

## MANAGEMENT OF THE DISSEMINATION OF INFORMATION AND THEIR PRAGMATIC IMPLICATIONS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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### Abstract

*The ability to manage the dissemination of apt information devoid of all forms of ambiguity, misinterpretation and vagueness is one of the first steps to overcome the Covid-19 pandemic. Information is power and this is majorly made possible through the use of language. As such, what goes into circulation ought to be properly situated to eliminate all forms of social unrest and this deals largely with the choice of appropriate pragmatic devices employed while passing information about the virus and their socio-economic, political as well as religious implications. Using Mey's (2001) pragmatic act theory as the theoretical framework and President Muhammadu Buhari's March 29<sup>th</sup>, 2020 address on Covid-19 pandemic as primary data, this study attempts a pragmatic evaluation of the ways language has been deployed by African leaders to enlighten, educate and instruct the people on the spread of the Covid-19 disease. It also highlights how the mismanagement of information necessitated by the wrong choice of expressions has hindered absolute cooperation, loss of trust for the government of the day and breakdown of laws and order during the Covid-19 pandemic.*

**Keywords:** Africa, Pragmatic act theory, PMB, Language, Covid-19, Jacob Mey

### Introduction

Over the years, nations of the world have experienced one disaster or the other, outbreaks, insurgencies and wars. While some of these outbreaks have affected countries or are dominant in specific continents, never have there been an outbreak that affected the whole world at the same time causing countries with political and economic power to crumble so devastatingly that they had to go months with no economic, educational, religious as political activities. The Coronal virus or Covid-19 disease has been described by many as one of the worst pandemics the human history has ever experienced. In Africa and specifically Nigeria, the novel Coronal virus has disrupted the normal functioning of all sectors. This is in line with Yiaga Africa's (2020) position that, "The novel

Coronavirus is wreaking havoc on all facets of human existence, and nation-states are mobilizing diverse resources to provide medical, political, economic, and legal solutions” (p. 4). The number of confirmed cases has continued to rise despite many preventive and precautionary measures the government has put in place since it entered Nigeria on the 27<sup>th</sup> February, 2020. The number of confirmed cases at present outweighs the dilapidated Nigerian hospitals, hence, orientation camps, stadia, schools and hotels have been converted to isolation centres. The government has remained relentless in proffering a lasting solution to the spread of this virus but up to date, no vaccine or cure have been discovered. Government has equally advised that everyone abide strictly by the Covid-19 rules and regulation to reduce the spread and restore normalcy in the land. But, one of the first steps to curbing this virus is by ensuring that information going to the public is appropriately and accurately disseminated to avoid misinterpretation and undue tension in the land. With this in mind, this study will attempt an analytical study of how information about the covid19 disease are disseminated to the Nigerian people and how language has been pragmatically selected to ensure that information passed to the masses are devoid of undue tension, fear and anxiety.

### **Pragmatic Act Theory (PAT)**

This concept was introduced by Mey (2001) in his book entitled *Pragmatics: An introduction* as an extension of and/or a deviation from Austin’s (1962) and Searle’s (1969) theory of speech act. Pragmatic act theory draws our attention to “an examination of the conditions that make language use and in particular, a certain language use possible” (Mey, 2010b, p.444). That is, “what is affordable” in that situated interaction at that point in time (Mey. 2001, 219). Pragmatic acts are an important and far-reaching meaning making techniques because, meaning emanates from the interplay of language with the situation that produces it as against being merely represented in semantic units and administered by way of syntactic rules (Mey, 2001 as cited in Kurson, 2016, p. 226).

Mey (2010) calls PAT “the general situational prototypes of acts that are capable of being executed in a particular situation or clusters of situation” (p.2884). This general situational prototypes, he terms *pragmeme* and particular instantiations he calls *practs* or *Ipracs*. Pragmatic act theory aptly captures an era where sentential componential analysis driving towards meaning, otherwise regarded as formal linguistic studies are no longer sufficient to shelter both legitimate and orphan constructions in any language. According to Osisanwo (2017), “a pragmatic act is

an instance of adapting oneself to a context, as well as adapting the context to oneself" (P.301). Here, we begin to look beyond the levels of linguistic analysis, that is, the phonological, grammatical and semantic aspects of linguistics and place context, affordances and situations in focus in order to derive a complete and intended meaning of social actions. Hence, our interest is not driven by sentential components but utterances and the situations surrounding them. According to Mey (2016), "all pragmatic acts are situation-bound and depends on, as well as, define the context" (p.133).

PAT can be realized as a pragmeme; "...a general situational prototype capable of being executed in a situation," (Mey, 2001, p. 221). Capone (2005) asserts that a pragmeme is:

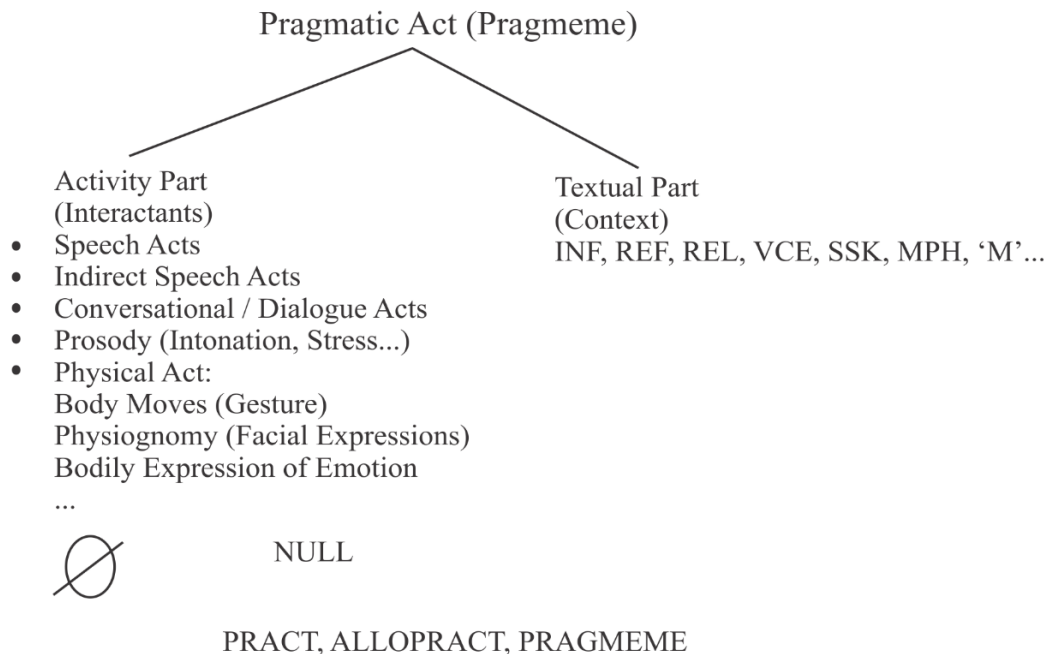
"an utterance whose goal is to bring about effects that modify a situation and change the roles of participants within it or to bring about other types of effect, such as exchanging/assessing information, producing social gratification or, otherwise, rights/obligations and social bonds" (p. 1357).

PAT can also be a pract; an instantiated pragmatic act. A pragmeme and/or pract can be realized as allopract. An allopract is the variant realizations of a particular pract or pragmeme. Mey (2001) introduced the PAT as an extension of speech act theory of Austin (1962) and Searle (1969).

### **Branches of the Pragmatic Act**

Figure 1.

Mey (2001) presented a diagrammatic representation of components of practs:



### Interpretation of the Branches of Pragmatic Acts

According to Mey (2001), “the column to the left list the various choices that the language user has at his or her disposal in communicating” (p.222). This means that during the process of performing a communicative act, there are linguistic choices open to an interactant, where he choose whichever he deems appropriate and this is what Mey (2001) calls “activity part.” To achieve communication purposes, language users have various choices available to them which when combined with different co(n)text-dependent strategies produces desired pragmatic interpretation. The activity part imbeds the very many possible acts ranging from direct to indirect speech acts, dialogue acts and physical acts to body movements, gestures, facial expression of emotions and even to the possibility of no perceived act whatsoever (Ming-Yu Tseng, 2010, p.1985). In the absence of speech acts, body movements and gestures can be used. Albeit, there are some cases where none of these pragmatic acts will be present. In such instance, the null (∅) schema which indicates silence may surface. However, we can also find two or more pragmatic acts playing up in discourses unlike speech acts that is focused basically on verbal utterances.

Also, to Mey (2001) “the right-hand side of the schema symbolizes elements that are present in the textual chain...” (p. 222) and these elements include: INF which stands for ‘inferencing,’ REF stands for ‘establishing referencing,’ SSK ‘shared situational knowledge,’ REL stands for ‘relevance,’ VCE stands for ‘voice,’ MPH ‘metaphor,’ while M represents ‘metapragmatic joker,’ an element that directs our attention to something happening on the metapragmatic plane

## **Methodology**

PMB’s press release on the outbreak of the Covid-19 disease on 29<sup>th</sup> March, 2020 was purposively selected to serve as a case study. The selection of this address as against others is traceable to the fact that it was the first address giving by the president on Covid-19 and only this address is selected to engender thorough analysis. The data was downloaded from the internet and analyzed to reveal how PMB is able to manage the dissemination of appropriate information to the Nigerian audience. Mey’s (2001) pragmatic act theory was adopted as the theoretical framework in order to subject PMB’s address to a pragmatic interpretation. With the title and closing, the address has just one thousand, five forty two (1542) words. Therefore, for a described analysis, the whole address was subjected to a critical evaluation, whereby, the pragmatic acts or practs found in each sentence was extracted. Also, a quantitative analysis of the address was done and the frequency counts were converted to percentage for statistical analysis.

## **Outline of PMB’s Press Release on Covid-19 on 29<sup>th</sup> March, 2020**

1. Giving all Nigerians a sense of belonging
2. Describing the preparedness of the Federal Government before Covid-19 entered Nigeria
3. Assuring that the whole instruments of the government have been mobilized to confront the Covid-19 crisis
4. Describing the Covid-19 as a health emergency
5. Describing the Covid-19 to be an economic crisis
6. Informing when Covid-19 was first confirmed in Nigeria
7. Describing the confirmation of the Covid-19 as unfortunate
8. Notifying that the number of confirmed cases have continued to rise
9. Informing the number of confirmed cases of Covid-19 as at March 29<sup>th</sup>, 2020

10. Informing that Nigeria has recorded her first fatality case on 23<sup>rd</sup> March, 2020
11. Identifying the first death victim of the Covid-19
12. Condoling with the family of the deceased
13. Praying for the quick recovery of all Covid-19 patients
14. Informing that there is no cure for Covid-19 yet
15. Informing that scientists are working hard to develop a Covid-19 vaccine
16. Informing that Nigeria is in touch with institutions working to get a solution to Covid-19
17. Proposing regular hygienic and sanitary practices as a means to avoid not getting infected
18. Proposing social distancing as a way to avoid contacting the virus
19. Identifying individuals as the greatest weapons to fight the pandemic
20. Describing what needs to be done to fight the Covid-19
21. Assuring that the virus can be contained
22. Stating that the coronal virus was first reported in China
23. Assuring that the Nigerian government has been following up with situations and responses concerning the Covid-19
24. Informing that the director general of the NCDC was one of the ten leaders invited by World Health Organization (WHO)
25. Informing that the essence of the visit of the director general of NCDC was to understudy Chinese response to Covid-19
26. Acknowledging how proud he is that the director general of the NCDC was invited to participate in the meeting
27. Informing that the NCDC has been implementing numerous strategies since the director general returned from China
28. Soliciting support from all Nigerians
29. Stating that Nigeria's implementation programs are tailored to reflect Nigeria's local realities
30. Informing that Nigeria is taking a two-step approach
31. Assuring that Nigeria will protect the lives of fellow Nigerians and residents living in Nigeria
32. Assuring that Nigeria will preserve the livelihoods of workers and business owners
33. Identifying the response mechanisms Nigeria has introduced

34. Promising to continue to introduce more response mechanisms as the situation unfolds
35. Acknowledging that the measures introduced by Nigeria will cause major inconsistencies to many citizens
36. Advising all to make the necessary sacrifices for the greater good of the country
37. Stating that the right reaction is needed by the right agencies and trained experts
38. Promising to rely on the guidance of medical professionals and experts at relevant agencies
39. Urging all citizens to adhere to guidelines released from time to time
40. Acknowledging that Lagos and Abuja have the highest number of confirmed cases in Nigeria
41. Assuring that his government will focus on urgently and drastically containing the virus.
42. Assuring that his government will support other states and region in the best way she can
43. Informing that fifteen billion naira has been provided to support national response to contain and control the virus
44. Informing that a presidential taskforce has been created to develop workable response strategies
45. Informing that the strategy adopted by Nigeria is international best practices and are adopted to suit local circumstance
46. Stating the goal of the federal government to states during the pandemic
47. Informing that hundreds of adhoc staff have been recruited in Abuja and Lagos to man call centres and support tracing of testing efforts
48. Informing that he has requested for the nomination of doctors and nurses by the governor's forum
49. Stating that the nominated doctors and nurses will be trained by the NCDC, Lagos and tactical and operational responses to the virus
50. Stating that the training will include medical representatives from armed forces, paramilitary and security and intelligence agencies
51. Advising that Nigeria's response to Covid-19 should be guided, systematic and professional
52. Stating the need for consistency
53. Assuring that all inconsistencies would be eliminated

54. Restating the number of confirmed cases in Nigeria
55. Informing that majority of the cases are in Lagos and Abuja
56. Assuring that all confirmed cases are getting necessary medical care
57. Assuring that his agencies are working hard to identify cases and people that Covid-19 patients have had contacts with
58. Informing that interstate and intercity movements are restricted
59. Stating his reason for the restriction
60. Ordering that movement in Lagos and FCT should cease for fourteen days with effect from 11pm on Monday, 30<sup>th</sup> March, 2020
61. Ordering the lockdown of Ogun state
62. Stating his reason for locking down Ogun state
63. Ordering all citizens in Abuja, Lagos and Ogun to stay in their homes
64. Ordering that interstate lockdown be postponed
65. Ordering the closure of businesses and offices within locations under lockdown
66. Informing that the governors and minister of Lagos, Ogun and FCT respectively have been notified
67. Informing that heads of security and intelligence agencies have been briefed
68. Identifying what the government intends to do within the period of the lockdown
69. Assuring that his government will treat confirmed cases and restrict further spread to other states
70. Exempting hospitals, all related medical establishments and organizations in health care related manufacturing and distribution from the lockdown
71. Exempting food processing, distribution and retail companies from the lockdown
72. Exempting petroleum distribution and retail entities from the lockdown
73. Exempting power generation, transmission and distribution companies from the lockdown
74. Exempting private security companies
75. Assuring that access to the exempted firms and companies are restricted and monitored
76. Exempting workers in telecommunication companies
77. Exempting broadcaster
78. Exempting print and electronic media staff
79. Stating his reason for exempting those in telecommunication companies



80. Instructing all seaport to remain operational
81. Informing that he has issued seaport operational guidelines
82. Instructing the screening of drivers and vehicles conveying essential cargoes from seaports
83. Instructing Hon. Minister of health to deploy all port health authority employees stationed in Lagos and Abuja airports to key roads that serve as entry and exit points to the restricted zones
84. Ordering the suspension of movement of all passenger aircrafts
85. Informing that special permit will be issued to passenger aircrafts if the need arises
86. Acknowledging that the measures adopted by the government will cause much hardship and inconveniences to citizens
87. Stating that the pandemic is a matter of life and death
88. Advising Nigerians to see the lockdown as a national and patriotic duty to control and contain the spread of the virus
89. Requesting all affected by the lockdown to put aside personal comfort and safeguard everybody
90. Referring to coronal virus as a common enemy
91. Proposing that all should come together and obey scientific and medical advise
92. Advising all to see obeying the lockdown rules as individual contribution to the war against Covid-19
93. Stating that many other countries have taken stricter measures to control the spread of the virus
94. Promising to deploy relief materials to residents of satellite and commuter town and communities around Lagos and Abuja to ease their pains
95. Promising to sustain the school feeding program
96. Informing that he has directed a three month repayment moratorium for all trademoni, marketmoni and farmmoni loans to be implemented
97. Informing that he has directed a moratorium to be given to all federal government funded loan issued by the bank of industry, bank of agriculture and Nigerian export import bank
98. Informing that he has directed the financial institutions to engage development partners and negotiate concessions to ease the pain of the borrowers

99. Informing that he has directed that the conditional case transfer be paid to the vulnerable in the society for the next two months
100. Assuring that internally displaced persons will also receive the conditional cash transfer
101. Soliciting that Nigerians take personal responsibility to support the vulnerable within their communities
102. Soliciting that Nigerians should help the vulnerable with whatever they need
103. Proposing that Nigerians continue to plan for all possible eventualities while praying for the best possible outcome
104. Giving reasons for ordering the conversion of government stadia, pilgrims camps and other facilities to isolation centres and makeshift hospitals
105. Promising to avail all necessary resources to support the response and recovery
106. Assuring that his government is committed to do whatever it takes to confront Covid-19 in Nigeria
107. Thanking private sectors and individuals for their supports
108. Requesting that all contributions and donations be coordinated and centralized to ensure efficient and impactful pending
109. Stating that the presidential taskforce remains the central coordinating body on the Covid-19 response
110. Assuring that all agencies with a role to play in the outbreak response are working hard to bring the virus under control
111. Stating that every nation in the world is challenged by the virus
112. Prompting a social (action) responsibility for all to help reduce the spread of the virus
113. Thanking all public health workforce, health care workers, port health authorities and other essential staff
114. Acknowledging them to be true heroes
115. Thanking all for listening

## **Analysis and Discussion**

A thorough examination of the management of language in PMB's address on Covid-19 disease reveals that one hundred and fifteen acts, categorized into

twenty four pragmatic functions (practs) were performed in the address. In their order of frequency, these practs include informing (twenty five), assuring (sixteen), stating (fourteen), exempting (eight), ordering (six), describing (five), acknowledging (five), promising (five), advising (4), identifying (four), proposing (three), soliciting (three), instructing (three), thanking (three), requesting (two). Others that occurred just once include giving Nigerians a sense of belonging, condoling, praying, urging, restating, referring, giving reasons, notifying, and prompting. The practs were made up of speech acts, psychological acts, indirect speech acts. More so, the practs were textually marked by the following pragmatic tools: shared situational knowledge, reference, relevance, and inference. The different pract served to achieve five goals which are, to reveal PMB’s and the government’s intentions, to appreciate the efforts all Nigerians were making to fight the virus, to give directives/direction, to give details on issues concerning the covid-19, and to show a feeling of empathy to Nigerians. Below is a tabular representation of the summary of the identified pragmatic acts, the goals, their frequency and percentage of occurrence in the address. The table is represented in Figure 2

**Summary of the Pragmatic Acts and Goals**

| Goal                            | Frequency | Percentage | Practs         | Frequency | Percentage |
|---------------------------------|-----------|------------|----------------|-----------|------------|
| To give directives or direction | 49        | 42.6%      | Advising       | 4         | 3.4%       |
|                                 |           |            | Informing      | 25        | 21.7%      |
|                                 |           |            | Notifying      | 1         | 0.6%       |
|                                 |           |            | Instructing    | 3         | 2.6%       |
|                                 |           |            | Exempting      | 8         | 6.9%       |
|                                 |           |            | Requesting     | 2         | 1.7%       |
|                                 |           |            | Ordering       | 6         | 5.2%       |
| To reveal intention             | 39        | 33.9%      | Proposing      | 3         | 2.6%       |
|                                 |           |            | Promising      | 5         | 4.3%       |
|                                 |           |            | Stating        | 14        | 12.1%      |
|                                 |           |            | Assuring       | 16        | 13.9%      |
|                                 |           |            | prompting      | 1         | 0.6%       |
| To give details                 | 12        | 10.4%      | Identifying    | 4         | 3.4%       |
|                                 |           |            | Describing     | 5         | 4.3%       |
|                                 |           |            | Giving reasons | 1         | 0.6%       |

|   |     |      |                                 |     |      |
|---|-----|------|---------------------------------|-----|------|
|   |     |      | Referring                       | 1   | 0.6% |
|   |     |      | Restating                       | 1   | 0.6% |
| To appreciate the effort of all Nigerians | 08  | 6.9% | Thanking                        | 3   | 2.6% |
|   |     |      | Acknowledging                   | 5   | 4.3% |
| To show a feeling of empathy              | 07  | 6.2% | Soliciting                      | 3   | 2.6  |
|   |     |      | Praying                         | 1   | 0.6% |
|   |     |      | Condoling                       | 1   | 0.6% |
|   |     |      | Giving all a sense of belonging | 1   | 0.6% |
|   |     |      | Urging                          | 1   | 0.6% |
|   | 115 | 100  | TOTAL                           | 115 | 100  |

## Goals of the Pragmatic acts

### 1. To give directives/direction

#### Informing

The pragmatic act of informing was mainly used in PMB's address/speech on covid-19 pandemic which he delivered on the 29<sup>th</sup> March, 2020. The preponderance (25 occurrence) of this pract, informing, can favourably pass PMB's March 29<sup>th</sup>, 2020 address on covid-19 as an address of giving information. The greater occurrence of this pract can be traced to the fact that at the time when information about the virus was very vague and many destructive information were widely circulated, there was a need to release an appropriate information about the covid-19, its causes, means of contracting it as well as protective and/or precautionary measures that the government had put in place to curb the spread of the virus. Also, the Nigeria people needed to be intimated on their individual and collective roles in the war against the virus. More so, the preponderance use of the pract of informing by PMB was in a bid to calm the tension that already misleading circulated information was causing on Nigerians.

The following extracts are practs of informing

Nigeria, unfortunately, confirmed its first case on 27th February 2020. Since then, we have seen the number of confirmed cases rise slowly. (Para. 4)

Regrettably, we also had our first fatality, a former employee of PPMC, who died on 23rd March 2020. Our thoughts and prayers are with his family in this very difficult time. We also pray for quick recovery for those infected and undergoing treatment (Para. 6)

Since his return, the NCDC has been implementing numerous strategies and programs in Nigeria to ensure that the adverse impact of this virus on our country is minimized. We ask all Nigerians to support the work the Federal Ministry of Health and NCDC are doing, led by the Presidential Task Force (Para. 13)

These practs of informing are marked by shared situational knowledge (SSK), relevance (Rel) and reference (Ref). In other words, the presence of the covid-19 pandemic is known to all Nigerians and the essence of informing the audience both on measures of curbing the virus and steps taken by the Nigeria government is to eliminate possible fear, misinformation and risk of contracting the virus. In some other part of the address, PMB informs the Nigerian people that he has set up different measures such as palliatives, repayment of moratorium for all tradmoni, marketmoni and farmermoni among others to help cushion the effect of the lockdown on the masses. For instance, PMB informs that he had directed the transfer of some money to vulnerable:

For the most vulnerable in our society, I have directed that the conditional cash transfers for the next two months be paid immediately. Our Internally displaced persons will also receive two months of food rations in the coming weeks. (Para. 54)

This piece of information will go a long way to reduce tensions building up already in the minds of the supposed vulnerable who on one hand would have been overshadowed with fear of uncertainty upon the declaration of the interstate and intercity lockdown. The pract of informing is very essential in a time such as this to portray a government with the interest of her people and curtail further spread of the Covid-19 pandemic.

### **Pract of Exempting**

On the goal of giving direction, the pract of exempting comes very close to the pract of informing. Although, not in preponderance but on the fact that it relates to giving information. This pract has eight occurrence (6.9%) in the whole of the address. PMB intimates the Nigeria people some sectors of the government that are not part of the restriction because they provide essential services to the people.

Extracts:

This order does not apply to hospitals and all related medical establishments as well as organizations in health care related manufacturing and distribution (Para. 38)

Furthermore, commercial establishments such as; a. food processing, distribution and retail companies; b. petroleum distribution and retail entities, c. power generation, transmission and distribution companies; and d. private security companies are also exempted (Para. 39)

The pract of exempting which PMB employed in the address is marked by SSK and Rel. He exempts these sectors because he understands the relevance of them and he also believes that the people shared knowledge of the situation the country and the whole world is into. He, however, places some restrictions and surveillance on the exempted sectors to ensure that they observe the Covid-19 guidelines to engender a reduction in the spread of the virus.

### **Pract of Ordering**

The pract of ordering takes 6% of occurrences in the address and using this pragmatic function, PMB orders that immediate and drastic measures be employed to intensify the war against the Covid-19. This pract is very important as it is appropriately employed by PMB to not just utilize his presidential power but to further compel the Nigerian people to abide by decisions of the government. Pract of ordering sends a message of being in control of the situation. PMB is not merely suggesting or experimenting if locking down affected states will be effective, he sees ordering the lockdown of these states and restrictions as the best possible option to curb the spread of the virus. For instance:

All citizens in these areas are to stay in their homes. Travel to or from other states should be postponed. All businesses and offices within these locations should be fully closed during this period (Para. 35)

Movements of all passenger aircraft, both commercial and private jets, are hereby suspended. Special permits will be issued on a needs basis (Para. 44)

The above extracts are clear cases of ordering. It means that the positions of PMB is non-negotiable. He employs Rel and VCE to help bend the people towards obeying him being aware that the virus is incurable, hence, he also employs the SSK while performing this pract.

### **Pract of Advising**

This practs occurs four times (3.4%) in the whole address but it conveys an important message of solidarity, brotherhood and a sense of belonging. It is an advice that indirectly solicits compliance from all concerned.

we must all see this as our national and patriotic duty to control and contain the spread of this virus. I will therefore ask all of us affected by this order to put aside our personal comfort to safeguard ourselves and fellow human beings. This common enemy can only be controlled if we all come together and obey scientific and medical advice (Para.44)

This advice acts together to compel the Nigerian citizens and others living on the Nigeria soil to accept the guidelines released by the president himself. A deviation from the laid down rules will only escalate the rise in the spread of the covid-19 disease. He also employs the pract of advising to convey Nigerian what role they ought to play in curbing the covid19 disease

### **Practs of Instructing**

Under this pragmatic function, PMB clearly instructs the screening of drivers and vehicles conveying essential cargoes from the seaports after having instructed them to continue with their operations at the seaports. Furthermore, PMB instructs the Hon. Minister of Health deploy all port health authority employees who had been in Lagos and Abuja airports to major roads that sever as entry and exit point

to the zones under lockdown. This pract takes 2.6% of the over-all acts performed in the address. PMB's use of the pract of instructing can be regarded as exercising his power as the president of Nigeria whose words should ordinary to be esteemed by all especially when it is to the benefit of the entire country. Having ordered the lockdown of some sectors which he considers non-essential, there is need to not just announce exempted sectors but to include some level of power to his announcements apparent in the following extracts:

All seaports in Lagos shall remain operational in accordance with the guidelines I issued earlier. Vehicles and drivers conveying essential cargoes from these Ports to other parts of the country will be screened thoroughly before departure by the Ports Health Authority (Para. 42)

Accordingly, the Hon. Minister of Health is hereby directed to redeploy all Port Health Authority employees previously stationed in the Lagos and Abuja Airports to key roads that serve as entry and exit points to these restricted zones (Para. 44)

### **Practs of Requesting**

In as much as PMB exerts some level of power and authority on the masses, there is, however, a need to crave their indulgence and not impose certain laws and orders on them. This pract is particularly useful in assuring Nigerians of the respect PMB has for them, albeit, it has only 1.7% preponderance.

At this point, I will ask that all contributions and donations be coordinated and centralized to ensure efficient and impactful spending. The Presidential Task Force remains the central coordinating body on the COVID-19 response (Para. 60)

PMB uses SSK in requesting that all payments should be coordinated and centralized. More so, he uses the REL to state the reason behind his request.

### **Pract of Notifying**

Notifying is an act of giving an official information about something. In PMB's address, this pract has a 0.6% occurrence. PMB employs this pract to report the unfortunate intrusion of the covid19 disease in Nigeria and it is closely related to the pract of informing



Nigeria, unfortunately, confirmed its first case on 27th February 2020. Since then, we have seen the number of confirmed cases rise slowly (Para. 4)

### **To Reveal Intention**

#### **Pract of Assuring**

In a society clouded with uncertainty and gross fear for the dreaded incurable covid19 disease, the need to assure the masses that the government is on top of the matter and that all possible actions would be taken to reduce if not eliminating completely the spread of the virus cannot be overemphasized. Many Nigerians are already are trembling from information they got from affected countries and most especially by its fast spread without cure. More so, Nigerians need to know how much they can trust the government of the day to restore stability and orderliness in the land. Consequently, the pract of assuring has 13.9% preponderance, that is, it occurred sixteen times in the address and this goes a long way to eliminate the doubt of many who may see the exercise as another political looting strategy by the political leaders. For instance, in the following extract, PMB assures Nigerians that his agencies are working very hard to identify those who have either contracted the disease or have had contacts with people who tested positive to the Covid-19 disease:

Our agencies are currently working hard to identify cases and people these patients have been in contact with (Para. 31)

This extracts assures Nigerians that PMB is committed to the search against the cpvid19 disease. Through this pract, he also employs the psychological act to speak directly to the emotions of the Nigerian people, thereby, restoring some level of tranquility in their distressed minds. In the address, there are assurances of eliminating inconsistencies in the federal and state agencies; he also assures internally displaced persons of his effort to make sure they are not starved during the pandemic. Because the above extract is personally voiced- VCE by PMB, there is a high degree of tension necessitated by the covid19 disease and this pract is relevant-REL to the topic of discussion.

#### **Pract of Stating**

Under this pragmatic function, PMB clearly states how the covid19 disease is a threat to all sectors of the Nigerian economy; some of the measures applicable

worldwide; revealing his reasons for either locking some sectors in Nigeria or some states up and exempting others. Stating takes 12.1% of the one hundred and fifteen acts performed in address and with this pract, PMB makes definite statements. For instance, he states the presidential task force remains the central coordinating body on the covid19 response; that Nigeria is not the only nation challenged by the virus and that these nations have taken stricter measures to control the spread of the covid19 disease. He further states his reasons for restricting interstate and intercity movement. This he does with the sake of transparency and ensure that there exist mutual understanding between government's decisions and the masses response. For instance, PMB decides to restrict movements to contain the spread of the disease:

We are therefore working to ensure such interstate and intercity movements are restricted to prevent further spread  
(Para. 33)

### **Pract of Promising**

Pract of promising occurs in PMB's address on covid19 disease outbreak as a way of assuring Nigerians that his government is committed to the war against the spread of the disease. Promising has 4.3% preponderance (five times) in the address and by becoming committal, PMB tells the people what they expect to hear, that it, that he is determined to defeat the disease. It is a shared situational knowledge (SSK) that most Nigerian hospitals are in their dilapidated states and majority of Nigerians live below the poverty line but PMB assures the people that he will ensure that the fatality rate is not high despite the poor health conditions. Therefore, he promises to ease the pain those living in places under lockdown:

For residents of satellite and commuter towns and communities around Lagos and Abuja whose livelihoods will surely be affected by some of these restrictive measures, we shall deploy relief materials to ease their pains in the coming weeks (Para. 49)

PMB uses the REL pragmatic tool to achieve this pragmatic function. Acknowledging the fact that there will be hardship necessitated by the restrictions and lockdowns, he commits himself to the people and pledges that none will starve during this period. He also understands the relevance of food as one of the basic necessities of life and, hence, he promises to make it available to all.

### **Pract of Proposing**

This is another important pract employed by PMB in his address on covid19 disease. It occurs three times (2.6%) and it showcases the intentions of the Nigerian government in tackling the recent scourge that has become a worldwide pandemic. PMB proposes that Nigerians should come together and embrace scientific and medical advice. This call is suggestively performed PMB respects the freedom of movement, association, worship and he knows that ordering will not yield positive outcome. Thus, he propose that more plans be put in place even as we continue to pray to God for his intervention.

As we all pray for the best possible outcome, we shall continue planning for all eventualities (Para. 56)

From the above extract, PMB employs the REL tool to highlight the need to stick together if we must defeat the covid19 disease.

### **Pract of Prompting Social Action**

The pract of prompting occurs just once in the address and it serves as a means of motivation and encouragement for all not to lose hope in the government of the day. Prompting pract is not always explicitly stated during conversations but can be deduced from their context of use. This is in line with Haugh (2016) assertion that “prompting social action involves one participant inviting another participant to initiate some kind of social action sequence, thereby, avoiding accountability for having launched the social action in question” (p.167).

Every nation in the world is challenged at this time. But we have seen countries where citizens have come together to reduce the spread of the virus (Para. 62)

PMB uses the REF tool to relate that citizens in other countries hit by this disease have equally come together to fight, by way of cooperating with the guidelines and taking responsibility to help, and encourage others. By making reference to the fact that other countries of the world have united within themselves to fight the Covid19 disease, PMB charges Nigerians to do same.

## **To Appreciate the Effort of Nigerians**

### **Pract of Acknowledging**

The pract of acknowledging takes 4.3% of the address. Although, it sometimes corresponds with the pract of thanking, it goes a long way to show how familiar PMB is with not only the situation that the country is presently facing but also the effort of well-meaning Nigerians to rid the country of the covid19 disease. It is, however, a shared situational knowledge (SSK) that the country will experience hardship and pain as a result of the restrictions and lockdown and this is a psychological act euphemistically stated in order to give the people a feeling of being cared for:

We are fully aware that such measures will cause much hardship and inconvenience to many citizens. But this is a matter of life and death, if we look at the dreadful daily toll of deaths in Italy, France and Spain (Para. 46)

PMB uses INF to draw a conclusion that the measures will result to hardship and even inconvenience for many especially, those below the poverty line. But these measures are relevant (REL) with reference (REF) to the daily death tolls recorded in Italy, France and Spain.

Accordingly, he acknowledges the effort of those in the health sector and regard them as living heroes; acknowledges how proud he is with the director general of Nigerian Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) who was invited by the World Health Organization (WHO) to understudy the Chinese response to the covid19 disease.

### **Pract of Thanking**

Thanking is a means of showing appreciation for a service rendered by someone to you and often times overlaps with acknowledging. This pract is useful because individuals being thanked feel obliged to do more. PMB employs this pract to appeal to the psychological minds of Nigerians who have in one way or the other being supportive in the fight to eradicate the covid19 disease. He does not introduce this pract in the beginning of his address but includes them in the middle and end. He appreciates the private sectors and individuals for their support; thank all public health work force, health care workers, port health authorities and other essential staff:

I will take this opportunity to thank all our public health workforce, health care workers, port health authorities and other essential staff on the frontlines of the response for their dedication and commitment. You are true heroes (Para. 64)

He also finds it appropriate (REL) to thank Nigerians as a whole for granting him audience:

I thank you all for listening. May God continue to bless and protect us all (Para 65)

### **To Give Details**

#### **Pract of Describing**

The pract of describing is used to give details or clearer explanation of someone or something. In PMB's March 29<sup>th</sup>, 2020 address on the outbreak of the covid19 disease, PMB describes the covid19 disease as a health emergency and an economic crisis which ought to be tackled head-on. In the second paragraph of PMB's address, he describes the preparedness of the federal government before the covid19 entered Nigeria:

From the first signs that Coronavirus, or COVID-19 was turning into an epidemic and was officially declared a world-wide emergency, the Federal Government started planning preventive, containment and curative measures in the event the disease hits Nigeria (Para. 2)

He equally described the measures that need to be taken to fight the disease stating the REL of adhering to the instructions of the NCDC:

As individuals, we remain the greatest weapon to fight this pandemic. By washing our hands regularly with clean water and soap, disinfecting frequently used surfaces and areas, coughing into a tissue or elbow and strictly adhering to infection prevention control measures in health facilities, we can contain this virus (Para. 10)

### **Pract of Identifying**

pract of identifying establishes as well as indicates individuals or things involved in an event. In PMB's address, this pract takes 3.4% of the total acts performed in the address and it functions to shield more light on the covid19 disease, means of contracting it, spreading it and measures that can be taken to curb it. PMB sees the need to pinpoint what the government intend to do during the lockdown which he considers relevant (REL):

We will use this containment period to identify, trace and isolate all individuals that have come into contact with confirmed cases. We will ensure the treatment of confirmed cases while restricting further spread to other States (Para.37)

Furthermore, PMB identifies individuals as the greatest weapon to fight the disease and even the first death case the country recorded and the deceased portfolio bearing in mind that Nigerians already have an SSK that there has been one death occurrence.

### **Practs of Giving Reasons, Referring and Restating**

Each of these practs occurred once and is used either to give a clearer explanation of PMB's actions as in the case where PMB explains why he decides to convert government stadia, pilgrim camps, and other facilities to an isolation centre.

In pract of referring, PMB refers to the covid19 disease as a common enemy that must be collectively fought against.

For the sake of emphasis, PMB employs this pract to reiterate the number of confirmed cases Nigeria had as at the release of the address and their locations:

As I mentioned earlier, as at this morning we had ninety-seven confirmed cases. Majority of these are in Lagos and Abuja. All the confirmed cases are getting the necessary medical care (Para. 30)

## **To Show a Feeling of Empathy**

### **Pract of Soliciting**

This pract occupy 2.6% occurrence from the one hundred and fifteen acts performed by PMB. PMB pleadingly requests the full support and cooperation of Nigerians in the fight against the deadly disease:

...we ask all Nigerians to support the work the Federal Ministry of Health and NCDC are doing, led by the Presidential Task Force (Para. 13)

Also, he solicit them to take personal responsibility to support the vulnerable with whatever they have. This pract is REL because, if this plead is executed by all, the hardship and pain the people, especially the vulnerable will feel would be greatly reduced.

### **Practs of Praying, Condoling, Giving all a Sense of Belonging and Urging**

Having identified the first fatality case in Nigeria caused by the covid19 disease, PMB finds it necessary to pray for the soul of the deceased, console the deceased family and pray for the quick recovery of those still undergoing treatment:

Regrettably, we also had our first fatality, a former employee of PPMC, who died on 23rd March 2020. Our thoughts and prayers are with his family in this very difficult time. We also pray for quick recovery for those infected and undergoing treatment (Para. 6)

He urges all to abide by the guidelines that are released from time to time in order to prevent another of such occurrences:

I therefore urge all citizens to adhere to their guidelines as they are released from time to time (Para. 21)

Most importantly, PMB begins his address by acknowledging that he does not own Nigeria alone by using the pract of giving all a sense of belonging when he said: Fellow Nigerians! (Para. 1)

## Conclusion

Language is a powerful political tool that can transform as well as destroy a society if not well managed. This is because of the fact that individual cohabiting in a particular speech community share diversified socio-political, religious, cultural, educational and ideological stance. Hence, to effectively disseminate information such as the address on the outbreak of the deadly coronavirus disease requires a lot of care. This PMB successfully performed with the help of pragmatics, especially the pragmatic act theory of Mey (2001).

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