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**FACE MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES IN PRESIDENT MUHAMMADU BUHARI'S
ENDSARS ADDRESS: A PRAGMATIC ANALYSIS**

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Abstract

This study examines face management strategies deployed by President Muhammadu Buhari in his nationwide broadcast of 22nd October 2020, delivered two days after security operatives opened fire on unarmed protesters at the Lekki Toll Gate, Lagos State. The study is anchored on Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory. Adopting a qualitative design, the study purposively sampled ten excerpts from the twenty-seven numbered paragraphs of the address. The analysis of excerpts identifies five dominant strategies: solidarity-building through inclusive pronouns and kinship terms; bald-on-record face-threatening directives against alleged "hijackers" of the protest; empathetic mitigation designed to project institutional benevolence; self-glorifying assertions of governmental achievement as a face-restoration device; and off-record evasion around the Lekki Toll Gate shooting as a strategy of face-protection through strategic silence. The study thus concludes that Buhari's face-work was structurally bifurcated: conciliatory toward the Nigerian public as a generalised audience, but confrontational toward the youth-protester in-group, a pragmatic dissonance that substantially explains the address's documented failure to de-escalate the crisis.

Keywords: Crisis Communication, #EndSARS Protest, Face Management, Muhammadu Buhari Pragmatics, Politeness Theory, Political Discourse,

INTRODUCTION

When institutional legitimacy is contested and public trust has eroded, a president's words are scrutinised not only for what they promise but for how he/she positions self in relation to the aggrieved public. It is in such moments that the concept of face, understood as the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself/herself in interactions, becomes analytically indispensable (Goffman, 1967). The #EndSARS protests of October 2020 constituted precisely such a moment for Nigerian. Triggered by long-standing allegations of extortion, torture, and extrajudicial killings by operatives of the-disbanded Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) of the Nigeria Police Force, the protests escalated within days into the most sustained youth mobilisation in Nigeria's recent democratic history, drawing global attention and culminating in the shooting of unarmed demonstrators at the Lekki Toll Gate in Lagos on 20 October 2020 (Iwuoha & Aniche, 2022; Ecoma, 2023). It was against this backdrop that President Muhammadu Buhari addressed the nation on 22 October 2020, two days after the Lekki shooting and ten days after the initial disbandment of SARS was announced. The speech was anticipated as an opportunity for the President to acknowledge the tragedy, console a grieving nation, and seek reconciliation. Instead, Buhari's response was overwhelmingly negative: as commentators and citizens criticised the address for its perceived detachment, its omission of any direct reference to the Lekki shootings, and its framing of the protest movement as having been "hijacked" by unnamed hoodlums (Ecoma, 2023). The address thus offers rich data for examining how a political leader, with a sense of self-exoneration, linguistically negotiates face under conditions of acute institutional distrust. Nigerian political discourse has attracted considerable scholarly attention, particularly around inaugural addresses, campaign rhetoric, and legislative debate, and, more specifically, a growing cluster of studies has turned directly to the #EndSARS speeches, examining power relations, pronominal choices, and social-media reception (Alfred & Oyebola, 2021; Aikoriogie & Idegbekwe, 2022; Ikechukwu-Ibe, 2023). In comparison, few of these studies apply a face-management lens to a single crisis address of this magnitude, and fewer still trace how face-saving and face-threatening strategies operate simultaneously, and often contradictorily, within the same text. This study thus seeks to ask the following three interrelated Research Questions: (a) what face management strategies are discernible in Buhari's #EndSARS address? (b) how are these strategies pragmatically realised? and (c) what does the coexistence of conciliatory and confrontational face-work reveal about the pragmatics of political crisis communication in Nigeria?. In pursuing these

research questions, the study contributes an empirically grounded, theoretically focused account of face management to the expanding field of Nigeria's political discourse.

Scope of the Study

The scope of this study is textual based. It examines a single presidential address in its entirety, rather than a corpus of multiple speeches or the broader social-media discourse that surrounded the protests. This scope is a methodological strength rather than a limitation, since it permits the kind of close, paragraph-by-paragraph pragmatic reading that a larger, comparative corpus would not sustain.

Significance of the Study

The significance of the study is twofold. Academically, it demonstrates that a single, consistently applied politeness framework can capture both the conciliatory and the confrontational dimensions of a politically consequential crisis address within one integrated analytical account, addressing a gap left open by prior rapport-management and discourse-analytic treatments of the same corpus. Practically, its findings are directly useful to political speechwriters, communication strategists, and public-relations practitioners operating in trust-deficit democratic environments.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the concept of face as elaborated by Goffman (1967) and systematised by Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory, which together furnish the analytical apparatus for the analysis. Goffman (1967) conceives face as the positive social value a person effectively claims for themselves through the line others assume, they have taken in an interaction; face is thus not an intrinsic property of the individual but a social good, constantly negotiated, threatened, and repaired in interaction. Brown and Levinson (1987) extend this insight into a systematic model of linguistic politeness, distinguishing between positive face, an individual's desire to be approved of and to have their wants regarded as desirable by others, and negative face, the desire for autonomy and freedom from imposition. Acts that threaten either face dimension are termed face-threatening acts (FTAs), and speakers are theorised to mitigate such threats through four broad strategies: bald-on-record (direct, unmitigated performance of the FTA), positive politeness (appeals to solidarity and shared identity), negative politeness (deference and indirectness that

respect the hearer's autonomy), and off-record strategies (indirection and implicature that allow the speaker plausible deniability).

Two features of this typology make it particularly apt for the analysis of political crisis rhetoric. First, it accommodates the possibility that a single text may deploy several, even contradictory, strategies toward different face dimensions and different segments of its audience simultaneously, precisely the pattern this study identifies in Buhari's address. Second, it treats silence and omission, not only as explicit linguistic choices, but also as a legitimate object of pragmatic analysis under the off-record category, which is essential for interpreting the address's notable avoidance of direct reference to the Lekki Toll Gate shooting. Brown and Levinson's (1987) four-part typology is applied here as the sole operational framework for classifying and interpreting the excerpts analysed. Goffman's (1967) broader concept of face is retained only as the foundational orientation from which Brown and Levinson's model itself was derived.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A growing corpus of pragmatic and discourse-analytic scholarship has examined the language of Nigerian political leaders, much of it converging on the finding that political speech in Nigeria is heavily inflected by face-management concerns, particularly the negotiation of legitimacy, solidarity, and blame. Aremu (2019) examined conceptual mappings and face management strategies in former President Olusegun Obasanjo's address on the political crisis, "The Way Out", demonstrating that Nigerian political leaders routinely deploy conceptual metaphor alongside explicit face-saving devices to reframe crises as external impositions rather than governmental failures, a finding with a direct bearing on the present study's analysis of blame-attribution in Buhari's address. In a closely related study, Akinwotu (2021) applied Spencer-Oatey's (2008) rapport management theory to carry out a comparative analysis of Buhari's and Sanwo-Olu's #EndSARS speeches, finding that both leaders relied heavily on inclusive pronouns, the institutional "I", and collective possessive forms to construct solidarity with citizens, while nonetheless differing in the degree of empathetic acknowledgement extended to the protesters. That study's focus on rapport-building devices is extended here through a attention to the face-threatening dimension of the same corpus, and through the specifically face-typological vocabulary of Brown and Levinson (1987) rather than Akinwotu's rapport-management apparatus. Ononye (2021), working within the same rapport-management paradigm but apply to the Niger

Delta conflict drama, demonstrated that face management strategies in Nigerian conflict discourse commonly bifurcate into incriminating and exonerating moves, a pattern that recurs strikingly in Buhari's treatment of "genuine" protesters versus alleged "hijackers" of the movement. Beyond the selected speeches, the concept of face-saving through blame displacement recurs across the Nigerian political-pragmatics literature, lending further credibility to its application here: leaders confronted with crises of legitimacy consistently prefer to relocate blame onto an external or internal "other" rather than to accept direct institutional responsibility, a pattern this study traces in linguistic detail in Buhari's treatment of the alleged "hijackers" of the #EndSARS protests.

A second, more recent cluster of studies has examined the #EndSARS speeches and their aftermath through discourse-analytic and pragmatic lenses that intersect with, but do not directly replicate, a face-management approach. Alfred and Oyebola (2021) analyse the same Buhari address using Systemic Functional Linguistics and Critical Discourse Analysis, demonstrating through transitivity and modality patterns how the President's grammatical choices positioned social actors, protesters, security forces, and the government itself, in ways that obscured state agency and reproduced institutional dominance. Their finding that modality structures function to naturalise inequitable representations of social actors complements the present study's observation that the address's modal choices function as significant face-threatening devices against the protester in-group. Aikoriogie and Idegbekwe (2022), working within a relevance-theoretic framework of procedural encoding, examined the same address's personal pronoun system, arguing that the President's pronominal choices generated a sense of threat rather than reassurance in the minds of addressees, and recommending, in terms that anticipate the present study's findings, that political speakers in comparable circumstances adopt more consistently inclusive pronominal strategies. Beyond the address itself, Ikechukwu-Ibe (2023) examined impoliteness as a strategy of oppositional discourse in citizen responses to the #EndSARS protest on Twitter, showing that Nigerians themselves deployed face-threatening strategies against the state in the aftermath of the crisis, a finding that situates the President's own face-threatening choices within a broader climate of reciprocal face-damage between state and citizenry.

Beyond the linguistic literature, socio-political scholarship has documented the broader context against which the address must be read. Iwuoha and Aniche (2022) provide an account of the repressive dimensions of the Nigerian state's response to the protests, drawing on interviews and

social media data to argue that a fundamental trust deficit between citizens and government predated and shaped the reception of official rhetoric during the crisis. Ecoma (2023) similarly offers a post-mortem legal and political assessment of the protests, noting that the government's public communications, including the President's address, were widely perceived as inadequate to the scale of the tragedy, particularly regarding the Lekki Toll Gate incident.

Collectively, this literature establishes three things relevant to the present study. First, face and rapport management are recurrent and analytically productive lenses for Nigerian political discourse, particularly in moments of national crisis. Second, the #EndSARS address itself has already attracted sustained linguistic attention, but principally through Systemic Functional Linguistics, Critical Discourse Analysis, and relevance-theoretic pronoun analysis (Alfred & Oyebola, 2021; Aikoriogie & Idegbekwe, 2022), rather than through the Brown and Levinson (1987) politeness framework applied here. Third, no existing study, including the rapport-management analysis of the same corpus by Akinwotu (2021), has isolated Buhari's #EndSARS address as a single, focused case for a systematic mapping of face-saving against face-threatening strategies within Brown and Levinson's integrated four-part pragmatic typology. This is the specific gap the present study addresses.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative research design situated within the pragmatic and discourse-analytic tradition. The primary data comprise the complete text of President Muhammadu Buhari's nationwide broadcast address on the #EndSARS protests, delivered on 22nd October 2020 and subsequently published in full by several Nigerian news outlets, including *The Guardian Nigeria* (Buhari, 2020). The twenty-seven numbered paragraphs of the address constitute the corpus for analysis. Consistent with the theoretical focus established in Section 2, the study concentrates its analytical apparatus on a single model, Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory, applied consistently across the entire corpus rather than supplemented by competing analytical frameworks.

A purposive sampling technique was employed to select excerpts illustrative of the face management strategies under investigation, in keeping with established practice in qualitative discourse-based studies of Nigerian political speech (Aremu, 2019; Akinwotu, 2021). The

analytical procedure proceeded in three stages. First, all twenty-seven paragraphs of the address were read closely to identify utterances performing face-threatening or face-saving functions, drawing on Brown and Levinson's (1987) four-part taxonomy. Second, the identified utterances were grouped into five recurrent categories on the basis of the face-management function they performed, yielding the five dominant strategies reported in data analytical section of the study. Third, within each category, the two or three most linguistically representative utterances were retained as excerpts for detailed analysis, while less representative or repetitive instances of the same strategy were set aside. Consistent with established conventions in linguistic scholarship, the excerpts are presented in tabular form in data presentation section of the study, before the detailed qualitative discussion of findings, in order to preserve analytical transparency, indicate clearly the specific Brown and Levinson (1987) category to which each excerpt has been assigned, and allow the reader to trace each interpretive claim back to its source in the primary text.

DATA PRESENTATION

Table 1 presents ten excerpts selected for analysis, numbered consecutively, together with the face management strategy each illustrates, the corresponding Brown and Levinson (1987) analytical category, and the paragraph location of each excerpt within the address (Buhari, 2020).

Table 1: Excerpts Selected for Analysis

S/N	Excerpt	Face Management Strategy	B&L (1987) Category	Source
1	"Fellow Nigerians"	Solidarity-building	Positive politeness	Buhari (2020), para. 1
2	"...we listened to, and carefully evaluated the five-point demands of the protesters..."	Solidarity-building	Positive politeness	Buhari (2020), para. 5
3	"...a fundamental right of citizens as enshrined in Section 40 of our Constitution..."	Solidarity-building	Positive politeness	Buhari (2020), para. 4
4	"I must warn those who have hijacked and misdirected the initial, genuine and well-intended protest of some of our youths..."	Bald-on-record face-threat	Bald-on-record FTA	Buhari (2020), para. 2

5	"...for you to do otherwise will amount to undermining national security... Under no circumstances will this be tolerated."	Bald-on-record face-threat	Bald-on-record FTA	Buhari (2020), para. 23
6	"...but it will not allow anybody or groups to disrupt the peace of our nation."	Bald-on-record face-threat	Bald-on-record FTA	Buhari (2020), para. 27
7	"I am indeed deeply pained that innocent lives have been lost."	Empathetic mitigation	Negative politeness / expressive act	Buhari (2020), para. 9
8	"...human lives have been lost; acts of sexual violence have been reported..."	Empathetic mitigation	Negative politeness / expressive act	Buhari (2020), para. 8
9	"Government has put in place measures and initiatives principally targeted at youths, women and the most vulnerable groups in our society."	Self- glorification / face-restoration	Positive politeness (identity face)	Buhari (2020), para. 12
10	"These included our broad plan to lift 100 million Nigerians out of poverty in the next 10 years; the creation of N75 billion National Youth Investment Fund..."	Self- glorification / face-restoration	Positive politeness (identity face)	Buhari (2020), para. 12

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

In line with the first objective of the study, five dominant face management strategies are identified in Buhari's #EndSARS address. Firstly, Solidarity-Building through Inclusive Deixis and Kinship Terms: From its opening line, the address adopts what Brown and Levinson (1987) classify as a positive politeness strategy, seeking to construct in-group solidarity between speaker and audience. Excerpt 1 addresses the citizenry as "fellow Nigerians", a kinship-based term of address that pragmatically presupposes shared national identity and mutuality before any substantive claim has been made. This opening move performs important face-work: it frames the subsequent, more confrontational content of the address as originating from within a shared community rather than from an adversarial state apparatus. Excerpts 2 and 3 sustain this solidarity strategy through the recurrent use of the inclusive first-person plural pronouns "we" and "our", positioning the President and citizens as co-participants in national concerns and shared responsibility for the country's welfare, rather than as opposing parties in the unfolding conflict. This positive-face strategy is pragmatically significant because it seeks to pre-empt the face threat inherent in the directive and evaluative content that follows: by first, establishing rapport, the President attempts to bank a

reserve of interpersonal goodwill against which the subsequent face-threatening acts, principally the warnings issued to protesters, might be more readily tolerated by the audience, a classic instance of what Brown and Levinson (1987) term redressive positive politeness preceding an anticipated FTA. Secondly, Bald-on-Record Face-Threat against Alleged "Hijackers". The second, and pragmatically dominant, strategy operates in a direct contrast with the first. Excerpt 4 constitutes a bald-on-record face-threatening act: an unmitigated warning directed at those characterised as having "hijacked and misdirected" the protests. This lexical choice performs significant ideological work. By characterising a portion of the protest movement as hijackers, the speaker discursively splits the audience into two face-differentiated categories: a legitimate, aggrieved youth whose concerns are acknowledged, and an illegitimate, criminalised Other whose actions are condemned in absolute terms. The face-threat is intensified in Excerpts 5 and 6 through strong deontic modality that leaves little room for negotiation, framing the continuation of the protest as carrying serious consequences for national security and explicitly stating that certain conduct "will not be tolerated". Such categorical, unmitigated assertions constitute negative-face threats to the protesting youth as a group. Notably, this strategy is directed not at named individuals but at an unidentified category of "hijackers", vagueness that functions to shift blame for the violence of the crisis away from state actors and onto an unspecified criminal group thereby protecting the collective face of the government and its security agencies.

Thirdly, Empathetic Mitigation as Institutional Face-Repair. A third strategy, involves the deployment of empathy markers to repair face damage already sustained by the government's image over the course of the crisis. Excerpts 7 and 8 contain explicit expressions of sorrow over the loss of lives, describing the President as being "deeply pained" by the deaths that occurred. Such expressive acts function pragmatically as an attempt, after face has been threatened by events outside the speaker's direct control, to realign the speaker's public image with the expectations of a sympathetic and responsible leader. However, this mitigation strategy is pragmatically undermined by its co-occurrence with the earlier bald-on-record threat. The expressions of grief in Excerpt 7 are immediately coupled, within the same paragraph, with the assertion that these tragedies cannot be attributed to a legitimate protest, the empathy marker functions less as unconditional condolence than as a face-saving qualifier for the government, one that accepts the fact of loss while explicitly declining to accept institutional responsibility for it. This dual move is

consistent with Ecoma's (2023) observation that public reception of the address centred precisely on this perceived gap between expressed sympathy and acknowledged accountability:

Fourthly, Self-Glorification as a Face-Restoration Device. A fourth, extensive strategy in the address involves an enumeration of the administration's socio-economic interventions, including youth employment and poverty-alleviation programmes. Excerpts 9 and 10, both drawn from paragraph 12, catalogue government achievements, including the plan to lift hundred (100) million Nigerians out of poverty and the creation of a seventy-five-billion-naira National Youth Investment Fund. Pragmatically, this constitutes a positive-face restoration strategy: by cataloguing achievements, the President attempts to reframe the government's identity from indifference, the very accusation animating the protests, to one of demonstrable commitment to youth welfare. From a rhetorical-pragmatic standpoint, however, this strategy carries considerable risks. Its extensive length relative to the acknowledgement of protester grievances risks being read by the audience as a topic-avoidance strategy, the speaker steers discourse away from the face-threatening heart of the crisis, specifically the conduct of the security forces, toward safer, self-congratulatory territory. Such a shift itself constitutes a face threat to the audience's sociality rights, since it may be perceived as dismissive of the immediate grievance being voiced, an interpretation borne out in the substantially negative public reception the address received

Lastly, Strategic Evasion as Face-Protection: The Lekki Toll Gate Silence. The most consequential face management strategy in the speech is a strategic silence rather than voice across all twenty-seven paragraphs, the speech contains no explicit, direct acknowledgement of the shooting of protesters by security operatives at the Lekki Toll Gate two days prior to the broadcast. This omission is classified as an off-record strategy taken to its extreme, avoidance so complete that the face-threatening event itself is never named. Where the address does gesture toward the tragedy, in Excerpts 7 and 8, it does so through generalised, agentless expressions of regret over the loss of life, a passive construction that pragmatically obscures agency and, by extension, accountability. This strategic silence can be read as the address's most significant face-protection manoeuvre: by declining to name the event, the President avoids the acute face-threat that direct acknowledgement of state responsibility would entail, while simultaneously avoiding the alternative face-threat of appearing to deny an event witnessed globally in real time on social media. Yet, this evasion did not succeed as a face-protection strategy in the broader public sphere;

rather, it was widely interpreted as confirmation of institutional insensitivity illustrating a key limitation of avoidance-based face-work under conditions of high media visibility and pre-existing distrust, where silence itself becomes semiotically loaded and face-da

In line with the second objective of the study, the five strategies identified above are realised through a recurrent, cross-cutting set of linguistic devices. First, deixis, particularly person deixis, functions as the primary vehicle for solidarity-building: the inclusive first-person plural forms "we" and "our" in Excerpts 1 through 3 construct a shared deictic centre between speaker and citizenry, while the same pronoun system shifts, in Excerpts 4 through 6, to an excluding second- and third-person reference (e.g., "those who have hijacked") that discursively expels the addressed "hijackers" from the in-group constructed moments earlier. This finding corroborates Aikoriogbe and Idegbekwe's (2022) relevance-theoretic analysis of pronoun use in the same address, extending it by showing precisely how the pronominal shift correlates with a shift in face-management function. Second, modality performs the central work of the bald-on-record strategy: the deontic modal auxiliaries in Excerpts 5 and 6, "will not be tolerated" and "will not allow", assert unmitigated obligation and prohibition, closing down the negotiating space that positive politeness elsewhere seeks to open. Third, a lexical choice is pragmatically loaded throughout: the label "hijacked" in Excerpt 4 performs a categorising function that pre-emptively delegitimises a segment of the protest movement, while the affective lexis of Excerpt 7, "deeply pained", performs the opposite, humanising function. Fourth, at the level of speech acts, the address moves between expressive acts (the condolence in Excerpt 7), directive acts (the warning in Excerpt 4 and the appeal in the surrounding paragraphs), and assertive acts (the enumeration of achievements in Excerpts 9 and 10), each carrying a distinct face-management valence. Finally, the off-record strategy identified in Section 6.1(e) is realised not through any single lexical or grammatical choice but through a structural pattern of omission across the entire twenty-seven-paragraph excerpts, confirming that silence and implicature, no less than explicit wording, are legitimate objects of pragmatic analysis.

In line with the third objective of the study, read together, the five strategies reveal a structurally bifurcated pattern of face management. Toward the Nigerian public conceived broadly, the address performs conciliatory, rapport-building, positive-politeness work: inclusive address terms, expressions of empathy, and an extensive account of governmental benevolence. Toward the

specific in-group of active protesters, however, the address performs confrontational, face-threatening work: bald-on-record warning, deontic assertion, and implicit blame-shifting through the hijacker frame. In Brown and Levinson's (1987) terms, the address simultaneously performs redressive action toward the face wants of one audience segment while directly and severely threatening the face wants of another, a dual orientation that the theory predicts would generate interpretive strain wherever both segments overlap in the same listening public, as they self-evidently did in October 2020.

Lastly, the central pragmatic finding of this study is that this dissonance, rather than any single lexical or grammatical choice, is what accounts for the address's widely documented communicative failure. A crisis address that simultaneously claims solidarity with its audience while threatening the face of a significant and vocal segment of that same audience risks being read as pragmatically incoherent, undermining the credibility of even its genuinely conciliatory elements. This finding extends Akinwotu's (2021) rapport-management analysis of the same corpus by demonstrating, through Brown and Levinson's (1987) more granular face-typology, that the face-threatening components of the address were not incidental but structurally central to its overall communicative architecture, and by tracing the specific mechanism, the hijacker and genuine-protester bifurcation, through which this dissonance was linguistically constructed. It further extends Alfred and Oyebola's (2021) transitivity-based account and Aikoriogie and Idegbekwe's (2022) pronoun-based account by showing that the patterns each identifies, obscured agency and threatening pronominal reference respectively, converge on a single underlying pragmatic architecture: an address whose positive-face work for the general public and negative-face threat toward protesters were mutually undermining rather than independent design choices.

Consequently, the analysis yields four principal findings. First, the address employs a layered combination of positive politeness (inclusive pronouns, kinship terms of address), bald-on-record face-threat (unmitigated warnings against alleged hijackers), expressive mitigation (empathy markers), and off-record avoidance (silence on the Lekki Toll Gate shooting.—Second, face management in the address operates differentially across audience segments, extending conciliatory face-work to the general citizenry while directing face-threatening acts at a discursively constructed category of illegitimate protesters. Third, the address's self-glorifying enumeration of governmental achievement functions as a face-restoration strategy that,

empirically, appears to have been counter-productive, given its documented reception as evasive rather than reassuring. Fourth, strategic silence regarding the Lekki Toll Gate incident constitutes the address's central and most consequential face-protection manoeuvre, one that ultimately failed to protect institutional face precisely because of the high public visibility of the underlying event.

These findings carry practical implications for political speechwriting in crisis contexts, particularly within democracies characterised by low institutional trust. The findings suggest that solidarity-building devices, cannot compensate for the pragmatic incoherence created by simultaneous face-threat against a significant segment of the very audience being addressed. The findings further suggest that avoidance-based face-protection strategies, while theoretically capable of limiting immediate face damage, carry substantially elevated risk in media environments characterised by real-time citizen documentation, where the gap between an official narrative and a competing, visually evidenced public narrative can itself become a potent source of further face loss. For political communicators, the analysis underscores the pragmatic necessity of explicit, unambiguous acknowledgement of contested events as a precondition for successful face-repair in crisis address, rather than reliance on generalised expressions of regret.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to identify and analyse the face management strategies deployed by President Muhammadu Buhari in his 22 October 2020 address on the #EndSARS protests, pursuing three specific objectives: to identify and classify the strategies discernible in the address, to analyse the linguistic devices through which they were realised, and to evaluate the pragmatic consequences of their coexistence within a single crisis text. Drawing on Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory as a single, consistently applied analytical framework, the study identified five interlocking strategies: solidarity-building through inclusive deixis, bald-on-record face-threat against alleged hijackers of the protest, empathetic mitigation, self-glorifying face-restoration, and strategic silence surrounding the Lekki Toll Gate shooting. In relation to the first objective, these five strategies were shown to be realised, in relation to the second objective, through a recurrent system of person deixis, deontic modality, evaluative lexis, and shifting speech-act types. In relation to the third objective, the study's central contribution is its demonstration that these strategies did not operate independently but formed a structurally bifurcated pattern of face-work, conciliatory

toward the general public, confrontational toward the protesting in-group, that substantially accounts for the address's documented failure to de-escalate the crisis. In extending existing rapport-management scholarship on this corpus (Akinwotu, 2021), discourse-analytic scholarship on the same address (Alfred & Oyebola, 2021; Aikoriogie & Idegbekwe, 2022), and pragmatic scholarship on Nigerian political crisis discourse more broadly (Aremu, 2019; Ononye, 2021), this study affirms the continuing analytical value of face and politeness theory for understanding the pragmatics of political legitimacy in moments of national crisis. Its principal contribution lies in demonstrating that Brown and Levinson's (1987) four-part typology, applied singly and systematically rather than alongside competing frameworks, is sufficient to capture both the conciliatory and the confrontational dimensions of a politically consequential crisis address within one integrated analytical account. The study is limited by its focus on a single address and by its qualitative, purposive sampling procedure, which, while appropriate to the depth of analysis undertaken, does not permit quantitative generalisation across the wider corpus of Nigerian presidential crisis rhetoric. Future research might productively extend this framework comparatively, examining subsequent Nigerian presidential crisis addresses, or triangulate the present textual analysis with audience-reception data to further specify the conditions under which face-repair strategies succeed or fail in high-distrust political environments.

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