

Stance Evaluation and Politics of Language: An Appraisal Analysis of President Muhammadu Buhari's Speeches on Covid-19 Pandemic

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Abstract: The paper analyses subjective evaluations of actors and processes surrounding the coronavirus pandemic in Nigeria in the context of political discourse. It examines President Muhammadu Buhari's subjective presence in texts as he adopts stances towards the pandemic and the Nigerian people with whom he communicates. Three speeches downloaded from the president's official Facebook page were purposively sampled and analysed using Martin & White's (2015) Appraisal Theory. The speeches were found to be characterised by seven evaluation resources, namely, affect expression of solidarity, affect expression of concern over effects of pandemic, affect expression of gratitude, judgement evaluation of the efforts at curbing COVID-19, appreciation evaluation of facilities available to curtail COVID-19, appreciation evaluation of processes designed to mitigate the effects of COVID-19, and appreciation evaluation of collaborative response to COVID-19. The preponderance of judgement value of the data implies that the president did more of assessing behaviours of actors involved in the process of managing, curbing or mitigating the effects of the pandemic than assessing the processes themselves. In conclusion, the paper argues that the primary goal of political speeches, especially in the context of a crisis situation, is to assert the relevance of political actors and express positive perception of power brokers.

Keywords: evaluation, stance, coronavirus, appraisal theory, COVID-19, speeches.

1. INTRODUCTION

In November, 2019, the world woke up to the shocking news of a sudden outbreak of coronavirus in the city of Wuhan in China. In January 2020, the COVID-19 was declared a global pandemic by the World Health Organisation. By February 27, 2020, Nigeria recorded its first case of COVID-19. The responses of both the Federal Government of Nigeria and the states were swift and strategic. Schools were shut, contact tracings began in earnest and the construction and equipping of isolation centres took the centre stage of all activities aimed at curtailing the spread and the impact of the virus on the populace. In the midst of these efforts, President Muhammadu Buhari later emerged to address the nation. His address occurred on three occasions within one month, which underscores the gravity of the pandemic. His aim was to inform the populace of the various strategies put in place by his government aimed at tackling the pandemic. His speeches made pronouncements on what the roles of the citizens should be to ensure concerted efforts aimed at nipping the pandemic in the bud. The three speeches delivered by the president within this period came in the interval of two weeks each as the pandemic grew worse across the country. The crux of the speeches was the declaration of a lockdown, first, in Lagos, Ogun and the Federal Capital Territory (Abuja). The lockdown was later extended to the entire country in the wake of the epidemic becoming a pandemic. In the speech, the president revealed the efforts of government, its achievements and what still needed to be done to flatten the curve of the pandemic. The current work analyses the three speeches delivered by the president within that period. It focuses on the stance of the president on the issues, actors and processes surrounding the pandemic. The work examines the linguistic and discursive dimensions of the speeches as political text-in-talk and explores the political nature of the discursive practice.

2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Previous works on political speech have examined several goals in speeches such as acceptance speeches, inaugural addresses, farewell addresses, concession speeches, campaign manifestoes, addresses on state of emergency and independence day speeches (Slagell, 1991; Vastermark, 2007; Adeyanju, 2008; Zhang & Mingxia, 2009; Irimiea, 2010; Ugwu, 2013; Pengsun & Fenfeng, 2013; Taiwo, 2014; Nartay & Yankson, 2014; Sharndama, 2015; Qi, 2017; Osisanwo & Chinaguh, 2018, Moronfoye, 2021). Few works have focused on presidential address on pandemics. The fact that the phenomenon is relatively new justifies the paucity of attention given to it by scholars. The current study, therefore, offers a fresh insight into the analysis of a political discourse in terms of its subjective evaluation of actors and processes involved in the coronavirus pandemic.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

van Dijk (1998, p.11) mentions the need to determine which discourse is political and which is not. A bulk of studies on political discourse defines it by its actors or authors including professional politicians or political institutions, such as presidents and prime ministers and other members of government, the media, parliament or political parties, at the local, national and international levels. Political discourse within the interactional view of Discourse Analysis also includes various recipients in political communicative events or participants in the political process, such as the masses, the citizens and other groups and categories. In this case, political discourse becomes public. Besides, political discourse is an institutional kind of discourse, because the speaker is not usually an individual person, but s/he represents a political party, a country or a ruling establishment (Karasik, 2004, p. 281). van Dijk (1998, p.14) argues for a delimitation of the concept based on the activities or practices being accomplished by political texts rather than only on the nature of its participants. He opines that the problem of definition may be approached in many more ways but it may be comfortable to take the whole context as decisive for the categorisation of discourse as 'political' or not. Though participants and actions form the core of such contexts, such contexts may broadly be analysed in terms of political and communicative events and encounters, with their own settings, occasions, intentions, functions, goals, and legal or political implications. Blommaert (1997) explains that political discourse had originally concerned the "interplay between language and politics and was contextualised within a renewed critical awareness of the dynamic, constitutive, and reciprocal relations between language and politics that had penetrated various domains of language study" (p.1-2). He explains that this modest paradigm shift within linguistics witnessed "the emergence of critical linguistics and Critical Discourse Analysis" which gave attention to "language ideologies and ideologies of language within linguistic anthropology" with special focus on "macro-societal studies of language and nationalism and language policy and language planning" (pp.2-6).

Bell (1975) argues for what constitutes the main thrust of political discourse. He opines that the triad of power, influence and authority constitute the linguistic modes of interacting with others in pursuit of political goals and effects (p. 12). This is a new paradigm that conceives of language as the "perceptual lens" for examining political phenomena and of political deeds as being "built of and around words" (p. 12). This view correlates with Hudson's (1978) position that language should be understood as a strategic resource whereby politicians gain and hold power (p.61). The meaning-making practices of politics therefore involve both political actions and the political language used to describe them. Both are symbolic forms that shape and disseminate public meanings of intrinsically ambiguous and complex political phenomena (Edelman, 1964, p.1). This recognition of the fundamental relationship between language and politics can be traced to classical Greek and Roman treatises on rhetoric (Dunmire, 2012, p.735). Because of the vital role political oratory played in the affairs of the state, Aristotle viewed the art of rhetoric as key to citizenship during the rise of city-states in ancient Greece.

Language is a powerful political weapon for shaping political belief and action. As a kind of discourse, political discourse is regarded as a product of political system. The purpose is to create power through language to realize the political intention of politicians (Fowler, 1979, p.2) and to make political decisions (Ananko, 2017, p.129). Political discourse is said to be characterised by high degree of manipulation. In this respect, the interest to its study is predetermined, firstly, by the search of optimal means of influence of politicians on the audience and, secondly, by the necessity of recognizing the true intentions of the speaker and covert mechanisms of manipulation of the audience (Sheigal, 2000, p.45). One of the functions of language is the way it shapes our perception of reality. Ike-Nwafor (2015, p. 15) maintains that politics is concerned with power - the power to make decisions, to control resources, to control other people's behaviours, and often to control their values. Like their counterparts in other parts of the world, certain nuances accompany the ways Nigerian politicians use language which reveal peculiar dynamics that shape politics in Nigeria. Language is projected not just as a means of

communicating ideas but also as a tool for accomplishing goal-directed actions. It is admitted that political discourse has considerably changed recently. It has become faster, sharper and tougher (Fitzwater, 2016, p.6) due to the intensive use of mass media, social media and social networking (Ananko, 2017, p.128).

In the context of a public speech delivered in a time of pandemic, political discourse is seen as a form of political action and a plan of political process in governance. In this sense, all members of the society are involved in this process and it calls for their active participation in the political process. In this case, the category of evaluation requires special focus on the manner in which prominence can be given to certain parts of the text-in-talk and in such a way, the attention of the audience might be attracted and manipulated. It also reveals the stance of the speaker and his character of persuasion, confidence and power. Given this direction, the paper attempts to provide answers to the following questions: (1) How do the different uses of evaluative language by the president act to construct different authorial and/or unauthorial voices and textual personas? (2) What are the underlying or covert value systems which shape and are disseminated by the president's constructed text? (3) What are the different assumptions which the president makes about the values and belief systems of his respective intended audience?

4. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: APPRAISAL THEORY

Appraisal theory derives from the theoretical apparatus of Systemic Functional Linguistics (Halliday, 1985; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). It is concerned with "the subjective presence of writers/speakers in texts as they adopt stances towards both the material they present and those with whom they communicate" (Martin & White, 2005, p.1). Appraisal is related to the interpersonal dimension of the Systemic Functional Grammar, focusing on the evaluative resources in discourse. The theory comprises three main domains: Attitude, Engagement and Graduation System.

Attitude system is concerned with positive and negative feelings, emotional reactions, and evaluation of things. This system is itself divided into three sub-systems: *affect*, *judgement* and *appreciation*. *Affect* refers to the expression of positive and negative feelings (like happiness/unhappiness, satisfaction/insatisfaction, security/insecurity). *Judgement* is concerned with resources for assessing people's behaviours and/or character by reference to ethics and other social norms. As with affect, *judgement* has positive and negative evaluations as well and it is socio-culturally and ideologically situated. *Judgement* can be classified into "social esteem" and "social sanction". Judgements of esteem have to do with "normality" (how unusual someone is), "capacity" (how capable they are) and "tenacity" (how resolute they are). Judgements of sanction have to do with "veracity" (how honest or truthful people are) and "propriety" (how far beyond reproach). *Appreciation* relates to the evaluation of things and phenomenon. The system of *appreciation* subsumes "reaction" (whether they catch our attention or please us), "composition" (balance and complexity), and "valuation" (how innovative, authentic, timely) (Qi, 2017, p.1327). *Attitude* is often seen as the central system within Appraisal, the way in which we can express feelings and evaluation of both people and things (Mayo & Taboada, 2017, p.9).

Engagement relates to dialogic positioning of the speaker/writer referring to how s/he views the opinion through resources such as projection, modality and concession. This system encompasses two parts: monogloss and heterogloss. Monogloss contains one voice but heterogloss contains many voices. Heterogloss has always received more attention because it construes different voices to agree or refute.

Graduation system contains scales of appraisal intensification degrees which can be high or low. This system runs through the whole appraisal system. It has two subcategories: force and focus. These resources help to measure the intensification degree of an evaluation – how strong or weak the feeling is (force) and the degree of prototypically (focus). *Force* includes the analysis of intensification in gradable linguistic features through the presence of realisations such as intensification, comparatives, superlatives, linguistic repetitions, morphology and phonological features. *Focus* accommodates non-gradable linguistic features in which graduation can adjust the strength of boundaries (Mayo & Taboada, 2017, p.9).

The current study organises the subjective evaluation of President Muhammadu Buhari's responses to the Covid-19 pandemic in the semantic system of *attitude* as it seeks to construe his stance on the phenomenon, explore his construction of textual personas and reveal how he manages his interpersonal positioning and relationship with his addressees.

5. METHODOLOGY

The data for the study comprise three speeches delivered by President Muhammadu Buhari on the COVID-19 pandemic on Sunday, 29th March, 2020, Monday, 13th April, 2020 and Monday, 27th April, 2020. The speeches were downloaded from the president's official page on Facebook. The purposively sampled data represent the stance of the president on the pandemic and his evaluation of various actors and processes surrounding it including the response of the Federal Government of Nigeria to the pandemic. Analysis is qualitative and it borders on the application of the *Attitude* component of the appraisal framework. By giving attention to the evaluative values of these texts, we reference the creation of individual self and group identities and explicate interpersonal engagements of the speaker. Instances of attitudinal resources were marked out and systematically analysed.

6. ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Analysis focused on the *attitude* system which includes *affect*, *judgement* and *appreciation*. The speeches are characterised by seven evaluation resources, namely, *affect expression of solidarity*, *affect expression of concern over effects of pandemic*, *affect expression of gratitude*, *judgement evaluation of the efforts at curbing COVID-19*, *appreciation evaluation of facilities available to tackle COVID-19*, *appreciation evaluation of processes designed to mitigate the effects of COVID-19*, and *appreciation evaluation of collaborative response to COVID-19*. All these resources helped to understand the stance of the president on the pandemic and revealed his subjective evaluation of the issues, actors, and processes surrounding the phenomenon. Across the three speeches, there are altogether 32 statements with evaluation values and stance representations. 10 of them have affect value; 13 have judgement value and 9 have appreciation value. The implication of this distribution is that the president does more of assessing behaviours of actors involved in the process of managing, curbing or mitigating the effects of the pandemic.

6.1 Evaluation Techniques of *Affect* Resources

The evaluation resource of *affect* in the president's speeches covers three domains of assessments - *affect expression of solidarity*, *affect expression of concern over effects of pandemic*, and *affect expression of gratitude*. All these resources are channeled towards expressing the positive and negative feelings of the speaker for various actors and beneficiaries who are either at the forefront of tackling the pandemic or at its receiving end.

6.1.1 *Affect* expression of solidarity

In the midst of commendations, directives, pronouncements and reportage, the president, in the speeches, took time to express his condolences to those who have been hit by the scourge of the pandemic through the death of their loved ones.

I am using this opportunity **to express our deepest condolences** to the families of all Nigerians that have lost their loved ones as a result of the COVID nineteen pandemic. This is our collective loss and **we share in your grief**.

As we continue to streamline our response in the epicenters of Lagos and the FCT, **I remain concerned** about the unfortunate developments in Kano in recent days.

Regrettably, we also had our first fatality, a former employee of PPMC, who died on 23rd March 2020. **Our thoughts and prayers are with his family** in this very difficult time.

The value of *affect* in the texts above operates with evaluation target of solidarity with audiences who have lost their loved ones to the pandemic. The president construes his speech to accommodate the notion of inclusion and implies that he is a leader sensitive to the plight of the people. The role of influence is conspicuous in this discourse as it constitutes the linguistic mode of interacting with the populace in pursuit of political relevance since people are likely to appreciate a leader who identifies with them in their trial. The rhetorical significance of this evaluation therefore is the potential to raise the social esteem of the speaker before the audience.

6.1.2 *Affect* expression of concern over the effects of the pandemic

Whereas the expression of solidarity references condolences to the bereaved, expression of concern over the effects of pandemic reflects an acknowledgement of responsibility and the willingness to exercise control over the situation.

While **we feel deeply concerned** about isolated security incidents involving hoodlums and miscreants, I want to assure all Nigerians that your safety and security remains our primary concern especially in these exceedingly difficult and uncertain times.

I **remain concerned** about the increase in number of confirmed cases and deaths being reported across the world and in Nigeria specifically.

The value of *affect* is represented as the expression of a growing dissatisfaction over certain horrid developments that trail the persistence of the pandemic. The speech implies that the government is conversant with such developments and is capable of stopping it. The role of power, influence and authority in political discourse, as opined by Bell (1975), manifests in this linguistic mode. While identifying with the people's struggle for survival occasioned by the pandemic, the president also registers his awareness of a security threat that trails it but guarantees the fact that his government is still focused on ensuring the security of the people. The goal of this strategic manipulation of language will be to raise the social esteem of the government in order to hold power and control the people.

6.1.3 *Affect* expression of gratitude

Here, the trajectory of the president's speech flows in the direction of the public. This is the hallmark of political discourse. Within the interactional view of Discourse Analysis, political discourse often includes various recipients in political communicative events or participants in the political process, such as the masses, the citizens and other groups and categories. An aspect of the president's speeches thus focuses on commending the efforts of health workers, celebrities, public figures, the organised private sector, individuals and organisations whose contributions in various ways have seen to the curtailment of the pandemic.

I **wish to once again commend** the frontline workers across the country who, on a daily basis, risk everything to ensure we win this fight.

I **wish to thank you all** most sincerely for the great sacrifice you are making for each other at this critical time.

I **must also thank the media houses, celebrities and other public figures** for the great work they are doing in sensitizing our citizens on hygienic practices, social distancing and issues associated with social gatherings.

We are very grateful to see the emerging support of the private sector and individuals to the response as well as our development partners.

The president's evaluation of the people's response to various efforts aimed at curtailing the pandemic is positive. The value of *affect* is thus construed to express gratitude to the public for their concerted sacrifices in nipping the pandemic in the bud. Influence constitutes the linguistic mode of communicating relevance of populace and the responsiveness of government. The political goal is the elevation of shared responsibility. The president implies that the citizens have a role in supporting the government to tackle the menace of COVID-19 and on noticing the actualization of such commitment by the people, does not fail to acknowledge it. In this regard, the president recognizes the active participation of these people in the political process and expressly appreciates it. This is the value system which shapes and is being disseminated by this discourse.

6.2 Evaluation Techniques of *Judgement* Resources

Judgement, a system of attitudinal positioning, relates to the assessment of people's behaviours by reference to ethics and other social norms which are socio-culturally and ideologically defined. Across the president's speeches, the evaluation resource of judgement covers a single domain of assessment, namely, *judgement evaluation of the measures aimed at curtailing COVID-19*. Assessments are all explicitly positive and are targeted at governments (federal and state), the masses and the security agencies.

6.2.1 Judgement evaluation of measures aimed at curtailing COVID-19

The president's speeches focus on the assessments of various measures put in place to address and curtail the spread of the pandemic. Those measures include border closure, placing a ban on interstate movement, lockdown of public activities and giving of directives relating to social distancing.

...the measures we have put in place **thus far have yielded positive outcomes against the projections.**

The proportion of cases imported from other countries **has reduced to only 19% of new cases, showing that our border closures yielded positive results.**

As a nation, **we are on the right track** to win the fight against COVID-19.

The response of our state governors has been particularly impressive, especially in aligning their policies and actions to those of the federal government.

As I mentioned earlier, these steps were necessary and overall, **have contributed to slowing down the spread of COVID nineteen in Nigeria.**

The texts above are explicit positive evaluations of the roles of governments (federal and states) and their responses to the challenge of COVID-19. This assessment is socio-politically situated. There are certain expectations that citizens have of their government. In times of crisis, in particular, they look up to leadership for direction and support. To this end, the president implies that he is aware of these expectations and his government is well disposed to meeting them. As a judgement of esteem, therefore, the texts construe the capability of governments at various levels and convey the toga of power since the assertion is presupposed that the policies that are put in place to checkmate the spread of the pandemic are yielding positive effects. This expression of capability of the government is further entrenched indirectly by an acknowledgement of the painful impact of various strategies instituted by the government, which are nonetheless essential to contain the virus:

As your democratically elected leaders, we made this very difficult decision knowing fully well it will severely disrupt your livelihoods and bring undue hardship to you, your loved ones and your communities. **However, such sacrifices are needed to limit the spread of COVID-19 in our country. They were necessary to save lives.**

This is a difficult decision to take, but **I am convinced that this is the right decision.**

The president attempts a balanced evaluation of the various policies established by his government in relation to their impacts on the people. Though the policies have dire consequences especially on people's livelihood, they are still adjudged normal and beneficial in terms of controlling and containing the spread of COVID-19. The value of *judgement* here is thus rendered positive though couched in both tenets of esteem and sanction. Judgement of esteem establishes the capability of government while sanction construes propriety on the part of the policies of government. The rhetorical significance of this posture is the rebuilding of confidence in the government by the people. This judgement of esteem is further rendered in support of the institutions of government set-up and saddled with the responsibility of helping government to combat the pandemic.

The Security Agencies **have risen to the challenges posed by this unprecedented situation with gallantry** and I commend them.

Finally, I want to thank the members of the Presidential Task Force on COVID-19 for all their hardwork so far. Indeed, **the patriotism shown in your work is exemplary and highly commendable.**

The president's speeches also evaluate the contribution of the security agencies and the special task force set-up to manage the pandemic. The explicit positive judgement is socially constructed to ascertain the professional competence of these institutions thereby asserting the confidence reposed in them by the government and the people. This assessment of capacity is needful to boost the determination of the people to contribute their own quota.

As individuals, **we remain the greatest weapon to fight this pandemic.**

...we must all see this as our national and patriotic duty to control and contain the spread of this virus.

This common enemy can only be controlled if **we all come together and obey scientific and medical advice.**

As we remain ready to enforce these measures, **we should see this as our individual contribution in the war against COVID-19.**

The texts imply that the responsibility of containing the spread of the virus cascades down the leadership to government institutions then the people. To get people involved in the fight against the pandemic, therefore, the president attempts to commit the people to certain demands that are socially and ideologically grounded. This fact buttresses Blommaert (1997) position about the interplay between language, political discourse and ideology. The value of explicit positive judgement in the samples, therefore, has the potential to manipulate people to comply with certain social restrictive orders. Of specific note is the rampant use of pronominal "we" across all the texts to foreground the exigency of unanimity. Pronominal as a syntactic strategy helps in creating and negotiating social, cultural, political and ideological meanings. It is specifically deployed in these texts to place a social demand on people to act in such a way as to show their cooperation with directives

of government aimed at containing the pandemic. This is the least they can do to express their patriotic zeal - *we must all see this as our national and patriotic duty to control and contain the spread of this virus.*

6.3 Evaluation Techniques of *Appreciation* Resources

The evaluation resource of *appreciation* in the president's speeches covers three domains of assessments - *appreciation evaluation of facilities available to tackle COVID-19, appreciation evaluation of processes designed to mitigate the effects of COVID-19, and appreciation evaluation of collaborative response to COVID-19.* The speaker commits these resources to certain positive aesthetic values, namely, the process of domesticating and investing huge resources in the fight against coronavirus, promised implementation of efficient process and system designed to manage the crisis as well as the faultless palliative distribution process.

6.3.1 Appreciation evaluation of facilities provided to tackle COVID-19

An aspect of the speeches is construed to assess the positive aesthetic quality of those equipment provided by the government to manage the crisis. The facilities include laboratories, treatment and isolation centres, emergency operation centres and risk communication gadgets.

Several new fully equipped treatment and isolation centres have been operationalised across the country thereby increasing bed capacity to about three thousand.

I will commend the state governors for the activation of **State-level** Emergency Operation Centres, establishment of **new** treatment centres and the delivery of **aggressive** risk communication strategies.

The evaluative value of the resources of *appreciation* is oriented towards a positive assessment of the provision of facilities by the federal and state authorities as a viable response to address the treatment of victims of the pandemic and manage its preventive measures. The facilities are said to be sufficient in number and adequately functional. The positive assessment also references the proactive responses of state governments which have culminated in the "activation" of "emergency operation centres", "new treatment centres" and "risk communication strategies". The positive assessment of the risk communication strategies is interpreted as being optimally functional since it is said to be "aggressive". The system of *appreciation* in this assessment subsumes *reaction* and *valuation*. The efforts at procuring the facilities as well as their qualities are pleasing to the president.

6.3.2 Appreciation evaluation of processes designed to mitigate the effects of COVID-19

An aspect of the evaluation by the president focuses on the positive aesthetic quality of those phenomena established to cushion the effects of the pandemic on the citizens and on the nation's economy. The phenomena include distribution of palliatives and policy on revitalization of the Nigerian economy.

The distribution and expansion of palliatives which I directed in my earlier broadcast is still ongoing in a **transparent** manner.

...I am directing the Ministers of Industry, Trade and Investment, Communication and Digital Economy, Science and Technology, Transportation, Aviation, Interior, Health, Works and Housing, Labour and Employment and Education to **jointly** develop a comprehensive policy for a "Nigerian economy **functioning** with COVID-19"

The president's evaluation of these phenomena confers a positive aesthetic attribute on the process of distribution and expansion of government's palliatives meant for that category of citizens referred to as the vulnerable and the poorest of the poor. The president infers that the process is faultless and crystal. Assessment also bestows the same quality on the policy framework intended to boost the economy despite COVID-19. The president's assessment of the planned collaboration of various ministries in realizing this objective is positive. The system of *appreciation* therefore subsumes *reaction* and *valuation*. The president is pleased with the pattern of distributing palliatives and believes that the concerted response of ministries to keep the economy in good standing despite coronavirus will yield commendable fruits.

6.3.3 Appreciation evaluation of collaborative response to COVID-19

The speeches also border on such ideas that relate to positive aesthetic quality of the responses of government to the pandemic. The responses are tailored to ensure a thriving economy despite COVID-19, an efficient management of preventive and curative measures, and a smart approach to protecting that sector of the economy that is germane to the survival of the nation's economy.

Our goal was to develop **implementable** policies that will ensure our economy continues to function while still maintaining our **aggressive** response to the COVID nineteen pandemic.

I have directed the Central Bank of Nigeria and other financial institutions to make further plans and provisions for financial stimulus packages for small and medium scale enterprises. We recognise **the critical role** that they play in Nigeria's economy.

The value of evaluation of the resources of *appreciation* construes a positive assessment of such policies that are important to keep the economy in good standing. The impact of such policies on the economy underlies the skillful approach needed to drive those policies to effectiveness. Part of the policies is to fertilize the nation's small and medium scale enterprises in order to fortify its "critical role" to the survival of the economy. There is a strong undertone of influence and authority in this discourse. Within the texts is the linguistic mode of communicating the ability of government to re-align forces in support of the economy in order to avert its strangulation by the pandemic. This fact establishes the felicity condition for the authority wielded by the apex bank to assist those sectors of the economy that are most germane to its stability. The system of *appreciation* subsumes composition and valuation. The government is aware of the impact of the pandemic on the economy and is proactive to ensure that such is mitigated by certain measures he believes will work. The feasibility of such measures is guaranteed by the smart approach designed for their implementation:

We are in touch with these institutions as they work towards a solution that will be certified by international and local medical authorities within the **shortest possible** time.

Although we have adopted strategies used globally, our implementation programs have been tailored to reflect **our local realities**.

As a nation, our response must be **guided, systematic and professional**.

The responses in this discourse are valued in terms of the best standard of procedures for confronting COVID-19. The evaluation entails a positive assessment of the attributes of both international and local partners as well as the programs and policies implemented by the government. The efforts of international and local institutions are assessed to be painstaking since the results of their discovery will be seen "within the shortest possible time". The programs and policies are assessed to be effective. The system of *appreciation* incorporates *reaction* and *valuation*. The president is pleased with the procedures which are construed as innovative, authentic and timely. The linguistic mode of communicating responsibility alludes to influence and authority. The president affirms a role to choose the best possible method to respond to the situation of pandemic through partnership with relevant institutions locally and internationally.

7. CONCLUSION

The paper has so far presented President Muhammadu Buhari's subjective evaluation of issues, actors and processes surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic. His assessments of these factors have been analysed using the semantic system of *attitude* to understand his construction of textual personas and his management of interpersonal positioning and relationship with his intended audience. There are 32 statements with evaluation values across the three speeches. 10 of them have affect value; 13 with judgement value; and 9 with appreciation value.

The preponderance of judgement value across the speeches implies that the president does more of assessing behaviours of actors involved in managing and mitigating the impacts of the pandemic. The expression of *affect* constructs solidarity with those who have lost their loved ones to the pandemic. It also conveys an acknowledgement of the responsibilities of the government as well as express gratitude to all stakeholders. The resources of *appreciation* confer a positive aesthetic value on the processes that border on fighting and managing the pandemic. The president churns out much influence in the pursuit of political relevance and social esteem. As it is consistent with most political speeches, the role of power, influence and authority is strongly recorded in the speeches. The president positively assesses his government's responses to the sad developments occasioned by the pandemic in order to register his firm control of the crisis. This is done without prejudice to the acknowledgement of the sacrifice being made by the people. The president therefore raises an assumption of patriotic zeal associated with various institutions of government and the people in general. He recognizes their value as active participants in the political process. In conclusion, the paper argues that the primary goal of political speeches, especially in the context of a crisis situation, is to assert the relevance of political actors and instigate positive perceptions of power brokers.

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