

# Orthophemism And Tact: A Strategic Impoliteness Analysis of Centre-Periphery Political Discourse in President Tinubu's Inaugural Speech

Lucky Amarachukwu Onebunne, PhD

Department of English Language and Literature, Faculty of Arts, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Nigeria.

## Abstract

This study investigates the pragmatic deployment of orthophemism and tact as instruments of strategic impoliteness in political discourse, with specific reference to President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's inaugural speech presented on 29 May, 2023 in Nigeria. Anchored in the theoretical frameworks of Culpeper's Impoliteness Theory, Grice's Cooperative Principle, and Expectancy Violation Theory, the paper adopts an Integrated Pragmatic Model of Strategic Impoliteness as its methodological lens. The study examines how Tinubu's candid announcements — particularly the removal of subsidy on Premium Motor Spirit (PMS) and the devaluation of the Nigerian Naira — constitute forms of strategic orthophemism that violate cooperative norms and societal expectations, thereby endorsing discursive impoliteness within the political centre-periphery relationship. The paper argues that such strategic straight-talking, while ostensibly transparent, functions as a political face-threatening act that reshapes the communicative contract between the government and the governed. Empirical data drawn from the inaugural speech are analysed qualitatively, revealing that the deployment of orthophemism triggers negative psychological, economic, and socio-political consequences on the Nigerian polity. The study recommends a more tactful balance between political transparency and communicative sensitivity in high-stakes political discourse, particularly in postcolonial, developing-economy contexts where public trust is delicate and economic anxieties are pervasive. The findings contribute to scholarship in political linguistics, critical discourse analysis, and pragmatics in African political communication.

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## 1. Introduction

Political language is never unbiased. Every word uttered by a political leader, especially during a milestone event such as an inaugural address, carries layers of ideological freight, pragmatic intent, and sociolinguistic consequence. The inaugural speech occupies a unique discursive space in political communication: it is simultaneously a promise to the governed, a declaration of political identity, and a calibration of the future government's agenda. For the citizens who listen, it is a moment fraught with expectation — an anticipatory event loaded with hopes, anxieties, and civic objectives. It is precisely this charged environment that makes the language choices of an incoming head of state so significant, both linguistically and politically.

In Nigeria, presidential inaugural speeches have historically served as theatres of carefully orchestrated sanguinity. Leaders traditionally deploy euphemistic strategies, soothing locutions, and diplomatic hedges to cushion the weight of difficult realities on the governed. This tendency reflects a broader communicative ethic in governance wherever tact — the deliberate management of face-threatening acts through linguistic softening — is employed to preserve the social contract between the state and its citizens. Against this backdrop, the inaugural address of President Bola Ahmed Tinubu, presented on 29 May 2023 at Eagle Square, Abuja, represented a notable — and arguably jarring — departure from convention.

In the course of that speech, President Tinubu announced, with apparent directness and without the equivocation or circumlocutions typical of such occasions, the immediate removal of fuel subsidy and signalled a floating of the Nigerian Naira. These announcements, stripped of the usual diplomatic padding, constituted instances of orthophemism — the use of neutral, direct, or technically precise language to communicate sensitive or uncomfortable truths. Where his predecessors might have spoken of 'gradual reforms' or 'necessary adjustments,' Tinubu's declaration that 'subsidy is gone' instantly entered public consciousness as a defining statement of his presidency. This directness, while framed as transparency, had immediate and far-reaching socio-economic and psychological consequences on millions of Nigerians.

The study of such language — where straight-talking functions as a form of impoliteness, intentionally or inadvertently violating the cooperative and face-saving norms that govern political speech — is the central concern of this paper. Using an integrated pragmatic framework that synthesises Culpeper's (1996; 2011) Impoliteness Theory, Grice's (1975) Cooperative Principle, and Expectancy Violation Theory (Burgoon, 1978; 1993), this study analyses the specific pragmatic mechanisms through which orthophemism in Tinubu's inaugural speech ratifies strategic impoliteness and reconfigures the centre-periphery political relationship in Nigeria.

Notwithstanding the growing body of scholarship on political discourse analysis, inaugural speech studies, and x-phemism in language, there exists a notable lacuna in the literature regarding the specific pragmatic function of orthophemism as an instrument of strategic impoliteness in African political communication. Most studies on political x-phemism have focused on euphemism and dysphemism (Ayodele [2020]; Onebunne and Chukwu [2023]; Chukwu and Onebunne [2023]); some in Western political contexts, leaving orthophemism — particularly in its capacity to violate communicative expectations and endorse face-threatening acts — critically underexplored. Furthermore, while Culpeper's impoliteness framework has been widely applied to interpersonal and institutional discourse, its application to high-stakes political address, especially inaugural speeches in postcolonial African states, remains limited.

The specific problem this paper addresses is the following: how does the deployment of orthophemism in Tinubu's 2023 inaugural speech function as a form of strategic impoliteness that reconfigures the centre-periphery relationship in Nigerian political discourse? This question is pressing because the economic announcements in that speech — most notably the removal of fuel subsidy — had abrupt, upsetting consequences on the cost of living for ordinary Nigerians, triggering public outcry, market volatility, and widespread psychological distress. The language choices that produced these effects warrant rigorous pragmatic scrutiny, both to understand the communicative mechanisms involved and to contribute to best practices in political communication in contexts of economic vulnerability.

There is also a theoretical gap: existing frameworks for analysing impoliteness in political discourse do not adequately account for the unique pragmatic dynamics of inaugural speeches, where the speaker enjoys an asymmetric power advantage, the audience holds sensitive expectations, and the communicative stakes are exceptionally high. An integrated model that brings together impoliteness theory, cooperative principles, and expectancy violation theory is, therefore, necessary to capture the full pragmatic texture of the phenomenon under investigation.

## **2. Purpose Of the Study**

The following four-point purpose steers this study:

- To examine the pragmatic strategies of orthophemism deployed in President Tinubu's 2023 inaugural speech, with particular attention to the linguistic features that mark these strategies as instances of straight-talking in politically sensitive communicative contexts.
- To analyse how the deployment of orthophemism in the speech functions as strategic impoliteness, applying Culpeper's Impoliteness Theory to demonstrate how specific utterances constitute face-threatening acts directed at the Nigerian citizenry as a collective interlocutor.
- To interrogate the extent to which the identified orthophemistic utterances violate the Gricean cooperative maxims and the societal expectations that typically govern inaugural political addresses in Nigeria, thereby constituting acts of expectancy violation with socio-political consequences.

- To propose pragmatic recommendations for a more balanced deployment of transparency and tact in political discourse, particularly in governance communication within postcolonial African contexts where public economic vulnerabilities amplify the impact of political language choices.

### **3. Conceptual Review**

#### ***A. X-phemism: Euphemism, Dysphemism, and Orthophemism***

The concept of x-phemism, popularised by Allan and Burridge (1991, 2006), encompasses three main strategies for encoding social meaning in language. Euphemism refers to the exchange of mild, indirect, or elusive expressions aimed at those that might be considered blunt, severe, or offensive. Dysphemism, by contrast, involves the deliberate use of offensive, derogatory, or crude language to refer to a person, thing, or situation. Orthophemism occupies the middle ground: it involves the usage of neutral, technically precise, or contextually appropriate language that neither inflates nor deflates the communicative content. It is, in essence, 'straight talk' — the deployment of literal, unadorned language in the service of communicative transparency.

In political discourse, the choice between these strategies is never accidental. Leaders and their speechwriters carefully calibrate the degree of x-phemism in any given communicative context, guided by concerns of political optics, audience management, and rhetorical purpose. Euphemisms are frequently employed to mask unpleasant realities, such as referring to retrenchments as 'downsizing' or to military casualties as 'collateral damage.' Dysphemisms may be deployed strategically to demonise political opponents or frame adversarial policies in extremely negative terms. Orthophemism, while ostensibly the most transparent of the three, carries its own pragmatic complications: in contexts where the audience expects diplomatic softening, straight talk can function as a form of communicative aggression — a violation of the tacit contract that political language will manage public affect as well as convey information.

The concept of tact, closely related to x-phemism, derives from Leech's (1983, p.81) Politeness Principle, which posits that 'communicative interactions' are governed by a set of maxims that minimise the expression of impolite beliefs and maximise the expression of polite ones. The Tact Maxim specifically enjoins speakers to minimise the cost and maximise the benefit to the hearer. In the context of political communication, tact functions as the lubricant of the centre-periphery relationship: it manages the gap between the hard realities of governance and the emotional and material interests of citizens. When orthophemism displaces tact — when political leaders choose bluntness over diplomatic management of public affect — the pragmatic consequences can be profound.

#### ***B. Political Discourse and Centre-Periphery Relations***

Political discourse, broadly defined, encompasses all forms of language use that are implicated in the acquisition, exercise, and contestation of political power (Van Dijk, 1997; Fairclough, 2001). Inaugural speeches occupy a particularly prominent position within this field. As Charteris-Black (2005) observes, such speeches function not merely as policy statements but as myth-making events — occasions on which a leader constructs a narrative identity, establishes a communicative relationship with the citizenry, and frames the terms of their political contract. This framing function is inherently ideological, even when — or especially when — it is dressed in the garb of plain-speaking transparency.

The centre-periphery framework, drawn from political sociology and world-systems theory (Wallerstein, 1974; Shils, 1975), provides a productive lens for understanding the power asymmetries encoded in political communication. In this model, the 'centre' comprises the dominant political actors — governments, institutions, and elites — who control the means of political communication and whose discourse sets the terms of public deliberation. The 'periphery' consists of ordinary citizens, marginalised communities, and those who are subject to, but largely excluded from, the production of authoritative political discourse. The relationship between centre and periphery is categorised by structural asymmetry: the centre speaks, and the periphery listens, reacts, and is acted upon.

In Nigeria's specific political-economic context, this asymmetry is amplified by historical legacies of colonial governance, post-independence political volatility, and the pervasive experience of economic precarity among the majority of the population. When the political centre makes pronouncements that directly impact the material conditions of the periphery — as Tinubu's fuel subsidy announcement unambiguously did — the communicative

event takes on significance far beyond mere linguistic exchange. It becomes an act of power, a reconfiguration of the social contract, and a test of the communicative relationship between governance and the governed.

### ***C. Inaugural Speeches in African Political Communication***

The study of inaugural speeches in African political contexts has attracted growing scholarly attention in recent years, reflecting increased interest in the role of language in the construction and contestation of political authority on the continent. Scholars such as Ayeomoni (2006), Adegaju (2008), and Taiwo (2010) have examined the rhetorical strategies, ideological formations, and linguistic features of Nigerian presidential discourse, highlighting the ways in which political language serves both communicative and ideological functions. These studies have generally emphasised the frequency of euphemistic and populist strategies in Nigerian political speech, reflecting the cultural and communicative norms that privilege harmonious, face-saving interaction in public discourse.

What has received less attention is the phenomenon of orthophemism — the departure from diplomatic hedging in favour of blunt, technically direct communication — and its pragmatic consequences in the specific context of the inaugural address. The Tinubu inaugural speech of 2023 offers a uniquely rich site for such analysis, not only because of the unprecedented bluntness of its key economic announcements, but also because of the scale and immediacy of the public response those announcements generated. Within hours of the speech, fuel prices had doubled, markets were in turmoil, and social media platforms were awash with expressions of shock, outrage, and despair from ordinary Nigerians. The pragmatic mechanisms that produced these consequences — the specific ways in which orthophemism functioned as impoliteness, violated cooperative norms, and crushed communicative expectations — are the analytical focus of this paper.

## **4. Theoretical Framework**

### ***A. Culpeper's Impoliteness Theory***

Jonathan Culpeper's Impoliteness Theory (1996, 2005, 2011) provides the primary theoretical scaffolding for this study. Culpeper established the idea of impoliteness as a counterpart to Brown and Levinson's (1987) influential Politeness Theory, arguing that impoliteness deserved equal theoretical attention as a constitutive feature of human interaction rather than merely a deviant or deficient form of polite communication. For Culpeper (1996, p. 349), impoliteness involves 'strategies designed to attack face,' where face is understood in Goffmanian terms as the positive social value that individuals claim for themselves in interaction.

Culpeper identifies several impoliteness super-strategies, the most relevant to this study being what he terms 'bold on record impoliteness' — the direct, unambiguous communication of a face-threatening message without any attempt at mitigation. This strategy is opposed to the diplomatic hedging and face-saving indirectness that typically characterise political speech, and it maps directly onto the phenomenon of orthophemism, as will be seen in this research. When Tinubu declared 'subsidy is gone,' the baldness of the formulation — its refusal to hedge, soften, or contextualise — constitutes a textbook instance of bold on record impoliteness, an unmitigated face-threat directed at the Nigerian citizenry.

Culpeper's later work (2011) further refines the theory by distinguishing between intentional impoliteness, where the speaker deliberately deploys face-threatening strategies, and incidental impoliteness, where face-threat is an unintended consequence of communicative choices. In the context of this study, the question of intentionality is particularly significant: was Tinubu's orthophemistic bluntness a deliberate rhetorical strategy — an attempt to project strength, transparency, and decisiveness — or was it an inadvertent violation of the communicative norms governing inaugural political address? The analysis in the empirical study section addresses this question through a close reading of the speech text.

Of particular relevance is Culpeper's notion of 'mock impoliteness' or 'banter,' where apparent impoliteness is understood by both parties as non-serious or performative. This concept helps to clarify what Tinubu's orthophemism is not: there is no banter dimension to the fuel subsidy announcement, no shared understanding between speaker and audience that the bluntness is playful or performative. On the contrary, the orthophemism is deadly serious in both intention and consequence, which places it firmly in the category of genuine, strategic impoliteness.

### ***B. Grice's Cooperative Principle***

H. Paul Grice's (1975) Cooperative Principle and its associated conversational maxims provide a second theoretical anchor for this study. Grice proposed that rational communicative interaction is overseen by a general principle that parties 'make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged' (1975, p. 45). This overarching principle is operationalised through four maxims: Quantity (be as informative as required, but not more so), Quality (say only what you believe to be true and have evidence for), Relation (be relevant), and Manner (be clear, brief, and orderly).

Political speech operates in a complex and often paradoxical relationship with the Gricean framework. Politicians routinely flout the maxims — deliberately violating them in ways that generate conversational implicatures — as well as violate them outright. Inaugural speeches, in particular, are expected to flout the Maxim of Quantity by being more expansive and ceremonial than strict informativeness would require, and to flout the Maxim of Quality through the deployment of aspirational and rhetorical exaggeration. What is not typically expected in an inaugural address is the kind of violation of the Maxim of Manner that orthophemism can produce: the blunt, unhedged communication of painful economic realities in a context where circumlocution and diplomatic framing are the communicative norm.

Tinubu's orthophemistic declarations, viewed through the Gricean lens, constitute violations of the pragmatic expectations that attach to the inaugural speech as a communicative genre. They are relevant and truthful — and in that sense technically compliant with the maxims of Relation and Quality — but their unmitigated bluntness violates the Manner expectations of the genre, and their informational specificity (announcing the immediate removal of subsidy rather than committing to 'review' or 'reform') exceeds what the Maxim of Quantity, in its generic political application, would typically license. The result is a series of implicatures that cut against the conventional expectations of inaugural address: rather than implying hope, continuity, and partnership between governor and governed, the orthophemistic utterances imply decisive unilateralism, economic austerity, and an indifference to the face-needs of the citizenry.

### ***C. Expectancy Violation Theory***

Expectancy Violation Theory (EVT), originally developed by Judee Burgoon (1978) in the context of nonverbal communication and subsequently extended to verbal and discourse contexts (Burgoon & Hale, 1988; Burgoon, 1993), offers a third theoretical dimension that enriches the analysis. EVT posits that 'communicative behaviours' are interpreted against a background of expectations — established norms, cultural scripts, and contextual schemas — and that violations of these expectations produce distinctive evaluative and affective responses in the audience. Crucially, EVT predicts that the valence of these responses depends on two factors: the direction of the violation (whether it departs from expectations in a positive or negative direction) and the communicator reward valence (the degree to which the audience values or trusts the speaker).

In the context of presidential inaugural addresses in Nigeria, EVT predicts a set of communicative expectations grounded in historical precedent, cultural communication norms, and genre conventions. These expectations include: the forecast of optimism about the future; diplomatic management of difficult policy announcements through euphemistic framing; acknowledgement of the suffering and anxieties of ordinary citizens; and the performance of solidarity and empathy between the incoming leader and the polity. Tinubu's orthophemistic announcements violate these expectations decisively and negatively: rather than projecting optimism, they announce immediate economic hardship; rather than deploying diplomatic framing, they communicate bluntly and without mitigation; rather than performing solidarity, they impose costs on the citizenry without apparent acknowledgement of their pain.

According to EVT's predictions, such negative expectancy violations, delivered by a communicator of uncertain or contested reward valence — Tinubu's 2023 election was itself contested in court — will generate strongly negative evaluative and affective responses. This prediction is borne out by the empirical record: the public reaction to the inaugural speech was one of widespread shock, outrage, and despair. EVT thus provides a predictive and explanatory framework that complements the descriptive and analytical dimensions of Culpeper's and Grice's theories, helping to account for the specific affective and socio-political consequences of the speech's orthophemistic strategies.

## **5. Methodology**

This study adopts an Integrated Pragmatic Model of Strategic Impoliteness (IPMSI) as its methodological framework. The IPMSI is a qualitative, theory-driven analytical approach that integrates the analytical tools of Culpeper's Impoliteness Theory, Grice's Cooperative Principle, and Expectancy Violation Theory into a unified, multi-level model for the investigation of impolite discourse in high-stakes communicative contexts. It is 'integrated' in the sense that it does not apply these frameworks sequentially or independently, but rather uses them as complementary lenses that illuminate different dimensions of the same textual phenomena.

The data for this study comprises the full text of President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's inaugural address, delivered at Eagle Square, Abuja, on 29 May 2023. The speech text was sourced from the official transcript published by the Presidency of the Federal Republic of Nigeria and cross-referenced with multiple published transcriptions to ensure textual accuracy. The full speech runs to approximately 1,800 words, and the analysis concentrates precisely on those segments that deal with economic policy announcements — the removal of fuel subsidy and the liberalisation of the foreign exchange market — as these constitute the primary sites of orthophemistic discourse in the text.

The analytical procedure unfolds in three stages corresponding to the three theoretical frameworks. In the first stage, the selected speech segments are examined through the lens of Culpeper's Impoliteness Theory to identify specific impoliteness strategies — including bold on record impoliteness, positive impoliteness (damaging the hearer's positive face), and negative impoliteness (damaging the hearer's freedom of action) — instantiated in the orthophemistic utterances. In the second stage, the selected segments are analysed using Grice's maxim framework to identify which maxims are flouted, violated, or otherwise manipulated, and what implicatures are generated by these communicative choices. In the third stage, the identified violations are interpreted through EVT to assess the nature and magnitude of the expectancy violations involved and to account for the evaluative and affective responses they are predicted to, and demonstrably did, generate.

This methodology is qualitative and interpretive in character, drawing on close textual reading, discourse analysis, and pragmatic inference. Triangulation across the three frameworks provides analytical rigour, ensuring that interpretive conclusions are grounded in multiple, converging lines of theoretical evidence. Where relevant, contextual data — including newspaper reportage, social media responses, and economic data on the immediate post-speech period — are drawn upon to corroborate textual interpretations with empirical evidence of real-world consequence.

## **6. Empirical Studies**

The empirical landscape of studies on political language, impoliteness, and x-phemism is rich and growing. Several scholars have examined the intersection of these fields in ways that inform the present study. This further gives a great argument and justification for this paper. Adegoju (2008) analyses the rhetorical strategies of Nigerian presidential discourse, highlighting the interplay of ethos, pathos, and logos in constructing political authority and managing public affect. While Adegoju's focus is on persuasion rather than impoliteness, his work underscores the significance of rhetorical framing in shaping public response to political announcements.

Ekpenyong (2014) conducts a discourse analysis of selected Nigerian presidential speeches, examining the deployment of linguistic strategies for political legitimation. Ekpenyong notes the pervasive use of euphemism in Nigerian presidential addresses and the means by which such strategies function to manage the communication of difficult policy choices. His work provides important comparative context for this study's focus on the departure from euphemism in Tinubu's speech.

On the theoretical side, Bousfield (2008) offers a comprehensive empirical study of impoliteness in institutional contexts, providing detailed analyses of how face-threatening strategies function in asymmetric power relationships. Bousfield's finding that impoliteness in institutional settings is frequently strategically deployed to assert dominance, enforce compliance, or project authority resonates with this study's analysis of orthophemism as a form of political power performance.

Culpeper et al. (2003) examine the deployment of impoliteness in dramatic and media discourse, arguing that impoliteness performs important social functions beyond mere face-threat, including the negotiation of social identity

and the performance of authenticity. This insight is relevant to Tinubu's orthophemism: the bluntness of his economic announcements can be read as a performance of decisive, no-nonsense leadership — a political identity construction that deploys impoliteness in the service of an image of strength and transparency.

Anchimbe and Mforteh (2011) analyse political discourse in postcolonial African contexts, highlighting the distinctive communicative norms and expectations that shape political language in societies with colonial linguistic legacies. Their work emphasises the importance of contextualising discourse analysis within specific historical and socio-political frameworks — a methodological principle that this study observes in its situating of the Tinubu speech within Nigeria's specific political economy.

More recently, Ayodele (2020) examines x-phemism in Nigerian political discourse, with particular attention to the deployment of euphemism in economic policy communication. Ayodele finds that Nigerian political leaders consistently deploy euphemistic strategies when communicating economically painful policies, and that departures from this norm are associated with heightened public distress and political instability. This finding provides direct empirical support for the central claim of this study: that Tinubu's orthophemism constituted a significant departure from established communicative norms with measurable socio-political consequences.

## **7. Data Analysis and Discussion**

### ***A. Orthophemism as Bold On-Record Impoliteness***

The most frequently cited utterance from Tinubu's inaugural speech — 'fuel subsidy is gone' — offers a paradigmatic example of bold on-record impoliteness in the Culpeperian sense. The formulation is structurally simple and semantically unambiguous: it uses the passive-like predicate 'is gone' to communicate the irreversible removal of a policy that had subsidised fuel prices for Nigerian consumers for decades. The choice of 'gone' — with its connotations of finality, irreversibility, and absence — over alternatives such as 'will be reformed,' 'is under review,' or even 'will be removed' is linguistically significant. It forecloses negotiation, contextualisation, or temporal deferral; the policy is not being removed, or about to be removed, or being considered for removal — it simply, already, is 'gone.'

In Culpeper's framework, this utterance constitutes bold on-record impoliteness through its failure to attend to the positive face needs of the hearer. The positive face of the Nigerian citizenry — understood as the desire to be approved of, respected, and treated with consideration — is threatened by the unmitigated abruptness of the announcement. There is no acknowledgement of the pain the removal will cause; no expression of regret or empathy; no promise of compensatory measures in the same breath. The utterance stands alone in its bluntness, a rhetorical island of brutal transparency in the sea of political optimism that surrounds it.

A secondary impoliteness strategy identifiable in the speech is what Culpeper terms 'condescend, scorn or ridicule' — a positive impoliteness strategy that asserts the speaker's superiority while diminishing the hearer's status. This is most evident in the speech's framing of the subsidy as a corruption-enabling mechanism: by characterising the subsidy as having benefited 'importers' and 'the privileged' rather than ordinary Nigerians, Tinubu implicitly positions himself as the bearer of an uncomfortable truth that the citizenry either did not know or did not want to acknowledge. This framing, while politically defensible, carries an impolite implicature: that the public was either naive or complicit in a system it now must pay to dismantle.

### ***B. Violation of the Cooperative Maxims***

Analysed through the Gricean framework, Tinubu's orthophemistic declarations reveal a complex pattern of maxim manipulation. With respect to the Maxim of Manner — which enjoins clarity, brevity, and orderliness, while implicitly proscribing unnecessary directness in contexts where indirectness is normatively expected — the speech's economic announcements represent a significant violation. In the political genre of the inaugural address, manner expectations include the diplomatic framing of difficult announcements, the use of hedging devices to signal tentativeness and openness to revision, and the employment of inclusive 'we' constructions to distribute the burden of difficult realities across the political collective. Tinubu's formulations depart from all of these manner conventions, producing the pragmatic effect of a unilateral imposition rather than a collaborative political act.

With respect to the Maxim of Quantity, the speech violates the implicit expectation of an inaugural address that policy announcements will be exploratory and directional rather than declarative and finalised. Inaugural speeches are typically understood as programmatic rather than legislative — as setting a direction rather than enacting a decision. Tinubu's announcement of the immediate removal of fuel subsidy exceeded the quantity of definitiveness that the genre licenses, generating the implicature that the decision was already made, was irreversible, and admitted of no public deliberation or input.

With respect to the Maxim of Relation, the inclusion of the subsidy announcement in an inaugural speech — an occasion conventionally devoted to vision, inspiration, and the articulation of political values — constitutes an interesting generic violation. The relevance of an immediate, specific economic policy announcement to the ceremonial context of an inaugural address is not self-evident; its inclusion generates the implicature that the speaker is prioritising policy declaration over the conventional ceremonial and solidarity functions of the genre, signalling that his governance style will prioritise decision over deliberation.

### *C. Expectancy Violation and Socio-Economic Impact*

The expectancy violation dimension of Tinubu's orthophemism is perhaps the most consequential for understanding the public response to the speech. EVT predicts that the magnitude of the negative public response to a communicative violation will be proportional to the degree of expectancy violation and inversely proportional to the communicator's reward valence. Both factors were operating at their most extreme in the situation of Tinubu's inaugural address.

The expectancy violation was extreme because the gap between what was expected — diplomatic management of economic policy announcements, expressions of empathy and solidarity, promises of gradual reform — and what was delivered — blunt, immediate, unmitigated declaration of painful economic change — was unusually wide. Nigerian inaugural addresses had not, in recent historical memory, included such immediate and specific declarations of economically painful policies. The closest precedent, the structural adjustment programmes of the Babangida era in the 1980s and 1990s, were associated in public memory with widespread economic hardship and social disruption — a historical association that amplified the negative valence of the expectancy violation.

The communicator reward valence — the degree to which the audience valued or trusted the speaker — was also problematically low at the time of the speech. Tinubu's electoral victory had been legally contested by his principal opponents, and his mandate was subject to ongoing litigation in the Election Petition Tribunal at the time of the inauguration. This contested legitimacy reduced the reward valence of his communication, making the audience less likely to interpret expectancy violations positively — as evidence of admirable boldness or refreshing transparency — and more likely to interpret them negatively, as evidence of arrogance, insensitivity, or political recklessness.

The empirical consequences of this negative expectancy violation were immediate and severe. In the days following the inaugural speech, the pump price of petrol rose from approximately 185 naira per litre to between 480 and 650 naira per litre across different parts of the country — an increase of between 160% and 250% almost overnight. Transportation costs surged correspondingly, triggering cascading price increases across all sectors of the economy. Within weeks, inflation had reached historic highs, and the purchasing power of ordinary Nigerians — already severely eroded by years of economic stagnation — contracted dramatically. The psychological impact was equally profound: social media platforms were swamped with expressions of despair, anger, and perplexity, and civil society organisations issued statements condemning the abruptness and insensitivity of the policy announcement.

### *D. Orthophemism as Centre-Periphery Power Performance*

At a deeper level of analysis, Tinubu's orthophemistic declarations can be read as a performance of centre-periphery power relations in the Nigerian political system. The bluntness and finality of the economic announcements — their refusal of diplomatic hedging, their foreclosure of public deliberation, their indifference to the face-needs of the citizenry — encode and enact the structural asymmetry between the political centre and the governed periphery. The speech communicates not merely that subsidy is gone, but that the centre has the power to remove it without consultation, without mitigation, and without apology; that the periphery must simply absorb the consequences of

the centre's decisions; and that the communicative relationship between governor and governed is fundamentally unilateral.

This reading aligns with critical discourse analysis perspectives on political language as a site of power reproduction (Fairclough, 2001; Van Dijk, 1997). The orthophemism in Tinubu's speech is not politically innocent: it reproduces and reinforces the vertical power gradient that structures Nigerian political life, asserting the centre's right to determine the material conditions of the periphery's existence without the mediation of tact, empathy, or communicative solidarity. In this sense, the speech's orthophemism functions not merely as impoliteness in the interpersonal pragmatic sense, but as a discursive instantiation of political authority — a claim, made through communicative form as much as through propositional content, to the absolute discretionary power of the executive.

## **8. Recommendations**

Based on the preceding analysis, this study proffers the following recommendations for political communicators, governance practitioners, and communication scholars:

### ***A. Institutionalise Communicative Impact Assessment in Political Speech Preparation***

Political speechwriters and government communication offices should develop and implement a systematic process for assessing the likely communicative impact of policy announcements in inaugural and other high-stakes political addresses. Such assessments should include analysis of expectancy violations, face-threat levels, and cooperative maxim implications, drawing on the frameworks developed in this study. In contexts of economic vulnerability and contested political legitimacy, the communicative management of painful policy announcements is not a peripheral concern but a governance imperative.

### ***B. Cultivate a Politics of Tact Without Deception***

The solution to the problem of orthophemistic impoliteness in political discourse is not a return to the evasive euphemism that has historically characterised Nigerian political communication. Euphemistic obfuscation breeds public distrust and enables the continuance of dysfunctional policies. Rather, what is needed is what might be called a 'politics of tact without deception' — a style of political communication that balances transparency with sensitivity, combines directness with empathy, and delivers uncomfortable truths in a manner that acknowledges rather than disregards the affective and material consequences for citizens.

### ***C. Reform Political Communication Education***

Communication training for political leaders, government spokespersons, and political party officials in Nigeria should incorporate pragmatic theory as a substantive component. Understanding the mechanisms of face-threatening acts, cooperative maxim violation, and expectancy violation can equip political communicators with the conceptual tools to make more informed and responsible language choices in high-stakes contexts.

### ***D. Engage Citizens in Policy Communication***

In contexts where politically painful but economically necessary policies must be communicated, the deployment of participatory communication frameworks — where citizens are engaged in deliberative processes before, rather than after, key policy decisions — can significantly mitigate the impoliteness effects of orthophemistic announcement. When citizens have been prepared for difficult news through genuine consultation and transparent information sharing, the expectancy violations associated with blunt policy declarations are substantially reduced.

### ***E. Advance Scholarship on African Political Pragmatics***

The findings of this study underscore the need for continued and expanded scholarship on the pragmatics of political communication in African contexts. The theoretical frameworks applied here — developed primarily in Western communicative contexts — require ongoing adaptation and enrichment through engagement with African linguistic, cultural, and political realities. Scholars of African languages and literatures are particularly well-positioned to contribute to this work by drawing on indigenous communicative traditions and cultural norms as resources for theoretical development.

## **9. Conclusion**

This paper has examined the deployment of orthophemism in President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's 2023 inaugural address as a form of strategic impoliteness with significant pragmatic, social, and political consequences. Through the

integrated application of Culpeper's Impoliteness Theory, Grice's Cooperative Principle, and Expectancy Violation Theory within an Integrated Pragmatic Model of Strategic Impoliteness, the study has demonstrated that the speech's blunt economic announcements — particularly the declaration that 'fuel subsidy is gone' — constitute bold on record impoliteness, violations of the cooperative maxims governing inaugural political speech, and severe negative expectancy violations with predictable and demonstrable socio-economic and psychological consequences.

The analysis has further revealed that orthophemism in this context functions not merely as a communicative style choice but as a discursive performance of centre-periphery power relations in the Nigerian political system — an enactment of executive authority that reproduces the structural asymmetry between the governing centre and the governed periphery through the medium of communicative form. This finding has broader implications for the study of political language in postcolonial African contexts, where the legacies of authoritarian governance and the pressures of economic vulnerability create a particularly fraught communicative environment for political leaders.

The study's contributions are both theoretical and applied. Theoretically, it extends the application of impoliteness theory and expectancy violation theory to the domain of inaugural political address in an African context, demonstrating the productive analytical potential of these frameworks when integrated into a coherent methodological model. Applied, it offers concrete recommendations for more responsible and effective political communication in governance contexts where the language choices of leaders have immediate and consequential impacts on the lives of ordinary citizens.

Ultimately, this study affirms that language in politics is never merely instrumental. The choice between tact and bluntness, between diplomatic framing and orthophemistic straight-talk, is a choice with real-world consequences for real people. In a country like Nigeria, where decades of governance failures have eroded public trust in political institutions and left millions in conditions of economic precarity, the pragmatics of political communication is not an academic abstraction but a matter of lived consequence. How political leaders speak — not only what they say, but how they say it — shapes the social contract between the state and its citizens, and bears directly on the health of democratic governance.

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