

**A LEXICO-SEMANTIC ANALYSIS OF CREATIVE EXPRESSIONS USED
DURING THE 2019 GENERAL ELECTIONS IN NIGERIA**

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Abstract

The paper seeks to examine peculiar creative expressions used during the 2019 general elections process in Nigeria with a view to carrying out a lexico-semantic analysis of the terminologies within the situational context they were used in consideration of the time, political space and interactants. The study adopts the Contextual Theory of Meaning as the relevant theoretical framework. Data for the study were collected by means of participant observation and such comments during political interactions in campaigns, social media platforms, political gatherings, news items and written materials. The findings indicate that, there were numerous of such terms generated and used during the various stages of the electoral process by the major actors such as the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and its adhoc staff, political parties, party loyalists and the electorate. The lexical items demonstrate the dynamic nature of language and its utterers to produce words or expressions for immediate needs-based communication which is politically motivated in this circumstance. It is observed that the semantic value of such lexical choices are contextually restricted and situationally restrained to, and comprehensible by the users within the 2019 electoral milieu driven by the peculiarity of the events. Aside from the fact that the study has broadened the scope of language used during political activities, the study also recommends multi-dimensional investigations into the political language in Nigerians in order to increase the already enlarging register of English for political discourse.

Key words: Lexico-semantic analysis, General elections, Creative expressions, Needs-based communication, English for political discourse

Introduction

Language performs multifaceted functions and can be used to achieve enormous purposes depending on the discourse participants, circumstance and context of use. In addition to the numerous functions of language, it is also used to influence, instruct, control and direct the behaviour of human beings (Ndimele, 1999; Odebunmi, 2016). At various levels of speech events, one of the aims has often been to 'do something' or

influence behaviour, which is what political discourse entirely seeks to achieve. Political discourse encompasses all levels and stages of political communication engaged by the actors; the political parties, politicians, election management body and the electorate. It subsumes language use in all political activities: campaigns, meetings, elections, collation, voting, and announcement of results, among others. Political discourse incorporates pre-election, election and post-election communicative activities bothering on politics in the past, present and future. To effectively do this, language (distinctive in nature) is often used as the medium to communicate peculiar circumstances associated with the particular political dispensation.

Since the inception of what is considered as nascent democracy (and by extension politics) in Nigeria, aside from the general usage of political language, there were (are) some unique forms or constructions created by political actors to describe political events specific to each of the dispensations in general, and elections in particular. This is because even where the process appears to be the same across the dispensations in terms of the legal framework, the dynamics in human behaviour and occurrence of (un)predictable events would often necessitate the linguistic description of such circumstance. This has been achieved through the introduction of expressions semantically and situationally constrained to the particular time and political space.

Therefore, the focus of this study is not an investigation into the broad concept of English for political discourse or general English language use during political activities. The study particularly aims to investigate the creative constructs used during the 2019 general elections in Nigeria with a view to describing their semantic assessment within the political context.

Literature review

Language can be classified according to use in specific situations such as advertisement, religious worship, business transactions, education, and political campaign, among others. Political communication during political campaigns or electoral process is an aspect of political discourse. Political discourse can be described as “the message through any politician who is normally a party member or candidate representative of a political party in a political function” (Dramnescu, 2016, p.47). Although politicians are not the only active participants in political discourse as Dramnescu seems to believe, they only tend to be prominent in political participation and communication. The aim of political language especially during campaigns is often to discredit is often opponents in order to win more votes which is often the intention that guide the verbal actions of participants (Oduori, 2002; Omozuwa & Ezejideaku, 2008). Omozuwa and Ezejideaku aver that the language “is intended to pass the needed information to the electorate with a view to convincing or appealing to them ... and has the effect of causing the electorate to have a change of mind” (p.40). The function of language in this circumstance is to

convince, appeal or change the mind of people (electorate) who, all things being equal, are the dependable force that determine who wins.

Researchers have done studies on the political language in Nigeria. For instance, Ayeomoni (2005) has carried out a study on a linguistic-stylistic investigation of the language of Nigerian political elite with the revelation that elite and the military in particular engage in official obliviousness on the use of the necessary devices and mechanics apparently to portray their authority and briskness. Omozuwa and Ezejideaku (2008) also investigate style in the language of political campaigns in Nigeria. In addition to the style features of political language: lexicon of conflict, reproach, drama, ridicule and persuasion, described by Szanto (1978), Omozuwa and Ezajideaku add a few other stylistics devices and features. They include propaganda, vague and abusive utterances, attack on party logo and slogan, and rhetorics such as repetitions, allusions, promises, colloquialisms, word coinages, pidginize expressions and figurative constructions. The authors provide insights into the stylistic use of language in political discourse.

Also, Taiwo (2010), Dunmire (2012), and Aduradola and Ojukwu (2013) have concluded separate studies on metaphor in Nigerian political discourse and the political language and language for politics in Nigeria. Taiwo states that political language in Nigeria is concealed in the metaphorical (mis)representation of the political actors. Dunmire explores the discourse patterns of the political class which reveal the distinctiveness in organization and intentions. The other study by Aduradola and Ojukwu reiterate that political language addresses issues differently in different political contexts using 'appropriate' terminologies and expressions.

In the same vain, Ajayi and Ajayi (2014), Sanmi (2016) and Aremu (2017) have conducted separate investigations on the pragmatics of political language in Nigeria. Sanmi, citing the misunderstanding between Olusegun Obasanjo and Peter Fayose, has noted that politicians often use confrontational language on their opponents deliberately to remain relevant in the Nigeria political scene. Ajayi and Ajayi also affirms that politicians employ various politeness strategies to "create good impression in the mind of the electorate about themselves, and warn or caution the electorate on their choice" (p.237). Aremu in his study, enumerates and analyses the conceptual mapping in the inaugural speeches of Nigerian presidents as pragmatic devices used to achieve their intentions. The investigations in this category bring to bear the intention and use of language in political contexts.

In the studies reviewed above, none focuses on the unique expressions in addition to the general political constructions used in the past general elections in Nigeria, and particularly in 2019. The study is therefore necessary because, it is aimed at describing the lexico-semantic value of the creative expressions used in the 2019 electoral processes and political context.

Theoretical consideration

The theory considered relevant to this study is Wittgenstein's (1953) Contextual Theory of Meaning. The German scholar in his book; *Philosophical investigations* proposes the Contextual Theory of Meaning as an alternative to the Referential and Mentalist theories of meaning. Wittgenstein argues that meanings, whether they are visible objects or images cannot be seen as entities. He proposes that rather than expressing meanings as entities, they should be determined by the context of use. That is, the meanings of words, phrases or sentences should be determined by the situational context in which they are used. It therefore means that the meaning of a word or expression is "the effect or effects that it creates in a particular context in which the (word or) expression is used" (Ndimele, 1999, p.20).

The theory is relevant to the study because the lexical items and expressions which form the data for analysis are peculiar creations generated and used within the 2019 general elections in Nigeria. The meanings of the creations are determined by the happenings and restricted to the 2019 elections activities and political space.

Methodology

Data for the study were collected by means of participant observation and collation of peculiar creations used during political interactions in campaigns, social media platforms, political gatherings, news items and written excerpts. The researchers monitored the communicative activities in the 2019 electoral process in Nigeria and extracted specific expressions used in the enumerated domains. Such unique constructions observed to be used by the different stakeholders during the political discourse in each of the platforms were extracted and compiled which form the data for the analysis.

Data presentation and analysis

The data considered relevant are presented and analysed below. The analysis is under the major heading; lexico-semantic analysis, with other subheadings; INEC and its adhoc staff, political parties and loyalists, party candidates, and electorate and political analysts.

Lexico-semantic analysis

This section attempts to examine the meanings of the lexical forms and expressions particularly unique in the political communicative activities during the 2019 general elections. Aduradola and Ojukwu (2013) have cautioned that political language could have different shades of meanings depending on the circumstance. The scholars maintain that "every political circumstance is explained and addressed differently by the stakeholders involved using carefully selected words that will justify or validate their particular course of action" (pp.105-106). The assertion informs and emphasizes the

relevance of context determining meanings in general and meanings of political expressions in particular. The contextual meanings of the forms and expressions used by stakeholders in the elections under investigation are explained below.

INEC and its adhoc staff

This section considers unique utterances made by employees of INEC and its adhoc staff of various categories before, during and after the 2019 general elections. Such constructions and their contextual meanings are analysed below.

Word/expression

Contextual meaning

Inconclusive elections:

Used to mean the situation where a winner is not declared because the difference in votes between the two leading contenders is fewer than the cancelled votes. In the 2019 electoral process, 40 elections of various categories were declared inconclusive including the gubernatorial elections of Adamawa, Benue, Bauchi, Plateau, Kano and Sokoto.

I came to count ballot

This utterance is credited to Mike Igini, the Resident Electoral Commissioner of Akwa Ibom State

Papers, not money:

Electoral commissioner of Akwa Ibom State. He made the statement in vehement resistance to attempts to bribe him in order to compromise the electoral process. The utterance meant that he deployed to Akwa Ibom to count votes not to count bribes, but ballot papers; to ensure that votes count.

Suspended election:

This means where a part of, or the entire election within an electoral constituency is suspended due to security or other reasons as it was the case of Rivers State.

Continuous collation:

This means the resumption of collation of result(s) in a particular electoral constituency

	where it was temporary suspended. This was the case of Tafawa Balewa Local Government Area in Bauchi State.
Duress result:	A result declared by a returning officer under duress by the authorizing officer which is not a true representation of candidate's votes. This was the case with Imo West Senatorial District where the returning officer was alleged to have announced the result as detated by Rochas Okorocha.
Destruction of reversed logistics:	The destruction of non-sensitive logistics/materials such as ballot boxes, voting booths, among others.
Transport stakeholders:	This means National Union of Road Transport Workers (NURTW) and other co-opted into the transportation of electoral personnel and materials.
Certified vehicles:	These are vehicles certified to be mechanically efficient by the Federal Road Safety Corps for use for the conveyance of personnel and materials during the elections.
ICCES:	This is the acronym for Interagency Consultative Committee on Elections Security comprising of major stakeholders.
INEC result:	A result declared by an authorized person either of pensionable employment with INEC or its adhoc staff.
Fake result:	Results other than INEC result declared by unauthorized persons or platforms.
Server result:	Result(s) believed to have been electronically transmitted to, and pasted on INEC server, which was part of the presidential candidate of the People Democratic Party's (PDP) claim to have won the election.
No filling of candidate:	A situation where due to pre-election irregularities, a party is not allowed by law to

fill in candidate(s) for electoral positions as in the case of All Progress Congress (APC) in Zamfara and Rivers States.

Political parties and loyalists

There were 91 registered political parties certified to, and participated in the 2019 general elections. The major actors of the political parties and their loyalists at different stages of the electoral process were observed to have made specific expressions whose meanings can only be explained within the context of the 2019 general elections. Such expressions are analyzed below:

Word/ expression	Contextual meaning
Your sins are forgiven:	This is credited to the Chairman of APC Adams Oshomole. The statement meant that all politicians who joined or intend to join APC would not be probed by the anti-graft agencies.
Empty vessel, no political worth or value:	These utterances were made by major actors referring to their political opponents especially those who have defected to or from their parties to accuse them of not having any influence on their chances of winning votes.
Rented crowd:	A large crowd at political rally believed to have been financially induced to attend. The APC and PDP used same utterance to refer to the crowds at the presidential rallies in Kano.
Federal might:	This was the expression used by the PDP to describe the alleged undue federal government influence on the electoral process in Rivers State intended to favour the ruling APC.
Stolen mandate:	This expression was used to describe the victory of a candidate believed to have won through rigging.

We'll meet at the court:	This, and 'heading to the court' were uttered by political party(ies) to mean its readiness to challenge different categories of the declared result/winner at the tribunal. 'We'll meet at the court' was APC Chairman's response to PDP's decision to challenge the result of the presidential election in the tribunal. It means APC's readiness to also defend its mandate.
Militarization:	The term was used to describe the unnecessary presence and 'participation' of the military in the general elections believed to be a deviation from their constitutional mandate. The term was used by the PDP and some other opposition parties.
Wailing wailers:	The expression used by party loyalists to describe complaints by, and the supporters of opposing political party(ies).
Electronic rats:	'E-rats' for short. Expression used by party supporters to describe authors of opposing views and members of other political parties in the social media platforms.

Party candidates

At various times during the pre-election, election and post-election activities, candidates of the various political parties had created and used specific expression to create emotions, woo and persuade electorate or describe events that were peculiar to the 2019 general elections. Such expressions could be personal creations (opinions) of the candidates or a representation of their party's ideology: They include:

Word/ expression Contextual meaning

Uncommon defection:	The expression describes the PDP minority leader in the 8 th Senate to describe his sudden and unexpected defection to the APC.
Uncommon crowd:	The utterance was also credited to Senator God'swill Akpabio used to describe the crowd at his defection rally held at Ikot Ekpene.

I will deliver:	This utterance was made by various candidates to assure their parties of victory at the polls.
Please, give me my certificate:	This statement is credited to Rochas Okorocha, the senatorial candidate of the Imo West Senatorial District. The statement means a plea to INEC to issue him his Certificate of Return based on hisself-deception that he 'won' the election announced under heavy threat.
Only one term:	The expression is credited to Atiku Abubakar and Nsima Ekere; the presidential candidates of the PDP and gubernatorial candidate of the APC in Akwa Ibom State. It means that, by the existing zoning 'agreement', Atiku's 'only one term' means a four-year term to complete the eight years zoned to the North while same applies to Eket senatorial District.

Electorate and political analysts

In the 2019 general elections, the electorate and political analysts were not left out in the generation of new constructions that were used to describe specific events before, during and after the elections. The creations from this category of stakeholders were collated mainly from the print and electronic media, and social media platforms. Some of the expressions and their contextual meanings are written below.

Word/ expression	Contextual meaning
Comprehensive loss:	The expression means the loss of all positions by the incumbent or influential politicians to the opposition typical of Olusola Saraki in Kwara State.
Comprehensive win:	This mean the victory of opposition party/ candidates in all categories of elections in the State as it was of APC in Kwara.
Final Obongowo:	A code-mixed expression coined by Akwa Ibomites to mean a top personality with high and influential political profile.

Supplementing failure:	An expression used by political analysts referring to INEC's supplementary elections as re-enforcement of failure and incompetence seen in the first elections.
Uncommon defeat:	An expression which means the defeat or victory of a less influential candidate over a political big weight. It was used to describe Chris Ekpennyong's victory over God'swill Akpabio in the senatorial election in Akwa Ibom State.
Comfortable lead:	An expression used to describe a stage in the collation and announcement of result where the margin between the leading candidate and the next is too wide and insurmountable.
Wicked Wike:	The expression describes Wike's political plots, intrigues and manoeuvres as being uncharitable to the survival of the opposition (APC) in Rivers State.
Incorruptible REC:	This expression describes the Resident Electoral Commissioner of Akwa Ibom State, Mike Igini, for his vehement refusal to collect bribe to compromise the electoral process.
One chance:	The believe that the electorate has mistakenly supported a candidate whose true character actually resurfaced after winning election.
Shocking result:	A declared result that does not reflect all predictable parameters and the votes cast.

Conclusion

In the study, we have enumerated forms and expressions created and used during the electoral process in the 2019 general elections in Nigeria. The data were grouped into four: INEC and its adhoc staff, political parties and loyalists, party candidates, and electorate and political analysts culled from comments during political communicative activities in campaigns, meetings, social media platforms and other news items. Although the researchers would not lay claim to have exhaustively covered the peculiar constructions with meanings situationally restricted to the 2019 political context,

however, it is believed that the ones enumerated have provided insights into the semantic features of those not listed. The 'fewer' excerpts, as they may appear, is due to the limitations in terms of time and the expansive Nigerian political landscape.

In addition to the peculiarity in the creations, the choices in the collocational restrictions such as 'supplementing failure', 'suspended elections', 'comprehensive loss', 'uncommon defeat', 'continuous collation', 'comfortable lead', 'rented crowd', 'stolen mandate', among others, were carefully coined to describe the events within the context of the particular general elections. The meanings are also appreciated in the context of the utterances. Active participation in the process also implies the required comprehension of the contextual meanings of the specific forms and expressions as specific representations of occurrences of the given political period.

The study has no doubt broaden the scope of political language in Nigeria and revealed that events in every political activity could call for conscious creations of utterances to describe the uniqueness. The study therefore recommends further investigations into language use in the 2019 general elections in particular and political language in Nigeria in general in order to further broaden knowledge on the field of English for political discourse.

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