity.

Early scholarly works on politeness can be traced to pragmatic scholars like Lakoff (1973), who proposed the rules: do not impose, give options and make the other person feel good, as reasons why participants in a communicative exchange may flout the Gricean maxims. Politeness is a feature of language use that is acquired through the process of socialisation. This is because, according to Holtgraves (2008:10), 'in our day-to-day communication, our words, both spoken and written, are typically directed at people who in their own rights are not abstract entities devoid of feelings, goals, thoughts and values'. Mills (2003:102) described politeness as "a

battery of social skills whose goal is to ensure everyone feels affirmed in a social interaction". Thus, Teng (2015:1689) explained that politeness can be viewed as a major part of a range of pragmatic strategies which can be included under the umbrella of conversation management or relational work. He opined that the politeness strategy is appropriate for any human communication that is goal-oriented. Fraser (1990) is concerned uniquely with scientific analyses of politeness as a general linguistic and pragmatic principle of communication, aimed at the maintenance of smooth social relations and the avoidance of conflict. Brown and Levinson (1987) submitted that politeness is an adornment of human language, more like an icing on the linguistic cake, while on the other hand, politeness can be viewed as an extremely fundamental aspect of human communication, one that language users will definitely be unable to do without.

Methodology

The research adopted a qualitative and descriptive approach to the interpretation of data. The purposive sampling technique was utilised to select from the 2023 Chatham House political interviews with Bola Ahmed Tinubu and Peter Obi, where both actors were meant to discuss their manifestos in the global space. The interviews lasted for the duration of about 1 hour and were transcribed by research assistants. The transcription was later evaluated by the researchers. These interviews were transcribed and qualitatively coded to reveal the politeness strategies. The research is saddled with the main objective of examining the deployment of the pragmatic strategy of politeness by the two aforementioned political actors during the 2023 presidential election. The corpus contains two strands of interviewed separately granted by Peter Obi and Ahmed Tinubu. Obi's full interview (including pre-interview speech) lasted for 1:12:04 minutes, while Ahmed Tinubu's full interview lasted for 1:09:25 (Including his pre-interview speech). However, the question-answer sections that constitute the sessions make the interest of this paper. A total of fourteen (14) interview excerpts were purposively extracted based on the prevalence of politeness resources and the presence of pragmatically charged deployment of language resources. Eight (8) of these excerpts emanated from Peter Obi, while six (6) were attributed to Ahmed Tinubu. The excerpts attributed to Tinubu include questions directed to Tinubu, which he reassigned to members of his team who went with him to the Chatham House. The top-down discourse analytical approach to the presentation and analysis of the selected data.

Analysis and Discussion of Findings

This section analyses the identification and discussion of sociopragmatic strategies of politeness in the interviews, compares and contrasts the deployment of these strategies by the candidates and examines the pragmatic implications of these strategies for political discourse.

Sociopragmatic strategies of politeness

Four sociopragmatic orientations of politeness strategies were identified: tact maxim of politeness, generosity, modesty, and deresponsibilisation. These are explicated within the provision of the principles of politeness.

Tact Maxim of Politeness in the 2023 Obi and Tinubu's Chatham House Interviews

The tact maxim of politeness hinges on the premise of maximising benefits to others rather than to oneself. Obi and Tinubu satisfactorily considered the masses the most important subjects in their 2023 pre-election interviews at the Chatham House. In their interviews, they gave due regard to Nigerians, respecting and seeing them as better than they are. They considered the electorate's power to make either of them the president of Nigeria. The linguistic act which shows politeness in their interviews are obtainable in the excerpts below:

Excerpt 1 (Obi):

Question: ..., how do you intend to implement a pragmatic mechanism for dealing with those societal concerns different from the previous administration?

Response: So as an end, I appeal to all of you.

There is nothing more powerful than an idea whose time has come...

Excerpt 2 (Obi):

Question: ..., if you become, or when you become president sir, could you tell us the sort of three things you would do in the first

Response: ... the time today is to have competent leadership with character, commitment and compassion. And that's what Datti and I are offering you. It's going to be life streamed.

In Excerpt 1 above, Peter Obi uses an indirect act of appealing to minimise imposition, demonstrating tact politeness strategy to reassure the electorate of their relevance in bringing the

candidates into political offices and as such, uses the speech act of appealing to persuade the Nigerian voters to see the need to vote him (the interlocutor) into office. Also, to show Nigerians that he holds them in high esteem and places them above himself on the drawing table of governance, Obi appeals to Nigerians to consider voting for him in the election. Excerpt 2 hinges on the tact maxim, to maximise benefits to others rather than to interlocutors. The speaker deployed this through a linguistic choice of identifying the wants of the Nigerian populace, which is to have competent leadership that possesses the character, commitment and understands the people's needs, such as providing a better system that guarantees them true leadership.

Generosity Maxim of Politeness in the 2023 Obi and Tinubu's Chatham House Interviews

The generosity maxim of politeness stresses the principle of displeasing oneself with a view to pleasing others. Obi deployed the generosity maxim of politeness in his interview to please Nigerians locally and in diaspora who were anxious to hear from him the policies of his governance if voted into power as president in the 2023 general election. Epitome of the generosity maxim of politeness is evinced in Excerpt 3:

Excerpt 3(Obi):

Question: ..., so further, how do you plan to quell the current ethnic tensions, insecurity ravaging our communities and consequently stagnating economic growth and development?

Response: ..., And we would [sic], I've said it before, we would show compassion, we would show love, because there's nothing, you're a leader, don't go away when Bayelsa is under water, don't leave Jigawa to dive, don't say oh I cannot go to Southern Kaduna because there's a problem, don't ... we would show compassion, we would lead from the front. We're not going to walk away...

Excerpt 4(Obi):

Question: ..., "insecurity is a major problem, what are your plans in tackling this? What are your plans in terms of security sector in Nigeria?"

Response: ... and for me Borno is part of Nigeria. I don't want to tell people, oh Borno is insecure, Nigeria is insecure. Like I told the people in Christmas I spent my Christmas with IDP people in Makurdi at Christmas and in New Year, I was in another IDP camp in Abuja. And I've said to them, as long as Nigerians are in IDP, all of us are in IDP.

Excerpt 5(Obi):

Question: ..., if or when you become the next president of Nigeria, would you seek to keep the

current central Bank governor or replace him?

Response: Let me come again go... people are talking about the central bank governor. The problem... first, let me assure you, central bank governor will maintain independence. He will be respected. And again, it is not the problem of the person there. Central bank have a role of monitoring policy. If I'm right. They have a physical space. It's like a, see football. When the person who is supposed to be in the physical space is no longer... it's like you go to a foot... football match and somebody who is supposed to play in a particular wing is no longer there. You find people playing various wing. The weakness of the physical space allows the monetary space to take over and is supporting if there's a weak governance structure. That is why we are able to do what we are sure of doing, where what is happening. So, if you are replacing Godwin and putting somebody with that level of rascality.

Obi's linguistics choices "we would show compassion", "we would show love", "you're a leader, don't go away", "don't leave Jigawa to dive", "don't say oh, I cannot go to Southern Kaduna because there's a problem", "we would lead the front", "we are not going to walk away" epitomised immense generosity of politeness in his interview as a presidential candidate. The linguistic choice was aimed at pleasing Nigerians who have suffered enough of neglect and abandonment, inordinate rule, security challenge, economic crunch, unemployment, hunger, mediocrity and a host of others. Obi maximised the cost of assuaging the pains of Nigerians to his, of the masses if voted into power in the election. This fulfills the condition of Leech's principle of politeness in relation to generosity maxim that states that the speaker must maximise cost to self, and minimise cost to others. Therefore, Obi's interview response has depicted him as generous leader deploying generosity maxim of politeness to communicate to his people. It can be further seen in the excerpt that the interlocutor empathise with the electorates who have suffered bad leadership immensely from the successive government and must be meticulous in the choice of who becomes the subsequent president. He stresses further that he feels what the people feel as he (the interlocutor) is not unaware of the security challenge bedeviling those in the far northern part of Nigeria. Hence in:

Obi in Excerpt 4 deployed the generosity maxim of politeness to sympathise with the victims who are the internally displaced persons in their various camp. The lexical choice deployed in the text such as the personal pronoun "I" and "all of us", implicitly connotes the speaker's inclusivity in

the challenging security situation across the Nigerian geographical space. This inclusive term is capable of making others feel appreciative of the speaker's empathy towards their predicament. The speaker in Excerpt 5 stresses the generosity maxim of politeness to sympathise with the masses on the rot within the financial institution, the Central Bank of Nigeria, whose governor is being blamed. The interlocutor deployed the speech act of assuring to show a strong commitment to addressing the problem. He also empathises with the Central bank governor by protecting his public face that he is not necessarily responsible for the decay in that sector; hence, he (speaker) metaphorically uses the "physical space" of a football match as a lexical choice that describes the scenario of a "weakness in the physical space to allow the monetary space to take over." Therefore, the speaker in the interview has depicted himself as generous candidate deploying generosity maxim of politeness to communicate to his people.

Modesty maxim of politeness strategy

The modesty maxim of politeness submits that the speaker should minimise the self-praise expressions and maximise the self-dispraise expressions. Obi and Tinubu abstained from self-boasting. They desisted from using personal first-person singular pronoun 'I' in the subjective case and "me" in the objective case where the need for the use of the grammatical units was inevitable. They applied the modesty maxim as they either used "we or us" in the subjective and objective cases to avoid self-boasting on the power and authority invested in them as political actors in Nigeria. They also substituted the possessive adjective "my" for "our" to claim that the seat of power belongs to Nigerians. Examples of modesty maxim in the interviews are:

Excerpt 6 (Obi);

Question: How do you deal with the legislators considering that Labour party not in control of the legislative arm of the government?

Response: When I was elected and sworn in as a governor, I had 30 house members not from my party, in fact no one from my party was involved. As long as you're pursuing what is right, everybody would go on with you, because the legislator has secured his place, he knows his people are without jobs and that's what he wants development, what else is he elected to do.

Excerpt 7(Tinubu):

Question: You've served two terms, Mr. Tinubu, already associated with government, why should you president?

Response: I've employed various hands in Lagos, whether you are from Lagos or not, I've encouraged private investment in Lagos more than any other part of the country. In fact, beating the federal in uh, uh, before we took over the reign of regime. Uh, mission, courage, and can-do attitude of an individual is self-given. And I believe I've earned that, throughout the country.

Excerpt 8 (Tinubu):

Question:

... And furthermore, there are issues at the moment running with regards to your identity and with your age, so, I wonder if you could provide some clarity on those issues of your identity and age?

Response: In this excerpt, Bola Tinubu addresses questions about his citizenship and his educational background. He begins by referring to an unnamed rival who has been accused of not being a Nigerian citizen, but quickly distances himself from making it a political attack- "I didn't touch that area" He then turns the focus to his own credentials, stating that Illinois state University has confirmed his graduation and that he has now received a replacement degree certificate. He reinforces his credibility by noting that he trained as an accountant, has an "outstanding recording record", and reached the peak of his career in the private sector, ending with a rhetorical challenge- "who among them can brag about it?"

In Excerpt 6, Obi reflects on his time as the government of his state (Anambra), where he had members of the House of Assembly who were not from his party, yet he was able to work with them. The speaker deployed the modesty maxim of politeness to minimise the self-praise of what he can achieve as an individual but rather maximise the self-dispraise by using the second-person pronoun "you" and the third-person pronoun "he" to show that a leader should know what is right and do it. The interlocutor convincingly demonstrates a high degree of accountability as a leader who loves to do the right thing that will advance societal development, such as creating jobs for the unemployed. Obi demonstrated a mix of modesty and immodesty maxim in his use of "when I was a governor of Anambra state..." In the other way round where, the speaker maximises the self-praise expression and minimise the self-dispraise expression, one can say the immodesty maxim has taken place.

The interlocutor in Excerpt 7 deployed the immodesty maxim of politeness in maximising self-

praise expressions and minimising the self-dispraise expressions, thereby boasting about his self-achievement rather than allowing the Nigerian people to access his leadership achievements as a past governor of Lagos State. The use of the first-person singular pronoun “I” throughout the excerpt clearly indicates evidence of maximising self-praise (immodest) and minimising self-dispraise.

Tact maxim is at play in his linguistic choice presented in Excerpt 8; to avoid commenting on his rival’s citizenship problem, he avoids a potentially face-threatening act that could be seen as personal mudslinging, thereby maintaining a certain level of political decorum. Immodest maxim was seen in “I have reached the pinnacle of my career in the private sector”.

Dere-responsibilisation strategy as a Politeness Strategy for Self Minimisation

One major strategy deployed by Tinubu in the interview is that of deresponsibilisation, where the interlocutor uses the strategy of deresponsibilising by simply delegating his team members to respond to the questions raised by the interviewers. This strategy is neither rooted in Brown and Levinson’s model nor in Leech’s, yet the context of the interview projected it. This agrees with Caffi’s (2002:118) description, “deresponsibilisation”, that is, “*deresponsabilizzazione*” or “deresponsibilities” (2007:159), has to do with the act of avoiding responsibility, or a text associated with “weakened responsibility” (Caffi, 2007: 67). Deresponsibilisation is achieved when a speaker or rhetor consciously and/or deliberately avoids conflict, uses indirectness, and deploys politeness-induced vagueness, which Caffi (2002, 2007) labelled as “bush.” This act symbolises Tinubu’s leadership style. Delegating a question to a team member signals a collaborative governance model, which reassured the electorate that expertise will be shared and decisions will not be centralised in one person; he believes in teamwork. “The unbreakable team” It’s not a sign of weakness in this wise, but framed positively as a demonstration of teamwork.

Excerpt 9 (Ben Ayade, for Tinubu):

Question 1: ... what program do you have for our young people, as you know, eh, most political parties benefit from the, the... uh goodwill of the young people, and so, have you got plans that will generate training, you know...

Question 2: ...so, what are your plans for, for youth, younger people? If you would like to answer the questions, Mr. Tinubu. Please, if we can keep quiet for one conversation here, thank you, go ahead.

Tinubu’s response: Ah, let me want, ah (pauses) once and demonstrate here, one of those

philosophies, I want a job training that I believe, family is teamship (pauses) unbreakable team to demonstrate that, I will choose the first question assign it to Dele Alake.

And the second question, assign to Nasir El-Rufai

...and the third question, assign to Ben Ayade

In Excerpt 9, the speaker, Mr Tinubu, deployed the desresponsilisation strategy of politeness by assigning the interview questions that were meant for him to answer. Tinubu uses the moment to demonstrate that he values teamwork and will empower others to act. He shifts the audience's focus from avoidance to inclusivity. The speech act of assigning is used by Mr Tinubu to strategically shift the responsibility of answering questions to his team.

In Excerpt 9 above, Ben Ayade, responding to a question on youth development and inclusion as delegated by Tinubu, asserts that, youths are part of today; they are the greatest asset for tomorrow. We need to prepare them from now for our all-inclusive government and education policy. He affirms the value of youth as both present and future assets... he outlines policy intentions: to overhaul the education system, introduce student loans for all, reform the Almajiri system, build more schools, recruiting and train teachers, and integrate technology and broadband to prepare youth for governance and modern economic participation. Positive Politeness strategy is deployed, in the repeated emphasis on inclusivity "no one will be left behind" This phrase builds solidarity, appeals to shared values, and reassures both youth and other stakeholders that his administration will be accessible and fair.

Generosity maxim is evident in his promises to provide tangible resources: student loans, more schools, more teachers, more training and opportunities for youth to "govern" and develop technology languages on their own. These commitments project a willingness to invest in others' growth, prioritising the needs of the public over personal gain. The tact maxim of politeness is deployed when speaking about reforming the Almajiri system. This is a culturally sensitive subject, but he frames it as part of a broader educational overhaul, avoiding language that could stigmatise the communities involved while signalling intent for reform.

There is evidence of immodest maxim when he ties Lagos governor's success to his own governance Legacy in Lagos. This indirectly presents Tinubu as a capable leader with a track record of empowering youth and achieving development goals. The linguistic choice of referring to youth as "the greatest asset for tomorrow" is metaphorical; it elevates their values and future role in governance. He deploys inclusive pronouns ("we", "our") to foster a collective sense of

responsibility and shared ownership of the future.

It is pragmatically significant to political communication because the youths are seen not merely as voters but as stakeholders in governance.

Excerpts 10 (Alake for Tinubu);

Question: "...Central Bank of Nigeria tweeted that NNPC has not remitted one kobo of oil revenue in the past six month..., what is the solution to this very pressing problem?

To demonstrate the spirit of Teamship, Tinubu delegates the response to one of his team Members "Dele Alake" this act signified his preferred style of governance, which involves sharing responsibilities and trusting his team members to speak on his behalf. Dele Alake's answer, frames oil theft as a decades-old problem tied to Nigeria's security situation, and he outlines a "three-pronged approach" to address it through improved equipment, technology, and security reforms.

Excerpts 11(El-Rufai, for Tinubu):

Question: ... I know we have remittances over \$ 30 billion remitted to Nigeria from worldwide every year, and I do appreciate that the leaders do come here every electoral cycle to speak to us in diaspora, but we can't vote, is there any plan with regards to diaspora voting?

Tinubu addresses the issue of diaspora voting, electoral technology, and public trust in Nigeria's democratic process. He begins by referencing El-Rufai's comment that diaspora voters should be allowed to vote, linking their economic contributions through remittances, to their entitlement to political participation. He supports the principle, saying such rights should not merely be "approved but promoted" He then pivots to the current state of Nigeria's electoral system, expressing conditional trust in the electronic transmission process, while stressing the need to continue building public confidence before introducing mail-in ballots.

One clear politeness strategy at play in Excerpt 10 is "deresponsibilisation", a strategy that agrees with the description of Caffi (2002; 118). By assigning the first question to his spokesman, Tinubu avoids answering it personally. This is a form of avoidance strategy, but here it is framed positively as a demonstration of teamwork. This removes immediate personal accountability for the answer, while allowing him to model his claimed leadership style.

There are three discursive issues observed in Excerpt 11. First, political inclusion of the diaspora,

tied to the agreement maxim. Tinubu not only accepts the idea, but link it to economic contributions, giving it moral and economic weight. Second, is public confidence in electoral technology connected to tact maxim and positive politeness strategy, as he reassures the audience of progress while admitting that more assurance is needed. The third is balancing reform with stability, linked to sociopragmatic politeness, as he advocates for diaspora voting but defers implementation until the existing system is more robust. Mr Tinubu align with El-Rufai on this issue.

Agreement maxim is evident in Mr Tinubu's alignment with El-Rufai's stance by openly agreeing that diaspora voters deserve the right to vote. Approbation maxim Acknowledgement of the diaspora's contribution to Nigeria's economy through remittance. Positive politeness is reflected in his inclusive language "we are not losing confidence..." The tact maxim comes into play with how he addresses electoral shortcomings, rather than openly criticising the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC)

Comparison and contrast in the deployment of politeness strategies by Obi and Tinubu

The sociopragmatic orientations of politeness strategies in Chatham House interviews of selected Nigerian 2023 presidential election candidates (Obi and Tinubu) are entrenched within the individual style of leadership principles and experience. The strategy adopted by the candidates reflects either on the previous leadership position held and their achievements, and, in some instances, is based on the ethnic extraction from which the said candidate emanates. While both candidates deployed certain strategies of politeness, there are also instances where the candidates differ in their strategies of politeness principles. A major point of departure in their deployment of the politeness strategies as contained in the interviews is the direct approach strategy of Obi's responses to questions such as:

Excerpt 12(Obi):

Question: The activities of the IPOB in Nigeria is at an alarming rate every day, and with all the policies, beautiful ideas that you've listed down sir, without tackling head-on, they are impossible. So, one of the allegations given to you is that, you've not condemned the activities.

Response: For the issue of IPOB, many of you are not following me. Even yesterday, I spoke about Biafra being ended 53 years ago. It's all about the place in the space. I condemn all agitators, but in condemning, you have to look at what brought these agitations all over the

place. It's not only IPOB, we have Yoruba Nation Movement, and we have all sorts... If you have 15% unemployment in Britain today, you're gonna have massive agitations, nobody will be able to have his house.

Excerpt 12 discusses the issue of ethnic agitation within the Eastern region in Nigerian society, as Obi is considered one who comes from the Eastern region, therefore faces the question of Biafra agitation to understand his position and stance on the contending matter. The use of the lexical choice "I" which is the first-person singular pronoun, orients to the concerns the interlocutor has on such issues as a person. The speaker "condemns all agitators. The use of the quantifier "all" orients to the indirectness in Obi's response to draw the Nigerian's attention to the fact that the issue of agitation is not peculiar to his ethnic extraction but a general one. Here, Obi deployed the sympathy maxim of politeness, which states that the speaker should minimise antipathy between oneself and others; rather, he/she should maximise sympathy between himself/herself and others. Obi sympathises with the various agitators across the regions of Nigeria and points out a common problem responsible for it, which is unemployment." To maintain his stance, he uses the speech act of condemning to express his position on the matter of agitations

Obi and Tinubu both deployed the modesty maxim of politeness, which emphasises that the speaker should minimise self-praise expressions and maximise self-deprecating expressions. An instance of this is contained in the excerpt below:

Excerpt 13 (Obi):

Question: Repaying the central bank debt by 19.5% interest rate. How do you plan to support the next generation by dealing with debt repayment crises? And also, how do you plan to deal with tackling financial transparency in Nigeria?

Response: I've governed a state for eight years and I've challenged everybody, Paul you were there, I've been the only Governor till today, the day I left office I was not owing salary, pension, gratuity, or any contract to supplier and I left the 3 banks in Nigerian which I say everyday: Access Bank, Fidelity Bank of Nigeria and Diamond Bank of Nigeria. I left a hundred and, over hundred and fifty million dollars, I didn't say naira. And I have over 30 billion naira. And Anambra State, you can go and verify...

Excerpt 13 contains Obi's deployment of the modesty maxim of politeness in his address to reflect on his experience while in office as a past Anambra State government. The modesty maxim of

politeness, where the speaker minimises self-praise expressions and maximises self-dispraise expressions, Obi, in the excerpt, uses the first-person singular pronoun “I” to maximise his self-praise as he points out several achievements, including leaving several amounts behind in different banks in Nigeria. This reassures the referent's stance, the level of modesty maintained by the speaker.

A major point of departure in the two candidates' deployment of the politeness strategies of Tinubu's deresponsibilisation strategy of politeness is where the speaker redirects questions directed at him from the referents to the members of his team to address the referents. The interlocutor deployed the act of avoiding responsibility or “weakened responsibility”, which is activated in a text through conflict-avoiding or politeness-induced vagueness or indirectness (Caffi, 2002, 2007). This is obvious in the excerpt below:

Excerpt 14 (El-Rufai for Tinubu): Three questions:

(1)...stroke uhm how can the diaspora vote?

(2)...How are you going to get employment up?

(3)How are you going to get economic growth? Those are the three questions

On the same method, we call on Wale Edun to answer...

...yes, the first question

Here again in the excerpts above, the speaker, Tinubu deployed the deresponsibilisation strategy of politeness, by delegating his team members to respond to the questions. Tinubu avoids answering it personally, which is a form of avoidance strategy, framed positively as a demonstration of teamwork. The deployment of deresponsibilisation strategy project the candidate in this case, not as a leader with a “weakened responsibility” who lacks certain level of competence and intelligibility to equivocally address the contending sociopolitical issues bedeviling the Nigeria society, but as a leader who believes in the spirit of “Teamship,” in inclusive government, by assigning and delegating responsibility to members to act in their areas of specialty.

The pragmatic implications of these strategies on political discourse

The use of pragmatic strategies in political language by presidential candidates during the Chatham House interviews has a substantial impact on public perceptions and assessments. These strategies,

including implicatures, speech acts, politeness, and linguistic markers, play a crucial role in shaping how voters perceive and evaluate the candidates. For instance, the use of implicatures or hidden meanings in statements can create the impression of the candidate as a wise or strategic figure, while assertive speech acts can enhance the perception of leadership or assertiveness. Furthermore, the relationship between the political language used by candidates and the public's acceptance of them is vital to comprehend. Effective political language can increase voters' appeal and trust in candidates, while inappropriate or offensive language can damage their image (Chiu et al., 2021).

Case studies on the use of pragmatic strategies of politeness in the Chatham House presidential interviews and public responses serve as effective illustrations of how specific language strategies can influence public opinion. By analysing these cases, it becomes evident how candidates use language to achieve their political goals and how voters respond to them. Through a deeper understanding of the relationship between pragmatic strategies in political language and public opinion, relevant political communication trends can be identified, leading to better insights into the dynamics of modern democracy.

In the context of presidential debates, the choice of discourse strategies by candidates depends on their intentions, while their impact on the opponent and the audience is influenced by meta-communicative issues of candidates' communicative behaviour and (im)politeness strategies in particular. Additionally, the use of hedges and boosters, which are crucial metadiscourse markers to soften and strengthen propositions, is also significant in shaping public perceptions.

The implications of pragmatic strategies of politeness in political language in the context of the Chatham House presidential interviews are essential for understanding the dynamics of the relationship between candidates and voters, as well as the factors that influence political preferences. By synthesising case studies and research on pragmatic strategies in political language, a comprehensive understanding of the impact of political discourse on public opinion can be achieved.

Conclusion

This study has systematically and pragmatically analysed presidential election interviews held at Chatham House by the two candidates, Peter Obi and Bola Tinubu, in 2023, with a view to providing insights into Obi and Tinubu's choices of language use in the course of their interactions with the citizenry locally and in diaspora of Nigeria as presidential candidates. The analysis, which

was made by the use of politeness maxims, identified politeness theories. The study analysed the politeness maxims found in the interviews through the choice of words and expressions of the interlocutors. The research found that the two candidates used six politeness maxims to portray themselves as polite, patriotic, ready-to-serve and available for the presidential roles. The politeness strategies employed in the interviews were: tact maxim, generosity maxim, approbation maxim, modesty maxim, sympathy maxim, and deresponsibilisation maxim. The study recommends that all political functionaries in Nigeria should choose to be polite and show readiness to accept responsibility rather than deresponsibilising even in difficult periods. The study advances that all political functionaries in Nigeria should deploy politeness strategies to avoid face-threatening acts at all levels of discourse, enhance transparency and engage youths effectively.

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