



Lexical Modality in Presidential Election Discourse in Selected Nigerian Online Newspapers (2011 – 2019)

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Abstract

Public opinion columns in the Nigerian online newspapers often provide vital information on sociopolitical issues. Previous studies on political media discourse focused on how public opinions shape pre-election political debates and speeches in Nigeria. However, little attention was paid to how linguistic choices constrain public opinions, especially on Nigerian presidential election results. This study is designed to investigate the representation of public opinions on the Nigerian presidential election results in Nigerian online newspapers, with a view to determining the public opinion types and linguistic forms. This study adopts Norman Fairclough's Dialectical-relational model to Critical Discourse Analysis, complemented by M. A. K. Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar as the framework. These approaches provide a method for studying language use in the discourses of Nigerians on the Nigerian presidential election results. The descriptive design was adopted. Six popular Nigerian online newspapers (Vanguard, Punch, Nigerian Tribune, The Nation, Leadership, and The Guardian) published between February and April of the election years in 2011-2019 were purposively selected because of their robust contents on Nigerian presidential election results, are critically examined and subjected to linguistic and qualitative method of analysis. Data are purposively selected from editorials, open letters, and comments based on election and attitudes of people to the presidential election results in Nigeria. The analysis revealed the lexical modality is used by people to express their views towards the presidential election results in Nigeria.

Keywords: Lexicalisation; Modality; Public opinions; Presidential election

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INTRODUCTION

The study of political discourse in the media enhances the public to become acquainted with the functionality of language, most importantly, in the media. Fairclough (1989, 1992), Osisanwo (1991), van Dijk (1998), Taiwo (2004, 2008) Alo (2008), Chiluwa (2005, 2008), Osisanwo 2011) among others, have examined diverse researches on media discourse and related fields on political media discourse focused on how public opinions shape pre-election political debates and speeches in Nigeria (Taiwo 2008). However, little attention was paid to how linguistic choices constrain public opinions, especially on Nigerian presidential election results. Studies on political discourse have provided remarkable theoretical and critical analyses of electioneering but have failed to demonstrate how such political discourse could be linguistically

or lexically accounted for, most importantly, in the reaction of the public to the presidential election results in Nigeria. We need to investigate lexical modality in the Nigerian online newspapers are used in expressing peoples' reaction to the election results. The study investigates the ways lexical modality in Nigerian online newspapers; *Punch*, *The Nation*, *Nigerian Tribune*, *Leadership* and *Vanguard* are very crucial in the Nigerian presidential election results. The online newspapers *Punch*, *Vanguard*, *The Nation*, *Nigerian Tribune*, *Leadership* were selected based on the fact that they are Nigerian newspapers and widely read in the country. This study is limited to presidential election results declared in 2011, 2015 and 2019.

Literature Review

The Print Media and Political Discourse

Undoubtedly, the role of the media in the contemporary society has expanded tremendously. It has become a viable tool through which public opinion has emanated as the key factor in both political and social organisation. One of the primary responsibilities of the media is to shape public opinion. While informing the general public about news and events of the day, the media play a critical role in helping people form opinions about issues, facts, phenomena and processes that are of societal interest (Boria *et al.*, 2000). Gunther and Mughan (2000) assert that the mass media are the connective tissues of democracy. They highlight the crucial role that the media play in promoting democratic ideals. The media in a democratic country performs various functions, including but not limited to information dissemination, education, providing a platform for fair debate or public discourse on state policies, and monitoring the activities of state institutions.

The media have a crucial role in disseminating information about government activities, including their impacts in the society. By doing so, the media promote, inform public debates and enlighten citizens to exercise their franchise, especially at election periods. Additionally, the media convey vital signals to the elected officials on different issues that are of interest to the electorate (Midguard *et al.*, 2008).

However, there are instances where the media are used to influence public opinion in favour of a particular candidate, and anyone who questions such events is sometimes labelled a "paranoid conspiracy theorist" (Boler, 2008). Despite this, the media remain a strong pillar of democracy as it educates citizens about societal happenings and help them make informed decisions about who rules over them, holding those in power accountable to the people. While the conventional function of the media is to provide information about societal events, it also serves as a bridge between different groups, including elected officials and the electorate (Kval-Mellbye-Tranoy, 2006).

It is important to acknowledge that the media should not be controlled by the elite in society. Instead, the media should serve as a tool to strengthen democracy by promoting debate, increasing the diversity of information, and monitoring various issues that affect the people in society. Furthermore, the media acts as a connector between the government and the people, serving as an intermediary between voters and politicians. The media not only supports various points of view but also acts as a platform for the exchange of ideas, where debates and conflicts can be emphasised.

However, the media face a significant challenge in dealing with the large amount of information available to them, making it difficult to determine which information is the most important. The media are responsible for determining the relative importance of different topics, which is known as the "model of priority" in the literature (Limani, 2006).

As previously mentioned, the media undergoes a rigorous evaluation process to ensure that news is transmitted in the best form and content possible, making it easy for audience to decode the message. In order for the media to remain impartial, news are often determined based on their level of priority and importance, without taking sides with any party involved. Hence, the media is regarded as the "gate keeper of information" responsible for receiving, verifying, simplifying and presenting information to the public for better understanding.

In contemporary times, the media plays a crucial role in discovering and reporting on significant issues, aiming to hold the society and those in power accountable. In Nigeria, the press and democracy have a close relationship, with the press serving as a tool to encourage democratic principles that empower people to exercise their political will and power. After the executive, legislature, and judiciary arms of government, the Nigerian press is the only organisation with a clearly stated role in the Nigerian Constitution. Chapter 2, Section 22 of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria recognises the crucial role of the press in upholding democracy:

The press, radio, television and other agencies of the mass media shall at all times be free to uphold the fundamental objectives contained in this chapter and uphold the responsibility and accountability of the government to the people.

Section 14 subsection (2) (a) of the Chapter declares that the autonomy belongs to the people of Nigeria, while the government's power to exercise authority is derived from the people. Also, people's involvement in the governmental system shall be done in line with the provision made by the constitution. These are the fundamental laws that the Nigerian press must put into consideration while discharging their duties. The Press is of great importance and an essential part of contemporary democracies with basic goals which include the provision of good governance sourced through intelligibility, reliability and sincerity.

Discourse is a form of language use, conceived as a social practice (Fairclough, 1993) imbued with invisible set as of values, beliefs and ideas in that social circumstances; these invisibilities are in a socio-cognitive manner (van Dijk 1998). Media discourse thrives on the occasion or actions of individuals, groups and institutions and how political, economic social and religious issues affect the life of the people. Fairclough (1995) posits that language analysis of media discourse becomes peculiar in mediating between the events that have happened in the text produced as a result of the events and the people who discourse is presented to.

Consequently, media language should be analysed as discourse. This is due to the fact that (critical) discourse analysis is concerned with social practices as well as texts. Kress (1990) stresses that the defined and delimited set of statement that constitute a discourse that is, media, are themselves expressive of and organised by a specific point of view. He notes that the opinions of different groups generate debates in the society; the media only participate in either justifying or criticising the debates in order to make sense out of it for the readers. Language use, therefore, can never appear by itself its always appears as the agent of a system of linguistic terms, which themselves reflect the prevailing discursive and ideological system (Halliday 1979; Olowe, 1993; Chilwa, 2011; Osisanwo, 2011).

As noted by Fairclough (1992), discourse practices are the ways in which texts are received by the audience (readers, viewers and listeners) and how media texts are socially distributed. Media discourse as a social practice involves the interaction of the primary actors involved in this practice. Opinion columns are more than just social interactions among

journalists; they also represent events and issues that shape society and have the potential to affect people's lives (Scollon, 1998 and van Dijk, 1998). Therefore, media discourse is a powerful mechanism for shaping ideas about significant and vital issues concerning the public, including government officials in society. According to Fairclough (1992), media discourse can be used as a tool for social change.

The Media and public opinion

Media contributes enormously at influencing people's views and attitudes by broadcasting information relating to the election results. It has been argued that the formation of public policy, which rest on opinion expressed by the public. Onibonoje (2003: 189) opines that public opinion can be viewed as a "process of public discussion leading to the formation or disability of public policy or mode of action by government" while Omotoso (2007:213) expatiates on the view that "citizens express opinions base on actions and inactions of the government". In both democratic and dictatorship system of government, people express their views through the media in order to make demands. In most cases, public opinions draw the attention of the government to the views of the citizens, particularly, on political issues or government policies.

The media is the basic channel through which, people express their varied opinions on political issues. According to Magstadt (2006:317). "In democratic states, public opinions on variety of issues is gauged and discussed freely and effort to identify the majority opinions on any particular issue are undertaken not only by public agencies but also by political parties and candidates, the media, various private organisations research institutes and inquiring scholars. To determine how the public stands on a given issue, organizations rely on public opinion polling". The role of the media in measuring public opinion can never be overemphasised in that "the first attempts measure opinion were the straw polls (unscientific samples) developed by newspapers in the 19th century. This view was corroborated by Janda, Berry and Goldman (2008) when he opined that "the media's role in reflecting public opinion has become much more refined in the age..." the mass media is extremely significant to both the government and politics as a medium of relaying information and influencing the people. It is an avenue through which the organisation are directed to the government.

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Methodology

This study utilizes Norman Fairclough's Dialectical-Relational Model for Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), combined with M. A. K. Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG), as the analytical framework. Fairclough's model is instrumental in examining the relationship between discourse and social structures, providing insight into how language use reflects and reinforces social power dynamics. Meanwhile, Halliday's SFG offers a detailed approach for analyzing the functional aspects of language, particularly in understanding how people use linguistic choices to convey meaning in social contexts. Together, these frameworks provide a robust methodological approach for analyzing how Nigerians articulate their views and reactions to presidential election results.

The analysis involved a systematic examination of linguistic properties, focusing on how Halliday's concepts of modality and transitivity reveal public sentiment and attitudes toward the election outcomes. Modal verbs were examined to interpret the degree of certainty, obligation, or possibility expressed by individuals regarding the election process and results. Transitivity processes were analyzed to identify how actions, events, and emotions were

represented, thereby uncovering patterns of social behavior and attitudes. The term “excerpt” was consistently emboldened to distinguish quoted material within the discourse analysis clearly.

To enhance clarity and organization, the analyzed data were categorized under sub-headings that reflected the emotional tone and public sentiments towards the 2011-2019 presidential election outcomes. Quotations were marked with double quotation marks to emphasize authenticity and precision in representation. Additionally, the units of analysis spanned from specific lexical items to entire paragraphs, enabling the capture of nuanced perspectives and diverse opinions related to the Nigerian presidential election discourse. This structured approach provided a comprehensive understanding of the linguistic patterns that shaped public narratives during this period.

The Research Data

The data for this study were got from six Nigerian online newspapers – *The Nation*, *Nigerian Tribune*, *Punch*, *Guardian*, *Vanguard* and *Leadership* usually produced daily, were selected out a range of other newspapers due to their wide readership within and outside the country. Lexical modality extracted from the selected Nigerian online newspapers published between February and April 2011 – 2019 were purposively selected and the sampled texts were subjected to discourse analysis. As a matter of fact, the few samples here is representative of the larger data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Lexical Modality

Modality occurs at the lexical and grammatical levels. At the lexical level, various word classes (groups, verbs/verbal groups, adjective/adjectival group and adverb/adverbial group) are used to represent the feelings or attitude of people towards the election results in the country. Modality in English can be realised in different linguistic units.

Modality adjunct expressing attitude and inadequacies

Modality may also be expressed by adjuncts. Adverbs generally are used to modify a verb, an adjective or another adverb. In the discourse of the public on the presidential election results, adverbs show or unveil the attitudes of the people. It is important to point out that, electorate, elect, constants and the Nigerian media use adverbs to express their opinion, emotions, feelings and show the dispositions towards the election results in Nigeria. The attitudes of the various actors could be positive, negative or ambivalent, which are expressed using modal adverbs as explicated in the excerpts below:

Excerpt 1:

It is therefore **hardly** surprising that Buhari proved himself to be the authentic leader.
(*The Punch*, March 4, 2019)

Excerpt 2:

The 2019 presidential election was **generally** acknowledged to be peaceful and transparent.
(*Leadership*, March 5, 2019)

In excerpt 1, both APC and PDP presidential candidates are from North based on this, it was assumed to be a battle ground in determining who would win the Northern part of Nigeria. The modal adverb “hardly” is used to underpin the fact that his vote was based on

integrity or power of incumbency. The modal adverb “generally” as used in excerpt 2, showed that the speaker’s positive opinion on the 2019 presidential election results. The speaker has used modal adverb “generally” tactically explained that in all states and local government areas the presidential election went on peacefully without electoral fraud. The attitude unveils his political affiliation to the party. The use of modal adverb “generally” revealed over generalisation of event or situation.

Excerpt 3:

It “**actually**” should not amaze any keen observer of political development in Nigeria.
(*Leadership*, March 5, 2019)

The modal adverb used by the speaker reveals the political trend in Nigeria. Nigerian political system has been tagged with “do or die” syndrome. Anybody who wishes to become the president must be ready to take the political seat forcefully. Following the political chronology, it was Goodluck Jonathan that magnanimously accepted defeat and peacefully handed over power to the president-elect. The election conducted in 2015 was relatively peaceful, due to the fact that the incumbent president (Goodluck Jonathan) declared openly that the “blood of Nigerian does not worth his political ambition’ Otherwise, the political party members would have hijacked the election and made it bloody. Therefore, the attitude exhibited by the presidential candidate is not surprising to anyone who has been monitoring our political system in Nigeria. \

Excerpt 4:

Ethnicity began to shape the turn of events **immediately**
the country attained political liberty.
(*The Nation*, March 4, 2019)

In excerpt 4, the ex-president, Olusegun Obasanjo is referred to as Ebor of Egba land. He was the first person who ruled the nation as a military (1977 - 1979) and civilian (1999 and 2007). Indisputably, Obasanjo controlled the non-operational Supreme Military Council (SMC) who handed over power to an elected civilian president. On the account of a successful transfer of power from the military to civilians in 1979, he became a great statesman and a citizen of the world. Till date, many world leaders still shower praises on him for exemplary leadership.

When he bounced back a president, 20 years after, he had laid a good groundwork, especially in his first term and stabilised the polity. He has been described as a total Nigerian, a detribalised leader with a national outlook. Historians claimed that he was not ethnic jingoist, but a president of all Nigerians. Going by Obasanjo’s wealth of experience, one could submit that, he had right to query Goodluck Jonathan’s administration, especially when the performance was not directly proportional to people’s expectation. Obasanjo succeeded in reminding him of the need to leave a good legacy for others to emulate.

The use of modal adverbs to express sportsmanship

Excerpt 5:

Ethnicity began to shape the turn of events **immediately** the country attained political liberty.

(*The Nation*, April 2, 2015)

Excerpt 6:

Buhari was **equally** instrumental to the peaceful transition

(*The Guardian*, April 3, 2015)

Nigeria's constitution guarantees freedom of religion. However, ethnic tensions and perceived economic inequalities between the north and south, which coincidentally divides Muslims and Christians, exacerbate religious tensions. The country's ethnically diverse population also contributes to these tensions. Both Christians and Muslims fear political and demographic domination by the other, leading to ongoing challenges for the Nigerian government in balancing regional and religious interests. Various organisations work to promote interreligious harmony, but their effectiveness is difficult to assess, and leadership records are mixed.

In excerpt 5, the modal adverb *immediately* is used to foreground the state of Nigeria after the independence from the hands of the colonial masters. One could have expected the three ethnic groups to maintain high level of peaceful co-existence among one another. Sadly, religious sentiment and tribalism has eaten deep into the system, to the extent that, the Islamic extremists believe that killing of people would facilitate special reward from Allah. This revealed high level of inhumanity to man.

In excerpt 6, the speaker used both adjectival modal and adverbial modal in the sentence. The deployment of the modal adjective “victorious” shows that the newly elected president played a significant role at ensuring that there was a peaceful transition of power. The adverbial “equally instrumental” suggests that the president elect is a lover of peace, he has right attitude towards the out-going president. He has reacted mutually with a comfortable feeling that is usually exhibited by a military officer; it is a feeling of loyalty shared by members of a group of people.

Noun/nominal groups expressing modality as revealed in nationalistic perspectives

Some nouns or nominal groups have the ability to express the feeling or emotion of a speaker to a certain proposition. Modal nouns/nominal groups, through skillful implementation, have the ability to showcase a writer's expectations and opinions. In the excerpt below, for example, though the news reporters tried the voice of the presidential opponent, it would be noted that there is an agitation for free and fair election in the country. This can be observed in the choice of modal nouns. It equally revealed the attitudes and the stance of the speaker. Instances of modal nouns expressing attitude are exemplified below:

Excerpt 7:

*I would have called **the victor** within seconds of my being aware of his victory to offer not just my **congratulation**, by my services to help unite **Nigeria** by being **a bridge** between **the North and the South**.*

(*Leadership*, April 2, 2019)

The modal nominal entities highlighted reflect the attitude of the writer towards the preposition. Modal nominal entities such as “the victor”, “congratulations”, “a bridge between the North and the South”. During the 2015 Presidential election in Nigeria, president Goodluck Jonathan put a call across to his opponent long before the INEC declared him (Muhammadu Buhari) as the winner. The speaker has tactically used the nominal noun “the victor” to depict one who defeats an enemy in a battle. The below excerpts are examples of modal nominals:

Excerpt 8:

*The PDP also said it would petition **the United Nations** and other global democratic institutions on the role of **the military**.*

(Leadership, March 8, 2019)

In the excerpt 8 above, topicalising the groups in the modal nominal entities in the excerpt foregrounds not only the importance placed on the group but also reveals the attitudes of the writer. The PDP political party is the most prominent opposition party in Nigeria. This political party had ruled the country for uninterrupted sixteen (1999 - 2015) good years before APC candidate emerged as the winner in 2015. These two political parties have been struggling with each other in order to retain their candidates on the corridor of power. In every political race, it is certain that one party would eventually emerge as the winner. The PDP candidate and its members have refused blatantly to accept defeat. The party members had jointly presented their grievance to the general public and have successfully alleged the United Nations and other global democratic institutions on the role played by the military and the killings of Nigerians during the presidential election.

The tone of the speaker is that of annoyance towards the attitude of the observers from the United States. The party expected positive reaction(s) from other global democratic institutions, especially on the reportage of killing the innocent masses during electoral process.

Modality used to express responsibility and obligation

In any democratic system of government, there must be decentralisation of power. The three arms of government (the legislature, executives and judiciary) must be duly recognised and there should be division of power; each must be able to checkmate one another. In most cases, preferential treatment is given to the legislative arm of government

Excerpt 9:

*President Buhari has a historic opportunity to change **the people's perception** of him in **the South east**.*

(Leadership, March 5, 2019)

The nominal group to change **the people's perception** reveals the negative impression the president-elect has created in the mind of the people from that part of the country. The inadequacies of the president is reflected in the alleged perception that he dislikes people from that region and they are being treated in the Biafra civil war's mindset while still considers it as an insignificant part of Nigeria's foundational ethnic entities. The president must acknowledge the place of Ndigbo in the economic life of Nigeria. They have been agitating to be at the helm of power, most especially the oil and gas sector, customs and even banking, which are the major pillars of the economic life of the country. The speaker opined that, the president must appreciate the importance of Nigeria's ethnicity; he must promote inclusiveness and manage our diversity.

Modality noun expressing commendation revealed in moralistic perspective

Excerpt 10:

*We hereby **commend** the **improvement** recorded by INEC within **the week***

The leadership quality of Jega was noticed by Nigerians. He strategically handled the electoral process, and it ended peacefully, despite the tensed atmosphere in the country, prior

to the conduct of the election. His method was systematic, he was able to introduce the permanent voter's card PVC and card reader, although, this was despised by some Nigerians, who wanted things to be done in the old manner and style. The 2015 presidential election results were a time that the political history of Nigeria was re-written. He insisted that the card reader must be used during the election "for how long would this democracy be nascent without maturity?" Another noticeable strategy deployed by the INEC chairman was deliberate postponement of the election. The presidential election was initially slated for February 14, 2015, later shifted to March 29, 2015. These six weeks delay gave Jega the privilege to make more efficient the PVC distribution process and test-run the card reader. Jega was able to maneuver his way and escape all forms of allegations because of his principled character and sincerity. An INEC chairman without self-esteem would have manipulated the election results and plunged the nation into a big chaos.

Excerpt 11:

President Goodluck Jonathan also deserves our commendations.

(Nigerian Tribune, April 2, 2015)

Excerpt 12:

President Goodluck Jonathan is acknowledged for humility, but he will need more than that to succeed as president of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

(The Nation, April 10, 2011)

Excerpt 13:

The Jonathan administration and the Jega led INEC must be commended for restoring the integrity of the ballot...

(The Punch, April 11, 2011)

The 2011 presidential election was characterised as being violent therefore, president Jonathan foresaw what could possibly happen during and after the election in 2015, this prompted him to make this statement "my ambition does not worth the blood of any Nigerian". This has become a recitation for many Nigerians and quote in his honour. Also, he has displayed a high level of maturity and humility by being the first to congratulate his opponent, this attitude of his, nullified the ferocious political norms of do or die syndrome in Nigeria. During the campaign, Jonathan's body language betrayed the people's expectation, especially, the trouble makers, He was a portrayal of peace and tranquility and not bloodshed. He said, if he lost, he would return to Otuoke, his hometown some of his political party members felt disappointed in him, they never expected him to utter such statement, to them, it meant acceptance of defeat. His uncommon patriotism was revealed when he called and congratulated Buhari before the announcement of the final result by the INEC chairman, Attahiru Jega. Despite the drama displayed by elder Godsay Orubebe, former Niger Delta minister, thinking it would trigger fight or disruption of the election's results. Immediately the ex-president noticed that president Buhari was leading with over two million votes, he put a call across to him; Jonathan's patriotism doused the tension across the country. By this act, President Jonathan did what no president has ever done in the history of Nigeria. Jonathan's positive disposition to the election results made him lost the election, yet he conceded defeat and openly mandated the people to shun violence and embrace peace and unity.

Modal noun expressing heroic victory from historical perspective

Excerpt 14:

Professor Attahiru Jega is becoming an **instant international hero**.
(*The Guardian*, April 2, 2015)

Excerpt 15:

The fine gentleman whose calm mien and character. I fell in love with and whom we have to thank for not subverting the will of **the people** inspite of **the pressures**...
(*The Nation*, April 2, 2015)

Excerpt 16:

Tinubu may not be **a saint**... he is definitely **a hero**.
(*The Guardian*, April 3, 2015)

Excerpt 17:

President, Dr Goodluck Jonathan, he remains **the hero** for his **magnanimity in defeat**...
(*Nigerian Tribune*, April 1, 2015)

In excerpts 14 & 15, Professor Attahiru Jega was regarded as the “international hero” and “fine gentleman” because he was able to comport himself during the collation of the election results. It was obvious that Godday Orubebe really tampered with his emotion but he never allowed his negative reaction to the election results to control his emotion. The speaker deployed noun groups to showcase the international recognition, which he had received after putting strategising the biometric registration and the use of card reader during the election in order to curb the acts of rigging the election results.

In excerpt 16, Tinubu is generally viewed as a man who knows the technicalities and nitty-gritty of the politics. He understands the foundation and the brain behind politics in Nigeria. Despite the fact that he was not a flawless man, he was able to lead the party to victory. In the political history of Nigeria, 2015 election gave room for a strong opposition party who unseat the incumbent president peacefully and through a free and fair election. The speaker in the above except expressed his feelings by using the negative modal auxiliary verb “may not” to reveal negation and possibility of Tinubu to unveil his characteristics. Other modal nouns used by the speaker include: a saint, onions, politics, the great victory and a hero.

In excerpts 17 above, revealed the attitude of the speaker towards the excellent performance of the Ex-President. He was named as ‘a leader’, ‘a hero’, ‘Mr President’, ‘Dr Goodluck Jonathan’ and other nominal groups such as ‘magnanimity in defeat’, ‘the uncommon’, ‘an election’ and ‘a democratic process’. With all the paraphernalia of the office, President Goodluck Jonathan promised to conduct an election, which would be free from rancor, He allowed people’s will to be respected. He was a highly dependable man, who held on to his words. He has not subjugated people’s will for his personal ambition. President Goodluck Jonathan would be remembered for his selfless sacrifices by maintaining peace and political stability before, during and after the election. Outright, he was opposed to shedding innocent blood of the citizen of the country during electoral process.

The use of modal adjectives / adjectival group to express attitudes and sentiments in moralistic perspective

Modal adjectives are used to express public opinion on the presidential election results to explicate attitudes, feelings, emotions and sentiments. Modal adjectives describe events, situations and happenings. They are deployed in the discourse of the public opinion on the presidential election results in order to evaluate their potentials and administrative prowess.

The excerpts below exemplify the tactical deployment of modal adjectives in the public opinion on the presidential election results.

Modal adjectives reflecting right attitudes to voting

Excerpt 18:

*It is time for Nigerians to vote for the best leaders and say no to **inept** and **corrupt** leaders.*
(*The Punch* April 11, 2011)

Excerpt 19:

*If all Nigerians can continue to come out en masse on every **election** day to vote for the **best** candidates in their units*

(*Leadership*, April 12, 2011)

Excerpt 20:

*the country might not be able to boast uninterrupted electricity and water supply, **competitive** and **qualitative** education, update*

(*The Punch* April 10, 2011)

The speaker was particular about the positive changes, which ought to have taken place in the country, this involve the joint effort of individuals to attain the positive changes. The eligible voters should be allowed to vote for the candidate of their choice. The speaker was eager to witness a situation whereby the citizens would be freely allowed to exercise their franchise as stipulated in the Nigeria constitution, which is the only weapon that could facilitate changes in our political system. In excerpt 19, the speaker deployed the modal adjectives “best” that is, superlative form to showcase the quality of leaders needed to rule over the citizens. If citizens should cast their votes for the leaders with high reputation and good leadership qualities, then, the country would enjoy smooth administration and political stability in the country. The speaker successfully used both the positive and negative form of the adjective to reflect the two types of leaders obtainable in the country. The word “best” is foregrounded as a positive pointer to a good system of government while “inept” and “corrupt” are used to reflect negative quality of a leader.

The speaker in the same excerpt used the word “candidate” to represent an individual who contests in an election. The basic criterion for contesting in any election should be on personal character and integrity. The contestant should exhibit a positive disposition to the plight of the masses. Emphasis was not laid on the political party rather; it was laid on the individual character. The opinion of the speaker differs from the general idea, especially during the manifestoes, when priority is placed on the political party. There should be screening and evaluation of each candidate from the grassroot to the national level. When these measures are put in place, then, Nigerians can anticipate for a new Nigeria. The modal adjectives “best” and “new” are used to reflect the type of candidate expected to contest in an election and the aftermath of choosing the “best” candidate to rule the country, which would eventually facilitate the emergence of a “new Nigeria”

In excerpt 20, the speaker used the first person plural pronoun “we” to depict involvement of all the citizens including the speaker himself. The speaker made reference to the ability of qualified citizens to be actively involved in politics, failure to change our recycling system of government will be tantamount to doing things in the usual manner and style while expecting different results. There should be political, economic and social innovation, which would transform the system positively. Otherwise, the democratic system of government would remain non-functional. The speaker used modal adjectives to deploy

the type of infrastructural facilities that the citizens are entitled to enjoy in any democratic system of government, which include; “uninterrupted electricity”, and “water supply”, “competitive” and “qualitative education”, “functional democracy” and “good governance”. A democracy is said to be functional when citizens are allowed to cast their vote without fear of being molested or even killed in the process. When they are given the opportunity to vote and their votes counted, without being rigged by the powerful political party members.

Excerpt 21:

A country where the new president will announce on his inauguration day that no policeman should collect money again...

(Vanguard, March 8, 2019)

Excerpt 22:

*A country where there will be **good** roads networks.*

(The Nation, March 9, 2019)

Excerpt 23:

*A country where our **huge fertile** land will be productive.*

(The Nation, March 9, 2019)

The speaker opined that there should be good road network and continuous maintenance of these roads would put an end to the killings of citizens. Reasonable percentage of Nigerian has been sent to their early grave as a result of poor road network. As a matter of fact, good roads are part of the rights that the citizens of any country practicing democratic system of government must enjoy. The government must be forced to construct and maintain the roads. The speaker used the adjective “good” to show the quality of roads to be constructed. The materials must be of high quality that would last longer and the potholes must be filled up on a regular basis. The choice of the adjective good connotes the possibility that bad roads exist in the country. Apart from the fact that bad roads network has led to the untimely death of Nigerians; it has equally demoted the economic growth of the country. The speaker reflected the possible implication of bad roads for the country’s economy in excerpt 22. The poor farmers would not be able to convey their farm produce to the main city so as to sell their goods to the final consumers. The produce would be sold to few people who could afford to risk their lives by plying the bad roads to the interior villages to buy from them and sell to their final consumers at exorbitant amount, therefore, leading to hyper-inflation in the country. In general, government has failed to develop the agricultural sector; lesser attention has been paid to this sector, which has led the nation to financial backwardness and stunted economic growth

Modal adjectives that revealed peoples’ plight

Excerpt 24:

***Many** Nigerians could not afford a **single descent** meal in a day, while the rulers live in mansion.*

(The Nation April 1, 2019)

Excerpt 25:

***Many** in the villages lived in hut without **running** water and without electricity, while those who controlled our **oil** money could fly abroad and get treatment.*

Excerpt 26:

*oil producing nation should be global capital of **extreme** poverty.*

(The Nation, March 3, 2019)

Excerpt 27:

*Our petroleum monies and other mundane aspects of human existence have disappeared into the pocket of **perennial political termites** in the corridors of power.*

(The Punch, April 11, 2011)

The speaker deployed “many” as a quantifier to reveal the large number of Nigerians that are suffering in the country. Average Nigerian could not afford a substantial meal per day. The leadership of the country is self-centered and conscious of their personal interest. Most times, they behave as if they don’t have the interest of the poor masses at heart by closing their eyes completely to the basic needs of the poor masses. The irony is that during their manifestoes, the politicians would canvass and promise to be the best ever produced leader but, the moment they receive the staff of office; every of their promises becomes null and vague. The poor innocent citizens would remain in the state of illusion for four or eight years. The speaker adopted the word “ruler” to portray negative characteristics of the politicians. Ordinarily, the speaker ought to use the word “leader” if actually they are doing the leading. A good leader would lead base on excellence performance or past achievement. Unfortunately, our system is making use of rulers to paddle the canoe of our dear country; they give instructions and compel the citizens to obey while they would flout the laws. They live in their comfort zones and inflict pains on the poor masses that voted them into power. The speaker used a “single decent” to qualify the word meal to portray the rate or level of poverty in the country.

In excerpt 25, the needed social amenities were not provided for the people. Nigeria is a country flowing with milk and honey, but the “power that be” have bastardised our national cake. The money retrieved from the oil sector should be used for the provision of social amenities that would benefit the entire populace. The demonstrative pronoun “those” is used to refer to our leaders and the extent of the control they exhibit over the oil money. The speaker deployed adjectives like: “oil money”, “medical checkup”, and “good hospitals” to foreground the source of money that should have used for the provision of infrastructural facilities for the people.

In excerpt 27, from the speaker’s point of view, “monies” is pluralised to foreground the large amount of money realised from the crude oil, which ought to have been utilised judiciously. Most of our hospital lack modern equipment needed to save lives, insufficient man power and bad road network. The money generated from crude oil has been used to cater for their personal selfish interest. The speaker used the adjective “perennial political termites” to qualify the politicians and the use of “termites” to represent the nature of our political members, how corruption has eaten deep into the fabric of our economic and social development.

CONCLUSION

The use of language in the representation of public opinions on the 2011, 2015 and 2019 Nigerian presidential election results in the online newspapers has been examined and analysed in this study. It is observed that Nigerians expressed their opinions in different forms. Public opinions are represented under six grounds in the Nigerian context- democratic system, peace and unity, obligation and social responsibility, historic victory, commendation and high moral standard, the opinions presented in this study established that public opinions in the presidential election remain a controversial issue in Nigerian society and politics. Lexical - modality is a linguistic tool deployed in the study to unveil people’s opinions from different perspectives such as historical, nationalistic and moralistic. The nationalistic point of view, the deployment of modal adjective revealed people’s plight, social responsibility and

obligations and right attitude to voting; moralistic perspective unraveled the use of both modal adjective that expressed sentiments and modal nouns expressing commendations; while the modal nouns show cased the heroic victory from the historic perspective.

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