

Pragmatic Framing in Nigerian Political Discourse: Elections, Actors and State Representation

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Abstract

This study investigates pragmatic framing in Nigerian political discourse through an integrated analysis of speech acts, implicature, presupposition, deixis, modality, and evaluative language. It argues that framing in political communication is not merely a rhetorical device but a structured pragmatic system through which ideological meanings are constructed, negotiated, and stabilised. Adopting a qualitative discourse-analytical approach, the study examines how elections, political actors, and states are discursively represented in Nigerian political texts. Findings reveal that elections are framed through a dual logic of contestation and decisiveness, producing competing interpretations of political struggle and democratic legitimacy. Political actors are constructed within a triadic schema of heroism, victimhood, and threat, while states are framed as both containers of socio-political identity and competitors within broader political and developmental struggles. These framing patterns are realised through the interaction of pragmatic resources, particularly modality, presupposition, deixis, and evaluative stance, which together naturalise ideological assumptions and guide audience interpretation. The study demonstrates that framing operates as a multi-layered pragmatic configuration rather than a purely lexical or metaphorical choice. It contributes to pragmatics and political discourse studies by showing how ideological meaning in Nigerian political communication emerges from systematic interaction between linguistic form and contextual inference. It further extends African political discourse scholarship by illustrating how global framing strategies are locally recontextualised within Nigeria's socio-political realities, including electoral competition, identity politics, and zoning dynamics.

Keywords: Deixis; Evaluative language; Implicature; Modality; Presupposition; Political discourse; Pragmatic framing.

1. INTRODUCTION

Political discourse is widely recognised as a key site for the production and reproduction of ideological meaning, where language functions not merely as a medium of information exchange but as a resource for constructing social reality. In contemporary pragmatics and discourse studies, political language is increasingly viewed as performative, where meanings are actively constructed, negotiated, and stabilised within specific socio-political contexts (Fairclough, 2021; van Dijk, 2021). Political discourse therefore operates as a site where ideology, power, and identity are continuously enacted and contested.

In African political contexts, particularly Nigeria, political communication is characterised by adversariality, identity negotiation, and strategic persuasion (Odeunmi, 2021; Taiwo et al., 2022). Electoral competition, ethnic and regional considerations, and power-sharing arrangements shape discursive practices, resulting in highly

pragmatic language use. Meaning is thus rarely explicit; rather, it is inferred through interactional and contextual cues.

Despite extensive research on political discourse, existing studies have largely focused on isolated linguistic features such as metaphor, modality, speech acts, or rhetoric. These approaches often fail to account for how such features interact systematically to produce coherent framing structures. Consequently, framing is frequently treated as a rhetorical or lexical device rather than a dynamic pragmatic process.

This study addresses this gap by adopting an integrated pragmatic approach to framing. It examines how framing emerges through the interaction of speech acts, implicature, presupposition, deixis, modality, and evaluative language in Nigerian political discourse. Rather than analysing these resources in isolation, the study conceptualises framing as an emergent property of discourse arising from their coordinated use. The analysis focuses on three central domains of Nigerian political communication: elections, political actors, and state representation.

Elections are examined as sites of legitimacy construction and contestation; political actors as identities pragmatically constructed through evaluative positioning; and states as ideological spaces where governance, competition, and spatial meaning intersect. Through these domains, the study demonstrates how pragmatic resources jointly structure interpretation, ideological alignment, and political perception.

1.1. Statement of the Problem

While political discourse is widely acknowledged as a site of ideological construction (Fairclough, 2021; van Dijk, 2021), scholarship on Nigerian political communication has largely focused on isolated linguistic or pragmatic features such as metaphor, modality, and speech acts. These studies provide valuable insights but often overlook the systematic interaction of multiple pragmatic resources in framing political meaning.

In particular, the combined role of speech acts, implicature, presupposition, deixis, modality, and evaluative language in constructing ideological representation remains underexplored. There is also limited understanding of how these resources jointly frame key political domains such as elections, political actors, and the state.

This fragmentation necessitates a more integrated analytical perspective. The study therefore argues that framing should not be treated as a lexical or rhetorical feature but as a structured pragmatic system through which ideological meanings are produced, stabilised, and reproduced.

1.2. Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to examine how framing in Nigerian political discourse is constructed through the interaction of speech acts, implicature, presupposition, deixis, modality, and evaluative language in the representation of elections, political actors, and the state.

Specifically, the study aims to:

1. Examine how selected pragmatic resources interact to construct framing in Nigerian political discourse.
2. Analyse how elections, political actors, and state representation are pragmatically framed in political communication.
3. Demonstrate that framing functions as a structured pragmatic system rather than isolated linguistic choices.

1.3. Research Questions

1. How do speech acts, implicature, presupposition, deixis, modality, and evaluative language interact to construct framing in Nigerian political discourse?
2. How are elections, political actors, and the state pragmatically framed in Nigerian political communication?

3. How does framing function as a structured pragmatic system for ideological meaning construction?

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

2.1. Literature Review

2.1.1 Political Discourse, Ideology, and Framing

Political discourse is widely recognised as a primary site for the production and circulation of ideological meaning, where language functions not merely as a representational system but as a constitutive force in shaping social reality. In this sense, political language does not simply describe events; it actively constructs versions of reality that become socially and politically consequential. Within Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), discourse is therefore understood as both socially shaped and socially constitutive, meaning that it is influenced by existing power relations while simultaneously reproducing and reinforcing them through linguistic choices (Fairclough, 2021; van Dijk, 2021). From this perspective, political communication is inherently strategic, as speakers carefully select, organise, and foreground particular meanings in ways that guide public interpretation, influence ideological alignment, and legitimise specific political positions while marginalising others.

Framing theory further deepens this understanding by explaining how discourse structures interpretation through processes of selection, emphasis, and omission. Frames operate as interpretive schemas that define what counts as a problem, how causality is assigned, and how events, actors, and institutions are evaluated (Goffman, 1974; Entman, 1993). In political communication, framing is therefore never neutral; it is ideologically loaded and strategically deployed to shape both cognitive understanding and emotional response among audiences (Matthes, 2009). By highlighting certain aspects of reality while downplaying others, frames guide how citizens interpret political events, often steering judgment before critical evaluation occurs. Scholars such as Kuypers (2006) and Snow and Benford (1988) further demonstrate that framing operates through diagnostic (problem identification), prognostic (solution proposal), and motivational (call to action) functions, thereby structuring not only how political realities are interpreted but also how individuals are encouraged to respond to them.

Recent developments in political linguistics have increasingly shown that framing extends beyond lexical selection or metaphorical expression to include broader discourse practices such as pragmatic inference, interactional positioning, and contextual negotiation (Chilton, 2004; Charteris-Black, 2018). This expanded view emphasises that meaning is often communicated indirectly through what is implied, presupposed, or strategically left unsaid, rather than through explicit statement alone. As a result, framing theory is becoming more closely aligned with pragmatics, particularly in its recognition that implicit meaning plays a central role in ideological positioning. This convergence allows for a more comprehensive account of political discourse, one that captures not only what is said, but also how meaning is constructed through inference, context, and interactional strategy.

2.1.2. Pragmatics and Political Meaning Construction

Pragmatics offers a micro-analytic framework for understanding how meaning is generated beyond explicit linguistic expression. Unlike structural or literal approaches, it examines language in use, focusing on how speakers perform social actions, imply meanings, and negotiate relationships within context (Yule, 1996; Levinson, 1983). Meaning is therefore context-dependent and inferential, relying on shared knowledge and assumptions. Speakers often communicate indirectly to manage politeness, assert authority, or mitigate face-threatening acts. Key pragmatic mechanisms include speech acts, implicature, presupposition, deixis, modality, and evaluative language. Together, they explain how utterances perform actions, convey implicit meanings, encode assumptions, index context, express certainty or obligation, and reveal ideological stance in discourse.

Speech act theory (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969) explains how utterances function as actions such as asserting, promising, accusing, or legitimising political actors and events. Implicature (Grice, 1975) accounts for meanings that are inferred rather than explicitly stated, enabling indirect communication of ideological positions. Presupposition (Stalnaker, 1974) allows speakers to embed assumptions as shared or taken-for-granted knowledge,

thereby naturalising ideological claims and reinforcing particular political worldviews without explicit assertion or contestation in discourse.

Deixis plays a key role in constructing in-group and out-group relations through pronouns such as “we” and “they,” as well as spatial and temporal references that anchor discourse contextually (Levinson, 1983). Modality expresses degrees of certainty, obligation, and necessity, thereby revealing speaker stance, commitment, and authority (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). Evaluative language encodes judgment and affect, shaping moral positioning and ideological alignment within discourse by signalling approval, disapproval, or value-laden assessments of political actors and events (Hunston & Thompson, 2000).

Recent pragmatic studies of political discourse show that these resources seldom operate in isolation; instead, they interact in systematic and mutually reinforcing ways to produce ideological coherence and persuasive force (Odebunmi, 2021; Taiwo et al., 2022). Through their combined deployment, speakers construct layered meanings that strengthen alignment and interpretation. However, despite these advances, much of the existing scholarship remains fragmented, with insufficient attention paid to how these pragmatic mechanisms function holistically as integrated framing strategies in political communication.

2.1.3 Nigerian Political Discourse and Pragmatic Framing

Nigerian political discourse is characterised by adversariality, identity politics, and strategic persuasion, reflecting a highly competitive and socially stratified political environment. Studies show that political communication is shaped by electoral rivalry, ethnic and regional affiliations, and power-sharing arrangements such as zoning, which collectively influence both alignment and discourse (Opeibi, 2012; Odebunmi, 2021). In this context, language functions as a tool for negotiating power, with political actors deploying pragmatic resources to construct legitimacy, mobilise solidarity, and delegitimise opponents. Consequently, discourse is deeply embedded in sociopolitical struggles where meaning is tied to identity and authority.

Empirical research also identifies recurring framing patterns in Nigerian politics. Elections are often represented as high-stakes, zero-sum contests rather than deliberative democratic processes (Taiwo et al., 2022). Political actors are framed through moralised categories such as heroes, victims, and threats, reflecting ideological positioning and polarisation (Tanko et al., 2021). The state is likewise constructed either as a competitive developmental unit or as a container of governance challenges such as insecurity and corruption (van Dijk, 2006). These patterns indicate that political meaning is systematically organised.

However, existing studies remain fragmented, focusing on isolated features such as metaphor, modality, or speech acts without fully explaining how they interact to produce coherent framing. This has led to an under-theorisation of framing as an integrated pragmatic system rather than a collection of rhetorical devices shaping ideological interpretation and audience perception.

2.1.4 Synthesis and Research Gap

The literature reviewed indicates a growing convergence between framing theory and pragmatics in explaining political meaning-making. However, there remains a conceptual and analytical gap in understanding how multiple pragmatic resources interact systematically to produce framing effects in political discourse. In particular, the combined operation of speech acts, implicature, presupposition, deixis, modality, and evaluative language in constructing representations of elections, political actors, and the state has not been sufficiently explored in Nigerian political communication.

This study addresses this gap by conceptualising framing as a structured pragmatic system rather than an isolated rhetorical or lexical feature. It argues that ideological meaning emerges from the coordinated interaction of pragmatic resources within specific sociopolitical contexts, particularly in adversarial political environments such as Nigeria.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

2.2.1 Framing Theory and Pragmatics

This study integrates Framing Theory and Pragmatics to account for both the macro-structural organisation and micro-interactional construction of meaning in political discourse.

2.2.2 Framing Theory

Framing Theory provides a macro-level explanation of how discourse selectively foregrounds aspects of reality while backgrounding others, thereby shaping interpretation, evaluation, and ideological positioning. It conceptualises frames as interpretive structures that define issues, assign causality, and guide audience perception within specific sociopolitical contexts. As ideologically driven constructs, frames are closely linked to power, as they privilege certain worldviews while marginalising alternatives.

2.2.3. Pragmatics

Pragmatics, in contrast, offers a micro-level perspective on how meaning is generated through context, inference, and interaction. It emphasises language as action, where speech acts perform functions such as asserting, accusing, and legitimising. Meaning is also conveyed indirectly through implicature and presupposition, which encode unstated assumptions and backgrounded ideological content. In addition, modality expresses degrees of certainty and obligation, deixis constructs relational positioning (e.g., inclusion and exclusion through “we” and “they”), while evaluative language encodes stance and moral judgment.

2.2.4. Integration of Framing Theory and Pragmatics

The integration of both frameworks is grounded in the assumption that meaning in political discourse is dynamic and context-dependent. Framing is therefore not a fixed cognitive schema but an emergent pragmatic phenomenon arising from the interaction of multiple linguistic resources. Speech acts provide functional force, implicature and presupposition supply implicit meaning, while modality, deixis, and evaluative language position participants within ideological structures.

Within this integrated model, framing is understood as a structured pragmatic system through which ideological meanings are constructed, reinforced, and naturalised. Recurrent patterns of pragmatic choices make particular interpretations appear natural and commonsensical, thereby sustaining ideological positioning. Consequently, framing is conceptualised as an emergent, multi-layered phenomenon located at the intersection of language, cognition, and sociopolitical context.

3. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative discourse-analytic design grounded in pragmatics and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). The approach is appropriate for examining how political meaning is constructed, negotiated, and stabilised through the interaction of linguistic forms and contextual factors in Nigerian political discourse.

3.1. Data

The dataset comprises purposively selected Nigerian political texts drawn from political speeches, campaign statements, press briefings, and media-reported political discourse. The texts are selected based on their relevance to three analytical domains: electoral discourse, political actor representation, and state and identity construction. This purposive sampling ensures that the corpus captures contexts in which ideological framing is most salient and systematically elaborated in public communication.

3.2. Analytical Procedure

Analysis proceeds through a three-stage procedure. First, the texts are examined to identify pragmatic features, including speech acts, implicature, presupposition, deixis, modality, and evaluative language. Second, these features are analysed for recurring patterns and systematic co-occurrence, which are interpreted as framing structures within the discourse. Third, the identified frames are interpreted in terms of their ideological functions, particularly how they construct representations of elections, political actors, and the state.

The final stage integrates these interpretations within the broader framework of framing theory, explaining how pragmatic resources collectively operate as a structured system of ideological meaning-making. Throughout the analysis, attention is paid to how linguistic choices function within specific sociopolitical contexts to produce inferential and evaluative effects.

Although interpretive, the analysis is anchored in systematic linguistic description and guided by established principles of discourse analysis, ensuring analytical rigour, transparency, and theoretical consistency (Fairclough & Fairclough, 2022).”

4. DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS, FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Data Presentation

This section presents the dataset used for the analysis, outlining the nature, sources, and organisation of the selected texts. The data consist of purposively sampled Nigerian political discourse drawn from political speeches, campaign statements, and media-reported political utterances. These sources were selected because they represent high-density sites of ideological construction, where political actors strategically deploy language to influence public perception and align audiences.

The dataset includes extracts that are contextually situated within electoral periods, political contestation, and governance debates. Particular attention is given to texts that explicitly or implicitly address elections, political actors, and state-related issues, as these domains constitute the analytical focus of the study. The selected excerpts capture a range of communicative contexts, including campaign rallies, press statements, televised interviews, and reported political commentary, thereby ensuring representational diversity.

For analytical clarity, the data are organised into three thematic clusters corresponding to the core domains of the study. The first cluster comprises extracts relating to electoral discourse, where language is used to construct elections as processes of competition, legitimacy, and decision-making. The second cluster focuses on representations of political actors, capturing how individuals and groups are discursively constructed in terms of competence, morality, and threat. The third cluster contains data on state representation, highlighting how spatial, identity-based, and competitive meanings are attached to political entities such as states and regions.

Each extract is presented as a discrete unit of analysis and is examined for its pragmatic features, including speech acts, implicature, presupposition, deixis, modality, and evaluative language. The presentation prioritises contextual relevance, ensuring that each example reflects naturally occurring political discourse rather than artificially constructed instances.

The data presentation reflects a well-structured yet flexible corpus organised into thematic domains and diverse discourse sources. This design enhances representativeness and supports rigorous qualitative analysis. It enables the identification of key pragmatic features while allowing nuanced interpretation, providing a strong empirical basis for examining how discourse constructs meaning, ideology, and audience alignment.

4.2. Data Analysis and Discussion

4.2.1 Analytical Orientation: Framing as Pragmatic Configuration

This study conceptualises framing as a pragmatic configuration of meaning realised through the systematic interaction of linguistic resources. In line with contemporary discourse studies, political communication is understood as ideologically structured and contextually embedded (van Dijk, 2022; Schäffner, 2021). The analysis focuses on three domains: elections, political actors, and state representation. Across these domains, framing emerges not from isolated linguistic items but from the coordinated deployment of pragmatic resources that collectively structure interpretation and ideological positioning.

4.2.2 Pragmatic Density of Political Discourse

The data indicate a high density of interacting pragmatic resources in Nigerian political discourse, notably modality (expressing certainty, obligation, and inevitability), presupposition (facilitating ideological naturalisation), implicature (conveying indirect meaning), deixis (enabling alignment through “we/they” distinctions), and evaluative polarisation. Their frequent co-occurrence demonstrates that framing functions as a relational and synergistic system rather than a set of isolated features, with meaning arising from the dynamic interplay of these resources within specific communicative contexts.

4.3 Framing of Elections

4.3.1 Elections as Contests

The data show that elections are predominantly constructed as agonistic struggles rather than routine democratic procedures. Expressions such as “do-or-die affair” and “not a tea party” metaphorically recast electoral processes as high-stakes confrontations, invoking shared sociopolitical knowledge to heighten urgency and emotional intensity. These framings are pragmatically realised through implicature, where the literal wording understates but strongly implies risk, conflict, and consequence. In addition, directive and prohibitive speech acts—such as warnings against violence—serve a dual function: they regulate behaviour while simultaneously presupposing the likelihood of disorder, thereby reinforcing the conflictual framing. Interrogatives used in political critique further contribute to this construction by functioning rhetorically rather than informationally, allowing speakers to indirectly question competence and legitimacy without explicit assertion. This is complemented by evaluative lexical choices such as “liability” and “incapable,” as well as predictive modality (e.g., “will not win”), which collectively intensify adversarial positioning. Through this convergence of pragmatic resources, elections are discursively constructed as zero-sum contests in which political actors are positioned as opponents in a struggle for dominance.

4.3.2 Elections as Decisive Events

Alongside this contest-oriented framing, elections are also represented as decisive and legitimising events that confer democratic authority. High-certainty modal expressions such as “must win” and “cannot fail” construct electoral outcomes as both necessary and inevitable, thereby projecting confidence and determinacy. Presuppositional formulations—most notably references to “the will of the people”—function to naturalise electoral outcomes as expressions of collective consensus, effectively masking contestation beneath a veneer of democratic inevitability. Deictic expressions such as “we,” “our people,” and “the people” play a crucial role in this process by constructing inclusive yet bounded identities, aligning audiences within a shared interpretive community while implicitly excluding opposing groups. In this way, elections are framed not merely as competitive events but as mechanisms through which political legitimacy is produced, affirmed, and normalised.

4.3.3 Contest–Legitimacy Duality

The coexistence of these two framings reveals a dual pragmatic structure underlying electoral discourse. On the one hand, the construction of elections as contests serves to mobilise support, energise political participation, and sharpen ideological distinctions. On the other hand, the framing of elections as decisive and legitimising events works to stabilise outcomes and secure institutional authority. Rather than functioning in opposition, these dimensions operate in a complementary relationship: contestation drives engagement and persuasion, while

legitimacy ensures acceptance and continuity. Nigerian political discourse thus sustains a dynamic balance between conflict and consensus, demonstrating that electoral communication is simultaneously oriented toward competition and consolidation. This duality underscores the complexity of pragmatic framing, where persuasion and institutional validation are co-constructed through interacting linguistic and discursive strategies.

4.4 Framing of Political Actors

4.4.1 Heroes

The data reveal that political actors are frequently constructed as heroic figures through a convergence of evaluative language, modality, and metaphor. Positive lexical choices such as “only hope,” “capable,” and “competent leaders” encode explicit value judgments that elevate selected actors above their competitors. These evaluations are often reinforced by deontic modality, as in expressions like “must queue behind him,” which not only endorse a candidate but also exert normative pressure on audiences to align with that endorsement. Commissive speech acts—such as “we will deliver” or “we will transform”—further strengthen this construction by projecting certainty, commitment, and future-oriented credibility. In addition, metaphorical framings of struggle, rescue, or transformation position these actors as agents of change operating against adversity, thereby enhancing their moral authority and legitimising their leadership claims. Through this layered deployment of pragmatic resources, political actors are discursively elevated into figures of trust, competence, and necessity.

4.4.2 Victims

Victimhood is constructed through more indirect but equally powerful pragmatic strategies, particularly presupposition and implicature. Expressions such as “plots against him” or “they are after him” presuppose the existence of hidden adversaries and unjust treatment without explicitly identifying agents or providing evidence. This allows speakers to evoke a sense of persecution while maintaining plausible deniability. The reliance on implicature enables audiences to infer wrongdoing and align sympathetically with the targeted actor, thereby fostering emotional identification and moral support. Such framings often draw on shared sociopolitical narratives of marginalisation or exclusion, making them especially persuasive within contexts where distrust and suspicion of political processes are already salient. In this way, victim framing constructs political actors as unjustly treated figures who deserve redress, protection, or electoral support.

4.4.3 Threats

Conversely, political actors are also framed as threats through negative evaluation, exclusionary modality, and delegitimising discourse. Statements such as “does not have what it takes” or “has no business aspiring” move beyond simple criticism to impose normative boundaries on political participation. Here, evaluation is transformed into prescription: actors are not merely described as inadequate but are positioned as unfit or undeserving of political office. This is often reinforced by categorical or high-certainty modal expressions that foreclose alternative interpretations and present exclusion as justified and necessary. Through such strategies, political opponents are constructed as risks to collective well-being, institutional stability, or democratic progress, thereby legitimising their rejection or marginalisation within the political space.

4.4.4 Identity Fluidity

Importantly, these identity constructions are not fixed but dynamically negotiated across contexts. The same political actor may be framed as a hero in one discourse, a victim in another, and a threat in yet another, depending on the speaker’s communicative goals and ideological positioning. This fluidity underscores the fundamentally discursive nature of political identity: it is not an inherent attribute but a strategic accomplishment achieved through language use. By shifting between these positions, political discourse enables actors to be recontextualised in ways

that maximise persuasive impact, confirming that identity construction in politics is both context-dependent and pragmatically orchestrated.

4.5 Framing of States

4.5.1 States as Containers

The data indicate that states are frequently constructed as bounded spaces of identity, belonging, and political ownership. Expressions such as “Imo is APC” collapse the distinction between geographical territory and partisan affiliation, effectively reimagining the state as a homogeneous political entity. Similarly, inclusive formulations like “the state belongs to all of us” invoke a collective identity that symbolically unifies diverse populations under a shared civic frame. These constructions are further reinforced through spatial metaphors such as “filled to capacity,” where physical presence is equated with political legitimacy, suggesting that numerical strength or visibility translates into rightful dominance. Through these strategies, the state is not merely a neutral administrative unit but a discursively produced container within which identity, loyalty, and authority are negotiated and stabilised.

4.5.2 States as Competitors

In addition to their role as containers of identity, states are also framed as competitive actors within broader political and developmental hierarchies. Discursive expressions such as “it is my turn” reflect underlying ideologies of rotation and entitlement, where access to power is structured as a sequential and territorially distributed right. At the same time, comparative constructions in governance discourse position states as benchmarks against one another, foregrounding performance, development, and political influence as metrics of evaluation. These comparisons implicitly rank states, transforming them into units of competition within a national framework. As a result, the state is recontextualised as an active participant in struggles over recognition, resources, and political relevance.

4.5.3 Spatial–Competitive Duality

The coexistence of these two framings reveals a spatial–competitive duality in the representation of states. On the one hand, states function as containers that anchor identity and belonging; on the other, they operate as competitors within a dynamic field of political contestation. This duality demonstrates that spatial meaning in political discourse is not neutral but ideologically structured. Space becomes a semiotic resource through which political actors construct and negotiate identity, assert authority, and legitimise claims to power. In this sense, the representation of states reflects broader discursive processes in which geography is mobilised to serve strategic communicative purposes.

4.6 Framing as a Multi-Layered Pragmatic System

Across the analysed domains, framing emerges as a multi-layered and systematically organised pragmatic phenomenon. Different pragmatic resources perform distinct but interconnected functions: speech acts structure communicative intent and force; implicature and presupposition encode implicit meanings and ideological assumptions; deixis facilitates alignment and group positioning; modality signals degrees of certainty, obligation, and commitment; and evaluative language drives moral and affective judgement. Crucially, these resources do not operate in isolation but interact dynamically within specific contexts to produce coherent and persuasive ideological meanings. This interdependence confirms that framing is not reducible to isolated lexical choices or surface-level rhetoric; rather, it is an emergent configuration arising from the coordinated deployment of multiple pragmatic strategies. Such a perspective underscores the complexity of political discourse, where meaning is continuously constructed through the interplay of linguistic form, contextual inference, and ideological intent.

5. Synthesis and Discussion of Findings

The findings demonstrate that Nigerian political discourse functions as a multi-layered pragmatic system in which ideological meaning is constructed through the interaction of linguistic and contextual resources. This means that political communication in Nigeria does not rely on single or isolated linguistic features but on the coordinated use of multiple pragmatic mechanisms. Elements such as speech acts, implicature, presupposition, deixis, modality, and evaluative language work together to shape how meanings are produced and interpreted. These linguistic resources operate within specific sociopolitical contexts, allowing speakers to embed ideological assumptions and guide audience interpretation indirectly. Consequently, political discourse becomes a structured system of meaning-making in which ideology is continuously negotiated, reinforced, and stabilised through language use.

First, elections are framed through a dual logic of contestation and legitimacy, meaning they are simultaneously presented as competitive struggles and as processes that produce accepted outcomes. In the contestation frame, political actors emphasise rivalry, opposition, and high stakes in order to mobilise support and intensify public engagement. In contrast, the legitimacy frame presents electoral outcomes as conclusive expressions of the people's will, thereby reinforcing institutional acceptance and political stability. This coexistence allows political discourse to maintain emotional intensity while still affirming the authority of democratic processes. In line with Schäffner (2021), this dual structure shows that political communication often balances antagonism with the need to sustain institutional order.

Second, political actors are constructed within a triadic system of heroism, victimhood, and threat, which serves as a flexible framework for shaping public perception. These positions are not fixed or inherent but shift depending on the communicative context, audience expectations, and political objectives. This supports van Dijk's (2021) view that political identity is not a stable attribute but is continuously produced and reproduced through discourse. Through this system, the same political figure can be praised as a hero in one context, portrayed as a victim in another, or framed as a threat when opposition narratives are advanced. The triadic schema therefore enables strategic repositioning that strengthens persuasion, mobilises support, and delegitimises opponents within political communication.

Third, states are framed as both containers of identity and competitors in political struggle, giving them a dual meaning in political discourse. As containers, states are presented as bounded spaces that hold shared identity, culture, and belonging, often expressed through language that emphasises unity and ownership. At the same time, they are constructed as competitors, where different states are compared in terms of performance, development, or political influence. This dual representation shows that references to space are not neutral but are used strategically to shape how people think about governance and identity. In line with Cap's (2020) notion of spatial pragmatics, such spatial framing reveals how political actors use ideas of place to advance ideological positions and influence public perception.

Across all domains, pragmatic resources interact systematically. Speech acts perform political functions; implicature enables indirect critique; presupposition naturalises ideology; deixis constructs inclusion/exclusion; modality encodes authority; and evaluative language produces affective polarisation. Importantly, these resources do not function independently but operate in coordinated configurations that stabilise ideological meaning. Overall, the study confirms that framing in Nigerian political discourse is not a set of isolated linguistic choices but a structured pragmatic system through which ideology is constructed, reproduced, and normalised (Fairclough, 2021; Huguet Cabot et al., 2020).

6. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that Nigerian political discourse is systematically organised through a pragmatic framing architecture. In this architecture, meaning is constructed through the interaction of multiple linguistic resources. Rather than functioning as neutral representations of political reality, political texts actively produce, organise, and stabilise ideological interpretations within specific socio-political contexts.

Findings show that elections are persistently framed through a dual logic of contestation and decisiveness. This duality simultaneously intensifies political competition while legitimising electoral outcomes as expressions of collective will. Political actors are similarly constructed within a dynamic triadic schema of heroism, victimhood, and threat, reflecting the strategic and context-dependent nature of identity formation in adversarial discourse. In addition, states are framed both as containers of identity and as competitors in political struggle, thereby demonstrating how spatial reference is ideologically loaded in political communication.

The study further establishes that these framing patterns are not incidental rhetorical choices but structured mechanisms of ideological production. Through the coordinated deployment of speech acts, implicature, presupposition, deixis, modality, and evaluative language, political discourse shapes interpretation, naturalises assumptions, and regulates audience alignment. Framing, therefore, emerges as a multi-layered pragmatic system through which ideology is constructed, reinforced, and sustained. This contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of political discourse as a site of structured ideological meaning-making in Nigeria.

7. Recommendations

Political actors should prioritise more inclusive and less adversarial framing strategies, particularly in electoral communication, in order to reduce discursive polarisation and mitigate sociopolitical tensions. This entails moving away from zero-sum and antagonistic rhetoric toward more dialogic and deliberative forms of engagement that acknowledge plurality, encourage mutual recognition, and foreground shared democratic values. By adopting language that invites participation rather than division, political actors can foster a more constructive communicative environment and enhance the quality of democratic interaction.

Media practitioners, in turn, should engage more critically with the implicit framing mechanisms embedded in political reporting. Rather than reproducing political statements at face value, journalists should interrogate and make visible the presuppositions, evaluative expressions, and ideological positions that underlie them. Such critical mediation would not only improve the transparency of political communication but also equip audiences with the analytical tools needed to better understand how meaning and bias are discursively constructed.

Civic education programmes should incorporate pragmatic literacy as a core component of political education. Training citizens to recognise and interpret key pragmatic features—such as implicature, presupposition, modality, deixis, and evaluative language—would significantly strengthen their interpretive competence. This, in turn, would enable more critical engagement with political discourse, reduce susceptibility to manipulation, and promote a more informed and reflective electorate.

Future research should extend the scope of this study by integrating corpus-based and multimodal approaches to political discourse analysis. A corpus-driven methodology would allow for large-scale pattern identification and greater empirical generalisability, while multimodal analysis would facilitate the examination of visual, digital, and performative elements—such as images, gestures, and social media interactions—that increasingly shape contemporary political communication. Such an interdisciplinary expansion would provide a more comprehensive account of how meaning is constructed across diverse communicative channels.

Finally, electoral management bodies and relevant policy institutions should develop systematic monitoring frameworks for identifying and addressing escalatory and polarising discourse in political communication. These frameworks could incorporate linguistic indicators of incitement, exclusion, and hostility, enabling timely intervention and regulation where necessary. By promoting accountability and encouraging responsible language use, such mechanisms would contribute to the reduction of communicative excesses and support the overall stability and integrity of democratic processes.

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