

# The Pragmatics of Phatic Utterances and Pleasantries in Nigerian Students Unionism

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**Abstract:** The apex body of students in any tertiary institution in Nigeria is student union which is led by students and for the students. Over the years, a unique pattern of greeting has evolved in Students Unionism. Student leaders tend to exhibit various phatic communions to develop and maintain social relationship. Extant studies on student union in the Nigerian context have largely addressed the phenomenon from the sociological and political perspectives with little attention paid to it from a linguistic perspective. This study, therefore, investigates the pragmatic functions of phatic utterances and pleasantries among student leaders in selected Nigerian tertiary institutions. Data was gathered from six tertiary institutions in the south-western part of Nigeria through observation and interview methods. Using Mey's Pragmatic Act theory as the analytical tool, it was revealed that seven major functions are achieved with the phatic communion in Students Unionism. These include disclosure of political position, prayer invocation, placement by hierarchical status, assertion of loyalty and support, incitation of special recognition, issuance of warning and unveiling personality traits of student leaders. These are achieved through the deployment of pragmatic tools such as used are speech acts, physical acts and prosody in the activity part and in the textual part, reference (REF), inference (INF), metaphor (MPH) and Shared Social/Situation Knowledge (SSK) are deployed. These phatic communions are intentionally and uniquely used in the domain of Students Unionism to communicate a lot of messages in the achievement of their desired goal.

**Keywords:** Greeting, Pragmatics, Phatic Communion, Pleasantries, Students Unionism, Nigerian Universities

## 1. Introduction

The term phatic communion was first coined by Malinowski in 1923 to mean expressions meant to create ties of union and maintain a social relationship. In daily encounters and interactions, people use various expressions to establish, develop and maintain personal and social relationships. As asserted by Wardhaugh (2006), not all utterances are meant to communicate or share specific information, sometimes, people employ utterances to keep a channel of communication open or show the willingness to engage in a conversation. As exemplified by Makice (2009), greetings such as "how are you?", "Hello", "You're welcome", "good afternoon" among others in many contexts are all phatic expressions.

"How are you?" in its phatic usage might not be intended to enquire about the present state of the respondents but usually a conversational opener or a means of engaging in social interaction. As a matter of fact, in Nigerian context, "you (are) look (ing) beautiful" is an utterance that does not

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really signify a true compliment of one's beauty or appearance but serves as a conversational opener and an attempt to make one feels good in a country with harsh economic condition. These kinds of expressions are regarded as phatic expressions. The content of such utterances may be trivial or irrelevant to the situation, yet, they perform the important function of establishing, maintaining and managing bonds of sociality between participants (Indarti 2016)

Stating the functions of phatic communion, Jumanto (2014) aver that the maintenance of the social relationship between the speaker and the hearer is carried out by breaking the silence, starting a conversation, making small talk, making gossip, keeping talking, expressing solidarity, creating harmony, creating comfort, expressing empathy, expressing friendship, expressing respect, and expressing politeness. These sorts of communion are found in every domain of human society. Each group of people society or culture has various phatic form of communication that is peculiar to them. In the domain of politics, law, education, even among secret societies and genders, there are unique ways of greeting that may be unimportant but have meaning in establishing social relationship. One of such domain is Students Unionism in Nigerian tertiary institutions.

The apex body of students in any tertiary institution in Nigeria is the student union which is led by students and for the students. A student union is an association of students in a particular place of education with stipulated rules/regulations to guide the operations of the association, purposely and primarily to protect and defend not only their interests but also the entire society (Oke 2013). The overall purpose of the Student Union (SU) in Nigerian tertiary institutions is to represent students' interests. For this reason, Students' Unions have an "Elected Officer" team made up of students who are democratically and universally elected by the student population to represent their needs and interests in each academic year. A Student Union Leader, therefore emerges through an election to rule or guide and inspire the student body or student community in a representative capacity for a stipulated period defined by the Union's constitution. These elected student leaders lead the strategic direction of the organisation to ensure that the services being offered are in line with student interest (Briggs, Robinson, Hadley and Pedersen 2019).

Over the years, as new leaders are produced and old ones become 'emeritus' and 'stakeholders', a unique pattern of greeting has evolved in Students Unionism. The researcher has observed that when politically engaged students meet, there are unique ways in which they exchange pleasantries. Irrespective of the school of these student politicians, whenever they meet or gather for both local and national occasions/ceremonies/meetings, they tend to exhibit various phatic communions. Either when passing by, before or after a conversation, there appears to be a usual pattern of phatic communion exchanged among the interlocutors. The content of these phatic utterances may be trivial and unimportant but serve as linguistic tools that interlocutors employ to perform many functions. These phatic utterances can give clues about the political status, clout and personality of interlocutors within the domain of the union. The extent and with who students can use the different types of phatic utterances is capable of revealing the personality and the level of engagement of interlocutors in Students Unionism. It has become a common practice even among students who are not politically engaged to salute student politicians with the usual phatic communion. Therefore, phatic communication has become a common practice to identify interlocutors' status, degree of solidarity among students, develop and maintain relationships and strata in Students Unionism. This makes Students Unionism susceptible to linguistic research.

As asserted by Malinowski (1923), Lyons (1968), Silva (1980) and Leech (1983), the phatic utterances appearing at the opening phase of a conversation contribute to the creation or maintenance of a feeling of solidarity and wellbeing between interlocutors, as well as the establishment of ties of

union between them. However, studies have not been able to account for how these effects are generated or how interlocutors achieve them in Students Unionism. Therefore, this study aims to examine the various forms of phatic utterances, how these utterances are selected in communicating pleasantries, to whom they are used, the diverse communicative effects that interlocutors may achieve with them and the implications that this may have for social interaction in the domain of student politics. Therefore, this study intends to fill this gap

### **1.1. Extant Literature and Statement of the Problem**

No doubt, over the years, Students Unionism has been studied predominantly from non-linguistic perspective. Studies focused on role performance (Krauss and Hamid 2013; Lara, 2017), students' leadership capacity (Dugan and Komives 2007; Gigliotti 2015), student leadership values (Osman, Manaf and Abdullah 2014; Fakeh, Shahibi, Jamaludin, Rahim and Ibrahim 2014), students' participation in unionism (Bosire, Chemnjor & Ngware 2010; Hilliard, 2010) political orientation and influence (Contento, Bonghanoy, Borres, Montiadora & Pogado 2012), Social Change (Soria, Fink, Lepkowski & Snyder 2013)

In the field of linguistics, studies on Students Unionism discourse are rare. Few of the studies in this area have only centred on Slangy Expressions (Chinomso and Madu 2012) linguistic tools used in Political Posters (Chukwu & Nwulu 2018) and a few others. Although phatic communion is a concept that has surfaced quite regularly in semantics, sociolinguistics and communication research, there have been very few systematic attempts to draw on the presence of the concept in the way student leaders exchange pleasantries in the domain of Students Unionism. This is capable of unveiling the trends in communication in the domain of Students Unionism. Therefore, this study attempts to examine the pragmatic functions of phatic expressions and the unique ways of communicating pleasantries in Students Unionism. In order to achieve this, the study will identify the phatic utterances of student leaders while exchanging pleasantries and the pragmatic functions in such communions. This is done within the framework of Mey's pragmatic acts.

## **2. Methodology**

This research adopted a descriptive qualitative method. This is because the collected data are in the form of words and not figures or numbers. Furthermore, the data are collected, classified and analysed qualitatively. Data was gathered within a period of seven years between 2015 and 2021 from six tertiary institutions in the southwestern part of Nigeria. The study made use of politically engaged students in Ekiti State University, Ado-Ekiti; Bamidele Olumilua University of Education, science and technology, Ikere-Ekiti; Adekunle Ajasin University, Akungba Akoko; Rufus Giwa Polytechnic, Owo; University of Ibadan, Ibadan and Emmanuel Alayande College of Education, Oyo. These institutions are located in Ekiti, Ondo and Oyo states in the southwestern part of Nigeria. The choice of these tertiary institutions is precipitated by their active engagement in political activities from the local to the national level and the researcher, being a student and student leader at various times within the study years aided the process of data collection

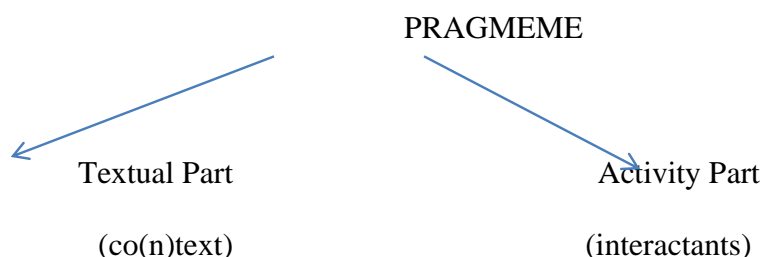
The researcher purposively observed and documented the way students who engage in politics exchange pleasantries at different encounters including meetings, public gatherings, political functions, casual places and different locations within the campuses. Phatic communions employed by the politically engaged students were taken as the samples of the research. Forms of phatic

communion, the relationship between the interlocutors and the domain of those phatic expressions were meticulously observed and recorded through literal note-taking. To complement this, random interviews were conducted with student leaders in the selected institutions for clarification and reliability. Data gathered was analysed using Mey's pragmatic act theory

## 2.1. Theoretical and Analytical Tool

This study is guided by the Pragmatic Act Theory (PAT) of Jacob Mey. Pragmatic act theory is developed by Mey in 2001 as a result of the weakness of Austin (1962) Speech Act Theory and its various collections. Speech Act theory is faulted for not accounting for action act and not situated in context. What is considered suitable in one context may not be in another domain. To Mey, an act is not complete with only the speech. It needs to be situated in a context and it is what context affords us that will determine the success or otherwise of an act. In this case, speech act can only be achieved with the aid of other resources. For instance, among the Yoruba people in the southern part of Nigeria, greeting is incomplete with only the speech. If one is greeting an elderly person, such person is expected to bow, kneel, bend or prostrate. It is these physical actions that make the speech act complete. Else, one is not according to the affordance of his culture. Yet, same greeting can be a complete act in another context if one is greeting his age mate. Thus, Odebunmi, Oloyede and Adetunji (2010) posit that pragmatic act is a theory of action that situates speech acts in their appropriate socio-cultural contexts so that the acts become instantiated pragmatic acts. Therefore, PAT focused on the pragmeme (the general situated prototype) rather than the necessary and sufficient conditions for performing individual acts (the nub of Speech Act Theory).

The diagram below summarizes some of the main ingredients of the theory.



INF REF REL VCE SSK MPH "M"

SPEECH ACTS

INDIRECT SPEECH ACTS

CONVERSATIONAL (DIALOGUE) ACTS

PSYCHOLOGICAL ACTS (EMOTION)

PROSODY (INTONATION,STRESS,ETC)

PHYSICAL ACTS:

BODY MOVEMENT (INCL GESTURE)

PHYSIOGNOMY (FACIAL EXPRESSION)

(BODYLY EXPRESSIONOF)EMOTION

⊗ (NULL)

PRACT

## ALLOPRACT

PRAGMEME, PRACT, ALLORACT (Mey 2001)

A pragmeme consists of two parts. These include the interaction/activity part and the textual/contextual part. The activity part includes the resources available to the interactant from which choices can be made. These include speech act, indirect speech act, conversational (Dialogue) act, psychological act, physical act, physiognomy and prosody. On the other hand, the textual or contextual part which borders on context includes Inference (INF) Reference (REF), Relevance (REL), Shared social Knowledge (SSK), Metaphor (MPH), and Metapragmatic joker (M).

To Mey, a speech act is more than the act alone; the success is dependent on other acts which usually accompanied the act. In this case, the interaction of the verbal act (greetings) and the physical acts (bow, kneel, bend or prostrate in Yoruba context) helps to realize an appropriate act. The interaction of the resources of the activity and textual part of pragmeme results in a pract and make up the pragmatic act (Adediran 2020). The two parts of pragmeme -activity and textual parts interact together to decode the contextual meaning of any communication. This helps utterances of interactants find affordances.

Since pragmatic act helps in the realization of the intended meaning of the language user, this theory would help in the identification of the embedded functions of phatic communions used by politically engaged students in their greetings and pleasantries

## 2.2. Analysis of Data

The analysis of the phatic expressions in Students Unionism revealed that there are seven major classifications of the pragmatic functions in the greetings of politically engaged students. These functions include issuance of warning, unveiling personality traits of student leaders, disclosure of political position, hierarchical placement, assertion of loyalty and support, incitation of special recognition and prayer invocation. These pragmatic functions are achieved through the pragmatic acts of assuring, praising, asserting, warning, praying, affirming, acknowledging, ranking and disclosing. Each of the pragmatic functions is taken in turn and adequately illustrated from the data below.

## 2.3. Disclosure of Political Position

Here, disclosing pract is used to achieve this pragmatic function. Phatic communion is used to indicate the political position or role of actors in student politics. In the realm of politics, each person involved belongs to a particular category or has a specific role being performed; such an actor can either be passive or active. He could have served, currently serving or intending to serve. The unique communication of social pleasantries reflects this pragmatic function of disclosing the political positions of student leaders.

Sample 1. The Able President

- 2: Able General Secretary
- 3: God bless the Powerful Speaker
- 4: God bless the Capacity P.R.O/Auditor

In the above samples, the exact portfolio of the student leaders who are currently serving in the student administration is explicitly indicated in the communion. These reveal that the comrades being greeted presently occupy an office in the realm of student politics, whether at the

departmental/association level or the union/national level. It shows the interlocutors are well familiar with one another. The shared social knowledge helps to directly specify the position of the other interlocutor. Whether as able, powerful, capacity President/Auditor/General Secretary/Speaker and so on, the position is conspicuously disclosed

Similarly, there is a unique way of saluting those aspiring to become student leaders. Those politically inclined students who are contesting in an upcoming student election are revealed in the process of salutation.

Sample 4: Leader in embryo

5: The incoming

6: The incoming leader

7: Incoming P.R.O/President

8: Cumcum Framcum

Generally, as seen in sample (4-8), contestants who are aspiring for political positions are greeted as 'leader in embryo' '(the) incoming (leader)', 'cumcum framcum' (incoming leader with potential). However, the exact position they are contesting for could be unveiled during greeting as seen in sample (7). This is capable not only to give other students the idea that the student being greeted is a candidate in the coming election but also reveal the exact position he is contesting for. Whether the interlocutors are genuinely in support of the candidacy or not, such contestant is overtly saluted based on the position he is contesting for in a way that gives the impression that the seat is automatically reserved for him/her

Also, comrades who have once served or held a political position in student politics are regarded as emeritus and eminent. Hence, emeritus is added to all forms of greeting to indicate that they are senior leaders and political fathers.

Sample 9: God bless the Emeritus

10: Capacity Emeritus

11: Aluta salutation to the Eminent

12: Leader of leaders

The interlocutors use the reference (REF) 'emeritus' and eminent in sample (9-11) to refer to student leaders who stand above others by the virtue of having experienced and directly partook in students politics. Meanwhile, the referents are only Presidents. The pragmatic tool of Metaphor (MPH) is deployed in sample (12) to indicate their experience and clout. Such leaders who have once served especially as presidents are believed to have control over those who emerge in subsequent elections. The popularity they earn in the previous position tends to give them the ability to control the decisions of the students during an election. Thus, they enjoy much respect from other student leaders especially from those currently having a political office.

## **2.4. Prayer Invocation**

One of the major pragmatic acts employed in the phatic communion of politically engaged students on campus is praying pract. In the religious context, a prayer is an act of communicating with a deity or gods. It connects the believers with the Supreme Being and it's the medium through which people can tender their request to whatever deity they believe in. Constantly, citizens have been advised by various spiritual leaders to always remember to pray to God for the country as well as her leaders in

the hope for positive change and development. Such act has been unconsciously performed by the students and practised in their daily communication of social pleasantries. A study of the sample below reveals the pragmatic function of prayer among politically engaged students:

Sample 13: God bless the Leader (sir)

14: God bless the Powerful (emotion)

15: God bless the Emeritus Leader

16: God bless the President

17: Victory assert you

18: May you walk and never stumble

19: May your days be long

In the samples above, all the samples indicate statements that invoke blessings and good wishes for the student leaders. This praying pract has become a usual norm of phatic communion among student leaders at different times, places and purposes. The pract could be initiated in greeting by an aspiring student leader to an incumbent leader or from an ordinary student to an emeritus (Stakeholder) leader. Sometimes, the name, position or sobriquet of the student leader being greeted is mentioned as we can have in samples (15) and (16). In sample (14), 'God bless the powerful 'Emotion'', "Emotion" here would be the cognomen of the student leader greeted. Also, sample 17 is a conscious expression said on purpose to a student aspiring for a political office or leader on the struggle for students' interest. It means victory is certain for such students. Samples (18) and (19) are communions that could be exchanged between students of equal or unequal political status. It shows solidarity and satisfaction with the leader's action and a well-wish in the path he threads. Meanwhile, in public places where the leader wants to address the students publicly, the leader uses the collective pronoun "we" for inclusive purpose "May we walk and never stumble/ May we never stumble"

This pract is often achieved with the activity parts of physical act and prosody. Also, contextual features of REF and SSK are employed. The interlocutors act on shared social knowledge (SSK) by making reference (REF) to the person greeted "You", "leader", "Emotion". This is often accompanied by physical act of bowing, handshake or raising of hands based on the proximity, level of formality and familiarity of the interlocutors and the mood of the moment. A gaily mood will be accompanied by high intonation and intense body gestures. These good wishes stem from the spirit of solidarity, unison and desire for the spiritual, moral and intellectual growth of the leaders.

## 2.5. Placement by Hierarchical Status

Whether implicitly or explicitly stated, the world is divided into strata. In the political domain, there will always be leaders and followers. Even among the leaders, some are more powerful than the others either by virtue of the political position they hold, wealth within their disposal or influence on the populace. Some do not overtly have any political office but have a great influence on the followers and among the followers, some have the potential and ambition of becoming leaders. These hierarchical arrangements are often reflected in the phatic expressions used in Students Unionism to exchange pleasantries. Salutations are divided into strata based on the level of superiority. Student leaders are saluted based on the virtue of their political influence, power and office. Consider the sample below:

Sample 20: Agbara

21: Agba

- 22: Ijoba (EKSU)
- 23: Agbara (BOUESTI)
- 24: Capacity
- 25: Leader
- 26: Leader of 20,000 students/President of the Few
- 27: Leading Leader
- 28: Leader of Leaders
- 29: Incoming Leader
- 30: Emeritus Leader
- 31: Capacity Leader/Powerful Leader/ Leaders!!!

The above samples of phatic communions show that the clout of each student leader determines the way such would be greeted. There are different ways of saluting incumbent leaders, to acknowledge an aspiring leader and those who have served or who demonstrate high influence during political activities like elections. Sample (27) is used for presidents at the departmental level or those who are adored as gallant comrade. The Student Union President and Senate President in various campuses are saluted as "Leader of 20,000 students". This is based on the virtue of the fact that these leaders control other executives under them and preside over a large number of students. Contrarily, sample (26) - President of the Few- depicts a president of a department with a limited population

A comrade who has once held a position and has become a stakeholder is acknowledged as "Emeritus leader/ leading leader". Those without political office but are stakeholders due to active involvement in political issues and possess the political clout to easily manipulate the students on who to or who not to vote for are greeted as Agbara (Power), Agba (old one), Ijoba (Government). This could be accompanied by the name of the institution as in Ijoba EKSU (Government of Ekiti State University, Ado-Ekiti) Agbara BOUESTI (Power of Bamidele Olumilua University of Education, Science and Technology, Ikere-Ekiti)

Also, a potential aspirant who has shown intention or been screened to contest in an election is saluted as "Incoming/incoming leader". This communion shows the student greeted is being initiated into the fold of leadership status in student politics whether he eventually emerges or not. Involvement in various activities, negotiation and engagement with the student populace in a bid to win in an election exposes them to the workings of student politics

However, 'leader (s)', 'capacity (leader)' or 'powerful (leader)' is a generic way of greeting student leaders who are aspiring to serve, presently serving or have served. It is unanimous and could be used in the salutation of any leader irrespective of the hierarchy or position. These forms of greetings are achieved with the deployment of physical act, physiognomy and prosody. The expression is often accompanied by the rising of hands and occasionally, banging the feet against the floor with unique intonation and placement of stress on a particular syllable. Sometimes, the tune is raised and unusually stretched out. This is demonstrated in the extracts below.

Sample 32: LEA..... der

- 33: POWERFUL leader
- 34: POWERFUL LEA...der
- 35: caPA.....city
- 36: CAPACITY leader



The intonation and stress pattern depends on the energy in the mood of the particular moment. It is articulated with some intense voice, often with the facial expression of a smile to indicate joy and solidarity. This is often done by ordinary students or comrades of lower hierarchy to show respect to the superiors. On part of the leader greeted, he can respond to the physical act by raising his hand, clenching his fist firm to show solidarity or showing pleasing and welcoming facial expressions such as a smile. He can also reciprocate by saying "leader" 'capacity' 'You are sighted'. The interlocutors relied on shared social knowledge (SSK) to achieve this pragmatic function. The knowledge of the political position and clout of each student leader helps reveal the hierarchical status of the student being greeted.

## 2.6. Assertion of Assurance

Another pragmatic function performed in the phatic communion of student leaders is the assertion of loyalty and support achieved through asserting and assuring practs. When leaders have the assurance that they have the support of the followers, there is an increased commitment and a certain level of confidence. Politically engaged students communicate loyalty in their phatic communion. The asserting and assuring practs are solely used by the subordinate to the superior because of the virtue of positions they occupy. The practs are used to achieve the pragmatic function of encouragement, assurance of loyalty, affirmation of support and expression of respect for the leaders. The samples below present the pragmatic act of assuring and asserting in student's communion

Sample 37: We (1) stand with your administration

38: I trust your judgement

39: We are loyal

40: I am loyal to you

41: Vibrate on leader

42: We are with you

43: I stand with you

44: Ride on

45: You have spoken well

46: You are doing well

47: Voice of God

Students, in the above samples, lend their voices to assure those who are steering the affairs of the union of their maximum support, loyalty and respect. The pragmatic act of assuring is achieved with a combination of the activity part of direct speech act, physical act and prosody as they appeal to the interlocutors' emotion. The interlocutors act on Shared social Knowledge (SSK) as they declare their commitment to the administration based on their satisfaction towards such administration. This is often accompanied by physical acts such as the rising of one or both hands, legs and clenching the fist. Prosody is also used to stress some words in the communion. There is often a strong accent on a particular word in the sentence based on the political excitement that replete the air as at the time of exchanging the pleasantries.

For instance, sample (37) -we are loyal - is accompanied by intense stress which could vary on the words. The stress could be on either 'we', 'are' or 'loyal' as in:

WE are loyal

we ARE loyal

We are LOYAL

The stressed word is accentuated with a rising tune usually determined by the political exhilaration, how happy the interlocutors are with each other and how sturdy the impression they want to create in the mind of the leader.

The use of the Metaphor (MPH) in sample (47) “voice of God” inferentially (INF) compares the decision of the leader to that of God which is flawless and infallible. This is also applicable to the metaphor in samples (43), (45) and (46) –‘We stand with you’, ‘You have spoken well’, ‘You are doing well’. These are ways to assure the leaders that their actions are commendable. They are meant to praise and give confidence that they got the leader’s back. They assure the leaders of their loyalty and allegiance to his actions and inactions. They affirm their commitment to the administration. Through these phatic communions, student leaders can get feedback on others’ opinion about them which encourage leaders to keep focused.

## **2.7. Incitation of Special Recognition**

The pragmatic function of giving recognition to student leaders is achieved through acknowledging practice. The phatic expressions that are used by politically engaged students are based on the willingness to accord significant recognition to the student leaders. The need to give leaders prominence often propels the students to devise unique phatic communions to greet them.

Sample 48: You are highly germane (Sir)

49: You are highly sighted (My Speaker)

50: You are highly recognized

51: The ‘jagaban’ of our time

52: God bless the president/leader/of our time

53: This is the ‘ijebu’ of our time

54: I doff my fedora for the leader

55: I salute you leader/You are a leader

56: Make way for the leader

All the identified expressions above are forms of phatic to give special recognition to student leaders. The above expressions are used by different students at different times but to perform the same function- to recognize the presence or company of a leader. Based on the Shared Social Knowledge (SSK), any non-politically inclined student can easily recognize a fellow student as a politically active person through the way others salute him. However, in the case of a public event or large gathering where there are many student leaders, the need to direct the communion to a specific person, show respect and eulogise such leader makes the phatic communion perform the pragmatic function of special recognition.

In the extract above, the position of the leader could be stated or substituted with the cognomen of the leader. ‘The ‘jagaban’ of our time’, ‘This is the ‘ijebu’ of our time’, ‘God bless the president/leader/of our time’. It shows relevance, signals respect and appreciation. Thus, these could be from the subordinate to the superior, superior to superior or from superior to subordinate. The context and intention of the speaker will determine from who to who these phatic utterances are directed.

## 2.8. Issuance of Warning

Warning is one of the least noticeable pragmatic acts performed by interlocutors with their phatic communion, especially from superior to the subordinate leader. It is used to warn a student leader who is offending some powerful or superior leaders and is not ready to dance to the tune of their demands.

Sample 57: Do the needful

58: The needful must be done

59: I will fine-tune your case

60: You are not loyal

"The needful" in samples (57) and (58) metaphorically represent the expectation of the superior leaders from the addressed interlocutor. Thus, when they exchange pleasantries or at the closing of a conversation, such practice is used to remind the interlocutor of the need to do the bidding of the superior leaders. The interlocutors act on Shared Situation Knowledge to infer the 'needful' that must be done. Sample (59) indicates that the superiors will meet to discuss the person, the outcome of which might be unfavourable. The lexical item 'fine-tune' infers that the leader will be queried and should expect the consequence of being resolute. Also, "you are not loyal" is used by a superior to a subordinate leader who is acting against the interest of the superior leader.

## 2.9. Unveiling Personality Traits of Student Leaders

Each person has unique psychological and social qualities that distinguished him from others. This is summed up as personality trait. In the samples collected, it was seen that leaders are acknowledged in phatic communion based on the distinguishing political feature manifested by the leaders. Under this pragmatic function, the phatic greetings are used to acknowledge the comradic deeds, gallantry and political acumen of the leaders. These encompass some unique personality traits of the leaders which are displayed in the political domain. The pragmatic tools employed are essentially Metaphor (MPH), Reference (REF), Inference (INF), and Shared Social Knowledge (SSK). This is aptly captured in the sample below

Sample 60: Vibrant leader

61: Articulate leader

62: Ever conscious/ever dynamic president

63: Influence/Ability/Agility

The phatic expressions in the following samples are used to praise the political dexterity of student leaders. The interlocutors draw on Metaphor (MPH) to make reference (REF) and acknowledge leaders as vibrant, eloquent, conscious and courageous with the ability and agility (what it takes) to take effective actions and make informed decisions. This is often used in an exchange of pleasantries with leaders who are superior either by position or political clout with the aid of Shared Social Knowledge (SSK).

Sample 64: A man of vision and mission

65: Step-up transformer

66: The leader that turned village to city

The expression above employed the pragmatic tool of Metaphor (MPH) to perform the pragmatic act of unveiling the unique trait of the leader in bringing about positive development in the

administrative system of the university community. Drawing on the resource of MPH, the leader is praised for having the clear ability to analyse situations and provide effective solutions. Hence, such leaders are regarded as 'the man of mission and vision', 'step-up transformer' and 'the leader that turned village to city' in phatic communion. Sample (64) is said to a leader who has it all figured out. He is clear about his purpose and knows what to do when it is needed to be done. Such have answers to every question and is assertive in his decisions and actions. Also, leaders saluted with sample (66) are those who were able to break new grounds during their administration/tenure. However, these phatic communions are only used as a form of greeting for presidents of associations or the student union on the campus or student leaders at the national level. This is because the success and failure of the administration rest on the presidents

Similarly, phatic communion is used to project the bravery or otherwise of leaders. The samples below give details of this.

Sample 67: Ever sagacious/garrulous leader

68: Aluta E.

69: Gallant comrade

70: We don't have brain, think for us sir

The communions above are used to salute the strength of the leader; especially active and gallant leaders. Brave and courageous leaders are saluted with 'Ever sagacious', and 'Gallant comrade'. These are leaders who not only make a month but take action no matter the challenge or obstacles. Such leaders can face political hostilities and adversaries. However, leaders who are more talkers than doers are saluted as garrulous leaders. They make month to students about their intentions but when the real-time comes to act, they are found hiding in their shells

Sample (68) is only directed towards active female student leaders. When beautiful, rugged and gallant in advocating for students' interest, despite being a female, such wins the respect of other leaders and in recognition of such trait; they are saluted as Aluta E. The interlocutor draws on physical act, physiognomy and prosody to engage in such communion. The "E" is often stressed and pronounced with raised tune

Sample (70) -We don't have brain, think for us sir- is an ambiguous phatic communion in Students Unionism. It connotes both positive and negative meanings. The interlocutors act on Shared Situation Knowledge (SSK) and inference (INF) to know the actual meaning. On one hand, it could be used humorously to salute a leader who is egocentric and claims to know it all. He sees his idea and opinion as the best and hardly turns to others to seek or take ideas. Thus, they will have to turn to him to provide the solution to everything since his idea is the only best one. This is used playfully in phatic communion at the closing of a conversation that involved more than two leaders. On the other hand, it could be used for leaders who are intelligent and have high problem-solving skills. Such a leader can be consulted in times of confusion and need for guidance. The ambiguity in the meaning makes it easier to use it on any student leaders without taking offence. When said at the beginning of a conversation, a solution to a hurdle is needed and the leader's adeptness would go a long way to help. When at the end of a conversation, the addressed interlocutor condemned the major ideas raised by others and insisted on his idea.

### **3. Conclusion**

This study has largely examined the pragmatic function of phatic utterances and communication of pleasantries of politically engaged students in Students Unionism in selected Nigerian tertiary

institutions. The analysis shows that there are seven major functions achieved with the phatic communion of student leaders. These include disclosure of political position, prayer invocation, placement by hierarchical status, assertion of loyalty and support, incitation of special recognition, issuance of warning and unveiling personality traits of student leaders. These pragmatic functions are achieved through the pragmatic acts of assuring, praising, asserting, warning, praying, affirming, acknowledging, ranking and disclosing. The pragmatic tools used in performing these functions are speech acts, physical acts, physiognomy and prosody in the activity part and reference (REF), inference (INF), metaphor (MPH) and Shared Social/Situation Knowledge (SSK) in the textual part of the theory of Pragmatic Act. These pragmatic acts are used as a medium of exchanging salutation among non-politically inclined students, aspiring student leaders, incumbent leaders, emeritus leaders and political father figures. This study concludes that phatic communion is intentionally and uniquely used in the domain of Students Unionism to perform various acts and functions. Phrases and sentences that are considered unimportant perform many pragmatic functions and communicate a lot of messages in the achievement of their desired goal.

paper.

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