Pragmatic (Im)politeness in the Language of Political Advertisements in Selected Nigerian Newspapers

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Abstract: *Language is central to politics because it is the instrument through which politicians exercise authority and influence the people. While evidence abounds on numerous scholarly efforts to unravel the hidden meaning in varieties of political discourse, it can be observed that very little has been done on the pattern of impoliteness employed in political communication especially, political advertisements. Unlike previous studies that have examined political discourse from the angle of interviews and speeches, this study examines (im)politeness as a meaning-making tool employed by politicians in political advertisements. The study employs Leech's (1983) politeness model to drive its analysis. Thirty political advertisements were published by the selected newspapers during the covered by the study. The study seeks to establish the extent of conformity to general communicative principles in political advertisement. Findings show that the competitive nature of elections is shown in the-language of political advertisements and that politicians use them to achieve two objectives: solicit for votes and blackmail their opponents, albeit indirectly because of the need for polite communication. Even though the adverts contain a blend of polite and impolite communication, the impoliteness is masked. In essence, the notion of politeness as a tool for maintaining social cohesion does not apply to political advertisements.*

Keywords: pragmatics, impoliteness politeness, political advertisement, language universal, context

INTRODUCTION

Political advertisement is a type of communication that is employed by a political group which seeks to influence and/or inform a target audience". As rightly opined by Adegbite (2009) cited in Wilson (2010), political advertisement is a form of political communication that is backed with very strong communicative goals that makes it possible to arrive at the appropriate interpretations. The word "politics" itself is a slippery concept that has continue to be identified with divers definitions. George Orwell, in his classical essay titled *Politics and the English Language* described politics as "a mass of

lies, evasions, folly, hatred and schizophrenia". In his views, the term denotes a situation where individuals use language to deceive, oppress and suppress. For Beard (2007), politics is an art that is essential for the good and general development of the human society. It is a process of public administration that allows humans to contribute to the good of the society by creating awareness both for the leaders and the governed. Like other spheres of human endeavor, politics has its own code which points at the linguistic variety of th---e discourse and grammatical pattern peculiar to politics. The appropriateness of lexical choices in every aspect of human endeavour explains why numerous academic efforts have been expended on the interconnection between language and politics. Evidence of this abound in works like Wodak & Forchtner (2018), van Dijk (2010), Opeibi (2009), Alo (2012), Wet (2010), Fairclough (2015) and Osakinle (2024). The main occupation of scholars in this regard is to understand, how language works to maintain interpersonal relationships in modern societies. Fairclough (2015) argued that "the nature of linguistic activity that goes on in a society is not just a reflection or expression of a social process or practice, it is in its entirety, the process". In other words, the centrality or meaning of a message is conveyed more in the manner in which the message is conveyed. He explained further that disputes about the meaning of political and politically motivated expressions are a constant aspect of politics. This is partly because in politics words are often used to convey contextual meaning. Politicians deploy the instrument of language according to their needs for the moment. The focal point of this paper is the need to understand what politicians do with language and how they seek to achieve their communicative objectives. Arguments have been advanced by scholars on the choice of politeness and impoliteness as pragmatic strategies in politically related communication. Ojo and Omotunde (2017), in a study which focuses on independence anniversary speeches, explained that Nigeria's political leaders employ endearing linguistic choices in their independence anniversary speeches. In the same vein, Fafiyebi (2022) opines that, in their inaugural speeches, Nigeria's political leaders tend to mitigate the affront in their speeches. The views expressed above are not far from the fact that Nigeria's fourth republic is at its nascent stage and that those speeches are often deployed to express comradeship among the political class, achieve unity and show solidarity of purpose with the masses. Adegbija (1989) is of the view that politeness is a sub-field of pragmatics that is designed to maintain harmonious interpersonal relationships. It is a universal linguistic behaviour that manifests in all areas of human communication including politics.

Pragmatics is an important aspect of sociolinguistic study that focuses on how meaning is achieved with language. Leech (1983) describes pragmatics as the study of the principles that guide our use of language. It studies the different social and cultural factors guiding human interaction. He explained that "language users will only understand the essence of language when they understand the variables responsible for particular linguistic choices". As pragmatics is interested in language according to users, it becomes apt to explain that the use of language in politics will be in tandem with the communicative intentions of the discourse participants. This study identifies a triangular relationship between language, pragmatics and politics as being a representation of form, process and meaning……

This study seeks to clarify the nature of linguistic choices ingrained into political advertisements. This is because there is the need to understand the contribution of communication in determining either short and long term political success or failures (Atolagbe 2018). Linguists also need to understand, whether or not, the language of political advertisements contributes towards a successful democratic process viz how politicians sway people's opinions with their pattern of presentation and manner of communication in these adverts. For the purpose of this study, the definition of politics advanced by

Enyi (2016) as "the struggle for power between those who seek power and those who seek to resist them' is adopted. In essence, politics is a fierce struggle between two categories of people who are conscious of each other's moves and are ready to deploy all means to outdo one another. This definition is in direct contrast with the view of politics as an institution put in place for resolving human conflicts that may arise as a result of clashes over interest like money, influence etc.

Wright (1983:8) sees advertisements as "containing a powerful linguistic force that is primarily designed to influence the sale of goods, services, images or ideas". Doghudge (1985:8) is of the opinion that "advertisements consist of linguistic activities that are aimed at and including dissemination of information in any paid media about a product, service, an individual or institution in order to compel action in accordance with the intent of an identifiable sponsor". Advertisements in this regard can be said to involve an attempt to persuade, educate, inform or convince the target audience. This view of advertisements makes it a very relevant medium for the analysis of the various ways in which man manipulates the entity called language. Kaid & Holtz's (2006) views political advertisement as any controlled message communicated through any channel designed to promote the political interest(s) of individual political groups, governments or government agencies. The use of advertisements as a part of political strategy in Nigerian politics cannot be too far flung in history. This may be attributed to the fact that the Nigerian political terrain was dominated by the military until 1999. Because the objective of politicians in political advertisement is to persuade, inform, convince and educate their audience, it becomes expedient to deploy their linguistic knowledge in a certain way. It is on this background. This paper focuses on the importance of language and communication in politics and political administration with attention given to the effort of politicians to convince the electorate to vote along a particular line. The aim of the paper is to examine selected political advertisements along the intricate line of communicative finesse. It then becomes clear that because politicians cannot overlook the importance of advertisements in the political proceess, it becomes a tool worthy of academic attention from language scholars. This is more so, that studies like Fafiyebi and Dada (2023), Osakinle (2011), Akinwotu (2016) and Fafiyebi (2023) have examined different aspect of meaning in varieties of political communication. It is instructive that while attention had been on the types of acts performed in political communication, adequate attention had not been paid to the deployment of the politeness strategy as a pragmatic element in political communication in the Nigerian political process. As such, this study is interested in the manner in which language is put to use in the struggle for political superiority and domination.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Pragmatics is the use of language in context, it is concerned with how people usually convey more than what is semantically encoded in the words of sentences. By implication, it involves more than what is said rather what is implied in context. The label 'pragmatic' is intended to suggest a relatively low degree of lexical specificity and a high degree of contextual sensitivity as a sine qua non for appropriate comprehension. Thus, various contextual nuances are factored into the meaning of language. One major factor that affects the meaning of language is politeness. This pragmatic concept is central to each and all of our relationships, fundamental in the way we communicate with one another and defines our personalities with those we relate with.

Opeibi (2009) explains the place of language in politics. He opines that language is the tool with which a candidate's manifesto, superior political thoughts and ideologies are expressed and translated into tangible social actions for the benefit of mankind. Language, therefore, becomes indispensable as a tool for convincing, mobilising, persuading and enlightening the citizenry. Scholars have equally conceptualised politeness as a form of social behaviour necessary for academic attention. Iman (2018) submits that politeness is an aspect of linguistic study that spotlights interactional decorum. It is a form of social behaviour that employs discourse markers that show courtesy, distance, closeness, decency and deference. It equally employs distant forms of address, suitable voice tone, moderate pitch and socially tolerable address terms.

For Watts (2003), a study of politeness should not only focus on language as a form of social behaviour, it should also shed light on how communicative finesse is achieved or flouted in human communication. Whatever approach is adopted in explaining politeness, its major aim is to show how language is used in context. In polite communication, individuals avoid being too direct by employing language forms which display respect towards or consideration for others. Different scholars have examined politeness in real-life communicative situations. As opined by Eelen (2001), scholars have focused more on polite behaviour than on impolite behaviour because politeness as a feature of human interaction was traditionally conceived as a tool for face maintenance.

This claim is faulted by Watts (2003) who explained that language users tend to be sensitive to impolite rather polite use of language because communicative politeness is a common and usually anticipated phenomenon. For example, Kim (2001), Baumann (1981) and Austin (1990) all examined impoliteness in language choices across different continents. Thus, traditional models of (im)politeness as conceived by Brown and Levinson (1987) may not be enough to explain all instances of polite/impolite interaction. The contribution of context to the study of (im)politeness is not only a function of the lexical choices employed but depends on the situational interpretation of those choices. An approach to the study of politeness should evaluate communicative strategies that birth (im)politeness rather than being fixated on the traditional conception of what amounts to politeness. The study of political language has been conducted from various angles.

Explaining why studies on politically related communication have been carried out using related frameworks of semantics, stylistics, discourse analysis, rhetoric and pragmatics, Akinkuolere (2011) argued that politicians are always conscious of the mode they adopt when interacting with the citizens because it determines the level of acceptance they get from the electorate. Balogun and Murana (2018) examined how former American president, Donald Trump uses pragmatic presuppositions to achieve politeness in his inaugural speech. The study revealed that Trump uses presupposition to signpost America's economic crisis and the urgency of the need to rescue the economy. The study equally identified the use of both face-saving and face-threatening acts by the speaker. Kampf and Danziger (2019), focusing on praising and complimenting, argued that the strategy of expressing admiration and appreciation in political discourse is necessary for politicians who intend to secure long-term political capital with the people. Taraq (2021), in a study conducted on the need to understand the type(s) of politeness strategies employed by Tunisian politicians to attain political goals, submitted that politicians tend to rely on face-threatening acts with a follow-up mitigated speech act, all in a bid to gain sympathy from the audience and reshape certain opinion of the electorate.

In a related study, Raesky and Novitri (2023) examined politeness strategies in George W. Bush's victory speeches. The study, in its findings, established a preference for the positive politeness strategy where the speaker mostly employs the strategies of offering help and making promises, paying attention and giving recognition as avenues to show sympathy to the addresses. The research also revealed that Bush's choice of strategy was affected by his social status and interest which points to the situational context of the speeches.

Akuka et al (2021), conducted a study which seeks to unravel the politeness strategies employed by Ghanaian parliamentarians. The study concluded that majority of the members of the Ghanaian parliament employ positive politeness strategy against the negative politeness strategy employed by the minority. The study concludes that parliamentary discourse in Ghana is made robust and meaningful through the direct explicit polite expressions than the indirect implicit expressions deployed by the discourse participants.

Rotimi et al (2021) examined how Nigerians use language on social media platforms to express their political stance and manage relationship as well as how impoliteness is expressed in discourse and the resources and strategies employed. The findings of the study show that bald-on-record and negative impoliteness were predominant in the identified discussions. Expressions like name-calling, vulgarism, cursing, dismissal and sarcasm were deployed to convey impoliteness. Direct linguistic expressions like *you* and *your were also used* to convey direct face attacks and serve as tools for driving home the effect of impolite expressions. Name-calling and attitude markers like cognitive verbs, were used to convey feelings and attitudes towards other discourse participants. The study concludes that social media platforms provide avenues for impolite political discourse due to the unrestricted nature of its context which allows participants deploy uncultured lexicons that are responsible for in-group personality clashes and disaffection.

What is evident in the studies examined above is the focus of scholars on almost all genres of political communication except political advertisements. While it may be natural to expect that politicians will employ courteous linguistic choices in their bid to secure the support of the electorate, it remains to be seen, how Nigerian politicians will react to contextual nuances and what choice(s) of (im)politeness will be preferred in this genre of political communication which is the focus of the present study.

One of the important working definitions of politeness is the view expressed by Brown and Levinson (1987) that politeness is essentially about sparing a thought for the feelings of others regarding how they should be treated in an interaction. It is a kind of linguistic behaviour that shows the speaker's concern for the social self-esteem of his/her addressees. Politeness is not only resident in particular linguistic forms like honorifics or terms used for deference but rather in the linguistic evaluations of various forms of communicative behaviour (Grundy 2020). Politeness or impoliteness results from our critical evaluation of social actions and the meaning(s) inherent in them (Fraser and Nolan 1981). Grice introduced what is known as the cooperative principles which was roundly criticised for its strict theoretical approach. Also worthy of note is the contribution by Brown and Levinson (1987), who introduced the notion of face-wants and social acceptability into the study of politeness. Both contributions had been critically examined by scholars. For example, it has been repeatedly argued that since the maxims are not strict rules, they can be violated as seen in further clarifications made by

Grice through: flouting, violating, infringing or opting out. The politeness strategy is an offshoot of the Gricean approach to human communication.

Theoretical framework

The concept of politeness is characterised by the need to be courteous and respectful in our interactions and communicative exchanges. Thomas (1995) believes politeness is rooted in sociocultural beliefs that determine interpersonal relationships in particular societies. This, equally, is a function of language as a tool for social harmony and an instrument for achieving certain communicative goals (Leech 1983) Culpeper (1999) however viewed interpersonal relationships from a different perspective. He explained that politeness and impoliteness are difficult to separate from human interaction. This is because they combine to recreate relational work as the absence of one translates to the presence of the other. He is of the view that relational work as it applies to politeness or impoliteness is the total effort made by interlocutors to modify and regulate their interaction. This is at variance with the notion of face-work as presented by Brown and Levinson (1985). It can be deduced from the aforementioned that impoliteness in itself is a deliberate feature of communication which may or may not necessarily result from the absence of politeness.

Brown and Levinson's contribution had also been criticised for adopting a universal approach to politeness studies in this regard include Masumoto (1988), Ide (1998), Sifianou (1992a), Mao (1994) and Gu (1998). Spencer-Oatey (2008), who proposed the rapport management approach explained that the uniqueness of politeness lies in its varied applicability in different communicative situations. She opined that different cultures have different sets of strategies expected to guide human interactions and that politeness is a judgement that is socially and contextually constrained. In her view, politeness engenders specialised forms of communication which can be recognised, even though taken for granted, by interactants. This is because its emphasis is often on practical ways of formulating and facilitating socially accepted communications that are clearly understood by language users, as doing and meaning certain things. She further explained that an appropriate model for the study of politeness should not only focus on individual self-esteem but encompass, face management, social rights and obligations as well as interactional goals. In other words, while language users seek to protect personal communicative goals, they should be conscious of socially imposed obligations and the permissible variable(s) in a particular event. For the purpose of this study, a blend of Leech's politeness maxim and the indirect indexing model of politeness proposed by Pizziconi and Christie will be adopted. The politeness approach to the study of meaning as proposed by Leech (2014) stems from indirect speech acts. These categories of language use are very efficient tools for communication due to their ability to convey two or more messages at the same time without sounding ambiguous. They have the ability to introduce sensitive issues with a slight touch of humour, exaggeration, mildness and nonchalance. Leech (1983) describes politeness as the linguistic strategy of expressing concern for others in social interaction. Culpeper (2006) is equally of the opinion that the politeness strategy is employed in communication as a way of indirectly voicing our desires to be respected. He explained that 'we are polite because we feel comfortable in it and because we do not expect impoliteness from others. This, in the views of Brown and Levinson (1983), explains the notion of face. The theory adopts a cost/benefit scalar approach to the study of politeness. Leech places the speaker and the addressee at each end of the scale with one bearing the cost while the other enjoys the benefit. In the scale, he proposed a set of maxims as necessary tools for ensuring communicative politeness. Leech identified a set of maxims as tools for providing the necessary guidelines for polite communication, these are:

the tact maxim, the generosity maxim, the praise maxim, the modesty maxim, the sympathy maxim and the consideration maxim.

The tact maxim minimizes cost to the hearer and maximizes benefit to the hearer. While employing this scale, the speaker tactically bears the burden for the hearer to enjoy the benefit. As a way of getting the addressee to perform a task that is costly, the speaker employs utterances that soften the effect of the imposition.

The generosity maxim is the opposite of the tact maxim in the sense that it focuses on the speaker. In an effort to make the addressee perform certain task, the speaker employs language choices that show the speaker as deriving little or no benefit from the act. The speaker is also presented as bearing a heavy cost as a result of the act.

The praise maxim, also known as the approbation method, is used to sing the praise of the addressee. In employing this strategy, the speaker expresses either positive or negative opinion about himself or the addressee. The intention is often to diffuse the implication of any perceived criticism that may affect the face of any party in the interaction. The main objective is to avoiding criticizing the addressee as criticism is inherently impolite.

 The modesty maxim unlike the praise maxim is directed towards the speaker. The speaker eulogizes the addressees and sings less praise of self. This is also because self-adulation is an impolite strategy that threatens the addressee.

The agreement maxim seeks to show the relationship between the opinion of the speaker and the addressee's. The speaker is expected to show agreement with the addressee and minimize disagreement with them in order to reduce communicative friction.

The sympathy maxim focuses on the feelings of each of the party involved. The speaker is expected to use words that show empathy towards the addressee. The speaker uses positive rather than negative words so as to maintain the cordial relationship necessary for harmonious living.

The consideration maxim shows the speaker as having consideration for the general well-being of the addressee. In employing this strategy, the speaker reduces the urge to bring to the fore, unpleasant or shocking experience that may unsettle the addressee but may bring such to the fore in regard to the speaker as a way of making the addressee feel at ease.

METHODOLOGY

The study utilizes samples of political advertisements sponsored by politicians and political parties seeking for votes and support from Nigerians during the 2011 general elections in Nigeria. Being archival materials, the instruments for this research were purposively selected to achieve the objectives of the study. These advertisements are usually sponsored by individuals or political parties seeking to be elected into various positions in Nigeria. The data for this study were obtained between January and April, 2011 from two major Nigerian newspapers: The Punch and The Nation. The choice of these newspapers is informed by the following:

(1) the national acceptability, wide coverage, and general readership enjoyed by the newspapers:
(2) they are the major media employed by political advertisers in their bid to canvass for political support:
(3) they are both award winning newspapers with numerous awards of excellence to their credit.

The study seeks to examine the politeness approach to pragmatic study because of the belief that adverts should be tailored to follow certain communicative pattern. In other words, the advertisers are normally expected to employ appealing communicative and discourse strategies in an effort to convince the electorate to vote for a particular individual.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Praising as a Politeness Strategy in Political Adverts.

Santoso and Putri (2020), explained that a major strategy for enhancing politeness in political discourse is cordiality, self-praise or adulation. Through this approach, the advertisers enhance the face of the candidate by attributing value to them through complimenting or extending sympathy. This is seen in data 1 as presented below.

> *President Goodluck Jonathan promised Nigerians free, fair and credible elections. To prove his sincerity, he appointed a man of integrity whom he never met, Prof Attahiru Jega, as the chairman of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). President Jonathan took a step further by giving him all the necessary support, never teleguided him, never attempting to influence him and never erecting any obstacle on his way. For the first time in a long time, there is a consensus that last Saturday's elections were among the most credible in Nigeria's history. The President is a man of his word, Nigeria's journey to greatness has begun. Vote for Jonathan. Goodluck, Good work.*
>
> *Excerpt 1 (THE PUNCH, TUE. APRIL 12, 2000)*

Nigerian Politicians use political adverts to remind the electorate of the positive antecedents of a candidate. In the case of the candidate presented above, obvious and concrete reference is made to the appointment of the country's INEC Chairman. As explained by Osakinle (2024), The advertisers employ the communicative strategy of recalling the achievement of the contestant on an issue where his predecessors had failed. To convince Nigerians to vote for Jonathan, the advertisers successfully conveyed the information that his predecessors had failed in appointing "the right person to oversee Nigeria's electoral process. While the objective of the advert is to garner support for the candidate being projected, the advertisers heaped the blame for Nigeria's woeful performance in the conduct of elections on past Presidents who: had failed to appoint the right person, had failed to provide the necessary support to initiate and drive a successful electoral process, had consistently controlling their appointees and had always forced past INEC Chairmen to do their bidding. He succeeded in praising himself to the disadvantage of his predecessors.

Indirect Commands and Directives as Politeness Strategies

Leech (2014) argues that language users avoid direct orders and commands as strategies in interpersonal communication. This is due to the need to preserve the self-esteem of the addressees. However, in political advertisements as observed in data 2 and 3, the advertisers issue indirect

commands to the electorate who are the direct recipients of the message in the advertisement. This approach flouts the Gricean maxim because the speaker is not expected to place any direct obligation on the addressee

> *Nigeria needs leaders who will stand up for what is right. It is one thing to know what is right and it is another thing to stand up for it, Nigeria needs leaders who will be faithful, loyal and honest to the dream of a new Nigeria. Stand up Nigeria for the men who will usher in this new dispensation in the best interest of our nation. Stand up for Nuhu Ribadu and Fola Adeola. A new Nigeria, it is possible.*

Excerpt 2

On the other hand, excerpt 2 also flouts the praise maxim which advocates that the speaker should maximize the praise of the addressee. In the excerpt under review, the Action Congress of Nigeria projects their candidate, Nuhu Ribadu as someone who knows what is right and will also be ready to do it. This is premised on the belief that the electorate is aware of his antecedents as a former Chairman of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission. With the intention to convince the people to vote for Nuhu Ribadu, the advertisers accused past Nigerian leaders of failing to stand for the truth in spite of having the necessary knowledge about the state of affairs in the country. The political party, ACN places an obligation on the electorate which demands that they should be bold enough even in the face of all forms of intimidation and harassment and vote for leaders who will do the right thing.in addressing the electorate to vote right, it can be inferred from the advert that Nigeria is facing certain challenges because of the failure of the leaders to stand up for the right thing

> *Let's take government to the people. Go out and register to vote. Government means nothing without the people. It is therefore your responsibility to choose who governs you. Your failure to partake in the process of choosing the right leader may result in the wrong person being voted in. Register today so that you can vote for the right candidate who will inspire you to achieve your dreams. Vote for Dr Ade Dosunmu*

Excerpt 3

Excerpt 3 presented above is an advert by the PDP governorship candidate in the 2011 elections, Dr Ade Dosunmu. Even though the advert did not explicitly canvass for the votes of the electorate, it is still a political advert that seeks to educate the people. In the sample, the advertiser obeys the maxim of tact where the speaker is expected to minimize cost to the addressee. In the advertisement, the obligation of voting is placed on the addressees with the directive "go out and register to vote." As a way of minimizing the face-threatening force of this responsibility on the electorate, the speaker explained the benefit in the addressee's obedience as well as the consequence of choosing to disobey. According to the advertiser, the apathy of the electorate may result in the wrong person becoming the democratic leader while being actively involved in the process will inspire the people to achieve their dreams. This viewpoint is a confirmation of the view expressed by Wodak and Fotchchner (2018) that in getting the electorate to perform their civic political obligation, African politicians tend to paint a situation that presents the people as the greatest and ultimate beneficiaries of the process, relegating those who are the actual and immediate beneficiaries to the background.

Interrogatives as a Communicative Strategy in Political Advertisement

The use of rhetorical questions by Nigerian politicians in political advertisements serves the purpose of avoiding the obvious. This also makes it possible for them to avoid confrontation with their opponents and the party they represent. This politeness of strategy gives the addressees the freedom to make inferences and draw conclusions based on their knowledge of the situational context. This is seen as presented below.

> *Why import items we can produce? Refined fuel, clothes, rice, frozen foods, even toothpicks! Is this the price you pay for being Nigerians? Vote for self-sufficiency, vote ACN*
>
> *Excerpt 4*

This sample makes reference to the Nigerian economy as a whole. In addressing the electorate on the need to vote for the candidate of the ACN, the party places an obligation on the people: voting. The sample draws on the fact of the economic situation of the country in terms of import and export. This sample presents a rhetorical question which is designed to query Nigeria's dependence on other countries for items that can and should be produced in Nigeria. While these are statements of fact that are backed with contextually relevant pieces of evidence, the advertisers avoid accusing the government of neglecting the economy. Rather, they employ the rhetorical question strategy as a way of inviting and guiding the electorate to make informed decisions. This politeness strategy, as explained by Osakinle (2024) borders on recollecting and recalling unpleasant experiences.

> *Why spend 6 years for a 4 year course? Strikes, poor infrastructure, unmotivated lecturers, substandard education, outdated curriculums… isn't it time you graduated from this situation? Vote for better education. Vote Nuhu Ribadu and Fola Adeola for President.*
>
> *Excerpt 5*

As a result of frequent squabbles between government and workers in the Nigerian education sector, especially Tertiary education, it is almost impossible for students to graduate within the stipulated period for any particular programme. The advertisers, in this sample, makes subtle reference to this situation and clearly avoids accusing the government of the day of neglecting the education sector. The advertisers avoid stating the obvious by deploying the rhetorical question strategy as a way of avoiding confrontation with those currently in charge of educational administration in the country.

Modesty as politeness Strategy

Mullany (2002), believes that political discourse is generally confrontational because of the competitive nature of politics and that it is not always the interests of participants to pay mutual attention to each other's face needs. However, for Odebunmi (2009), culture and context are very important factors in determining the nature of (im)politeness. He explains that the Nigerian social and political context is one that frowns at direct confrontation. Thus, in the way they use language, speakers are expected to minimize discomfort to the addressees and maximize communicative comfort to them. To achieve this they are expected to avoid referring to historical events that cast a dark shadow on the personality of the addressee and make them appear as social misfits.

> *Who would you vote for? A man who fought third term and put his life on the line for the sustenance of our democracy or a man who supported third term financially or morally? He*

withdrew three billion naira from his state coffers in 2006, pocketed five hundred million and took the remaining to the then President in Abuja…. He left his state poorer, he will leave Nigeria poorer if we make the mistake of re-electing him.

Excerpt 6

The sample above also employs the rhetorical question method as a politeness strategy in political advertisements. The question "Who would you vote for" is followed by different statements on the antecedents of two major contenders in the election. It is instructive that in this advert, the advertisers did not ask the electorate to vote for a particular candidate, they merely present two different situations and emphasized the role(s) played by each individual in an event that cast a shadow on everyone who advocated in its favour. It is instructive to say that the unpleasant experience of the third-term agenda is not one to remember for those who orchestrated it. However, for the election and the need to project a particular candidate, the advertisers had to dig into history to bring up past occurrences in the belief that the understanding is mutual.

> *Affordable healthcare! It's in your vote. We gained our independence many years ago but today, we cannot boast of having qualitative healthcare delivery system in place. Obviously, we need a change that can equip our hospitals with ultramodern facilities and making it affordable for all. The destiny of our people and the future of our nation lies in our hands, let us rise up and take control. Vote Nuhu Ribadu and Fola Adeola for President*

Excerpt 7

This excerpt presented in data 7 above obeys the maxim of tact as stated in Leech's politeness approach. The advertisers identifies the need for shared obligation and makes it clear to the addressee, the necessity of bequeathing a worthy society to the next generation. This shared obligation is exemplified in the use of collective pronouns like "us", "our", "we" and "all". The speaker successfully creates a sense of belonging in the addressees by acknowledging their invaluable role as team players and stakeholders in building a society that is just, equitable and devoid of all forms of social disadvantages. With this approach, the burden of ensuring that the right persons are elected as the President of Nigeria is shared by both the speaker and the addressee.

> *Make the good work in Lagos continue. Construction and upgrade of roads are taking place across the state, people can move faster on our roads and all the Lagos heavy traffic is reducing, life is getting better because our government is changing the face of Lagos. If you love what you are seeing, don't leave the elections to chance*

Excerpt 8

This data excerpt is another sample that borders on the maxim of modesty. In the maxim, the speaker is not expected to engage in self-praise or adulation. Even where the maxim is flouted, the speaker is expected to tone down the force of the impolite expression. This could have been achieved with the opening statement in the advert which requests the addressee to "make the good work in Lagos continue." With this obligation placed on the addressees, the speaker is expected to engage in mitigating communicative strategies intended to make the addressees feel good and feel comfortable carrying out the obligation. However, the advertisers refrain from singing the praises of the candidate. This is conveyed with the expression "life is getting better" as a result of the perceived achievements

of their aspirant in terms of road construction, traffic decongestion and general well-being. The burden of responsibility is further placed on the addressee with the concluding statement "if you like what you are seeing…." It then becomes clear that the speaker adopts a stance of someone doing the electorate a favour and leaving them without a choice.

Inferences as a Politeness Strategy

Nigerian politicians often employ the inference strategy as a pragmatic tool in conveying their messages in political discourse. In this strategy, they outrightly avoid making reference to individuals but identify mutually shared situations from which the addressees are expected to make inferences. In the advert samples presented below, the advertisers make reference to some situation that characterized the Nigerian socio-political context expecting the electorate to make their decisions.

> *To hand our children a banner without stain should be our common goal. Therefore we must take a stand against all social disadvantages. Let us build a Nigeria we can all be proud of and leave a self-sustainable society as a legacy. For the Nigeria of our dreams, vote ACN.*
>
> *Excerpt 9*

The issue of social inequality is one that was roundly condemned during the latter days of the administration of the incumbent President who was seeking re-election in this particular cycle. The advert under scrutiny here stems from a social dichotomy issue that was rampant in the political circle of the government of the day. In the Jonathan administration, Politicians were fillng public offices with their relatives thereby creating a form of social injustice where qualified individuals were denied certain opportunities because of their social status. In condemning this act, the advertisers employ politeness by not being direct in their accusations. They expected the electorate to draw the appropriate inferences from the scenario painted before them. This is also seen in sample 10 where copious reference is made to the nature of the relationship between the Northern and Southern part of Nigeria as the main political blocs in the country.

> *Shagari on Jonathan*
> *Even after the independence, the people from the Niger Delta remained faithful to the friendship that had developed over the years. The north will remain grateful for such a long political friendship with the people of the Niger Delta. I believe you will succeed having worked so hard. Vote Nigeria united, Vote Jonathan/Sambo.*
>
> *Excerpt 10*

The primary intention of this excerpt is to project the cordial relationship between the candidate and the people of northern Nigeria. This advert sample comes from the contextual situation where Goodluck Jonathan's Presidential ambition was made possible as a result of the death of a sitting northern President, Umaru, Musa Yar' Adua. The content of the sample under analysis comes from the northern leaders. It expresses the fact that the people of the Niger Delta had shown friendship and total commitment to the north in spite of the many challenges of the past. The sample only reminds us of the pleasant occurrenc3es between the North and the Niger Delta and chooses to ignore bringing up any experience that may bring back unpleasant memories. It is on record that the two groups referred to in the advert have had lots of pleasant and unpleasant political, economic and social engagements that are far-flung into the country's history and that the speaker is constrained by the need for communicative politeness to only dwell on the pleasant ones.

DISCUSSION

Politicians have always been the originators of all forms of politically related discourse including political advertisements. As such, they explore context to determine both the form, function and goal of the adverts. The current study examined political adverts obtained in the build-up to the 2011 general elections in Nigeria with the sole aim of identifying the degree of conformity to or deviation from the politeness and impoliteness approach to language use. Elections in Nigeria are marked with diverse forms of linguistic exchanges, either among politicians, their political parties or their supporters. One of the avenues through which these exchanges are obtained is the political advert. The study observes that elections in Nigeria are characterized with intense competition, rivalry, mud-slinging and a lot of name-calling. This confirms the view expressed by Opeibi (2009) that the political class uses political adverts as platforms for bringing past misdeeds of their opponents to the fore. While political adverts are primarily designed and intended to solicit votes.

From the analysis carried out in this study, it is evident that communication is an important feature of the political process. As argued by Jones and Thermistocleous (2022), electioneering is an important aspect of the political process where language is put to conscious and cautious use. In unravelling the mystery of the conscious and cautious deployment of language in political adverts, the study has shown that political adverts maintain the objective for which they are designed. In other words, the advertisers focus on the need to secure the support of the electorate and convince them to commit their votes to a particular political party and/or candidate. The advert samples examined in the study further show the integral role of context in crafting political advertisements. This confirms the view expressed in Fetzer (2007) where he makes it clear that language users, include politicians explore contextual knowledge because it helps in advancing the meaning and comprehensibility of communication. The analysis clearly establish the use of linguistic brevity as a way of showing mutual contextual knowledge between the advertisers and their target audience.

It can also be established from the study that political adverts not only serve as tools for soliciting for votes but also provide contextual justification(s) on why the electorate should vote for a particular candidate and why they should not vote for a particular candidate. As established by Osakinle (2024) that political advertisers employ communicative strategies that are relevant to the context of use to achieve their aim, the study has been able to show, through the analysis carried out in this study, that Nigerian politicians use political adverts as a linguistic tool to "reduce" the political influence of their opponents. This is because elections are viewed as a context where only one winner can emerge. As a result of this, each candidate employ language to cast aspersions on the other which explains the use of what Opeibi (2005) earlier described as negative smear campaign.

While it can be deduced from the analysis that politicians use the adverts as tools for smear campaign against a known opponent, we are also able to establish the fact that politicians employ both the polite and impolite communicative strategies in political adverts. Here, the advertisers, in projecting the qualities of a particular candidate, focuses on the shortcomings of his opponent which results in the performance of face threatening linguistic acts which are often intentional. It is noteworthy that as much as these acts may be seen as threatening the social face of the opposition candidate, they are considered contextually appropriate because all is fair in politics. Thus, the claim by Wodak and

Fotchner (2018) that the terrain of politics allows divers use of language that may be otherwise considered offensive is reinforced. Furthermore, from the politeness perspective, the study established a significant deviation from the conventional politeness approach in political advertisements. Findings show that in crafting the message of their adverts, politicians dig up historical facts that are often intended to serve dual purposes. They use the adverts to advertise and project the positive social perception of their preferred candidate and also use the same advert to indirectly condemn the socio-political and economic state of the country. The maxims often flouted are the praise maxim and the modesty maxim. While the politicians are not unaware of the need for interactive etiquette as a means for establishing and maintaining social harmony, ultthey deliberately engage in self-adulation and are at the same time, intentionally immodest in their quest to occupy a political office. This is because of the view that their past achievement is what qualifies them for the position sought.

It is also important to emphasize the view that political advertisements produced by Nigerian politicians, combine a blend of both polite and impolite communication. This view draw relevance from the socio-political and economic situation of the Nigerian society. Previous studies which include Balogun and Murana (2018), Odebunmi (2009), Augustina et al. (2023) and Ifecholobi and Okpokiri (2020) all established this view For example, in a study that examines the use of presupposition and politeness in the inaugural speech of Donald Trump, Balogun and Murana (2018) submit that political discourse often centres around the socio-economic issues confronting the people. This has also been confirmed in the samples selected for this study. The adverts discuss the numerous socio-political events prevalent in Nigeria. Polite and face-threatening acts are often employed in a single piece of political communication. Our findings show the use of strong condemnation and direct and mitigated criticism as communicative strategies in political advertisements. In an earlier study conducted by Odebunmi (2009), it was argued that to achieve politeness in political communication, participants in print media political interviews in Nigeria work on three contextual beliefs, namely, shared knowledge of subjects, shared knowledge of political gimmicks, and shared knowledge of ideological expectations. It shows that participants in the interviews put up politic, polite and impolite verbal behaviours, which are respectively indexed by confrontations and criticisms, veils, and condemnations and accusations.

From the analysis presented above, it is deducible that political advertisement is a unique form of political discourse where politicians explore contextual nuances to achieve their communicative goals. This confirms the view expressed in Ayoola (2005) that politicians employ few words to say much more. Findings from the study also reveal that political advertisements, the type employed in this study, are directed at two groups of people, the electorate and a political opponent. The advertisers successfully use one advert to address two different sets of audience. As a result of this, there is the need for each of the groups to rely on contextual knowledge to derive the appropriate pragmatic intention of the advertisements.

CONCLUSION

The need for a peaceful co-existence among humans informs the choice of polite expressions in inter-personal communication with the need to sound pleasant and less offensive. However, this is not always the case with political advertisements. In other words, while political adverts are not devoid of linguistic affronts, those affronts considered offensive are communicated in a way that the faces of

certain individuals are not threatened. The nature of elections all over the world demands that aspirants demean one another to secure the votes and support of the electorate. This is contrary to the universal approach to the study of politeness proposed by Brown & Levinson (1983). This study concludes that politicians identify the need to maintain interactional equilibrium in political discourse thereby making a great effort to avoid conflict in political adverts.

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The New Okota-Itire Link Bridge.

Make the **good work** in Lagos continue.

Construction and upgrade of roads are taking place all over the state; people can move better on our roads and all the heavy Lagos traffic is reducing. Life is getting better because our government is changing the face of Lagos. If you love what you are seeing, don't leave this election to chance.

Vote Fashola for continuity.

VOTE Babatunde Raji Fashola
For 2nd TERM as Governor, Lagos State 2011

Eko o ni baje o!