Global Scientific JOURNALS

This is not a joke: a critical discourse analysis of President Buhari's Covid-19 war rhetoric

Ayo Ayodele PhD
Department of English,
Lagos State University,
Ojo-Lagos
Nigeria
+2348023143731
ayotunde.ayodele@lasu.edu.ng

Abstract

This study adopted a critical discourse analytical (CDA) approach to cognitively analyze the discursive and rhetorical strategies underlying President Muhammadu Buhari'swar rhetoric on the outbreak of Covid-19 in Nigeria. Employing the methodology of critical discourse analysis, the data consisted of President Buhari's three speeches to the nation on the Covid-19 pandemic. The study has the objectives of explaining the mental model responsible for the President's strategy of war rhetoric in its construction of Covid-19 as the aggressor and enemy 'Other', and explaining the rhetorical strategies used to frame Covid-19 as the Other. The analysis reveals that the President relies on metaphor, evidentiality, lexicalization and number game to discursively and rhetorically paint Covid-19 as an aggressor at war with the country. In its discursive representation of the social reality of the onslaught of the ravaging corona virus, the President carefully and deliberately makes the 'war' against covid-19 seem reasonable, responsible, and inherently 'good' in spite of the severe social, economic and cultural effects that the measures would have on the people, civic culture and the country. Thus, the paperconcludes that directing attention to the language and discourse formations of the President, and political actors in general is critical to understanding the social practices that often shape the mental models that political actors reproduce in discourse.

Keywords: Covid-19,critical discourse analysis, rhetorical strategy, war rhetoric.

Introduction

Language is a social practice (Wodak &Fairclough, 1997) and plays a significant role in shaping mental models and understanding of social phenomena. Generally, individuals, groups and institutions as social actors acquire, spread, and reproduce their perceptions of social phenomena through text and talk, such as a Presidential address to the nation. In other words, language use in discourse production and comprehension depends on and is influenced by the relevant properties of the communicative situation as interpreted by language users. (van Dijk, 2005).

The outbreak of Covid-19 in late 2019 has triggered multiple discursive processesrelating to the causes, spread and measures taken by the governments to confront and combat the disease. Globally, discourse has been overwhelmingly dominatedby the societal imperatives of preventive and curative measures to check the further spread of the disease and limit fatalities. These measures have been targeted at the way social relationships are conducted with its attendant disruptive effects on social practices that have their roots in cultural practices and expressed through language. This has had an overwhelming influence on the pattern of language useleading to the emergence of a new vocabulary in the form of new acronyms and words. In view of the changing patterns of social relationships and the disruptions to the lifestyles of billions of people, it is incumbent upon governments to disseminate accurate information and encourage compliance with various measures put in place to combat the further spread of the disease and minimize fatalities.

The corona virus-induced global crisis pandemic has engendered various responses from various social actors ranging from presidents, religious leaders, medical experts, scientists, researchers. These responses have given rise to multidisciplinary research efforts across the fields of medicine, pharmacy, sociology, semiotics, linguistics etc. Barreneche(2020) is a critical discourse analytic description of the covid-19 conversation showing how the covid-19 virus hasled to the narrative construction of an 'Other' to be blamed for the threatby means of discursive mechanisms of actorialization, generalization and axiologization.

This present study is another linguistic investigation into the Covid-19 narrative. The main aim of the paper is to investigate the rhetorical strategies of President Buhari's presidential addresses to the nation on the incidence of Covid-19 in Nigeria. The specific objectives of the paper are (i) to explain President Buhari's speeches as war rhetoric in its construction of Covid-19 as the aggressor and enemy 'Other', and (ii) to determine the contributions of the rhetorical strategies of metaphor, evidentiality, lexicalization and number game to the construction of Covid-19 as the Other. From a critical discourse analytical sociocognitive perspective, the paper argues that President Buhari's speeches on Covid-19 adopts the war rhetoric strategy to represent his cabinet's knowledge, attitudes and beliefs (mental models) about the disease by means of discursive and rhetorical strategies of metaphor, evidentiality, lexicalization and number games.

It concludes that the war rhetoric strategy is effective as a persuasive strategy to win the support of the people, especially during national emergencies, such as in the period of the pandemic.

Presidential Speeches and War Rhetoric

Several research efforts have been devoted to the study of Presidential speeches. (Campbell and Jamieson, 1990; Wolfe, 2008; Adetunji, 2009; Wang, 2010; Najarzadegan, et al.,2017). The studies point to a general consensus that presidentialspeeches perform a generally persuasive function, and many, more specifically, are constructed to communicate ideologies and power. Gross and Aolain, (2014:242) assert that speakers use "words not only to communicate and express our thoughts, but also to shape thought itself." This power of words to shape thoughts is rhetoric and it lies in the ability of a speaker, the rhetor, to use argumentation strategies that will enable listeners not only to understand but also to agree with the perspective they are being called upon to process and accept. Rhetorical strategies equip the audience with the resources— the metaphors, evidentiality, linguistic categories, and discursive concepts needed to align their, values, worldview, and perception of reality with that of the speaker. Generally, rhetoricians recognised that different contexts required different methods of persuasion and audiences are only persuaded when the speaker's rhetoric is successful. Charteris-Black (2011:7) states that the success of rhetoric in the classical tradition of Aristotle depended on three artistic proofs of ethos, logos and pathos. In other words, inaddition to taking a stance that was morally worthy (ethos) and proofsto support argument (logos), the successful rhetorician should also beable to arouse the feelings (pathos). Sauer (1997) identified deliberative,forensic or epideictic contexts of rhetorical speeches emphasizing the fact that rhetors will often consciously or unconsciously select whichever speech variant would serve their purposes. The argument in this paper for a presidential war rhetoric relates to the deliberativeor political speech that is addressed to a public eliciting a decision or actions to be made about a future, for example, whether to lockdown the whole country on account of the ravaging Covid-19. On the other hand, while the forensic or judicial speech often addressed to a judge and jury is an evaluation of a past action, the epideictic or ceremonial speech plays a passive role with the purpose of giving credit or apportioning blame.

Presidential speeches constitute a vital instrument of governance. Presidents use speeches to communicate their policies, address the public on important developments that are of public interest among other functions. Presidential war rhetoric will therefore be described as speech delivered in times of national emergencies or when the situation of the country could be defined as a crisis, emergency or war with the potential of leading to social, political and economic instability that could drastically alter the living standards of the people. In such circumstances, when the feelings of fear, panic and insecurityare rife and the people yearn for security and protection, presidential speeches are targeted at garnering public support for the actions the government wishes to take.Studies in Presidential war rhetoric have shown the use of framing as a strategyin constructing the threats facing the nation and the responses to these threats.

(Kupers,2006; D'Angelo&Kuypers, 2010; Gross and Aolain, 2014; Wolfe:2008). According to Kuypers (2010:8) framing;

> is a process whereby communicators, consciouslyor unconsciously, act to construct a point ofview that encourages the facts of a given situation to beinterpreted by others in a particular manner. Frames operatein four key ways: they define problems, diagnosecauses, make moral judgments, and suggest remedies.

In constructing the perception of a situation as a crisis or war situation, the President relies on the framing of information to influence and shape the interpretationand meaning that recipients of that information are likely to attach to it. In a study of the rhetoric of President Bush on the wars in Afghanistan andIraq, Wolfe (2008) reveals the use of framing and threat rhetoric aimed at successfully accomplishing risky foreign policy shifts by presenting a situation to the public that implied a need fordecisions to be made under risk or uncertainty. Campbell and Jamieson's (1990) study of presidential war rhetoric in the United Statesreveals that the war rhetoric often portrays force as necessary to confronting the enemy's intransigence. Ittherefore deploysemotionally charged language to identify the threats by an identifiable enemy and exhorts the audience to unanimity of purpose and total commitmentto sacrifice for the sake of the country.

The discursive strategies employed in Presidential war rhetoric are usually built around two socially constructed target actors: the dangerous invading 'Other' which in this instance is the Covid-19 pandemic, and the whole country often represented as vulnerable and weak 'Self'.Consequently, the language mirrorsthe dichotomized and polarizing dialectic of good versus evilas a way of appealing to the patriotic instincts of the members of the community thereby mobilizing them for a counter offensive against the actors identified and namedas the enemy. Using the lexicon of coded military engagement characterized by precision, the rhetoric of Presidential war speeches often serves as a metaphorical call to national and individual sacrifice.

Methodology

The data for this study were the texts of the three national broadcasts of President Mohammadu Buhari to the nation on the 29th March 2020, 13th April 2020 and 27th April 2020. The texts were downloaded from the internet and were annotated asPresidential Speeches (PS1,2,3) respectively. Portions of the texts that reflect the goals of the study were purposively selected and subjected to qualitative analysis. The study draws on Dijk's (2005,2015) socio-cognitive critical discourse analytical approach to account for the rhetorical strategies of President Buhari's Covid-19 war rhetoric employed in communicating government's response to the covid-19 pandemic in Nigeria. The analytical method relies on the concept of ideological square which construe Covid-19 as the negative 'Other', the advancing army at war with the Nigerians and the

Federal Government representing the people of Nigeria as the positive Self. This perspective is presented through metaphor, lexicalization, evidentiality and number game.

Van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach

Within the context of a broader critical discourse analytical framework, the van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach holds that it is the peoples' personal interpretation of social interaction, social institutions and social structures that produces text and talk. In other words, perception mediates and consequently shapes discourse and society. (van Dijk, 2005) While stating that many interactionist approaches to discourse tend to be limited to what is believed to be directly 'observable' or socially 'available', Dijk (2015) argues that in the tradition of psychological approaches, cognitive mediation is fundamental to the discursive representation of social phenomenon. What this means in reality is that language users both act and think simultaneously. So, discourse production and comprehension require an understanding of the interface between the mind, memory and especially withthe cognitive processes and representations. While memory features autobiographical experiences and socially shared knowledge, attitudes andideologies, mental models are products of individual personal experiences within the context of spatiotemporal setting, participants (and their identities, roles and relations), actions/events, and goals. Social cognition, therefore, would be defined as the attitudes or more fundamental ideologies shared by language users as members of specific social groups. It is on the basis of the various forms of social cognition that members personal experiences are construed and represented as mental models. (van Dijk, 2015) The interaction of these crucial features of human cognition, society and language are responsible for the interpretation of discourse as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Dijk's (2015) organization of the socio-cognitive approach of discourse

Level of structure	Cognition	Society
Micro	Socially shared knowledge, Attitudes, ideologies, norms, values	Communities, groups, organizations
Macro	Personal mental models of (experiences of) social members	Interaction/discourse of social members

A critical sociocognitive analysis of discourse will require the processing of the discursive properties andthe various cognitive structures as represented in shared sociocultural knowledge, for instance about the Covid-19 pandemic currently ravaging the world. The attitude to this disease stems from a more fundamental belief about the nature of pandemics and their adverse consequences on the human population. In addition, both the discursive and cognitive structures will become communicative within the context model that includes the participants, setting, participants' identities, action and aims. For instance, President Buhari's speeches to Nigerians is based on the context model of the global pandemic and the need to prevent its spread in

Nigeria.These speeches, at the level of societal andpolitical macrostructures, is a form of organizational communicative action(presidential address) of the government as a political actor in Nigeria and as part of the global comity of nations, and as part of the World Health Organization's global actions against the novel disease which has assumed the role of an aggressor, hence the panic and fear it has generated.

Generally, the socio-cognitive approach to the processing of discourse relating to beliefs is often carried out on the basis of ideological structures relating to group membership detailing gender, ethnicity, appearance and origin; actions carried out by the participants, the reasons for those actions (aims); norms and values underlying the actions; as well as the relationships forged by various groups among themselves. The ideological square resulting from this approach to ideology, cognition and discourse (Van Dijk 1997, 2001) operates mainly on two strategies of positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation. In other words, a central tenet of the socio-cognitive model is the mental representation of eventsin which social actors of one group will generally tend to present themselves or their own group in positive terms, and those of other groups in negative terms.

Analytical framework

The analysis of the Presidential speeches carried out in this study is based on the interface between discourse, cognition and context. Using Dijk's (2015) sociocognitive theoretical framework, it analyses the discursive and rhetorical strategies used by President Buhari in histhree speeches on the Covid-19 pandemic to the nation. The analysis relies on the discursive strategies of lexicalization and nominalization and the rhetorical strategies of metaphor, evidentiality and number game. Metaphor as a semantic feature of discourse arises from discourse knowledge. In political rhetoric, it has the primary purpose of framingthe perspectives of social and political issues and their negative or positive representations. This requires that political actors legitimize their utterances by imbuing it with evidence, authority and truth that will establish the speaker "as a legitimate source of authority" (Chilton 2004: 47)

Evidentiality**refers to the provision of facts or proof by a discourse producer to support their arguments or beliefs. Lexicalization is a strategy of using semantic features of words to frame the image of actors in a communicative event. Number game is the application of numbers or statistics by a discourse producer in an argument to increase the credibility of their opinions or ideas. (Rashidi & Souzandehfar, 2010; Van Dijk, 2005).

Data Analysis

The discursive and rhetorical features of a political discourse will reveal much about the unique character of such a discourse, and allow inferences about the cognitive, social and especially political functions of such discourse. (Van Dijk, 2002, p. 22) These features of metaphor, evidentiality, euphemism, hyperboles, lexicalization and how they have contributed to the Covid-19 war rhetoric of President Muhammadu Buhari constitute the focus of this data analysis section.

Metaphorical representation of Covid-19

The perspective of war rhetoric adopted in this study is built on metaphoric representation as a cognitive tool for abstracting and constructing discourse strategies. In political rhetoric, metaphor is a framing device to construct how political issues are viewed or understood by eliminating alternative points of view. There is a dominant image of war and death painted in all the three speeches of President Buhari being analysed in this study. The image is constructed through lexicalization and the dichotomous presentation of actors and actions in the communicative event.

Therefore, consistent with thesociocognitive approach adopted in this study, it is recognized thatFederal Government, Covid-19 are principal actorsas part of the contextual features of the text. Agentivity in President Buhari's speeches is a strategy used to construct the ability of state actors and non-state actors to act and to bring about change with regards to the pandemic. Consequently,discourse structures of nominalisation, personal pronouns, descriptions, and semantic structures of evidentiality, metaphors, number game are often used to frame agency. Let's examine the following extracts.

Extract 1.

From the first signs that Coronavirus, or COVID-19 was turning into an epidemic and was officially declared a world-wide emergency, the Federal Government started planning preventive, containment and curative measures in the event the disease hits Nigeria. (PS1)

Extract 2

As of today, COVID-19 has no cure. Scientists around the world are working very hard to develop a vaccine. (PS1:)

Extract 3

I will start by commending you all for the resilience and patriotism that you have shown in our collective fight against the biggest health challenge of our generation. (Ps 3:2)

As revealed in the Extracts, Covid-19 (the out-group Other) is constructed as the enemy/aggressorinvolved in the combat for the health of Nigeriansmarching against the Federal Government and the people of Nigeria (the in-group Self). This"common enemy" that "has no cure" and which has become a "matter of life and death" would require a "tactical and operational response" and "preventive, containment and curative measures" being taken by the government. As a deadly advancing enemy, Covid-19is"officially declared a world-wide emergency" and "the biggest health challenge of our generation". This declaration therefore justifies theaction of mobilizing "the whole instruments of government … to confrontwhat has now become both a health emergency and an economic crisis" and putting up a collective fight

against the biggest health challenge of our generation. (Ps 3:2)". This led the President to assert that, "This is not a joke. It is a matter of life and death" (PS2:39) to paint the gravity of the danger that humanity in general and Nigerians in particular are faced with.

The outbreak of wars and its attendant deaths and disruption to social life is often viewed as a period of emergency when individual liberties are suspended, combat strategies put in place and sacrifices are expected to be made by the general public as part of the containment measures. In the speeches, President Buhari declares in Extract 4:

> The *whole instruments of government* are now *mobilized* to *confront* what has
> now become both *a health emergency and an economic crisis. (emphasis mine)*

Through the use of lexical items 'mobilized' and 'confront', the President locates the discourse within the rhetoric of war. He speaks of "implementing *numerous strategies* and programs" "to support the national response as we *fight* to contain and control the spread(PS1:23)" urging the gallant security agencies to "continue to maintain utmost vigilance, firmness as well as restraint in enforcing the restriction orders while not neglecting statutory security responsibilities". The picture that readily gets painted is that of a war, which though is not a war to be prosecuted physically, it is nonetheless a battle that comes with fatalities and has negative consequences on the general living condition of the people. At such times, the people look forward to a leadership (like a military commander) who issues commands and gives direction and assures them of the ability of government to put the situation under control. So, the President did just that when he says in Extract 5,

> As your democratically elected leaders, *we* made this very difficult decision
> knowing fully well it will severely disrupt your livelihoods and bring undue
> hardship to you, your loved ones and your communities. (PS2:4)

The 'we' shifts responsibility for the decisions taken and the leadership being provided to prosecute the war away from the President to the 'war cabinet' consisting of medical experts, scientists, security agencies and others whose opinions could contribute to the success of the fight. In this category are the State Governors, the Ministry of Health, the Presidential Task Force on Covid-19, Security agencies. This 'war cabinet' holds weekly reviews of the strategies and give weekly briefings on the progress being made.

President Buhari appeals for understanding of the people and reminds them that "As individuals, we remain the greatest weapon to fight this pandemic". He therefore solicits for sacrifices which would bring about significant inconveniences to the people stating that:

Extract 6

> No country can afford the full impact of a sustained restriction of movement on its
> economy. I am fully aware of the great difficulties experienced especially by
> those who earn a daily wage such as traders, day-workers, artisans and manual
> workers.(PS2:45)

A marked consequence of any war is the restriction or shut down of economic activities which often will cause difficulties to the people. So, in military strategy, the plan is usually "First, to protect the lives of our fellow Nigerians and residents living here and second, to preserve the livelihoods of workers and business owners to ensure their families get through this very difficult time in dignity and with hope and peace of mind." Part of security measures that is taken in moments of insecurity is to declare a curfew" hence the declaration that "There will be an overnight curfew from 8pm to 6am. This means all movements are will be prohibited during this period except essential services" (PS3:35)

In spite of all these measures, the reality is the fact that there will always be casualties, those who would be directly affected and those who would suffer collateral damage. Usually, the greatest victims are usually the ordinary most vulnerable citizens, who ordinarily should be the ones to be protected. Here also, those who suffer most the measures taken by the government are "those who earn a daily wage such as traders, day-workers, artisans and manual workers" who constitute an out-group at the micro textual level. Apart from the effects on the people, there have also been traumatic effects of the virus on businesses. The President states that, "such lock downs have also come at a very heavy economic cost. Many of our citizens have lost their means of livelihoods. Many businesses have also shut down."

The President gives directives as the 'commander' of the army against Covid-19. These directives marked by the explicit performative verbs, for example, *directing*and *follow* contained in the following:

Extracts 7

> Based on the advice of the Federal Ministry of Health and the NCDC, I am directing the cessation of all movements in Lagos and the FCT for an initial period of 14 days with effect from 11pm on Monday, 30th March 2020. This restriction will also apply to Ogun State due to its close proximity to Lagos and the high traffic between the two States. (PS1:34)

Extract 8

> Fellow Nigerians, follow the instructions on social distancing. The irresponsibility of the few can lead to the death of the many. Your freedom ends where other people's rights begin. (PS2:50)

The directive to impose restrictions on intra city movements and cause cessation to inter-state movements is a strategy to minimize the number of people that will contract the disease and thus become casualties of covid-19 war. However,based on the knowledge that "No country can afford the full impact of a sustained lockdown while awaiting the development of vaccines or cures", the President further directed "the Central Bank of Nigeria and other financial institutions to make further plans and provisions for financial stimulus packages for small and medium scale enterprises" (PS3:) in recognition of the "the critical role that they play in Nigeria's economy."

Lexicalization

Lexicalization is a strategy of using semantic features of words to frame the image of actors in a communicative event. (Rashidi & Souzandehfar, 2010; Van Dijk, 2005). In Dijk's opinion, discourse producerschoose lexical itemsthat ae reflective of the context features of the position, role, goals, point of view, or opinion of the speaker to communicate their mental models of a social reality.

Lexicalization in President Buhari's speeches on Covid-19 is used to strengthen the representation of warfare waged by the Covid-19 Other against the nation and her people represented as the victim Self. In other words,lexicalization is a discursive strategy used to emphasize the negative attributes of the Covid-19 while at the same time foregrounding the positive attributes and features of the efforts of the Federal Government. Words and expressions used are reflective of military strategy and the social reality of a nation facing an emergency. So, words and phrases such as 'mobilize', 'confront', 'contain', 'fight', 'strategy''tactical and operational response' 'deploy' 'fatality' are indicative of mental models that construct the social reality of covid-19 as warfare. It is equally in a war situation that some areas become'restricted area'; "cessation of all movements" is enforced; the "armed forces, paramilitary and security and intelligence agencies" are deployed as principal actors, and "food and other essential humanitarian items" are distributed to the vulnerable population in the community.

The President's declaration that "Movements of all passenger aircraft, both commercial and private jets, are hereby suspended" is in consonance with measures often taken during a period of national emergency, to which the outbreak of the pandemic can be likened. It is widely believed that the virus gets into the country through passengers who came into Nigeria from other countries via the airports. In warfare, cutting off supplies to an enemy is strategic to winning. So, shutting the airports is a strategic move to cut the importation of the virus into Nigeria.

President Buhari's belief in 'sacrifices we should all be willing and ready to make for the greater good of our country' is expressed to rationalize the government's imposition of lockdowns, restriction of movements, suspension of economic activities etc. which are 'the adverse impact of this virus on our country' and 'have caused major inconveniences to the people.'But it is not all gloom and death; the President assures a traumatized citizenry of hope. His optimism of victory over the covid-19 enemy comes across in the use of the word 'assure' and phrases 'shall get over' 'have no doubt' in the following expressions:
Extract 9

I want to assure you all that Government Ministries, Departments and Agencies with a role to play in the outbreak response are working hard to bring this virus under control. (PS1:61)

Extract 10

Fellow Nigerians, I have no doubt that by working together and carefully following the rules, we shall get over this pandemic and emerge stronger in the end.(PS2:59)

Evidentiality

Evidentiality is used to provide facts or proof by a discourse producer to support their own opinions, beliefs or information (Rashidi & Souzandehfar, 2010; Van Dijk, 2005). Using evidentiality, President Buhari reminded Nigerians of the deadly nature of the corona virus which according to scientists has no cure. The President claims that "As of today, COVID-19 has no cure. Scientists around the world are working very hard to develop a vaccine". This claim is further reinforced by the fact that certain international institutions are still working "towards a solution that will be certified by international and local medical authorities within the shortest possible time" The lack of a medical solution heightens the anxiety and fear being expressed all over the world. The President stresses that;

Extract 11

This is not a joke. It is a matter of life and death. Mosques in Makkah and Madina have been closed. The Pope celebrated Mass on an empty St. Peter's Square. The famous Notre Dame cathedral in Paris held Easter Mass with less than 10 people. India, Italy and France are in complete lockdown. Other countries are in the process of following suit. We cannot be lax. (PS2:39)

The President is simply saying that if the great centers of religion in the world could take such strict measures to contain the spread of the virus; Makkah and Madina representing Islam and Rome and Paris representing the Church, there is every justification for the actions which are being taken in Nigeria. Indeed, he further corroborated this by way of comparing the situation in Nigeria with those of other countries saying that "India, Italy and France are in complete lockdown" and that there was "dreadful daily toll of deaths in Italy, France and Spain."He used this comparison to build an argument for the justification of the very stringent measures announced by the government. For instance, it will be suicidal to do nothing when it has become clear that the "health system of even the most developed nations (are) being overwhelmed by this virus" and having had a confirmation that "Here in Nigeria, we had 131 confirmed cases of

COVID-19 in 12 States on 30th March 2020."(PS1:27). This certainly must the basis for the President declaring that:

Extract 12

> In Nigeria's fight against COVID-19, there is no such thing as an overreaction or an under reaction. It is all about the right reaction by the right agencies and trained experts (PS1:19).

Moreso, that "Many other countries have taken far stricter measures in a bid to control the spread of the virus with positive results." (PS1:48) The President then goes ahead toemphasize the positive efforts of the government in the fight against the spread of the pandemic stating that the Director General of the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) was "one of *ten global health leaders* invited by the World Health Organisation to visit China and understudy their response approach.". (PS1:12) It is in the same vein that he speaks glowingly about the fact that "Over ten thousand healthcare workers have been trained" and "additional personal protective equipment have been distributed to all the states" in efforts to boost the containment of the virus and assure the people of government's commitment to the fight.

The initial doubts expressed by the people about the reality of covid-19 in Nigeria is addressed with evidential information, sometimes using examples and illustrations,to show that confirmed cases are not only already being recorded, they are on the increase. First, in his maiden speech, the President states: "as at this morning we had ninety-seven confirmed cases" mainly in Lagos and Abuja and with "few confirmed cases outside Lagos and Abuja" linked to persons who have travelled from these centres. These instances are cited to persuade the public of the reality of the disease, hence the need for their cooperation to observe the containment and treatment protocols put in place by the government.

Number game

The number game is the use of numbers or statistics in an argument by a discourse producer to enhance the credibility of their opinions or ideas. Van Dijk (2005) emphasizes that numbers and statistics have a primarily persuasive role in discourse. In war rhetoric, numbers assume significance to the extent that it reveals who is winning or losing the battle. Figures that project the casualties inflicted on the opposition would be a morale booster to the winning army. President Buhari utilizes the number game to convince Nigerians, especially those who are either still in denial or are doubtful of the existence of the disease in Nigeria and win the approval and support of others against the common enemy. For instance, the following extracts mainly from the President's second address (PS2) rely heavily on figures.
Extract 13

On 30th March 2020, when we started our lockdown in conforming with medical
and scientific advice, the total number of confirmed cases across the world was
over 780,000.
Yesterday, the number of confirmed COVID-19 cases globally was over one
million, eight hundred and fifty thousand. This figure is more than double in two
weeks!
In the last fourteen days alone, over 70,000 people have died due to this disease.
(PS2:22-24)

The statistics of Covid-19 confirmed cases and fatalities globally is an argumentative move used
to legitimize the Self actions that suggest the saying 'in war all is fair'. It is an attempt to justify
all the difficult measures for the prevention of the disease. For instance, using comparison, the
President shows the sudden rise in the figures of confirmed cases, in the space of two weeks;
from 780,000 to 1,850,000 not only to buttress the fears about Covid-19, but also to serve as
warrant for the 'difficult decisions' that were taken requiring sacrifices to be made. The numbers
further represent the Covid-19 negative Other as a cruel and ruthless enemy that must be fought
to a standstill by the people who are called upon to bear the hardship patriotically in the interest
of the country.

The President also gives the figures of confirmed cases and fatalities in Nigeria, which in
comparison to global figures appears insignificant but nonetheless paints a negative picture of
the disease.

Extract 14

Here in Nigeria, we had 131 confirmed cases of COVID-19 in 12 States on 30th
March 2020. We had two fatalities then.
This morning, Nigeria had 323 confirmed cases in twenty States. Unfortunately,
we now have ten fatalities. Lagos State remains the center and accounts for 54%
of the confirmed cases in Nigeria. When combined with the FCT, the two
locations represent over 71% of the confirmed cases in Nigeria. (PS2:25-28)

Thedeliberate comparison of the figures of 131 confirmed cases and two fatalities on the 30th of
March 2020 with the 323 cases and ten fatalities of 15th April 2020. This is more than a 100%
percentage increase. These figures will certainly send a strong message to the public thereby
encouraging them to take the necessary precautions not to contract the disease.

Conclusion

The study sets out to investigate the discursive and rhetorical strategies of President Buhari's
three speeches on the Covid-19 pandemic in Nigeria. The specific objectives of the study are to
explain the mental model responsible for the President's strategy of war rhetoric in its
construction of Covid-19 as the aggressor and enemy 'Other', and to explain the contributions of
the rhetorical strategies of metaphor, evidentiality, lexicalization and number game to the

construction of Covid-19 as the Other. The analysis which relies on the sociocognitive theoretical framework reveals the President employed the war rhetoric to represent his cabinet's knowledge, attitudes and beliefs (mental models) about the Covid-19 pandemic. The speeches invoked the imagery of war, violent crisis and emergencycharacterized by sudden, urgent, and unforeseen events or situations that require immediate action. These actions have a destabilizing effect on the lifestyles of the people and the economy of the country. In such a difficult time, the government needs tact and a strong argument to persuade the citizenry of their need to trust the judgement of those in government and readily agree to render the sacrifices required of them in order to defeat the enemy. While metaphor serves as the framing tool for painting the image of Covid-19 as the unwanted aggressor at war and visiting the Nigerian people with death, disease and hunger death, lexicalization is used to reinforce the images by means of lexical choices that foreground war and the military strategies of combating its spread. Both the evidentiality and number game strategies employ examples, comparison and contrast of statistics to corroborate the images of war and present the President's views as objective reality, thus discouraging dissent and thereby encouraging compliance with the directives to make sacrifices. Thus, the President's reliance on the cognitive semantic representational tools of war rhetoric to reproduce the social reality of Covid-19 becomes an effective strategy to greatly influence and manipulate how the entire citizenry interpret the social condition brought upon them by the rampaging corona virus. Indeed, the rhetorical strategy has revealed that the Covid-19 enemy (the Other) and the war it wages on the country is not a joke.

References

Adetunji, Akin. (2009). Speech acts and rhetoric in the second inaugural addresses of Nigeria's President Olusegun Obasanjo and America's President George W. Bush. In Odebunmi. A, Arua. E and Arimi. S. (Eds), *Language, genre and politics. (A festschrift for Y.K. Yusuf)*. 275-296.

Barreneche, S. M. (2020). Somebody to blame: on the construction of the other in the context of the Covid-19 outbreak. *Society Register*, Vol. 4, No. 2 19-32.

Campbell, K.K. & Jamieson, K.H. (1990). *Deeds done in words: presidential rhetoric and the genres of governance.* Chicago: Chicago University Press.

Charteris-Black, J. (2011). *Politicians and rhetoric: the persuasive power of metaphor.* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Chilton, P. (2004). *Analysing political discourse: theory and practice*, Routledge.

Gross, O., and Ni Aolain, F. (2014). The Rhetoric of War: Words, Conflict, and Categorization Post-9/11, *Cornell Journal of Law and Public Policy*: Vol. 24: 2. 241-289.

Kuypers, J.A. & D'Angelo, P. (Eds.) (2010). *Doing News Framing Analysis: Empirical and Theoretical Perspectives*. Routledge.

Kuypers, J.A. (2006). *Bush´s War: Media Bias and Justifications for War in a Terrorist Age*. Lanham, MD:Rowman & Littlefield.

Rashidi, N. and Souzandehfar, M. (2010). A critical discourse analysis of the debates between republicans and democrats over the continuation of war in Iraq. *JoLIE* . 55-82.

Najarzadegan, S., Dabaghi, A., & Eslamirasekh, A. (2017). A critical discourse analysis of Iran and US presidential speeches at the UN: the sociopragmatic functions. *Theory and practice in linguistic studies* Vol 7, No 9. 764-774.

Sauer, C. (1997) Echoes from abroad – speeches for the domestic audience: Queen Beatrix's Address to the Israeli Parliament', In C. Schäffner (ed.) *Analysing Political Speeches*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters. 233-267.

van Dijk, T. A. (1997). *Discourse as social interaction.* Sage Publications, London.

van Dijk, T.A. (2005). Contextual knowledge management in discourse production: A CDA perspective. In R. Wodak, & P. Chilton (Eds.), *A new agenda in (Critical) Discourse Analysis: Theory, methodology and interdisciplinarity*, Amsterdam/ Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 71-100.

van Dijk (2015) Critical discourse studies: a sociocognitive approach In Ruth Wodak & Michael Meyer (eds) *Methods of Critical Discourse Studies* 3rd revised Sage: 63-85.

Wang, J. (2010). A critical discourse analysis of Barack Obama's speeches. *Journal of language teaching and research*, 1(3), 254-261.

Wodak, R., & Fairclough, N. (1997). Critical Discourse Analysis. In T. A. van Dijk (Ed.), *Discourse as Social Interaction.* Sage: 258-284.

Wolfe, W.M. (2008). *Winning the war of words: selling the war on terror from Afghanistan to Iraq*, Praeger.