

A PRAGMATIC ANALYSIS OF THE ACADEMIC STAFF UNION OF UNIVERSITIES (ASUU) PRESIDENT'S SPEECH AT THE SIGNING OF THE 2025 FEDERAL GOVERNMENT-ASUU 2025 AGREEMENT

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Abstract

Language does more than communicate information; it performs actions, negotiates relationships, and shapes institutional realities. This study examines the pragmatic features of the speech delivered by the President of the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), Prof. Chris Piwuna, during the signing and presentation of the 2025 Federal Government-ASUU Renegotiated Agreement. The study adopts a qualitative descriptive research design and uses the full speech text published by *The Guardian* (Nigeria) as its primary data source. The study adopts a qualitative pragmatic approach based on Speech Act Theory (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969), Grice's Cooperative Principle, and Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory (1987). These frameworks are employed to identify and interpret the speech acts, conversational implicatures, presuppositions, and politeness strategies embedded in the address. Findings reveal that assertive speech acts dominate the speech, enabling the speaker to present an authoritative account of ASUU-government relations, challenges facing Nigerian universities, and the need for educational reform. Expressive acts convey gratitude and concern, while commissive acts reflect cautious optimism regarding the implementation of the agreement. The analysis also uncovers implicatures relating to government unreliability, institutional accountability, and the conditional nature of ASUU's cooperation. Positive politeness strategies promote solidarity and goodwill, whereas negative politeness strategies facilitate criticism without overt confrontation. The study concludes that pragmatic devices in the speech serve both communicative and institutional functions by shaping perceptions, managing relationships, and reinforcing ASUU's identity. It contributes to Nigerian pragmatic scholarship by extending research beyond political speeches to the relatively underexplored domain of labour-union institutional discourse.

Keywords: Pragmatics, Speech Act Theory, Conversational Implicature, ASUU, Labour-Union Discourse.

1. Introduction

The relationship between the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) and the Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN) has remained one of the longest running and most contentious issues in Nigeria's industrial relations history (Ilodigwe, 2026). For more than three decades, the university system has been characterised by recurring disputes over inadequate funding, governance challenges, staff welfare, and frequent strike actions. During these periods, speeches delivered

by ASUU leaders, especially during negotiations, agreement signings, and industrial actions, have played an important role in shaping public opinion, legitimising union demands, and communicating the union's position to government officials, academics, and the wider public (Nsungu & Orabueze, 2022).

The 2025 FGN-ASUU Agreement was the outcome of a renegotiation process that began in 2017 to review the 2009 FGN-ASUU Agreement, which was originally due for revision

in 2012. Between 2017 and 2022, three separate renegotiation committees led by Wale Babalakin, Munzali Jibrin, and Nimi Briggs were unable to produce a final agreement. Significant progress was made only after the Tinubu administration inaugurated the Yayale Ahmed led Renegotiation Committee in October 2024. Following about fourteen months of negotiations, both parties reached an agreement, which was signed on 23 December 2025 and formally presented on 14 January 2026 in Abuja. The agreement was widely described as a major step towards restoring stability to Nigerian universities after years of disputes over funding, autonomy, staff welfare, and governance.

Speeches delivered during labour negotiations occupy a distinctive communicative space. They are directed at multiple audiences, including union members, government officials, the media, academics, and the general public. At the same time, they must balance the celebration of progress with the need to maintain the union's critical voice and capacity for future mobilisation. The speech delivered by ASUU President, Prof. Chris Piwuna, during the signing and presentation of the 2025 Agreement offers a valuable text for pragmatic analysis because it combines institutional communication, political rhetoric, and labour advocacy (Ilie, C. 2018).

Language is always shaped by purpose, context, and ideology. In labour government relations, it serves as a tool for persuasion, mobilisation, legitimisation, face management, and the construction of institutional identity. Although Nigerian discourse studies have examined political and institutional communication extensively, relatively little attention has been paid to the pragmatic features of ASUU leadership speeches. Existing studies tend to focus on presidential addresses, election campaigns, and government policy statements, while labour union speeches surrounding major agreements remain largely understudied.

Prof. Piwuna's speech at the 2025 Agreement presentation demonstrates considerable pragmatic complexity. While expressing appreciation for government efforts, he also highlighted longstanding shortcomings. He

advocated cooperation while affirming ASUU's readiness to defend its interests through future industrial action if necessary. Addressing multiple audiences simultaneously, he employed a careful mix of diplomacy and criticism. Examining these communicative choices is important for understanding how language functions within labour relations and institutional discourse (Thornborrow, J. 2014).

This study examines the pragmatic features of the speech delivered by the ASUU President during the signing and presentation of the 2025 Federal Government–ASUU Agreement. It seeks to identify the communicative strategies and ideological positions reflected in the union's public discourse at this important institutional moment. Specifically, the study aims to identify the speech acts used in the ASUU President's speech, examine the presuppositions and implicatures embedded in the speech, analyse the politeness and face-saving strategies used in addressing different audiences, investigate the ideological and persuasive functions of the language employed, and determine how these pragmatic features contribute to the achievement of the speaker's communicative goals. To achieve these objectives, the study addresses the following questions: What speech acts dominate the ASUU President's speech at the 2025 Agreement signing ceremony? What presuppositions and implicatures are conveyed in the speech? How are politeness strategies used in addressing government officials, union members, and the public? What ideological messages are communicated through the speaker's pragmatic choices? How do these pragmatic features influence audience perceptions of ASUU, the government, and the 2025 Agreement?

This study contributes to the growing body of pragmatic and discourse research in Nigeria by examining an underexplored form of institutional communication, namely labour union speeches delivered during major collective bargaining agreements. It highlights the linguistic strategies used in labour and political communication and demonstrates how pragmatics functions as a tool for negotiation, persuasion, and institutional identity construction. The study will be valuable to scholars in linguistics, applied

language studies, communication and media studies, industrial relations, and public policy. It also offers practical insights for union leaders, labour relations practitioners, and policy analysts interested in understanding the language of institutional negotiations in Nigeria. (Oni et al., 2025).

The study focuses exclusively on the speech delivered by ASUU President, Prof. Chris Piwuna, during the signing and presentation of the 2025 Federal Government–ASUU Renegotiated Agreement. The agreement was signed on 23 December 2025 and formally unveiled on 14 January 2026 in Abuja. The analysis is limited to the pragmatic aspects of the speech, including speech acts, presupposition, conversational implicature, politeness strategies, and persuasive or ideological functions. Phonological, morphological, and syntactic features fall outside the scope of the study.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Concept of Pragmatics

Pragmatics is the study of language in use and how meaning is created and interpreted within specific contexts. It goes beyond the literal meanings of words to examine how speakers and listeners use contextual information to negotiate meaning during communication. The field emerged as a distinct branch of linguistics in the second half of the twentieth century, drawing heavily on the works of philosophers and linguists such as Austin, Searle, and Grice. According to the Indiana University Pragmatics and Discourse Group (Bardovi-Harlig, K., & Hartford, B. S. 2005), pragmatics concerns language use in context, taking into account both verbal and non-verbal contributions made by speakers and hearers during interaction.

The development of pragmatics marked a shift from viewing language as a self-contained system to understanding it as a form of social action. Key areas of study include deixis, speech acts, implicature, presupposition, politeness, and relevance. These concepts are particularly important in institutional and political communication, where speakers often convey meanings that extend beyond the literal content of their words. Mey's (2001) concept of pragmatic

acts (practs) further expanded the field by emphasizing that communicative actions are shaped by their social contexts. This perspective has been widely applied in analyses of Nigerian political discourse.

2.2 Political and Institutional Discourse

Political discourse is a form of communication closely tied to power, governance, and the mobilization of citizens. It serves as a platform through which ideologies, identities, and social relationships are constructed and negotiated. Studies of Nigerian political communication show that language plays a central role in shaping social, cultural, economic, and political realities. Through their linguistic choices, political actors establish authority, communicate ideological positions, manage relationships with audiences, and influence public opinion.

Labour-union discourse occupies a unique place within institutional communication. Unlike campaign speeches aimed primarily at voters, union speeches address multiple audiences simultaneously, including union members, government officials, employers, and the media. As a result, speakers must balance confrontational and cooperative rhetorical strategies Van Eemeren, F. H., & Houtlosser, P. (2015). Research on Nigerian Workers' Day speeches shows that governors and labour leaders frequently use assertive, commissive, directive, and expressive speech acts to demonstrate authority, make commitments, issue demands, and foster solidarity. ASUU leadership speeches operate in a similar environment, requiring speakers to celebrate achievements, criticize policy shortcomings, address governance concerns, and reinforce the union's identity and values.

Institutional communication refers to language used within formal organizations and shaped by their structures and roles. Studies of Nigerian presidential speeches indicate that institutional positions both enable and constrain communicative choices. Speakers often rely on their official authority to make declarations, commitments, and directives while maintaining positive relationships with audiences whose support is needed. ASUU leadership speeches share these characteristics but are further

influenced by the union's long-standing and often contentious relationship with the government.

2.3 Overview of ASUU–Government Relations

2.3.1 The 2009 Agreement and Its Context

The 2009 Federal Government–ASUU Agreement remains the cornerstone of contemporary ASUU–government relations. Signed in June 2009 after a four-month nationwide strike, the agreement addressed issues such as funding, conditions of service, university autonomy, and academic freedom. Although it was scheduled for renegotiation in 2012, delays by the Federal Government contributed to a series of disputes and industrial actions.

Between 1999 and 2022, ASUU embarked on sixteen strikes, many of which were linked to the government's failure to implement the provisions of the 2009 Agreement and related agreements. Among the most significant were the nine-month strike in 2020 and the eight-month strike in 2022, both of which severely disrupted academic activities across Nigerian universities.

2.3.2 Renegotiation Efforts from 2017 Onward

Efforts to renegotiate the 2009 Agreement formally began in 2017 with the establishment of the Wale Babalakin-led Renegotiation Committee. Later committees headed by Munzali Jibrin (2021) and Nimi Briggs (2022) also attempted to reach a new agreement but were unable to achieve consensus.

The repeated failures reflected persistent disagreements over salary structures, earned academic allowances, university autonomy, research funding, and the proposed University Transparency and Accountability Solution (UTAS) payment platform. In October 2024, the Federal Government inaugurated the Yayale Ahmed-led Renegotiation Committee, which eventually reached an agreement after approximately fourteen months of negotiations.

2.3.3 The 2025 Agreement: Key Provisions

The 2025 Federal Government–ASUU Renegotiated Agreement was signed on 23 December 2025 and publicly presented on 14 January 2026 at the TETFund Conference Hall in Abuja. The agreement introduced a 40 percent increase in academic staff emoluments through the Consolidated Academic Tools Allowance

(CATA), effective from 1 January 2026.

It also established a Professorial Cadre Allowance of ₦1.8 million annually for professors and between ₦840,000 and ₦870,000 annually for readers. Other provisions addressed university autonomy, research funding, pension improvements for retiring professors, and governance reforms. Notably, the agreement proposed the National Research Council Bill, which seeks to allocate at least one percent of Nigeria's GDP to research and development. ASUU described the agreement as the outcome of a renegotiation process that began in 2017 and aimed to strengthen and revitalize Nigeria's university system.

2.4 Empirical Review

2.4.1 Pragmatic Analysis of Political Speeches in Nigeria

Research on the pragmatics of Nigerian political discourse has expanded considerably in recent years. Kwasau and Abdulrasheed (2024), for example, examined speech acts in the 2023 presidential campaign speeches of Bola Tinubu and Peter Obi and found commissives and representatives to be the most frequently used categories. These speech acts were strategically employed to attract public support and communicate policy intentions.

Similarly, analyses of President Tinubu's Democracy Day address and second-year anniversary speech (Kende, R. 2026), identified the use of assertives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declaratives as important tools for shaping public perception and strengthening political legitimacy. Studies of gubernatorial inaugural speeches (Sharndama, E. C. 2016), have also highlighted the role of persuasion, affiliation, mitigation, and empathy in mobilizing support and presenting visions of governance. Research on Atiku Abubakar's 2023 (Jegade, O. O., & Okere, A. C. 2025), speech demonstrated how implicatures can function as subtle forms of political criticism, allowing speakers to challenge opponents indirectly while reinforcing their own positions. Such findings are relevant to ASUU leadership discourse, where indirect criticism and carefully managed implications often characterize communication with government officials.

2.4.2 Studies on Nigerian Labour-Union Discourse and ASUU

Most studies on ASUU–government conflicts have focused on historical, sociological, and policy-related issues rather than linguistic or pragmatic dimensions. Rivera-Williams, J. (2025), for instance, traced the roots of recurring conflicts to chronic underfunding, poor working conditions, inadequate infrastructure, and broader economic challenges. The study concluded that government indecision and failure to address these issues significantly contributed to industrial disputes and the continued decline of university education.

Research on labour-management relations in Nigerian universities (Ukeje, I. O., et al 2025), similarly suggests that recurring strikes reflect weaknesses in collective bargaining mechanisms and institutional communication structures. From a discourse-analytic perspective, studies of Nigerian political communication have identified strategies such as selective framing, emotionally charged language, presupposition, and the construction of "us-versus-them" narratives. Comparable patterns can be observed in ASUU's public statements, where the union frequently frames its demands as matters of national development and educational advancement rather than narrow professional interests. Despite these insights, there remains a lack of systematic pragmatic studies specifically examining ASUU leadership speeches delivered at major institutional events, including agreement-signing ceremonies.

2.5 Gap in Literature

Existing research demonstrates substantial scholarly interest in the pragmatics of Nigerian political speeches, presidential addresses, campaign rhetoric, and other forms of political communication. However, ASUU leadership speeches and labour-union institutional discourse have received little attention from pragmatic scholars. This gap is especially evident in studies of speeches delivered during significant institutional events, where speakers must simultaneously inform, persuade, negotiate, reassure, and project authority. The 2025 ASUU–Federal Government Agreement signing ceremony, attended by senior government

officials, legislators, university administrators, and media representatives, provides a valuable opportunity to address this gap and deepen understanding of the pragmatic strategies employed in labour-union leadership discourse.

3. Theoretical Framework

3.1 Speech Act Theory (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969)

Speech Act Theory, developed by Austin (1962) and later refined by Searle (1969), serves as the primary theoretical framework for this study. The theory is based on the idea that language does more than convey information; it performs actions. Austin argued that when people speak, they are often doing something rather than merely describing a situation. He identified three dimensions of speech acts. The locutionary act refers to the production of a meaningful utterance. The illocutionary act concerns the communicative intention behind the utterance, such as informing, requesting, warning, or promising. The perlocutionary act refers to the effect of the utterance on the listener, including persuading, convincing, motivating, or discouraging particular actions. Building on Austin's work, Searle (1976) classified illocutionary acts into five categories: Assertives, which present information or beliefs as true; Directives, which seek to influence the listener's actions; Commissive, which commit the speaker to future actions; Expressives, which reveal the speaker's feelings or attitudes; and Declarations, which bring about a change in reality through their utterance. This framework is particularly relevant to the analysis of Prof. Piwuna's speech, where these speech-act categories are employed to inform, persuade, criticize, appreciate, and make commitments.

3.2 Grice's Cooperative Principle and Conversational Implicature

Grice's Cooperative Principle provides a second theoretical lens for this study. According to Grice, effective communication depends on the assumption that participants cooperate in the exchange of meaning. This shared assumption enables listeners to infer meanings that go beyond the literal content of an utterance, a process known as conversational implicature.

The Cooperative Principle is guided by

four conversational maxims: Quantity, which requires speakers to provide sufficient information without unnecessary detail; Quality, which requires truthfulness and adequate evidence; Relation, which requires relevance; and Manner, which requires clarity and avoidance of ambiguity. When speakers deliberately flout these maxims, listeners often infer additional meanings. In political and institutional discourse, such deviations frequently serve strategic purposes. A speaker may provide excessive information to emphasize a point or use indirect and ambiguous language to communicate criticism without stating it explicitly. Since Prof. Piwuna's speech combines appreciation, advocacy, and critique, Grice's framework offers valuable tools for uncovering implied meanings embedded within the discourse.

3.3 Politeness Theory (Brown & Levinson, 1987)

Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory constitute the third theoretical foundation of this study. The theory centers on the concept of face, which refers to an individual's public self-image and desire for social approval.

The authors distinguish between positive face, the desire to be valued and appreciated by others, and negative face, the desire for autonomy and freedom from imposition. Communicative acts that threaten either of these desires are known as Face-Threatening Acts (FTAs). To minimize potential conflict, speakers often employ politeness strategies when performing such acts.

Brown and Levinson identify several politeness strategies. A speaker may perform an act directly and without mitigation (bald-on-record), appeal to solidarity and shared values (positive politeness), show respect and indirectness (negative politeness), or communicate indirectly through implication (off-record politeness). This framework is especially useful for analysing institutional speeches in which speakers must balance criticism with cooperation. As a union leader addressing government representatives, Prof. Piwuna is required to express concerns and demands while preserving a constructive relationship with key stakeholders. Politeness Theory therefore helps explain how criticism, requests, and demands are strategically framed to

reduce confrontation and maintain institutional harmony.

4. Methodology

4.1 Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative descriptive research design, which is well suited to the interpretive nature of pragmatic and discourse analysis. Qualitative research focuses on understanding how meaning is constructed and communicated within specific social and institutional contexts. Unlike quantitative approaches that emphasize measurement and statistical relationships, it allows for an in-depth exploration of communicative intentions, audience engagement, and the socio-political realities reflected in language use.

The study employs close textual analysis, systematic identification of pragmatic features, and contextual interpretation of linguistic choices. These approaches provide a comprehensive understanding of how meaning is created, conveyed, and negotiated within the selected speech.

4.2 Data Source

The data for this study consists of the speech delivered by Prof. Chris Piwuna, President of the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), during the signing and presentation of the 2025 Federal Government–ASUU Renegotiated Agreement. The speech was delivered at the agreement-signing ceremony on 23 December 2025 and later presented during the formal unveiling held on 14 January 2026 at the Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFund) Conference Hall, Maitama, Abuja. The full text of the speech was obtained from *The Guardian* (Nigeria), where it was published under the title “*Full Text: Piwuna's Remarks at Signing of Historic Renegotiated Agreement Between FG–ASUU.*” The speech serves as the primary corpus for the pragmatic analysis.

4.3 Data Collection Procedure

The speech text was retrieved from reputable Nigerian print and online media platforms that reported the agreement-signing event, including *The Guardian* (Nigeria), *Channels Television*, and *Premium Times*. To ensure accuracy and completeness, the text was compared

across multiple reports and published versions. Where minor variations in transcription were observed, the version published by *The Guardian* was adopted as the principal source because it provided the complete speech as an attributed document. This process enhanced the reliability and authenticity of the data used for analysis.

4.4 Method of Analysis

The analysis was conducted in four stages. First, the speech was read repeatedly to achieve familiarity with its content, structure, and communicative context. Second, relevant pragmatic features including speech acts, presuppositions, implicatures, politeness strategies, and persuasive or ideological expressions were identified and coded. Third, the identified pragmatic features were classified using the analytical frameworks of Speech Act Theory (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969), Grice's Cooperative Principle, and Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory. Finally, the identified features were interpreted in relation to the historical, institutional, and socio-political context of ASUU–government relations. This integrated analytical framework enables a systematic examination of how linguistic choices are employed to communicate intentions, negotiate relationships, project institutional identity, and advance ideological positions within a significant labour–government discourse event.

5. Critical Pragmatic Analysis

5.1 Contextual Analysis of the Speech

The speech was delivered at the TETFund Conference Hall, Maitama, Abuja, during the signing of the 2025 Federal Government–ASUU Renegotiated Agreement and its subsequent public presentation. The venue itself is significant because TETFund is closely associated with educational development and funding in Nigeria, making it an appropriate setting for discussions about the future of higher education. The event brought together a diverse audience that included government officials, legislators, university administrators, former ASUU leaders, union members, and media representatives. Because these groups have different interests and expectations, the speech was carefully structured to address multiple audiences at the same time.

The speech serves several purposes. It celebrates the successful conclusion of a lengthy negotiation process, acknowledges the contributions of key stakeholders, raises concerns about unresolved issues, cautions against poor implementation, and presents ASUU as a responsible partner committed to national development rather than narrow professional interests.

5.2 Speech Act Analysis

5.2.1 Assertives

Assertive speech acts dominate the address. Through these acts, Prof. Piwuna presents claims about the history of ASUU–government negotiations, the condition of Nigerian universities, and broader national challenges. For example, the statement that the 2009 agreement should have been renegotiated in 2012 but was delayed because of a “poverty of sincerity” in government goes beyond reporting facts. It attributes responsibility for the delay and portrays ASUU as the more committed party in the negotiation process. Similarly, statements emphasizing inadequate research funding and the difficult state of the country reinforce the union's position that its demands are driven by genuine institutional and national concerns rather than self-interest.

5.2.2 Commissives

Commissive acts appear when the speaker expresses confidence that the agreement will be fully implemented. However, this optimism is balanced with caution, as he recalls previous experiences of unfulfilled commitments. The speech also commits ASUU to constructive engagement with government. By describing the union as an ally willing to work for national progress, the speaker projects cooperation while subtly reminding listeners that such cooperation depends on the faithful implementation of the agreement.

5.2.3 Directives

The speech contains several directives aimed at different institutions. The National Assembly is urged to accelerate consideration of the National Research Council Bill, while university administrators are encouraged to address issues related to promotions and governance. These directives extend ASUU's voice

beyond labour negotiations and position the union as an active participant in broader discussions about university administration and educational reform.

5.2.4 Expressives

Expressive acts are used to communicate gratitude, admiration, concern, and disappointment. The speaker repeatedly thanks members of the renegotiation committee, government officials, and ASUU members for their contributions to the success of the agreement. At the same time, expressions of concern about economic hardship and declining living standards reveal the speaker's emotional investment in the welfare of both university workers and the wider Nigerian society. These expressions help humanise the speech and strengthen its persuasive appeal.

5.2.5 Declarations

Declarative acts are evident in statements marking the successful conclusion of the renegotiation process. By announcing that ASUU and the Federal Government have reached a new agreement after sixteen years, the speaker formally acknowledges a significant institutional achievement. These declarations also reinforce ASUU's status as a major stakeholder in national educational development.

5.3 Presupposition Analysis

The speech contains several presuppositions that reflect ASUU's ideological stance. For instance, the claim that negotiation delays resulted from a lack of sincerity presupposes a history of government inconsistency. Likewise, calls for universities to operate free from undue external interference presuppose that such interference already exists. The appeal for increased research funding presupposes that current funding levels are inadequate, while comparisons between past and present wage values assume a decline in workers' purchasing power. These assumptions are presented as shared knowledge, allowing the speaker to advance arguments without explicitly defending every claim.

5.4 Conversational Implicature

Prof. Piwuna frequently communicates criticism indirectly through implicature. His statement that ASUU is optimistic about

implementation but remains cautious because of past experiences implies a history of broken promises without directly accusing the government. Similarly, comments about media reports on government funding suggest that public narratives often misrepresent the realities of ASUU's struggles. References to universities being managed by consultants imply concerns about inefficiency, financial mismanagement, and weakened institutional accountability. Through these indirect messages, the speaker criticizes existing practices while maintaining a diplomatic tone.

5.5 Politeness Strategies

5.5.1 Positive Politeness

Positive politeness is evident in the speaker's extensive expressions of appreciation and respect. Praise directed at members of the renegotiation committee and government officials helps create goodwill and strengthens interpersonal relationships.

The repeated use of inclusive language also promotes solidarity, presenting ASUU and government stakeholders as partners working towards a common goal.

5.5.2 Negative Politeness and Diplomatic Criticism

When addressing sensitive issues, the speaker adopts indirect and carefully worded criticism. Rather than making direct accusations, he often relies on suggestions, observations, and generalized statements.

This approach allows him to raise concerns about governance and accountability while minimizing potential threats to the audience's face and preserving a cooperative atmosphere.

5.5.3 Face-Saving Strategies

The speech carefully balances criticism with reconciliation. References to past disagreements are followed by expressions of respect and appreciation, allowing both ASUU and government representatives to maintain dignity. These face-saving strategies help shift attention from previous conflicts towards future collaboration and mutual trust.

5.6 Persuasive and Ideological Functions

A central persuasive strategy in the speech is the presentation of ASUU's interests as

inseparable from Nigeria's educational and developmental goals. The agreement is framed not as a victory for a labour union but as a step towards strengthening the national university system. The speech also emphasizes collective responsibility. Government officials, legislators, university administrators, and ASUU members are all portrayed as stakeholders in the success of higher education. This broad framing increases the appeal of the speaker's arguments and strengthens the legitimacy of the union's position.

5.7 Critical Evaluation

Strengths: The speech demonstrates considerable rhetorical skill. It successfully combines celebration with caution, appreciation with criticism, and cooperation with accountability. By addressing multiple audiences simultaneously, the speaker shows a strong awareness of the institutional context and the diverse interests represented at the event.

Another strength is the consistent linkage between ASUU's demands and broader national development goals, which enhances the speech's persuasive power beyond the academic community.

Weaknesses: Despite its strengths, some aspects of the speech may reduce its effectiveness. The strong emphasis on ASUU as the defender of educational values may not resonate equally with all audiences. In addition, extended comments on broader economic issues occasionally shift attention away from the primary purpose of the occasion. The recurring references to past government failures and the cautious tone surrounding implementation may also reinforce an adversarial narrative at a moment intended to celebrate renewed cooperation. While these references serve to justify ASUU's concerns, they may weaken the atmosphere of trust that the agreement seeks to establish.

6. Findings and Discussion

6.1 Summary of Major Pragmatic Features

The analysis of Prof. Chris Piwuna's speech at the signing and presentation of the 2025 Federal Government–ASUU Renegotiated Agreement reveals several significant pragmatic features. First, assertive speech acts emerge as the dominant category. These are used to present the

speaker's assessment of the university system, the history of ASUU–government negotiations, and the broader socio-economic realities affecting higher education in Nigeria. Through these assertives, the speaker establishes credibility and constructs a factual basis for his arguments. Expressive acts are also prominent, particularly in passages that convey gratitude, appreciation, concern, and social criticism. Commissive acts occur in a qualified form, combining optimism about the agreement's implementation with caution arising from previous experiences. Directives, although less frequent, are strategically directed at government officials, legislators, university administrators, and other stakeholders whose actions are essential to the successful implementation of the agreement.

The speech also generates several important conversational implicatures. These include suggestions of past government unreliability, concerns about governance and accountability within universities, and indications that ASUU's commitment to cooperation remains dependent on the faithful implementation of the agreement. Rather than expressing these criticisms directly, the speaker relies on indirect communication that allows sensitive issues to be raised without undermining the conciliatory atmosphere of the occasion. With regard to politeness, positive politeness strategies are particularly evident in expressions of gratitude, praise, solidarity, and institutional recognition. At the same time, negative politeness and off-record strategies are employed when addressing controversial issues, enabling the speaker to criticize institutional practices while minimizing potential threats to interpersonal and institutional relationships.

6.2 Discussion of Findings

The findings demonstrate that language serves as a crucial instrument of power, negotiation, and relationship management in institutional discourse. In Prof. Piwuna's speech, power is not exercised through direct authority or overt command but through carefully selected linguistic strategies that shape perceptions, establish legitimacy, and influence audience interpretation. The dominance of assertive speech

acts allows the speaker to present ASUU's perspective as credible and authoritative, while presuppositions and implicatures subtly guide the audience towards particular interpretations of historical and contemporary events.

The speech further illustrates how pragmatic resources function as tools of negotiation and persuasion. Through strategic face-work, indirect criticism, and conditional commitments, the speaker balances cooperation with caution. He acknowledges the success of the renegotiation process while simultaneously reminding listeners of unresolved concerns and previous implementation failures. This dual strategy enables ASUU to project goodwill and readiness for collaboration without relinquishing its capacity to hold government accountable. Consequently, the speech does more than celebrate the signing of an agreement; it helps define the expectations, responsibilities, and power relations that will shape future interactions between ASUU and the government.

The findings also highlight the importance of pragmatics in understanding labour–government communication in Nigeria. Previous studies of Nigerian political discourse have shown that assertives and commissives frequently dominate high-profile institutional speeches. The present study supports this observation but further demonstrates that labour-union discourse possesses distinctive pragmatic characteristics. In particular, the combination of evaluative assertives, cautious commissives, indirect criticism, and face-saving expressives reflects the communicative demands of a union leader addressing multiple stakeholders at a politically sensitive moment.

Furthermore, the study shows that reconciliation-oriented institutional speeches are not merely ceremonial. They serve important communicative functions, including relationship repair, image management, agenda setting, and the negotiation of future expectations. By combining praise with criticism, optimism with caution, and solidarity with accountability, Prof. Piwuna constructs a discourse that simultaneously celebrates achievement and safeguards the union's institutional interests.

Overall, the findings suggest that the speech represents a distinctive form of labour-union institutional discourse in which pragmatic strategies are deployed not only to communicate information but also to manage power relations, maintain institutional identity, and shape the future trajectory of labour–government engagement in Nigeria's higher education sector.

7. Conclusion and Recommendations

7.1 Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that pragmatic analysis provides a valuable framework for understanding the communicative strategies employed in ASUU leadership discourse, particularly during the historically significant signing of the 2025 Federal Government–ASUU Renegotiated Agreement. The analysis reveals that Prof. Chris Piwuna's speech extends beyond a ceremonial celebration of the agreement. Rather, it functions as a complex institutional discourse through which multiple communicative objectives are pursued simultaneously.

Through the strategic use of speech acts, implicatures, presuppositions, and politeness strategies, the speaker celebrates the successful conclusion of negotiations, expresses cautious optimism about implementation, raises concerns regarding unresolved issues, reinforces ASUU's historical role in advocating for university reform, and projects the union as a responsible stakeholder committed to national development. The effectiveness of the speech lies in its ability to balance cooperation with caution, appreciation with criticism, and institutional solidarity with accountability.

The findings further confirm the usefulness of Speech Act Theory, Grice's Cooperative Principle, and Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory in analysing labour-union institutional discourse. These frameworks provide complementary insights into how meaning is communicated, inferred, and negotiated in contexts where speakers must simultaneously manage relationships, advance institutional interests, and influence public perception. More broadly, the study contributes to the growing body of research on Nigerian discourse by extending pragmatic inquiry beyond political campaign speeches and

presidential addresses to the relatively underexplored domain of labour-union communication. It highlights the important role of language in shaping institutional relationships, negotiating power, and constructing organizational identity within Nigeria's higher education sector.

7.2 Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Promote Greater Transparency in Labour–Government Communication

The recurring expressions of caution and conditional trust observed in the speech reflect a history of implementation challenges and institutional distrust. To strengthen confidence between both parties, labour unions and government agencies should adopt more transparent communication practices, including clearly defined implementation timelines, periodic progress reports, and publicly accessible monitoring mechanisms.

2. Encourage the Application of Pragmatic Analysis in Public Policy Communication

Policymakers, union leaders, and institutional communicators should recognize the value of pragmatic analysis in understanding how meaning is constructed and interpreted in official communications. Greater awareness of speech acts, implicatures, presuppositions, and politeness strategies can enhance communication effectiveness and reduce misunderstandings among stakeholders.

3. Expand Research on Labour-Union Discourse

Future studies should examine ASUU communications across a wider range of contexts, including strike declarations, negotiation briefings,

post-agreement speeches, and responses to government policies. Such research would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the union's communicative strategies. Comparative studies involving other labour unions, such as NASU, NAAT, and the NLC, would also enrich scholarship on labour discourse in Nigeria.

4. Integrate Pragmatic Analysis into Academic and Professional Training

The study of institutional and public discourse should be incorporated more extensively into programmes in linguistics, communication studies, political science, and public administration. Exposure to pragmatic analysis can enhance students' critical understanding of language use in governance, policy communication, labour relations, and institutional leadership.

5. Encourage Constructive Dialogue Through Strategic Communication

Government agencies, university administrators, and labour unions should adopt communication strategies that prioritize dialogue, mutual respect, and collaborative problem-solving. The effective use of pragmatic resources can help manage disagreements, preserve institutional relationships, and promote sustainable conflict resolution within the education sector.

In conclusion, the study underscores the significance of pragmatics as a tool for understanding how language functions in institutional settings. It demonstrates that speeches delivered during major policy and labour-relations events do more than convey information; they shape relationships, construct identities, negotiate power, and influence the future direction of institutional engagement.

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