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ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES IN SOCIAL ACTORS' RESPONSES TO THE #ENDSARS PROTEST

Abstract: *Studies on the #EndSARS protest have examined the movement from a non-linguistic standpoint, providing perspectives on the human right violations leading up to the stifling and abrupt end of the protesters' activities, the potential consequences of the government's response in relation to foreign ties with global communities, and the economic implications of the protest on the nation. There exists a gap of knowledge in linguistic-related studies on the protest, especially on the techniques protesters employ in establishing meaning and building solidarity with the audience in the communication processes. The study, therefore, examined the engagement strategies in the responses of social actors to events following the #EndSARS protest, and James Martin and Peter White's Appraisal framework constituted the theoretical framework. For data, two newspaper reports on the Lagos State inquiry panel on the protest and the Nigerian government's response to Cable News Network (CNN) were purposively drawn from two Nigerian newspapers, and the analyses were carried out using a descriptive approach. The results showed that of the three selected social actors, only two efficiently engaged readers, providing lucid evidence to corroborate stance in the meaning-negotiation process. Negative connotations were evoked to disclaim, condemn, and disendorse other social actors in the entrenchment of propositional values, and authorial presence was extensively engaged to reveal authors' evaluative stance.*

Keywords: #EndSARS, engagement strategies, interrogatives, protest, social actors.

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1. Introduction

Protests are fundamental to democratic processes, deployed to express displeasure at government's policies/activities, fight social injustice or seek economic transformations, among other factors (Oritz. et al, 2022). Protesters often set out with plans for peaceful demonstrations but its tendency to end in violence, given certain circumstances (Balogun and Akano, 2021), such as government resistance, uncoordinated structures/resources, infiltration from hoodlums or disgruntled groups, among other factors, is high. It was not until the twentieth century that protest became perceived as an entrenchment of democracy, and not a threat to political structures (Runciman, 1966; Stekelenburg and van en Klandermans, 2009). Since that time, it has become a historical landmark revolutionising cultures, societies and governments (Ben Said and Kasanga, 2016), with a common thrust that seeks recourse to conventional patterns of engaging matters affecting groups. For instance, globally in 2020, the highest number of protests in fifteen years (2006-2020) was recorded, with highest occurrences from sub-Saharan Africa (Oritz., et al, 2022). Contemporary definitions of protest hold that it can be designed to either promote or prevent changes, as the focus has shifted from "why people are aggrieved to why aggrieved people participate" (Stekelenburg & van en Klandermans, 2009:p.7). Protests thrive under vibrant democratic systems (Oritz., et al, 2022) with standard procedures for masses' participation in political decisions and economic transformations. Most protest events have recorded repression or fierce aggression from government institutions that serve as primary targets. While there has been a major shift from the earlier forms of social movement to a modern, organised and more structured pattern, indicators for classifying them remain constant, as grievance, frustration and discontentment constitute primary catalysts. Protest can be categorised into three classifications; namely, factors responsible for protests, description of protesters, and various types of protests (Stekelenburg & van en Klandermans, 2009). Determinants of well-coordinated protests are predicated on resource mobilisation – finance, labour, legitimacy (McCarthy & Zald, 1977) – which are strategically generated. The outcome of protest demands could be positive or negative as government may respond with unprecedented force.

2.0 Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS)

The Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) was a unit of the Police force created by Danladi Midenda, a former Police Commissioner in 1992 to combat the

increasing cases of robbery, kidnapping, and other crimes in the country at that time. The increased crime rate was as a result of the military's invasion of the street to kill any police man at sight, following the reported death of Col. Rindam, a Nigerian Army Colonel, killed at a checkpoint in Lagos State by police officers. (My Engineers, 2020). This revenge mission took many police officers off the street and by the time the pressure waned, criminal activities had surged across the country. The newly created unit of the Police Force (SARS) helped in curbing the growing crime rate as they were successful for the most part of their early days (Iwuoha & Aniche, 2022) and helped in combating cultism and the Internet (PulseNG, 2020). However, over the years, this unit became a terror to the society with multiple allegations of intimidation and torture for civil offences (Amnesty International, 2020). For instance, in 2009, Amnesty International produced a 64-page evaluation of the activities of the squad, which captures the extrajudicial operations of the unit, the undertrained and underpaid dilemma of members of the Nigeria Police Force. The document stressed the impunity for unlawful killings, highlighted the various limitations in pursuit of justice, and made suggestions on the obligation of the country to her citizens. This material appears to be the most comprehensive document on the activities of the dreaded team, as it details reports from victims whose fundamental right to life were threatened, and demand for swift decisive actions to be taken to prevent further breakdown of order and justice.

2.1 The #EndSARS Protest

In year 2000, the Network on Police Reform in Nigeria (NOPRIN), a coalition of fifty-three civil society organisations committed to facilitating police accountability and regard for human rights (namati.org), was established and this network played a significant role in the earlier days of the agitation, which began in 2010. Amnesty International, in 2016, affirmed violations of human rights by members of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS), a unit of the Nigeria Police Force, notorious for brutality, injustice and extrajudicial killings, unlawful detainment, arbitrary arrests, coerced payment of fines, among other criminal actions (Iwuoha & Aniche, 2022). This gained nationwide attention in December 2017, when the hashtag first trended on Twitter through the online advocacy campaign initiated by Segun Awosanya, which never gained government's attention (Ogundipe, 2017). Within the next four years, more reports were filed to condemn the pervasiveness of the unit's impunity (Husted, 2020), yet the government failed to act on the reports provided by victims. However, Nigeria witnessed a nationwide protest in major

cities across the country on October 8, 2020 as a result of a video that went viral on social media regarding a young man who was reportedly shot in Delta State by members of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) (Iwuoha & Aniche, 2022). The fury of previously aggrieved persons spiked as many young people took to the street with placards. This protest began as a peaceful demand but succeeded in gaining not only the Nigerian Government's attention but also global interest. The protest was specifically to demand outright disbandment of this unit of the Police Force (SARS). Shortly after the agitation made waves across major social media platforms, especially Twitter, where Jack Dorsey, Twitter CEO, created a special emoji for the movement within days, the Federal government's response was to dissolve the unit on October 11 with promises to redeploy them to other units of the Police Force, an action that spiked further national unrest. Fierce resistance was recorded on the implication(s) of the action and focus shifted to public demand of total restructuring and reformation of the Nigeria Police Force that would thrive on a structured system of accountability, as well as salary increment to mitigate consistent extortions (Husted, 2020). Another thrust of the agitation was targeted at demanding good governance and a system where accountability becomes central to socio-political affairs.

This particular protest draws inference from both the classical and the contemporary approaches, as the protesters describe themselves as an organised, peaceful movement to end social injustice perpetrated by members of the police force. According to their claims, hoodlums, under the guise of the crowd, assumed anonymity to instigate violence, looting and vandalism that led up to the eventual crackdown of the protesters, judging by their ability to maintain peace in the wake of the protest. Under the contemporary approach, resource mobilisation was well coordinated as individuals, groups, firms and start-ups made voluntary donations of money, food, transportation, free medical and legal services, among other things (Ozibo, 2020), to cover expenses and logistics required for a smooth operation; a process that corresponds with McCarthy and Zald's (1977) submission on the factors that determine the successful outcome of a protest.

The protest mobilisation was primarily conducted on social media (Twitter). Protesters gathered randomly at specified locations to march across targeted government houses and parastatal to demand reforms in governance. As momentum of the protest grew, protesters in Lagos State announced a large gathering at Lekki Toll Gate but the Lagos State Government declared a curfew to restrict movement. Angry youths defied the restrictions and stayed at the location till late in the evening. Armed officials arrived at the location under the guise of maintaining order but

after cutting off power and removing CCTV cameras installed at the Toll Gate, they opened fire on thousands of unarmed protesters in order to conceal evidence (Amnesty International, 2020). Global leaders condemned the crackdown and threatened to sanction the country for violation of human rights.

3.0 Existing studies on protest

There are extant studies on protests across the globe and their import on political and socio-economic stability can be described as transformational. While some have succeeded in achieving their goals, others have been coerced to yield to external pressures that stifled such movements. Ben Said and Kasanga (2016) examined the frames of identity, Intertextuality and Interdiscursivity in protest discourse and identified three frames classified into; nationalist-patriotic, revolution-freedom and people's agency-power frames. According to them, those orientations were derived from the analysis of texts, signs and the necessity to comprehend the implicit background information. The study describes protest as "a mediated action" (74) embedded in language. The limitation of the study was in its data, which focused only on the Arab Spring revolution in the Middle East, and a broader examination of other protest activities from the region would have provided a trend. Wetzstein (2017) similarly undertakes a descriptive evaluation of visual representation of the 2014 Hong Kong protest on Twitter and points out the impacts of the representations in depicting messages to the government and how creative placards and images contribute to the representations. In analysing world protests, Oritz, et al (2022) undertake analysis of 2809 protests in over hundred countries, with data drawn from six languages. Their study reveals growing numbers of protests from 2016 till 2020, and four categories were identified as a focus of grievances. These are protests against the failure of political systems/corruption/mismanagement of office, economic injustice, civil/racial rights, and global justice system. Agitations for democratic change and reforms constitutes the highest factor. These comprehensive analyses of protests from various nations provide robust evaluation of predominant protest triggers, implication for nascent democracies and foreground the need for sustainable democratic systems globally.

3.1 Existing studies on #EndSARS

Since the protest event in 2020, several studies have examined various aspects of the protest, such as, the evolution of the protest and Police brutality (Uwazuruike,

2020), impacts of social media on the protest (Egbunike 2021; Usman & Ogbuvbu, 2021), youth engagement and participation (Akinyetun, 2021), among other areas. For instance, in reviewing the American Police structure and advocating for a collaborative platform that allows the Nigerian Police Force to engage in training programmes from their American counterparts, Husted (2020) reveals the gaps in orientation and advocates for a consideration of the Leahy law by the American Congress. His paper condemns the excesses of officials of the Nigerian Police Force, especially the SARS unit, whom he claimed had been consistently criticised by Amnesty International but had failed to investigate the allegations provided by the public against the unit. This evaluation provides information on the need to reinforce foreign relationships with Nigeria and the implication of the government's action on international ties with the global community. Following the end of the protest, Ogbu (2020) examines the socio-economic implications of the #EndSARS protest on the country's economy. Recounting the various looting, vandalism and violence across major cities that trailed the protest in its final days, he discussed the gross impact the protest made and proffered recommendations that could help in managing future cases of civil unrest as well as how affected victims can be assisted by the government. His work provides a post-analysis on the consequences of the protest, and assists in the evaluation of the impact on the development of the Nigerian economy. According to the study, the protest inundates government's efforts to stabilise the economy and tackle recession compounded by the global pandemic.

Usman and Ogbuvbu (2021) investigate the impacts of social media on the #EndSARS protest and reveals that although social media was a viable tool used to mobilise the protesters as well as create international awareness on the state of the nation, the same media, sadly, created more panic in the society, thereby resulting in chaos and more divisiveness as a result of the prevalence of a fake, inaccurate and often unskillful presentation of information. The study identifies that through the social media, youths now have an increased ability to obtain information from other outlets - perspectives of others, rather than relying solely on the existing media establishments such as Television stations, Radio stations, and Newspapers. The paper recommends that since digital technology and the Internet have become a core part of the global society, Nigeria as a nation cannot be locked out of it; therefore, it is expedient for media regulations to be established and tightened in order to check the excesses of social media engagements.

In assessing the evolution of the protest and the excesses of members of SARS, Uwazuruike (2020) enunciates government's need to adequately address

protesters' agitations and enforce human rights' policies to mitigate abuse of civil and political rights by the Police Force and other security agencies by treating reports of violence, torture, and extrajudicial killings with commensurate penalty. A major recommendation to ensure intensive human rights training be conducted for all law enforcement officers to effectively protect the rights of citizens to life and freedom from torture. Lastly, the article argues that the government should prioritise "pro-poor policies" by investing in education and youth empowerment so as to productively engage the country's teeming youths which account for roughly 70% of the total Nigerian population. Similarly, Balogun and Akano (2021) identify some discourse strategies used by some online participants during the protest comprising person, place and time deixis, commands, repetitions to depict in(ex)clusion, interpersonal elements, colloquial expressions to reveal language dynamics. The study provides a linguistic evaluation of the protest to reveal the nexus between language and power, and how they influence communication.

These studies and documents have considered the activities of the SARS and Nigerian security forces prior to and during the protest, as well as the economic implications of the unrest created by hoodlums who hijacked the peaceful action; however, they have neither considered the evaluation of government officials' responses and their attempt to engage readers in the meaning negotiation process nor provided a linguistic-oriented approach to the discourse on the protest. Therefore, this study aims to discuss major social actors' responses as captured in the media regarding the Lekki Toll Gate shooting and how they align or distance themselves from evaluative propositions in order to establish solidarity with the audience. The study can serve as a linguistic backdrop for other related studies on the protest.

4. Appraisal framework

The Appraisal framework, developed in the late 1980s, through the works of James Martin and later expanded in the 1990s with contributions from Peter White, Iedema, and others, extended the interpersonal metafunction of Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar. It has, since then, become an essential tool for evaluating actions and processes in discourse, arising from its focus on meaning. It explores the interactions between writers and readers, how they pass judgment, express their feelings and valuation on processes, events, other speakers/writers, and social actors, and how writers distance themselves from those who disagree with their opinions but align with those who support them. The framework examines

meaning at the levels of words, lexis, phrases and other structures with the goal of exploring the attitudes and affective intensity used in engaging prospective readers to perceive the world through their lens. It also explains how writers adopt stances to evaluate processes. Furthermore, Appraisal can be explicitly or implicitly represented in a text to convey positive or negative feelings. Arising from overt representation of information, the feelings of the writers can be perceived and assessed at a quick glance, drawing from the preponderant lexical selections (explicit appraisal); however, implicit appraisals are indirectly represented and they require comprehension of the sentences or even the paragraphs in order to pass judgment on its polarity. As such, identifying implicit appraisals can be problematic and they are clear to the audience who share a mutual understanding with the author on the topic (Tupala, 2019).

The framework is divided into three aspects: engagement, attitude and graduation. The engagement deals with the interaction between speaker/writer and audience/reader and how they foster the negotiation of meaning.

Engagement is targeted towards readers and it examines the forms of interaction occurring between writers and readers which can be monoglossic or heteroglossic. Monoglossic engagement occurs when the authorial presence is pronounced and the author solely presents his views to readers without reference to other sources. Here, the ideologies of the writer become pronounced and readers can pitch their submissions as representations of the writer's opinions or the institution he represents. In monoglossic engagement, a writer's stance is foregrounded and explored in a broad way to make readers engage in the step-by-step evaluative process that supports the preponderance of direct speech. Heteroglossic engagement occurs when other sources are referenced, and authorial presence here is limited compared with monoglossia. Writers might choose to either endorse or disendorse a piece of information. When the latter occurs, distancing is engaged (disclaim) and they take no responsibility for the cited opinions, but in cases of endorsement, the dialogic contraction (proclaim) is used to enunciate writer's stance.

The second system of the framework, attitudinal appraisal captures the evaluative feelings and reactions of writers as expressed in a text or the evaluation of a process and social actors. Attitudes can be inscribed (explicit) or invoked (implicit) through lexical selections, inferences, implications, etc. and can be classified into an emotive region, ethical region and aesthetic region. The emotive region is otherwise known as affect which reveals the writer's inner feelings towards a proposition and represented through adjectives, nominalised forms or adverbs. It focuses on human's emotional response or appraisal of an event, object or process

along polarity lines with the intent of evaluating the relevance of such responses to the overall assessment of the proposition. Judgment, otherwise described as the ethical region, refers to writers' evaluation of a proposition which can be societal standards, principles or policies social actors are required to comply with, realised through modality, mood or lexicalisation, it is largely influenced by ideological or cultural leanings.

Appreciation is the third sub-system of the framework, otherwise known as the aesthetic region. Since it is targeted towards the appraisal, it examines the reaction of writers in examining the impact, the quality, and the composition of an object. Graduation has to do with the force or the focus of the argument, which deals with the degree of impact or the intensity of the evaluation.

5. Methodology

The study adopted James Martin and Peter White's Appraisal theory, using the descriptive research approach to analyse data. Data for the study were purposively drawn from two Nigerian newspapers (*Punch* and *Vanguard),* which constitute part of the major newspapers in Nigeria with a wide circulation and large readership base (Ojebuyi & Chukwunwike, 2018). Two major issues that served as follow-up to the event of the Lekki Toll Gate shootings that occurred on October 20th, 2020 constituted the data for the study. The first was the judicial panel set up by the Lagos State Government to look into cases of recorded deaths at the location, and the second was the Minister of Information and Culture's letter to Cable News Network (CNN), condemning the latter's report on the event. The justification for selecting these issues was based on the need to examine government's responses following the reported massacre, as well as the dynamics of communication. The online version of the *Vanguard* newspaper was extracted for the data analysis on the inquiry panel, while the online version of *Punch* newspaper was extracted for the features on Lai Mohammed's reply to the Cable News Network. These selections were based on the attention both subjects attracted across the nation and in the media globally.

6. Data analysis

The analysis first examined the report on the judicial panel and the second aspect captured responses of the Federal government's representative to violation of journalistic principles by Cable News Network (CNN). The first sitting of the

Lagos State panel was held on November 3rd, 2020 where members of the Army and Lekki Conservation Centre officials were interrogated and cross-examined by the panel.

6.1 Engagement strategies in the judicial panel reports on #EndSARS

There were a number of engagement tools utilised in this section of the analysis and they were used to establish solidarity with readers or query certain provided information on the activities and involvement of the Nigerian Army in the Lekki Toll Gate massacre, a build-up from the #EndSARS protest. These will be discussed one after the other.

Interrogatives as an effective engagement tool

Interrogatives have proven to be a veritable tool in the fields of journalism, law, medicine, education, and other daily communicative transactions. They are generally employed in generating information relevant to discourse and their earlier use in journalistic practice was to elicit and gather information. Over the years, however, they have become a means of presenting information to media audience. When used within institutional settings, the interrogator assumes the leading role while the responders take a less powerful position (Clayman, 2010; Thornborrow, 2010). In the provided data, Mr. Olumide-Fusika, the counsel for some #EndSARS protesters headed the examination, while the Brigadier-General representing the Army, assumed the respondent's position. The explicit domain restriction was a major form of the five expressions of wh-questions (Ciardelli, et al., 2019) reflected in the interrogation processes.

Excerpt 1: Why did you tell lies, why did the army deny being at the scene?... There is controversy between you and our Governor, Babajide Sanwo-Olu, when you (Army) denied saying that it was fake news and the Governor came out to say he saw some footage... Are you not aware that information posted on the Nigerian Army Twitter handle on Oct. 21 still exists till this day, aren't you an intelligence officer?

In the above excerpt, limitation is placed on domain options for the responder, Brigadier-General, and the prosecuting counsel, Mr. Olumide-Fusika, posed two non-polar questions to the defendant to streamline responses to desired questions. The direct question on why the Army provided false information regarding the

shooting presupposes the existence of truth and readers' interest to situate the respondent's claim within courtroom discourse, thus anticipating a subsequent defense mechanism by the Brigadier-General. Readers' judgment and evaluation of the interrogation process becomes contingent on the answers provided as justification for the act, focus gets shifted from the speaker to the responder. The speaker elicits presupposition of falsehood through the selected interrogatives. With that, readers would rely on his response(s) to ascertain veracity even though past events had created cynicism among the masses, and a defense of the act is anticipated. The prosecutor assumes influence through the interrogative technique to indicate mastery of courtroom dynamics.

Interrogative preface as an engaging strategy

While engaging readers or listeners in interpreting propositions, writers and speakers look for common grounds likely to serve as a springboard for initiating discourse and to build along those boundaries and meanings that resonate with them (Hyland, 2005). In the same excerpt, the prosecuting counsel resumes probing with confrontational enquiries without establishing solidarity with the audience. In order to strengthen mutual communicative grounds, he graduates to a preface that provides background to subsequent inquiry. This preface is a form of allusion to the Governor's statement through intertextual positioning considered relevant to the current proposition. The reference made is intended to trigger certain feelings of distrust with the respondent's submissions and entrench speaker's authorial influence. Through the evocation of this tool, readers are reminded of the information earlier provided by the Governor on the protest, and a chain of cognitive activities is triggered in readers' minds to process and compare the disputed information the activated social actor (the Governor) earlier provided. The speaker, Mr. Olumide-Fusika, actively engages readers to initiate solidarity so as to perceive his stance on the matter as valid, while projecting the respondent as insincere and mendacious. The activation of the lexical choice *controversy* also suggests a negative connotation to readers that indicates the inconsistency existing between the Governor's and the Army's statements. He stresses his perspective and entrenches his opinion by evoking the conflict in information when he foregrounds the Army's reports on the Lekki shootings as fake information that contradicts the Governor's claim of sighting a few footages from the scene.

Interrogatives as a confrontational tool

In judicial panels, there are occasions where questions are used as confrontational tools in order to draw decisive actions or probe some activities. The prosecuting counsel engaged in confrontational options to verify some actions of the Nigerian Army during the massacre.

Excerpt 2: ... Are you not aware that information posted on the Nigerian Army Twitter handle on Oct. 21 still exists till this day, aren't you an intelligence officer?

Querying the Brigadier-General's position in the Army was the peak of the confrontations. Readers are implicitly compelled to doubt the respondent's competence and the veracity of the provided information. The interrogator assumes power by putting to question the office of the interrogated through the adoption of the rhetorical question, 'aren't you an intelligent officer?' Here, the credibility of the respondent's statement is doubted which could result in readers' distrust in his capacity to adequately provide information representative of the Nigerian Army. The first part of these questions is a polar question intended to provoke responses beyond the requirements of polarity but extends to a strategic action designed to generate further information from the interrogated. Adopting this model, the prosecuting counsel engages readers to query the position of the Brigadier-General. The speaker in the above excerpt further establishes his knowledge and capability in following through with the interrogative processes, a fundamental requirement in negotiating meaning with the audience, by providing verifiable information that arouses listeners' interest and sense of enquiry. By alluding to the Nigerian Army's Twitter handle and providing a specific date, readers are covertly encouraged to verify that information while he depicts himself as knowledgeable and well-informed about the steps of the Army. The further information provided about the current existence of the information on the page indicates his qualification to champion the interrogation as that was meant to be evidence that boosts confidence in his ability.

Personalisation as an engagement strategy

In the next excerpt, as responses to the questions posed by the prosecuting counsel, Brig-Gen. Ahmed Taiwo, Commander of the 81 Division, Military Intelligence Brigade, provided the information below in defense of himself and the institution he represented. The responses suggest to readers that the intentions of the prosecuting counsel have been met through the evocation of defense strategies.

Excerpt 3: I'm not aware of what the AGF said, I'm not on Twitter. I'm speaking here as the most senior Army officer on ground and on behalf of the 81 Division.

First, the selection of the first person pronominal subject (I) suggests that the Brigadier-General was speaking for himself rather than the Army he was supposed to represent. His adoption of the monoglossic engagement technique reflects his intention to project personal information without alluding to external sources with the aim of shielding the Nigerian Army from public embarrassment. According to White (2002), monogloss positionings are used to reveal power or solidarity through bare assertions. While the latter will accrue authority to speakers and exterminate contrary opinions, the former is expected to be mutually understood. In this respect, it was possible to use the same form of engagement to represent the Army's position on the matter but directing attention to himself indicates the speaker's unwillingness to represent the Armed Forces while excluding external sources and establishing himself as a self-endowed personality worthy of defending his actions without involving appropriate authority; thus, absolving the Nigerian Army from perceived misconduct. His misconstruction of the directed questions speaks volume to prospective readers who anticipated the Force's position on the discourse rather than a personal statement.

Readers' initial contact with him indicates his responses are self-directed and not necessarily the position of the Army. This undermines further information he is likely to provide since it is expected that he would speak largely to save face rather than provide an accurate, detailed official statement, with the aim of discouraging further engagement on the discourse. The audience or readers are less likely to fully engage his propositions due to this initial breakdown in the establishment of credibility, solidarity and veracity. The presence of the Brigadier-General was supposed to be a representation of the Force and information provided was expected to reflect the opinion of the Army, given the circumstance that the prosecutor specified the target of his interrogation (the army) when he earlier queried, "why did you tell lies, why did **the army** deny being at the scene?" (emphasis added) The questions posed at him were enough to aid his response but it was clear the Brigadier-General was going to absolve himself and not defend the Force he was sent to represent, an action that can result in the loss of credibility. His views become contradictory when he claims to represent the 81 Division of the Armed Force but puts on a defense that appears personal. This action could dissuade readers as they struggle to comprehend whose voice to follow, the speaker or the Force meant to be represented? Clarity becomes elusive and little can be done to generate support for the speaker's proposition.

Mendacity as an engagement strategy

It is common to find government officials providing mendacious statements in circumstances as this for peculiar reasons such as fear of being criticised by the public or being relieved of his duties on an incompetence basis. Mendacity is used in the context of the information provided by the Brigadier-General in defense of his reputation. In excerpt 4 below, the defendant counsel claimed ignorance on statements made by another senior military officer (the AGF) on Twitter due to his absence from the platform and the Army's description of the Lekki Toll Gate shootings as false.

Excerpt 4: I'm not aware of what the AGF said, I'm not on Twitter. I'm speaking here as the most senior Army officer on ground and on behalf of the 81 Division.

(Judicial Panel: I'm unaware Army called Lekki shootings 'fake news' on Twitter. *Vanguard*, November 21st 2020).

It is quite unusual for a top ranking officer in the Intelligence unit of a nation's military to be oblivious of a public statement made by the AGF, considering the wave it made on social media. He draws from the distancing technique to dissociate from speaking for the AGF while providing justification for his response which is his absence from Twitter. This raises another major concern of veracity in the statement of one of the most senior Army officers in the Intelligence department. Such bare assertion reveals his disconnection from day-to-day issues that affect people's lives which account for decisions unfavourable to the protesters. This statement breaks automatically any form of confidence the audience might be grappling with prior to the remark because the #EndSARS protest had its base primarily on Twitter, and to publicly affirm his absence from that particular platform gives him off as insensitive, indifferent, and impervious to the demands of the protesters who are largely populated by the younger generation.

National Crime Agency (2020) identifies a range of skills an intelligence officer must possess and the first on the list is information technology skills, including MS Office applications. The statement of the Brigadier-General on his ignorance of the activities of the National Army Headquarters' presence on Twitter could spike rage among his audience who are largely victims of the brutality. Such assertions question his competence as a high ranking intelligence officer. It is expected that information related to the Force would be circulated among high ranking officers before being made public but that affirmed the public's cynicism in the structural order and information dissemination processes of most parastatals in the country. This statement and his insistence on being absent on Twitter do not engage readers

in a positive way, nor do they represent the Army perfectly either. The audience's provocation is likely going to mount following the responses supplied, expressed through various defense mechanisms that channeled attention away from the subject under discussion to the Brigadier-General.

6.2 Engagement strategies in the Federal Government of Nigeria's responses to Cable News Network (CNN)'s report on the Lekki Toll Gate massacre.

In this next part, the Minister of Information and Culture, Lai Mohammed's letter to Cable News Network (CNN) will be examined. Following the incidence at Lekki Toll Gate, the international news organisation published a video that detailed the events on the night of the shooting, positing that the Federal government provided misleading reports on the narrative they presented to the global communities. Details of the bullets from the shooting were analysed by experienced military personnel and shooting footages made available to them were purported to have corresponded with provided information from trusted sources. Evidences of this report were also retrieved from eyewitnesses at the scene and a few accounts of injured persons who survived the massacre were aired. The Nigerian Government, in response to this report, swiftly acted through its Minister of Information and Culture who wrote a letter to the news agency and made copies available to the Nigerian media organisations who published them in the newspaper dailies and other audio-visual mediums.

Collective representation as an engagement tool

Collectivism is an essential engagement tool to signify shared perspective on a matter. The Minister of Information, Alh. Lai Mohammed, responds to the Cable News Network's report on the massacre using a collective engagement device to capture the position of the Federal Government on the protest and the resultant death of several young people.

Excerpt 5: "Our attention has been drawn to an 'investigation' by CNN... (FG petitions CNN over Lekki shootings report. *Punch*, Nov., 23rd 2020)

The Minister begins his letter by establishing himself as a representative of the Nigerian government through the deliberate choice of 'our' to depict his commitment to the administration as well as the information he would be providing

as a collective representation and not individually-based. He employs a monoglossic approach that entrenches him as a competent representative of the government's stance regarding the proposition's evaluative properties. He maximises the elements of monoglossia through the personal deixis contrary to the Brigadier-General's inadequate exploration of the same evaluative system. Within the monoglossic domain, speakers' opinion is advanced and authorial presence takes preeminence while silencing other opinions (Martin & White, 2001). In most cases, it is used as an assertive tool to negotiate meaning with readers and suggest that subsequent information provided are coordinated and structured to depict a systematic approach to media engagement. Another aspect worthy of note is the acknowledgement of the government's drawn attention to the published report, a lexical choice used to depict ignorance and suggest to readers that until that time, the government was unaware of the published report. Also, the lexical item, 'investigation' was placed in an inverted comma to attract readers' attention to the word and stir a wave of criticism towards the action of the news organisation, which he believes falls short of a standard investigation since none of the government authorities was contacted for verification of the published news.

He critiques and undermines the effort of the journalists by eliciting sarcasm, and the invocation of these lexical items suggests the Ministers' displeasure at the 'unethical' action of the news organisation who failed to engage the Nigerian government in the Lekki toll gate shooting investigation. In most cases, readers create frames from the available information and those mental pieces add up an entire chain of opinion that becomes internalised. Most language users familiar with this skill exploit it to initiate and negotiate meaning, even without literally providing excessive information. Most media outlets in Nigeria prior to this video report had been threatened with huge fines and had not advanced their pursuit of publishing information about the event. Many of them witnessed the gamut fines the government had slammed a few media houses who had published information related to the government's crackdown and the legal actions levied against them for inciting violence through the release of supposedly unverified images on the protest.

Presupposition as an engagement strategy

Presupposition as used in this context was to direct readers' attention to an earlier action that had taken place prior to the release of the statement of the Minister of Information.

Excerpt 6: … in which the international news organisation said it had "uncovered that Nigerian security forces opened fire on unarmed protesters" at the Lekki Toll Gate in Lagos, Nigeria, during the #EndSARS protest (FG petitions CNN over Lekki shootings report. *Punch*, Nov., 23rd 2020)

The Federal Government's limitation in curtailing the influence of Cable News Network (CNN) in publishing reports on the protest is revealed in the designation of the news outlet as a foreign organisation. The attention depicts frustration and limitation in controlling and shaping the narrative on the protest as it had successfully accomplished with local news agencies. The Minister alludes that CNN engaged in an investigation on the #EndSARS protest where certain claims were made by some people. This presupposes that the global community had gained interest in the event and the evocation of 'investigation' suggests a thorough examination of the protest which most people would describe as credible, considering the global ranking of the cable network. Uninformed readers could consider the statement as a response to the content of the investigation which might further spike interest to read up what had earlier been posted. The presuppositions were that there was a protest, there was a report by the Cable News Network on the protest and the letter was a response to the involvement of CNN in reporting the process. The reported speech was adopted as a tool to undermine the involvement of the cable network because the Federal Government had reportedly carried out an investigation on the shooting where it claimed that the Nigerian Army did not open fire on the unarmed protesters but CNN's investigation proved contrary.

Distancing as an engagement strategy

The disclaim elements are evoked through the use of the verbal phrase, *said it had…* and readers are implicitly drawn to perceive and assess that information as untrue as the Minister distances himself from the proposition. His further disendorsement of the report is implicitly represented through the quotation of the news organisation's action when it alluded to the uncovering of proof that the Nigerian security officials had fired at people. The administration had provided various opinions about the incident, with the most recurrent narrative as fake news targeted at upsetting the democratic processes in the nation. As such, he did not begin the letter with a blatant condemnation, neither did he explicitly classify in this preface, the action as insubstantial but readers could infer his stance through the choices and ordering of lexical items that the government was displeased at

such global publicity of an event it had earnestly strove to conceal through stifling local media productions on the military's intervention.

The negotiation of meaning in this extract prepares readers' minds for a condemnatory approach, rather than a commendation for providing international publicity for the #EndSARS protest. It is projected to readers that there were lapses in the supposed investigation by the news network which have come under criticism before the Federal government's evaluative procedures. As such, readers are implicitly encouraged to disregard the information in the report as they have not approved of the processes it underwent, nor validated its release. Leading to that time, there had been various reports on the Lekki toll gate shooting across local and international media stations and the specification of the report under discourse was intended to guide readers' attention towards the proposition. However, the manner it was alluded to, "...CNN...said it had uncovered that Nigerian security forces opened fire on unarmed protesters" suggests a discredit of the information by the Federal government.

After the preface provided to prepare readers for engagement, a further note was added to clearly state the stance of the Nigerian government towards the action of the news agency. This was a further attempt to negotiate meaning with readers and reveal their opinion about the proposition.

> **Excerpt 7:** We write to put on record that the report did not just fall short of journalistic standards, it reinforces the disinformation that is going around on the issue, it is blatantly irresponsible and it is a poor piece of journalistic work by a reputable international news organisation

> (FG petitions CNN over Lekki shootings report. *Punch*, November, 23rd 2020).

The evaluative stance of the government was amplified in this extract through the evocation of the personal deixis *we*, an attitude marker employed to affirm the Minister's solidarity with the presidency's stance on the news agency's action. He further stated the government's condemnation of the report which he claimed fell short of journalistic standards, as part of the principles of journalism, balance and fairness, which inform objectivity (Parenti, 1986) should be considered when engaging journalistic processes. The Minister draws on these requirements and projects them to readers who are considered as evaluators in the given conditions, where a world-class news organisation flouted basic journalistic rules. His strategic approach that appeared to first shift attention from outright condemnation to a mere documentation of facts by the Nigerian government is an action designed to initiate solidarity and take readers' focus off the subsequent steps intended to be pursued since the information is essentially meant for record-keeping purposes.

The deliberate deletion of the contrasting conjunction indicator (but) and the implicit preference of the negator (not), gives off the Minister as adept and skilled in adequately engaging readers; however, further information in the letter clearly elucidates on the meaning the Minister seeks to establish. There were threats of legal actions planned against the cable network which were included in subsequent aspects of the letter. The Minister further stresses that there are rounds of disinformation spreading across the media on the Lekki Toll Gate shootings. In contrast to the report by CNN, he infers that nothing of such happened as the Nigerian security forces did not shoot at unarmed protesters. Although he failed to affirm the perspective of the Federal government on actual events, he clearly criticised the report of the news agency, expecting readers to relate only with the one-sided condemnatory information he provided. The choice of the phrases, *blatantly irresponsible* and *poor piece of journalistic work* indicates negative evaluative judgment that justifies the government's stance to encourage readers join force in condemning the action. The reputation of the news agency as an international institution was mentioned to affirm the government's expectation of conformity from such institutions. The degree of engagement in this extract was high, considering the intention of the Federal government to establish the inadequacies of the cable network and generate support for their stance.

Disclaim as an engagement strategy

Disclaim is a form of engagement tool used to either deny or counter what had been earlier stated in a confrontational manner. It is a sub-subsystem under heteroglossic contraction, a linguistic resource that limits, restricts or challenges alternative perspectives on a proposition (Xia Dai, 2019). In the below extract, the Federal Government's spokesman uses the heteroglossic domain to denounce the claims of the Cable News Network.

Excerpt 8: "CNN said it contacted over 100 protesters and family members, but did not speak to one official of Nigeria's Federal Government. While CNN said there was no response from the army and that officials of Lagos State would not speak in view of the Judicial Panel that is investigating the matter, it did not say what effort it made to speak with any official of the Federal Government."

In the above, Lai Mohammed, queried the reports of the Cable News Network (CNN) and pointed out their failure to verify the information on the Lekki shootings with any official of the Federal Government. For various reasons, two of which can be the bureaucratic procedures of verifying news information that can

impede the eventual production of the news, and or the enforced modifications that could be imposed to colour the outcome of the report, which also will forfeit the initial intention of the news report. Acting as an independent news agency, the international news organisation chose to produce the news without credence to the Nigerian government.

Alluding to the statement by the organisation, Lai Mohammed invokes the disclaim engagement category through the preferred choice of "CNN said…." By this, he presents the organisation's infelicitous action to the public to discredit the report as unverifiable and insubstantial, since the evidence was retrieved from 'inappropriate' or, at best, unapproved quarters. Fundamentally, as pointed out by Parenti (1986) and Sabao (2013), objectivism is a required tenet of journalism and to ascertain this, information is to be derived from all parties involved before a balance is struck in reporting. However, in cases like this, where multiple reports have trailed the public space regarding who does what or who sanctioned the army's intervention, getting a reliable perspective from the government would require a second thought. For instance, prior to the news report released by the CNN International correspondents, Stephanie Busari and Nima Elbagir, there had filtered across the Nigerian news media various shades to the #EndSARS Lekki shooting, and a few news agencies who had attempted to produce information related to the event had been massively sanctioned by the Federal government, an action that stifled objective reporting about the event by local media stations.

The government agents and institutions involved in the action provided different information under various circumstances. Beginning with the Governor of Lagos State, Babajide Sanwo-Olu, who first denied in an interview with the same international news agency, CNN, on October 21, 2020, that he was unaware of the Army's presence at the Lekki Toll Gate, but a few days after, consented that he requested for the Federal Government's assistance to combat the crisis in the State and never told them to fire arms at the unarmed protesters. This was a sequel to the official report released by the Nigerian Army on the crisis, where they justified their intervention as a directive from the Presidency, a report that came long after they had earlier claimed that the pictures of the Army officials present at the Lekki Toll Gate were photo-shopped. Prior to this, the Army had denied being present but later changed the narrative five days later that their presence was to enforce curfew and the troop did not shoot at the protesters.

The Minister did not deny efforts made by the news organisation to contact witnesses and victims, as he acknowledged that in his letter; however, his grievance

was their failure to contact the Federal government who was supposed to provide a broader perspective to the seemingly brutal clampdown on the protesters.

7. Findings

The prosecuting counsel engaged readers sufficiently through the use of interrogatives directed towards the Army representatives. Since the hearing was designed to gather information regarding the Armed Forces' involvement in the Lekki Toll Gate shooting, the questions posed to the representative adequately captured prospective readers' expectation in the inquiry. However, the Army representative failed to connect with readers as the use of personalised pronouns failed to represent the authority (Nigerian Army) he was meant to defend. His failure to establish solidarity was reflected in the disconnected responses he offered to the prosecuting counsel. However, in the next data, the Minister of Information and Culture, Lai Mohammed, systematically established solidarity with prospective readers as he adopted more implicitly-conveyed meanings that bear negative connotations contrary to the Army representative's comments. His ability to negotiate meaning effectively aided the establishment of solidarity with readers even though aggrieved protesters might dispute his claims and submissions. This study agrees with Xia's (2019) claim on the most used appraisal resources in court discourses as the engagement resource which addresses fundamental positioning of social actors and how these tools aid the meaning-negotiation process to establish solidarity with readers. While five engagement strategies were identified in the judicial panel report on the protest (three were employed by the prosecuting counsel and two captured the responses of the Army representative), four engagement techniques were used by the Federal Government representative to express displeasure at the independent report on the protest.

8. Conclusion

Engaging readers in the meaning-negotiating process can be a daunting task but with constant efforts, the skills can be developed. Since persuasion levels differ, the degree of engagement is conditioned by various factors, one of which is experience and expertise. Fundamentally, of the three social actors, two of them effectively engaged the audience and this ability can be ascribed to the background of those involved. The first is a legal practitioner trained in the act of systematic presentation of information in legal related matters, while the other is

an experienced media practitioner, with years of negotiating with local and foreign political actors; however, the last representative is an intelligence officer whose previous responsibilities might not have included interfacing with an audience in the negotiation of meaning. The study categorised these representatives as active and passive; while the prosecuting counsel representing #EndSARS protesters and Lai Mohammed, the representative of the Nigerian government, are classified as active despite the different engagement techniques they adopted, the Brigadier-General representing the Nigerian Army was categorised as passive. The various engagement techniques used by these active representatives were well developed owing to their background, and through the linguistic tools such as deixis and interrogative elements, readers are made to participate in the entire evaluative process of a proposition. Therefore, it is essential that in the representation of information, appropriate attention should be paid to social representatives who can speak in defense of their respective institutions rather than those who lack fundamental skills in duly providing information representative of the institution's opinion, as this largely contributes to the persuasive degree and the definite image of the represented created in readers' minds.

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СТРАТЕГИЈЕ АНГАЖМАНА У ОДГОВОРУ ДРУШТВЕНИХ АКТЕРА НА ПРОТЕСТ ПОД НАЗИВОМ #ENDSARS

Резиме

Овај рад замишљен је као начин да се испитају процеси које писци користе да би пренијели значење читаоцима у намјери да остваре успјешну комуникацију, имајући у виду чињеницу да је улога језика у комуникацији веома битна. Стога се овдје пропитују стратегије ангажмана у одабраним дневним листовима у Нигерији у погледу одговора друштвених актера на протест под називом #EndSARS.

Као материјал за истраживање користили смо два новинска чланка двију различитих дневних новина, од којих се један тицао истражне комисије Савезне државе Лагос о протесту, а други одговора нигеријске владе на извјештавање кабловске мреже Си-Ен-Ен (CNN), при чему смо се у нашим анализама ослањали на оквир за процјену Цејмса Мартина и Питера Вајта, користећи дескриптивни приступ.

Резултати нашег истраживања откривају да је употреба упитних облика представљала главну стратегију ангажмана. Остале стратегије преношења значења укључивале су пресупозицију, дистанцирање и персонализацију, да поменемо неке од њих. Два друштвена актера, од укупно троје који су анализирани, успјешно су ангажовали читаоце тако што су им обезбиједили јасне информације којима су поткријепили свој став у процесу преношења значења. Искориштене су бројне негативне конотације да би се одбациле и презреле установљене контрадикторне тврдње и да би им се ускратила подршка, при чему је јасно видљиво присуство ауторског гласа у наведеним чланцима.

▶ *Кључне ријечи*: #EndSARS, стратегије ангажмана, упитни облици, протест, друштвени актери.