

# Candidacy Endorsement and Rebuttals as Mediated Campaign Strategies in The 2023 Nigerian Election

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## ABSTRACT

Endorsements trigger arguments and rebuttals about the relevance of political actors by the spokesmen frontline political parties. Previous linguistic studies have focused more on campaign speeches; little attention has been paid to endorsement as a campaign strategy. This study investigated the endorsement speech of Olusegun Obasanjo (OBJ) and rebuttals by supporting and opposing spokesmen of Labour Party (LP), People's Democratic Party (PDP), and All Progressive Congress (APC) in Nigerian elections, identifying and analysing the locutionary, illocutionary and Pragmatic strategies. The qualitative design was used. Data comprise purposely selected and transcribed texts from Channels Television (CHNLSTV) interview, moderated by Seun Okinbaloye. Data was downloaded from their YouTube channel Mariana Sbisá's Speech Act, supported by John Searle's classification of illocutionary, and the textual part of Mey's Pragmatic Acts were used as the framework. The locutionary strategies of endorsements and rebuttals in the data were: juxtaposition with alternative facts, conscious denial of position and facts, affirmation of thoughts, representation of opinionated position and counter-position, acceptance of position or facts and attack/defense of personality traits. Three major illocutionary acts: expressive, representative, and directive, were seen. Pragmatic resources such as inference, reference, relevance, metaphor and shared situational knowledge underlined. Expressive was achieved by condoning, criticising, condemning and praising. Representative was constructed by the forces of asserting, accusing, comparing and contrasting or juxtaposing. Directive was justified by defining, declaring, endorsing and analogising. The study concludes that endorsements and rebuttals are the performance ratings of political agents.

## KEYWORDS

endorsement; political campaign; Nigerian elections; pragmatics of intention

## INTRODUCTION

The Nigerian election has been at the forefront of democracy in Africa, and as such, has generated intense debates or arguments, arising from comments, endorsements and rebuttals. These discourses are marked interconnectedly, to a large extent, and in a general sense, by locutionary and illocutionary resources of language. In relation to the Nigerian political process, there is every reason to align with Schmid's (2001: 4) position that political issues often spark up controversies. This goes with the obvious reality that democracy always entails contentious sides, in this case, political parties and agents.

Political agents project the interest of their parties, and the arguments raised in defense of their parties may arouse counter arguments and rebuttals from other opposition parties. In other words, language serves as a powerful instrument used to define not only political identity, but also to project stance and boundaries by ingroups and outgroups (Schmid, 2001: 9). It is important to conceptualise that even within the political class there are these two significant subgroups, because political parties claim to have different ideologies and perspectives on issues. Thus, when language is used by one party to legitimate claims, language is also used to delegitimize the same claim. The questions that arise here are, how do politicians use language to legitimate and delegitimize claims and positions, what are the pragmatic or performative functions of the linguistic resources deployed in the legitimisation and delegitimation speeches? These questions are answered in this study.

In the words of Wodak (2009), political speeches such as endorsements may have long time effects. They stir remarkable controversies that may make the process interesting, if not contribute to shaping the nascent democratic process. Most of these speeches or endorsements ignite feelings of dissatisfaction and subsequently rebuttals. This is given considering the fact that politics is seen as a struggle for power, or the struggle to legitimise one's claim to it (Bourdieu, 2005: 39). Political endorsements are rhetorical arguments that are rendered with 'persuasive, textual, pragmatic and lexical' markers for the purpose of preferring a particular candidate to others or recommending the candidate to electorates in an election cycle. Thus, political endorsement speeches come with convictions (Smith, 1971: 149–50), power (Chomsky, 1979: 191). To what extent do speeches of endorsement affect the political process, and how densely (il)locutionary the speeches posit are not less important as the rebuttals and arguments they spark up, which are laden with locutions and illocutions in their own rights. The main objective of this research is to examine the locution and illocution strategies of both sides of the divide, that is, the endorsement act, and the candidate it favours, on the one hand, and the opposers of the endorsements from the opposing party.

Wodak (2009) avers that in the Aristotelian model of political discourse (speeches), endorsements are tied to ethics, moral values and the credibility of political actors which they favour. They give mental pictures of actors in each society or political landscape. Endorsements arouse both good and bad responses as perlocutionary acts. The locutions and illocutions are underpinned by both the context and the political system that warrant such endorsements. One of the pondering questions that arise here is what are these contextual features, as well as the issues that underpin such endorsement? There is a general feeling that the electorate, who are at the centre of any electoral process, are viewed as the grounds for contention. Thus, endorsement can sway the demography of electorates because it can determine how the electorates feel about the agent (Achen, and Bartels, 2016). How they feel subsequently affects how they respond to the agent's position on policies, and political life in general. Achen and Bartels (2016) argue that 'elections are determined by powerful forces, and the only way they get the people to think they are involved is bringing them into the arena by endorsing preferred candidates (politicians). The pragmatic way(s) these are done is an essential area of concern in this study.

Previous studies on political – election discourses in relation to endorsement of candidates have focused on micro issues around participation. For instance, Bankston and Burden (2023) worked on mobilisation of registered voters to support particular candidates. Certain rhetorical strategies are used to motivate or mobilise voters, including endorsement by political heavy weights, though not emphasised by Bankston and Burden (2023). Onapajo and Babalola (2020) worked on the assessment of Nigeria's 2019 general

elections, qualifying it as ‘a shattered hope’. The goal of politics and every election cycle is to institute leadership that will raise the hope of the nation. The gap exploited in their study is, while cycles of election dampen the hopes of citizens, political endorsements are aimed at establishing and rekindling hope, which makes people participate more in election cycles. The pragmatic strategies used to express such hope in endorsement texts are the main concerns of this study. Nwagwu, Uwaechia and Udegbonam (2022) assessed the commodification of the Nigerian electoral system, focusing exclusively on vote buying. The gap here is that endorsements are different from inducements, and their pragmatic markers have seeming differences as this present study seeks to uncover.

Rasak, Ogunlade, Asamu, Ake, Olowojolu and Ake’s (2022) research is related to Nwagwu, Uwaechia and Udegbonam’s (2022) study, which centres on money in the Nigerian election. They noted that election have become a do-or-die affair, which has set politicians in Nigeria to a survival of the fittest mode. The limitation in their study is that endorsement s, which this present study is focused on, is not highlighted as one of the triggers of desperation among politicians. When one candidate gets the endorsement of a political heavy weight, the tendency to generate stiff contention between and among that candidate is high. Onuoha and Okafor (2020) adopted the word, ‘moneyocracy’ to describe the condescension in the Nigerian electoral system. The fact that this may or may not contribute to endorsement is not clearly established in Onuaha and Okafor’s study. This present study is focused on the comments and rebuttals emanating from political endorsements to underscore the pragmatic strategies deployed to either support or counter the endorsements.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### ***Pragmatics and Political Talk***

Political discourse (talk) is a multifaceted area of discourse that has attracted various interests in scholarships. Fetzer (2013: 1-2) posits that it can be classified, dominantly, under institutional, public and media discourses. It is institutional because it takes place, contextually, in institutional settings. It qualifies as public discourse because it is bidirectional and, in many cases, in political talk, there are communicative bidirectional exchanges between people in power (the in-group) and the people (the out-group), while it qualifies as media discourse as it involves interviews and media appearances. In the words of Fetzer (2013), political talk takes place in media settings. This also implies that every political talk attracts media outfits; they make news easily. Every talk that has a political undertone attracts media attention. Added to this is the fact that political talks are transmitted through various means (Fairclough 1995, 1998; Fetzer and Weizman 2006; Sbisà 2006).

Political discourse involves actors like political aspirants, heads of state or other leading representatives of the government’ (Fetzer, 2013), agents or spokes’ persons of political candidates of parties both in power and the opposition. Issues raised can be from special occasions, campaigns, official debates, press conferences, including endorsements which is the focus of this research. Lauerbach (2004) opines that political talk can be moderated by journalists and broadcast live by the media to engage the public, because all political talks find their way to the media one way or the other. There are areas of political talk like endorsements that exist in a thread. Such discourses attract trending comments, responses and rebuttals. Everything done in the period of election is aimed at swinging voters or winning other actors and electorates to their side (Peters, 2018), Persson and Tabellini (2000: 58) submits that political talks are campaigns in their own rights in the same way that endorsement in politics often raise valiant or critical social and economic issues to

vilify or praise certain political agents. The comments and rebuttals from endorsements are conversational turns and discourses that linger in the political space for a long period of time. They are also capable of shaping the electoral process.

Political talks are power-related discourses (Wodak, 2015). In other words, the relationship between power and discourse is bidirectional. van Dijk (2008) notes that power affects discourse in the same way that discourse is shaped by power relations. The way people talk may be motivated or influenced by their authority, power and status. Alternatively, the way people perceive, demonstrate or even negotiate power can be determined by the way they use language. Political endorsements are affected by power relations. The endorser is often regarded as a political heavyweight and the belief is that how they use language to present their feelings about a political actor or give their endorsement may affect people. Pursuing this argument further, Wodak (2020) views endorsement as an indelible part of the political system. What guides political actions and behaviour is the feeling that such an action will receive endorsement by people or members of the political class. Fairclough (2006) argues that political talk exists as a part of social discourse, meaning that everything that concerns politics affects society. This implies that whatever is done within the corridors of power constitutes a topic for endorsement whether directly or indirectly.

### ***Language, Discourse and Frontline Politicians***

Politicians consider themselves to be a different class in society; hence use language in a way that legitimates their position, power or authority (van Dijk, 2008). In the previous section it was stated that the identity of the politician is clearly defined within the scope of the in-group and out-group. The in-group identity reflects in the fact that politicians have a common interest, which they project through language. Jeffries (2010), aligning with Eagleton (1991) and Kress (1985), describes common interest in the political class as a form of ideology. Kress (1995: 65) opines that the ideology of the political class is operationalised through language, and the way language is used among the politicians gives an understanding of the workings of power and ideology. His intention is to clearly mark the interface between how politicians use language and the ideology projected by them. For Fairclough (1995) language is used to pursue some form of hegemony. Politicians use language to control the will of people.

John, Akano and Adegbembo (2022) draw three conclusions on the way power reflects in language, on the one hand, and how language projects power, rank and social status. The first has been established in the previous section, which is that language plays a role in social conditions and actions, including revealing what goes on within power. In other words, political ideology is reflected both in the production and interpretation of political texts. Second, political discourse and the representation of identity is not devoid of rhetorical and pragmatic strategies. These are often shaped, produced and determined by the nature of interpretation or analysis of the texts in the contexts they are uttered. Third, political texts could be the results of ideology, or the condition for ideology. Therefore, the value of the text in political discourse cannot be underestimated (van Dijk, 1998, Widdowson, 1975). The text is what the analyst works on to reveal the instantiations of ideology, power and authority.

### ***Theoretical Framework***

The framework for this study is Marian Sbisá's model of Speech Act theory complimented by John Searle's classification of illocutionary acts. The rallying point of these two models is locutions and illocutions, which cannot be considered in isolation of the speech act

theory in transcendence from the time of Jane Austin. The foundational principle for speech act is propositions. In other words, speeches directed at influencing people's beliefs, attitudes or behaviour (Lyons, 1977: 725). In every utterance there is at least a proposition from a speaker, triggering a kind of response or reaction from the hearer. For Mayanga (1990:3), the interface between the proposition and response is best described as a social intercourse whereby the speaker, in a specific context, passes an information to the hearer making him accept certain conditions, opinion or discussion. While Mayanga refers to this as the function of language, Searle (1976:25) calls it the usefulness of language; to him, language makes has no use or meaning if it does not clearly make a proposition or elicit a kind of (re)action. Searle (1976) subsequently identifies five areas of use of language; it is used in telling 'people how things are, getting people 'to do things', committing oneself to doing things, expressing one's feelings and attitude, and bringing about certain changes. These are achieved by illocutionary verbs, according to Thomas (1995:32), which are distributed among performative acts like informing, making statements, asking questions, issuing commands, giving reports, greetings, warning, promising, entreating and apologising.

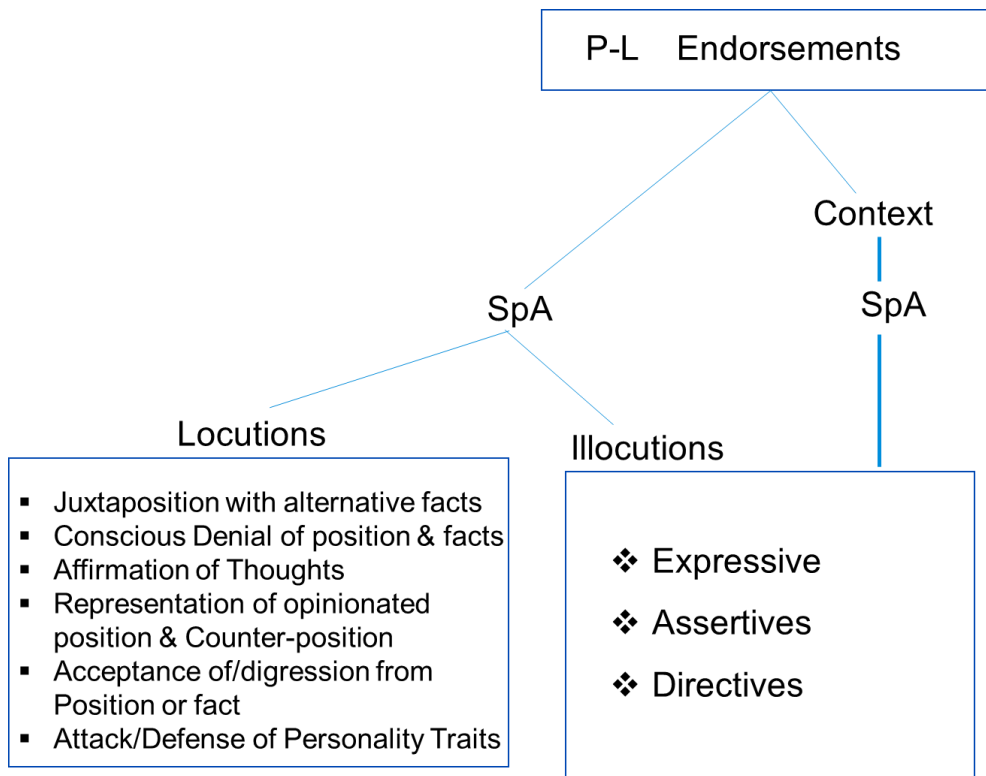
Oishi (2006) suggests that the summary of Austin's speech act theory of meaning is premised on the fact that meaning should not be explained through reductive complexities or 'logical or mathematical model', by reducing meaning to a fact 'to which the sentence corresponds'. However, this is an established shade of meaning which Austin calls 'constatives' meaning, which can be verified as what is true or false, for instance, 'I eat rice daily', which can be verified as a regular food for most people (Odebunmi, 2006). The speech act theory is funded upon performative meaning which are projected by some forms of illocutionary force, and has three interconnected tiers: locution, illocution and perlocution. Locutionary acts include phonetic acts, phatic acts, and rhetic acts. Phonetic acts involve pronouncing sounds; phatic acts involve uttering words or sentences following the phonological and syntactic rules while rhetic acts involve uttering a sentence with sense with definite reference. Locutionary meaning, according to Fraser (1986:32), conveys the sense in utterance, the identity of objects stated by the speaker in connection to deixis, that is, time, person and place, and its connection to sounds, phatic acts, which are ways of uttering words or sentences in accordance with the phonological and syntactic rules. Rhetic acts are acts of uttering a sentence with sense and definite reference; this is related to the context of utterance (Levinson, 1983:62).

Illocutionary acts are performative actions, that is, overtly or covertly doing something (Oishi, 2006). From Austin's (1975) foundational study, it implies *doing something with words*. In Searle's (1969) perspective, an illocution is the production of a token act, using linguistic devices, performed by illocutionary force. Austin (1962) identifies five illocutionary acts: verdictives, exercitive, commissive, behabitive, and expositive'. Examples of these are found in Oishi (2006) to include exercising judgment (Verdictive), exerting influence or power (Exercitive), assuming obligation (Commissive), adopting attitude or expressing feeling (Behabitive), and clarifying arguments or communicating positions (expositive). Searle's (1969) classification is slightly different. It includes assertives, directives, commissives, expressives and declaratives. Assertive involves making assertions, conclusions, claims, among other propositions. Directives are marked by commanding, begging, requesting, while Commisives involve making promises, vows, and pledges. Expressives entail thinking, apologising, congratulating, condoning, praising, among others while declaratives include firing, christening or commissioning and declaring (Odebunmi, 2006).

Austin (1962) views perlocution as the ‘consequential effect which reflects on the feelings, thoughts or actions of the hearer. A perlocutionary act is the response generated from the performance of an act. In Odeunmi’s (2006: 95) view, three relative responses are garnered by perlocutions. They are effects because of the utterance made or the force generated, responses achieved through conventional and unconventional acts and the effects of the verbal and non-verbal cues. Sbisá’s (2006) orientation and model of speech act is founded upon context and inference, which, according to her, have clear connection with the hearer’s understanding of the speech act that are assigned to utterances. This though is connected with both Bach and Harnish’s (1979) mutual contextual belief and Sperber and Wilson’s (1986) optimal relevance – inference of the illocutionary force driving utterances or conditioning the speech act in the speaker’s utterance. In Sbisá’s (2006) perspective, the inferential model of speech act emphasises speaker’s performed act, not according to certain conventions or rules, but on the hearer’s cognitive activity. In other words, Sbisá’s model focuses on the reconstruction of speaker’s intentions, which is the starting point of the performance of an act within a limited or unlimited, objective or cognitive context. The intention also encapsulates some form of linguistic behaviour, which are organised or consciously planned to achieve specific acts. Sbisá (2016: 6) argues that locutions are cognitive inferential activities within social norms, that aid the performance of speech act or ‘illocutionary acts. The inference is an obligation on the hearer to perceive the speaker’s intention, and that which he tries to communicate. The inference or intention of an action can shift the focus of an utterance from action to the mind (Sbisá, 2006).

## **RESEARCH METHODS**

The research design for this study is qualitative. It employs mediated data, obtained from Channels Television which is aired on Cable to reach millions of viewers both locally and internationally. The data are interviews of political agents expressing their opinions and rebuttals on President Obasanjo’s open letter and endorsement of the candidacy of Peter Obi and the ‘Obidient’ movement. Three interviews, 47 minutes each, featuring the spokespersons of the three frontline candidates in the 2023 election, Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), Action Progressive Congress (APC) and the Labour Party (LP), were downloaded from the station’s website with a redirect to YouTube, where the interviews were streamed. The data were transcribed to textual forms and subjected to critical discourse and pragmatic analysis, using a blend of Mariana’ Mbisá’s and Searle’s models of Speech Acts theory. The analysis was done qualitatively at two pragmatic levels, at the level of locutionary strategies and illocutionary acts. The analytical framework used is presented in figure 1.



**Figure 1.** Endorsements in Nigerian Political discourse (Source: mine)

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Six locutionary strategies, with respect to intentional acts are underscored in the debates among three (3) political agents, and the moderator, while reacting to President Olusegun Obasanjo's (OBJ's) endorsement of Mr Peter Obi as a more credible candidate. Three dominant illocutionary acts are used to project these intentions. The analyses in the following subsections demonstrate these clearly.

### *Juxtaposition with alternative facts*

Political agents do a lot of juxtaposition, in most cases with alternative facts. This is mainly done to refute certain claims that are used to legitimise or endorse other candidates. Such alternative facts can be fabricated, reinterpreted or even misinterpreted by the political agents to achieve certain ends. In the case of reacting to President Obasanjo's endorsement letter, spokespersons of political agents who were not the focus of the endorsements employed the pragmatic intentions of juxtaposing with alternative facts to express dissatisfaction with Obasanjo, and to downplay the gravity of facts that he presented to endorse his choice of candidate.

- (1) **MODERATOR:** ... for those who have questioned Obasanjo's **electoral value**, cannot take away **the fact that that was a man that perhaps has governed this nation the most**, either in Khaki or as a civilian. He's been a **former Head of state, and a two-time president...**
- (2) **RESPONDENT (1):** ... **I think that em... we** have established a track of not **exactly** embracing the person and personality of General Olusegun Obasanjo...His performance in Office does not sell him to us as a credible **ah individual** that we should seek his endorsement... **(APC Spokesperson)**

From excerpt 1, the moderator, who is the interviewer, sets the record straight about the political influence of the endorser, former president ‘General Olusegun Obasanjo’ (henceforth, OBJ), using ‘electoral value’. On the one hand, the moderator establishes relevance of his statement, using reference to OBJ’s duration of leadership, both as a military ‘head of state’ and democratic president. These are indexed by metonyms, which are metapragmatic representations in African politics, ‘Khaki’ and ‘civilian’. This record is not in doubt, as the moderator puts it in the indirect act expressive, and emphatic assertive acts. Historically, while OBJ and President Muhammadu Buhari (PMB) have had the same experiences ruling the nation at both military and democratic dispensations, OBJ’s cumulative years of leadership (3yrs as military and 8yrs as democratic) exceeds that of PMB (2yrs as military and 8yrs as democratic), which is also a feature of relevance to the fact laid by the moderator. On the other hand, the respondent, using wavering assertive act, set up by the verbal process ‘think’, and culminating with the negative adjunctive mood, not exactly, counters the notion with an alternative fact. In this case, the speaker places down on OBJ’s status and ‘performance’. He used tautology, in ‘person’ and ‘personality’, in search of words to portray his alternative fact, while the adjunctive, not exactly’, is used to provide another side of the substantiated fact presented by the moderator. The respondent resorts to mannerism ‘em’, ‘ah’, and pragmatic silence (pulse) as reinforcement strategies to cover his search for the right alternative fact to present, which he hinges on his ‘performance in office’. However, this is generalised, that is, not pointing out, in specific terms, the period of OBJ’s military rule, the first or second tenure of democratic rule; alternative facts lack specificity (Lehtonen, 2018).

- (3) **RESPONDENT (2):** He has virtually destroyed every concept of democracy in his entire reign... whether he has weight, whether he has a voter’s value... he did not win his polling unit in 1999; in 2003, he practically rigged his polling unit... (**PDP spokesperson**)

The respondent above, using assertive act, demonstrates the same pragmatic intention of juxtaposition, using alternative facts that is hinged on dismissing the moderator’s submission about OBJ’s political (electoral) value. The speaker uses adjunctive mood, virtually, ‘entire’ and ‘practically’, in trying to emphasise his point of view. However, the use of emphasis does not substitute proof beyond doubt. First, in his assertion, he uses generalisation in ‘entire reign’. It has been established that there were three dispensations of OBJ’s presidency, each having specific details. Not having to make reference to any particular administration makes it an alternative fact. Another feature of alternative fact in the respondent’s statement is contradiction of fact, which he implies using the verb, ‘destroyed’. OBJ’s three dispensation of ‘reign’ has documented values. As a military head of state, he laid the foundation of democracy, by successfully organising an election, and then handing over power to a democratically elected president, in person of Shehu Shagari. In his regime as a democratic president, he was able to secure forgiveness for Nigeria’s humongous international debts, and set the tone for some level of development, economically. The speaker uses anaphora to set up synonymous terms, ‘weight’ and ‘value’, in search of the right lexicon to get the moderator to accept his own position, which he employs another assertive act to posit, this time, making an unsubstantiated claim. The respondent cross indexes winning an election with defining electoral – ‘voter’s value’. This accounts for his reference to 1999 and 2003 election cycles. However, the ability to win one’s ‘polling unit’ does not substantiate one’s political ‘value’, especially when one has won the general election. the polling unit is insignificant when considered with the entire population of voters in Nigeria. The claim about ‘rigging his polling unit’



cannot be substantiated. This requires more than just verbal claim; to prove rigging, the speaker is supposed to present the original polling unit result, and the declared result, or provide verified testimonies from all the voters in that polling unit.

### ***Conscious denial of/digression from position and fact***

The opposers of political endorsements reject or deny facts that are used to endorse other candidates. The overall essence of presenting or denying facts in political discourse is for legitimising and delegitimising candidates. Notably, the value of political endorsements is in the facts presented by the endorser. In this case, OBJ lays out specific positions which he represents as facts to trigger more debates among agents of PDP, APC and even LP. Respondents who the endorsement do not favour, in most cases, engage in digression from the content or fact presented, to mitigate the impact of the political agent's endorsement.

- (4) **RESPONDENT (1):** ... the number of poor people in Nigeria by both the world-bank statistics and the NBS statistics, has reduced compared to the number of poor during Obasanjo's time... **(APC Spokesperson)**

One of the contextual underpinnings of OBJ's endorsement speech is the economy. In this case, reference is made to the suffering of the masses for the purpose of delegitimising the APC government, and legitimising his recommendation of the endorsed candidate, Peter Obi (PO), presenting him as a 'messiah'. The APC respondent in excerpt 3 used 'assertive' act to consciously deny the claim made in the endorsement, by way of providing comparative statistics. The speaker here deploys two pragmatic strategies to cover up his locution (pragmatic intention) of denial of the claim. On the one hand, he employs the strategy of concealing. For instance, he refuses to provide the statistical figure. On the other hand, it is obvious that the speaker streamlines the basis for comparison between OBJ's dispensation and the present dispensation on percentage parameter, rather than numerical parameter, contradicting himself in the process. The noun, 'number' betrays his pragmatic intention of denial. The endorser, OBJ, and the APC respondent are mutually aware that the population (which is synonym to number) of Nigerians has significantly increased since OBJ's presidency. The National Bureau of Statistics, which is referenced in the respondent's statement, reports the population of Nigeria to be 122,283,850 during OBJ's tenure, and 226, 184,946 (Statista, 2024) the same NBS referenced by the speaker reports 54% of poverty during OBJ's dispensation, amounting to 66 million people, while the present is reported at 133 million. Consequently, the speaker's utterance amounts not only to denial, but also misinformation for the sake of delegitimising OBJ and the power of his endorsement.

- (5) **RESPONDENT (1):** ... since 2019, he had gone his way and we had not been bordered... we know that em... during his term, **eight years in office, he didn't perform despite all the opportunities, despite all available resources at his beck and call...** **(APC Spokesperson)**

OBJ's choice of presidential candidate and subsequent endorsement is based on the ability to 'perform' in office. The inference is that the present government has not performed well enough to be praised or legitimised for continuity. The respondent denies this position, once again bringing the notion of comparison between OBJ's administration and the present. The pragmatic strategy used here is normative delegitimation. It is the norm for every political administration to claim to have done more than the previous, even if it is an obvious denial of the truth. For instance, in excerpt 4, the speaker does not deny the fact that the present administration had a lot of 'opportunities' or 'resources.' In the same way, the period of administration 'eight years' of democratic regime is comparatively

the same. The basis for differentiating them is ‘performance’, which is referenced by the speaker. The negative expressive act used by the respondent about OBJ’s non-performance is a conscious way to deny some of the good things that have been presented about OBJ’s regime. It is also an indirect way to deny the accusation made by OBJ of the non-performance of the present administration.

### ***Affirmation of thought/acceptance of position***

Political endorsement in the Nigerian democratic condition is polarised at the level of response because there are multiple political parties. With the rise to importance of LP in the 2023 election, three major parties emerged as contenders. Hence, OBJ’s endorsement was greeted with 3 shades of responses, the party that is beneficiary of the endorsement, the party that benefits in proxy but not entirely because it does not entirely favour them, but works in their advantage, and the party that the endorsement completely disfavours. Thus, while the first group completely affirms of accept the positions raised, the second group agree or accept some of the views, while the last group completely deny the positions.

- (6) **RESPONDENT (2):** ... you see, **no doubt**, the letter of the elder statesman, former President Obasanjo, **quite a number of things** in that letter that **cannot be argued... I agree with him, the last 8years was a perilous time.... (PDP Spokesperson)**

The dominant speech act in excerpt 5 is expressive. In the case, first the respondent identifies with the feeling of the endorser, who in the endorsement letter had stated it in clear terms that the ‘8 years’ of the present administration had been difficult for Nigerians. Really, this is a position that generates mixed expressive reactions from the those who support or oppose. There are those, especially from the camp of the present administration that totally say otherwise. Apart from sharing the feeling, the respondent also, using the expressive act, uses the denotative verbs, ‘agree’, ‘cannot be argued’ to signify acceptance or agreement with the position of OBJ, because it also supports their course, as part of the opposition. The broader effect is to delegitimise the present administration and give approval for their own candidate. Other signifiers of the acceptance or agreement to positions include the adverb, ‘no doubt’, and ‘quite’; they are used by the spokesperson to counter every element of opposition to the ‘fact’ that is acclaimed to be the basis of OBJ’s endorsement. Using the generalised – indefinite nominal group, ‘a number of things’, in the expressive act, the speaker implies that there are more things to condemn in the present administration, in agreement with OBJ’s Letter. Hence, the pragmatic strategies of amplification and reiteration are adopted to specifically delegitimise the present government on the acclaimed basis of faults in many areas and ‘perilous times’, which can be anaphorically referenced as a part of the ‘number of things.’

- (7) **RESPONDENT (3):** Let us come to the letter. In Law, the reason for a judgement is more important than the judgement itself... He said whoever wants to be the president **must meet up with four factors** which he summarised in the acronym TVCP, **track record of ability and performance...** he talked about **vision... Character...** then he talked about **physical and mental ability...** (LP Spokesperson)

The only respondent that totally agrees with the content of OBJ’s endorsement is the LP spokesperson. This is because the contents of the endorsement favoured his principal, the LP presidential candidate. The speaker here uses assertive, expressive and directive acts. The excerpt begins with the directive act, where the speaker employs the hearers, in this

case, the moderator, and the other two respondents, to focus on the content of the endorsement, which is signified using the noun, 'the letter'. The illocutionary force controlled by the verb 'come' notionally condemns the other participants' criticism of the endorser, OBJ, rather than addressing the issues he raised in endorsing his choice of candidate. He uses indexation, using the strategy of analogy, in the subsequent assertive act to distinguish the act of endorsement from the contents of the endorsement. The analogy is drawn from the context of 'law', which is coindexed to the context of politics. The speaker asserts that 'judgement' can be coindexed to the endorsement, while the reason for the 'judgement' is indexed to the contents of the endorsement, which he presents by expressive acts, and using acronymisation, 'TVCP' and optimally relevant nouns, 'track record', 'vision', 'character' and adjectives like 'ability', 'performance'. These are used to affirm OBJ's position about the candidate he endorsed for the election.

### ***Representation of opinion, position and counter position***

Much as the endorser, in this case, OBJ is presenting his opinionated position during his endorsement of his preferred candidate, respondents of the both the supporting and opposing sides also demonstrate their liberty to present their own opinions or positions about the contents of the endorsements. They do this by reinterpreting or analysing points raised by the endorser, especially the cogent - selling points that give the endorsed candidate the advantage. Opinions presented by the respondent from the favoured (supporting) side use mostly employ analogy as pragmatic strategy in this respect.

- (8) **RESPONDENT:** ... the part **that he is wrong**, which can be **summarized** in the fourth to the last paragraph... in fact the big one, where he referred to **Peter Obi as his niddle that has a string, a rope in it, where he said he can easily be controlled when he goes wrong. That is the crux of his letter, Obasanjo is in search of a third term by proxy. In other words, he is saying that Peter Obi is a puppet and that is why I believe he should be voted for, because at any given time he goes wrong... I am going to control him... (PDP Spokesperson)**

The speaker in excerpt 7 adopts different pragmatic strategies to reinterpret and counter the endorser's position. First, he uses negative inference in the adjective, 'wrong' to refute the endorser's own position. The speaker's position is that OBJ's metaphor is ambiguous; hence, has the inference of 'control', laying emphasis on the 'string' and 'rope', which could be pulled. The speaker employs commissive acts to create a difference between OBJ's position and his opinionated position of the endorser's statement. For instance, he uses, he says he can'; 'he is saying', 'I am going to', to imply that he knows exactly what is in OBJ's mind. He uses the verbs, 'control' in sequence to amplify the endorser's intention, thereby giving a different opinion, as signified with the verb 'signified'. The speaker uses personal reference for the purpose of indexation, the pronouns, he 'his', and 'I', to mark himself as the speaker, and OBJ, the endorser. But this again shifts the focus 'Peter Obi', who is the beneficiary of the endorsement. The intention here is to trivialise him in the equation, which he demonstrates clearly resorting to the pragmatic strategy of name-calling. For instance, he calls him 'a puppet', to juxtapose his notion of 'control'. The speaker also uses the pragmatic strategy of accusing and indicting in the course of presenting his own position about OBJ's statement. He accuses OBJ of wanting to practice an illegal government, that is, 'third term in proxy'. This is also indicting, bring back the memory of OBJ's alleged ambition/ intention to have a third term in office during his dispensation as president.

- (9) **MODERATOR:** But he has said it here that **he has people who can pull his ears; that he is a niddle with thread attached. So, it means that there are people who can actually caution Peter Obi**, and you want a president that someone can control?
- (10) **RESPONDENT:** ... what Obasanjo meant was simply democracy is '*awa lokan*' not '*emi lokan*'. It is a collective thing. Obasanjo knows that no man can know it all... **(LP Spokesperson)**

The expressive and directive act interpreted by the moderator justifies the elusiveness of metaphors, when subjected to pragmatic analysis. While the PDP respondent in excerpt 7 interprets the metaphor as 'control', the moderator in excerpt 8 interprets it as 'caution', which has a milder inference. Caution is a necessary condition for leadership, as implied in OBJ's statement of endorsement. However, the moderator uses the pragmatic strategy of contradiction to in the expressive act, where he brings in the notion of 'control', which has a completely different inference from 'caution'. While caution gives the inference of making suggestion and recommendation and criticism, which may even be to the advantage of the candidate being endorsed, 'control' is given a negative inference by the respondent in excerpt 7, hence the use of name-calling as seen in the excerpt. But in this case, the moderator simply reads OBJ's metaphorical statement denotatively to imply influence in the pragmatic sense. Pragmatically, this means that Peter Obi can be easily influenced by other people outside the government. Another opinionated interpretation of OBJ's metaphorical statement is seen in the LP spokesperson's utterance in excerpt 8. The speaker uses both directive and assertive acts to explicate his opinion of the speech. The assertive act is used to adapt the metaphor to a code-mixed slogan, which was coined during the campaign season as a metapragmatic joker. '*Emi lo'kan*' and '*awa lo'kan*' is used to describe individualism and collectivism, which the speaker uses the expressive act to state subsequently. Linking the OBJ's metaphor to the metapragmatic term, *awa lo'kan* implies that democracy should be run to get everybody involved. This is hinged on the basis that a president will have to work with people and depend on others for ideas, suggestions and most times criticism, which 'pulling the ears' metaphorises as pragmatically intended by the endorser, 'OBJ. the speaker also gives the inference that the president does not need to be the most intelligent person, but the one who can listen to people, one who can take advise and criticism lightly.

### ***Attack/Defence of personality traits***

Political endorsement is a course for some forms of review of both the endorser and the candidate being endorsed, in this case, OBJ and Peter Obi. To do this, on the one hand, the respondents – spokespersons on the opposing side, digress, pragmatically from the contents or main subject of endorsement or the facts in the disposition of the endorsed candidate, to attack the personality traits of the endorser and the preferred candidate. Basically, they raise issues that are irrelevant to the content and attack the personality with the broader intention of discrediting the personality of the endorser or the endorsed candidate. On the other hand, the spokesperson of the supporting side employs reinforcement, as pragmatic strategy, to counter oppositions and negative submissions about their candidate, and defense, as pragmatic strategy, to extol the endorser as well as the candidate they are supporting.

- (11) **RESPONDENT:** He is talking about the **qualities we need in the next leader...** I will tell you **what Obasanjo saw** in Peter Obi... **Obasanjo saw a man** who has the **capacity to secure and unite this**

**country... a man who will shift emphasis from consumption to production... (LP Spokesperson)**

The respondent in excerpt 9 is defending the interest and qualities of Peter Obi, the labour party candidate, who is at the centre of the endorsement. The speaker uses directive acts to portray the candidate's qualities, deploying admiration as a pragmatic strategy. He uses repetitive structures in form of anaphora not only to draw attention to the content of OBJ's endorsement, but also to vindicate him from the criticism of the opposers. Reference is used also to draw attention to 'qualities. These qualities are denotatively represented in nominal, as in capacity, and verbal forms, portraying the ability to 'secure', 'unite', and foster 'production'. The speaker also uses cross indexation as strategy. Each of the performative verbs that define the attribute of the candidate is linked to a fundamental problem in the nation, thereby giving Peter Obi in a messianic attribute as the one that can solve the problem. Political mantra can also serve as a means of justifying or projecting personal traits. Peter Obi's mantra, from 'consumption to production', which is represented in the directive act is indicative of his political philosophy. The speaker uses the epistemic modality of certainty, using the auxiliary, will, to strongly defend the candidate's ability to produce the result.

- (12) **RESPONDENT:** ... they have **better quality than Obasanjo**. Let me give you examples. Obasanjo **ordered the killing** in Oji. Obasanjo **ceded Nigerian Bakassi** to a foreign country of allegedly his ambition to become the United Nations Secretary General. Obasanjo **instituted the foundation of what we call Ghana-must-go** politics in the National Assembly... it has been reported. **(PDP Spokesperson)**

The respondent in excerpt 10 deploys directive acts to attack the personality of OBJ, dwelling more on analogies of issues during his administration as President of Nigeria. He uses accusation and indictment as pragmatic strategies in each of the repetitive – anaphora structures. In the first utterance, the speaker plays down on the political weight of OBJ, undermining his ability to endorse any of the candidates. The adjective, 'quality', here implies OBJ's political status or influence. The speaker uses strong illocutions to attack OBJ's personality; take for instance, the verb, 'ordered', which is a command to explicitly portray OBJ as a 'killer'. The speaker uses the verb 'ceded' to imply personal interest rather than patriotism. The inference is that he betrayed national interest for political or self-interest, and he uses the verb, 'instituted' to imply corruption. In other words, The PDP spokesman is attributing corruption among the members of the 'National Assembly to Obasanjo's dispensation as president. Corruption is metaphorised in the excerpt as 'Ghana-must-go' politics. The speaker then interfaces accusation and inditement, using reference and passive expression, 'it has been reported'. This projects the pragmatic intention of establishing distance, implying that he is speaking from information extracted from sources that he has not disclosed in the utterance.

- (13) **RESPONDENT:** ... one **man**, using a letter, **to threaten and intimidate** the entire nation that if a certain direction is not taken then doom lie ahead... **he has virtually destroyed every concept of democracy** in his entire reign... **(PDP Spokesperson)**

The respondent in excerpt 11 employs inference with the assertive act to counter and attack the personality of OBJ. The inference in the illocutionary forces, 'threaten' and 'intimidate' is that the respondent calls OBJ a political bully, because of his consistent use of open letters to critique the government, give endorsements and urge people to behave in

a certain way. The speaker uses litotes (understatement) as a rhetorical – pragmatic strategy to undermine the personality of OBJ, calling him, ‘a man’, regardless of his awareness that he (OBJ) is a retired General and a former two-time president of the nation. The speaker also undermines the significance of OBJ’s letter, calling it a threat rather than advice or admonition for the concerned audience. He resorts to irony in the latter part of the statement, using the assertive act, implying that OBJ has to moral justification to comment on democracy, having been a party to undermining it himself during his administration. He uses explicature in the verb, ‘destroyed’, as a pragmatic strategy for accusing OBJ as one of the problems of Nigerian’s democracy.

- (14) **RESPONDENT: ... Obasanjo has refused to keep silent in times of moral crises... Obasanjo wants to escape going to hell by being an accomplice to corrupt leaders... Obasanjo has never kept silent in times of moral crises; he went to jail because of it... (LP Spokesperson)**

The respondent in excerpt 12 defends OBJ, explicating the necessity of his intervention in Nigerian politics. At the background, the speaker shows the importance of criticism in any government. Another inference countered by respondents is that while OBJ may have had his limitations during his administration, it is appropriate to talk about them when noticed in any other administration. Pragmatically, the speaker refers to OBJ as a honourable politicians, who does not have conflict of interest with the present administration, hence can bitterly critique it. He uses the illocutionary force ‘refuse’ to resilient spirit, not bowing to pressure of criticism anytime he spoke against government. The sequences of expressive acts used describe OBJs traits, one of which is defined in the context of religiosity. He describes OBJ as a religious man, who does not want to go to ‘hell’. This also implies that religion is one of the bases for defining or obscuring attitudes in political spaces. The speaker, using repetition and reference, presents OBJ as a morally inclined person; in other words, there is the inference that one can only critique government when one is morally upright. The respondent here is giving a counter argument to PDP respondent’s maligning of OBJ’s personality in excerpt 11.

## CONCLUSION

Political endorsement is a trigger for different comments, positions, counter-positions and arguments as have been established in the findings of this study. These comments could be annexed in mainstream media through television interviews and political debates as observed in the data. Such interviews or debates bring together respondents from different parties. These respondents debate on the cogent issues raised by the endorser who becomes a major participant in the interaction process. Therefore, the endorser becomes a major subject of debate as the contents of the endorsement. The contents and the agents of endorsement discourse elicit five pragmatic intentions, namely, juxtaposition with alternative facts, ‘conscious denial of and digression from position or fact’, ‘affirmation of thought and acceptance of position’, ‘representation of opinion, position and counter position,’ and ‘attack or defence of personality traits’. While juxtaposing with alternative facts, respondents employ expressive, assertive and directive acts, utilising denotative verbs, with emphasis like ‘agree’, adverbs, such as ‘no doubt’ and adjectives like ‘performance, ‘ability’. Pragmatic strategies like generalisation, amplification, reiteration, reference, indexation, using features like analogy, and acronym. Conscious denial of or digression is a pragmatic intention of the oppositions. In some cases, the respondents recontextualise the content of the endorsement for denial, and ignore facts presented for the

purpose of delegitimation. Mostly, the expressive act is used, deploying pragmatic strategies like provision of comparative -alternative statistics, conscious denial of the claim, streamlining, and misinformation. Resources like ‘synonym’ and inference are used.

The pragmatic intention of affirmation of thought or acceptance of position is achieved by expressive, assertive and directive acts, using pragmatic strategies like sharing personal feeling, using denotative verbs, agree, negation, ‘cannot be argued’, and adverbs like ‘no doubt’, and ‘quite’. It is also realised by delegitimation, condemning, and amplifying, using features like generalization, reference, indexation, coindexation and analogy. In representing opinion, position and counter position, respondents use expressive, commissive, assertive and directive acts, using positive and negative inference to emphasis the noun and verb ‘control’, adjective, wrong, code-mixed slogan, such as ‘emi lo’kan’, ‘awa lo’kan’, and personal pronouns. The speech act used elicits pragmatic strategies like trivialising, name-calling such as ‘puppet’, contradicting, recommending and criticising. For attack and defence of personality traits, the debate centred on the attributes of the endorser and the candidate being endorsed, employing strategies like defending their interest or qualities, using adjectives and nouns like ‘capacity,’ ‘secure’, and ‘unite’. The respondents use repetitive structures, reference, analogy, cross indexation, litotes (understatement) and epistemic modality, dwelling on certainty. Mostly, assertive and directive acts are used dominantly, using pragmatic strategies like accusation, and indictment. Political endorsements are engaging and elicit arguments, positions and counter positions of the personalities and issues. But in most cases, attention is focused more on the personalities that the issues raised. The purpose is to undermine the endorser’s worth so that the contents of his endorsement will not achieve the intended results. There is a pattern here; politicians and their spokespersons attack personalities rather than address issues, and this affects the nation and the democratic institution. This for a long time has affected the development of political culture and institutions.

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