

**CURRENT LINGUISTIC AND
LITERARY ISSUES IN DIGITAL
COMMUNICATION IN THE
GLOBALISED AGE**

EDITED BY

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CHAPTER TWELVE

Discourse Mapping of Online News on Fuel Subsidy Removal in Nigeria

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Abstract

Removal of fuel subsidy in Nigeria generated a lot of protests as a result of the national broadcast by the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, Goodluck Ebele Jonathan, on 1st January 2012. Nigerians home and abroad condemned this through protest movements, display of placards and different posts in social media to express their grievances. This issue has been extensively reported by the Nigerian national dailies, online news reports and other social media. Scholars have also considered the implications and effects on the nation's economy and the populace in general. However, the discourse mapping of the news report which are capable of revealing the peculiar patterns and the ideological underpinnings are yet to be considered. This paper, therefore, examines the discourse mapping of online news on fuel subsidy removal in Nigeria with a view to explicating the peculiar patterns of language use, its lexical relations, and the transitivity options of how social actors are represented. For data, corpus gathered from online news reports in such computer mediated sources as *BBC*, *CNN*, *Pointblanknews*, *Osundefender*, *Economic Confidential*, *Nigeria Village Square*, *VOA* and *Reuters* were purposively selected because they have wider coverage and they largely covered the fuel subsidy removal issue. The study employs an aspect of critical discourse analysis theory by Fairclough & Wodak. Different patterns of language use are identified that show bitterness, caustic, passionate, vituperative and unequivocal expressions.

Two social actors such as the government and the protesters has identified in the news throw up the dichotomous categories and social formations in Nigeria: the government against the governed, the oppressor and the oppressed, the rich against the poor, the strong against the weak, truth against falsehood, and dream against reality. This revealed not just our social realities but a critical interrogation of the forces and ideological configurations behind the socio-economic and political harshness being witnessed by the vast majority of Nigerians. It is thus established that the relevance of language in social discourse encompasses understanding, explaining and analyzing new phenomena in our sociopolitical system which are relevant to Nigeria's social transformation, if the nation has to rise above her plethora of challenges.

Keywords: discourse, fuel subsidy, lexical relations, social actors

Introduction

On 1st January 2012, President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, Goodluck Ebele Jonathan, in a national broadcast, announced the removal of fuel subsidy in the country. This generated a lot of condemnation from Nigerians, and indeed some foreign nationals at home and across the globe. Immediately, "Occupy Nigeria", a protest movement, was formed on 2nd January in response to the 1st January announcement by President Jonathan.

The protests aim to, among other things, force the Nigerian government to return to the status quo and cause petrol to be sold at the previous rate of 65 naira per litre; alert Nigerians to the fact that they are being made to pay the outrageous cost of maintaining public officers' lives of

luxury and indolence which have reached alarming proportions; get the Jonathan government to act responsibly by tackling the near collapse of crucial social amenities and the endemic corruption that is ravaging the Nigerian nation and weaken and gradually eliminate the existing "power cabal".

In response to the call for protest by the Labour Unions and *Occupy Nigeria*, the protests attracted large crowds in Lagos, Ibadan, Kano, Kaduna and several other Nigerian cities. Protesters were equipped with placards with various inscriptions that included:

Jonathan is a fraud;
 Sanusi is a confusionist;
 Oshiomhole is a traitor;
 PDP is a disaster;
 Okonjo Iweala is an IMF agent;
 This is our stand: Remove Corruption, not
 subsidy.

Although many Nigerians agree with Jonathan's diagnosis of Nigeria's problems, they question his sloppy and effete methods of addressing the issues. The response to the call for action was almost spontaneous. All ministries and parastatals were shut down, except essential services. The *Occupy Nigeria* protests also took place in other countries (London, Washington DC, Belgium, Brussels) to show solidarity with the plight of Nigerians back home. As many as 20 people were wounded and at least three demonstrators were reportedly killed as police opened fire on the protest march in the country's business capital, Lagos.

as well as in the largest northern city of Kano. From the posts, majority of the protesters believe he should go back to the drawing board to perfect his strategies rather than the continuous exploitation of the people.

Removal of fuel subsidy assumes that a procedure was put in place where the cost of fuel was subsidized by the Nigerian government. It is therefore necessary to examine the issue of fuel subsidy removal in order to put this in proper perspective. Soremekun (2011) in an interview has argued that:

Subsidy essentially originates from the government's inability to process the crude oil within. Nigeria is something of a stand alone in OPEC. So, you can then imagine the absurdity of the concept. When they talk of removal of oil subsidy, they are actually showcasing to the rest of the world, the bankruptcy of the Nigerian political class.

And in saying this, I want to repeat once more that as far as 1968-69, the duo of Obafemi Awolowo and Abdulazeez Attah were there running the Ministry of Finance as Minister for Finance and as Permanent Secretary, respectively. They evolved a document through which Nigeria could have run a viable oil industry. That document was ignored.

Review of Literature on Fuel Subsidy

Ering and Akpan (2012), using Saro-Wiwa's (1995) development racism theory to explicate the issue of fuel subsidy in Nigeria observe that:

To anyone remotely acquainted with Nigerian politics, oil resources occupy the prominent place in power politics. The struggle for power is clearly a struggle to control the oil resource and improve the lots (sic) of one's ethnic group through development opportunities. Politics in Nigeria cannot be divorced from oil. National and personal dreams, hope and aspiration are built around oil. It remains the benchmark of Nigeria's socio-economic, education, foreign and defence policies. No doubt the intensity with which the local elites struggle for power is, in part, evidence of our failure to divorce politics from oil and oil from politics. Given this scenario, it should be easy to understand the politics of fuel subsidy in Nigeria...The CBN official statistics show that over 70 per cent of Nigerians live below the poverty line (CBN, 2011). It is normally computed as those living below one US dollar per day. The implication here is that fuel subsidy removal will further cause emotional trauma and torture on the psyche of those who are struggling to feed ...

Okpaga *et al* (2012) focuses on the "claimed" reason behind the removal of fuel subsidy alongside the negative effects it has on the masses and the nation's economy. All governments from Obasanjo's first coming as Head of State to his second coming as President have one way or the other "deregulated" the oil sector, which is a euphemism for price hike in petroleum products, the most guilty being the Obasanjo and Babangida regimes (See Table 1). However, with 115 per cent price hike of petrol, Jonathan's regime is conclusively the guiltiest. One of the main recommendations

made is that government should identify areas of wastages in governance, such as the allocation of largesse and booties in the name of allowances and withdraw same forthwith.

Onyishi *et al* (2012) appraises the implications of the subsidy removal on the Nigerian economy in general and the populace in particular. They observe, among other things, that: the removal of fuel subsidy has affected the cost of commodities at the various markets in Nigeria; the increase would provoke hyperinflation of prices in the consumer products market and thus compound poverty. They pointedly noted that diesel and engine oil prices have been deregulated for years yet, the prices keep going up unlike the situation in the telecommunication industry. Nigerians have lost small scale industries that are supposed to serve as the backbone of her economy. The protests resulting from the hike in fuel prices were to be expected. "This shows that Nigerians have rejected the "subsidy" removal because they are tired of policies which do not attempt to increase purchasing power in the country."

Dare (2012) is definite in his views: "So, what we have on our hands, it is necessary to insist, is at bottom a tax on consumption, and all the talk about ending a subsidy and ploughing the proceeds into projects designed to raise living standards is a gigantic swindle". Soremekun (2011) in an interview concludes: "And in saying this, I want to repeat once more that as far as 1968-69, the duo of Obafemi Awolowo and Abdulazeez Attah were there running the Ministry of Finance as Minister for Finance and as Permanent Secretary, respectively. They evolved a document through which Nigeria could have run a viable oil industry. That document was ignored". (*This Day*, 11/7/2011).

Nwafor *et al* (2011) examines the effects removal of petroleum subsidies have on poverty in Nigeria using the poverty line of the Nigerian living Standards Survey. The affinity between the findings in this study and the earlier ones reviewed here is striking. The paper concludes that subsidy removal, without spending of the associated savings, would increase the national poverty level.

Table 1 shows that such monumental hike in fuel prices (300%) was recorded during President Babangida's military regime in 1990, when the economy was more buoyant than it is today.

Table 1: Data on Petroleum Price Increases/Adjustments in Nigeria (1978 – 2012)

S/ N	Date	Administration	Price	Percentage Change
1	1978	Gen. Olusegun Obasanjo (as military ruler)	15.37k	-
2	1982	Alh. Shehu Shagari	20k	-
3	1990	Gen. Ibrahim Babangida	60k	300%
4	1992	Gen. Ibrahim Babangida	70k	17%
5	1992	Gen. Ibrahim Babangida	N3.25k	364%
6	1993	Gen. Ibrahim	N5.00	54%

		Babangida		
7	1994	Chief Ernest Shonekan	N11.00	120%
8	1994/98	Gen. Sani Abacha	N11.00	-
9	2000	Olusegun Obasanjo (as civilian ruler)	N20.00	82%
10	2000	Olusegun Obasanjo (as civilian ruler)	N22.00	10%
11	2001	Olusegun Obasanjo (as civilian ruler)	N26.00	18%
12	2003	Olusegun Obasanjo (as civilian ruler)	N40.00	54%
13	2004	Olusegun Obasanjo (as civilian ruler)	N45.00	13%
14	2007	Olusegun Obasanjo (as civilian ruler)	N70.00	56%
15	2007	Alh. Umaru Shehu Yardua	N65.00	0.07%

Source: *Communique by South-South Elders and Leaders, 2012.*

Excerpts from President Jonathan's Broadcast:

... Since the announcement, there have been mixed reactions to the policy. Let me seize this opportunity to assure all Nigerians that I feel the pain that you all feel. I personally feel pained to see the sharp increase in transport fares and the prices of goods and services. I share the anguish of all persons who had travelled out of their stations, who had to pay more on the return leg of their journeys.... The interest of the ordinary people of this country will always remain topmost in my priorities as a leader. I remain passionately committed to achieving significant and enduring improvements in our economy that will lead to sustained improvement in the lives of our people.

I am determined to leave behind a better Nigeria, that we all can be proud of. To do so, I must make sure that we have the resources and the means to grow our economy to be resilient, and to sustain improved livelihood for our people. We must act in the public interest, no matter how tough, for the pains of today cannot be compared to the benefits of tomorrow. On assumption of office as President, I swore to an oath to always act in the best interest of the people. I remain faithful to that undertaking... (President Jonathan, Jan 2012).

In spite of this speech, Nigerians did not believe him, thus the protests went on as planned.

Methodological approaches to Discourse Analysis

There exists a bi-directional relationship between discourse and society in terms of three major components: social members, institution, and ideology. Social members construct various kinds of text within an institution, which in turn conditions or constrains the way texts are constructed, most often through the mediation of values or beliefs engendered or promoted within the institution (i.e. ideology).

Critical Discourse Analysis

The basic claim of Critical Discourse Analysis, henceforth CDA, is that all human languages encode ideological patterns, that is, language is not just a transparent medium of communication about the objective world, but a constantly operative part of the social process (see Malmkjaer, 1991: 89 cited in Taiwo, 2007: 3; Wodak, 1996). Ideology in CDA is an essential channel of establishing and maintaining unequal power relations, and how language is used in a variety of social institutions.

Fairclough & Wodak (1997: 271-280) summarize the main tenets of CDA as:

1. CDA addresses social problems
2. Power relations are discursive
3. Discourse Constitutes Society and Culture
4. Discourse does ideological work
5. Discourse is historical
6. The link between text and society is mediated
7. Discourse analysis is interpretative and explanatory
8. Discourse is a form of social action

Van Dijk (2000) posits that:

Critical Discourse Analysis is a type of discourse analytical research that primarily studies the way social power abuse, dominance and inequality are enacted, reproduced and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context. With such dissident research, critical discourse analysts take explicit position, and thus want to understand, expose and ultimately to resist social inequality.

CDA is thus relevant to this paper since the paper investigates the social problem of protests caused by "removal" of fuel subsidy within the context of the Nigerian sociocultural environment, while tracing the historical factors that contribute to this social problem. The abuse of power is clearly shown here. It equally explains, interprets and situates the text within social discourse, using language to point out the ideology behind the protests.

Halliday's metafunctions of language

From a general simplistic orientation, Halliday (1973) sees language as performing three primary functions: delivering information, transacting between persons, and expressing reality. He thus points out that:

A functional theory of language is a theory of meanings, not about words or constructions; ...where then do we find the function differentiated in language? They are differentiated semantically, ... (1973: 110).

He further notes that the transitivity system of a grammar reflects the ideational function of that language. According to Halliday and Matthiessen (2004), metafunctions are the ideational knowledge /metafunction (the ideas, knowledge of a culture/, background knowledge prevalent within the society, content words that carry meaning, etc) which express as well as constrain our concept of reality. This function helps to impose order on our experiences by highlighting the cause and effect relation of things.

The interpersonal knowledge/metafunction (the degrees of formality, social distance, negative or positive language and the roles that people assume as a consequence) refers to the system of options of the modality system, for instance, "sentence types" such as declaratives, interrogatives and imperatives. It is concerned with the way social and personal attitudes and relationships are related and expressed.

Textual metafunction (knowledge of intra- and inter-textual contexts, conventions for the realization and organization of texts such as elements of coherence, intelligibility and how the entire text is structured) refers to the way sentences are organized into meaningful messages. In other words, the combination of both ideational (the propositional) and interpersonal (modal elements) aspects are arranged or organized to convey meaningful and relevant discourse within the context of the society.

Thus, the study examines how language is used to identify social actors, the inequality in the society, the way power is abused, how social and personal relationships are expressed in types of sentences and specific lexical choices,

and how the texts are organized into meaningful discourse that spurred millions of Nigerians to action.

Crises/Conflict Discourse

Oha (1994) analyzes war speeches of the opposing sides (Nigeria versus Biafra) during the civil war in Nigeria (1967-1970) using "systemiotics", one of the strands of systemic functional linguistic theory. He focuses on how war situation impacted on the writers' style and specific linguistic choices. The study interrogates the functions of language use, style and the meaning generated from this in crises discourse.

Lukin, Butt & Matthiessen (2004) using newspaper reports and briefings, explores the ideological impact of different grammatical choices in the Iraqi war. The study argues that grammar is central, in a not too obvious way, to the construing of our reality, and observes that when we speak or write, we tend to favour a particular view by our choice of words. This is what is commonly referred to as ideology. However, in crises situations, it is crucial to "understand the role of language and the ideological consequences of the choices made".

Mourad (2012) investigates from a critical discourse analysis approach, how language functions are used to represent people and events from a corpus of news on and about *Jihad* in *The New York Times* (1991-2011). The study also emphasizes the relevance of language in conflict situations. Kitis and Milápidés (1997:558) notes that:

Language is embedded in societal, political, and ideological structures and processes. Meanings

are not frozen entities, but are generated and regenerated as they are immersed in the processes and structures constituting them on the one hand, but also being reconstituted by them, on the other hand.

Thus, Abioye (2011:26) observes that linguistic and stylistic choices are embedded in the socio-cultural, political and ideological views of the writer; the writer, knowing what has to be said and the motives behind this, then makes the choices depending on the orientation and the effect the message is expected to have. Abioye (2010:104) also observed a persistent pattern in government's attitude to issues of fundamental interest to the nation, and that government has consistently exhibited lack of political will in the implementation of these. "Also, misplaced priorities ... where policies and projects are poorly implemented/completed, sometimes diverted, inadequately monitored or even abandoned and subsequently forgotten." It is clear that this is the case with the Nigerian government. But these are not just the fundamentals of the Nigerian debacle. Corruption has become a cankerworm; eating steadily and voraciously into the very fabric that holds the nation together.

Excerpts from the online articles/editorials on fuel subsidy
Shilgba (2011) points out:

The Jonathan government is lying to Nigerians.
There is no saving anywhere that would make any significant difference in the welfare of Nigerians...
President Jonathan lacks the moral strength to fight

corruption. He is corrupt himself, and is so clever to make it appear as if he is fighting corruption. Jonathan must give account to Nigerians why he wasted our money on paying those his government argues are feeding on the fuel subsidy. Jonathan's government is confessing weakness... President Jonathan wants Nigerians to pay for the inefficiency and corruption of government. Impunity reigns in the land, and Jonathan encourages it when his government cannot prosecute those cheating the system. He encourages impunity when he runs away from the responsibility of governance to rather inflict pains on Nigerians as an escape route.

If government is so concerned about cutting cost why would any public official in Nigeria earn about one million US dollars a year? ... When the right time and what is the right manner? I dare say there is never a right time to remove fuel subsidy. What government must remove are corruption and waste in governance.

Olatunji Dare, professor of Mass Communication who is credited with the greatest satirical output in the Nigerian print media (Abioye, 2009), temporarily discarded his trademark satirical style in order to address this vexing issue. The article is vintage Dare: with the use of rhetorical questions, imperatives, declaratives, metaphor, ridicule and sarcasm. All these devices serve to highlight the pragmatic functions of language in social crises:

The day after Abuja sprang an ambush on a people who had been led to believe that their

representatives were negotiating with honourable and well-intentioned officials, I can almost see the in-house choir serenading President Goodluck Jonathan as the Lion-hearted Man who did what his predecessors, among them battle-tested generals whom nobody ever accused of timidity, could not bring themselves to do.

And I can almost see Himself the Lion-hearted Man and his fawning inner circle downing yet another cocktail and another far into the night, as is said to be the custom of the house... As for courage, the jury is not yet out. But I am not persuaded that imposing on other people pain and hardships from which you and your household and your courtiers and your cronies are splendidly insulated qualifies as an act of courage... The harder they try to explain away the withdrawal of the "subsidy" and the more they rhapsodise about all the wonders that will flow from it, the more dubious the whole thing becomes. Abuja adds wanton insult to bitter injury when it reminds the public that Ghana recently abolished gasoline subsidy without stirring any social upheavals. As a result of the price adjustment, the gasoline price rose by just 15 per cent in Ghana. In Nigeria, it rose by an unconscionable 115 per cent... When did Nigeria become "other countries?" Nigerians live and work and create and reproduce in Nigeria, not in "other countries." It is on the Nigerian reality that public policy must therefore be grounded.

At any rate, why are public officials ever so quick to point to what happens in "other countries" when it comes to taking concrete measures to improve

living conditions of Nigerians, but never say a word about the practice in “other countries” when appropriating unto themselves obscene compensations, one notorious example being the “hardship allowance” paid to legislators?

Whatever the outcome, one thing is certain. The Jonathan Administration has proved itself unworthy of the public trust. (my emphasis).

(Dare, 2012: Thenationonline)

From the “Occupy Nigeria” website:

“Jonathan has failed Nigerians. He has cheated us. When he came for our votes, he never said he wanted to increase our sufferings. He made many enticing promises; today, he has done the worst thing ever. He and his party are wicked. They do not love common Nigerians.”

“For instance, the unalloyed and almost blind support given to Jonathan during the election by the Southwest has been completely lost. A look at all those who participated and addressed the mammoth crowd that massed at the Gani Fawehinmi Park, Ojota, is enough to send signals that he (Jonathan) has lost the critical support of the region”.

“NBA Ikeja....” On the purported economic gains of the subsidy removal, Falana, an eminent lawyer/social activist said:

But from experience, we know that this is not true. During Obasanjo regime, subsidy was removed for

about eight times and there was nothing good to show for it. All we want to remind Nigerians and let them know is that our leaders are corrupt and are insensitive to the plight of the masses, they are selfish, self-centred, so we must reject this oppression.

Although not a Nigerian, Ghanaian journalist, Obour (2012) points out that:

As a Ghanaian who was born and largely educated in Nigeria, I'm not oblivious of the difficulties ordinary Nigerians confront on a daily basis as they try to go about their lives.... But the country's oil monies have hardly benefitted ordinary citizens. Nigeria lacks basic resources including power and critical infrastructure. The education is in shambles; health sector is challenged; security is pathetic, with tens of citizens dying on a monthly basis; institutions are weak, while corruption among politicians and other high-profile Nigerians is endemic. Nothing seems to be working in Nigeria, forcing citizens to take their destinies into their hands.

Nigerians have become their own government: They generate their own electricity and water; they provide themselves with education and healthcare... the Nigerian government has failed to channel over \$500 billion in oil revenue over the last decade - that's about \$50 billion per year- into improving the lives of ordinary Nigerians. The over \$50 billion available to the government a year is entirely distinct from the billions of dollars

realised annually from taxes, Import duties, royalties, foreign aid and other sources. But the whereabouts of those huge sums are a mystery. The government, therefore, has no credibility whatsoever to be entrusted with an additional \$8 billion per year.... Depriving the people of this benefit amounts to imposing extra hardship on them. It amounts to pushing a long-suffering people to the wall. It amounts to insensitivity on the path of a Nigerian government and must be rejected by all Nigerians using all peaceful means necessary. **In the words of Arch Bishop Desmond Tutu, "If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor" (my emphasis).**

Even the clergy were not left out of the condemnations and acrimony targeted at government:

We the Bishops of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria, Ibadan Province comprising of Ibadan, Ondo, Oyo, Ilorin, Ekiti, and Osogbo dioceses, having carefully examined the political and economic reasons advanced by the federal government to justify the removal of petroleum subsidy, **wish to express our regrets and reservations at the unpopular decision. We deplore the fact that economic considerations were prioritized over moral implications and immediate public interests in the timing of this subsidy removal.**

Before removing the subsidy, the Federal Government alluded to huge irregularities and corruption associated with the provision of

petroleum products in Nigeria. It took no action to prosecute anyone as a consequence of its discovery. It did not allay palpable fears of harsher economic effects on the average Nigerian nor did it take any action to protect or support the poorest and most vulnerable Nigerians. The harsh consequences of the eventual removal of subsidy, as has been seen, have been instantaneous. Many Nigerians who went to their hometowns and villages to celebrate Christmas and the New Year could not even afford the cost of returning to their places of work" (my emphasis).

Method of Analysis

Fairclough's (1995, 2003) notion of text as being embedded in the contexts of its production, distribution and reception as well as in wider social, political, economic and cultural contexts; Fairclough & Wodak's (1997) tenets of CDA; and van Dijk's views on CDA all provide some background on the central topic of the text. This is complemented by outlining the historical development of this national problem, examining the conditions of text production, distribution and reception, addressing social actor representation in the texts and the impact of the protest on the Nigerian nation.

Thus, this study provides a background to the issue of Fuel Subsidy, allows some of the articles to "speak for themselves" as it were, and properly situates the analysis within appropriate methodological constructs. The primary data for this study are the online feature stories, headlines, news reports and editorials generated before and after the removal of the fuel subsidy. Out of a considerable corpus of

over 1,000 news reports on the web generated from such sources as *BBC*, *CNN*, *Pointblanknews*, *Osundefender*, *Economic Confidential*, *Nigeria Village Square*, "Occupy Nigeria", *VOA* and *Reuters*, 100 were selected for analysis.

Other prominent social media networks include *Facebook* and *Twitter*, which provided the protesters with a common middle-ground where they could monitor the protests; send situation reports including pictures and make contributions. However, only 30 headlines, features, editorials and news reports were actually analyzed on the basis of contiguity, as it was clear that virtually all these posts shared the same semantic affinity. Most of the texts not directly analyzed were also incorporated in the discussion.

Analysis and Findings

The analysis comes under headings as discussed below. In discussing social actors, transitivity options and lexical choices are incorporated since they operate in a symbiotic relationship. Then, motives and functions of texts are shown to manifest discursively.

Discourse Mapping Strategies.....

Headlines: The headlines serve the function of indicating the immediate reaction of Nigerians towards the fuel price hike (or removal of subsidy). The motives here are clearly spelt out. The country is likened to a situation of crises/unrest where the government (President Jonathan) the agent, has declared war on the carrier-the masses, the opposition, and the public. This justifies the call-to-arms: the hike **must** be rejected. It is a wake-up call for all Nigerians. For instance:

Nigeria's unhappy new year

President Jonathan's flight of Pharaoh-like vindictiveness

Why Nigerians must reject fuel subsidy removal

Fuel subsidy: Workers declare war with FG, reject removal • Say Jonathan has declared war on Nigerian masses.

How Powerful Is Nigeria's Opposition?

*Fuel Subsidy Removal: The Government Vs The People
Nigeria defends fuel subsidy removal to unions, public.*

Adjectives and Metaphors

The texts predominantly use mostly descriptive adjectives and powerful metaphors perhaps to make known the anger, resentment and general public's mental state towards the fuel subsidy matter. For instance, "Abuja" is a metaphor for government and its representatives. Other examples include: Abuja sprang an ambush....

"Labour unions in Nigeria have threatened to paralyse the country with mass protests and strikes..."

"...where angry motorists paid more than twice the usual price for fuel."

"Nigerian regulators announced the start of the deeply controversial measure to remove fuel subsidies on Sunday."

"Economists and government officials' view removing the subsidy as essential to allow for more spending on the country's woefully inadequate infrastructure"

"Nigeria refines very little of its crude despite being a major oil producer"

"Nigerians have become their own government: They generate their own electricity and water; they provide themselves with education and healthcare"

Threatened: *Endangered, jeopardized, periled, menaced*

Paralyse: *make powerless, disable,*

Skyrocketed: *increased, spiked, inflated*

Blackouts: *darkness, dim-out, power-failure*

Deplorable: *terrible, condemnable, miserable*

Queues: *rows, long-lines*

Protests: *disapprovals, complaints, objections*

Strikes: *boycotts, shuns, eschews*

For instance, "Paralyse the country", and "Nigerians have become their own government" generate negative image schema.

Use of Negative Expressions

The texts show how the writers' choice of words and expressions are targeted at casting aspersions on the government which could also be viewed as a wake-up call and instigating the public. Expressions and quotations from the texts and angry protesters further reveal how reprehensible the situation is to the majority of the Nigerian populace. For instance:

"They want to kill the masses..."

"They are deceiving us here in the name of governing us."

"They have pushed Nigerians too far."

"They have argued that it is one of the keys to unlocking development in a country that has been unable to

provide even sufficient electricity to its population despite its oil wealth."

"Blackouts occur daily and roads are in deplorable condition in the West African nation"

"Long nightmare"

"Beneficiaries of decadence"

"Given the scandalous revelations about what it takes to run this country, then we begin to wonder if we have our heads in the right places."

Social Actors in Transitivity

In the expressions identified here, two social actors are identified: "They, Abuja, It" (government) in these expressions function as an agent, trying to bring about "change" in the characters of the carrier- "the masses, Nigerians, average Nigerians, the poorest and most vulnerable Nigerians", which apparently is against the carrier's will. "Abuja sprang an ambush..." is indicative of a war/crisis situation where unsuspecting opponents are given an erroneous feeling of security while their enemies work out an elaborate plan of surprise attack.

It is not surprising that even the bishops identify with Nigerians. Here, it is clear that the protesters have a collective identity, thereby securing a basis for the protests in the sense that the nation-wide suffering has been identified as a consequence of leadership misrule, insensitivity and brazen corruption. The culpable devastation and reckless plunder of the nation's resources is obvious, and from this emerges the image of an irresponsible and ineffective government incapable of providing such basic necessities as water, light, good roads. For instance:

"They want to kill the masses,"

"They have pushed Nigerians too far."

"Abuja sprang an ambush on a people who had been led to believe that their representatives were negotiating with honourable and well-intentioned officials."

"The harder they try to explain away the withdrawal of the "subsidy" and the more they rhapsodise about all the wonders that will flow from it, the more dubious the whole thing becomes."

"Abuja adds wanton insult to bitter injury when it reminds the public that Ghana recently abolished gasoline subsidy without stirring any social upheavals."

"We deplore the fact that economic considerations were prioritized over moral implications and immediate public interests in the timing of this subsidy removal".

"It took no action to prosecute anyone as a consequence of its discovery. It did not allay palpable fears of harsher economic effects on the average Nigerian nor did it take any action to protect or support the poorest and most vulnerable Nigerians."

"...corruption among politicians and other high-profile Nigerians is endemic."

"Nothing seems to be working in Nigeria, forcing citizens to take their destinies into their hands."

Use of words:

The writers use specific words to explain the perceived hidden intention of the subsidy, as can be seen in words like:

Findings: discoveries, results, outcomes

Leaked: disclosed, revealed, exposed

Fraud: scam, deceit, trick, cheating

Corrupt: dishonest, immoral, fraudulent, insincere

Greed: covetousness, rapacity, materialism

Wrongdoings: crimes, misconducts, criminalities,

Rhetorical questions (RQs)

A rhetorical question has the illocutionary force of an assertion used for persuasive effect rather than as a genuine request for information. It is asked only as a thought-provoking gesture or a way of stimulating discussion that does not necessarily require an answer. Thus, it is usually declaratory in the sense that it is often used by the speaker to assert or deny something obvious. Strong feelings of outrage and inherent contradictions are expressed in the RQs and this is an index of different ways in which messages can be expressed. An authoritative way of making a statement, the RQ has more impact on the reader than a conventional statement as it comes out as a strategy used in marshalling evidence, facts and information in the readers' mind. This strategy allows readers to participate in the "discussion", so to say, by questioning and reviewing their own opinions. Thus, the RQ is an effective instrument of rhetorical manipulation used for strategic/stylistic effectiveness and which usually creates a deeper impression. For instance:

What, indeed, is Nigeria's oil policy? (Nigeria does not have an oil policy).

In the first instance, how and why should we have built a refinery that was to process heavy crude when we only possess light crude?

I challenge the government by asking, is there any other OPEC member-state that indulges in this kind of wasteful practice of taking out its product, adding value to it elsewhere, creating jobs for other nationals and then going ahead to inflict the pain on its citizens? (Although this takes the structure of a yes/no question, it is semantically mapped as a rhetorical question because the answer is obvious to the reader). The pragmatic function here is to expose the anomaly for all to see and assess.

If they cannot keep faith in a little matter like sticking to a self-selected date for ending a dubious gasoline subsidy, why should anyone believe that they will invest the expected harvest in projects that will rebound to the public benefit?

The question bears asking again: Where will those trillions come from – the trillions that the authorities have been dangling before the public? At any rate, why are public officials ever so quick to point to what happens in “other countries” when it comes to taking concrete measures to improve living conditions of Nigerians, but never say a word about the practice in “other countries” when appropriating unto themselves obscene compensations, one notorious example being the “hardship allowance” paid to legislators?

In whatever case, will the bus fares be subsidised? If not, how will the passenger buses help cushion the pains arising from ending the so-called subsidy? And are those pains limited to transportation?

... who is subsidising who?

Factual Expressions

To further substantiate the fact that the fraudulent activities of the oil moguls have gone a long way in paralyzing the economy of the nation, the writers embellish the texts with factual expressions as can be seen in the following:

"Nigeria is a major oil producer but has to import most of its fuel."

"Despite being a major oil producer, Nigeria has not invested in the infrastructure needed to produce refined fuel, so has to import much of its petrol."

"Our oil was discovered first in 1956; it was then found in commercial quantities later in 1958. And this means that from 1958 till date, Nigeria has failed to show that it has the capacity to add value to our primary resource".

"Kaduna refinery was structured to process heavy crude. Whereas, Nigeria does not have or process heavy crude".

"According to Daily Trust (January 5, 2010), the Jonathan Administration has been operating the Account as an in-house ATM, depleting it as quickly as it could be rebuilt".

Cynicism/Ridicule

The writers make use of certain lexical items to signify personal disbelief in the government of the day, its policies, and people who believe in the government. Indeed, it borders on the tragic. This can be seen in expressions like:

The joke in the oil industry is that when the smallest tanker that takes crude oil away from Nigeria is processed and the various components are got, the

money from that consignment is enough to pay all the salaries of the Nigerian members of staff in a company like Agip Oil. You can see that we have missed out completely.

"...see Himself the Lion-hearted Man and his fawning inner circle..."

Emphasis

The writers, in order to achieve the intention for which the texts employ the use of inverted commas, capitalization and the bracket to emphasize some salient words, phrases, and clauses which go a long way in giving more revelation to the fuel subsidy scandal in the country. Examples:

Inverted Commas: *"oil subsidy", "discount", "subsidies", "given documentation", "subsidize", "dangerous and poor gasoline [i.e., petrol]", "Nigerian port of Lagos",*

Brackets: *(with a miserable minimum wage of N7, 000 per month or about \$45 per month— against America's over N180, 000 minimum wage per month), (The caustic petroleum residues were dumped on Cote d'Ivoire on July 2, 2006),*

(confirmed supplier of bad petrol).

Capitalization: *"I pointed out that the petrol I use for my car in America burns A LOT SLOWER than the one I use when I visit Nigeria" "...60, 000 barrels of oil per day in exchange for their mega tonnes of DEADLY-sulphurous petrol!"*

"Jonathan's government is paying a foreign company to systematically KILL Nigerians."

Conclusion

This paper has explicated the place of language in social crises - how it can be used to negotiate meanings, alleviate or even complicate problems. The language is bitter, caustic, passionate, vituperative and unequivocal. The point established here is that 'facts' alone, can never speak for themselves: they have to be situated into the proper context through specific choices of words and expressions. All the texts examined in this disquisition present not just our social realities but a critical interrogation of the forces and ideological configurations behind the socio-economic and political harshness being witnessed by the vast majority of Nigerians. Both the government and the protesters who are identified as the major social actors were adversely affected during the period of social unrest in terms of loss of lives, man-hours, revenue, freedom of movement, etc. The issue of objectivity and balance of opinion in the texts does not arise because all the texts supported the Nigerian populace based on facts and figures outlined.

The fact that English is a global language and all the posts were written in English gives the texts a wider and global currency, coupled with the fact that the texts, freely circulated on the internet, makes it necessary for everybody in the global village to access and also post comments. The protests took place even beyond the shores of Nigeria because Nigerians in the diaspora from London, Washington DC, Belgium, Brussels also actively participated.

The lexical relations and social actors throw up the dichotomous categories and social formations in Nigeria: the government against the governed, the rich against the poor, the strong against the weak, truth against falsehood, and dream against reality. The writers passionately and vehemently reject the oppression and unnecessary sacrifices the people are forced to make under different guises. In effect, what these texts have done is hold up the truth for everybody to see, and because "truth is bitter", it becomes a bitter pill to swallow both for the oppressor and the oppressed. It is thus established that the relevance of language in social discourse encompasses understanding, explaining and analyzing new phenomena in our sociopolitical system which are relevant to Nigeria's social transformation, if the nation has to rise above her plethora of challenges.

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Appendix

Online News

National Broadcast By President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan, GCFR, on The Deregulation of The Downstream Petroleum Sector, Saturday, January 7, 2012. pointblanknews.com

2. Oil subsidy: The week after. Olatunji Dare, *Thenationonline*, 10/1/2012.
3. President Jonathan's flight of Pharaoh-like vindictiveness: Is'haq Modibbo Kawu
4. Nigeria fuel subsidy strike: Protests suspended: 13 January 2012
5. African viewpoint: Nigeria's unhappy new year (BBC)
6. Nigeria fury as fuel prices double after subsidy ends (BBC)
7. 'Searing anger' as Nigerians protest fuel price increase (CNN)
8. Nigerian Unions, President Meet Over Fuel Subsidy Stalemate (Voice of America - VOA)
9. 3 Killed as Nigerians Strike against End of Fuel Subsidy (Voice of America- VOA)
10. How Powerful Is Nigeria's Opposition? Lagun Akinloye. *Nigeria Village Square*, Jan 5, 2012.
11. What is behind Nigeria fuel protests? Stephanie Busari, *CNN*, January 13, 2012
12. Nigeria defends fuel subsidy removal to unions, public. Chijioke Ohuocha, *Reuters*, Dec 22, 2011.
13. UPDATE 1-Nigeria inflation rises on fuel subsidy removal. *Headline. Reuters*, Feb 20, 2012.
14. Nigeria investigates \$4 billion fuel subsidy fraud (Reuters)
15. Oil higher on Nigeria unrest (www.fin24.com)
16. UPDATE 4-Nigeria unions suspend strikes in fuel dispute *Reuters*
17. Nigeria scraps fuel subsidies (www.fin24.com)
18. Nigeria fuel strike ends with soldiers in streets (*Yahoo News*)
19. Nigerian unions to decide on fuel strike (www.fin24.com)
20. Nigeria unions suspend strike after fuel price cut - *Reuters*)
21. UPDATE 4-Nigeria fuel protests turn violent, two killed *Reuters*
22. Fuel Subsidy Removal: The Government Vs The People, *Nigeria Village Square*

23. On Fuel Subsidy Removal: Facts and Falsehood. L. K. Shilgba, *Economic Confidential*, Oct. 2011.
24. The 7 Hardliners behind Fuel Subsidy Removal. Headline. *Economic Confidential*, Jan 2012
25. Organised labour begins nationwide strike to protest fuel subsidy removal. *AIT Online News*, 9 Jan, 2012
26. Fuel Subsidy Removal: Whither Public Opinion? www.osundefender.org
27. Fuel subsidy: Workers declare war with FG, reject removal • Say Jonathan has declared war on Nigerian masses. Headlines. *Nigerian tribune online*.
28. Worrying effects of fuel subsidy removal. *Punchonline editorial*. January 31, 2012
29. Lies About Fuel Subsidy Removal. L. K. Shilgba. *Pointblank News*. 15/01/2012
30. Why Nigerians must reject fuel subsidy removal. S. K. Obour. 7 Jan 2012.
31. Statement of the Catholic Bishops of Ibadan Ecclesiastical Province on the Fuel Subsidy Removal. Bishop's Corner, Catholic Diocese of Oyo. 03 Jan 2012
32. Subsidy removal: NLC, TUC may declare indefinite strike Monday. Headlines. *The Nigerian Observer*.
33. Subsidy removal: NLC, TUC may declare indefinite strike Monday. *Businessday*.
34. Nigeria news: Fuel subsidy removal protest turns blood
35. Nigerian Tribune: *Fuel subsidy removal: Passengers besiege railway stations.*
36. Nigerian Tribune: *Removal of fuel subsidy and matters arising*
37. *Businessday: The 'fuel subsidy removal' conundrum. Thursday, 12 January 2012 00:00 Dominic Obozuwa*
38. Jonathan Orders Arrest of Femi Falana, Tunde Bakare, Dino Melaye and Shehu Sani. *Occupy Nigeria: January 15, 2012.*
39. Subsidy matter: How did Artists Occupy Nigeria? *On February 2, 2012*

40. Nigeria Paralyzed by 'Occupy' Strike over Gas Prices. *SaharaReporters*
41. Educating Nigerians on fuel subsidy removal. Adeyeye Oyedokun Sunday, 05 February 2012
42. *Lessons from fuel subsidy removal crisis*. BUSINESSDAY Headlines. 18 Jan.2012.
43. Fuel subsidy report: time to wield the big stick. *Punch Editorial*. April 20, 2012.