



Pragmeme of Commitment and Cohesion: A Pragmatic Analysis of the Nigerian National Pledge and Revised Anthem

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Abstract

This study examines the Nigerian National Pledge and the revived 1960 National Anthem, *Nigeria, We Hail Thee*, through Mey's Pragmatic Act Theory (PAT). PAT explains how language functions as a socially and contextually bound activity, where meaning emerges from the interplay of linguistic choices, participant roles, socio-cultural norms, and situational factors. Within this framework, the pledge and anthem are treated as institutionalised pragmatic acts whose illocutionary force is reinforced by their performance in ceremonial and official settings. Using qualitative textual analysis, the study identifies the speech act types in each text and maps them to associated pragmemes. The pledge predominantly uses commissives and expressives to establish personal moral responsibility and civic duty, while the anthem integrates declaratives, commissives, and directives to promote collective unity and moral governance. The analysis reveals that the Nigerian National Pledge and Anthem function as performative acts that foreground commitment and cohesion, balancing individual responsibility with collective national identity to reinforce nation-building. The research contributes to scholarship by linking PAT to the socio-political functions of national symbols, arguing that these texts are not static recitations but dynamic speech events that continually negotiate and reaffirm the moral and ideological boundaries of the Nigerian nation. The findings have implications for civic education and cultural policy, particularly in multiethnic and multilingual societies that seek unity through symbolic acts.

Keywords: Pragmatic Act Theory, National Pledge, Nigerian Anthem, Pragmeme, Commitment, Cohesion, Nation-Building.

Introduction

National symbols are central to the formation, reinforcement, and expression of collective identity in any nation. In Nigeria, the National Pledge and National Anthem transcend their ceremonial function to operate as linguistic and symbolic acts that bind citizens to a shared vision of unity, loyalty, and service. Both texts occupy a privileged position in the nation's sociopolitical life; they are performed at official functions, schools, sporting events, and national ceremonies, often as opening rituals to collective gatherings. These performances are not mere traditions; they are communicative events that seek to affirm belonging, strengthen solidarity, and instil a sense of obligation to the state and fellow citizens (Omoniyi, 2010; Adegbite, 2009).

The Nigerian context makes these acts particularly significant. With over 500 languages and a deeply pluralistic ethno-religious composition (Eberhard, Simons, & Fennig, 2024), the challenge of fostering national cohesion remains a persistent theme in political and social discourse. Scholars have long argued that in multilingual and multiethnic societies, official discourse plays a crucial role in constructing a unifying national identity (Wodak et al., 2009; Usman, 2019). In such contexts, the pledge and anthem are deliberate attempts to create a verbal common ground. In this inclusive linguistic space, Nigerians, irrespective of ethnicity, religion, or language, can articulate a shared commitment to the nation.

The study analyses national symbols through the lens of Mey's (2001) Pragmatic Act Theory, providing an avenue to understand not just what is said, but how and why it is noted in specific sociocultural contexts. Mey's framework moves beyond the classical speech act model by situating meaning in the interaction between text, context, and societal norms. Central to this approach is the concept of the *pragmeme*, a generalised pragmatic act embedded in a socio-cultural context and instantiated as an adapted pragmatic act in real communicative events. The Nigerian National Pledge and Anthem can therefore be viewed as *pragmemes* of commitment and cohesion, which, when performed, enact social obligations and affirm collective unity.

Historically, the role of the national anthem in Nigeria has evolved in response to political and cultural shifts. At independence in 1960, *Nigeria, We Hail Thee* was adopted as the national anthem. Written by Lillian Jean Williams and composed by Frances Benda, it emphasised patriotism, loyalty, and collective responsibility, values considered crucial for the young nation (Adewumi, 2024). However, in 1978, it was replaced by *Arise, O Compatriots*, a composition authored entirely by Nigerians, in line with a post-civil war drive for cultural nationalism (Nigerian Tribune, 2024). In a significant policy reversal, the National Anthem Bill 2024 was signed into law by President Bola Ahmed Tinubu on 29 May 2024, restoring *Nigeria, We Hail Thee* as the national anthem (The Guardian Nigeria, 2024). This change, according to supporters, rekindles historical memory and national pride; nevertheless, critics argue that the process was rushed and diverts attention from pressing socio-economic issues. This development highlights the enduring symbolic power of the anthem and emphasises the importance of studying such national symbols in their socio-political contexts.

Yet, despite their ubiquity, these two national symbols remain underexplored in pragmatic scholarship. Existing studies, such as Agbiboa, (2011), Akinwotu, (2020), Usman (2019), have approached the research from the historical, literary and political science perspectives, often focusing on their symbolic or ideological content without fully interrogating the interplay between context, pragmatic force, and their intended sociopolitical functions. This leaves a gap that lacks a systematic account of how the language used in the national symbols functions as a binding act in the Nigerian public sphere.

This article addresses that gap by examining the Nigerian National Pledge and Anthem as institutionalised pragmatic acts of commitment and cohesion. It argues that these texts, when analysed as *pragmemes*, reveal a structured interplay between illocutionary intentions and the socio-cultural environment in which they are performed. The study contends that they not only

declare allegiance but also performatively enact it, producing both immediate and enduring perlocutionary effects on national consciousness. In doing so, the pledge and anthem participate in the discursive construction of Nigerian identity, promoting solidarity while implicitly negotiating the tensions inherent in a plural society.

The argument here aligns with Wodak et al.'s (2009) view that national identity is not a fixed construct but a continuous discursive achievement. It also resonates with broader work in political pragmatics, which emphasises that public, ritualised speech acts operate as mechanisms of social regulation, unification, and mobilisation (Chilton & Schäffner, 2002). This study situates the analysis in Mey's pragmatic act framework. It demonstrates that the Nigerian National Pledge and Anthem are not passive symbols but active verbal instrumental tools for cultivating national ethos through the strategic alignment of language, context, ideology and how they function as pragmemes of commitment and cohesion. This methodology is appropriate because it combines linguistic analysis with pragmatic interpretation, enabling a comprehensive understanding of how the Nigerian National Pledge and Anthem operate as acts of commitment and cohesion. Mey's Pragmatic Act Theory provides the necessary tools for connecting the texts' linguistic features to their contextual realisation, while Speech Act Theory supports the identification of specific illocutionary forces. Together, these frameworks ensure that the analysis moves beyond symbolic interpretation to reveal how these national symbols function as institutionalised acts that shape civic identity and national unity.

Review of Related Literature

The Concept of Pragmatics

Pragmatics is a core area of linguistics that examines how people use language to communicate in real-life situations. It focuses on meaning as it is shaped by the interaction between linguistic expressions and the circumstances of their use (Levinson, 1983; Yule, 1996). Unlike semantics, which is concerned with meaning as a property of words and sentences in isolation, pragmatics studies meaning in relation to the people who use language, the purposes for which they use it, and the settings in which it occurs. This orientation reflects the understanding that language is not only a system of rules and symbols but also a resource for social action. The defining feature of pragmatic analysis is the recognition that context is indispensable to understanding meaning. Context refers not only to the physical setting of communication but also to the relationship between participants, their social roles, shared cultural knowledge, and the expectations governing interaction (Verschuere, 1999). It also includes institutional norms and historical circumstances that shape the way utterances are produced and interpreted. The same words can carry very different meanings when spoken in different contexts. For instance, the phrase "I promise to serve" might be interpreted casually in a private conversation but acquires formal and binding significance when uttered as part of a national pledge during an official ceremony. Pragmatics treats meaning as co-constructed between speaker and hearer. Communication is not a one-directional transfer of information; it is a process in which speakers choose their words with certain intentions, and hearers interpret those words considering both the linguistic content and the situational background. Thomas (1995) explains that this interpretive process is dynamic, meaning emerges from the interplay between what is said, what is left unsaid, and what is inferred from the shared context. This is why pragmatic analysis often focuses on implied meaning, presuppositions, implicatures, and the unspoken cultural knowledge that underlies successful communication.

A central concern of pragmatics is the idea that language is a form of action. When people speak, they are not merely describing reality; they are doing things with words. They can make promises, issue commands, declare allegiance, or offer apologies. These verbal acts have real effects on relationships, obligations, and social outcomes. The performative nature of language

becomes even more pronounced in formal and institutional contexts, where words carry official authority and are often ritualised. In these contexts, utterances are designed not only to express meaning but also to bring about certain social states of affairs.

National pledges and anthems exemplify this performative dimension of language. When recited, they are not simply statements about loyalty or unity; they are acts that, in the moment of performance, enact those very commitments. The utterance itself is the action, declaring allegiance, affirming unity, and reinforcing shared values. In Nigeria, these texts operate within a socio-political context marked by ethnic, religious, and linguistic diversity. Their communicative power lies in their ability to evoke a shared identity and purpose across these divides. This effect is achieved through both the linguistic choices within the texts and the ceremonial contexts in which they are performed.

The pragmatic view is therefore necessary for understanding the Nigerian National Pledge and Anthem. When analysing them purely as literary texts, one would miss the fact that their full meaning emerges only in performance, when words and context come together to produce a binding act. Pragmatics provides the conceptual tools to examine how these texts function as communicative events whose meanings are grounded in context, shared understanding, and social purpose.

Similarly, Mey's Pragmatic Act Theory (PAT) provides the analytical lens for this study. PAT emphasises that pragmatic meaning is not solely a product of linguistic form but of the interaction between text, participants, and socio-cultural context. Central to this theory is the concept of the *pragmeme*, a generalised pragmatic act realised through specific *practs* (situated realisations of the act). In this research, the pledge and anthem are seen as *pragmemes*, "commitment" and "cohesion" respectively, whose force emerges from their performance in culturally sanctioned contexts. This framework allows for an integrated analysis of linguistic form, intended function, and the socio-political work these national symbols perform. This article expands the argument that examining the pledge and anthem as pragmatic acts provides fresh insights into their role in nation-building. It contributes to both the theoretical literature on pragmatic acts and the applied study of institutional discourse in African multilingual contexts by revealing how these texts operate as *pragmemes* of commitment and cohesion.

Speech Act Theory

Speech Act Theory is one of the most influential frameworks in pragmatics for understanding language as action. Introduced by Austin (1962) and further developed by Searle (1969), the theory is based on the idea that when people speak, they are not only saying something but also doing something. Language is treated as a tool for performing actions such as making promises, issuing warnings, declaring allegiance, or giving commands.

Austin (1962) distinguishes three levels of speech acts. The locutionary act refers to the actual utterance and its literal meaning. The illocutionary act concerns the speaker's intention, the action being performed by speaking, such as promising or declaring. The perlocutionary act refers to the effect the utterance has on the hearer, such as persuading, inspiring, or motivating. This layered view allows analysts to see that language has multiple functions operating simultaneously.

Searle (1969) refines the theory by classifying illocutionary acts into five categories: representatives (statements of fact), directives (attempts to get the hearer to do something), commissives (commitments to future actions), expressives (expressions of feelings or attitudes), and declarations (utterances that bring about a change in the external world). This classification is useful because it links the form of the utterance to its function in social interaction.

National pledges and anthems provide clear examples of multiple illocutionary forces working together. The Nigerian National Pledge begins with a commissive act, "I pledge to Nigeria my country", binding the speaker to loyalty and service. The anthem contains declarative elements

that affirm unity “one nation bound in freedom”, and expressive elements that convey pride and reverence for “our heroes past.” Each of these acts contributes to the overall purpose of reinforcing national identity and cohesion.

This theory also highlights the role of conventional and institutional contexts in shaping the performance of speech acts. Some utterances achieve their illocutionary force only in specific settings and under recognised conditions. A declaration such as “I now pronounce you married” only works within an authorised ceremony. Similarly, the force of the National Pledge and Anthem depends on their performance in official contexts, school assemblies, state events, and national celebrations, where they are recognised as legitimate acts of allegiance and unity.

Speech Act Theory’s relevance to the present study lies in its ability to systematically identify and categorise the kinds of actions embedded in the pledge and anthem. It provides a foundational framework for understanding how these texts function not just as words but as commitments, declarations, and expressions that have both symbolic and practical significance. However, while Speech Act Theory captures the functional aspect of these utterances, it does not fully address how broader socio-cultural and institutional realities shape their meaning and impact. This limitation points to the need for a context-sensitive approach, which is where Mey’s Pragmatic Act Theory becomes important. Mey’s framework builds on the insights of Speech Act Theory but extends the analysis to consider the cultural, political, and institutional environments in which speech acts occur.

Mey’s Pragmatic Act Theory

Pragmatic act, also known as the theory of pragmeme, is a linguistic theory that examines how language is used to perform actions and achieve specific effects on the listener. It moves beyond the literal meaning of words to consider the speaker's intentions, the context of the utterance, and the resulting impact on the recipient.

Mey’s Pragmatic Act Theory (2001) offers a broader and more socially grounded approach to analysing how language functions as action. The theory emerges as a response to the limitations of Speech Act Theory, particularly its focus on the sentence or utterance without giving sufficient attention to the wider socio-cultural and institutional contexts in which communication occurs. Mey argues that language use cannot be fully understood without considering the societal realities, norms, and expectations that shape both production and interpretation.

The central concept in this framework is the pragmeme, a generalised pragmatic act that is tied to a recurring social situation. A pragmeme is not merely an abstract category; it exists as part of the social fabric and becomes meaningful when it is instantiated in real-life discourse. Once this happens, it appears as an adapted pragmatic act, shaped by the immediate context, participant roles, and shared knowledge. This distinction between the general form and its context-specific realisation allows the theory to capture both stability and variation in language use.

In addition, Mey emphasises that pragmatic acts operate through several key features. Contextualisation refers to the way an act is framed within its cultural, political, and institutional setting. Conversational strategy involves the alignment between the speaker's intention and the hearer’s interpretation. Action performance covers the illocutionary and perlocutionary outcomes of the act. These elements ensure that the analysis moves beyond sentence-level meaning to explore how language is embedded in real-world practice.

The Nigerian National Pledge and Anthem can be viewed as institutionalised pragmemes. Their wording remains constant, but the specific contexts of performance, school assemblies, national celebrations, and diplomatic events produce variations in their impact and reception. During a school recitation, the focus may be on civic education and moral instruction, while at a state function, the same words may serve as a declaration of political unity and national

resolve. Examining these texts as pragmemes also highlights their dual role in expressing commitment and fostering cohesion. Commitment appears in commissive forms that bind the speaker to loyalty, service, and national duty. Cohesion is achieved through inclusive references and collective pronouns that symbolically unite diverse citizens into a single national identity. These effects cannot be understood solely by analysing the words; they require attention to the interaction between the text, the participants, and the cultural context in which the act takes place.

Mey's approach is therefore well-suited to the aim of this study. It allows for an analysis that recognises the fixed linguistic structure of the Nigerian National Pledge and Anthem while also accounting for the dynamic social settings in which they are performed. The concept of pragmemes, in the study, captures how the national symbols function as both verbal commitments and unifying acts within Nigeria's complex sociopolitical landscape.

Commitment and Cohesion as Core Pragmemes

Commitment in the Nigerian National Pledge and Anthem emerges through the deliberate use of declarative and commissive structures. Declarative forms present statements of loyalty as facts, while commissive forms bind the speaker to specific moral and civic duties. For example, the phrase "*I pledge to Nigeria my country*" in the pledge functions as a binding commitment, indicating an intention to remain loyal and obedient to the nation. These grammatical choices are not accidental; they are purposeful in constructing a sense of duty and responsibility that extends beyond the moment of recitation (Searle, 1969; Mey, 2001).

Furthermore, the pledge calls for obedience to the nation's laws and service to the common good, reinforcing a relationship between the individual and the state based on mutual trust and accountability. This aligns with Chilton and Schäffner's (2002) observation that political and institutional discourse often relies on commissive acts to secure long-term allegiance. In this sense, the commitment expressed in these national texts is both a personal promise and a public declaration witnessed by others, which increases its social weight and performative force.

In addition to commitment, the texts foster cohesion through linguistic strategies that create a sense of collective belonging. Cohesion is achieved through the use of inclusive pronouns such as "*our*" and "*we*", which linguistically unite the speaker with the audience. References to shared history, for example, "*the labour of our heroes past*", connect present generations with those who have contributed to the nation's development. This mirrors what Wodak et al. (2009) describe as the "discursive construction of national identity," where shared memory is a unifying resource in diverse societies.

Empirical Studies on Pledges and Anthems

Research from different national contexts confirms that pledges and anthems function as performative acts with both ideological and emotional consequences. National anthems, for instance, do more than celebrate identity; they encode historical narratives and express visions of national destiny. Cerulo (1993) demonstrates that many national anthems contain themes of struggle, victory, and shared purpose, which serve as frameworks for collective memory and identity formation. These narratives often become central reference points in the public imagination, helping to sustain a sense of belonging even during times of political or economic instability.

Evidence from African contexts supports this performative and ideological dimension. For instance, Adegbite (2009) argues that in multilingual African societies, national symbols and policies are deliberately framed to serve both pedagogical and legitimising purposes. For instance, language policies and ritualised texts such as national pledges are designed not only to instil civic virtues but also to legitimise state authority and foster national integration. In the Nigerian context, pledges recited in schools function as daily moral lessons in honesty, loyalty,

and service, while simultaneously reinforcing political obligation to the state. This dual role highlights how language in institutionalised forms operates as a tool for both character formation and political consolidation. In school settings, pledges are often part of daily routines that aim to instil civic virtues and foster loyalty to the state. In political contexts, they serve as ritual affirmations of unity and authority, reflecting the state's expectation of citizens' moral and patriotic commitment.

Further studies illustrate how anthems can be instrumental in promoting cohesion in post-conflict or culturally diverse societies. Mählmann (2014) explains that anthems in such contexts are carefully designed to reflect inclusive values and shared aspirations, often avoiding overtly partisan or ethnically exclusive references. In addition, Reicher and Hopkins (2001) note that the ritual performance of national symbols like anthems can transform abstract ideals into emotionally resonant experiences, thereby deepening citizens' attachment to the nation. In the Nigerian context, scholarship has largely addressed the symbolic and political significance of these national symbols without fully engaging with their pragmatic dimensions. Similarly, Agbibo (2011) argues that Nigeria's national project is continually undermined by ethnic and religious loyalties that weaken the formation of a cohesive national identity. While this perspective underscores the obstacles to cohesion, it does not account for how symbolic state practices attempt to mitigate these fractures. The present study extends this conversation by analysing the National Pledge and Anthem as pragmemes of devotion and collective identity. Onwuegbuchulam (2017) provides a theoretical lens on Nigeria's national identity crisis, attributing it to systemic failures of governance and the absence of a stable unifying framework. His argument foregrounds the structural and institutional weaknesses that have prevented Nigerians from developing a cohesive sense of belonging. This interpretation is important because it situates the problem of identity within the failures of political leadership and governance rather than merely cultural plurality.

However, while Onwuegbuchulam identifies the macro-level structural dimensions of disunity, his analysis is limited by its neglect of the micro-level discursive practices through which unity can be cultivated and performed. National belonging is not only shaped by governance frameworks but also by the symbolic and pragmatic acts that individuals and collectives ritually perform. This creates a gap in his analysis; while he focused solely on political structures, he overlooks how language in ritualised contexts, such as pledges and anthems, contributes to the continuous negotiation of identity. The present study directly addresses this omission by examining the Nigerian National Pledge and Anthem as institutionalised pragmatic acts within Mey's Pragmatic Act Theory. Unlike Onwuegbuchulam, who identifies the absence of frameworks for unity, this study shows how such frameworks are linguistically enacted. The pledge and anthem, through commissives, declaratives, and directives, do not remain passive symbols; rather, they function in ceremonial contexts to enact allegiance, inspire solidarity, and symbolically counterbalance systemic divisions. In this way, they serve as pragmemes of devotion and collective identity, complementing but also challenging Onwuegbuchulam's structural emphasis by demonstrating that national identity is sustained not only through governance but also through pragmatic performance and linguistic ritual.

Usman (2019) examines the socio-political symbolism of Nigeria's national symbols and their role in promoting unity, yet the work does not explore their operation through the lens of Mey's Pragmatic Act Theory. This omission leaves an analytical gap. Although existing studies recognise that the Nigerian National Pledge and Anthem have unifying and legitimising effects, there is limited research on how these effects are achieved through pragmatic acts that emerge from the interaction between linguistic structure, performance context, and socio-political environment. Addressing this gap is essential because it allows for a more comprehensive understanding of these texts not only as symbols of national unity but also as institutionalised speech acts that enact commitment and cohesion in specific contexts.

Moreover, visions of unity, such as “*one nation bound in freedom, peace, and unity*”, serve as symbolic bridges across Nigeria’s ethnic, cultural, and religious divides. Adegbite (2015) notes that in multilingual and multi-ethnic states, such inclusive language is vital for projecting a singular national identity. Van Dijk (2018) adds that political discourse often employs positive self-representation to encourage in-group solidarity, especially in contexts where internal divisions threaten stability.

Consequently, commitment and cohesion in the Nigerian National Pledge and Anthem are not separate functions but interdependent elements. Commitment anchors the individual’s duty to the nation, while cohesion ensures that this duty is understood as part of a larger, collective project. Together, they operate as core pragmemes, recurrent, context-bound acts that shape and reinforce the ideals of unity and loyalty in Nigeria’s national consciousness. This dual role confirms Mey’s (2001) view that pragmatic acts draw their power from the combination of linguistic form and the socio-political context in which they are performed.

Methodology

Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative research design because its focus is on interpreting language use within its socio-cultural and institutional context. Qualitative analysis is particularly suitable for examining the Nigerian National Pledge and Anthem as communicative acts, as it enables an in-depth exploration of their linguistic structures, pragmatic functions, and performance contexts (Creswell, 2014; Silverman, 2020). The analytical framework is grounded in Mey’s Pragmatic Act Theory, complemented by insights from Speech Act Theory to identify illocutionary forces embedded within the texts. The data analysis relied on manual coding procedures, which involved systematically categorising linguistic features such as pronoun use, commissive expressions, and collective references into relevant pragmemes. To enhance rigour, codes were cross-checked for consistency, and reflexivity was maintained to reduce researcher bias. A limitation of this study is that the analysis is restricted to the English versions of the pledge and anthem, without accounting for translations into Nigeria’s major indigenous languages; future research could expand the scope by incorporating multilingual perspectives to assess whether the pragmemes of commitment and cohesion shift across linguistic contexts.

Data Collection

The data for this study consist of the official English versions of the Nigerian National Pledge and the Nigerian National Anthem, *Nigeria, We Hail Thee*, as reintroduced in 2024. Both texts are sourced from official government publications and verified through the Federal Ministry of Information and National Orientation website to ensure authenticity. The choice of these texts is justified by their official status as national symbols and their regular performance in schools, public events, and state functions. Contextual information on the settings and occasions of performance is obtained from policy documents, educational directives, and media reports covering state ceremonies and national celebrations. This additional information provides the background necessary for interpreting the pragmatic force of the texts within real-life situations.

Analytical Framework

The analysis is guided primarily by Mey’s Pragmatic Act Theory (2001). The Nigerian National Pledge and Anthem are treated as pragmemes, generalised pragmatic acts that occur in recurring social situations. Each text is examined to identify the adapted pragmatic acts that emerge when the generalised form is realised in specific contexts, such as a school assembly or a diplomatic event.

The analytical process proceeds in three stages:

Line	Pragmeme	Speech Act	Illocutionary Force	Perlocutionary Effect
<i>Nigeria, we hail thee</i>	Cohesion	Declarative	Enacts collective reverence for the nation	Evokes pride and shared recognition of Nigeria as a unifying symbol
<i>Our own dear native land</i>	Commitment	Expressive	Affirms emotional attachment and belonging	Instils affection and loyalty, reinforcing national identity
<i>Though tribes and tongue may differ</i>	Cohesion	Assertive	Acknowledges diversity while setting unity as a higher value	Validates plurality, reassuring inclusion of ethnic and linguistic groups

Data Analysis Procedure

The analysis is conducted manually to allow for close reading and interpretation of the texts. Cohesive markers, thematic patterns, and pragmatic strategies are coded using an inductive approach, allowing themes to emerge from the data rather than imposing rigid pre-set categories. Contextual factors, such as the occasion of performance, the audience, and the socio-political climate, are integrated into the interpretation to ensure that the analysis captures the interaction between the text and its context.

Pragmatic Analysis Tables

Table 1: Nigerian National Pledge

Line	Speech Act Type	Associated Pragmeme	Contextual Pract	Contextual Interpretation
I pledge to Nigeria, my country	Commissive	Commitment	Allegiance Pract	Spoken in formal settings (schools, parades), this line functions as a direct personal oath, binding individuals to the nation.
<i>To be faithful, loyal, and honest</i>	Commissive	Moral Duty	Integrity Pract	Emphasises moral expectations of citizenship, especially in civic and educational contexts where

				integrity is underlined.
<i>To serve Nigeria with all my strength</i>	Commissive	Civic Responsibility	Mobilisation Pract	Evokes active participation; in contexts like independence celebrations, it reaffirms the citizen's duty to national development.
<i>To defend her unity</i>	Commissive/Declarative	Cohesion	Protective Pract	Recited in ceremonies, this line addresses Nigeria's fragility as a A multiethnic state, urging citizens to preserve harmony.

The Nigerian National Pledge functions as a commitment pragmeme, binding citizens to moral integrity, civic duty, and loyalty to the state. Its reliance on the pronoun “I” personalises responsibility, making each reciter individually accountable for the promises declared. The structure progresses from moral values (*faithful, loyal, and honest*) to civic service (*to serve Nigeria with all my strength*), and finally to protective duties (*to defend her unity and uphold her honour and glory*). In Mey’s terms, each line realises adapted practs, pedagogical in schools, where it teaches discipline and honesty, and legitimising in civic contexts, where it affirms allegiance to the state. The personification of Nigeria as “*her*” strengthens emotional attachment, elevating the pledge beyond a symbolic text into a performative act of loyalty. Through ritualised repetition, the pledge continually enacts individual alignment with the nation’s moral and political vision.

Pragmatic Analysis of the Nigerian National Anthem (1960, Reintroduced 2024)**Table 2: Stanza One**

Line	Speech Act Type	Associated Pragmeme	Contextual Pract	Contextual Interpretation
Nigeria, we hail thee, our own dear native land	Declarative/Expressive	Reverence & Unity	Identity Pract	Creates a shared symbolic identity; in official ceremonies, it signals respect for sovereignty.
Though tribe and tongue may differ, in brotherhood we stand	Declarative	Inclusive Unity	Integration Pract	Highlights unity in diversity, making it compelling in multiethnic contexts, such as political rallies or sports events.
Nigerians all are proud to serve our sovereign Motherland	Commissive/Expressive	Duty & Loyalty	Service Pract	frames service as a patriotic commitment resonates in contexts of civic duty (e.g., national service, army)

The first stanza constructs Nigeria as a collective identity, using inclusive pronouns “we,” “our” to unify its citizens. It acknowledges ethnic and linguistic diversity but reframes it as secondary to shared brotherhood. Its Pragmatic functions are a cohesive pragmeme, where the practice adapts to different settings (school assemblies → civic education; diplomatic events → sovereignty affirmation).

Table 3: Stanza Two

Line	Speech Act Type	Associated Pragmeme	Contextual Pract	Contextual Interpretation
Our flag shall be a symbol that truth and justice reign	Declarative/Commissive	Duty and Loyalty	Service Pract	Positions the flag as a moral emblem; in diplomatic contexts, it symbolises ethical leadership.

In peace or battle honour'd And this we count as gain	Declarative/ Expressive	National Honour	Valuation Pract	Frames sacrifice as noble; in remembrance events, it honours national heroes and fallen soldiers.
To hand on to our children a banner without stain	Commissive	Intergenerational Responsibility	Pract of continuity, pledging to transmit untainted values to future generations.	Projects duty into the future; in school settings, it transmits values of integrity and national pride to youth.

The second stanza emphasises symbolism and legacy. The flag becomes a visual metaphor for justice, integrity, and honour. This stanza enacts a commitment pragmeme, but one focused on moral continuity and transmission to ensure the nation's future remains unstained. In performance, it functions pedagogically (teaching children responsibility) and ideologically (legitimising the country as an enduring moral project).

Table 4: Stanza Three

Line	Speech Act Type	Associated Pragmeme	Contextual Pract	Contextual Interpretation
O God of all creation, grant this our one request	Declarative (Invocation)/ Expressive	Divine Authority/ Petition	Pract of religio-political grounding, invoking divine legitimacy.	Invokes divine authority; in solemn occasions, it legitimises nationhood by appealing to God.
Help us to build a nation where no man is oppressed	Directive/Commissive	Justice & Equality	Pract of mobilisation, directing effort toward fairness and inclusion.	Frames citizenship around fairness and justice; resonates strongly in contexts of political reform or democratic renewal.
And so with peace and	Declarative/Expressive	Aspiration & Blessing	Pract of projection,	Envisions prosperity; in

plenty Nigeria may be blessed			envisioning prosperity and peace as outcomes of justice.	celebratory contexts, it inspires optimism and collective hope.
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The third stanza situates Nigeria's destiny within a divine framework, shifting from civic duty to spiritual aspiration. It constructs a cohesive-pragmeme where national identity is tied to justice, peace, and divine blessing. In practice, this stanza adapts to contexts of prayerful solemnity, linking national unity to moral and spiritual legitimacy.

Analysis

The pledge operates as a pragmatic act that foregrounds individual responsibility. Through the repeated use of the singular pronoun "I," the pledge makes each citizen accountable for embodying civic virtues. The commissive acts, faithfulness, service, defence, and protection of honour, create a layered sense of obligation. These commitments resonate with Mey's pragmatic act theory, where meaning is not only embedded in words but also in context. In the Nigerian case, the pledge emerges as an adapted pragmeme that responds to the socio-political challenges of corruption, sectionalism, and weak civic culture. Its performance in formal and educational settings turns the pledge into a ritual of discipline. Citizens, particularly students, internalise a sense of civic duty through repetition. The illocutionary force of the pledge, therefore, lies not in describing values but in enacting them. The pledge becomes an ethical compass, directing individuals toward loyalty and responsibility within the framework of national identity.

Unlike the pledge, the anthem projects collective solidarity through the recurrent use of "we." This linguistic shift from the singular to the plural positions the anthem as a pragmeme of cohesion, where language works to fuse diverse ethnic, religious, and cultural identities into one imagined community. The declaratives in the opening stanza affirm shared ownership of the Nigerian state, while commissive and directive elements project aspirations of peace, justice, and cooperative nation-building.

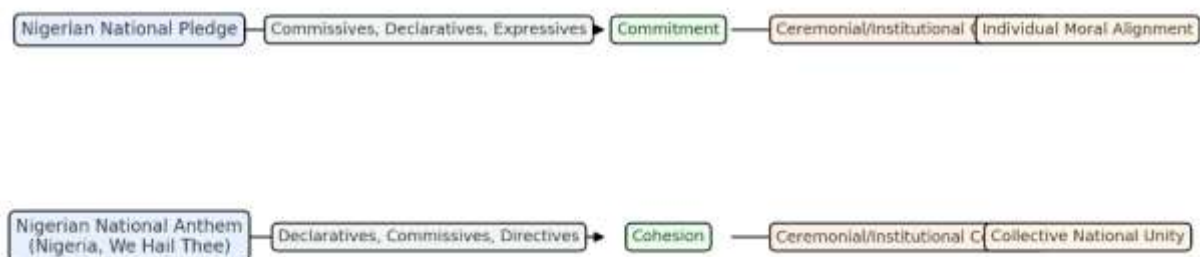
The anthem functions as a symbolic bridge across Nigeria's plurality. It promotes inclusivity by recognising the nation's diversity and then transcending it with a unifying discourse. The pragmatic force of the anthem lies in its capacity to create shared consciousness. In contexts of ceremonial performance, such as Independence Day, state occasions, and school assemblies, it reinforces the idea of belonging to a national collective that is greater than individual or sectional identities.

The pragmatic significance of these two national texts is best understood in their complementarity. The pledge addresses the individual, binding each citizen to moral and civic duties, while the anthem addresses the collective, binding the community to ideals of justice, peace, and unity. The synergy between the two ensures that nationhood is not only personal but also communal. Together, they construct a dual-layered discourse of identity: the pledge turns the individual into a moral actor, and the anthem transforms the collective into a cohesive body. This interplay aligns with the broader national project of sustaining unity within diversity. The ceremonial recitations institutionalise this duality, converting abstract ideals into lived practices that reinforce patriotism.

Again, both the pledge and the anthem are performative instruments rather than mere symbolic texts. Their pragmatic force lies in their ability to bind, integrate, and mobilise citizens. In a nation often fractured by ethnic rivalry, political instability, and weak institutional trust, the texts stand as linguistic strategies of cohesion. The pledge promotes ethical citizenship at the micro level, while the anthem promotes solidarity at the macro level. Together, they demonstrate how language functions as a resource for nation-building, moral education, and civic integration. Their continuous performance ensures that ideals of unity, responsibility, and justice remain present in the national psyche, even if socio-political realities often challenge these ideals.

The Nigerian National Pledge and Anthem emerge as institutionalised pragmatic acts whose illocutionary force is clarified in ceremonial contexts. The pledge operates as a discourse of commitment, focusing on the personal responsibilities of citizens, while the anthem operates as a discourse of cohesion, uniting the collective under shared ideals. Their complementary roles highlight the power of language to merge the individual and the community into a single national identity. These texts are not passive symbols but active instruments of nationhood. Their performative repetition serves to sustain Nigeria's fragile cohesion, reminding citizens of their duty to the nation and of the shared vision of unity, justice, and peace.

Pragmatic Act Mapping of Nigerian National Pledge and Anthem



Findings

1. Both texts consistently realise two central pragmemes, commitment (through commissive acts) and cohesion (through inclusive references and shared ideals).
2. The pledge uses first-person singular pronouns to personalise duty, whereas the anthem uses first-person plural pronouns to collectivise identity.
3. Both texts emphasise moral integrity, loyalty, unity, and service, indicating a deliberate ideological alignment in Nigeria's national symbols.
4. The pragmatic impact of both texts depends heavily on performance in formal, state-sanctioned settings, which legitimises and reinforces their illocutionary force.
5. The pledge reinforces individual responsibility, while the anthem projects a shared national vision, making them mutually reinforcing tools of nation-building.

Conclusion

The analysis of the Nigerian National Pledge and the revived National Anthem (*Nigeria, We Hail Thee*) demonstrates that both texts function as institutionalised pragmatic acts whose communicative power lies in their ability to enact, rather than merely express, national values. Through their fixed linguistic structures, carefully chosen vocabulary, and consistent ceremonial performance, they do more than describe ideals; they actively bind citizens to them. The study infers that the pragmemes of commitment and cohesion are not accidental features, but intentional constructs embedded within the design of both texts. The pledge's use of first-person singular pronouns (I pledge) personalises civic duty, making every reciter directly accountable for moral and patriotic obligations. In contrast, the anthem's use of inclusive first-person plural pronouns (we hail thee) collectivises identity, fostering a sense of shared ownership and solidarity. This difference in pronoun strategy reveals that the two texts complement each other: the pledge fosters the individual's moral alignment with the state. At the same time, the anthem unites the collective under a shared vision. The findings also confirm that the pragmatic force of these national symbols depends heavily on their performance context. Reciting them in schools, public gatherings, or state ceremonies intensifies their illocutionary force because these contexts confer legitimacy and symbolic weight. The moral and civic ideals embedded in the pledge and anthem serve both pedagogical and ideological functions, for policy-makers, sustaining the ceremonial use of the pledge and anthem can reinforce unity, accountability, and anti-corruption campaigns; for educators, routine recitation can be transformed into civic education by engaging students with the moral and patriotic values embedded in the texts; for cultural stakeholders, including artists, civil society, and faith groups, the pledge and anthem serve as cultural anchors for messages of solidarity and social renewal. Future research should include empirical studies with schoolchildren and surveys on the public's perception of the anthem change to provide deeper insight into its societal impact. Thus, these national symbols connect directly to Nigeria's broader discourse on unity, corruption, and civic responsibility, affirming their continued relevance as tools of nation-building.

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