



Responsibilisation and Discourse: A Study of the Nigerian 2019 Election Postponement Speech of INEC Chairman

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Received: June 1, 2020; Accepted: October 23, 2020

Date of Publication: December, 2020

Abstract: This paper identifies the discourse strategies and constructions in the representation of the postponement of the 2019 general elections in Nigeria. The INEC Chairman's speech of the postponement shows how the electoral umpire 'responsibilise' involvements in the postponement of the Nigerian electoral project. Guided by aspects of Caffi's deresponsibilisation and responsabilisation, 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 of the 2019 general elections postponement namely commitment to a successful electoral conduct and logistical challenges. The constructions were achieved through six discourse strategies: historical reference to antecedent success, emotional appeal and blackmail, self-glorification, blame avoidance and attribution, assuring and reassuring of control, and creating common ground. The INEC Chairman weakens excessive responsibility in order to safeguard his honour. **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. Suffice it to say that political leaders and actors alike use language to pursue their political agenda. According to the Association of American Colleges and Universities, there are a core set of skills that are necessary 'both for a globally engaged democracy and for a dynamic innovation fueled economy' (Rhodes, 2010, p. 10), and speechmaking, with particular reference to public speaking, is listed as one of these core skills. Political actors attempt to deploy the appropriate language usage to achieve their desired

goals in different speeches such as acceptance speeches, inaugural speeches or farewell speeches. The social or political actors are influential people, that 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).

Language scholars have emphasised the role of context in language and the role of language in politics and elections. According to Engholm (1965 cited in 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. 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 struggle between the left and the right is the result of the underlying polarisation of political ideologies that have permeated society as a whole. Elections, parliaments, political campaigns, propaganda, demonstrations, and many other phenomena of the political field are thus profoundly ideological,' and are reflective in some forms of political speeches.

From van Dijk's submission, it can be argued that the speech of the INEC Chairman cannot be said to be ideologically neutral. Hence, some questions are considered paramount to drive this study. What discourse strategies and ideological constructions have been deployed by the INEC Chairman to represent the postponement of the 2019 general elections in Nigeria? To what extent has the electoral umpire responsabilised or deresponsibilised involvement in the postponement of the 2019 general elections through ideological means? Thus, the aim of this paper is to identify the discourse strategies and constructions in the representation of the postponement of the 2019 general elections in Nigeria, and examine how the electoral umpire ideologically responsabilises or deresponsibilises involvement in the postponement.

Responsibilisation and Deresponsibilisation

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, as explained by Mey (forthcoming: 13) and (Odebunmi, 2019), expresses certainty by the deployment of modified voices and unclear choice of words. It "connotes the non-attributability of the 'voices' involved in uttering or writing" (Mey, forthcoming: 6). In other words, deresponsibilisation has

Ayo Osisanwo

to do with utterances that do not clearly commit the speaker or writer to the certainty of a proposition. 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.

Elections and the Electoral Commission in Nigeria

Nigeria gained its independence from British rule in 1960 and was led by Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe as the first President. Nigeria has experienced three types of government from 1960 to 2015. From 1960 to 1966, it had a ceremonial government; from 1966-1979 and 1983-1999 Nigeria was ruled by military administrators. The civilian government was voted to power from October 1, 1979 to December 31, 1983 and May 29, 1999 to 2015, 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 up of three separate arms: executive, legislative and judiciary. Nigeria has been governed by the military for twenty-nine years since independence. The country has only had the privilege of a little over twenty years in a democratic dispensation. In a democracy, a leader is voted to power by the electorate. The electorate is often made up of registered voters of a particular electoral zone who are up to 18 years of age. Such elections, as in Nigeria are conducted by an independent electoral body. In Nigeria, the electoral body is known as 'Independent National Electoral Commission,' or INEC.

CJLS 8(2), 2020

This commission, which has evolved under different names, has conducted at least eight presidential elections in Nigeria, in the years 1979, 1993, 1999, 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015 and 2019.

During general elections in Nigeria, six different elections are conducted within two weeks. In the first week, three elections are conducted – the Presidential, and the House of Assembly elections. 109 senators elected across the 109 senatorial districts of the country and 360 members of the House of Representative. On a fortnight from the previous election, three other elections are held, namely the gubernatorial elections and the state House of Assembly and local government elections.

Postponement of elections in Nigeria dates back to 2011, when a parliamentary election that was to be held on April 2, was postponed by two days to April 4, 2011. Also, the presidential election was shifted from April 9 to April 16. In 2015, the general election was originally scheduled to hold on 14 February, but was 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. The elections were postponed by one week due to what INEC described as operational challenges. The elections were rescheduled for 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 the 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 Military 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. These elections ushered in the Second Republic under the leadership of Alhaji Shehu Shagari. FEDECO also conducted the general elections of 1983.

During the General Ibrahim Babangida government, the National Electoral Commission (NEC) of Nigeria was constituted and was headed by Professor Eme Awa (1987–1989) and Professor Humphrey Nwosu (1989–1993). In December 1995, the military administration headed by 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. However, the elected institutions were not inaugurated before the sudden death of General Abacha, on June 8, 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 led 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

nominations of Guobadia and Iwu were approved by the Senate. When the tenure of Jega expired in June, 2015, President Muhammadu Buhari nominated and got the Senate's approval of Senate for the appointment of the current Chairman, Professor Mahmood Yakubu.

Literature Review

The political landscape within and outside Nigeria has enjoyed scholarly attention from practitioners in the social sciences and humanities, such as political scientists, linguists, sociologists, cultural anthropologists and psychologists. Evidently, linguists and 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, Osisanwo 2016a), 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 2011, Oyeleye and Osisanwo 2013a and 2013b; Osisanwo 2016b) advertisement and campaign discourses of Nigerian political parties (Adegoju 2005; Opeibi 2009; Osisanwo 2011, 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 examines 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

The arguments in the speech of the INEC Chairman, Professor Mahmood Yakubu (henceforth PMY) on the postponement of the 2019 general elections in Nigeria invite a combination of the theoretical concepts of deresponsibilisation and responsabilisation, and stance as framework.

Stance Framework

Stance and engagement framework 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. According to Biber and Finnegan (1989:124), stance is 'the lexical and grammatical expression of attitudes, feelings, judgments or commitment concerning the propositional content of a message'. Other scholars have used words such as appraisal, attitude, evaluation, among others, to represent the concept of stance. 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. Among other scholars, Chilwa and Ifukor (2015) have applied

stance in evaluating the roles of social actors in #BringBackOurGirls campaign discourse. In relation to the data for this study, the INEC chairman deploys different stance elements to responsabilise or deresponsibilise his involvement.

Methodology

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 'autonomisation' and 'responsibilisation.' Guided by aspects of Caffi's deresponsibilisation and responsabilisation, and Hyland's stance framework, this paper subjects the 1624-word speech to discourse analysis. Some of such discourses show how PMY 'responsibilises' or 'deresponsibilises' his individual involvement in the Nigerian project, thereby canvassing for trust from Nigerians and the need to be calm and trust the INEC under his headship. The analysis, which is top-down, is organised around two main constructions and six discourse strategies.

Analysis and Findings

The analysis of the data reveals that there were two main constructions on the 2019 postponement of the general elections: commitment 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 refers to natural occurrence like 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.

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

Commitment to Successful Electoral Conduct

The first striking construction in the first paragraph of the speech is the chairman'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 responsabilise his role and present the discursal self as the Chairman of INEC who should convey the decision. In the same sentence, he goes further to deresponsibilise his role by systematically weakening his responsibility and involvement in the postponement. He does this by generalising the decision; that is, the postponement 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 has the elements of stance as it reflects the affective attitude of PMY to the postponement. Attitude markers indicate the writer's affective response to propositions, in order to convey surprise, agreement, importance, and frustration. The use of the inclusive pronoun "our" in the phrase "our democracy" indicates that PMY is included in the Nigerian project.

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 responsabilise the Commission's promise and commitment 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 portrays Professor Attahiru Jega's tenure as the period which heralded major improvements to the electoral process in Nigeria.

To further express the commitment of the commission to the postponement under his watch, PMY uses inclusive responsabilisation – *our promise* – accompanied with the discourse strategy of self-praise 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, 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 responsabilises the success of the Commission in organising elections, he deresponsibilises the historical antecedents and backgrounds of the said success, and uses indirectness and 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 responsabilise and deresponsibilise involvement, using the self-glorification and self-praise discourse strategies. In both paragraphs, PMY gives account of the successes the Commission has made under his leadership. The Chairman uses the first-person pronouns and possessive adjectives to present information, and the voice of the Commission. He also uses the self-mention stance to present the discorsal self – INEC and its success so far in order to project an impression and the stance of self in relation to his arguments. In the speech, there is also the use of the singular pronoun "I", which PMY uses to 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 responsabilise the achievements of 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 takes positions that show finality and 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 show the use of attitude markers. The Chairman deploys attitude markers to indicate affective attitude to convey the importance of the Commission's actions and commitment to the success of the elections. He shows this through his choice of nouns (e.g., *Strategic Plan, Strategic Programme of Action, Election Project Plan, commitment, goal*) and verbs (e.g., *registered, prepared, printed, delivered*). The Chairman further uses boosters to show certainty in his appraisal of the Commission's activities by giving the statistical presentation of facts 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 legitimate. 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 empathise with the Commission, bearing in mind the success achieved so far. The Chairman together with his Commission responsabilises the achievement they assume to have made.

Operational and Logistical Challenges

The second construction of the reason for the postponement, as contained in paragraphs 7-12 of the speech are the operational and logistic challenges. The challenges include bad weather, fire disaster and numerous court orders on the inclusion of some politicians and their political parties in the ballot papers.

The Chairman begins the seventh paragraph by acknowledging how difficult it was to organise general elections in Nigeria due to the operational and logistics challenges. According to him: *It is therefore not unexpected that such a tremendous national mobilization of men and materials will encounter operational challenges.* He generalises the failure as a recurring decimal, which is not peculiar to his leadership. The Chairman goes further to responsabilise 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 an inherent feature 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 administrations as equally guilty of such a failure. Nevertheless, the use of the inclusive "we" and "our" in the shared blame responsabilises the Commission, personally deresponsibilises the blame to PMY.

The Chairman ideologically emphasises and associates the exclusive self-mention "I" to responsabilise the achievement of the Commission despite its challenges; thus: *"..., 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 was court orders on the 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 responsible for the postponement, and responsabilises the politician-plaintiff and their defendant, and the courts giving late-hour judgments on including specific candidates as the reasons for the postponement. The blame attribution strategy calls for emotional response from Nigerians for the Commission.

Similarly, in paragraph 7, the Chairman goes further to identify another factor associated with logistical challenges – natural cause (the 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. Bad weather hindered the movement of sensitive and non-sensitive materials from one location to the other as they disrupted air travel within the country. 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 to others and blame avoidance to self, attempt to 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 – that of “saboteurs,” as the Chairman describes them:

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 speech sample, 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, allocating blame to the saboteurs, assuring and reassuring the electorate.

The Chairman begins with the use of the inclusive “we” to indicate collective responsibility and shared suffering. In the same vein, PMY deploys boosters as devices to express certainty of what the Chairman said and his involvement with the topic and solidarity with readers (Hyland, 2008). In the speech, PMY takes positions that show finality and the extent of the destructive effects of the fire disaster on the

Commission with the use of adverb *quickly*. Some of the choices also depict the use of attitude markers. PMY also deploys attitude markers to indicate affective attitude 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 in the speech 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 underscore the act included *disruptions, the fire* and so forth, verbs (e.g., *burnt, reprinted*), adjectives (e.g. serious) to convey *affect* in his *appraisal* of the fire incident. PMY further conveys *affect* through the methodical and explicit itemisation of the Commission's losses, inviting pity from Nigerians. He concludes the paragraph by using the self-mention exclusive "I" in *I am glad that all the cards were...* for self-praise to present the discursal self and responsabilise to himself the achievement of quickly reprinting and making the voters 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 responsabilised self by generalising the achievements of INEC to the activities of 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. He further constructs 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. According to PMY:

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 emphasises the need for a successful electoral conduct as a strong reason for the postponement. He further justifies the week-long postponement as a necessary requirement for a successful election. In the remaining paragraphs 13-17, PMY uses both responsabilisation and deresponsibilisation discourse strategies such as blame-share, assuring and reassuring to attempt to gain the trust of Nigerians 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 produces the 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 responsabilising 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-warming statement made by PMY after the whole speech was the one contained in paragraph 16 where the Chairman responsabilises 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 responsabilisation and deresponsibilisation, and identifying the discourse strategies and the constructions used in representing the postponement. Guided by aspects of Caffi’s deresponsibilisation and responsabilisation, and Hyland’s stance, the paper reveals that there are two central constructions of the 2019 general elections postponement: commitment to a successful electoral conduct and logistical challenges.

Reference to antecedent-success, emotional appeal and blackmail, self-glorification and self-praise, blame avoidance and allocation, assuring and reassuring of control, and creating common ground are the six discourse strategies deployed to achieve the two constructions.

Confronted with the challenge of convincing and communicating with the electorate that INEC is still in charge and discharges the electoral task appropriately despite the disappointing last-minute postponement, the INEC Chairman responsabilises and deresponsibilises his involvement as deemed appropriate in taking stances on the postponement discourse. Hence, the present paper, equally, deploys Claudia Caffi’s terms, ‘deresponsibilisation’, as a means by which the INEC Chairman safeguards his integrity by weakening excessive responsibility on the one hand, and ‘responsibilisation’ as a means by which he makes unequivocal locution which directly commits him to the certainty on the issues and discourses surrounding the election postponement. In agreement with Odeunmi (2019), Caffi’s de/responsibilisation has proved to be apt in unpacking 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. The choice by the INEC Chairman to postpone the elections could be a pointer to the need to perfect different plans – positive or negative, as observed by some activists and opposition parties. For instance, some critics have argued that the postponement could actually be a deliberate plan of the ruling party to rig the elections in their favour.

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About the Author

APPENDIX

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

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