

The Pragmatic Functions of Rhetorical Strategies in Senator Ademola Adeleke's Acceptance Speech

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Abstract: *Political acceptance speeches are strategic communicative events in which a newly declared winner consolidates legitimacy, reconciles a divided electorate, and projects a governing vision. This study examines the pragmatic functions of the rhetorical strategies deployed in the acceptance speech delivered by Senator Ademola Adeleke following his re-election as Governor of Osun State, Nigeria. Adopting a qualitative, descriptive design, the study integrates Austin's and Searle's speech act theory, Grice's theory of conversational implicature, and Brown and Levinson's politeness theory with the classical Aristotelian appeals of ethos, pathos, and logos, to interrogate how meaning is strategically constructed and performed. The speech was analysed at the level of individual utterances and larger discourse units to identify the dominant rhetorical strategies and the pragmatic acts they perform. The findings reveal that Adeleke employs a cluster of interrelated strategies, including inclusive personal pronouns, repetition and parallelism, antithesis, metaphor, religious and political allusion, and gratitude formulae, and that these strategies perform identifiable pragmatic functions such as asserting, thanking, promising, conceding, reconciling, and appealing. The study concludes that rhetorical strategy in the speech is not ornamental but functional: it enacts speech acts, generates implicatures, and manages the face wants of a heterogeneous audience in the service of political legitimation and national reconciliation. The study contributes to the pragmatics of Nigerian political discourse and offers a replicable framework for analysing the persuasive architecture of acceptance speeches.*

Key words: *Pragmatics, Rhetorical Strategies, Speech Acts, Political Discourse, Acceptance Speech, Adeleke*

Introduction

Language is the primary instrument of political action. Politicians do not merely describe the world through language, they act upon it, mobilising words to win support, legitimise authority, and shape collective perception[1]. Among the many genres of political discourse, the acceptance speech occupies a distinctive place. Delivered at the threshold of a new mandate, it is at once a ritual of celebration, a performance of legitimacy, and a bridge between a divisive contest and the governance that must follow[2]. It is spoken to multiple audiences simultaneously: loyal supporters who must be thanked and energised, defeated opponents who must be conciliated, and the wider public whose confidence must be secured. To accomplish these competing goals within a few paragraphs, the speaker must marshal a repertoire of rhetorical strategies whose effectiveness depends on how skilfully they perform their intended pragmatic functions.

Rhetoric, in the classical sense articulated by Aristotle, is the faculty of discovering the available means of persuasion in any given case, chiefly through appeals to the credibility of the speaker (ethos), the emotions of the audience (pathos), and the reasoning of the argument (logos)[3]. Pragmatics, for its part, is the study of meaning in context, of how language users perform actions and convey more than they literally say through utterances embedded in situations[4][5]. The intersection of these two traditions is especially productive for the study of political speech, because it allows the analyst to ask not only what strategies a speaker uses but what those strategies actually do, that is, what acts they perform, what inferences they invite, and what social relationships they manage[6][7].

The speech under study was delivered by Senator Ademola Adeleke on the occasion of his re-election as the Executive Governor of Osun State. It is a compact but rhetorically dense text that thanks supporters, dedicates victory to the electorate, promises accelerated development, endorses the national president, extends an olive branch to opponents, and invokes divine trust. Each of these moves is realised through deliberate rhetorical choices whose pragmatic significance repays close analysis. This study therefore sets out to examine the pragmatic functions of the rhetorical strategies in Adeleke's acceptance speech, treating the speech as a purposeful act of political communication rather than a neutral report of a result.

The occasion of the speech magnifies its rhetorical stakes. It opens by naming a season of tension, an acknowledgement that the election was fiercely contested and emotionally charged for the people of Osun State. An acceptance speech delivered in such circumstances cannot afford to be merely celebratory, it must actively defuse hostility, reassure the anxious, and convert a partisan victory into a broad-based mandate. The speaker therefore faces the classic dilemma of the victorious politician: how to affirm triumph without deepening division. The rhetorical strategies analysed in this study are, in large part, responses to that dilemma, and their pragmatic functions can be fully appreciated only against the backdrop of the volatile context in which they are deployed.

The study is significant on several counts. Theoretically, it demonstrates how classical rhetoric and modern pragmatics can be combined into a single analytical lens for political discourse. Practically, it illuminates the persuasive machinery of Nigerian political communication at a moment of intense partisan feeling, contributing to public understanding of how leaders use language to legitimise power and pursue reconciliation. Methodologically, it offers a replicable procedure for analysing acceptance speeches that other researchers can apply to comparable texts.

Statement of the Problem

Acceptance speeches are often dismissed by casual listeners as formulaic courtesies, ritual expressions of gratitude and goodwill with little substantive content. This perception obscures the sophisticated pragmatic work such speeches perform. Beneath their apparent simplicity, they accomplish delicate acts of legitimation, reconciliation, and self-presentation under conditions of political tension. While a considerable body of scholarship has examined inaugural and campaign speeches, the acceptance speech as a genre, and particularly the Nigerian gubernatorial acceptance speech, has received comparatively little dedicated pragmatic-rhetorical attention. Furthermore, existing analyses tend to treat rhetorical strategy and pragmatic function separately, describing figures of speech on the one hand or speech acts on the other, without adequately showing how the two are integrated in the construction of political meaning. There is therefore a need for an integrated study that shows precisely how the rhetorical strategies of an acceptance speech perform specific pragmatic functions. This study addresses that gap through a close analysis of Senator Adeleke's acceptance speech.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of the study is to examine the pragmatic functions of the rhetorical strategies employed in Senator Ademola Adeleke's acceptance speech. Specifically, the study seeks to:

1. identify the dominant rhetorical strategies used in the speech,
2. determine the pragmatic functions these rhetorical strategies perform in context, and

3. examine how the interplay of rhetoric and pragmatics serves the speaker's goals of legitimization, reconciliation, and self-presentation.

Research Questions

The study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the dominant rhetorical strategies employed in Senator Adeleke's acceptance speech?
2. What pragmatic functions do these rhetorical strategies perform in context?
3. How does the interplay of rhetorical strategy and pragmatic function serve the speaker's political goals?

Pragmatics and Political Discourse

Pragmatics is concerned with the relationship between linguistic forms and their users, and with the ways in which context contributes to meaning[8]. It attends to phenomena such as speech acts, implicature, presupposition, deixis, and politeness, all of which are central to how utterances function in real communication. Political discourse is a privileged site for pragmatic analysis because political language is fundamentally action-oriented: it is designed to persuade, legitimise, mobilise, and manage relationships. Wilson argues that the study of political language must go beyond surface content to examine the implicit strategies through which politicians position themselves and their audiences. In the same vein, Fairclough[9] shows how language encodes and reproduces power relations, so that the choice of a pronoun or a metaphor is never politically neutral.

Within Nigerian scholarship, a growing number of studies have applied pragmatic and discourse-analytic tools to political speeches, examining inaugural addresses, campaign rhetoric, and concession statements for their speech acts, presuppositions, and persuasive devices[10][11]. These studies confirm that Nigerian political speeches are rich in strategic language use, but they also reveal a relative neglect of the acceptance speech as a distinct genre with its own communicative demands. The present study builds on this tradition while focusing specifically on the integration of rhetoric and pragmatics in a gubernatorial acceptance speech.

Rhetoric and Persuasion

The study of rhetoric dates to classical antiquity, where Aristotle systematised the art of persuasion around the three appeals of ethos, pathos, and logos. Ethos concerns the projection of the speaker's character and credibility, pathos concerns the arousal of appropriate emotions in the audience, and logos concerns the logical substance of the message. Modern rhetorical theory has extended these categories to include a wide range of stylistic and structural devices, such as repetition, parallelism, antithesis, metaphor, and allusion, whose persuasive force lies in their capacity to shape attention, memory, and feeling[12]. Charteris-Black in particular demonstrates that metaphor is not decorative but cognitive and persuasive, framing complex political realities in terms of more familiar experiences and thereby guiding evaluation.

Contemporary work on political rhetoric emphasises that persuasive devices operate pragmatically. Repetition, for instance, does more than embellish, it foregrounds, emphasises, and aids retention while performing acts of insistence or reassurance. Inclusive pronouns such as *we* and *our* construct solidarity and shared identity, performing the pragmatic work of alignment and in-group formation. The literature thus supports the central premise of this study: that rhetorical strategies are best understood not as ornaments but as instruments that perform pragmatic functions in context.

Face, Politeness, and Political Reconciliation

A specialised strand of the literature examines how politicians manage face in situations of conflict and transition. Building on Brown and Levinson[13] scholars have shown that concession and victory speeches are saturated with face-work: winners must avoid gloating, which would threaten the face of the defeated, while losers must accept defeat without wholly sacrificing their own dignity. The trope of magnanimity, in which a victor publicly minimises the scale of his triumph and reaches out to opponents, is a recurrent positive-politeness strategy that redistributes face and facilitates

reconciliation. This body of work is directly relevant to the present study, whose data contains a paradigmatic instance of such magnanimity in the declaration that there is no victor and no vanquished. The literature thus provides both conceptual tools and comparative precedents for interpreting the reconciliatory gestures of the speech.

Empirical Studies on Acceptance and Political Speeches

Several empirical studies have analysed the language of victory, concession, and inaugural speeches across contexts. Analyses of American and African inaugural addresses have identified recurrent strategies of unification, gratitude, and vision-casting, realised through assertive and commissive speech acts and through appeals to shared values[14]. Studies of Nigerian political speeches similarly report a prevalence of assertives and commissives, together with the strategic use of religious allusion and inclusive language to build legitimacy and solidarity. These findings provide a comparative backdrop for the present analysis. However, the specific configuration of strategies in an acceptance speech delivered in a keenly contested Nigerian gubernatorial election, and the precise pragmatic functions those strategies perform, remain underexplored. This study contributes fresh, text-specific evidence to fill that gap.

Theoretical Framework

The study adopts an eclectic framework that combines speech act theory, the theory of conversational implicature, and politeness theory, integrated with the Aristotelian appeals. This combination is necessary because no single theory fully captures the multifunctionality of political rhetoric.

Speech Act Theory

Speech act theory, originating with Austin[15] and systematised by Searle[16] holds that in uttering sentences speakers perform actions. Austin distinguished the locutionary act of saying something, the illocutionary act performed in saying it, and the perlocutionary act achieved by saying it. Searle[17] classified illocutionary acts into five categories: assertives, which commit the speaker to the truth of a proposition, directives, which attempt to get the hearer to do something, commissives, which commit the speaker to a future course of action, expressives, which convey the speaker's psychological state, and declarations, which bring about a change in the world by their very utterance. This taxonomy is central to the present analysis, since acceptance speeches are dense with assertives (claims about the situation), commissives (promises), and expressives (thanks), each realised through particular rhetorical strategies.

Grice's Theory of Conversational Implicature

Grice's[18] theory explains how speakers mean more than they say. According to the Cooperative Principle and its maxims of quantity, quality, relation, and manner, hearers infer additional, unstated meanings, or implicatures, particularly when a speaker appears to flout a maxim while remaining cooperative. In political speech, implicature allows a speaker to communicate sensitive messages indirectly, to praise or criticise by suggestion, and to invite the audience to draw favourable conclusions. The analysis draws on this theory to uncover the implied meanings behind Adeleke's strategic statements.

Politeness Theory

Brown and Levinson's politeness theory concerns the management of face, the public self-image every interactant seeks to maintain. Speakers use positive politeness to affirm the hearer's desire to be approved of, and negative politeness to respect the hearer's desire for autonomy. In an acceptance speech addressed to a divided audience, politeness strategies are crucial for reconciling opponents and unifying the polity. The extension of an olive branch to defeated rivals, for example, is a positive-politeness act that attends to their damaged face. The framework thus enables analysis of how the speech manages the face wants of supporters and opponents alike.

Presupposition

Presupposition, the set of background assumptions that an utterance takes for granted, is a further pragmatic resource of political language. Because presupposed content is presented as already

established rather than open to debate, it is a powerful, and often covert, persuasive device: to accept the utterance is tacitly to accept its presuppositions. Political speakers exploit this by embedding contentious claims within presupposing constructions, so that the audience absorbs them without scrutiny. The analysis draws on presupposition to reveal the assumptions the speech smuggles into its statements about the electorate, the opposition, and the speaker's own record.

The Aristotelian Appeals

Finally, the Aristotelian appeals of ethos, pathos, and logos provide the rhetorical dimension of the framework. They allow the analysis to connect the pragmatic acts performed in the speech to their persuasive purposes: how the speaker builds credibility, arouses emotion, and constructs reasoned appeals. Together, these theories furnish a comprehensive lens for examining how rhetorical strategies perform pragmatic functions in the service of political persuasion.

Methodology

The study employs a qualitative, descriptive research design appropriate for the close analysis of a single, naturally occurring text[19]. The design allows the researcher to describe and interpret the rhetorical and pragmatic features of the speech in depth rather than to quantify their frequency across a corpus.

The data for the study is the full text of Senator Ademola Adeleke's acceptance speech, delivered following his re-election as Governor of Osun State. The speech was purposively selected because it is a complete, self-contained acceptance speech by a prominent Nigerian political figure delivered at a moment of significant political tension, making it a rich and representative instance of the genre. The text was obtained as reproduced in the public domain and treated as the primary object of analysis.

The analytical procedure followed three stages. First, the speech was read repeatedly and segmented into its constituent utterances and discourse moves. Second, each segment was examined to identify the rhetorical strategies at work, such as inclusive pronouns, repetition, antithesis, metaphor, and allusion. Third, each identified strategy was analysed to determine the pragmatic function it performs, using the categories of speech act theory, implicature, and politeness, and its persuasive appeal was related to the Aristotelian triad. Representative excerpts are quoted verbatim to ground the interpretation in the text. The analysis is qualitative and interpretive, its validity rests on the transparency of the reasoning and the fidelity of the interpretation to the data, rather than on statistical generalisation.

Two methodological caveats should be noted. First, the study analyses the speech as a written, transcribed text and does not incorporate paralinguistic features such as intonation, gesture, or audience response, which would require audiovisual data, the analysis is therefore confined to the verbal resources of the text. Second, the interpretation of pragmatic function is necessarily context-sensitive and reader-dependent, as is inherent in qualitative pragmatic analysis, to mitigate subjectivity, each interpretive claim is anchored to a specific textual feature and to an established theoretical category, so that the reasoning can be independently evaluated. Within these limits, the descriptive-qualitative approach is well suited to the study's aim of revealing how meaning is strategically constructed in a single, rhetorically rich text.

Results

This section presents the analysis of the speech, organised by rhetorical strategy. For each strategy, the relevant excerpt is quoted, the strategy is described, and its pragmatic function is analysed in relation to the theoretical framework. The discussion then relates the findings to the speaker's overarching political goals.

Inclusive Pronouns and the Construction of Solidarity

One of the most pervasive strategies in the speech is the strategic alternation between first-person singular and first-person plural pronouns. The speaker moves between the individual I of personal commitment and the collective we and our of shared identity:

"As you have trusted me again for the second term in office, I will not disappoint you... We shall expand development, and widen the net of good governance."

The singular I foregrounds personal accountability and agency, projecting the speaker's ethos as a responsible and committed leader who personally guarantees the promise. The plural we, by contrast, dissolves the boundary between leader and led, constructing a collective political subject in which governor and governed are joined in a common enterprise. Pragmatically, the inclusive we performs an act of alignment and in-group formation: it presupposes shared goals and invites the audience to identify with the speaker's programme. In Aristotelian terms, the pronoun strategy simultaneously builds ethos (through the accountable I) and pathos (through the solidary we), while the second-person you directly interpellates the electorate, acknowledging their agency in the victory and performing the expressive function of appreciation.

Expressives and the Rhetoric of Gratitude

Gratitude is a structural backbone of the speech. The speaker repeatedly performs expressive speech acts of thanking, directed at successive constituencies:

"I therefore dedicate this victory to the good people of Osun state. I deeply appreciate your resilience, your strong will and your unwavering commitment to democracy... I must deeply appreciate Mr President... I thank the media for standing by us."

Each act of thanking is an expressive in Searle's taxonomy, conveying the speaker's psychological state of appreciation. Yet these expressives do more than express feeling, they perform strategic relational work. By thanking the electorate, the speaker attends to their positive face, affirming that their resilience and commitment are seen and valued. By thanking the President and the media, the speaker publicly acknowledges powerful allies, thereby consolidating strategic relationships and, through Gricean implicature, signalling the breadth of his support base. The repetition of the intensifier deeply and the verb appreciate heightens the sincerity condition of the expressive, reinforcing the speaker's ethos as a grateful and gracious victor. The cumulative effect is a rhetoric of gratitude that binds diverse constituencies to the new mandate.

Commissives and the Language of Promise

As a leader assuming a renewed mandate, the speaker is obliged to project a governing vision. He does so through commissive speech acts that commit him to future action:

"As you have trusted me again for the second term in office, I will not disappoint you. To serve you better, I will reinforce my strong points and correct my errors. Osun will witness further accelerated development and growth under my renewed five point agenda."

The modal will recurs as the grammatical marker of commitment, transforming statements into promises. The commissive I will not disappoint you performs a pledge whose felicity depends on the speaker's sincere intention and future performance. Notably, the admission that he will correct my errors is a face-threatening act mitigated by its embedding within a forward-looking promise, by conceding fallibility, the speaker paradoxically strengthens his ethos, projecting humility and self-awareness while implicating that past shortcomings will be remedied. The phrase accelerated development and growth appeals to logos by asserting a programme, and the reference to the five point agenda invokes a concrete policy frame that lends the promise specificity and credibility. Pragmatically, these commissives establish the terms of the new social contract between governor and governed.

It is worth noting the conditional framing as you have trusted me again, which precedes the central promise. The construction presupposes the electorate's renewed trust as an accomplished fact and then binds the speaker's pledge to it, creating a reciprocal logic of obligation: because you have

trusted, therefore I will not disappoint. This reciprocity performs the pragmatic function of ratifying the mandate as a mutual covenant rather than a unilateral grant of power, and it appeals to the audience's sense of fairness and partnership. The commissive is thereby strengthened, for it is presented not as a gratuitous boast but as the speaker's side of an exchange already begun by the voters. Such conditional-reciprocal framing is characteristic of the covenantal rhetoric through which elected leaders seek to convert votes into ongoing legitimacy.

Antithesis and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation

Perhaps the most striking rhetorical figure in the speech is the antithesis through which the speaker frames his relationship with the defeated opposition:

"In this race, there is no victor, no vanquished. I extend olive branch to my co-contestants. I am the governor of all Osun people."

The balanced negation no victor, no vanquished is a classical antithesis that rhetorically erases the hierarchy of winner and loser. Although the speaker has in fact won, the figure performs a magnanimous redefinition of the contest, implicating through the flouting of the maxim of quality (for there manifestly is a victor) that reconciliation matters more than triumph. The metaphor of the olive branch, an allusion with deep cultural and biblical resonance, performs a positive-politeness act directed at the opponents' damaged face, offering peace and inclusion. The assertive I am the governor of all Osun people redefines the speaker's role from partisan winner to universal representative, performing an act of inclusive self-repositioning. Together these devices enact reconciliation, transforming a divisive contest into a unifying resolution and appealing simultaneously to ethos and pathos.

Metaphor and the Framing of Progress

Metaphor is used to frame both the political moment and the developmental vision. Two metaphors are especially salient:

"Osun state is on the march again... My vision remains taking Osun from a civil service state to an industrial state and an investment destination."

The journey metaphor on the march again construes governance as forward movement and collective progress, casting the state as a body advancing purposefully towards a destination. This framing performs the pragmatic function of an optimistic assertive that presupposes momentum and direction, encouraging the audience to feel part of a dynamic, progressing enterprise. The transformation metaphor from a civil service state to an industrial state and an investment destination frames development as a qualitative metamorphosis, appealing to logos by outlining a coherent economic vision and to pathos by projecting an aspirational future. The contrast between a civil service state, connoting dependency and stagnation, and an industrial state and investment destination, connoting productivity and prosperity, functions as an evaluative antithesis that presupposes the desirability of the latter and positions the speaker as the agent of that desirable change. Metaphor here is cognitive and persuasive rather than decorative: it structures how the audience conceptualises the speaker's programme and evaluates its promise.

Religious Allusion and the Appeal to Shared Values

The speech is framed at both ends by appeals to the divine, a strategy deeply characteristic of Nigerian political discourse:

"Today, the issues are settled by the grace of God and people... In God we Trust, all the time."

The attribution of the victory to the grace of God performs several functions at once. It is an expressive of humility that enhances the speaker's ethos by subordinating personal ambition to divine will, it is an appeal to pathos that resonates with a deeply religious electorate, and it invokes a shared value system that presupposes common ground between speaker and audience. The closing formula In God we Trust, all the time functions as a benediction that sacralises the mandate and implicates that the governance to follow will be conducted under moral and divine sanction. Through religious

allusion, the speaker aligns himself with the moral community of the audience, strengthening solidarity and legitimacy.

Repetition, Parallelism, and Emphasis

Repetition and parallel structure recur throughout the speech, lending it rhythm and emphasis:

"I deeply appreciate your resilience, your strong will and your unwavering commitment to democracy."

The parallel triad of noun phrases, each introduced by the possessive your, is an instance of tricolon that foregrounds the virtues attributed to the electorate. Pragmatically, the parallelism performs an intensified expressive act of praise, and its cumulative rhythm heightens emotional impact, appealing to pathos. The recurrence of the appreciation frame across the speech, deeply appreciate, I thank, we are grateful, constructs a coherent thematic emphasis on gratitude, reinforcing the speaker's gracious ethos. Repetition thus operates as both an aesthetic and a pragmatic device, ensuring that the key relational messages of the speech are foregrounded and remembered.

Political Allusion and Strategic Endorsement

A politically consequential move in the speech is the endorsement of the national president, framed through appreciation and shared identity:

"Mr President is a son of Osun State, and I hereby reaffirm my earlier endorsement of him for a second term in the 2027 presidential election."

The performative I hereby reaffirm is a declaration-cum-commissive whose explicit performative verb and adverb hereby foreground its illocutionary force. The appositive a son of Osun State deploys kinship and territorial identity to presuppose a natural bond between the president and the state, implicating that supporting him is an act of local loyalty. Pragmatically, the endorsement performs strategic political alignment, repaying acknowledged support and positioning the speaker advantageously within national party politics. The move illustrates how an acceptance speech can extend beyond its immediate occasion to perform broader political work.

Presupposition and the Framing of Struggle

The opening of the speech frames the electoral period through presupposition and emotive lexis, establishing a narrative that shapes everything that follows:

"In the last few months, Osun people have been under very intense pressure. Today, the issues are settled by the grace of God and people."

The definite noun phrase the issues presupposes the existence of a set of contested matters known to speaker and audience alike, while the passive are settled presupposes a prior state of unsettledness now resolved. Through these presuppositions, the speaker constructs a shared narrative of struggle and deliverance without having to argue for it explicitly. The emotive phrase very intense pressure appeals to pathos, inviting the audience to recall a collective experience of hardship, and thereby heightening the emotional payoff of the resolution announced in the next sentence. Pragmatically, the opening performs an assertive that establishes common ground and casts the victory as a communal liberation rather than a partisan win. This framing is strategically foundational: by beginning with shared suffering and shared relief, the speaker primes the audience for the messages of gratitude, reconciliation, and hope that constitute the body of the speech. The reference to the struggle being resolved by God and people further distributes agency away from the speaker alone, reinforcing both his humility and the collective ownership of the outcome.

Multiple Addressivity and Audience Design

A defining feature of the speech is its rapid movement between distinct addressees, a phenomenon that pragmatics describes as audience design or multiple addressivity[20]. Within a short compass, the speaker addresses the people of Osun, all lovers of democracy, the President, the media, and his co-contestants in turn:

"To all lovers of democracy, I thank you for supporting our struggle... Most importantly, I thank the media for standing by us... I extend olive branch to my co-contestants."

Each shift of addressee is accompanied by a shift of pragmatic act tailored to the relationship: solidarity-building with democrats, gratitude to the media, and reconciliation with opponents. This calibrated addressivity performs the delicate work of speaking to a fractured polity as if to a single, reconcilable community. Pragmatically, the technique allows the speaker to distribute face-attentive acts across every significant constituency, leaving no important group unaddressed and thereby maximising the inclusiveness of the mandate. The categorisation of supporters as lovers of democracy and supporters of good governance is itself a rhetorical framing that presupposes the moral legitimacy of the speaker's side, implicating, without stating, that opposition to him was opposition to democracy and good governance. Audience design thus emerges as a master strategy that coordinates the more local devices analysed above.

Discussion

The analysis demonstrates that the rhetorical strategies in Adeleke's acceptance speech are systematically functional. Inclusive pronouns construct solidarity, expressives perform gratitude and manage relationships, commissives establish the governing contract, antithesis and the olive-branch metaphor enact reconciliation, journey and transformation metaphors frame progress, religious allusion sacralises the mandate and invokes shared values, repetition foregrounds key messages, and political allusion performs strategic endorsement. Across these strategies, three pragmatic macro-functions recur, corresponding to the study's objectives: legitimation, whereby the speaker establishes the rightfulness of his mandate through gratitude, humility, and divine sanction, reconciliation, whereby he heals the division of the contest through inclusive language and conciliatory gestures, and self-presentation, whereby he projects an ethos of accountable, humble, and visionary leadership.

It is instructive to observe how the strategies cooperate rather than operate in isolation. The presuppositional opening establishes common ground, gratitude then rewards the audience for their part in the shared struggle, commissives translate that goodwill into a forward-looking contract, and the reconciliatory antithesis widens the circle of beneficiaries to include former opponents. The religious frame, meanwhile, envelops the whole in a discourse of divine sanction that raises the speech above ordinary partisanship. This orchestration illustrates a key insight of discourse pragmatics: that persuasive effect is cumulative and architectural, arising from the interaction of strategies across a text rather than from any single figure. The speech is, in this sense, a designed artefact whose parts are calibrated to a unified rhetorical purpose.

The analysis also reveals a recurrent pattern of strategic self-presentation through calculated humility. At several points, the speaker diminishes his own agency, attributing the victory to God and the people, conceding past errors, and disclaiming the status of victor. In each case, the lowering of the self performs the paradoxical function of elevating the speaker's ethos, since humility is culturally valued and disarms the resentment that a triumphalist posture would provoke. This confirms the observation in the rhetorical literature that modesty is itself a persuasive strategy, one especially suited to the delicate task of governing a recently divided electorate.

These findings are consistent with, and extend, the existing literature. They confirm the prevalence of assertives, commissives, and expressives reported in analyses of Nigerian political speeches, and the salience of inclusive pronouns and religious allusion in the region's political rhetoric. They extend that literature by showing, at the level of individual strategies, precisely how rhetoric and pragmatics are integrated in the acceptance-speech genre. The study thus supports the central thesis that rhetorical strategy in political speech is not ornamental but performs concrete pragmatic acts in the pursuit of political goals.

Conclusion

This study set out to examine the pragmatic functions of the rhetorical strategies in Senator Ademola Adeleke's acceptance speech. Combining speech act theory, implicature, and politeness theory with the Aristotelian appeals, it analysed the speech strategy by strategy, showing how inclusive pronouns, expressives, commissives, antithesis, metaphor, religious and political allusion, and repetition each perform identifiable pragmatic functions. The analysis established that these strategies work together to accomplish three overarching goals, namely legitimation, reconciliation, and self-presentation, and that rhetorical figures in the speech are best understood as instruments of pragmatic action rather than mere ornament. The speech emerges as a carefully constructed act of political communication that thanks, promises, concedes, reconciles, and legitimises through a coordinated deployment of rhetorical resources. Beyond its descriptive contribution, the study carries a broader implication for how political language should be read. If rhetorical strategies perform pragmatic acts, then to listen critically to a political speech is to ask not merely whether its claims are true but what its language is doing: whom it thanks and whom it silences, what it presupposes and what it implies, whose face it protects and whose it threatens. The acceptance speech, precisely because it appears conventional and benign, rewards this kind of scrutiny, for its courtesies and blessings are also instruments of legitimation and alignment. A pragmatic-rhetorical reading thus equips citizens, students, and analysts to see the political work that everyday political language quietly accomplishes. The study contributes to the pragmatics of Nigerian political discourse by providing a detailed, text-grounded account of an underexamined genre, the gubernatorial acceptance speech, and by demonstrating the analytical value of integrating rhetoric and pragmatics. Its findings have implications for political communication practice, for the teaching of discourse analysis, and for the critical literacy of citizens who must interpret the strategic language of their leaders. Future research could extend the analysis to a corpus of acceptance speeches across parties and states, or complement this qualitative approach with quantitative measures of strategy frequency, to establish the generality of the patterns identified here. What this study makes clear is that, in the hands of a skilled political speaker, rhetoric is a form of action, and understanding that action requires the tools of pragmatics.

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