

Pragmatic Acts and Politeness Strategies on the Official X Page of Nigerian Super Falcons

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ABSTRACT

Social media, unfettered by the constraints of traditional media, has emerged as the most potent avenue for expressing opinions on a variety of issues, including sports-related matters, in Nigeria. Existing studies on sports discourse on social media platforms have focused on sociological, economic, and cultural perspectives, with little attention to the linguistic and pragmatic construction of politeness in online sports discourse. This study, therefore, focuses on how politeness strategies are achieved through pragmatic acts on the official X account of the Nigerian Super Falcons during the 2024 Women's African Cup of Nations (WAFCON) tournament. The study draws on Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory and Jacob Mey's Pragmatic Acts Theory to examine how tweets on the Nigerian Super Falcons' official X page convey politeness in context. The findings reveal that the Super Falcons' official X page primarily employs bald-on-record politeness strategies, with few instances of off-record and negative politeness strategies during the WAFCON 2024 Tournament. The positive politeness strategy was achieved through the pragmatic acts of informing, motivating, and identity marking; the bald on record strategy was achieved through the pragmatic acts of celebrating and historical framing; the off-record strategy was achieved through the pragmatic acts of commanding, while the negative politeness strategy was achieved through the pragmatic act of motivating. Thus, the language used in the Super Falcons' official X space amplifies nationalism. Hence, language can be used as a tool that shapes a community, fosters identity creation, and aids social recognition, even on X.

Keywords: Politeness Strategy, Pragmatic Acts, Soccer, WAFCON, Super Falcons, X (Twitter)

Introduction

Social media platforms serve various functions, ranging from building a community to promoting fandom and enhancing user engagement. It has grown to a global user base for billions in 2024 and has been used by individuals and groups to enhance engagement, discussions, and insight sharing. The platforms are characterised as multifunctional and influential across several domains. According to van Dijck & Poell (2013), social media platforms have evolved over the years from simple networking tools into complex ecosystems that integrate information sharing, entertainment, and commerce. These platforms promote interaction, visibility, and real-time engagement, empowering users while raising concerns about surveillance, data privacy, and the commodification of attention (Andrejevic, 2013, in Aydin, 2025). Social media habituation has also significantly influenced educational competencies (Emama, 2023).

Discourses about sports have been prominent is topical on print and E-media (Diri, 2024). Sports have also been widely captured and discussed on various social media platforms, and one sport that has enjoyed broad engagement over time is football. It is one of the most discussed subjects on social media platforms, especially Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and X (formerly Twitter). Fans can actively engage and share insights and opinions on the sport, the players, and other social actors associated with the game. The relationship between social media and football is gradually shifting from just a global phenomenon to a culture that no longer involves just the male gender but also the female gender.

The X platform has, in recent years, been one of the most engaged and active platforms for quickly spreading information in Nigeria, and football is no exception. One relationship that football and the X platform share in Nigeria is how X has enabled expanded discussions about football beyond traditional media and has allowed players to connect with fans and vice versa, fostering a direct relationship between them. Beyond this, the platform is a quicker and easier way for fans to follow and discuss football, and to share news, updates, and opinions about it, both locally and internationally. On the X platform, users often present themselves in several ways, depicting what they represent, their beliefs, and who they are. This way, they can build an image they want their followers to see, which might come off as polite, impolite, or a blend of both, depending on the face they want to present.

Nigeria has an enviable sports pedigree (Mohammed, Obaje & Ekhareaf, 2024), and football is the most popular sport. Governed by the Nigerian Football Federation (NFF), the Nigerian women's national football team, popularly known as the Super Falcons, has qualified for the FIFA World Cup six times in eight tournaments and has won the Women's African Cup of Nations (WAFCON) 10 times. In the FIFA 2024 rankings, the team ranked 36th. This shows that the team has not just been active but has been vital in the history of sports in Nigeria and the globe at large. In their participation in various tournaments, the Super Falcons have enjoyed a degree of relevance, respect, and engagement from fans and Nigerians as a nation following their achievements and wins. This is not just done physically; more recently, it has been done on their official social media platforms. This is due to the rise in use and engagement with social media platforms over the past few years.

The Confederation of African Football's (CAF) WAFCON 2024 tournament attracted some engagement on the Super Falcons' X page, reflecting past victories and the anticipation built after its announcement. The anticipation and joy were fully displayed on the official X page, in a bid not only to keep fans informed but also to keep them engaged throughout the game. This resulted in consistent tweeting on the page and engagement from their fans and Nigerians, achieved by strategically aligning actions with words. This study, therefore, seeks to investigate how fans were consistently engaged through various pragmatic acts and the politeness strategies employed in tweets to keep followers anticipating and engaged throughout the tournament.

Literature Review

Social media discourse has attracted scholarly attention in recent years due to its unique features, which set it apart from face-to-face communication and other media platforms. One of the unique features of social media discourse is how participants achieve their face needs. Hence, studies have examined the use of politeness strategies on social media platforms, focusing on political discourses (Sunday & Eniola: 2017; Akinlabi: 2020; Adetunji: 2025) and other formal discourses (Chandra: 2021; Andersson: 2023; Waziri: 2022). The studies reveal that politeness strategies are employed in computer-mediated discourses in different ways and for different purposes. It can be achieved through simple or complex sentences, to meet a conversational need that does not threaten the face wants of the listeners, mainly when extra-linguistic elements like emoticons and reactions are employed (Andersson, 2023). While this is not always the case as some conversations end up being misinterpreted by the hearer (reader) who cannot engage with the extra linguistic cues of the speaker, Sunday & Eniola (2017) point out that social media platforms have a positive effect on politics in Nigeria but cautions that people must respect the face wants of others especially when commenting on their post. Waziri (2022) further notes that politeness strategies can be employed on social media platforms to resolve conflicts between interlocutors through commenting, liking, and sharing content, thereby maintaining content-positive, respectful communication. They may use hedging language to soften assertions and avoid appearing overly authoritative or confrontational. They may also use humour and emoticons to lighten the tone of a message, diffuse potential tension, and create a friendly, light-hearted atmosphere.

Furthermore, they may offer compliments or positive feedback to show support, validate contributions, and foster a sense of mutual appreciation. One such unique feature is the ability of users to show their positive or negative faces through what they share, like, or comment on. Studies have also examined the relationship between gender and politeness strategies in social media discourse (Maros & Rosli, 2017; Aydin, 2022). These studies have revealed that language use on social media varies in some contexts by participants' gender, and this, in turn, shapes how other platform members respond to posts or comments from other users.

In addition, linguistic studies have been carried out on sports discourses focusing on the language of the commentaries (Rawian et al.: 2024), media reports, and news headlines (Olagunju: 2016, Olagunju: 2019) (Al-Hindawi & Mirza: 2018, Lengacher: 2019, Shekhovskaya: 2020, Osisanwo et al.: 2024). Shekhovskaya (2020) concludes that the use of specific semantic frames and syntactic structures of simple sentences, alone and in compound sentences, and of separate words on the semantic level reveals the MetaSelf metaphor in the English-language sports discourse. This is used as a linguistic means of pragmatically influencing sports discourse in which sports are likened to a living organism, while Osisanwo et al. (2024) reveal that slang is the most prominent verbal art employed by the BBC Yoruba in relaying the English Premier League.

Furthermore, linguistic studies have examined language and sports on social media platforms (Lee, 2020; Biro, 2023; Sandjaja & Afriana, 2024). Lee (2020) reveals that there is the use of the us-versus-them dichotomy in conflict talks on Instagram conversations about sports through "explicit disparagement, disapproving representation of the other, stereotyping, and overgeneralization are readily utilized by both parties, who also occasionally engage in verbal reconciliation through lexical and syntactic mirroring" on sports discourses on social media platforms. One of the key findings of these studies is that the language used on social media platforms is unique and differs from that in other media of interaction and communication. This study, therefore, investigates how pragmatic acts are performed and the politeness strategies achieved through these pragmatic acts on the official X page of the Nigerian Super Falcons, in a bid to enhance players' and fans' communication during the WAFCON 2024 football tournament.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopts Penelope Brown and Steven Levinson's Politeness theory and Jacob Mey's Pragmatic Acts as its theoretical framework. Goffman first introduced politeness theory in 1963 and also introduced the notion of 'face'. This was developed by Brown and Levinson in 1978 as the Face Theory, which asserts that the basic notions of face are face, face-threatening acts (FTAs), and politeness strategies. According to Brown and Levinson (1987), face refers to a form of emotional investment that can be lost, maintained, or enhanced and must be constantly attended to. A Face-Threatening Act (FTA) is an act that attacks the addressee's face wants. Politeness Theory is a framework used to understand how individuals manage face and politeness in communication. According to Brown and Levinson (1987), there are four types of politeness strategies in human communication: positive, negative, bald-on-record, and off-record.

- Positive Politeness: The positive politeness strategy is used to affirm an individual's face wants. It is aimed at boosting the hearer's positive face wants.
- Negative Politeness: Negative politeness strategies are used to respect hearers' need to be independent, to have freedom, and not to be imposed on by others (Osisanwo, 2008). Speakers at this point employ indirect requests, hedging, and deferential expressions to maintain politeness and avoid conflict.
- Off-Record Politeness: Off-record politeness involves hinting, an ambiguous intention to allow the hearer to interpret the meaning for themselves, and indirectly conveying a message without making explicit requests or demands. Speakers often use vague language, allusions,

or humour to indirectly communicate their intentions, allowing others to save face while still understanding the intended meaning.

- Bald on record: This strategy is a direct attack on the face wants of an individual. The speaker does not attempt to minimise or control the FTA. It is a direct and unambiguous act on the hearer, not minding how they would feel or react.

Mey's pragmatic acts theory is a departure from what is believed to be the excessive individualism and abstraction of earlier approaches to language as a tool for performing actions. Instead of examining utterances in isolation, as in Austin's (1962) Speech Acts theory, the theory holds that language gains its pragmatic potency only within specific social settings and institutional frameworks. Mey (2001) asserts that the exact string of words can constitute entirely different actions depending on who is speaking, who is listening, where the interaction is occurring, and the social standards established between the discourse participants. The theory is action-based because it adapts the discourse participants to the context and the context to the participants (Ojobo-Charlie: 2025). The textual part concerns the contextual features that affect communication. The elements are: inference (INF), reference (REF), voice (VCE), shared situational knowledge (SSK), metaphor (MPH), and metapragmatic joker (M).

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative method, focusing on posts made on the official X page of the Nigerian Super Falcons during the WAFCON 2024 football tournament, which took place in Morocco from 5th to 26th of July, 2025. The study used a purposive sampling technique, targeting posts made during this period. A total of 30 tweets were selected based on their relevance to the current study. Comments, shared posts, and advertisements were not included in the data. These tweets were subjected to pragmatic analysis.

Analysis and Discussion

The tweets on the official Super Falcons' X page were characterised by the four politeness strategies as propounded by Brown and Levinson. One or more pragmatic acts achieved each of these strategies.

1. Positive politeness through the pragmatic acts of informing, motivating, and identity marking.

In the Super Falcons' tweets during the WAFCON 2024 football tournament, the dominant politeness strategy is positive politeness. This strategy was achieved through pragmatic acts of informing, motivating, and identity-marking.

Extract 1

- i. Nigeria NG 3-0 Tunisia TN
A commanding performance from the Super Falcons to kick off our #WAFCON2024 journey 
Goals from Oshoala, Rinsola, and Ihezuo seal a three-nil win over Tunisia.
We're up and running!
- ii. We're in the final, baby!
- iii. Mood after silencing our hosts!
Una dey feel am?! 
- iv. Tell your neighbors, tell the world — the Super Falcons reign supreme again!
- v. That was tense... but tell your neighbour — MISSION X is ON! 

- vi. The Babajide Rinsola Show 

- 1 assist. 1 goal. Just 45 minutes.
- The Super Falcons winger lit up the first half in Casablanca ⚽.
- vii. Who's your Fans' Player of the match?
- viii. FT' Nigeria NG 5-0 zM Zambia
 - A five-star performance sends the Super Falcons into #WAFCON2024 semifinals!
 - Eyes on the prize, #MissionX rolls on 100
- ix. We've touched down at the Olympic Stadium, ●.
- Team news coming up... □
- x. The votes are in! 🗳
- Ashleigh Plumptre is your Fans' Player of the Match! 🏆🦅
- xi. We stay locked in
- xii. Where in the world are you watching from?
- Drop your location and rep your zone
- xiii. Second half underway in Casablanca!
- Let's finish strong, Super Falcons.
- xiv. Our 12th player- the amazing fans!
 - Thank you for showing up and showing out these past two games.
 - Una too much!

The tweets that make up the Extract 1 project show that the speaker (poster) and hearers (followers) are co-operators and members of a community of like-minded people to see the Super Falcons win the tournament. Thus, the poster employs the positive politeness strategy in order to meet the positive face wants of the fans. The poster not only updates followers but also engages them through pragmatic acts of informing, providing live updates on the players' experiences before, during, and after the matches. The tweets include statements like "Nigeria NG 3-0 Tunisia TN" and "We've touched down at the Olympic Stadium, ● Team news coming up...", which keep fans informed about the team's progress. The contextual elements of Shared Situational Knowledge (SSK) show that there have been previous conversations between the community members about the game, hence tweets like "We're up and running", "Second half underway in Casablanca!", "We're in the final, baby!" The poster also employs the Voice (VCE) to express gratitude to the fans: "Thank you for showing up and showing out these past two games," as a way of showing that the fans' support is being seen and felt all the way.

The second pragmatic act employed in the tweets to achieve a positive politeness strategy is motivating. This act is achieved through the contextual elements of SSK, REF, and INF. Tweets like "Let's finish strong, Super Falcons" and "We stay locked in" are calls to shared hope and anxiety, and to a collective spirit to keep expectations up even in unlikely situations, especially given the SSK that the match was not going in the Super Falcons' favour. The tweets reveal a degree of compassion for the fans, building solidarity through a shared stressful experience. "Eyes on the prize, #MissionX rolls on 100", "That was tense... but tell your neighbour — MISSION X is ON! 🏆🔥" maintain expectation even in the face of a likely draw. At this point, the optimism is declarative, and the poster Inferenes (INF) declares that they would win for the tenth time despite the challenges they face throughout the tournament. The tweets also make indirect References (REF) to their previous nine wins. They are phrased as confident predictions intended to share hope and optimism for a positive outcome, presupposing that fans are already picturing their win.

Furthermore, the tweets employ in-group language for branding, culturally coded bonding, interactive fan engagement, commanding, and solidarity to achieve a positive politeness strategy. This is aimed at directly including fans in the team's motivated mindset. Tweets like "♪ Mood after silencing our hosts! Una dey feel am?! ☺" are acts of identity marking aimed at creating a public image of oneness between the fans and the players, and they are achieved through the Voice (VCE) of celebrating and SSK of their most recent win against the Moroccans. The repeated use of "your, we, our, you, us, and una" shows that the poster is very conscious of followers and what keeps them together. This merges the team's identity with the fans' as one entity and aligns the federation, players, and fans into a collective. The tweets also ask for fan input by asking: "Who's your Fans' Player of the match?" and then announces, "The votes are in! 🎉 Ashleigh Plumptre is your Fans' Player of the Match! 🎉" as a collaborative ritual that strengthens the bond of the community. One element employed in the tweets to achieve identity marking is the employment of Metapragmatic Joker (M) through the consistent use of hashtags: #SoarSuperFalcons, #MissionX, #NGARSA. These are exclusive slogans that only the in-group (Nigerian fans) uses and understands deeply. Complimenting teammates: "Goals from Oshoala, Rinsola, and Ihezuo seal a three-nil win over Tunisia", "The Babajide Rinsola Show 🎊 1 assist. 1 goal. Just 45 minutes" is also employed to enhance group face and motivate individuals. This way, the poster can meet the positive face wants of fans and followers, keeping them glued to the team and committed to its success and victory.

2. Bald on-Record Politeness through Pragmatic Acts of Celebrating and Historical Framing

This strategy is used not to impose on the fans, but to project the team's strength and confidence. The speaker does not mitigate face-threatening acts here because the statements are about the team's power. This is achieved through the pragmatic acts of celebrating and historical framing.

Extract 2

- xv. "CHAMPIONS OF AFRICA...!"
- xvi. "64' GOAL!"
- xvii. "We lead, others follow — 10 titles in the bag."
- xviii. "The Super Falcons are in full control of the game; sharp, composed, and dictating the tempo."
- xix. "Three points secured and a foot firmly in the quarter-finals."
- xx. "Job done. On to the next!"
- xxi. "isn't just part of history; she has written her own chapter."
- xxii. "One step closer to the crown, Mission X is ALIVE!
NEVER IN DOUBT.
- xxiii. NIGERIA ARE IN THE #WAFCON2024 SEMI-FINALS ❤️
"The numbers tell the story of our #WAFCON2024 group stage journey
Solid, but we know there's more to give. 99'
- xxiv. "The cross. The header. The moment. 99
Three years ago, @Rasheedat08 sealed the win with a brilliant header against
Cameroon in our #WAFCON2022 quarter-final.
Now wearing the armband, she leads us into another quarter-final battle at
#WAFCON2024.
- xxv. "Throwback to WAFCON22 in Rabat.
Goals from Ifeoma Onumonu and Christy Ucheibe sealed a 2-0 win over
Botswana.
Same fixture loading tomorrow..."

While factual and celebratory declarations were made, historical records were also presented unmitigated in the tweets that comprise Extract 2. Thus bringing in the pragmatic acts of celebrating and historical framing. This fulfils the fans' desire to support a powerful, winning team. The tweets, "Job done. On to the next!""CHAMPIONS OF AFRICA...!", "64' GOAL!", "We lead, others follow...", "The Super Falcons are in full control of the game; sharp, composed, and dictating the tempo" are bald assessment of their own performance, acknowledging reality and a way of celebrating the most recent victory of the team through the SSK of the just concluded match, VCE of confidence and INF that they cannot lose the match to any of their opposing teams.

The statistics about Oshoala's goal-scoring history, "isn't just part of history, she has written her own chapter," is used prodigiously to state facts and issue commands with no mitigation, reflecting supreme confidence. Similarly, the tweet about Rashidat's victory some years back "Three years ago, @Rasheedat08 sealed the win with a brilliant header against Cameroon in our #WAFCON2022 quarter-final" and the throwback to their victory against Botswana at WAFCON 2022 "... sealed a 2-0 win over Botswana. Same fixture loading tomorrow..." shows that even before the match, the players held on to their victory in time past as a way to boost their confidence against their upcoming rivals. Through the pragmatic act of historical framing with the contextual elements of SSK of the ongoing tournament, REF past WAFCON tournaments, and the Metapragmatic joker (M) of emoticons and hashtags, the tweets can confidently, without any form of mitigation, declare their victory to their fans even before the match. This could be said to be an element used to show their fans that they are confident and capable of winning repeatedly.

3. Off-Record Politeness through the Pragmatic Act of Commending/ Commenting

Off-Record politeness is subtly present in the tweets. The poster, on a few occasions, employed the off-record politeness strategy to prompt readers to think and derive the intended meaning on their own. This was achieved through the pragmatic acts of commanding/ complimenting.

Extract 3

xxvi. "These girls have got serious moves! 😊"

xxvii. Some things never change 99

xxviii. Deborah Abiodun understood the assignment- Moro dance activated

The excerpts above are examples of off-record politeness strategies that reflect the poster's need for readers to extract meaning themselves through ambiguity. The tweet about the girls' dance moves could be interpreted as an off-the-record invitation to appreciate and enjoy the players' personalities beyond football. This is also reflected in the tweet "... understood the assignment. Moro dance activated" when Deborah Abiodun was shown doing the trending *Moro* dance to celebrate victory. The tweet does not specify whether the assignment referred to is the game or the dance itself. It is an off-record strategy employed to divert their followers' attention from the game to a bit of extra activity, especially dancing. Similarly, one of the posts states, "Some things never change" as a way to admire the team players. This, however, does not clearly state what remains the same, but keeps the fans guessing that there is something consistent among the players. This, in turn, indirectly strengthens the fan-player bond. The contextual elements of SSK, INF, REF, and M, and the still and motion pictures showing the players dancing and celebrating their victory, show that every tweet made with the off-record strategy is aimed at commanding and complementing the players' efforts to do other things well aside from being good footballers.

4. Negative Politeness through the Pragmatic Act of Motivating

This is the least used strategy on the page. The tweets make very few requests of the fans that would threaten their negative face. The only implicit request is for their support, which is framed as a shared activity rather than an imposition.

Extract 4

xxix. It "feels good to be here. I can't wait to win."

xxx. We are sooo backkkkk- tell the world the real queens are coming!

Through the tournament, the Super Falcons' official X page featured tweets aimed at motivating the players, but even more their fans. The tweets in Extract 4 aim to motivate fans and keep their hopes for the Super Falcons' victory high. The act is achieved through the contextual elements of SSK, M, and INF. These elements are employed in the tweets to capture the players' experiences and feelings and, simultaneously, to bring fans into the energy the players are putting into the game despite the challenges they face in achieving MissionX. Tweets 29 and 30 express confidence in the players' ability to win the tournament. However, the poster does not say this directly and only INF that they (the Super Falcons) and no other team would win the match and every other 'queen' that emerged before them were not the 'real' queens. To avoid imposing on others' face needs, the tweets are written in an ambiguous way. There is no direct inference about whether the other teams are capable of winning, whether they are interested in winning the match, or whether they are actual queens. The tweets focus solely on the speaker's facial expressions, leaving readers to infer the speaker's intentions.

Discussion of Findings/ Conclusion

The tweets on the official X account of the Super Falcons during the WAFCON 2024 football tournament were all aimed at informing, motivating, celebrating, historical framing, and commending. These pragmatic acts performed in the tweets were achieved through the contextual elements of SSK, INF, REF, VCE, M, and MPH. These elements were employed to meet the poster's and the fans' communicative needs. They further aided the fulfillment of the poster's and the followers' wants. Most times, the poster considered the positive face wants of followers and, at some points, employed the bald-on-record strategy, followed by the off-record strategy, and, in a few instances, negative politeness strategies. As a page that focuses on identity representation, the poster went so far as to create a public image of the team and fans as one community by using in-group communication techniques, such as hashtags, Naija, symbol hashtags, and historical references. The study thus reveals that the official Super Falcons' X page is not just a space of Nigerians interested in the victory of the team but a community of people who employ language in a way that meets the positive face wants of the fans without necessarily paying attention to the face wants of others who do not share their common goal or cultural background. Hence, language can be used as a tool that shapes community, fosters identity, and aids social recognition, even on X.

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