



---

## A Critical Pragmatic Analysis of Selected Tweets on The 2022 Christmas Day Murder in Nigeria

Gambari-Olufadi Kifayat

Department of English, Faculty of Arts, University of Ilorin Ilorin, Nigeria

---

### Article Info

[kifaolufadi@gmail.com](mailto:kifaolufadi@gmail.com)

### Abstract

Police brutality among other forms of social injustice, has been a controversial issue generating mixed reactions from majority of the Nigerian citizens. While some perceive this vice as an adverse effect of indiscipline among the Nigerian police force, others view it as the failure of the Nigerian political system towards the maintenance of law and order. Critical pragmatics as an approach to critical linguistics studies the issues of power and ideology embedded in different communicative acts performed by interlocutors in different speech contexts. Interlocutors' communicative intentions are discernible in critical pragmatics by virtue of the application of different pragmatic strategies. This study aims to examine selected tweets of the 2022 Christmas day murder from a pragmatic perspective. More specifically, the study adopts Critical Pragmatics as the conceptual framework for the study. Korta & Perry's (2011) perspectives to Critical Pragmatics are adopted for the analysis of five (5) purposively selected tweets. The study also employs both the qualitative and quantitative research designs. The study found that implicature is the most preponderant pragmatic strategy used in the selected tweets. In conclusion, the use of the critical pragmatic approach for the analysis of the selected tweets has revealed the interrelationship between the variables of class, power and ideology which form the basis of the tweeters' judgment.

### Keywords:

brutality,  
injustice,  
Political System

---

### Introduction

Pragmatics according to Crystal (1997) is the studies language from the users' point of view, from the choices they make, the constraints interlocutors encounter in using language in social interaction and the effects their use of language has on other participants in the act of communication (p. 301). Pragmatics investigates is study of language in context contrary to formal system. It examines how language use is modified by context, how it changes the context and interacts with the context. According to Huang (2017, p. 1) pragmatics is heterogeneous in nature, it is beyond the study of language in context. According to him, it is a complex in nature, other field of study has influence in it. Pragmatics can be investigated through anthropological, psychological, sociological, sociolinguistic point of view.

About a decade ago, studies in pragmatics have surpassed the examination of utterances from the contextual perspective. Scholars of pragmatics have delved into the role of ideology and power in shaping social and linguistic contexts, hence, the study of pragmatics from a critical perspective. Critical pragmatics as a pragmatic approach emanates from critical linguistics, which is an approach to language study which focuses on power as an important aspect of human social life. Based on the significance of power and ideology towards the understanding of the choices made by interlocutors in diverse linguistic contexts, the study aims to investigate selected tweets on the 2022 Christmas day murder In Nigeria, from a critical pragmatic perspective.

### Literature Review

The most outstanding pragmatic theories that are involved in conveying criticality are reference, speech act theory, implicature, politeness/impoliteness and presupposition. As a result of this, the speech act theory of Searle and implicature will be adopted as guide for data analysis. Talking about Speech Act, Under the critical pragmatic perspective, speech function manifest in different ways according to context of use (Korta & Perry, 2011). Context is

one of the tools or channels through which the language of an utterance creates intention (function) of the utterance (Kaburise, 2005). The study of the context of an utterance is based on the idea that utterance performs different illocutionary acts or meaning because of their background and circumstance. According to Austin (1962) asserts that, context defines language use. He further explains that an utterance cannot be performatives except it is uttered in an appropriate context or situation. For example, one such condition of speech act of naming or christening a child is that the speaker be recognised by his speech community as having the authority to perform the act. Austin calls this 'felicity condition' of which he distinguished three types: there must be an accepted conventional process for which includes: the uttering of certain words of certain persons in certain situation, the particular person and context in a given case must be appropriate for the particular procedure being invoked, and the procedure must be executed by participants both correctly and completely (pp.14-16). The context of a speech act according to Austin is the cluster of actual states of affairs or events of various kinds, related to the issuing of an utterances and its intended force.

In line with Austin (1962) Searle (1969;1979) states that speech act have felicity conditions to be fulfilled by context. He revises Austin's felicity condition into four basic categories namely: the propositional content condition (that is the 'what' of speech act), the preparatory condition (which is the background of a speech act), the sincerity condition (the hearer's accompanying psychological feelings and thought), and the essential condition (what the speaker wants to accomplish linguistically by issuing a speech act). He states that context is a set of propositional attitudes of the participants than a cluster of actual states of affairs: most of those conditions are formulated in terms of belief or intention of the participants. So, the way is opened to foregrounding, a subjective or cognitive conception of context.

Searle focuses on three of these dimensions and identifies five basic kinds of speech acts. The three key dimensions he identifies include: differences in the type of illocution; variation in the appropriateness of language use between words and the world. Here, the illocutionary force often determines the relationship between the content and the world. The last is the differences that occur in expressed psychological state or sincerity condition (Searle, 1979, pp.3-6). These three dimensions are important building blocks of Searle's illocutionary acts taxonomy.

The five basic illocutionary acts identified by Searle are assertives, directives, commissives, expressives and declaratives. By assertives, Searle states that the speaker be truthful in his expressed proposition. All members of the assertive class are assessable on the dimension of assessment which includes true or false. Directives refer to the illocutionary points which are attempts by the speaker to get the hearer to do something. Here, the propositional content is always that the hearer does some future action. Commissives are the acts whose point is to commit the speaker to some future course of action. Expressives are the illocutionary acts of expressing the state of mind or emotion specified in the propositional content. Declaratives: is about some variation in the status or condition of the referred to object or objects solely by the virtue of the fact that the declaration has been successfully performed. The paradigmatic cases include officially opening a bridge, declaring war, excommunicating, firing from employment, and nominating a candidate, and so on (Searle 1979, pp.14-18).

Communicative intention according to Korta and Perry (2011) is from Grice's of idea implicature. According to them, communicative intention connects language as action to language as a possessor to content. Grice (1957) introduced the concept of implicature. According to him, a speaker can utter something and mean something else, sometimes speaker also say something without implying it, but merely implicating it. In communication Grice argues that, there are differences between linguistic and speaker meaning, as well as the three-part distinction between saying, meaning and implicating. When language users interact, they depend mainly on the meaning of words they utter or hear, they also do not only rely on the linguistically encoded information, but also rely on their mutually shared belief or background of the language to understand one another. To buttress this, Bach (2012, p.48), asserts that language users depend on the background information and contextual cues of the words uttered in other to understand what is communicated. According to Him, when speakers aim at communicating things, they utter bits of language that makes their communicative intentions evident to their hearer.

According to Grice (1957), to say is the act of uttering such as asserting, stating a proposition. From his notion of saying, a speaker can mean something while uttering something completely different from what is uttered or could mean something in addition to what he/she utters or utters something without meaning anything at all. This act saying is what Austin (1962) calls illocutionary act. Meaning according to Grice (1957) consists of what the speaker intends to rely to his hearer, of his/ her communicative intention, when uttering a particular sentence in a communicative event. He asserts that there are two types of meaning in communication, natural and non-natural meaning. The word "smoke" naturally means 'fire' because it is associated with fire. Fire is conventional means of describing smoke. The category of non-natural meaning, the speaker makes use of the linguistic meaning as well as the speaker meaning of what smoke is. The utterance 'I smell smoke', can be assessed from the syntactic arraignment of the words used, 'I'

is a pronoun, 'smell' is the verb which is in the present tense for olfactory sense and 'smoke' is the noun. On the other hand, the speaker meaning of the utterance could be a figurative expression. In other words, it is one thing for a speaker to utter a sentence to mean something and another for a speaker to mean it in uttering it.

Implicature according to Grice (1957), is a term derived from the verb imply. Implicature means saying something and meaning something else. According to him, it means a situation in which what is communicated is beyond the literal meaning of the words uttered. There are of two kinds, conversational and conventional implicature. Levinson (1983, p. 97) defines conversational implicature as any meaning or proposition expressed implicitly by a speaker in his or her utterance of a sentence which is meant without being part of what is said in the strict sense. According to Grice (1975), conversational implicature is what is uttered minus what is said. It is different from what is said. It also characterise a relation between a speaker and a proposition by the speaker on the basis of the logic of conversation. He argues that conversational implicature is part of what a speaker means, though not part of what is said.

Conversational implicature according to Grice (1975) has six characteristics, they are as follow:

- i. defeasibility or cancellability: it implies that conversational implicature can be abolished in certain linguistic or non-linguistic situation. If the language user is in consistent with semantic entailment, background assumptions, contexts etc., it can be cancelled.
- ii. non- detachability: it is non- detachability relies on the fact that language users can use synonyms in their expression and still be intact with their implicature.
- iii. calculability: the conversational implicature of an utterance is different from the literal meaning, the hearer must be able to work out the speakers intended meaning in conversation.
- iv. non-conventionality: the language user needs to know the literal meaning of the utterance made and the context in which it is used in other to work out the conversational implicature.
- v. reinforceability: conversational implicatures are not part of the conventional import of an utterance, and
- vi. indeterminacy: an utterance with a single meaning can give rise to multiple implicature in different contexts.

He further explains that for a conversation to be successful, interactants must cooperate with each other, speak sincerely, use clear language and in relevant. This implies that the interlocutors must observe the cooperative principles. Grice (1989, p.28) the cooperative principles and its constituent maxims are core principles of language use based on the rational nature of human communication, and indeed any shared-goal human activity. The cooperative principle maxims are quality, quantity, relation and manner.

Critical pragmatics according to Huang (2017) has it root in sociopragmatics. Critical pragmatics just like Critical Discourse or Critical linguistics is an approach to language study that examines power as a central condition in social life that may be indexed in language use (Zienkowski, Ostman and Verschuereen 2011, p.2). Critical pragmatics is an approach to language study that has it concentrates on the analysis of ideology and power abuse issues such as racism, sexism, cyber bullying, and so on. This field is different from pragmatics in that it does not just investigate ordinary language use but rather examines language abuse and especially the role of power, dominance and control in language use. Critical pragmatics goal is to increase people's awareness and understanding regarding language use and how power, dominance and control are increased through manipulative language use.

According to Korta and Perry (2011), critical pragmatics is based on three basic assumptions. Their first idea is seeing language as a form of action, that is language users do not just utter words be perform actions with their utterances. which coincides with Austin's (1962) speech acts. According to them, just like Austin (1962) interactants do not just use language to say things, such as making statements, but also to do things for instance performing actions like promising, commanding, requesting, and so on. In line with this argument, Mey (2001, p. 95) states that speech act are verbal actions happening in the world. Uttering a speech act, is doing something with words. Utterances are activities that bring about change in the existing state of affairs. Secondly, the of critical pragmatics centres on communicative intentions. This idea of theirs can be traced to Grice's (1969) meaning intention. They connect language as action to language as a possessor of content. According to them, intention is part of plan, plan is based on the structure of acts: one does one thing by doing another in certain circumstances. This according to Grice is referred to as implicature. Implicature means a situation in which what is communicated is beyond the literal meaning of the words uttered (Grice 1975). Finally, the idea that distinguishes reflexive and referential truth- conditions mores specifically, they assert that in language use, interlocutors need reflexive semantic contents beside ordinary referential ones in order to account for linguistic meaning in communication. The reflexive contents according to them are derived from the reflexive truth- conditions of sentences. An example of this is seen in the utterance "I have a broken leg".

The true referentially if the speaker has a broken leg. The sentence according to Perry (2001) has reflexive truth-conditions if truly the leg is broken.

**Research Design and Methodology**

The data for the study, constituting five (5) purposively selected tweets on the 2022 Christmas day murder in Nigeria, are analysed using the highlighted elements of critical pragmatics. The data were downloaded from the Tweeter page and the search term is “Murder of Bolanle Raheem”. Going by Korta and Perry’s (2011) description of critical pragmatics and their categorisation of the elements of critical pragmatic, the pragmatic concepts of speech acts, reference and politeness/impoliteness have been identified as the veritable toolkits for the examination of utterances using the pragmatic approach. The data under consideration in this study are analysed using these tools in the succeeding section.

The study adopts Critical Pragmatics as the analytical framework. Critical pragmatics according to Huang (2017) has it root in sociopragmatics. Critical pragmatics just like Critical Discourse or Critical linguistics is an approach to language study that examines power as a central condition in social life that may be indexed in language use (Zienkowski, Ostman & Verschueren 2011, p.2). Critical pragmatics is an approach to language study that has it focus on the analysis of ideology and power abuse issues such as racism, sexism, cyber bullying, and so on.

**Discussion and Analysis**

In the analysis of the tweets that constitute the data for the study, three elements were considered based on Korta and Perry’s (2011) description of critical pragmatics and their categorisation of the toolkits of critical pragmatics. These are: reference, politeness/impoliteness, and speech act. From the analysis, it has been found that:

firstly, the tweeter uses elements of reference, especially naming as endophoric reference (in-text) which is either anaphoric or cataphoric. The essence of naming in the tweets is for the purpose of validating authenticating and justifying the claims of the tweeters, giving accurate and precise description of the incidents. Naming is also used in the tweet to reflect the ideology of the tweeters and their persona. Not only naming and reference, the use of mixed sentence forms based on their functionality by the tweeters is clear indication of their state of mind as well as their ideological dispositions;

secondly, there are elements of politeness and impoliteness in the tweets, but impoliteness is more recurrent as this reflects the emotional states of the tweeters toward the incident, which is violence on the Christmas Day. Not only does politeness/impoliteness reflect the emotional states of the tweeters, the choice of the linguistic indicators of impoliteness also reflects the ideological disposition of the tweeters towards the situation as well specific practices in the nation, where the incident occurred. For instance, the law enforcement agent in the state, the “police”, is condemned using the expressions that lack mitigation, to indicate impoliteness.



**Figure 1: datum one**

In the tweet above, there is the use of the assertive act. This is repeated in the tweet using varying sentences, from simple sentence to complex sentence.

**Table 1: Sentential Act in Datum 1**

Simple sentence	Complex Sentence
Mrs. Bolanle Raheem was not a yahoo boy,	She was coming from a Christmas service with her family when she was shot at close range.
She did not wrestle the gun from the officer	
She committed no offence	
Yet she was killed brutally	

She is every one of us.	
Remember her name.	

Aside the use of assertives, the manner of presentation of the tweeter’s view point constitutes a climax. This peculiar use of language is meant to stir people’s emotion, to appeal to the readers’ emotive sense. It also reflects the tweeter’s state of mind at the moment.

In the tweet, the indicators of reference include naming as well as the repetition of the pronoun, ‘she’. The personal pronoun is used as an anaphoric reference likewise the name of the victim, “Mrs. Bolanle Raheem”. The implication of this is to solidify the tweeter’s claim, in the report of the violence and injustice against the victim. Other nouns that are used as reference in the tweet include: “yahoo boy”, “gun”, “officer”, “Christmas” and “family”

The tweeter uses a polite form through the choice of title indicator, “Mrs.”. In the context of the text, the use of this term indicates attributing honour to the dead. The tweeter could have possibly stated the victim’s name without it.

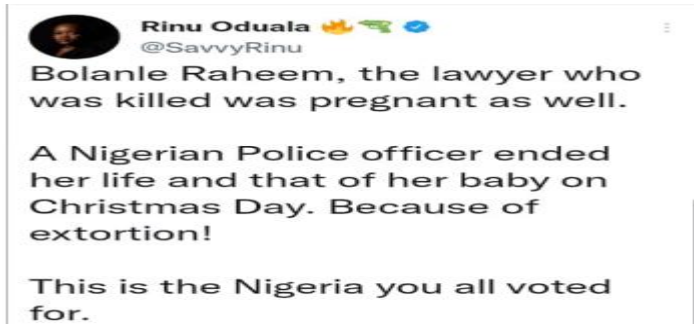


Figure 2: datum two

Like the previous tweet, the tweeter uses declarative forms in diverse sentence structures. The first sentence is expository, containing a detail, which is omitted in the previous tweet— the pregnant state of the deceased. The sentence forms based are presented as follows:

Table 2: Sentential Act in Datum 2

Simple sentence	Complex sentence	Compound-complex sentence
This is the Nigeria you all voted for.	Bolanle Raheem, the lawyer who was killed was pregnant as well	A Nigerian police officer ended her life and that of her baby on Christmas day because of extortion!

Apart from the sentence types, the use of reference is also evident in the tweet. Naming abounds in the tweet: “Bolanle Raheem”, “lawyer”, “Nigerian police”, “baby”, “Christmas day” and “Nigeria”. Aside the use of both proper and common nouns, the use of the pronoun “her” as a cataphoric reference also abounds in the tweet. Reference is used in the data to provide justification for the tweeter’s claims.

In this tweet, the ideology of the tweeter as regards the entity for law enforcement in the state; “Nigerian police officers” is reflected and this is indicative of condemnation rather than praise, hence, the tweeter’s disuse of politeness marker. Instead, the tweeter adopts an exclamation— “... because of extortion!” to express bitterness and dissatisfaction against the violent act.



Figure 3: datum 3

In the tweet above, the use of mixed sentence forms based on their functionality is clear indication of the state of mind of the tweeter as well as the tweeter’s ideological disposition.

**Table 3: Sentential Act in Datum 3**

Declarative sentences	Exclamatory sentence
It’s sad that Barrister Bolanle Raheem met her untimely death at the hands of those employed to protect her life when shee was coming from #ChristmasDay22 worship.	This madness must stop!
The Nigerian Police Force needs to weed out these trigger-happy officers.	

The choice of the word, “sad”, as well as the use of adjectives: ”madness”, “untimely” in “untimely death” and “trigger-happy” in “trigger-happy officers”, expresses the tweeter’s dissatisfaction at the murder of the victim, as well as the condemnation of the “officers” using emotion laden adjectives. This language use simply reflects impoliteness on the part of the tweeter. Contrarily, the tweeter uses both euphemism as well as structural and lexical hedges, which are contextual markers of politeness in the tweet.

**Table 4: Indicators of Politeness and Impoliteness**

Euphemism	Lexical hedge	Structural hedge
...Barrister Bolanle Raheem met her untimely death at the hands of those employed to protect her life....	Officers	...those employed to save her life....

Relatively, the tweeters detachment of the Nigerian Police Force from the so-called “trigger-happy officers” also indicates politeness, as well as the tweeter’s regard for the law-enforcement body of the Nigerian state. The title, “Barrister” as attributed to the deceased after her death also indicates politeness. Reference markers in the tweet are: nominals— “Barrister Bolanle Raheem”, “death”, “Nigerian Police Force and Officers” to emphasise the credibility of the tweeter’s claims; as well as the pronoun “her” as a cataphoric reference.



**Figure 4: datum four**

In the datum above, two sentences are used to relate the incident at hand. The two sentences used are structurally simple sentences. The sentential illustration is presented thus:

**Table 5: Sentential Act in Datum 4**

Sentence 1	Sentence 2
A lawyer, Bolanle Raheem, is reported to have been shot and murdered at close range on Christmas Day by a rogue policeman attached to Ajiwe Police Division, Ajah.	This is barbaric

From the sentential illustrations above, it can be inferred that even though both sentences are simple, the formal characteristics of the sentences vary. While the first sentence has apposition, as a component of its subject, as well as a compliment, which constitutes infinitive and prepositional phrases, the second sentence has only three words. Functionally, while sentence one is expressive act, the second sentences is declaratives, performing assertive functions.

Also, the tweeter employs a politeness strategy, hedging. Instead of stating the fact categorically, the structural hedge—“is reported to have been shot and murdered”. Contrarily, the emotional state of the tweeter is displayed subsequently through the use of the words, “rogue” in “rogue policeman” and “barbaric” in the later sentence, which are quite derogatory. These descriptions are reflective of the fact that the emotional state of the tweeter is expressed using words of different grammatical categories, and politeness is taken for granted on the note of emotional expression which is context-oriented

The tweeter uses elements of reference, especially naming—“A lawyer, Bolanle Raheem”. This is an apposition, which essence is to give an accurate and precise description of the victim. Other illustrations of naming are “Christmas Day” “policeman” “Ajiwe Police Division, Ajah”. These references are meant to validate the tweeter’s claims.



Figure 5: datum five

In the tweet above, the tweeter adopts varying sentence structures to demonstrate the use of expressive act as well as the assertion. The emotional engagement of the tweeter is clearly reflected through the choice of: “just imagine...”. The tweeter also relates the issue in form of a lamentation. The ideological disposition of the tweeter is indicative of pessimism towards the nation, “Nigeria”, hence his chose of assertive act in the concluding sentence. The sentential distribution based on form is all simple sentence while the functional distribution of the sentences is presented as follows:

Table 6: Sentential Act in Datum 5

Exclamatory Sentence	Declarative Sentence
Just imagine the trauma Bolanle Raheem’s children will face for the rest of their lives!	Every Christmas is sad time for the family and for the kids in particular.
Their mother was shot dead right in their presence!	Surviving Nigeria takes a special gift.

Like in the previous illustrations, naming is used as a form of reference to validate the claims of the tweeters. Names in the tweet include proper nouns; “Christmas” and “Nigeria”. Other nouns in the tweet are common nouns—“trauma”, “children”, “lives”, “mother”, “family”, and “kids”. However, in this tweet, naming does more than reference; it reflects the ideology of the tweeter and his persona as one who has lost hope in the security of the nation, “Nigeria”, hence, his strong assertion regarding “survival” in the nation. Politeness is not illustrated in the tweet. The tweeter is blunt. This is indicated through the use of the exclamation mark repeatedly in the tweet.

**Conclusion**

This study has examined selected tweets on the 2022 Christmas day murder in Nigeria from a pragmatic perspective. More specifically, the study has adopted Korta and Perry’s (2011) perspectives to Critical Pragmatics as the conceptual framework. Also in the study, a critical examination of the deployment of linguistic elements and indicators of speech act, reference and politeness/impoliteness have been carried out. From the analysis, the study found that the deployment of those critical pragmatic tools does not only portray the context of use but also reflects the social actors’ (Tweeters’) ideology towards the nations’ political and judiciary system as being decayed and unjust,

with the masses being at the disadvantage. In conclusion, the use of the critical pragmatic approach for the analysis of the selected tweets has revealed the interrelationship between the variables of class, power and ideology, which form the basis of the tweeters' judgment.

### References

- Austin, J.L. (1962) *How to do things with words*. Cambridge. Cambridge University Press.
- Crystal, D. (1997). *English as a global language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University.
- Grice, H.P. (1957). 'Meaning', *Philosophical Review*, 66: 377– 388. in  
Grice, H.P. *Studies in the Way of Words*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University
- Grice, H.P. (1975). 'Logic and conversation', in Cole, P. and Morgan, J. (eds), *Syntax and Semantics*, vol. 3: *Speech Acts*. New York: Academic Press.
- Kaburise, P. K. (2005). *Speech act theory and communication: A Univen study*. An Unpublished Thesis.
- Oni, J. F. (2010). Lexicalisation and discursive expression of power in Olusegun Obasanjo's speeches. Postgraduate Seminar Series, Department of English, University of Ibadan.
- Ostman, J., Verschueren, J. & Zienkowski, J. (2011). *Discursive pragmatics*. Netherlands. John Benjamin Publishing Company.
- Searle, J. (1969). *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Searle, J. (1979). *Meaning and Expression in theory of Speech acts*. Cambridge: Cambridge University press.
- Van Dijk, T.A. (2001). Critical discourse analysis. In Hamilton, H.E., Schiffrin, D., & Tannen, D. *The Handbook of Discourse analysis*.



@ 2023 by the author. Licensee University of Chitral, Journal of Linguistics & Literature, Pakistan. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).