

DISCURSIVE STRATEGIES IN SELECTED PROTEST PLACARDS ON THE 2024 #ENDBADGOVERNANCE PROTEST IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This paper examines the discursive strategies in selected protest placards on the 2024 #EndBadGovernance protest in Nigeria. The data for the analysis were sourced from social media platforms such as Facebook, Google engine search and YouTube videos. The data were downloaded, read, and analysed. Van Dijk's (2004) socio-cognitive approach to critical discourse analysis was employed for the analysis of the data. Data analysis revealed that the texts were characterized by discursive strategies such as actor description, evidentiality, number game, polarization, authority, and victimization. The discursive strategies were used to depict the extent of suffering being witnessed in Nigeria. The protest has become a medium through which the people can have their voice heard through public opinion and reach out to the government to ameliorate their sufferings.

Keywords: Protest, Discursive Strategy, placards, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), #Endbadgovernance

Introduction

Social protests have a long history in the Nigerian nation, as protests had held even before the existence of the nation. This fact is captured by Adisa (2021: n.d.) when he states that "agitations, demonstrations, protests and confrontations have always been held in the Nigerian socio-political space". Indeed, the road to the independence of the country was characterised by social protests

colonialism by Nigerian nationalists such as Chief Azikiwe, Chief Obafemi Awolowo, Alhaja Tafawa Balewa, among many others. Post-independence Nigeria also continued to witness social protests as there were the Structural Adjustment Programme riots of 1989, Ali Must Go Crisis of 1978 and the June 12 protests of 1993.

However, the prolonged military rule in Nigeria negatively affected the organization of social protests and marred the outcomes of such protests as many of the military Heads of State were often ruthless in dealing with the protesters. Therefore, the military rulership in Nigeria negatively impacted on the protest culture in the country. In fact, the stifling situation of the military rulership of the time made Aiyede (2003:2) to state that the “the relations between state and society under authoritarian rule in Africa has been described as a case of states without citizens”.

The #EndBadGovernance protests in Nigeria represent a significant moment in the country's history, marked by widespread public outcry against systemic issues such as police brutality, corruption, and economic inequality. Beyond the physical demonstrations, these protests were characterized by a powerful discursive dimension, shaped by the language, rhetoric, and narratives employed by protesters to mobilize support, challenge dominant power structures, and demand accountability. This study seeks to explore the discursive strategies employed by protesters during the #EndBadGovernance movement.

Language is seen as a tactical tool for displaying power, dominance, and ideologies. By analysing the language used in social media posts, news articles, and other relevant sources, the study is aimed at understanding how these strategies contributed to shaping public opinion, mobilizing support, and exerting pressure on the government to address the pressing concerns of Nigerian citizens. It is used to manipulate and create power inequalities by influencing people, often against their best interests (Van Dijk, 2006; Post, 2009; Rudyk, 2007). Despite lacking intrinsic power, language can alter power

arrangements and highlight disparities in social structures (Wodak, 2001 and Gul et al., 2023(a)).

The study employed a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) framework to examine the power relations, ideological messages, and discursive strategies employed by the protesters. By analysing these elements, we can gain insights into how language was used to challenge the dominant discourse of the Nigerian government, construct a counter-narrative, and mobilize public support for social and political change.

The #EndBadGovernance protests represented a culmination of years of frustration and a demand for fundamental reforms. The movement gained momentum through social media, with protesters using platforms like Twitter and Instagram to share their experiences, organize demonstrations, and raise awareness. The protests were marked by a diverse range of participants, including students, youth activists, and ordinary citizens from all walks of life.

Previous studies on discourse strategies focused on ideological representation, discourse analysis of selected football texts, discourse strategies in the tweets and comments of virtual #Endsars movements, discourse strategies of the #endsars protest on Social Media, Transitivity and Youth violence in #Endsars Discourse and Youth protest in Nigeria: the Endsars Perspective, Discourse Strategies in President Buhari's Speech on the #EndSARS Protests in Nigeria, but a research gap exists due to the limited scope of investigations, focusing mostly on protest placards. Despite the widespread public outcry and international condemnation of the systemic issues plaguing Nigeria, there remains a dearth of scholarly research investigating the discursive strategies employed by protesters in the #endbadgovernance protests. The study seeks to address this gap by examining how the discursive strategies or techniques help to influence public perception of the protests using placards. The present study thus seeks to investigate the discursive strategies deployed on the placards by the protesters. The aim

of this study therefore is to identify and discuss the discursive strategies used by the protesters in the #EndBadGovernance placards in the 2024 protest with the following objective: To identify the discursive strategies on the protester's placards and to analyse the functions of the strategies employed on the protest placards.

The study hopes to answer the following questions on the aim and objectives raised above. What are the various discursive strategies found on the placards? What are the functions of the linguistic items on the placards used by the protesters? And how are the discursive strategies deployed through the placards?

The scope is limited to the discursive strategies on the placards used by the protesters in the 2024 #EndBadGovernance protest in Nigeria. Such strategies include actor representation (negative or positive labelling), evidentiality, number game, victimization, lexicalization, polarization, and authority.

Studying the discursive strategies employed by protesters on end bad governance protests is significant for several reasons. Placards play a crucial role in shaping public opinion, and analysing their discursive strategies which can provide insights into how they influence public perceptions of the protests. Discursive strategies can be used to reinforce or challenge existing power structures and analysing them can help identify who benefits or loses from the media's portrayal of the protests. It Contribute to the existing body of knowledge on media, protest discourse, and social movements, particularly in the context of Nigeria since enough analytical template has not been used to analyse protest placards, this will now pave way for further research in this area.

Empirical Review on Protest Discourse

Linguistic studies on social protests in Nigeria have focused on resistance in secessionist discourse (Chiluwa 2012), media representation of social protests (Egbunike 2015; Osisanwo & Iyoha 2020), multimodal features of social protests (Abdullahi-Idiagbon 2014;

Onanuga & Ademilokun 2014), placards as a language of civil protests (Agbedo 2012), and discursive strategies in media interviews of participants in social protests (Akinwotu 2014). In particular, the studies from diverse linguistic perspectives have centred on the major protests that have held in Nigeria especially since the beginning of the current fourth republic in Nigeria. Agbedo (2012) studies the use of placards as a language of civil protest in Nigeria during the 2012 fuel subsidy crisis. The study showed that the protest transcended the issue of fuel subsidy to important issues such as official corruption, high cost of governance and crash in public expectations of a Jonathan presidency.

Onanuga and Ademilokun's (2014) multimodal analysis of selected graphic protestations on fuel subsidy in Nigeria. The analysis showed that the protest images conveyed surreal, realistic and humorous meanings. Egbunike (2015) examines the frames employed by traditional and new media to represent the fuel subsidy removal protests in 2012. The study showed that the newspapers performed better in the framing of the protests, and they presented a heterogenous narration of the protests. The study concludes that newspaper contributes to the discourse of the fuel subsidy removal protests better than the social media.

Chiluwa and Ifukor (2015) examine stance and engagement in Bring Back our Girls (BBOG) campaign on Twitter and Facebook using appraisal theory and critical discourse analysis. The authors reported that the campaigners made a great use of affect. Jibril (2017) examines the framing of BBOG campaign by some Nigerian online newspapers. The study showed a favourable coverage of the campaign with 81.3% of the stories favouring the protests. The study concluded that the newspapers made concerted efforts to cover the campaign positively.

Osisanwo and Iyoha (2020) also examine the discourse representation of the pro-Biafra protest in selected Nigerian newspapers. Using van Leeuwen's representation of social actors, the

study showed that the protesters were represented as freedom fighters, economic saboteurs, and law-abiding citizens. Also, the strategies of passivisation, nomination, association, disassociation, exclusion, aggregation, functionalisation, differentiation, in determination, and collectivisation were indexed in the representational strategies.

The most recent EndBadGovernance protests which constitute our focus in this research have however only enjoyed scanty linguistic attention. While Onwubiko and Egwim (ibid) is not a stand-alone study as it examines data on Covid-19 and EndSARS, Alfred and Oyebola (2021) only analyses the speech of President Buhari of Nigeria in reaction to the EndSARS protests. There has not been any noticeable linguistic study that has examined the discursive strategies of the protest placards on the end bad governance protest in Nigeria. The study therefore focused on the protest placards in the EndBadGovernance protests in Nigeria.

Chiluwa (2015) conducted a critical discourse analysis of Facebook posts in the Fuel Subsidy Removal in 2012 in Nigeria. The analysis was carried out along the ideological divides/imprints of the positive “we” in-group and the negative “others” out-group representations. The study showed that the protesters employed a blend of Standard Nigerian English, local languages and Pidgin to express solidarity with several groups in the country and ethnic affinity/fraternity. In the same vein, Egbunike and Olorunnisola (2015) did a comparative study of the social media and Nigerian newspapers’ framing of the 2012 #Occupy Nigeria protest. The study reported that the newspapers negatively represented the protest more than the social media.

Temitope Balogun and Richard Akano, 2021: Discursive Strategies in the Tweets and Comments of Virtual #Endsars Protesters. The paper examines discursive strategies in tweets and comments of virtual #EndSars protesters. One hundred (100) tweets and comments

hash tagged #EndSars between October 1 and 31, 2020, were purposively extracted, representing the data for the study.

Abuh, D. 2024: Pragmatic Acts in selected Placards in the 2024 End Bad Governance Protest in Nigeria. The paper examines the pragmatic Acts by bringing out the language features and their functions in the 2024 End Bad Governance protest in Nigeria using the Jacob Mey's Pragmatic Acts Theory as an Analytical template.

However, no significant study has focused on the discursive strategy on protest placards in the #endbadgovernance protest in Nigeria, hence the discursive strategy employed by the protesters on the placards needs a linguistic attention.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study is Van Dijk (2000a) socio-cognitive model of critical discourse analysis, especially the categories of ideological discourse analysis. There is an argument that news texts are controlled by dominant power (Herman & Chomsky, 2002; Van Dijk, 1991). According to Van Dijk (2000a), ideologies may determine all structures of text or talk, and they may be expressed explicitly or implicitly in the structure of discourse. Van Dijk (2001b) defines social power as control and asserts that groups have power if they can control the acts and minds of other groups. Van Dijk (*ibid.*, p. 355) distinguishes two main types of power: (1) the "coercive power", which is based on force i.e., power of the military, power of violent men, etc.; and (2) the "persuasive power", which is "based on knowledge, information, or authority" such as "the power of parents, professors, or journalists" (see Gramsci, 1971).

Van Dijk (2000a) introduces four principles for the analysis of ideology, which he calls "ideological square": "1- Emphasize positive things about Us; 2- Emphasize negative things about Them; 3- De-emphasize negative things about Us; 4- De-emphasize positive things about Them" (P. 44). Van Dijk's (*ibid.*) ideological square contributes

to polarization of in-groups versus out-groups to represent Us favourably but Them unfavourably. Van Dijk (2000a, 2004) has proposed categories of ideological analysis conducive to the representation of Us versus Them which some of them are as follows: Actor description: the ways we describe actors are based on our ideologies, for example, the description of ingroup as positive and out-group as negative. Authority: mentioning authorities to support one's argument, Categorization: classifying people to different groups and attributing them positive or negative characteristics, Lexicalization: the expression of lexical items creating an overall ideological strategy for negative other presentation, Polarization: categorizing people in ingroup and out-group and assigning good attributes to Us and bad characteristics to Them, Vagueness: using vague expressions which do not have definite referents. , Victimization: emphasizing the "bad" nature of out-group by telling horrible stories about them.

Van Dijk's (2001a) socio-cognitive approach focuses on the tripartite discourse-cognition-society model of ideology. According to Van Dijk (*ibid.*) here "discourse" means "communicative event", including conversation, written text, and any "semiotic" or multimedia dimension of signification. Personal or social "cognition" involves "mental" or "memory" structures, representations and processes in discourse and interaction such as beliefs, evaluations, and emotions. "Society" includes both microstructures of interactions and societal and political structures such as group relations, institutions, and political systems. Van Dijk (2001a) views "the combined cognitive and social dimensions of the triangle as defining the relevant (local and global) context of discourse" (p. 98). As it is obvious from most of Van Dijk's studies, his critical analysis of texts tends to make explicit the ideological dimension of Us versus Them and demonstrate the discursive structures and strategies used to exercise the dominant power.

Methodology

The paper adopted a qualitative approach to data analysis. A total number of 28 texts on the placards were used. The data were sourced from Facebook posts and other social media sources. The relevant data were identified, downloaded, and analysed in line with the theory. The applicable data were selected based on theoretical relevance. The reason for this choice lies in the fact that the #EndBadGovernance protest is unarguably the largest protest which got international attention since independence of Nigeria. Protest is a form of political participation and political apathy is a trend in Nigeria. However, millions (including those in diaspora) took to the protest, breaking the existing political apathy in Nigeria. The placards on social media adopted discursive strategies such as actor representation, authority, victimization, polarization, lexicalization, and evidentiality all aimed at drawing the attention of the Nigerian government and international communities to help in reverting fuel pump prices, end hunger, and end food hikes among other national issues. The analysis considers the linguistic aspects of the placards using Van Dijk's Socio-Cognitive model of discourse analysis strategy.

Data Analysis and Presentation

S/N	TEXTS	DISCURSIVE STRATEGIES
1	We Demand Accountability	Actor Representation
2	I Lost My Job Because Of Corruption	
3	Economy Is Booming But We Are Hungry	Evidentiality
4	Empty Promises, Filled Pockets	
5	Politicians Must Enrol Their Children In Public Schools	
6	Our Future Is Bleak If We Don't Act Now	
7	Hunger Is Too Much	Number Game

8	Pay Nigerian Workers a Minimum Wage of Nothing Less Than #250,000 Monthly	
9	Our Dreams Buried by Corruption	Victimization
10	I Lost My Job Because Of Bad Governance	
11	Suffering Is Too Much	
12	One Day the Poor Will Have No Food to Eat But The Rich Oppressors.	
13	No To Poor Living Conditions	
14	We are hungry we need to eat. We tired of starvation.	
15	We Are Tired of Being Secon Class Citizens	
16	Our Leaders Don't Represent Us	
17	We The People Demand Change	Authority
18	Our Vote, Our Power	
19	Where is our money?	
20	Enough Is Enough We Are Angry	Lexicalization
21	Nigerians Are Tired	
22	Nigerians Are Frustrated	
23	Why are they rich, we are poor?	Polarization
24	Revolution Now	
25	End Corruption, End Poverty	
26	We Want Change	Vagueness
27	End Bad Governance	

Discussion and Findings

This section comprises the discussion of findings emanating from the analysis of data. As can be seen from the table above, the discursive strategies are found in the placards used by the protesters.

Actor representation

The actor may have positive or negative labelling. Labelling is a linguistic process of identifying and describing a person or group of

people with specific labels or tags. Positive or negative labels are ascribed to people depending on the perceived social attitudes associated with the people or group. While positive labels approve of a group's activities and ideologies, negative labels condemn such activities as well as attack a group's ideologies.

Text 1: "We Demand Accountability"

In the text above, the protesters "we" demand accountability from the government of the day. The 'we' could be the in group positive labelling and name the government as out group. The government here is the receiving end and accountability is demanded of them.

Texts 2: "I Lost My Job Because of Corruption"

The inscription above is based on ideological portrayal of the system. The labelling could be that the government is responsible for corruption which has bedevilled the country and hindering its progress. The government did not create job and that alone has caused a misnomer in the country.

Evidentially

Evidentiality is the use of evidence or proof to make opinions, claims or points of view more plausible, reliable, and credible in news reports. According to van Dijk (2006), providing evidence and giving credibility to opinions influence the mental models of recipients/readers by persuading them to accept views as real and true. In using this discourse strategy, evidence or proofs from eyewitnesses/victims or references to authorities are provided to authenticate in group's good deeds and out-group's bad behaviour. This becomes evident in conflict news reporting that involve discourses about "Us" and "Them". Instances in the protest placards are:

Texts 3: "Economy Is Booming but We Are Hungry"

Nobody needs to be asked if really the people are hungry or not. The inscription is bold enough for everyone to see the level of hunger in Nigeria right now. We are all aware of the economic resources abound in this country, yet the people still suffer.

Texts 4: “Empty Promises, Filled Pockets”

In this instance, the promises we get from politicians are evident enough to see their level of unseriousness in the country. People are given fake promises and yet their pockets are filled. This is a common scenario in Nigeria. The speaker is drawing conclusions based on observations and general knowledge.

Texts 5: “Politicians Must Enrol Their Children In Public Schools”

In evidence in the inscription above is glaring and we all know what it is right now in the country. Our children do not attend the same schools as there are schools for the rich and poor, in fact, most of their wards school abroad and have never experienced strikes before. The placards are calling on them to enroll their children here in Nigeria. It is seen and felt everywhere on the price tag of rice in the country right now. With this inscription,

Texts 6: “Our Future Is Bleak If We Don’t Act Now”

The speaker here is making a prediction based on current trends.

Number Game

Number game is a discourse strategy used to emphasize objectivity and enhance credibility in news reports but now on the placards. Numbers are a means of representing facts against opinions and impressions. They are mainly used to emphasize “their” bad actions and “our” good ones. According to van Dijk (2006), numerical descriptions of the victims in conflict news reports predominantly

signal precision and hence truthfulness. Instances of the use of numbers in the August 1st end bad government protest include:

Text 7: “Hunger Is Too Much”

The emphasis here is on the word “too” as used on the placards to signal plenty, of course the word HUNGER is an abstract word which cannot be counted, and it was used to tell us the level of hunger in Nigeria right now.

Texts 8: “Pay Nigerian Workers a Minimum Wage Of Nothing Less Than #250,000 Monthly”

In the second example here, the amount mentioned in is in number and that is part of the tenets of discursive strategies identified by Van Dijk using the Socio-Cognitive Approach of discourse analysis.

Victimization

This is a discourse strategy of creating polarity by representing the negative deeds of the other and portraying the self as a victim. Here, the negative behaviour of the ‘out-group’ is associated with threats while the ‘in-group’ is represented as victims of such threats. Victimization is a rhetorical device that position the speaker as a victim of injustice, is a powerful tool employed in protest placards. They portray themselves as victims, protesters can garner sympathy to mobilise public support, and pressure authorities to address their grievances. Instances abound on the placards, there include:

Texts 9: “Our Dreams Buried by Corruption”

The poor are having the feeling of victimization and are calling on the leaders to avail them the opportunity of BREATH of life. The scenario

here is that corruption have swallowed many dreams, people are being victimised on daily basis. The inscription on the placards here is so sympathetic in that the language used is metaphorical.

Texts 10: “I Lost My Job Because Of Bad Governance”

By sharing personal experiences or stories of hardship and suffering, protesters humanize the impact of bad governance and create a sense of empathy in viewers. Bad leadership is responsible for the loss of many jobs in Nigeria according to the inscription above. When things are not properly done, one cannot tell the adverse effect on the citizens. It can go a long way to break them psychologically and otherwise.

Texts 11: “This Suffering Is Too Much”

Sometimes one tends to wonder if the rich go to the same market with the poor or if they have a different market. Truly, the SUFFERING is too much and there are using the placards to address their plights.

This has taken us to the next example, where the inscription says,

Texts 12: “One Day the Poor Will Have No Food to Eat but The Rich Oppressors”

If nothing is done with immediate effect, Nigeria is moving towards that direction. The average Nigerian can only afford two-square meals a day, but it has dwindled. Once you can feed a day, you thank God. Prices of food have escalated beyond control.

Texts 13: “No to Poor Living Conditions”

The people do not dare talk more on living condition this day but survival. And average civil servant cannot buy a bag of cement now to say he wants to build a house. The government have failed in providing such palliatives to the people. And housing is a necessity.

Texts 14: “We Are Hungry We Need to Eat” “We Tired of Starvation”.

It is torchy and sympathetic when you see an able-bodied man on the street begging for food, it is not to catch fun for him by the hunger which has bedevilled the country pushed him thus far. There is STARVATION everywhere and the end bad governance protesters have ceased this opportunity to inform the government where Nigerians are right now in the world.

Text 15: We Are Tired of Being Second Class Citizens

The text above is a clear example of victimization. The “we” like we discussed before are the protesters, there are the ones at the positive side and are the second-class citizens. To be a second-class citizen means one’s right is limited, and one does not have a say in the country or whatever one says does not matter.

Text 17: Our Leaders Don’t Represent Us

The use of “Our and Us” here categorizes the groups into two, which are the in-group and the out group. The in-group is the “Our” while the out-group represents “Us”. The in group again carries the positive labelling which are the protesters, and the out group is the government with negative labelling.

Authority

Another prominent discursive strategy in the discourse is the use of authority. According to van Dijk (2006), in a discourse, one can mention authorities to support his or her case in an argument. To convince the audience about the issues that they raise regarding the EndSARS protests and other allied matters, the discourse producers deployed authority. Below are excerpts containing authority in the discourse:

Texts 18: “We the People Demand Change”

Texts 19: “Our Vote, Our Power”

Texts 20: “Where Is Our Money?”

Most of the statements here are direct and compelling. The protesters are simply telling the government to end the bad leadership authoritatively. Authority can be used to amplify the message of protesters placards by invoking credible sources, protesters can strengthen their arguments, mobilize public opinion, and pressure the government to address their grievances.

Lexicalization

This is the deployment of lexical choices. It played a pivotal role in shaping public discourse and mobilizing support. The words on the placards could be concise and impactful. For instance,

Texts 21: “Enough Is Enough We Are Angry”,

Texts 22: “Nigerians Are Tired”

Texts 23: Nigerians Are Frustrated

We also have placards with emotionally thrilling languages words such as “TIRED”, “FRUSTRATED”, “ANGRY” helped to evoke strong feelings in viewers and reinforce the urgency of the protesters demands. Lexicalization also deploys metaphorical language to create a vivid

image and emphasize the severity of the situation. The placards also used persuasive language as a socio-cognitive approach to make their messages more impactful and memorable. Placards with rhetorical questions, repetition and alliteration served as visual representations of the protesters' collective voice, amplifying their message and inspiring others to join the movement.

Polarization

Polarization refers to the classification of individuals into two groups: "us" with positive qualities and "them" with negative qualities (van Dijk, 2006b). This is a socio-cognitive phenomenon where individuals or groups adopts increasingly extreme position, by playing a significant role in the #EndBadGovernence protests. Protest placards were used to amplify these polarised views. The use of "Us vs Them" framed a solidified group identity and reinforced feelings of collective grievances as shown on the placards. The placards also depict the government as corrupt, incompetent, or even as evil. This can heighten emotion and solidified the belief that the government was fundamentally wrong in its decision-making process. Polarized placards can strengthen social bonds within the protest movement.

Texts 24: "Why Are They Rich, We Are Poor?"

Texts 25: Revolution Now

Texts 26: End Corruption, End Poverty

Vagueness

This is the deliberate use of ambiguous language, is a powerful rhetorical tool that can be employed to evoke emotions and mobilize support. In the context of the end bad governance protest placards, vague language served several positions. For example, slogans like

Texts 27: "We Want Change"

Texts 28: “End Bad Governance”

Protesters can unite people with concerns under a common banner. It can also evoke strong emotions by tapping into universal human experiences. Such words like “frustration, hope, and anger”. Vague language can be more persuasive than specific language, as it allows individuals to fill in the blanks and create their own interpretations. This can increase a greater commitment to the cause.

Findings

It was generally discovered that since the placards are mainly demanding, appealing, and requesting, the discourse was geared towards letting the government know their plight and how to attend to them. The Us vs Them were properly harnessed in the discourse using polarization as a strategy. The protesters remained Us while the government remained Them according to the Socio-Cognitive model of discourse analysis. Going by the findings, the implication be that protesters will always have themselves as a group to protest the government of the day. This will enable the government change toward serving the electorate and realize the political promises there made during campaigns.

Conclusion

This paper has shown that the protesters carefully deployed language to convey their opinions on the 2024 #Endbadgovernance protests. The paper shows that the discourse is characterized by the careful selection of discursive strategies for positive representation of the protests and negative representation of the government. Specifically, through actor description, the discourse producers positively labelled the protesters and condemned the government in totality. Also, using evidentiality, authority and number game, the discourse producers tried to give a graphic detail of the horrendous level

of poverty in Nigeria to show that the claims of the protesters are not spurious and that they really deserved to be pitied. Furthermore, the discourse producers used comparison for the purpose of comparing the conditions in Nigeria with the conditions elsewhere to further show the deplorability of the situation regarding the hunger and poverty in Nigeria.

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