

A Corpus-Based Critical Discourse Analysis of Pre-2019 General Elections Reports in Selected Nigerian Newspapers

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ABSTRACT

Generally, language experts believe that there are inherent ideologies in language use. The aspect of discourse study that discloses such ideologies is known as Critical Discourse Study (CDA). This paper seeks to exhume the various inherent ideologies that presuppose selected news reports on the Nigeria's 2019 General Elections in Nigerian newspapers. This study is, however, corpus-based. Scholars have established that discourse is a kind of constructively conditioned public exercise. They believe that power relations exist at different levels of daily social interaction; revealing superiority or inferiority of interlocutors involved. News reports relating to the General Elections were electronically collated from the various newspaper platforms for a sizable language corpus. The name Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) was selected and analysed purposively with the aid of Digital Humanities (DH) tool to observe the frequency of the acronym INEC and the textual context in which it occurs in five newspapers' reports about the electoral body via the authority it gives; the warning it issues, and the appeal it makes to the stakeholders. The paper finds out that the negative perceptions of many observers about the elections have actually been predicted by the various reports in the newspapers, prior to the elections. The paper concludes that reporters of news items do not account for issues concerning electoral body with the same constructive and destructive dispositions; and this gives room for subjectivity and prejudice.

1. Introduction

One of the primary aims of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is to apply critical approach, position or stance on research works on writing and oral conversation. Because there are inherent ideologies in language use, it is the focus of CDA to exhume these ideologies, beliefs and perceptions as reflected in the use of language. CDA attempts to reveal and uncover the implicit ideas that are not immediately inferred while considering the discursive relations in a text. According to Van Dijk (1993), CDA typifies 'discourse investigative study that predominantly researches the manner social abuse of influence, supremacy and disparity are legislated, replicated and repelled by writing and speech in societal and governmental settings.' Scholars believe that CDA set out to expose 'the philosophical and irregular control systems that dwell in communal, governmental and traditional processes'. This shows that language elements have some kind of expressive power which can characterize and reveal any given communicative event just like how the Latin tag puts it: *Stilus virum arguit* (the style proclaims the man). This paper critically looks at the various reports about the 2019 General Elections in Nigeria through the lens of CDA by relying on the 'mining' power of linguistic corpora tool to bring about valid generalization of our findings.

Nigeria came into a fully democratic dispensation on the 29th day of May, 1999 and vested the authority to conduct free, fair and acceptable elections in the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). This institution has since carried out

about five presidential polls, heralding about three transitions from one regime to another. Preparatory to these elections, the INEC had engaged stakeholders in terms of enlightenment and moderation of campaigns, as well as giving the stakeholders proper education on the electoral guidelines. Preparations for the 2019 Nigeria general elections were not an exception. Therefore, this paper focuses on the various news reports by some Nigerian newspapers before and during the 2019 general elections.

2. Review of Literature

We cannot explain CDA without making allusions to aspects of literature by scholars such as Fowler *et al.* (1979) and Hodge and Kress (1993). Among other ideas these scholars hold is that the practice of human communication could lead to a perplexity of societal issues which methodical examination could unearth. For instance, an omitted structure in English passive sentences could be perceived as a philosophical technique for disguising or “mystifying” reference to an agent (Chilton, 2013). One of the primary ideologies of CDA is the significant reflection that the manipulation of human communication is a collective exercise which is known by societal systems and also helps in normalizing and altering that system concurrently. These scholars have established that discourse is a kind of constructively conditioned social practice. They believe that power relations exist at different levels of daily social interaction; revealing superiority or inferiority of interlocutors involved. In the words of Van Dijk (1993), ‘the practice of control typically presumes cognitive administration, including the effect of knowledge and views which we intellectualize in terms of social cognition’. Therefore, CDA centres on both printed and oral systems of human communication with explicit attention to the way human communication operates, and its systems and structures that expose supremacy in a specified speech community.

In our contemporary society, one of the major channels of effective human management in terms of information dissemination is mass media. They provide access to reliable information about language for analyses and academic investigations through how human communication functions in news reports, advertisements, and editorials among others. Also, recently, the convergence of the media on the Internet gives unlimited access to the linguistic resources from the various media organisations. Though mass media have always been seen as disseminators of objective reportage, the influence of the ownership has over the years conditioned the affiliation of many media organisations to different opinions in the political sphere.

Computer-based analytical methods have contributed in no small measure, recently, to the study language. This includes the area of patterns of language use. This method has been used for a large number of researches on media, legal and political discourses. Notable in this area are Mulderring (2009), Koller and Mautner (2004), and Baker *et al* (2008). The combination (of CDA and computer-based analytical tools) has added many values to the research process including the possibility of having a huge language database, ensuring the accuracy of data, as well as saving time usually spent on analyses and processing of data.

Another work in this area of research is Taiwo (2007) which focuses on newspaper headlines in Nigeria. The paper submitted that connotations and denotations of human communication are obviously terminologies of representation of thoughts of the entities in a certain speech community. Also, Dahunsi (2016) investigated the reportage of some Nigerian newspapers with emphasis on political parties. He concluded that newspapers did not write proceedings and happenings of the incumbent government and its political party with the same constructive and destructive dispositions.

3. Methodology

There are many tabloids and newspapers in Nigeria that report both local and international activities. Five newspapers were selected using the yardstick of readership, as well as frequency of review on other media platforms. They are *The Punch*, *The Tribune*, *The Nation*, *Daily Independence* and *The Guardian*. All these newspapers, which are documented in Standard English on daily basis, are accessible on the Internet. Fifty (50) reports were randomly picked from each of these newspapers. This gave us a total of two hundred and fifty (250) in our corpus.

3.1 Method of Corpus Creation

A corpus of 400,000 words was built for each of the newspapers making 2,000,000 words. It also covered between June 2018 and February 2019. The reports were sourced primarily from the websites of the newspapers. These reports and news were not articles written by independent writers or freelance journalists but write-ups from the ombudsmen of these organisations. The contents of the corpus also contained unedited and unaltered news and reports. We have, however,

removed pictures and other information considered to be irrelevant to this study. Consequently, issues such as the name of the writer and place of reporting were not incorporated in our study.

4. Data Analysis

4.1 Frequency of the acronym INEC across corpora

The first step was to examine the number of times the acronym INEC was mentioned across corpora, and in each of the newspapers within the same period of publication. This enabled us to understand the environments of the various occurrences. We also observed the occurrence of the acronym in the negative, positive and neutral environment across corpora. This enabled us to establish the thought pattern of each newspaper organisation and their ideology, prior to the 2019 general elections in Nigeria.

4.2 Concordancing of the acronym INEC across corpora

We used *Antconc*, *Wordsmith tools* and *Web matrix* for concordancing. Here, our major interest was in the electoral body, INEC. Therefore, we decided to investigate the way its (INEC) issues and happenings were told by these newspapers within the period under examination. The tools we used search a corpus for a certain word or phrase and gave every example of the selected word or phrase in the middle of our computer screen, with the pre- and post-modifying words of the highlighted word or phrase.

The textual context around the acronym INEC varied in the various newspapers examined, but those that had to do with either appeal by INEC or appeal to INEC were sorted as shown in Figure 1. It is a typical example of the mood of stakeholders around the period of election in Nigeria where there are appeals and cross-appeals. Examples of these are shown in Figure 1, with manifestations in ordinary sentence or phrase as:

- He advised INEC and the security agents to live up to their responsibilities.
- INEC has urged religious leaders in Delta to advise their....
- Unsubstantiated allegations by the PDP spokesperson against the INEC chairman.

have 84 million eligible voters that can vote? No. And INEC created this problem by itself. \x93INEC got Nigerians exercise that would last till January 21, this year. The INEC National Commissioner, Prof. Anthonia Simbine, who disclose gement body, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), has made provisions through legal frameworks for Persons to any other location for that matter.\x94 Osun INEC to distribute PVCs at rural areas Mr. Segun Agbaje, readiness to conduct a free, fair and credible poll. INEC delivers fresh 25,777 PVCs in Plateau The Independent Natio complaining of being unable to register. This led\xA0INEC\xA0to recently deploy additional registration machines and Port Harcourt last week issued a restraining order on INEC not to recognise candidates of both factions of APC electoral body, Independent National Electoral Commission, INEC, has commenced recruitment for ad-hoc positions ahead of frameworks. She said that they are also pleased with INEC\x92s reforms of creating separate queues for expectant the All Progressives Congress in the state. Recall that INEC had also refused to paste the names of APC ral violence The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) has urged religious leaders in Delta to advise their oving a Resident Electoral Commissioner (REC). It is beyond INEC powers to remove a national commissioner. \x93The Chairman mooth conduct of the 2019 general elections in Enugu State. INEC\x92s Resident Electoral Commissioner in the state, Dr mooth conduct of the 2019 general elections in Enugu State. INEC\x92s Resident Electoral Commissioner in the state, Dr geared toward safe return of kidnapped Chibok school girls. INEC: Nobody can rig the elections The Independent National Elec in place for the smooth conduct of the elections. INEC leaves out Rivers APC candidates from list The Independent nsubstantiated allegations by the PDP spokesman against the INEC chairman. He said: \x93Rather than work with the , Lunch Time Politics, Chief Press Secretary to Chairman of INEC, Rotimi Oyekanmi, said, \x93We all read the statement of MacArthur Foundation in Lokoja yesterday. He advised the INEC and the Security Agents to live up to their officials of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), who were sentenced to a total of 91 years jail

Figure 1: INEC in environment of appeal

The textual contexts that had to do with INEC exercising authority or having anything to do with higher authority were also sorted to show the concordance lines in which INEC performed or expected that role. Examples of these can be found in the excerpt depicted in Figure 2:

- INEC releases regulations....
- DSS arraigns INEC officials....
- INEC disenfranchising many Nigerians by insisting on PVC...
- INEC has banned APC from presenting candidates....

submit names of any candidate from Zamfara State,\x94 INEC said in a letter addressed to the party\x92 retain the guidelines the way they were drafted. The INEC National Commissioner and Chairman of its Information and V and declare emergency rule in the state. Court upholds INEC ban on APC candidates in Zamfara A Federal High tions following parallel primaries held in the state. Also, INEC had banned APC from presenting candidates for National Asse epresented by highly placed title holders in their domains. INEC warns against attempt to compromise PVC distribution at war as chair of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) in 2015, the body has carried out over 167 elections.\xA0 determined to cast aspersions on the good work that INEC has been doing in the last three years just and the state apparatus is also pivotal. DSS arraigns INEC officials, other, for stealing, selling PVCs 2019 Election Wike, Agbaje pray for peaceful 2019 general elections, task INEC Rivers State Governor Nyesom Wike has prayed for peaceful oral Act 2010 (as amended 2015) and Paragraph 2 of the 2019 INEC Regulations and Guidelines for the Conduct of Elections, fo that INEC in Enugu State has over 400 permanent staff. INEC releases regulations, guidelines for general elections The \x94 Okoye stressed that the security agencies have assured INEC that they have the capacity and capability to secure the nearly 5 million voters on the register in Kano. INEC has previously helped other countries in West Africa clean was strictly based on the policies and guidelines of INEC. According to him, the commission has received all the and guidelines for the conduct of elections (available at INEC website: www.inecnigeria.org). \x93While noting that the eral election in the state. The Administrative Secretary of INEC in Delta, Mr Felix Enabor, made the call in stand known in a statement issued late night by INEC\x92s National Commissioner and Chairman, Voter Education an guidelines to enable them to ask the right questions. INEC disenfranchising many Nigerians by insisting on PVC \x96 Ex Nasir Islam (JNI) are equally expected at the meeting. INEC: 2019 elections in North-East to be determined by security tion between the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and media practitioners in the state. He said the

Figure 2: INEC in environment of authority

Also, the acronym INEC in the environment of warning was sorted out. This manifested in the form of INEC warning a group of people or prominent individuals warning INEC on the credibility of the elections as seen in Figure 3:

- INEC is not in the business of rigging elections...
- This is to ensure that INEC does not in any way allow untrained ad-hoc personnel to....
- We also urge INEC to continue in its bid to ensure free, fair and credible elections.

\x93In our letter dated February 13, 2019 addressed to the INEC Chairman, the Honourable Attorney of the Federation in reac arears prone to terrorists\x92 raid. According to the INEC national commissioner, however, \x93INEC will conduct 2019 ion\x92s website, tomorrow Thursday, 31st January 2019.\x94 INEC: It is impossible for any presidential candidate to withdra State Assembly elections in Zamfara State,\x94 he said. INEC boss swears in new REC, awaits confirmation of Osun across the state, especially in the riverine areas. The INEC National Commissioner, in charge of Edo and Delta, Dr -hoc staff. \x91\x91This is to ensure that INEC does not in any way allow an untrained ad- -hoc staff. \x91\x91This is to ensure that INEC does not in any way allow an untrained ad- Guidelines for the conduct of elections in the country. INEC announced this in a statement dated January 12, 2019, and p of today\x92s INEC. \x93Today\x92s INEC is not in the business of rigging elections and and guidelines for the conduct of elections (available at INEC website: www.inecnigeria.org). \x93While noting that the s in Zamfara The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) on Wednesday insisted that having reviewed the two court voter cards for voting in the 2019 elections. He said INEC\x92s insistence on the use of PVC would election on account of the orders given and the INEC has no intention of postponing the 2019 general elections i interest to surrender because the game is up.\x94 INEC: Vote buying is virus that needs to be crushed welcome the EU Chief Observer Mrs. Maria Arena to INEC. The EU is one of the long-standing partners \x96\xA0INEC The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) says that it has discovered fresh plot by desperate 019 governorship election, Mr. Jimi Agbaje, has charged the INEC to ensure it delivers free, fair and credible elections. exercise their right to vote. \x93We also urge INEC continue in its bid to ensure a free, fair by security The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) has reiterated its readiness to hold next year\x92

Figure 3: INEC in environment of warning

5. Results of Analysis

5.1 Analysis of Frequency of INEC

The result shows that the acronym INEC was mentioned 6,337 times with the following distribution among the five corpora:

The Nation	-	920
The Punch	-	1,302
The Tribune	-	1,280
The Daily Independence	-	1,315
The Guardian	-	1,520

The graphic representation of these results is seen in the Figure 4:

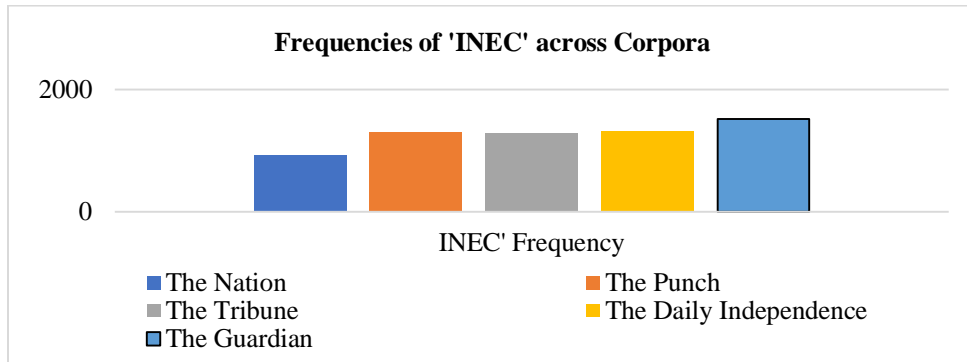


Figure 4: Frequencies of 'INEC' across Corpora

5.2 Concordance Analysis

Table 1: Occurrences of INEC in different environments across corpora (in percentage)

	Nation	Punch	Tribune	Daily Independence	Guardian
Appeal	30	40	30	45	30
Authority	40	32	45	40	40
Warning	35	45	20	35	20

The graphic representation of the occurrences of INEC in Table 1 is shown in the Figure 5, which reflects the three different environments already identified:

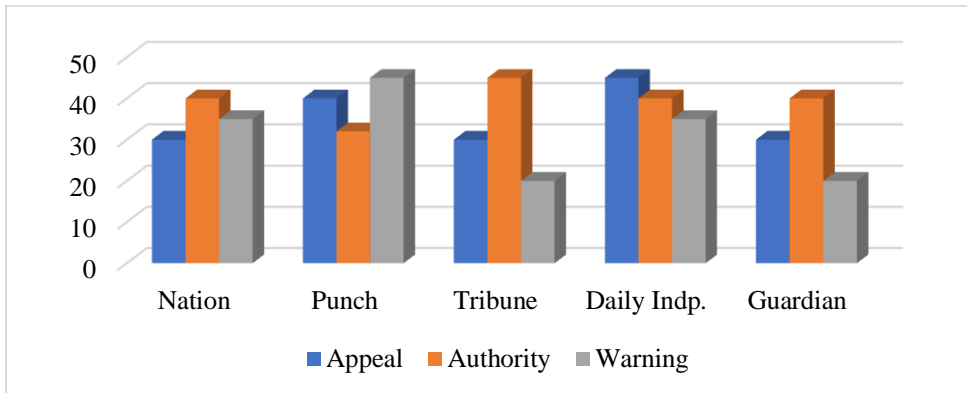


Figure 5: Concordance of 'INEC' at different environments of its occurrence in each Corpus (%)

6. Discussion

The various levels of analysis show that the five newspapers selected for this study did not report the same side of news on INEC at the same level of disposition. This can be confirmed in the frequency of the acronym INEC in the five newspapers examined. *The Nation* corpus mentioned INEC 920 times; *the Punch* corpus 1,302 times; *The Tribune* corpus 1,280 times; *The Daily Independence* corpus 1,315 times and *The Guardian* corpus 1,520 times. Also, it was discovered that *The Nation*, *The Tribune* and *The Guardian* approached their report about INEC from angles relating to authority during the period under study with percentages of 40, 45, and 40 respectively. While *The Punch* picked most of its report on INEC from angle of warning in terms of semantic association and environment with 45%, *The Daily Independence* preferred the angle of appeal in reporting issues and events relating to INEC with 35% in terms of frequency of occurrence.

The implication of these results as seen in Figures 4 and 5 is that the idiosyncratic orientations of the various writers of the texts examined are clearly reflected in their write-ups. First, *The Nation* shows great deal of reports on INEC that assert

authority or reeling out warnings against defaulters rather than appeal. Second, *The Punch* prefers the angle of warning rather than appeal and that of authority. *The Tribune* presents INEC from the angle of a body giving directive and order during this period rather than warning and appeal. However, *The Daily Independence* prefers to present INEC in a soft manner that shows the body appealing to the electorate and other stakeholders. It sees INEC not as authority, even though it is during this period, but as a responsible major stakeholder in ensuring smooth elections. Finally, *The Guardian*, just like *The Tribune*, sees INEC issuing more directives and orders rather than appeal and warning.

Since analysts are not neutral in Critical Discourse Studies, but commit themselves in approving of the dominated and prominent people in the society, and based on the results of examination in this research, it can be reasoned that *The Daily Independence's* preference of showing INEC from the soft and appealing angle is a clear evidence of its bias to portray INEC as 'weak' and almost incapacitated in handling matters of election with confidence. It could also be inferred that *The Nation*, *The Punch* and *The Tribune* did not hide their bias for INEC during this period since they wrote to show the body as not only authoritative, but also as an institution that could aid punishment and prosecution against defaulters of electoral laws.

7. Conclusion

The objective of this paper was to disclose the various innate ideologies that presume selected news reports on the Nigeria's 2019 general elections in five Nigerian newspapers of *The Punch*, *The Tribune*, *The Nation*, *Daily Independence* and *The Guardian*. The findings of the paper showed that reporters of news items did not write activities about the electoral body in Nigeria with the same disposition, and this has established the non-neutrality of some of the newspapers in Nigeria about their reportage in terms of language use. Only *The Daily Independence* is seen as markedly different from the CDA point of view. Corpus analytical methods and tools were employed in the study. These methods and tools enhanced data accuracy that enabled us in the analysis of large volumes of written language. The paper, however, believes that the negative perception of many observers about the 2019 general elections in Nigeria have actually been predicted by the various reports in the newspapers, prior to the elections. The paper concludes that newspapers were bias in their reportage. The bias nature of their reportage gives room for subjectivity and prejudice on the part of readers. Future research could focus on the 2016 General Elections in Ghana.

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