

Politics Is ‘Wordfare’: A Pragmatic Analysis of Exchanges during Nigeria’s 2019 Presidential Election Campaign

Ibitayo Olamide Oso
University of Ibadan, Ibadan

Abstract

This paper attempts a pragmatic analysis of exchanges during Nigeria’s 2019 presidential campaigns in Nigeria. This study is carried out within the purview of Culpepper’s (1996) Impoliteness theory. Data were collected from campaign exchanges of the two leading political parties’ candidates and their campaign organisations. The study reveals that rather than base their campaigns on issues, the political parties and their candidates launch face attacks, using impoliteness strategies to discredit their opponents in order to sway the electorate in their favour. Name-calling, dissociating from the opponent and seeking disagreement are the strategies identified in the study. These strategies are used by political parties and their candidates to attack their opponents. The study concludes that the use of unguarded expressions has become the norm in political discourses in Nigeria and if this is not checked, it may lead to electoral crisis in the country.

Introduction

After a long absence of democracy in Nigeria, it was re-inaugurated on May 29, 1999. Prior to this date, there had been a general election on February 27, 1999, where Nigerians had gone to the polls to elect a leader to pilot the affairs of the country to allow the nascent democracy to thrive. The first presidential election was contested by

Olusegun Obasanjo of the People's Democratic Party and Olu Falae who ran on a joint Alliance for Democracy-All People's Party ticket. The election was won by Olusegun Obasanjo of the PDP. The success of the People's Democratic Party in the presidential elections continued as they won the 2003, 2007 and 2011 presidential elections as well. Other parties such as the All People's Party and the Action Congress at each election sought to wrest power from the PDP to no avail.

Finally, in 2015, All Progressives' Congress, which is a merger of the three biggest opposition parties (Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN), All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP) and a faction of the All Progressives Grand Alliance (APGA)) finally wrested power from PDP.

Since the emergence of the APC in Nigerian politics, the rivalry has been more pronounced as PDP seeks to reclaim its lost position in the forthcoming elections. There has been a war of words on both sides on the performance of the APC since the emergence of its candidate, Muhammadu Buhari. While the APC maintains that they are trying to salvage the ruins left by the PDP government, the PDP asserts that APC has made the country worse than they met it. This war of words is geared towards swaying the voters in their favour ahead of the presidential elections. This paper looks at how candidates of APC and PDP and their parties use words as weapons to attack the positive face of their opponents.

Language and Politics

Language is a very vital tool in politicking. It is very important because it is what affords a candidate the opportunity to sell him/herself to the electorate. It is also

important because electorate, through the careful consideration of what has been said or unsaid, choose who to vote for at the polls. In politics, language is a strong device for communication as it carries many or different shades of meaning (Aduradola and Ojukwu 2013, p. 105). It is the tool of political discourse. The role of language in the fight against colonialism in Africa cannot be overemphasised. African languages were used as tools to fight the colonizers and awaken the consciousness of locals to their socio-political realities. In East Africa, for example, the Swahili word 'uhuru' (freedom) became at the time of independence, a powerful word- a call to action Aduradola and Ojukwu (2013, p. 106). In Malaysia, the word 'merdeka' (also meaning freedom) had a similar effect. Again, in South Africa, the concepts 'black' and 'white' do not merely refer to the skin colours of the various racial groups rather, they symbolize a whole way of life, a conflict of identity and political culture.

In Nigeria, language has been used as propaganda in the political sphere. For example, in 2015, the All Progressives' Congress used the word 'change'. This word was everywhere. Even though, it was just one word, it meant a lot to Nigerians who were tired of the Peoples' Democratic Party that had been in government for 16 years. Many Nigerians adopted this slogan and it eventually swayed the votes in the favour of the party at the polls. Being fully aware of the role of language in politicking, APC adopted another mantra for the 2019 general elections. They made use of the phrase, 'Next Level'. Their argument was that the first term was to undo the havoc wreaked by the PDP and to lay a solid foundation for governance. However, the second four

years will be to take governance to the next level. In the 2019 elections, the APC in Kwara also adopted a slogan, 'O to ge', meaning, 'it is enough'. This slogan was used to refer to the Saraki dynasty's hegemony in the state. The Sarakis have had a long hold on the state from the days of the patriarch of the dynasty, Olusola Saraki to his son, Olubukola Saraki. For over four decades, they had held sway in Ilorin, determining the political sphere in the Kwara state. Harping on the fact that the hegemony has lasted too long, APC came up with 'O to ge', which an average Ilorin indigene can relate with. This achieved tremendous results as Senator Bukola Saraki was denied a fourth term at the senate and the candidate for the gubernatorial seat that had his support also lost the election.

However, rather than use speeches to sell themselves to the electorate, political actors use it to attack their opponents at every given opportunity, hereby, ignoring issues and attacking personalities. This is very rampant among the two dominant political parties in Nigeria, namely All Progressives' Congress (APC) and People's Democratic Party (PDP).

Language and politics are inseparable. In the words of Ajayi and Ajayi (2017), 'if one can imagine how important water is to fish, one can then appreciate the relationship between language and politics. An inquiry into the language of politics helps us to gain insight into how language is used by those who wish to gain power, those who wish to exercise power and those who wish to keep power. Charteris_Black, in his own opinion states that:

Within all types of political system, from autocratic, through oligarchic to democratic; leaders have relied on the spoken word to convince others of the benefits that arise from their leadership. Charteris_Black (2005, p. 4).

Language is the tool by which politicians pass across their ideas and ideologies to the electorate to influence them in their favour. This is why Barber (1999, p. 27) argues that language enables us to influence one another's behaviours and thereby makes human cooperation possible. The support that citizens have for the politicians is determined by what they say and how they say it. Omozuwa and Ezejideaku (2007) opine that politicians all over the world embellish their language in a unique way to give extra effect and force to their message in order to achieve their objective of winning more votes. No wonder they take full advantage of every opportunity that presents itself. West (1984, p. 27) observes that communications play a vital role in political campaigns. Candidates communicate messages to various constituencies, which these audiences receive and interpret. The ability of the electorate to interpret the intention of the politicians and respond appropriately is a result of the effective use of language. They use language to inform, persuade, and instruct voters about issues that are of considerable importance. They also use language to attack, denigrate and dehumanize their opponents. Szanto (1978, p. 7) describes the language of politics as a "lexicon of conflict and drama, of ridicules, and reproach, pleading and persuasion, colour and bite permeated. A language designed to valour men, destroy

some and change the mind of others.” Politicians choose their words carefully because they know that they shape people's thoughts and perceptions. Ideologies and ideas are conveyed through language. Words and expressions used or omitted to affect meaning in different ways (Kulo, 2009, p. 1). Beard (2000, p. 57) notes that political campaigns are of interest, when viewed from a linguistic perspective, because they show language being used for such a clear and central purpose. She argues that "although political campaigns, with their speeches, their written texts, their broadcasts, need to inform and instruct voters about issues that are considered to be of great importance, ultimately all the written and spoken texts that are produced during an election campaign are designed to persuade people to do one thing: to vote in a certain way."

Beard (2000, p. 18) opines that a political speech is not a success because of correctness or truth, rather it may be a matter of presenting valid arguments. In Nigeria however, it seems that the success of a political speech depends more on how much one is able to spew propaganda and verbally attack an opponent than address issues. It is not only the candidates that attack one another, even their supporters are not left out. They hurl verbal missiles and invectives at one another at every given opportunity which sometimes escalates into physical violence because as Oduori (2002) notes, political leaders have a lot of influence on the society and many of their followers and supporters believe in what they say. Opeibi (2007, p. 2) asserts that, 'with the resuscitation of democratic activities in 1999, the competitive nature of recent election campaigns and the "winners-take-all-syndrome" that characterised the last

2003 elections, many of the political candidates abandoned positive, issue-focused, image-building adverts for direct attacks on their opponents’.

The studies of the language of politics have been carried out within the framework of political rhetoric, linguistic stylistics, discourse analysis and critical discourse analysis references. Opeibi (2007) placed his focus on political marketing or macheting in negative campaigns in the Nigerian political discourse. Using data from selected Nigerian national newspapers, he submits that in their newspaper adverts, many politicians abandoned positive, issue-focused, image-building adverts for direct attacks on their opponents. He also argues that voters exhibit differential attitudes towards negative adverts. Omozuwa and Ezejideaku (2007) investigated the stylistic analysis of the language of political campaigns in Nigeria using evidence from the 2007 general elections. They submit that politicians use propaganda, repetition, promise, colloquialism, word coinages pidginized and figurative expressions to embellish their language. Aduradola and Ojukwu (2013) explored the language of political campaigns and politics in Nigeria. Drawing 51 samples from newspaper advertisements and handbills displayed in strategic places, they opine that politicians in Nigeria merely entertain or deceive the electorate. They advocate that politicians should inform the electorate about what they have in store for them. These previous researches have made tremendous contribution to the field of political discourse however; this research is pertinent because it affords the opportunity to investigate political discourses particularly in a time when there have been vigorous campaigns against hate speech.

In the last three years, a lot of funds have been directed towards the orientation and re-orientation of Nigerians against the use of hate speeches. There have been newspaper publications, television adverts, radio jingles against the use of derogatory languages. However, the political class seem not to have due attention to these. Those who are seeking the votes of Nigerians seem not to care about how they use language. Those who should be concerned about the unity of Nigerians are the same ones trying to polarize the nation by their utterances. This work is motivated by the publication of *The Nation Newspaper* of 30th January, 2019 where the director of the Nigerian Broadcasting Commission, Modibbo Kawu, raised alarm over the use of hate speech particularly by the APC and the PDP. He accused the two political parties of engaging in hate speech, name-calling and abusive language.

Theoretical Issues

This work is carried out within the purview of Impoliteness theory by Culpeper (1996; 2008). Culpeper (1996; 2008) opines that impoliteness is a linguistic behaviour aimed at attacking the face of another. Face here, is as defined by Brown and Levinson in line with Goffman. They define face as the public self-image that the MP wants to gain (Brown and Levinson 1987). They distinguish between positive face and negative face. The positive face is the positive consistent 'self-image' or 'personality' claimed by interactants. It is a desire to have one's contribution approved of. According to them, negative face deals with the desire to express one's idea without resistance. It is also described as the desire to be unimpeded by others. Impoliteness seeks to damage the face of someone else. The aim of every politician is to be

accepted by the people which will eventually culminate in votes on the Election Day. Hence, they like to project and protect their positive face. Everything they do in their campaigns is to enhance their positive face. However, politicians intentionally use words to destroy the positive face of their opponents so that he/she may not be acceptable to the people. Political actors use words to attack their opponents. This is what has been tagged 'wordfare' in this paper. Words are hurled like missives to dent the political career of one another. Culpeper (1996) outlines five impoliteness super-strategies as follows:

- *Bald on record impoliteness* - the FTA is performed in a direct, clear, unambiguous and concise way in circumstances where face is relevant. This strategy is different from Brown and Levinson's Bald on record in that, for Brown and Levinson, Bald on record is a *politeness* strategy in fairly specific circumstances. For example, when face concerns are suspended in an emergency, when the threat to the hearer's face is very small (e.g. "Come in" or "Do sit down"), or when the speaker is much more powerful than the hearer (e.g. "Stop complaining" said by a teacher to a student). In all these cases little face is at stake, and, more importantly, it is not the intention of the speaker to attack the face of the hearer.
- *Positive impoliteness* - the use of strategies designed to damage the addressee's positive face wants.
- *Negative impoliteness* - the use of strategies designed to damage the addressee's negative face wants.

- *Sarcasm or mock politeness* - the FTA is performed with the use of politeness strategies that are obviously insincere, and thus remain surface realisations.
- *Withhold politeness* - the absence of politeness work where it would be expected. For example, failing to thank somebody for a present may be taken as deliberate impoliteness (Culpeper 1996, pp. 8-9).

Culpeper (1996) goes ahead to spell out strategies for positive and negative impoliteness. These strategies are as follows:

Positive impoliteness output strategies:

- *Ignore, snub the other* - fail to acknowledge the other's presence.
- *Exclude the other from an activity*
- *Disassociate from the other* - for example, deny association or common ground with the other; avoid sitting together.
- *Be disinterested, unconcerned, unsympathetic*
- *Use inappropriate identity markers* - for example, use title and surname when a close relationship pertains, or a nickname when a distant relationship pertains.
- *Use obscure or secretive language* - for example, mystify the other with jargon, or use a code known to others in the group, but not the target.
- *Seek disagreement* - select a sensitive topic. Make the other feel uncomfortable - for example, do not avoid silence, joke, or use small talk.
- *Use taboo words* - swear, or use abusive or profane language.

- *Call the other names* - use derogatory nominations.

Negative impoliteness output strategies:

- *Frighten* - instill a belief that action detrimental to the other will occur.
- *Condescend, scorn or ridicule* - emphasize your relative power. Be contemptuous. Do not treat the other seriously. Belittle the other (e.g. use diminutives).
- *Invade the other's space* - literally (e.g. position yourself closer to the other than the relationship permits) or metaphorically (e.g. ask for or speak about information which is too intimate given the relationship).
- *Explicitly associate the other with a negative aspect* - personalize, use the pronouns 'I' and 'you'.
- *Put the other's indebtedness on record*

Data Presentation and Analysis

The presidential candidates of the two dominant parties, APC and PDP, use different impoliteness strategies to 'war' against each other. Rather than focus on issues, they attack each other with accusations and counter accusations. Instances of these are presented below:

Name calling

Excerpt 1

Festus Keyamo, the Director, Strategic Communications of the president's campaign organisation, said any allegations by Mr Abubakar's campaign was a deliberate attempt to divert attention from the record of corruption and abuse of office of their own candidate.

*In the statement titled **"WHEN THE THIEF IS SHOUTING "THIEF": THE CASE OF ALHAJI ATIKU ABUBAKAR"**,*

Mr Keyamo reeled out some allegations, which he described as “indisputable facts regarding Alhaji Atiku Abubakar.” He said the U.S Congress in a report featured the PDP presidential candidate as one of the four notorious cases of money laundering in the world. He quoted the report as saying “Jennifer Douglas Abubakar, a U.S. citizen, is the fourth wife of Atiku Abubakar, the former Vice President of Nigeria and a former candidate for the Presidency of Nigeria from 2000 to 2008, Ms. Douglas helped her husband bring over \$40 million in suspect funds into the United States, including at least \$1.7 million in bribe payments from Siemens AG, a German corporation, and over \$38 million from little known offshore corporations, primarily LetsGo Ltd. Inc., Guernsey Trust Company Nigeria Ltd., and Sima Holding Ltd”.

In the above excerpt, Festus Keyamo, the spokesperson of President Muhammadu Buhari, the APC presidential candidate, launches a face attack on Atiku Abubakar. He alleges that Atiku has a corrupt record and that he abused office as a former vice president. Atiku Abubakar is a former vice president of Nigeria between 1999 and 2007. The campaigners for President Muhammadu Buhari have always called Atiku Abubakar a thief both publicly and privately. They claim that he has stolen public funds to enrich himself as seen in the excerpt above. These are serious allegations that should be made based on facts and a conviction from a court of law. However, no court of competent jurisdiction in Nigeria has ever convicted him of theft. In as much as he has not been convicted, it is not right to call him a thief. Even if he has truly stolen, he is innocent until proven guilty. It is clear that Keyamo engages this strategy to attack the

credibility of Atiku Abubakar with the aim of making him to lose face among the electorate.

It is not only the APC that has resorted to name calling. The candidate of the PDP has done the same as well. This is presented in the excerpt below.

Excerpt 2

President Buhari has stolen your jobs. He has stolen your rights. Don't let him steal your votes. They are preparing the ground to steal your votes. I know that Nigerians are ready to 'Get Nigeria working again', but don't let President Buhari steal your votes",

In the excerpt above, Atiku Abubakar of the PDP alludes to the fact that President Buhari is a thief. By issuing a warning to the electorate at his campaign, he makes some allegations that attack the positive face of the president. He alleges that the president has stolen their jobs. It is a known fact that there are no jobs in Nigeria. Many Nigerians are unemployed as statistics prove. However, to say that the president is the one who has stolen the jobs is unfounded. He also makes a deeper incision in the already rotten wound by saying that the president has also stolen the rights of the people. The issue of human rights in Nigeria has always been an issue. There have been controversies on the way some Nigerians who are deemed to be corrupt are being treated. However, using a strong word like 'steal' shows that Atiku Abubakar has the intention of attacking the positive face of the president by clothing him in undesirable regalia. By establishing an antecedent that the president is a thief, Atiku launches the final blow, warning them not to allow the president steal their votes. With all he has said, he has attacked the image of the

president, calling him a pathological thief. As said before, since the claims made are unfounded and controversial, one would expect that political actors would avoid such and deal with issues. However, this is not the case as what is paramount to them is how to attack the face of their opponents to score political points.

The candidates resort to calling each other thieves because they intend to dent each other's reputation. No one wants a thief to be the president because it will be detrimental to the progress of the country. The president is usually in charge of the nation's treasury hence, if he/she is a thief that will be a case of using the cat to guard a fish.

Dissociate from each other

Another strategy the candidates used to attack each other is to 'paint the other black' and then dissociate from him. The campaigns of both parties have shown this considerably. The excerpts below are from PDP and APC respectively.

Excerpt 3

Nigerians should understand that the choices before them have never been this clear: It is between a fugitive from the law in America and a President who has never been accused of stealing anything in his entire life and is respected both locally and internationally; It is between a man who claims he wants to 'get Nigeria working again' yet has always refused to pay his taxes AS AT WHEN DUE and a man who has NEVER cheated the Nigerian State. Alhaji Atiku Abubakar has since kept an ominous silence over this damaging allegation of irresponsible and deliberate tax evasion that is now before a court of law.

Excerpt 4

The choice before Nigerians in 2019 is a simple one. Nigerians have a choice of electing a lively candidate with a record of providing 50,000 jobs to Nigerians in his private capacity versus a candidate under whom Nigeria lost 11 million jobs and became the world headquarters for extreme poverty. "Nigerians have a choice of a man who will provide an efficient and business-friendly solution to the herdsmen crisis and a man whose government said 'giving land for cattle ranching is better than death.

The above excerpts show how the candidates try to dissociate from each other. Nigerians have a belief that all politicians are the same. A politician in Nigeria is typically portrayed as self-serving, corrupt, dishonest, unfaithful and witty. This portrayal stems from the attitude and behaviour of politicians in the past. In fact, this is one of the reasons of apathy towards elections since to most Nigerians, the choice of who to elect is like choosing between two devils. However, the candidates of the leading political parties try to make themselves distinct from each other. APC claims that Buhari is different from Atiku because he has never stolen from the government. APC has always claimed that Atiku has used dubious means to enrich himself while he was in government. They place him side by side with Buhari who they say has never cheated the Nigerian state and dissociate him from Atiku's perceived flaw. Atiku's face is attacked this way to portray himself as a thief and enhance Buhari's face as a different breed without greed. APC also claims that Atiku does not pay his taxes as at when due but Buhari does. This dissociates Buhari from

tax evasion, portraying him as a law abiding Nigerian while describing Atiku's attitude as otherwise.

Atiku does not fold his arms as he launches his attack by highlighting what he sees as failures of the Buhari government and distances himself from them. He dissociates himself from the president under whom 11 million jobs have been lost. He directly blames Buhari for the unemployment rate in the country while highlighting that he has provided fifty thousand jobs to Nigerians in his own private capacity (this fact has always been contested by APC). He capitalises on the fact that some people lost their jobs within the four years that Buhari has been the president of the nation. He also dissociates himself from a president who cannot find solution to the herdsmen crisis. The herdsmen crisis has been a terrible menace that has compromised the safety of Nigerians. There have been disturbing news on how herdsmen have, in the middle of the night, pounced on an unsuspecting community killing harmless Nigerians. The herdsmen have also been fingered in the numerous kidnaps in different states of the federation. Many people have accused the government of insensitivity citing the fact that Buhari has been indifferent because he is a Fulani man. It is a sensitive issue and Atiku uses it to deride Buhari alleging that he does not have an efficient and business friendly solution to the issue.

As seen above, the two candidates dissociate from each other by highlighting the flaws of each other to foreground their own purported strength. This is ironic since the two candidates, Muhammadu Buhari and Atiku Abubakar used to be in the same party where they both claimed to believe in the same ideologies.

Seek disagreement

This strategy is very rampant in the political space in Nigeria. The two leading political parties raise issues that heat up the polity. They throw accusations back and forth to discredit each other. This causes disagreement, not only between the parties but also among their supporters. They make it clear that they seek to expose the flaws of each other to the Nigerian public. For example, the candidates accuse each other of corruption... In doing this, they 'call out' each other on the pages of newspapers alleging ownership of phantom properties and shares etc. The excerpt below is an example of this

Excerpt 5

The presidential candidate of the People's Democratic Party, Atiku Abubakar, has asked relevant agencies to investigate President Muhammadu Buhari's family's alleged ownership of shares in the Etisalat Nigeria and Keystone Bank. Atiku, in a statement yesterday by his Special Assistant to Public Communication, Phrank Shaibu, said: "Such a probe was necessary in view of reports that members of President Muhammadu Buhari's family now own substantial share in Etisalat Nigeria which has an estimated \$2bn of its estimated \$20bn global net worth." Atiku said he was shocked by "reports from unimpeachable sources that the first family now plays big in the nation's financial sector after acquiring mouth-watering shares in Keystone Bank with total assets of \$1.916bn as well as purchasing about ₦3bn worth of shares in the new Pakistani Islamic Bank.

In the excerpt, Atiku alleges that Buhari and his family own substantial shares in Etisalat and Keystone Bank.

This is a calculated attempt by Atiku to drag the self-acclaimed anti-corruption crusader in the mud. Not only does he taint Buhari, he also involves his family members. This means that he intends not only to label Buhari as corrupt but his whole family members. He made reference to some ‘*unimpeachable*’ sources. The sources were not named. This makes the allegation unsubstantiated. The goal of the allegation is to make Buhari lose public sentiments and eventually make him lose the elections. With this, Atiku seeks disagreement with Buhari and shows that he is ready to attack his face at any given moment.

In response to this allegation, Festus Keyamo responds below:

Excerpt 6

A few days ago, the Presidential Candidate of the PDP, Alhaji Atiku Abubakar, called out President Muhammadu Buhari over certain allegations of “corrupt practices” which the President allegedly condones in his government. Whilst we have repeatedly addressed each and every of the instances cited by him to show the transparent nature of the government, it is shocking that the Presidential candidate of the main opposition has refused to issue a personal statement up till this minute clarifying in details his record of crass corruption and abuse of office. He is clearly taking Nigerians for a ride and hopes to distort the ethical revolution in public office that Nigerians clearly desire to his own philosophy of abusing public office to promote private interests. By his subliminal messages, he wants Nigerians to accept that becoming wealthy by abusing public office is not a bad thing after all. After three days of publicly announcing that they have hard proof that the President’s relations bought shares in

Etisalat and Keystone Bank, the PDP has not produced a single piece of paper, a document of any sort to buttress the grave allegations it made. This is how shameless and callous the Atiku team has become, all in a desperate bid to get their hands on the public purse.

In responding to the allegations by Atiku, Keyamo rather than just defend his principal also attacks Atiku. He calls out Atiku for not clarifying the issues raised about his integrity. Keyamo, through his use of words, seeks to show Nigerians that Atiku is not worth voting for since he takes them for a ride. Keyamo also portrays Atiku as someone who has a warped ideology about governance. All these attacks are just to persuade the Nigerian electorate from voting Atiku. As seen above, the two candidates/parties use every opportunity they have to attack each other trying to discredit each other in the face of the electorate. Why do you pluralise this collective noun???

Another instance of how the political parties show disagreement is that they accuse each other of untoward practices that may taint the integrity of the elections. An example given below:

Excerpt 7

The presidential candidate of the People's Democratic Party (PDP), Atiku Abubakar has accused President Muhammadu Buhari and the All Progressives Congress (APC) of using state resources as apparatuses for electioneering campaign. Describing the action as a violation of the nation's electoral laws, Atiku said Buhari and the APC have been acting contrary to claims by the President that he would not use state resources for election. In a statement Thursday by his media Adviser,

Mr. Paul Ibe, the PDP presidential candidate called on the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to sanction President Buhari and the APC for violating the Constitution and the Electoral Act.

In the excerpt above, APC and President Buhari has been accused of using state resources for their electioneering campaign by Atiku. This is a face attack on Buhari portraying him as a liar and a dishonest person. He paints a picture that he is the underdog who does not have access to state funds to evoke sympathy from the electorate so that they can vote for him. He also calls on INEC to sanction Buhari for the violation.

The APC also raise issues that cause disagreements to attack the face of PDP and its candidate in the presidential elections

Excerpt 8

The All Progressives Congress (APC), has accused the presidential candidate of the People's Democratic Party (PDP), Alhaji Atiku Abubakar of exhibiting early signs of depression, resulting from what it described as obvious frustration, making him unable to focus on his campaign. Describing Atiku as a discredited person, the APC in a statement signed by its National Publicity Secretary, Mallam Lanre Issa-Onilu, challenged him to tell Nigerians why a person like him should be elected as President instead of raising puerile allegations on a daily basis, "President Muhammadu Buhari and the All Progressives Congress (APC), not his programmes for the country, appear to be his main campaign issues."

In the excerpt above, APC goes personal in their attack on Atiku Abubakar describing him as depressed. This is

a serious allegation as someone who is depressed cannot lead a country. They are indirectly labelling him unfit to be the president. Depression can only be diagnosed by a doctor after a careful assessment of a patient. Since, we do not have access to the medical records of Atiku Abubakar, it is not appropriate to say he has symptoms of depression. Even though this allegation is made based on what the APC describes as Atiku's raising of puerile allegations on a daily basis, it should not warrant another puerile allegation by APC itself.

Conclusion

The paper has been able to show how political actors in Nigeria attack each other with words in order to dent the image of their opponents. It has explored how politicians use face attacks to discredit their opponents in order to sway the electorate in their favour. It has been seen that they dissociate from the other, use name calling and seek disagreement to

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