

Article

Apology as a Politeness Strategy: The example of former President Buhari

Ebere Celina Krisagbedo¹, Chris Uchenna Agbedo²

University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Enugu State, Nigeria

¹Use of English Unit, School of General Studies / Department of English & Literary Studies.

²Department of Linguistics, Igbo & Other Nigerian Languages.

Correspondence: Chris Uchenna Agbedo, ebere.krisagbedo@unn.edu.ng

Abstract

This paper examines the speech act of apologies evident in the official statements of President Muhammadu Buhari, intended as politeness strategies meant to mitigate certain face-threatening acts (FTA). Using Austin's (1962) speech act theory as a framework, the work sets out to analyse a sample of Buhari's presidential apologies, which, in theoretical terms, belong to expressive and commissive illocutionary acts. The central objective is to determine the extent to which the apology intended as a politeness strategy by the addresser, recognises the addressee's positive/negative face need, meets the addressee's overall face needs, and whether negative politeness is the universally preferred approach for doing face-work as Brown and Levinson claim. To this effect, we elicit data on presidential apologies from online editions of newspapers and subject them to a speech act analysis. We identify four instances of apology, namely (i) apology to Obama for plagiarism, (ii) apology for sacking vice chancellors and governing councils of Nigerian universities, (iii) apology to the senate, and (iv) apology to the Global Fund and Gavi. The results of the data analysis suggest that the speech acts of apology are basically intended to address the face needs of the addressees, redress infraction, and restore social equilibrium, and interlocutors do not value negative politeness over positive politeness, and may even have an overriding preference for avoidance-based, off-record verbal behaviour or other means of addressing face.

Keywords: Apologies, Face, FTA, Politeness, Semantic formulas, Speech act

Introduction

Human beings communicate to build interpersonal relationships of various kinds: consummating mutual understanding, mutual respect and trust, learning to like, respect, trust, influence each other, and start and terminate relationships. Language represents a means of communication that is uniquely human. Linguistic research (notably Sifianou, 2000; Tomah-Layoff, 1975) has shown that communication is not only the way in which a piece of information is transmitted from the speaker to an addressee, but also an equally important means of establishing, maintaining, and even terminating social relationships with other people. Language as a means is achieved through speech acts, which Austin (1962) sees as 'doing things with words'. A typical act in Austin's Speech Act Theory (SAT) refers to the action that is performed in making utterances, and there exist a number of speech acts that apply to the speaker's communicative intention in producing utterances, which have been classified into five types of general functions: declarations, representatives, expressive, directives, and commissives. In this regard, the speech act of apology, which forms the subject of discourse here, falls within the category of an expressive illocutionary act. As a type of speech act, the apology has been the subject of numerous studies that set out to clarify the concept of apology, how the different

ways of apologising can be classified, and also how this particular speech act is performed.

According to Grainger and Harris (2007), inquiry into the speech act of apologies is likely to have gained popularity due to their function of maintaining and restoring good relations in a society. Apology has been defined as a regretful acknowledgement of fault or failure. Goffman (1971) views apologies as 'remedial interchanges'; that is to say, remedial work, which aims at re-establishing social harmony after a real or virtual offence has been performed. Using Brown & Levinson's terminology, apologies are generally perceived as *negative politeness* since they express respect rather than friendliness. Olshtain & Cohen (1983) examine apologising strategies and classify them into Illocutionary Force Indicating Device (IFID, i.e. taking on responsibility, explanation or account, offer of repair, and promise of forbearance).

By implication, apology is a form of politeness strategy, which is an expression of the speaker's intention to mitigate face threats occasioned by certain face-threatening acts towards another. What appears to be the most influential politeness model to date is the face-saving view proposed by Brown & Levinson (1987), Watts (1992) and Kasper (1998). This model is based on constructing a Model Person (MP) who is a fluent speaker of a natural language and equipped with two special characteristics, namely 'rationality' and 'face'. For Brown and Levinson (1987), every competent speaker of a language, a model person, has face – a public self-image he wants to maintain in communication with other people. Face, as originally defined by Goffman (1967), is a mask which changes depending on the audience and the social interaction. Basically, face-saving is shown by respecting two basic human needs: the need not to be imposed on (what to avoid), which is called negative face; and the need to be liked and admired, which is also called positive face (i.e. the desire to be appreciated as a social person, what to do). Brown and Levinson (1987) outline five main types of politeness strategies based on the minimisation of loss of face by face-threatening acts (FTA).

In essence, apologies, notes Aijmer (1996), are semantic strategies used to fulfil people's communicative goals. Apology, as a speech act, wherein the speaker acknowledges some perceived social transgression and which the hearer equally acknowledges as sufficient reparation to mitigate whatever face-threat occasioned by the act, suffices as a form of politeness strategy. Throughout his 8-year tenure (2015-2023), as the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, Mr. Muhammadu Buhari engaged in speech acts of apology in the course of steering the ship of governance within the context of constitutional democracy. In this work, we set out to examine the speech act of apology as an integral part of his public communication. There are several linguistic strategies for expressing apologies. For instance, Olshtain and Cohen (1983) distinguish five strategies for apologising: (i) expression of apology, (ii) acknowledgement of responsibility, (iii) explanation or account of the situation, (iv) offer of repair, (v) promise of forbearance. Our primary objective is to determine the extent to which Mr. President's speech act of apology is in line with the strategies attested to in the literature.

Literature Review

In the recent past, a great deal of studies has been carried out concerning different speech acts, such as request (Jalilifar, 2009; Taguchi, 2006), compliment (Sharifian, 2008; Wolfson, 1981), refusals (Allami & Naeimi, 2010; Tanck, 2002), and apology (Owen, 1983; Mir, 1992; Harris, Grainger & Mullany, 2006). Apology is a speech act that has received attention from a number of researchers from various disciplines. For Goffman (1971), apology is a 'remedial exchange' and 'a gesture through which an individual splits himself into two parts, the part that is guilty of an offence and the part that affirms a belief in the 'offended rule'. Fraser (1981: 262) and Olshtain & Cohen (1983: 20) agree with this view of apologies as "constituting two processes, taking responsibility for an offensive act, and expression of regret for the offence committed" and as "an act of redress used when social norms have been violated by a real or potential offence" respectively. Gill (2000: 24), in his definition of apologies as "offered in response to a breach of moral standards," avers that apologies are not only tools for holding offenders accountable to the community, but also social measures that provide insurance against future violation by the offender. Gu's claim that apologies are 'face-caring' tallies with Edmondson & House's (1981: 47) position, which conforms to Leech's (1983: 133) hearer supportive maxim: Support the hearer's costs and benefits and suppress your own. Holmes (1990: 159) contends that apologising is a speech act, which seeks to address the face needs of the offended person and is meant to rectify the offence that the offender is responsible for, and by implication redress the social disequilibrium. The implication of apologies from the theoretical prisms of Ohbuchi, Kameda, & Agarie (1989) and Weiner (1995) is not only that the offender feels guilty and has already served part of the penalty, but is also indicative of the transgressor's rehabilitation and as a commitment on the part of the offender not to repeat the transgression.

Fraser's (1981) conceptual analysis of apology speech acts seeks to outline the prerequisite conditions for successful realisations of such a speech act. He lists several assumptions that should be true of the apologiser; notably (i) that the apologiser believes that some act happened prior to the time of apologising; (ii) that the apologiser believes that the act offended the hearer; (iii) that the apologiser must hold herself responsible for the offence; (iv) that the apologiser feels sorry for the offence he has committed. Without prejudice to these conditions, Fraser outlines two essential conditions that must be met for a speech act of apology to be successfully remedial: the apologiser's acknowledgement of responsibility for the offence caused, and the apologiser's regret for the offence. Fraser (1981: 263) goes further to investigate the conditions that establish the success of the speech act of apology by introducing nine strategies that an apologiser may use to fulfill the act of apologising as follows: (i) announcing one's apology: 'I apologise for...'; (ii) stating one's obligation to apologise: 'I must apologise for...'; (iii) offering to apologise: 'I offer my apology for...'; (iv) requesting the hearer to accept an apology: 'Please, accept my apology for...'; (v) expressing regret for the offence: 'I truly regret that I...'; (vi) requesting forgiveness for the offence: 'Please, pardon me for...'; (vii) acknowledging responsibility for the offending act: 'That was my fault.' (viii) promising forbearance from a similar offending act: 'I promise it will never happen again.'; (ix) offering redress: 'Please, let me pay for the damage I've done.'

In their description of the apology speech act set, Olshtain & Cohen (1983: 21) assume that apologising is a two-party act involving two participants – one perceiving himself as deserving an apology and the other perceived as responsible for causing the infraction – thus, suggesting that there is a circle of interaction between the recipient and the apologiser. This formed the basis for Olshtain & Cohen to distill the apology speech act set from some different dimensions: (i) the recipient's expectations determined by his evaluation of the degree of severity of the offence; (ii) the offender's apology determined by her perception of the degree of severity of the offence; (iii) the offender's apology controlled by the extent of compunction expected from the recipient; (iv) the interactive nature of both the initial apology and the recipient's response; (v) the social status of the two participants; (vi) the way the tone of voice may function to convey meaning.

Further to this, Cohen & Olshtain (1981) and Olshtain & Cohen (1983) modify Fraser's list and come up with five semantic formulas by taking Fraser's list of semantic formulas (1979, 1981) as a point of departure. To this effect, any discussion of the semantic formulas of the apology speech act, as Olshtain & Cohen (1983) argue, presupposes a marked distinction between the case where the offender feels the need to apologise and the case where he does not need to accept responsibility. In this regard, the semantic formulas range from acknowledging responsibility for the offence to rejecting it outright. In the event that the offender apologises positively, five semantic formulas would be in use: (i) an expression of an apology; (ii) an explanation or account of the situation; (iii) an acknowledgement of responsibility; (iv) an offer of repair; (v) a promise of forbearance. Several researchers, notably Bach and Harnish (1979); Holmes (1990), and Aijmer (1996), have proposed sets of felicity conditions for apologising, starting with the apologiser committing an infraction, which upsets the apologisee, followed by the offender's regret about the offence, and ending with the apologiser's acknowledgement of responsibility for the act committed.

Many politeness theories abound—from Goffman's (1967; 1971) notion of face, Lakoff's (1973; 1975; 1990) theory of politeness, Brown & Levinson's (1978; 1987) model of politeness, Fraser & Nolen's (1981) conversational contract view, Leech's (1983) principles and maxims of interaction, Watt's (1989; 2003; 2005) politic verbal behaviour, and the notion of relational work as introduced by Locher & Watts (2005), Spencer-Oatey (2005), to Arundale (2006). It is a fact that most politeness theories are consensual in defining the role of politeness as a link between language and the social world. Yet, they tend to differ in the way they conceptualise and operationalise politeness. For Grainger and Harris (2007), an apology is an action in interaction where the speaker acknowledges some perceived social transgression and the hearer receives and deals with this act. From this perspective, an apology is treated as interactionally achieved. In other words, an action counts as an apology if framed as an apology by the speaker and treated as an apology by the recipient. However, some studies of apologies have largely ignored the role of the recipient, focusing principally only on how they are produced by speakers.

Another set of studies, notably Olshtain and Cohen (1983); Olshtain (1989); Blum-Kulka, House & Kasper (1989); Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984), have focused on cross-cultural and inter-language studies of apologies, using data collected through discourse completion tests (DCT). Nonetheless, recent times have witnessed

increased interest in analysing apologies in situated spoken discourse, as attested to by Márquez-Reiter (2008), Koutsantoni (2007), Robinson (2004), Deustchmann (2003), Aijmer (1996); Holmes (1990; 1995); Owen (1983). The treatment of apologies as perfect examples of politeness originated basically from two sources: (i) Goffman's (1971) study of apologies as remedial work, and Brown and Levinson's (1978, 1987) follow-up study of apology as an aspect of their face-saving modes (1969, 1979) analysis of apologies as a speech act.

The perspective of the speaker is central to both Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory and Searle's Speech Act Theory. For emphasis, the politeness theory of Brown & Levinson (1978, 1987) adopts the speaker's perspective in treating apologies as the speaker's way of deference to the addressee's negative face. It is one action that yields politeness, assuming that a commensurate amount of regard is accorded relative to the offence (R), and the social distance (D) and power differential (P) that subsists at the material time between the speaker and addressee. This theoretical approach to politeness says nothing about how the apology is received by the addressee and, by implication, leaves no room for interrogating typical sociolinguistic situations where the treatment of the act in question as an apology is in dispute amongst interlocutors. The dominance of such speaker-centred approaches explains the limited number of studies focusing on apologies in situated spoken discourse, such as Robinson (2004), Owen (1983), Aijmer (1996), Holmes (1990), and Deustchmann (2003).

Even in such studies that adopt a speaker-centred approach to apology as a politeness strategy, none have focused on presidential apologies. It is not every day that presidents apologise; it is even rarer that presidents apologise in the middle of a firestorm for decisions their administrations made. Therefore, it becomes a big deal when they do. History is replete with instances of presidential apologies:

- (i) **John F. Kennedy apologises for the Bay of Pigs invasion (1961):** "We intend to profit from this lesson";
- (ii) **Richard Nixon apologises for Watergate (1977):** "I'm sorry. I have let the American people down";
- (iii) **Ronald Reagan expresses regret for Iran-Contra (1987):** "This happened on my watch";
- (iv) **Bill Clinton's Rwanda apology (1998):** "The international community did not react quickly enough after the killing began";
- (v) **Clinton says he "misled people" about Monica Lewinsky (1998):** "I misled people, including even my wife. I deeply regret that";
- (vi) **Obama apologises for 'Special Olympics' remark (2009):** "I think it's important to see that words hurt, and words do matter - and these words can, in some way, be seen as humiliating or a put-down to people with special needs. They do cause pain, and they do result in stereotypes, and they do result in behaviour that's neglectful and almost an oppressive moment for people with special needs.
- (vii) **Obama's health-care apology** in an interview with NBC News: "I am sorry that they are finding themselves in this situation based on assurances they got from me";
- (viii) **Obama apologises to Japan for America's bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki:** "Today, I stand with you in acknowledging the suffering and sacrifices on all sides of that conflict";

(ix) **George W. Bush apologises** after Hurricane Katrina devastated the Gulf Coast: "Katrina exposed serious problems in our response capability at all levels of government. And to the extent that the federal government didn't fully do its job right, I take responsibility."

The list is not exhaustive; yet, there is no known work that has taken up presidential apologies as its focus. This gap is what the present study sets out to fill. In the subsequent section, we shall be looking at naturally occurring apologies that arose in isolated instances of spontaneous speech events that involved President Buhari and/or his public communications aides and the semantic formulas (apology strategies) in realising them.

Data

The corpus of apologies is elicited from the online editions of local and international newspapers. The speech acts of apology are listed as follows:

Exc. i: "It was observed that the similarities between a paragraph in President Obama's 2008 Victory Speech and what President Buhari read in paragraph nine of the sixteen-paragraph address while inaugurating the Campaign on Sept. 8, are too close to be passed as coincidence. There was a mistake by an overzealous staff and we regret that this has happened. Already, a Deputy Director in the Presidency has accepted responsibility for the insertion of the contentious paragraph. This serious oversight will be investigated thoroughly and appropriate sanctions meted out. Presidency wishes to state in the clearest possible terms that it regrets this unfortunate incident and will ensure that this does not happen again." – Garba Shehu (Nigerian president apologises for plagiarising Obama in speech www.theguardian.com 20 July, 2016)

Exc. ii: "I heard the statements after and I want to apologise to the Distinguished Senate, to the Committee on Judiciary and the distinguished senator because that statement ought not to have been made. And the Attorney General is the Attorney General of the Federation, appointed by Mr. President, cleared by the Senate and responsible for the federation. We will handle this matter, but I first have to tender my unreserved apology for the impression it may have created to the distinguished Senate, Senators and the Committee members." – Senator Eta Enang – Special Assistant to the president, Senate (I am Sorry, Buhari apologises to Senate <http://www.vanguardngr.com/2016/07/I-am-sorry-buhari-apologises-senate/>)

Exc. iii: "Bear with us as we reflect on where we found ourselves. We gave a blanket order, which we had to rescind when we said all boards are suspended or dissolved. We had to go back and lick our vomit in terms of university boards because we found out that, according to their laws, they cannot choose a vice-chancellor unless the boards sit and interview prospective candidates who want to be VCs. So, there is nothing wrong in saying sorry and going back on your decision." – President Buhari (Nigerian president apologises for sacking vice-chancellors – Chris Haverg www.timeshighereducation.com 5 April, 2016.)

Exc. iv: "We are making genuine efforts to correct the lapses. We are very serious about people behaving themselves and being accountable. We thank you for deciding to re-engage with us, despite our inefficiencies. You decided to be here,

not minding our shortcomings. Other countries would bring fewer problems. We appreciate your commitment, and we will do our best to put ourselves in the best shape to help us.” – President Buhari (We’re Making Efforts To Correct Our Lapses – Buhari Assures Global Fund, GAVI 26 July, 2016.)

Analysis and Discussions

The way apologies are classified depends very much on the way they are defined. Thus, the diversity in definitions of apologies also brings about diversity in classification. Bergman and Kasper (1993) distinguished seven different apology categories. Janet Holmes (1990) divided apologies into four main categories, each category having sub-classifications. Trosborg (1995) distinguished five categories according to whether the speaker considers that an action that requires an apology occurred or not. Owen (1983) identified three types of apologies: one that incorporates “apology,” “apologies,” or “apologise, one that incorporates “sorry,” and, finally, the one that is created by the phrase “I’m afraid” followed by a sentence. Fraser (1981) designed a categorisation of apologies based on the intent of the speaker distinguishing eight categories: (i) announcing that you are apologizing, (ii) stating one’s obligation to apologise, (iii) offering to apologise, (iv) requesting the hearer accept an apology, (v) expressing regret for the offense, (vi) acknowledging responsibility for the offending act, (vii) promising forbearance from a similar offending act, and (viii) offering redress. A completely different approach to creating a taxonomy of apologies has been attempted by Deutschmann (2003), who, after analysing the British National Corpus, proposed three main categories of apologies according to the function they express: real apologies, formulaic apologies, and ‘face attack’ apologies.

Despite this classificatory diversity, these speech acts of apology will be analysed using the categorisation of Cohen and Olshtain (1981) – (i) Illocutionary Force Indication Devices (IFIDs) (a) an expression of regret, (b) an offer of apology (c) a request for forgiveness (ii) an offer of repair/redress (REPR) (iii) an explanation/account of the situation (EXPL) (iv) acknowledging responsibility for the offence (RESP), (v) promise of forbearance (FORB). The five semantic formulas as attested to in the corpus of apology speech acts form the thrust of analysis in the next subsection.

Semantic formulas

The Illocutionary Force Indicating Devices (IFID) as an apology strategy consists of some sub-semantic formulas: an expression of regret, an offer of apology, and a request for forgiveness. A number of these sub-formulas were clearly attested to in (i) – (iii) listed above.

(i) ‘... we regret that this has happened.’; ‘... it (Presidency) regrets this unfortunate incident...’ (ii) ‘I want to apologise to the Distinguished Senate...’; I first have to tender my unreserved apology...’; that statement ought not to have been made. (iii) ‘Bear with us as we reflect on...’; ‘...there is nothing wrong in saying sorry and going back on your decision...’

The IFIDs cut across the semantic sub-formulas, which express regret, offer an apology, and request forgiveness. An offer of repair/redress (REPR) forms the

second leg of apology, which is evident in the corpus of apologies being examined here.

- (i) 'This serious oversight will be investigated thoroughly and appropriate sanctions meted out.'
- (ii) 'We will handle this matter'
- (iii) 'We had to go back and lick our vomit...'
- (iv) 'We are making genuine efforts to correct the lapses... we will do our best to put ourselves in the best shape to help us.'

The third semantic formula is an explanation or account of the situation (EXPL). Evidence of this apology strategy is sifted from the corpus thus:

- (i) 'The similarities between a paragraph in President Obama's 2008 Victory Speech and what President Buhari read in paragraph... are too close to be passed as coincidence'.
- (iii) 'We gave a blanket order which we had to rescind...'
- (iv) 'We are very serious about people behaving themselves, and being accountable'.

The fourth semantic formula is taking responsibility for the offence committed (RESP). From the corpus, we sift the following formula:

- (i) A Deputy Director in the Presidency has accepted responsibility for the insertion of the contentious paragraph. The fifth semantic formula, which is promise of forbearance (FORB), is attested to in the first speech act of apology:
(1) presidency...will ensure that this does not happen again."

Discussions

The speech acts of apology examined here justify Goffman's definition as a 'remedial exchange' involving a split individual, called President Buhari, represented by two third parties – Garba Shehu and Eta Enang. For Goffman (1971), apology is a 'remedial exchange' and 'a gesture through which an individual splits himself into two parts, the part that is guilty of an offence and the other part that affirms a belief in the 'offended rule'. In (i), the third party utilised a number of semantic formulas – IFIDs, repairs/redress, and explanation – to perform the speech acts of apology on behalf of his principal, which imply admission of guilt of an offensive act, expression of regret, and willingness to latch on to remedial measures to redress the social norm violation act. The same set of apology strategies subsists in (ii) where the third party, acting on behalf of his principal, attested to the fact that apologies constitute two processes: taking responsibility for an offensive act, expression of regret for the offence committed and an act of redress used when social norms have been violated by a real or potential offence. This is in line with Gill's (2000) view of apology as a speech act offered in response to a breach of moral standards and serves as not only a tool for holding offenders accountable to the community, but also a social measures that provide insurance against future violation by the offender.

The apologiser in (i) equally makes use of repair (redress), explanation, responsibility, and forbearance to buttress the claims of Edmondson & House (1981) that apologies are 'face-caring,' which conforms to Leech's (1983) hearer supportive maxim: support the hearer's cost and benefits and suppress your own. In a like

manner, Holmes (1990) contends that apologising is a speech act which seeks to address the face needs of the offended person and is meant to rectify the offence that the offender is responsible for, and by implication redresses the social disequilibrium. The offer of repair by the apologiser in (ii) attests to the facts that not only that the offender feel guilty, and has already served part of the penalty, but is also indicative of the transgressor's rehabilitation and as a commitment on the part of the offender not to repeat the transgression. This explains the apologiser's offer of redress: "We will handle this matter," in the same manner that the apologiser in (i) offered forbearance: "Presidency...will ensure that this does not happen again." In the first instance, the apologiser makes a bid to carry out an action or provide reparation for some kind of damage resulting from his infraction; in the latter, the apologiser takes responsibility by expressing regret, and he is expected to behave consistently and not immediately repeat the act for which he has just apologised. He further leaps into the future, perhaps to drive home the point of insurance against the possibility of a repeat of the offensive act by making a promise to improve his behaviour in a number of ways. Such responses are often signalled by the performative verb *promise*: 'It won't happen again, I promise'. In most cases, one of the formulas may just be sufficient to perform an apology. This is what obtains in (ii), where the apology speech act is majorly performed by the profuse use of IFIDs in terms of explicit expression of apology. However, (i) shows that often four or more formulas are combined to create a higher intensity of apology. This is evident in the use of IFIDs, repair, explanation, responsibility, and forbearance.

The characterisation of political apology by Agyekum (2015) as one-sided in the public domain, highly mediatised and involving politicians or prominent figures associated with politics, delineates another essential feature of apology speech act (i). He notes further that sometimes, the media strongly demand an apology, and this is held on the general public, thus compelling the politician to apologise. Writing under the caption, 'Nigerian President apologises for plagiarising Obama in speech', the London tabloid, *The Guardian* (www.theguardian.com Saturday 17 September, 2016) referred to a Friday column for *ThisDay* newspaper, wherein Adeola Akinremi denounced "the moral problem of plagiarism on a day Mr. President launched a campaign to demand honesty and integrity". The writer demanded pointedly for an apology: "It is my submission that Buhari needs to apologise to Nigerians for apology, in most cases, as Agyekum claims, is engineered from the victim's group that compels the politician to apologise. Although the writer cannot be said to be a direct victim of the interactional infraction except in a metaphorical sense as a Nigerian, Mr. President promptly obliged them by apologising through his media aide, Garba Shehu.

The speech acts of apology in (i) and (ii) are markedly different from those of (iii) and (iv) only in the sense that the latter leave no room for a third-party involvement. In other words, the speaker, President Buhari directly addresses the apologees (i.e. the Committee of Vice Chancellors in (iii) and Global Fund and Gavi in (iv), thus meeting the two essential conditions for a speech act of apology to be successfully remedial: the apologizer's acknowledgement of responsibility for the offence caused, and the apologizer's regret for the offence. In theoretical terms, the speaker avails himself of Fraser's (1981) prerequisite conditions for successful

realisations of such a speech act, notably that the apologisee believes that some act happened before the time of apologising; the act offended the hearer; the apologisee holds himself responsible for the offence; and he feels sorry for the offence he has committed. By combining several semantic formulas but to a lesser degree than the speaker in (i), President Buhari utilizes IFID (stating his obligation to apologise), requesting forgiveness for the offence ('bear with us'), acknowledging responsibility for the offending act ('we gave a blanket order, which we had to rescind') expressing self-deficiency ('they cannot choose vice-chancellors unless the boards sit down and interview prospective candidates who want to be v-cs', '...despite our inefficiencies', '...not minding our shortcomings', '...other countries would bring less problems'), offering redress ('we have to go back and lick our vomit', and making explanation ('We are very serious about people behaving themselves').

On the whole, all the instances of apology speech acts examined in the foregoing authenticate the theoretical standpoint of Olshtain and Cohen (1983) that apologizing is a two-party act involving two participants – one perceiving himself as deserving an apology and the other perceived as responsible for causing the infraction – thus, suggesting that there is a circle of interaction between the recipient and the apologizer. However, except in (iv), where the responses of the apologisees (i.e., the recipient(s) of the apology speech act) were ascertained, it is not possible to determine the set in a two-party act in (i) – (iii). In a statement signed by Femi Adesina (another special assistant to Mr. President on media and publicity and dated 28 July, 2016), Gavi and the Global Fund were disappointed when forensic audit revealed systemic weaknesses and corruption in the utilization of funds given in the past, adding that there is now a 'breath of fresh air' under President Buhari's leadership and fight against corruption and they willing to 'close the books of the past, and look in the future support.' In this case, it is tenable to distill the six-way dimensional scale proposed by Olshtain & Cohen (1983) from the speech acts of apology in (iv): (i) the recipient's expectations determined by his evaluation of the degree of severity of the offence; (ii) the offender's apology determined by his perception of the degree of severity of the offence; (iii) the offender's apology controlled by the extent of compunction expected from the recipient; (iv) the interactive nature of both the initial apology and the recipient's response; (v) the social status of the two participants; (vi) the way the tone of voice may function to convey meaning. These dimensions hardly apply to (i) – (iii) apology speech acts.

Perhaps, what may apply to the flipside of (ii) apology act is the theoretical reformulation of semantic formulas by Olshtain and Cohen (1983). In seeking to modify Fraser's list, Cohen and Olshtain (1981) and Olshtain and Cohen (1983) come up with five semantic formulas by taking Fraser's list of semantic formulas (1979, 1983) as a point of departure. To this effect, any discussion of the semantic formulas of the apology speech act, as Olshtain and Cohen (1983) argue, presupposes a marked distinction between the case where the offender feels the need to apologise and the case where he does not need to accept responsibility. In this regard, the semantic formulas range from acknowledging responsibility for the offence to rejecting it outright. Shortly after being reported to have apologised to the Senate, the speaker, who performed the act of apology on behalf of Mr. President, denied media reports that Buhari had apologised to the Senate. (cf: 'Buhari hasn't apologised to Senate - Presidency.' Samuel Ogundipe

www.premiumtimesng.com 1 July, 2016). In the report, the Senior Special Assistant to the President on National Assembly Matters (Senate), Ita Enang, said the reports were a misrepresentation of his comments.

Although the speaker acknowledges an infraction for which a remedial action in the form of an apology is required, he dismisses as 'terrible' any insinuation that the apology he tendered to the Senate was on behalf of Mr. President. One of the strategies for apologising is acknowledgement of responsibility. The speaker, Mr. Enang, recognises the fault of Okoi Obono-Obla (a Special Assistant to the President on Prosecution) in causing the infraction. The degree of such recognition on the part of the apologisee can be placed on a scale, which is open to Mr. Enang. The highest level of intensity is an acceptance of the blame. At a somewhat lower level would be an expression of self-deficiency. At a still lower level would be the expression of lack of intent. Lower still would be an implicit expression of responsibility. Finally, the apologisee may not accept the blame at all, in which case there may be a denial of responsibility, or even blaming of the hearer. In this case, Mr. Enang chose to tread the middle course of accepting responsibility for Mr. Obono-Obla's 'inappropriate action' and denying Mr. President's responsibility, blaming instead the press for misrepresenting his statements. Again, this typifies a political apology as a highly mediated interactional activity.

All the same, in the event that the offender apologises positively, five semantic formulas would be in use: (i) an expression of an apology; (ii) an explanation or account of the situation; (iii) an acknowledgement of responsibility; (iv) an offer of repair; (v) a promise of forbearance. All of these apply to the four instances of apology speech acts being examined. Also, these speech acts of apology meet the sets of felicity conditions, which some researchers, notably Bach and Harnish (1979); Holmes (1990); Aijmer (1996), have proposed for apologizing, starting with the apologizee committing an infraction, which upsets the apologisee, followed by the offender's regret about the offence, and ending with the apologisee's acknowledgement of responsibility for the act committed and perhaps a promise of forbearance.

Conclusions

Analysis of public discourses of both local and global politics indicates that speech acts serve as a resource for politicians to, in the Austinian theoretical parlance, 'do things with words' in the world of politics. A speech act of apology throws light on an apparently avoidable transgression made in the past by an offender, who regrets his infamous action or malfeasance, acknowledges responsibility for its realization in the present time, and possibly makes a firm promise of forbearance, with the sole aim of currying forgiveness from the apologisee(s) and being re-integrated into the social fulcrum in the nearest future. The results of data analysis address the central objective of this work, which seeks to ascertain different ways an addresser explores the speech act of apology to achieve politeness during interactional exchanges in social contexts, and how the overall face needs of the addressee are met.

The foregoing scenario captures the public communication paradigm of Muhammadu Buhari during his 8-year tenure. The common feature of this type, which Kampf (2008) terms 'social dramas of apology', is a speech act of apology, (containing such apology strategies as Illocutionary Force Indication Devices

(IFIDs), taking of responsibility, explanation, offer of repair, promise of forbearance) made by a transgressor at a crucial point in the trajectory of a social or political conflict. This is not altogether surprising. Political apologies have become an accepted and frequent component of contemporary politics mainly because they not only offer public rectifications of the past, an apology reset the moral framework in which the community operates and acknowledge that the social face of certain individuals or groups that have experienced social slur requires some remedial measures.

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