De/Responsibilisation in Inec Chairman’s Speech on the Postponement of the 2019 General Elections in Nigeria

The 2019 general elections in Nigeria was an important election to determine the continued existence or otherwise of the Nigerian project. On the morning of the presidential and national assembly’s elections, many Nigerians woke up to realise elections have been postponed. The INEC Chairman’s speech was hedged with elements of responsibilisation and deresponsibilisation on the postponement. No doubt, the speech has not enjoyed scholarly attention because it was a recent occurrence. This paper is therefore interested in identifying the discourse strategies and the constructions used in representing the postponement. The speech shows how the electoral umpire ‘responsibilise’ involvements in the postponement of the Nigerian electoral project. Guided by aspects of Caffi’s deresponsibilisation and responsibilisation, and Hyland’s Stance theory, this paper subjects the 1624-word speech to discourse analysis. The analysis of the data revealed that there were two main constructions on the 2019 general elections postponement: allegiance to a successful electoral conduct and logistical challenges. The logistical challenges bifurcate into two other sub-constructions: natural and human-induced disruptions. The natural disruption is as a result of natural occurrence (bad weather), while the human-induced disruptions are as a result of court judgments and fire disasters. The constructions were achieved through six discourse strategies: historical reference to antecedent-success, emotional appeal/blackmail, self-glorification, blame avoidance/allocation, assuring/reassuring of control, and creating common ground. The paper concludes by recommending e-voting to forestall wastages and challenges associated with manual voting.

Keywords: Deresponsibilisation and Responsibilisation, Independent National Electoral Commission, Speechmaking, Election Postponement, 2019 General Elections in Nigeria

Introduction

Speechmaking as an art has become part of the practice associated with political actors across the world (Osisanwo & Chinaguh, 2018). Suffice to say that political leaders and actors alike appropriately use language to pursue their political agenda (Osisanwo 2011a:200). Political actors deploy appropriate choices in language usage to achieve desired goals in different speeches such as acceptance speeches, inaugural addresses, farewell addresses, among others. The social or political actors are influential people, including opinion leaders, courts, government, other prominent national figures, celebrities and even the newspaper editors (Osisanwo 2011a:1). With their use of language, they play a vital role in shaping issues in society and setting the boundaries of what is talked about and how it is talked about (Henry and Tator, 2002; Taiwo, 2008; Osisanwo, 2016a).

Language scholars have emphasised the role of context in language and the role of language in politics and elections. As cited by Osisanwo (2016b), one of the most comprehensive definitions of language is the view that it is
“human vocal noise or the arbitrary graphic representation of this noise, used systematically and conventionally by members of a speech community for purposes of communication” (Osisanwo, 2008:1). Whereas according to Engholm (1965) as cited by Adeyanju (2002: 532), language is the key to the heart of the people, if you lose it, you lose the people, if you keep it safe, it unlocks the people’s heart. Crystal (1987:2) observes that ‘since the use of language in politics can easily hurt if it is unfeelingly attacked, the user has to be conscious of its function as a public behaviour so that it is easy for different usages to be noted’. Language, which is used to drive the intent of the political actors to the heart of the electorate, plays a significant role in political mobilisation (Osisanwo, 2016a). Politics involves wielding power and political actions are enacted through discursive formations (van Dijk, 2001). van Dijk (2006:728) also asserts that ‘politics is one of the social domains whose practices are virtually exclusively discursive.’ The different discursive choices made by the political actors, therefore, are consciously crafted in order to persuade and convince the electorate to belong to their camp.

Political discourses can be broadly viewed as discourses that relate to political or electoral views. van Dijk (2006:732-733) argues that political discourse is defined in terms of political contexts; and that it is not enough to observe that political discourse often features the renowned ‘political’ pronoun *we*, it is also vital to relate such use to such categories as who is speaking, when, where and with/to whom, that is, to specific aspects of the political situation. In his paper, *Politics, Ideology and Discourse*, van Dijk (2006:732) proposes a valuable framework for political discourse analysis thus: “the social organisation of the field of politics, and hence of politicians and political groups, is largely based on ideological differences, alliances, and similarities. The overall organisation of social beliefs as a struggle between the left and the right is the result of the underlying polarisation of political ideologies that has permeated society as a whole. Elections, parliaments, political campaigns, propaganda, demonstrations, and many other phenomena of the political field are thus profoundly ideological.” From van Dijk’s submission, it can be argued that, though written by the electoral umpire, the speech of the INEC Chairman cannot be said to be ideologically neutral. No doubt, the opposition parties believe that any electoral commission in Nigeria tries as much as possible to do the bidding of the government that sets it up. Hence, this paper is interested in the language and other choices as used by the INEC Chairman in relaying the Commission’s decision on the postponement of the 2019 general elections.

Elections and the Electoral Commission in Nigeria

Nigeria, a republic in Western Africa, gained independence in 1960 and was led by Dr. Nnamdi Azikwe as a Ceremonial President. In Osisanwo’s (2016b) account, Nigeria has experienced three types of government from 1960 to 2015. From 1960 to 1966, it had a ceremonial government; from 1966-1979 (twenty-four years) and 1983-1999 (sixteen years), Nigeria was ruled by...
military administrators. Meanwhile, the civilian government – a government voted to power by the electorate – was in control, first, from October 1, 1979 to December 31, 1983 (four years), and May 29, 1999 to 2015 (sixteen years), and remains in power from 2015 to date. There was also an interim government of three months in 1993 (August – November). Under the democratic government, especially since 1999, Nigeria became a federal republic with a democratically elected government made of three separate arms: executive, legislative and judiciary. In all the period of existence of Nigeria so far, especially from the post-independence era, Nigeria has spent twenty-nine years, governed by the military. Meanwhile, the country has only had the privilege of a little over twenty years in democratic dispensation. In a democratic dispensation, a leader is voted to power by the electorate. The electorate is often made up of indigenes of a particular election zone who are up to 18 years of age. Such elections, as that of Nigeria, are conducted by an independent body. In Nigeria, it is conducted by the Independent National Electoral Commission. This commission, which has evolved under different names has conducted at least eight presidential elections in Nigeria, that is, in the years 1979, 1993, 1999, 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015 and 2019.

During general elections in Nigeria, as it is now the structure, six different elections are conducted within two weeks. On the first day, three elections are conducted. Elected by Nigerian electorate for a four-year term are an individual who occupies the seat of the president, 109 senators elected across the 109 senatorial districts in the country and 360 House of Representative members. On the second day – a fortnight from the previous election, three other elections are held. Elected across the 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory are state governors, members of the state house of assemblies and local government chairmen/councillors.

The inception of election postponement in Nigeria dates back to 2011. In 2011, a parliamentary election was to be held on April 2, but was postponed by two days to April 4, 2011. In the same vein in 2011, the presidential election was postponed from April 9 to April 16. In 2015, the general election was originally scheduled to hold on 14 February, but was later postponed to 28 March for the presidential, senatorial and house of representatives; while those of the governorship and state house of assemblies were postponed to 11 April 2015. In 2019, the presidential and national assembly elections were scheduled for 16 February 2019, while the governorship and state house of assemblies were scheduled for 2 March 2019. Elections were postponed by one week after INEC cited what it claimed to be operational challenges. The elections were rescheduled to hold on 23 February and 9 March, 2019.

Electoral Commissions in Nigeria

The origin of electoral bodies in Nigeria dates back to the period before Independence when the Electoral Commission of Nigeria (ECN) was established to conduct 1959 elections. The Commission (headed by Chief Eyo
Esua) conducted the immediate post-independence federal and regional elections of 1964 and 1965 respectively. The military coup of 1966 led to the dissolution of the electoral body. In 1978, the regime of General Olusegun Obasanjo constituted a new Federal Electoral Commission (FEDECO) (headed by Chief Michael Ani, who was succeeded by Justice Victor Ovie Whisky) to organise the elections of 1979, which ushered in the Second Republic under the leadership of Alhaji Shehu Shagari. FEDECO also conducted the general elections of 1983.

During the General Ibrahim Babagida regime, the National Electoral Commission of Nigeria was constituted and was headed by Professor Eme Awa (1987–1989), Professor Humphrey Nwosu (1989–1993). In December 1995, the regime of General Sani Abacha, which earlier dissolved NEC in 1993, established the National Electoral Commission of Nigeria (NECON), which was headed by Professor Okon Uya and Chief Summer Dagogo Jack (1994–1998). The Commission conducted another set of elections; Local Government councils to National Assembly. However, the elected institutions were not inaugurated before the sudden death of General Abacha, on June 1998. The current and longest-serving commission, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), was established in 1998 when General Abdulsalam Abubakar’s Administration assumed power and dissolved NECON. Since the establishment of INEC, the Commission has been headed by different people. First, it was Justice Ephraim Akpata (1998–2000). Upon the death of Akpata in 2000, President Obasanjo appointed Abel Guobadia (2000–2005). When Guobadia retired in 2005, President Obasanjo appointed Professor Maurice Iwu (2005–2010). Upon the expiration of Iwu’s tenure, President Goodluck Jonathan nominated Professor Attahiru Muhammadu Jega (2010–2015) as the new INEC Chairman. The nomination, as those of Guobadia and Iwu was approved by the Senate. When the tenure of Jega also expired in June, 2015, President Muhammadu Buhari also nominated and got the Senate’s approval for the current Chairman, Professor Mahmood Yakubu.

Literature Review and Knowledge Gap

The political landscape within and outside Nigeria has enjoyed scholarly attention from practitioners in the social sciences and humanities based disciplines including political scientists, linguists, sociologists, cultural anthropologists and psychologists. Evidently, linguists, discourse analysts, among others have also given sufficient attention to the examination of discourses on politics and elections. Meanwhile, previous works on (presidential) election discourse have focused mainly on inaugural and victory speeches (Slagell, 1991; Zhang & Mingxia, 2009; Vastermark, 2007; Irimiea, 2010; Sharndama, 2015), campaign manifestos (Ademilokun & Taiwo, 2013; Taiwo, 2014; Aduradola & Ojukwu, 2013; Ugwu, (2013); Nartay & Yankson, 2014), and concession speeches (Corcoran, 1994; Ademilokun, 2016; Osisanwo & Chinaguh, 2018). Other discourse studies have examined, among
others, (media) electoral discourses (Pengsun & Fenfeng, 2013; Wei, 2001; Opeibi, 2007; Osisanwo 2011a, 2012, 2013; Oyeleye and Osisanwo 2013a and 2013b; Osisanwo 2016b & 2016c) advertisement and campaign discourses among Nigerian political parties (Adegoju 2005; Opeibi 2009; Osisanwo 2010, 2011b and 2011c, Akinwale and Adegoju 2012; Ademilokun and Taiwo 2013), political interviews and debates (Odebunmi 2009), political speeches of past Nigerian leaders (Awonuga 1988; Oha 1994; Ayeomoni 2007; Alo and Igwebuike 2009). However, there is no emphasis on election postponement discourse. Hence, this paper sets out to examine the constructions and discourse strategies used in the INEC Chairman’s speech on the postponement of the 2019 general elections in Nigeria in order to identify how the electoral umpire ‘responsibilise’ and ‘deresponsibilise’ involvements in the postponement of the Nigerian electoral project.

Theoretical Perspective and methodology

Comprehending the arguments in the speech of the INEC Chairman, Professor Mahmood Yakubu (henceforth PMY) on the postponement of the 2019 general elections in Nigeria invites a combination of the theoretic concepts of deresponsibilisation and responsibilisation, and stance theory, as briefly discussed below.

Deresponsibilisation and responsibilisation

The introduction of the terms “Deresponsibilisation” and “responsibilisation” has been attributed to Caffi (2002, 2007). Respectively, the terms refer to the conceptualisation of uncertainty and certainty in reports, events or utterances. In Caffi’s (2002:118) description, “deresponsibilisation”, that is, “deresponsabilizzazione” or “deresponsibilities” (2007:159), has to do with the act of avoiding responsibility, or a text associated with “weakened responsibility” (Caffi, 2007: 67). Deresponsibilisation is achieved when a speaker or rhetor consciously and or deliberately avoids conflict, uses indirectness, deploys politeness-induced vagueness, which Caffi (2002, 2007) labelled as “bush.” Deresponsibilisation expresses certainty by the deployment of modified voices, unclear choice of words (Mey 2016: 13), (Odebunmi, 2019). It “connotes the non-attributability of the ‘voices’ involved in uttering or writing” (Mey 2016:6). Responsibilisation, on the other hand, has to do with the clear, unequivocal locution which directly commits the speaker or rhetor to the certainty of their propositions. Responsibilisation is seen in texts, speeches or utterances devoid of hedges. It does not convey information through another utterer’s voice or the evocation of another person’s authority.
Stance Theory

Stance and engagement theory serves as a complementary analytical guide for this study. According to Hyland (2005:176), *stance* expresses a textual ‘voice’ or community recognised personality. Stance refers to the ways speakers, writers or discourse participants present themselves and convey their judgments, opinions, and commitments about a particular topic. It is the ways that writers intrude to stamp their personal authority onto their arguments (Osisanwo 2017). Stance is ‘the lexical and grammatical expression of attitudes, feelings, judgments or commitment concerning the propositional content of a message’ (Biber and Finnegan 1989:124). Other scholars have used words such as appraisal, attitude, evaluation, among others, to represent the concept of *stance* (Osisanwo 2017). The key resources which realise stance are otherwise known as elements of stance; and as identified by Hyland, they are Hedges, Boosters, Attitude markers and Self-mention. In relation to our data, the INEC chairman deploys different stance elements to responsibilise or deresponsibilise.

De/responsibilisation is associated with a vital political value which the contemporary society accords to a particular image of what it means to be a person, that is the ‘enterprising self’, who interprets its reality in terms of individual responsibility and who shapes its life through acts of choice (Odebunmi, 2019). This paper aims to examine a plethora of discourses, practices and techniques, relating to the speech of the INEC Chairman on the postponement of the 2019 general elections, which are underpinned by presumptions of self ‘autonomization’ and ‘responsibilisation.’ De/responsibilisation and Hyland’s Stance theory will be deployed as framework for analysis, while the data will be subjected to discourse analysis. Some of such discourses show how PMY ‘responsibilises’ or ‘deresponsibilises’ his individual involvement in the progress of the Nigerian project, thereby canvassing for trust from Nigerians and the need to be calm and trust the INEC under his headship.

Analysis and Findings

The analysis of the data revealed that there were two main constructions on the 2019 postponement of general elections: allegiance to a successful electoral conduct and logistical challenges. The logistical challenges bifurcate into two other sub-constructions: natural and human-induced disruptions. The natural disruption is as a result of natural occurrence (bad weather), while the human-induced disruptions are as a result of court judgments and fire disasters. The constructions were achieved through six discourse strategies: reference to antecedent-success, emotional appeal/blackmail, self-glorification, blame avoidance/allocation, assuring/reassuring of control, and creating common ground. The next subsection presents the examination and explanation of the findings.
Allegiance to successful electoral conduct

The first striking construction in the first paragraph of the speech is PMY’s acclaimed commitment to electoral success. Defending the reason for the postponement of the election, PMY draws on his avowed commitment. In the first sentence: About thirteen hours ago, I conveyed to Nigerians the decision of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to reschedule the 2019 general elections by one week, PMY begins by using the self-mention element of Stance, “I” to responsibilise his role and present the discoursal self as the Chairman of INEC who should convey the decision. In the same sentence, PMY goes further to deresponsibilise, that is weakening his responsibility, role or involvement in the postponement by generalising that it was a collective decision of INEC. To further convey his judgment, opinion and commitment to the Nigerian project, PMY quickly hedges his speech with a booster element using the discourse strategy of emotional appeal to Nigerians with the adjective, “painful” in the expression, The one-week adjustment was a painful one for INEC but necessary in the overall interest of our democracy. The use of ‘a painful one’ and ‘overall interest of our democracy’ also have elements of attitude marking in stance to show the affective attitude of PMY to the postponement. Attitude markers indicate the writer’s affective attitude to propositions, in order to convey surprise, agreement, importance, frustration. The use of the inclusive pronoun “our” in the phrase “our democracy” implicates PMY as included in the Nigerian project.

The second paragraph begins with the use of historical reference, where PMY takes Nigerians down memory lane, reminding them of the new beginnings since 2011 thus:

Nigerians will recall that when this Commission was appointed in November 2015, we promised Nigerians two cardinal things. First, we shall work hard to consolidate the improvements made in the management of elections in Nigeria since 2011. Secondly, we shall always be open, transparent and responsive. We have strived diligently to keep these promises in very trying circumstances.

The paragraph is dominated with attitude markers to responsibilise the Commission’s promise and allegiance to successful electoral conduct. Attitude is mainly expressed through the participant’s choice of verbs, adverbs and adjectives to convey affect in his appraisal (Martin 2000) of the discourse in order to both take a stand and align self with others’ propositions and discourses. Hence, PMY uses words and expressions such as “work hard,” “consolidate,” “improvements,” “open”, “transparent,” “responsive,” and “diligently” as appraisal techniques to depict the acclaimed commitment. Meanwhile, the particular reference to 2011 and 2015 elections implicate the Professor Attahiru Jega’s regime as the regime which heralded major improvements to the electoral process in Nigeria.

To further proclaim the judgment, opinion and commitment of the commission to the postponement under his watch, PMY uses inclusive responsibilisation – our promise – accompanied with the discourse strategy of
self-praise and or self-glorification thus: In keeping with our promise to consolidate the gains of the last two electoral cycles, the Commission has conducted 195 rerun and off-season elections across the country since the last general elections. To implicate the assurances that the Commission is not a failure, but has been known for serial successes, PMY’s speech reveals that: Most of these elections have been generally adjudged to show progressive improvements in planning, execution and outcomes. However, while PMY responsibilises the success of the Commission in organising elections, he deresponsibilises, backgrounds uses indirectness and or totally excludes those who have made such judgments of progressive improvements.

The fourth and fifth paragraphs of the speech have a preponderant use of boosters, attitude markers and self-mention pronouns to responsibilise and deresponsibilise, using the self-glorification and self-praise discourse strategies. In both paragraphs, PMY gives account of the successes the Commission has made under his watch. PMY uses the first person pronouns and possessive adjectives to present information, and the voice of the Commission. He uses the self-mention to present the discoursal self – INEC and her success so far in order to project an impression and the stance of self in relation to the arguments at hand. In the speech, there is also the use of the singular pronoun “I”, which PMY uses to responsibilise and project his personal opinion on the success of the electoral conduct. There is also the use of the inclusive pronoun “we” and the possessive “our” to show solidarity and oneness, and responsibilise the achievements to the members of the Commission thus: our preparations, our goal, we announced, we began, we subsequently issued, we carefully followed, we kept to, we have, we registered, we prepared, I should note.

In the same vein, PMY deploys boosters as devices to express certainty in what is said and mark involvement with the topic and solidarity with readers (Hyland 2008). In the speech, PMY take positions that show finality and or the extent of the Commission’s preparedness despite the postponement. Using discourse strategies like emotional appeal and blame avoidance, PMY discusses his conviction on what the Commission had achieved before the postponement in order to assure Nigerians of the workability of the one week postponement and gain their trust. In the paragraphs, PMY tries to convince Nigerians with the use of adverbs of manner and degree to express the how and what the extent of preparedness of the Commission is. According to him, their goal is to plan carefully, to execute meticulously. In addition, they began the planning quite early, and they carefully followed the timetable. Some of the choices also implicate the use of attitude markers. PMY deploys attitude markers to indicate his affective attitude to propositions, in order to convey surprise, agreement, importance, frustration, as expressed through his choice of nouns (e.g. Strategic Plan, Strategic Programme of Action, Election Project Plan, commitment, goal), verbs (e.g. registered, prepared, printed, delivered), adverbs and adjectives to convey affect in his appraisal. To further convey affect in the Chairman’s appraisal, he gives the statistical presentation of facts and figures thus: Within a period of 16 months, we registered over 14 million
Nigerians as new voters, collecting their names...and their entire ten fingerprints... I should note that of the 14.28 million Permanent Voters’ Cards (PVCs) made available for collection, about 10.87 million or 76.12% have been collected.

Likewise in paragraph 6, he says:

Not only we have recruited and trained about 1 million young people..., the Commission has printed 421.7 million ballot papers for six scheduled elections, as well as 13.6 million leaves of result forms for the Presidential election alone. Indeed, managing 91 political parties and 23,316 candidates for whom votes will be cast in 119,973 polling units by over 84 million voters is certainly astounding.

In paragraph 6, PMY uses emotional blackmail as a discourse strategy to invite Nigerians to pity INEC, to accept and agree with the Commission that the postponement was in order. According to him: *It is often not appreciated the magnitude of activities that the Commission undertakes during general elections.* This calls Nigerians to question on the need to be emotive with the Commission, bearing in mind the enormous task given to the success achieved so far. Mainly, therefore, on allegiance to good electoral conduct, the Chairman together with his Commission responsibilise the good achievement perceived to have been made so far to themselves.

Operational/Logistical challenges

The second construction on the reason for the postponement, as contained in paragraphs 7-12 of the speech are operational/logistical challenges. A further examination of the logistical challenge reveals a tripartite sub-issues that created the challenges. First of them is natural disruption (bad weather). The second which are twin in form, both human-induced, are fire disaster and numerous court orders on inclusion of some politicians or their political parties in the ballot papers. PMY draws on these operational and logistical challenges as another reason for the postponement of the general elections.

The Chairman begins the seventh paragraph by acknowledging how herculean a task it is to organise general elections in Nigeria, stating operational challenges as a given. PMY’s acknowledgement of such challenges as a given in *It is therefore not unexpected that such a tremendous national mobilization of men and materials will encounter operational challenges* generalises failure as a recurring decimal which is not only peculiar to his regime. Having sought the redress, the Chairman then goes ahead to responsibilise his regime’s failure thus: *and we have had our own fair share of such challenges.* PMY uses the discourse strategy of historical reference to deresponsibilise the Commission’s ineffectiveness, and the discourse strategy of creating common ground between the Commission and the electorate to share the perceived blame of ineffectiveness as a given in the history of elections in Nigeria thus: *There has been delays in delivering ballot papers and result sheets for the elections which is not unusual. The use of which is not*
unusual implicates the previous regimes as equally guilty of such a failure. Nevertheless, the use of the inclusive self-mention “we” and “our” in the shared blame responsibilised to the Commission, personally deresponsibilises the blame to the Chairman. With a subtle recourse to van Dijk’s (2006) argument that ideological discourse often features the following overall strategies of what might be called the ideological square: Emphasise Our good things, Emphasise Their bad things, De-emphasise Our bad things, De-emphasise Their good things (Oyeleye and Osisanwo, 2013:765), PMY emphasises and associates the exclusive discourse-self “I” to responsibilise the achievement of the Commission despite the challenges thus: “However, I must emphasize that all the ballot papers and result sheets were ready before the elections despite the very tight legal timeframe for finalizing nomination of candidates and dealing with the spate of legal challenges that accompany it.”

One of the human-induced sub-constructions which accounted for the logistical challenges faced by INEC has to do with court orders on inclusion of politicians or their political parties in the ballot papers. As stated in the speech:

the Commission has been sued or joined in over 640 court cases arising from the nomination of candidates. As at today, there are 40 different court orders against the Commission on whether to add or drop candidates. The net effect of these is that there is usually roughly a one-month window for the Commission to print ballot papers and result sheets and either fly or transport them to several destinations until they finally get to each polling unit.

The evidential statistical enumeration of 640 court cases and 40 court orders deresponsibilises the Commission as the causative agents forcing postponement, and responsibilises the politician-plaintiff and or defendant, alongside the courts giving late-hour judgments on including specific candidates as the causative agents forcing back the hands of the Commission and Nigeria as a country. The blame allocation discourse strategy calls for emotive response from Nigerians to the Commission and castigation of the others.

Similarly, in paragraph 7, the Chairman goes further to identify another factor associated with logistical challenges – natural disruption (bad weather), thereby deresponsibilising his role and that of the Commission since it is a natural occurrence which is beyond the control of any human, but allocating blame to the bad weather. He identifies bad weather as a causative agent which hampered the movement of sensitive/non-sensitive materials from one location to the other as another constructed reason for the postponement. According to PMY, *Unfortunately, in the last one week, flights within the country have been adversely affected by bad weather. For instance, three days ago, we were unable to deliver materials to some locations due to bad weather.* The strategies of blame-shift from self, blame allocation to others and blame avoidance to self, present the Commission in good light to the electorate.

In paragraphs 8-10, PMY identifies another human-induced factor that forced the hands of the Commission to resort to postponement by a week.
“Saboteurs,” as he represented them, set three of their offices across three states on fire in order to truncate the general elections thus:

We also faced what may well be attempts to sabotage our preparations. In a space of two weeks, we had to deal with serious fire incidents in three of our offices in Isiala Ngwa South Local Government Area of Abia State, Qu'an Pan Local Government Area of Plateau State and our Anambra State Office at Awka. In all three cases, serious disruptions were occasioned by the fire, further diverting our attention from regular preparations to recovery from the impact of the incidents. In Isiala Ngwa South, hundreds of PVCs were burnt, necessitating the recompiling of the affected cards and reprinting in time to ensure that the affected voters are not disenfranchised. I am glad that all the cards were quickly reprinted and made available for collection by their owners.

In this construction which obviously deresponsibilises possible castigation of postponement to INEC, PMY deploys different stance elements – hedging, boosters, attitude markers and self-mention, accompanied with discourse strategies like emotional appeal, creating common ground between the commission and the electorate, blame allocation to the saboteurs, assuring and reassuring the electorate.

The Chairman begins with the use of the inclusive “we” to self-mention what the Commission had recently gone through. In the same vein, PMY deploys boosters as devices to express certainty in what is said and mark involvement with the topic and solidarity with readers (Hyland 2008). In the speech, PMY takes positions that show finality and or the extent of the dastardly effect of the fire disaster on the Commission with the use of adverb of manner like quickly. Some of the choices also implicate the use of attitude markers. PMY deploys attitude markers to indicate the affective attitude to propositions, in order to convey surprise, and frustration, as expressed through his choice of nouns, like fire incidents, which took place in real locations as identified using proper nouns like Isiala Ngwa South Local Government Area of Abia State, Qu'an Pan Local Government Area of Plateau State and Awka Office in Anambra State. Other nouns which implicate the dastardly act included disruptions, the fire and so forth, verbs (e.g. burnt, reprinted), adjectives (e.g. serious) to convey affect in his appraisal. PMY further conveys affect through the methodical and explicit itemisation of the Commission’s losses, inviting pity from Nigerians. He concludes the paragraph using the self-mention exclusive “I” in I am glad that all the cards were… for perceived self-praise to present the discoursal self and responsibilise to himself the achievement of quickly reprinting and making the cards available to the owners, and ensuring that the qualified electorate are not disenfranchised.

In the next paragraph (9), PMY switches to the inclusive “we” in order not to entirely personalise the responsibilised self-praise by generalising the achievement to the activities if the Commission thus: We recovered quickly and have since replaced everything destroyed. In addition, we secured a suitable building from which to conduct the elections. No doubt, the construction is equally meant to pacify the electorate, assure all of the
Commission’s preparedness and justify the need for the one-week-long postponement. Meanwhile, having identified the logistical challenges that the Commission has been facing, in paragraphs 11 and 12, PMY negotiates with the electorate and Nigerians in general, stating his avowed commitment to free, fair and credible elections and the postponement as a failure-forestalling strategy since all the logistical issues could not be resolved within 24 hours.

In like manner, and almost most importantly, PMY in paragraphs 10 and 12 identifies that the Commission had to replace the destroyed over 4,600 Smart Card Readers which were to be used for the elections. He submits by deresponsibilising but passing the buck to the ICT Department of the Commission that:

While the Commission was considering the following Monday 18th February 2019 as an option, our ICT Department advised us that it would require 5-6 days to reconfigure about 180,000 Smart Card Readers earlier programmed to work only on election day Saturday 16th February 2019. It is for this reason that the Commission decided to adjust the election dates to Saturday 23rd February 2019 for Presidential and National Assembly elections and a consequential adjustment of Governorship, State Assembly and FCT Area Council elections to Saturday 9th March 2019.

The Chairman fronts the need for a successful electoral conduct as a strong reason for the postponement. While trying to hedge seven whole days of postponement instead of 24 or 48 hours, PMY responsibilises that for him he would have opted for Monday 18th February, and deresponsibilises his role in the final day selected being a period that is convenient to take care of the affordances of the ICT Department of the Commission.

In the remaining paragraphs 13-17, PMY uses both responsibilisation and deresponsibilisation with discourse strategies such as blame-share, assuring and reassuring, among others to gain the trust of Nigerian that some sensitive materials have been distributed. However, all such materials have been retrieved and will be taken back to custody of the Central Bank of Nigeria. He also requests the trust of Nigerians that I want to assure you that there will be proper audit to account for all materials, in order not to discredit the new date.

To further prove the competence level of the Commission to the electorate, PMY reels out the programme of activities and or check-list of different activities within the one week.

On a final note, PMY appeals to Nigerians and all other stakeholders in what has been a very difficult decision for the Commission deresponsibilising the postponement to himself and responsibilising same to the Commission, and drawing on common ground and assuring discourse strategies to convince Nigerians, using the inclusive possessive “we” in we believe that ultimately this is for the good of our democracy and country to show that he is a part of the Nigerian populace and the Nigerian project.

The most heart-melting statement made by PMY after the whole statement was the one contained in paragraph 16 where the Chairman responsibilise the postponement to himself as the Chairman and the Commission at large thus: As
Chairman of INEC, and on behalf of the Commission, we take full responsibility for what happened and we regret any inconvenience our decision might have caused.

Conclusion

This study set out to examine INEC Chairman’s 2019 election postponement speech, paying attention to the elements of responsibilisation and deresponsibilisation, and identifying the discourse strategies and the constructions used in representing the postponement. Guided by aspects of Caffi’s deresponsibilisation and responsibilisation, and Hyland’s stance, the paper reveals that there are two central constructions on the 2019 general elections postponement: allegiance to a successful electoral conduct and logistical challenges. The logistical challenges bifurcate into two other sub-constructions: natural and human-induced disruptions. While the natural disruption is as a result of natural occurrence (bad weather), human-induced disruptions were as a result of court judgments and fire disasters. The constructions were achieved through six discourse strategies: reference to antecedent-success, emotional appeal/blackmail, self-glorification/self-praise, blame avoidance/allocation, assuring/reassuring of control, and creating common ground. It is recommended that the challenges advanced by the Chairman are avoidable if Nigeria can explore the use of e-voting in order to forestall wastages and challenges associated with manual voting.

References


Mey 2016


Odebunmi, 2019


Address By The Chairman Independent National Electoral Commission (Inec),
Professor Mahmood Yakubu To The Stakeholders' Meeting On The 2019 General
Elections Held At The International Conference Centre Abuja On Saturday 16th
February 2019

1. About thirteen hours ago, I conveyed to Nigerians the decision of the Independent National
Electoral Commission (Inec) to reschedule the 2019 general elections by one week.
Presidential and National Assembly earlier scheduled for 16th February 2019 will now hold on
Saturday 23rd February 2019 while Governorship, State Assembly and FCT Area Council
elections scheduled for 2nd March 2019 will now hold on Saturday 9th March 2019. The one-
week adjustment was a painful one for Inec but necessary in the overall interest of our
democracy.

2. Nigerians will recall that when this Commission was appointed in November 2015, we
promised Nigerians two cardinal things. First, we shall work hard to consolidate the
improvements made in the management of elections in Nigeria since 2011. Secondly, we shall
always be open, transparent and responsive. We have strived diligently to keep these promises in very trying circumstances.

3. In keeping with our promise to consolidate the gains of the last two electoral cycles, the Commission has conducted 195 rerun and off-season elections across the country since the last general elections. Most of these elections have been generally adjudged to show progressive improvements in planning, execution and outcomes.

4. This commitment to continue to improve on election administration has informed our preparations for the 2019 general elections. Our goal is to plan carefully, execute meticulously and bring stability into election management in Nigeria. Consequently, we announced fixed data for elections in Nigeria to the effect that Presidential and National Assembly elections will always hold on the third Saturday in February of an election year, while the Governorship and State Assembly elections follow two weeks later. Having settled this, we began the planning quite early, with a Strategic Plan (SP), 3 Strategic Programme of Action (SPA) and an Election Project Plan (EPP). In fact, the plan for the 2019 general elections was ready in November 2017 and we subsequently issued the timetable and schedule of activities for the elections over one year ago on 9th January 2018. We carefully followed the timetable and implemented 13 of the 14 activities as scheduled. We kept to the timeframe and have not missed the date fixed for any single activity.

5. In preparing for the 2019 general elections, we have come face-to-face with the realities of conducting such an extensive national deployment of men and materials in a developing country like ours. It is said that elections constitute the most extensive mobilization of men and materials that any country could undertake in peacetime. The challenges of doing so, even under the best of circumstances, are enormous. Within a period of 16 months, we registered over 14 million Nigerians as new voters, collecting their names, addresses, photographs and their entire ten fingerprints. Beyond that, we prepared, printed and delivered their permanent voter’s cards for collection. I should note that of the 14.28 million Permanent Voters’ Cards (PVCs) made available for collection, about 10.87 million or 76.12% have been collected.

6. It is often not appreciated the magnitude of activities that the Commission undertakes during general elections. Not only we have recruited and trained about 1 million young people to serve as ad hoc staff, the magnitude of materials mobilized for our elections is enormous. For instance, the Commission has printed 421.7 million ballot papers for six scheduled elections, as well as 13.6 million leaves of result forms for the Presidential election alone. Indeed, managing 91 political parties and 23,316 candidates for whom votes will be cast in 119,973 polling units by over 84 million voters is certainly astounding. No doubt, preparations for the 2019 general elections have been extremely tasking for the Commission.

7. It is therefore not unexpected that such a tremendous national mobilization of men and materials will encounter operational challenges and we have had our own fair share of such challenges. There has been delays in delivering ballot papers and result sheets for the elections which is not unusual. However, I must emphasize that all the ballot papers and result sheets were ready before the elections despite the very tight legal timeframe for finalizing nomination of candidates and dealing with the spate of legal challenges that accompany it. In this regard, the Commission has been sued or joined in over 640 court cases arising from the nomination of candidates. As at today, there are 40 different court orders against the Commission on whether to add or drop candidates. The net effect of these is that there is usually roughly a one-month window for the Commission to print ballot papers and result sheets and either fly or transport them to several destinations until they finally get to each polling unit. Unfortunately, in the last one week, flights within the country have been adversely affected by bad weather. For instance, three days ago, we were unable to deliver materials to some locations due to bad weather. We therefore had to rely on slow-moving long haulage vehicles to locations that can be serviced by air in spite of the fact that we created five zonal airport hubs Abuja (North
Central), Port Harcourt (South South and South East), Kano (North West), Maiduguri and Yale (North East) and Lagos (South West) to facilitate the delivery of electoral logistics.

8. Apart from these logistical challenges, we also faced what may well be attempts to sabotage our preparations. In a space of two weeks, we had to deal with serious fire incidents in three of our offices in Isiala Ngwa South Local Government Area of Abia State, Qu’an Pan Local Government Area of Plateau State and our Anambra State Office at Awka. In all three cases, serious disruptions were occasioned by the fire, futher diverting our attention from regular preparations to recovery from the impact of the incidents. In Isiala Ngwa South, hundreds of PVCs were burnt, necessitating the recompiling of the affected cards and reprinting in time to ensure that the affected voters are not disenfranchised. I am glad that all the cards were quickly reprinted and made available for collection by their owners.

9. In Qu’an Pan Local Government Area, our entire office was razed, destroying all the materials prepared for the elections printed register of voters, ballot boxes, voting cubicles and several electricity generating sets. II Registration Areas and over 100 polling units were affected by the fire. We recovered quickly and have since replaced everything destroyed. In addition, we secured a suitable building from which to conduct the elections.

10. Perhaps the most serious was the fire incident in our Anambra State Office at Awka, which destroyed over 4,600 Smart Card Readers being prepared for the elections. These Card Readers take at least six months to procure. Despite this setback, we have practically recovered from this by mopping up every available spare SCR across the country and within 24 hours delivered them for elections to hold in Anambra State.

11. All these challenges mean that there have been differences in preparations from one State to another. Our overall assessment is that if the elections went on as planned, polls will not open at 8am in all polling units nationwide. Yet, we are determined that polls must hold at the same time everywhere in the country. In this way, elections will not be staggered. This is very important to public perception of elections as free, fair and credible. We promised Nigerians that we shall be open, transparent and responsive.

12. Faced with these challenges, we initially thought that we only require a maximum of 24 hours to resolve the logistics issues involved and complete our deployment for the election. This would mean shifting the elections to commence on Sunday 17th February 2019. However, given the restriction of movement during elections, that could affect many votes who worship on Sundays. While the Commission was considering the following Monday 18th February 2019 as an option, our ICT Department advised us that it would require 5 – 6 days to reconfigure about 180,000 Smart Card Readers earlier programmed to work only on election day Saturday 16th February 2019. It is for this reason that the Commission decided to adjust the election dates to Saturday 23rd February 2019 for Presidential and National Assembly elections and a consequential adjustment of Governorship, State Assembly and FCT Area Council elections to Saturday 9th March 2019.

13. Some sensitive materials have been distributed. However, all such materials have been retrieved and will be taken back to custody of the Central Bank of Nigeria. I want to assure you that there will be proper audit to account for all materials.

14. In the next few days, the Commission will work on the basis of the following plan:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>S/No.</th>
<th>Activity Timeframe</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Completion/confirmation of deployment Monday 18th February 2019 of materials</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Configuration of the Smart Card Readers Sunday 17th Thursday 21st February 2019</td>
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<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Receipt and Deployment of sensitive Wednesday 20 and materials to LGAs Thursday 21st February 2019</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
4. Refresher training for ad hoc staff Thursday 21st February 2019
5. Deployment of personnel to RACs Friday 22nd of February 2019

15. I want to appeal to Nigerians and all other stakeholders for their understanding in what has been a very difficult decision for the Commission. But we believe that ultimately this is for the good of our democracy and country. I wish to assure you of our commitment to free, fair and credible elections.

16. As Chairman of INEC, and on behalf of the Commission, we take full responsibility for what happened and we regret any inconvenience our decision might have caused.

17. Thank you and God bless.