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Exploring Speech Acts and Common Ground in Student Corruption Discourse: Insights from Southeastern Universities in Nigeria

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A R T I C L E I N F O

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A B S T R A C T

Using the mixed method research design, the study looks at how students use speech acts and shared knowledge to negotiate meanings around morally and legally questionable behaviours, drawing on Speech Act Theory and Common Ground Theory. The study's examination of focus groups, participant interviews, and naturally occurring conversations shows that corruption is frequently spread covertly through code-switching and uniquely grounded expressions that mainly rely on mutual understanding among peers. These pragmatic strategies assist to preserve group cohesion and steer clear of overt moral judgment in addition to reflecting underlying sociocultural attitudes regarding corruption. The study contributes to how language both reflects and reinforces institutional and pervasive corruption in higher educational institutions by revealing the influence of context, purpose, and common knowledge on corruption-related discourse.

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INTRODUCTION

One essential tool that people use to communicate with one another is language. The word "language" has been used conceptually to refer to all human efforts, including the language of politics, the media, and similar fields, and this is reflected in its very technical usages. In essence, language is a means of communicating social reality. Human interaction and activities are impossible without language- verbal or non-verbal. Language plays a communicative role in all forms of discourse.

In social and interpersonal discourses, people engage in different stylistic use of language to achieve their goals. This nature of word meaning makes it possible to assign references that are not usually found in dictionary descriptions (Olinya & Ezeifeka, n.d, p.1). This is also captured in the view of Holmes (2008), who states that language varies according to its uses, it users, where it is used and to whom, as well as according to who is using it. The way people use language is influenced by the social context in which they find themselves. Choices of words and even rules for conversing are highly determined by certain social requirements. Urser & Prideaux (1989) see such social factors as age of participants, degree of familiarity, relative intimacy of the participants, subject matter, relative differences in perceived power and authority of participants and a host of others as contributing to how language is used. However, whatever the motivating factors responsible for the variant use of language are, the aim is to communicate the intended message.

The linguistic cues collated in this study are found to portend pragmatic features and properties. Their meanings cannot be deduced by merely looking at the literal or surface value of the words that constitute them. Speech acts analysis of linguistic cues unravels the intention of the addresser, and how the addressee responds to the message leaves one with nothing but a misconstrued utterance. In explicating the pragmatic value of the linguistic cues of corruption, the illocutionary act by Searle is used as a frame for analysing the illocutionary force in the cues used by interlocutors.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Adegoju and Raheem (2015) examine language habits associated with aspects of corrupt practices in Nigeria. They classify the different data elicited using pragmatic strategies, into different contexts such as blatant requests (a strategy used by familiar people); cunning/subtle elicitations (question-like strategy used to elicit empathy from the one who bribe is requested from); proverbial/metaphorical cues (using proverbs and metaphors to mask corrupt requests); and technical/bureaucratic nounce formations (verbal cues used in corporate establishments). Their study underlines the fact that corrupt practices are expressed through languages, and that the nuances of corruption can be tracked and forestalled through the investigation of users of the codes outlined as cues of corruption. Further, they recommend an empirically based research to investigate how corruption is being aided through the use language in Nigeria. Their recommendation shows a gap in empirically based literatures in the area of the language/linguistic cues of corruption, a gap the present study sets out to fill.

Isyaku, Hasan and Kunalan (2016) in a different study examine the use of corruption metaphors in online media sources in Nigeria, Iraq and Malaysia. Their study sourced data from five (5) online news outlets each of the three study areas, to comparatively analyse how the three countries conceptualise corruption in their online media reports. Two major questions that guide their research and data analysis are; (i.) what are the different conceptual metaphors used to depict corruption in the three countries under study, and (ii.) What similarities and differences abound in the conceptualizations of corruption by the three countries? By adopting the conceptual metaphor theory by Lakoff & Johnson (1980), the study reveals that metaphors have become one of the most powerful sources of force used by the media, which acts as tools to shape the mentality of the members of the society. The study suggests that journalists have to be aware and careful of the use, as well as misuse of corruption metaphors to avoid unnecessary negative circumstances.

The above study focuses on the use of metaphor by the media in reporting corruption to mass audience, and does not give a clue of other forms of linguistic cues of corruption. Aside being used to report corruption, metaphors are also used to conceal and hide corruption and corrupt practices. This is the academic vacuum the current study sets out to fill, examining the manifestations of and use of metaphors to express corruption.

Ogunmuyiwa (2019) in another study examines language choices related to the theme of corruption in speeches made by Nigerian presidents, between 1957-2015. Using the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) as theoretical frameworks, the study provides an overview of how corruption discourse has metamorphosed over the years, to determine specific facets of the construction of corruption, analyse how the interpersonal meta function of language is enacted, interrogate from a critical discourse standpoint, the ideological and partisan interests and base of language choices in speech, and to evaluate the different ways different presidents try to combat corruption in their speeches. The findings from the study show that corruption is a reoccurring discourse in the speeches of Nigerian presidents. It also points out that language choices largely deployed by the presidents indicate strategic ambivalence towards tackling corruption. The study also reveals that the fear of post-power loss of immunity from prosecution is also key in explaining the patterns of language use/choices observed in speeches.

Ojo, Ayandele and Egbeleye (2020) study the euphemisms of corruption among students of higher institutions in southwest Nigeria. The main objective of their study is to reveal corrupt practices in Nigeria educational sector that are concealed because of the euphemistic language used by students to describe and help perpetuate corrupt practices in their academic relationships with academic and non-academic staff of the institution. Their findings show the use of 'runs', as a major euphemistic code for the expression of any corrupt practice by students in the universities studied. They also note that corrupt practices in higher institutions range from examination malpractices, trading sex for grades, monetary bribery of school officials, using fake documents for admission/clearance purposes. The study concludes that the use of euphemistic

expressions such as 'sort', 'settle', 'runs', 'follow-up' and sundry codes used for masking corruption must be identified by school authorities and closely monitored to avoid further occurrence of corruption in the educational sector.

The study of Ojo, Ayandele and Egbeleye (2020) differ from our current study in two ways. Firstly, their study majored only on the use of euphemistic expressions as codes for masking corruption, leaving other possible forms of linguistic cues of corruption unexplored. Secondly, their study was situated in the southwest universities, while the current study is situated in the southeast institutions. These differences provide a gap in literature which the current study intends to fill.

Khalif, Ong'onda and Mwihia (2022) examine how language is used to represent the menace of corruption in Kenyan print media. The data used in the study are got from two major newspapers printed in the country; the Daily Nation and Standard Newspapers. Data from the print materials are analysed using the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as propounded by FairClough (1989, 1992 and 1993). Their study reveals that there are features evident in the language of representation of corruption and corruption-related clauses, which they categorize into; lexical features and linguistic features. Under the lexical features, they note that nouns and noun phrases are often used to express corruption. The linguistic features evidently show the use of clichés and epithets as persuasive and convincing devices used in editorial writing by the media. The study concludes that language avails Kenyan editors unique means to craft and frame messages of corruption in a persuasive manner to evoke the thoughts of the readers on the menace of corruption perpetrated by those in authority.

The study of Khalif, Ong'onda and Mwihia (2022) represents the root of corruption to be from the angle of those in authority. It does not capture the possibility of corruption perpetrated by the common citizen. It also views language used by the media in Kenya as a tool in fighting corruption. However, it does not take into cognisance the evident use of language by the media, those in authority and the general public, in masking corruption. This, therefore, is the gap in literature the current study sets out to specifically fill. The current study analyses how language is being used to mask and conceal corruption tendencies, with special focus on public institutions of higher learning in southeast Nigeria.

Patrick (2025) explores the sociolinguistic aspects corruption in public universities in the south-eastern part of Nigeria. His study hinged on the theory of language code by Bernstein. The study notes that although there are few expressions that explicitly or elaborately convey corruption, there more instances where corruption is covertly expressed in the use of restricted languages. The study identifies the use of Igbo, English and Nigerian Pidgin languages as the languages used. Drawing from the study location, the study establishes that Igbo language and the Nigerian pidgin are most employed by the participants in expressing covert corruption tendencies. From his study, Patrick (2025) reports that the participants who are mostly Igbo also employed the use of proverbs (Igbo proverbs) as covert expressions of corruption.

Our study differs from that of Patrick (2025) in the area of linguistic area of analysis. While Partick (2025) presents the sociolinguistic dynamics that play out in the corruption discourse in public universities in the south east, we are more concerned with the pragmatic aspects of these linguistic cues employed for expressing corruption.

METHODOLOGY

This section discusses the method used for data collection for this study. Adopting the mixed method research paradigm, data was gathered primarily by using the key informant interview (KIV) method where purposively selected participants were categorised into different focused groups. The participants in the focused groups were selected based on two criteria. The first was their willingness to participate in the research, and secondly, their ability to identify and interpret the different linguistic cues of corruption used in the selected universities. The researchers also employed the use of participant observation and informal interaction methods to allow participants freely state their experiences and how they have encountered corrupt practices.

Out of approximately 16 public universities in the south east, the researchers delimited the collection of data to 10 universities comprising of one federal university and one state university from each of the 5 states. The 10 universities which are represented in the table below were selected because of their large student population which marks them out as veritable sources for the data this study requires. Quantitatively, the study adopts the use of simple percentages explain the data presented. Qualitatively, the researchers classify the data recorded into the different pragmatic acts they are considered to have performed. The demographic features of the participants such as gender, ethnicity, educational qualification, occupation and institution were also documented. The age range of the participants varied between 25 and 55 years. From the demographic representation above, 65% of the participants are females, while 35% are males. On the basis of their educational qualifications, 50% of the participants are undergraduates students of the universities visited having obtained SSCE (Senior Secondary Certificate Examination) results as their highest qualification, 25% are graduates with only first degrees (BA, BSc, BEd, etc), 15% have master's degrees in their respective fields, and 10% have Ph.Ds. In terms of occupation, 20% of participants are lecturers while 50% and 30% are students and administrative (or non-teaching staff), respectively.

RESEARCH RESULT AND DISCUSSION

To analyse the illocutionary acts in this study, the corpus is broadly divided into two categories, for the purpose of clarity. The first category deals with the illocutionary speech acts in utterances used to code corruption, while the second category deals with illocutionary speech acts in the names tags used to code corruption. The utterances are sentential cues that do not refer to people but to the activity intended by the speaker while the name tags are cues that are used to label or refer to the addressee in a manner that provokes a perlocutionary act in response to the label called.

Illocutionary Acts in the Linguistic Cues (Utterances) of Corruption

In this section, the researchers analyses illocutionary acts in utterances gathered from the field. Using Searle's classification of illocutionary speech acts, and based on the data presented in this study, the researchers identifies three illocutionary speech acts performed by the utterances. They are discussed below:

Directives

Twenty-one utterances from the corpus presented below are found to have features of directive illocutionary speech acts. The directive function played by the utterances in this study are primarily requesting and commanding. Out of the twenty-one (21) utterances, thirteen (13) utterances, which represent 61.91% are commanding linguistic cues, six (6) utterances (28.57%) are questioning cues, while two (2) (9.52%) are suggesting cues. The high percentage of commands derived from the data shows that the addresser adopts an authoritative tone in collecting illegal incentives for services and favours, thereby threatening the addressee to do what is required of them by the addresser, without negotiations or choice. The directive utterances are presented in Table 1 below;

Table 1. Directive Utterances as Linguistic Cues of Corruption. (Culled From (Patrick, 2025, P.38-40), And Expanded)

Linguistic cues (utterance)	Directive type
Where is your razor blade?	questioning
Where is your tithe/offering?	questioning
Go and bring money for baby food	commanding
Join the moving ship	commanding/suggesting
Tinyere Father ihe na boot (put something in Priest's booth)	commanding
Ị hụna Father? (have you seen the Priest)	questioning
Ego fuel kwanụ? (what about money for fuel)	questioning
Weta ego pure water (bring money for sachet water)	commanding
Bịa confession (come for confession)	commanding
Show me love	commanding
Troway salute	commanding
Kip somtin for cold wota o	commanding
Shake ya bodi	commanding
No be to tok, na to do	suggesting
Me gharịa ahụ (shake your body/do something)	commanding
Ị ma ịhe i kwesịrị ime (you know what you ought to do)	suggesting
Ọbụ na onweghị ihe ị ga-enye m? (is it that there is nothing you want to give to me?)	questioning
Weta ihe e ji anụ mmanya (bring something for drinks)	commanding
No be talk, na to do	commanding
You tink say na fritown you dey?	questioning
Under the table	commanding

Assertives

Sixteen utterances from the data set presented in this study are found to have features of assertive illocutionary speech acts. 68.75% of the utterances are the stating assertive type, while 18.75% and 12.5% are announcing and claiming assertive types respectively. They are presented in Table 4 below:

Table 2. Assertive Utterances as Linguistic Cues of Corruption (Culled from (Patrick, 2025, P.38-40), and Expanded)

Linguistic cues (utterance)	Assertive type
My birthday is tomorrow	claiming
Eribe m nri since morning (I have not eaten since morning)	claiming
Ogbu opi na-ezi imi (a labourer deserves his wages)	stating
onye kwe, chi ya ekwe (Life/success responds to one's determination)	stating
Na umbrella dey prevent rain	stating
Egg shell don crack	announcing
Na fuel my moto carry come here	stating
Wit speshal cordination, satan go fit see god o	stating
If you on faya, you go see smoke	stating
Na ink my biro dey use	stating
Garri wey rise, na water wey dem add cos am	stating
Notin dey free even for freetown..	stating
Ana m añukwa ihe jụrụ oyi (I drink something cold)	announcing
Anaghị agba aka ahụ nwata eze (nothing goes for nothing)	stating
obodo kpọrọ akpọ / obodo kpọsiri ike (society/ country (living condition) is hard)	announcing
e menyere nwaogwugwu, e menyere nwanọsike (act in equity and fairnesss)	stating

The assertive speech acts as shown in Table (4) are laden with the primary function of stating what the addresser considers to be true of the world. Here, the speakers carefully employ the use of words that align with their worldview or perspective of what is true of the world. However, their usage of these acts are employed to represent the link between what is intended and what is true / factual in the real world. In our study, the speakers adopt the use of proverbs that portray positivity to fit into their intentions (illegal demand of money).

Commissives

In the data presented in this study, five (5) utterances are found to express the features of commissive acts. The utterances commit the addresser to performing a duty in the future for the addressee. The linguistic cues used here are reassuring as well as promising that provided the addressees plays their own part (giving illegal money), the addresser will fulfil the terms and conditions for which the money was received.

Table 3. Commissive Utterances as Linguistic Cues of Corruption (Culled From (Patrick, 2025, P.38-40), And Expanded)

Linguistic cues (utterance)	Commissive type/function
Wit speshal cordination, satan go fit see God o	Promising
If you on faya, you go see smoke	Promising
Money for hand, back for ground	Promising
After reggae, we go play blues	Promising
Aka nri kwọọ aka ekpe, aka ekpe akwọ aka nri (A good turn deserves another)	promising

A careful analysis of the illocutionary acts performed in the coding corruption in the utterances shows that of the five classifications of speech acts by Searle, only three (directive, assertive and commissive) of these acts are used by addressers to code corruption and convey their intention to the addresser.

The use of directives and assertives over commissives show that although the addressers use the codes to request illegal financial commitment for a favour to be done in the future, they (the addressers) seldom commit themselves in their speech, to fulfilling their role in the agreement reached. In using more commissive utterances, they open up the conversation for negotiations which may present them in a weak perspective or at the mercy of the addressee. In using more assertive and directive utterances, they exert a non-negotiable force, leaving the addressee with no other option but to 'dance to their tune'.

Illocutionary acts in the linguistic cues (names) of corruption

The data presented in this study show that some of the linguistic cues used in public universities in the southeast to code corruption are visible in the usage of (nick)names during conversations by addressers, to refer to the addressee and other concepts in their conversation. The names used in referring to the addressee by the addresser are nicknames that portray the contextual idea the addresser has about the addressee.

Nicknames according to Holland (1990, p. 256) are "used in different ways by different groups of people… with their respective… social structures, the cultural milieu, out of which their usage arises". Leslie and Skipper (1990) corroborating the view of Holland (1990), state that nicknames are dependent on contextual properties in creating belief and recognition of meaning, even if it means nothing more than the simple identification of that person.

By nicknaming the addressee, the addresser subtly accepts the fact that the addressee is able to fulfil the act of providing what is asked for. On the other hand, the addressee by responding to the nickname used, subtly accepts their role (of providing the required item) in the context of the conversation. The illocutionary act performed by nicknaming in this study is the declarative act of christening and praising the addressee, which produces a positive force of praising, encouraging, recognizing and endorsing (Hang'ombe and Siantumbu, 2018, in Mashiri, 2004).

Table 4. Linguistic Cues (nicknames) of Corruption

Linguistic cues (nicknames)	Illocutionary act
Odogwu na dollar/ odogwu	praising/ christening
Ultimate principality	praising/ christening
Importer and exporter	praising/ christening
Jagaban	praising/ christening
Oga kpata kpata	praising/ christening
Dangote/Otedola	praising/ christening
Dimkpa (a strong/noble man)	praising/ christening
Onye isi (leader)	praising / christening
Mula/allawe/ransom/rubbers/bars	christening

The nicknaming strategy used by the addressers above provides a rapport between the addressers and the addressees, which is usually a foreground that enables the addresser to make (illegal) requests that the addressee will not be able to refuse, as Adams (2009) puts it, "in nicknaming, there are lots of business to transact, because power is brokered" (p.89). Sometimes, the nicknames are used alone, and the addressee understands from the context of the conversation that the addresser infers the ability of the addressee to fulfil the demands associated with the nickname.

The nicknames Otedola and Dangote are names of known business moguls in Nigeria, who are listed among some of the richest men in the world. It is common knowledge in the nation that when one is referred to as either Dangote or Otedola, the reference is associated with wealth more than it is about the original bearers of the name. The association of the nicknames to wealth is visible in contemporary Nigerian hip-hop music were the song writers use the terms Dangote and Otedola to mean one who is wealthy and commands appreciable level of affluence.

Odogwu, Dimkpa and Onye isi can be roughly translated into 'a person of appreciable financial means', 'a strong person' and 'leader'. These nicknames are products of the Igbo-speaking participants of the conversation. The use of the nickname Odogwu evolves from its use among Igbo speakers to being used by young people across different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Odogwu was popularized by the song entitled 'Odogwu' by Burnaboy, a Nigerian musician, who lyrically referred to Odogwu as a 'wealthy person'.

Two other terms that are coded as linguistic cues that are cardinal to the context of this study that also exhibit the illocutionary act of declaration (specifically, christening) are (i) money and (ii) process of collection. Addressers have developed / christened terms to perform declarative acts, thereby coding the money they request for illegal services, as well as the process in which the monies are collected.

Terms such as 'ransom', 'allawee', 'rubbers', 'mula', 'pepper', 'bars', 'green card', 'minimum wage', 'VAT' (from value added tax) and 'support system' have been variously used as covert codes to mean 'money given for gratification' . Addressers often switch from any of the term to the other. Except for the term 'ransom', which is a unique creation of students in Abia State University, the interlocutors across different universities adopt the use of the other terms to refer to money, interchangeably. According to one of the respondents,

> "*ransom became a new term for describing money in Abia State University after the kidnapping incidences around the Uturu-Okigwe road. Many students were kidnapped and were only released when ransoms were paid to the kidnappers. We saw ransom as illegal money used to save one's life. From that time, we started using ransom to refer to illegal money collected to save one's grades*." (Udo, personal communication).

Also, users have uniquely created terms to refer to the process of collecting/giving monies from/to their 'clients'. Most commonly used term in universities to refer to this process is known as sorting (as had been explained earlier). "However, sorting is now very commonly used even amongst parents, and has lost its ability to preserve the privacy of the process for which it was used" (Chidi, 2022, personal communication). Therefore, newer codes are being used to replace sorting such as 'worship service', 'customer care', 'runs' and 'blocking'. These terms were "initially hard for students to understand but the consistent usage of these terms overtime have made them covert terms used by students in their conversations, especially in contexts of corruption and illegal service provision" (Chinelo, 2022, personal communication)

Perlocutionary Acts in Linguistic Codes of Corruption

The yardstick for measuring how effective a message is in the cycle of communication is the feedback received from the addressee. Pragmatically speaking, the feedback (action or verbal response) is described as the perlocutionary act performed. "It is the execution of the locution. That is to say, the consequential effect of a verdict… it is focused on the response others have to a speech act" (Dadjoi 2022, p.26). A perlocutionary act is the actual effect of an utterance such as persuading, convincing, scaring, enlightening, inspiring or otherwise getting someone to do or realize something whether intended or not (Austin 1962).

The illocutionary act is what one does in saying something, the intention conveyed in what is said. The perlocutionary on the other hand act is the effect of the utterance that the speaker said to the hearer. Simply put, every illocutionary act performed leads to a perlocutionary act. The act sometimes can be in concordance to the illocutionary act while at other times, it can be the opposite of what the addresser intends. Hence, it is important to note that the perlocutionary effect of an illocutionary act may not often be easily determined. But in context-specific analysis like this research, the perlocutionary effect is can be predicted.

From our study, there are two perspectives to explaining the perlocutionary acts of the linguistic cues of corruption. The first perspective to the perlocutionary act of the linguistic cues of corruption studied is as expressed by the addresser. Under this category, there are two; persuasion- an act of convincing the addressee of the need to do what is required to pass a course, get better grades or services unduly, and coercion- an act of verbally threatening the addressee to carry out an instruction in the favour of the addresser, for which the addressee may receive illegal services rendered.

Table 5. Perlocutionary Acts in Linguistic Cues (Utterances) (Culled From (Patrick, 2025, P.38-40), And Expanded)

linguistic cues (utterance)	illocutionary type	perlocutionary act
Where is your razor blade?	Requesting	Persuasion
Where is your tithe/offering?	Requesting	Coercion
Go and bring money for baby food	Commanding	Coercion
Join the moving ship	Commanding/suggesting	Coercion
Tinyere Father ihe na boot (put something in priest's booth)	Commanding	Coercion
Ị huna Father? (have you seen the priest)	Requesting	Persuasion
Ego fuel kwanụ? (what about money for fuel)	Requesting	Coercion
Weta ego pure water (bring money for sachet water)	Commanding	Coercion
Bịa confession (come for confession)	Commanding	Coercion
Show me love	Commanding	Coercion
Troway salute	Commanding	Coercion
Kip somtin for cold wota o	Commanding	Coercion
Shake ya bodi	Commanding	Coercion
No be to tok, na to do	Suggesting	Persuasion
Me gharịa ahụ (shake your body/do something)	Commanding	Coercion
Ị ma ihe i kwesịrị ime (you know what you ought to do)	Suggesting	Persuasion
Ọ bụ na onweghi ihe ị ga-enye m? (is it that there is nothing you want to give to me?)	Requesting	Persuasion
Weta ihe e ji anụ mmanya (bring something for drinks)	Commanding	Coercion

Ogbu opi na-ezi imi (a labourer is deserves his wages)	Stating	persuasion
Onye kwe, chi ya ekwe (life/success responds to one's determination)	Stating	persuasion
Notin dey free even for freetown..	Stating	coercion
Ana m añụkwa ihe jụrụ oyi (i drink something cold)	announcing	persuasion
Money for hand, back for ground	Promising	coercion
Aka nrị kwọ aka ekpe, aka ekpe akwọ aka nrị (a good turn deserves another)	Promising	coercion
Odogwu na dollar/ Odogwu	Praising/ christening	persuasion
dimkpa (a strong/noble man)	praising/ christening	persuasion

The second perspective considers underlying perclocutionary acts the addresser expects of the addressee. Within the context of our analysis, two acts are under this perspective. They are; agreement or disagreement to the illocutionary acts performed by the addresser. Agreement in this context translates into the addressee providing the (illegal) payment for the service(s) required. However, disagreement can be expressed in a number of ways. Firstly, the addressee may disagree by performing a perlocutionary act of leaving the environment wherein the conversation is held. Angrily leaving the place (office, canteen, beer shops) where the conversation is taking place, usually accompanied with non-response to the addresser is a perlocutionary act that depicts disagreement to the proposal of the addresser for an illegal payment. Crying is another perlocutionary act that is interpreted as disagreement in this context. Below is a narrative of a student of one of the universities visited for data collection. The narrative is presented as a dialogue for clarity.

Speaker A (student): *Ma, you asked me to see you about the last semester exams, last week.*

Speaker B (staff): *Oh, yes! You are xxx (name of the student), right? you failed the exam o. If you want to pass, megharịa ahụ (shake your body, meaning, do something about it).*

Speaker A (student): *What do I do, ma?*

Speaker B (staff): *because of you, just bring xxx tomorrow. I'll see how I can help you.*

Speaker A (student): *(starts crying silently)*

Speaker B (staff): *bịa (come), I am only offering to help you. If it is not possible for you do what I said, I'll just put in what you scored. You can leave my office, biko. (please).*

From the conversation above, it is deducible that speaker B interpreted the act of crying by speaker A as a show of disagreement to the proposal of imegharị ahụ (doing something). Although one can infer that the cause for crying may not immediately mean disagreement, but the inability to be able to provide the requirement from the addresser. Albeit, it still shows that the addressee is not in agreement with the proposal. The perlocutionary acts of agreement or disagreement discussed above is as expected by the addresser and expressed by the addressee.

Based on the foregoing discussion, we observe that the choices of codes used to depict corruption used by addressers to their addressees are dependent on the shared knowledge the participants have about the utterance or terms used, as these terms do not literally depict what is said but an intention of corruption, coded in words. In terms of the speech acts performed, our study shows that out of the five speech acts outlined by Searle, only three speech acts (directives, assertives, and commissives) are found in the utterances generated as data from the field, with directives having the highest percentage of occurrence. Also, using the speech act analysis, the work confirms that the nicknames adopted in the course of conversation in the context of the study are skewed negatively to compel the addressee to 'dance to the tune' of the addresser. Finally, the analysis show that the underlying perlocutionary acts performed in the context created by corruption-induced utterances can be viewed from two perspectives. Firstly, from the perspective of the act performed by the addresser and secondly from the perspective of the perlocutionary act performed by the addressee.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The effect of every cue on the listener comes into two basic forms- the persuasive or coercive effect. Because the speaker wants the addressee to 'play along', they produce perlocutionary effect of coercing or persuading the addressee. This attempt leads to either agreement (consent) or disagreement (disapproval) on the part of the addressee.

Pragmatically, applying the theory of common ground shows that the choices of codes used to conceal corruption used by addressers to their addressees is dependent on the shared knowledge the participants have about the cues used, as these terms do not literally mean what they are used for, but an intention of corruption, concealed in words. In terms of the speech acts performed, the study shows that only three speech acts (directives, assertives, and commissives), out of the five speech acts outlined by Searle, are found, with directives having the highest percentage of occurrence.

From the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made. Forensic linguist should, in addition to their knowledge and use of phonological cues in determining corruption, appreciate and understand the place of pragmatic cues as veritable tools in corruption assessment and prevention. Sometimes, the speaker may efficiently mask his/her voice or alter the features of his/her voice, making it nearly impossible being "caught in the act" of corruption, using phonetic or phonological variables. However, the pragmatic cues when analysed, give hint of the intention of the speaker analysed.

ADVANCED RESEARCH

Still conducting further research to learn more about Exploring Speech Acts and Common Ground in Student Corruption Discourse: Insights from Southeastern Universities in Nigeria.

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Some of the linguistic cues in tables 3, 4, 5, and 7 were excerpted from Patrick (2025), who studied the sociolinguistic practices in encoding corruption. His work provided a foreground upon which this current work was built. See Patrick, K. O. (2025) in references for full citation. However, the researchers in this current work explored the pragmatic aspects of the given cues and not the socio-linguistic implications of the languages used as studied by Patrick (2025).

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