

Stance Taking in Some 2023 Presidential Aspirants' Declaration Speeches

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Abstract

This study examines stance taking surrounding the Nigerian 2023 General Election by some presidential aspirants in their declaration speeches to become the next president of Nigeria. Existing linguistic studies on political speeches have focused on inaugural speeches by different nations' presidents with little attention paid to declaration speeches by presidential aspirants. Data for the study were drawn from online national dailies such as Business Day, Premium Times, The Nation and Daily Post. The period covered was between January to April, 2022 before the primary election of each party. The combined qualitative and quantitative research designs. Ken Hyland's (2005) Stance and Engagement Theory served as the theoretical framework for the study. The data were subjected to discourse analysis. The findings of the study reveal that based on the frequencies of the stance and engagement tools, self-mention has the highest with 57 representing 35.84%, while directive and personal aside have the lowest frequencies with 6 representing 3.77. For the stances, the following were observed: winning the presidential seat is a battle; winning the presidential seat is all about antecedents and experiences; the president should be someone who knows the plight of his people and becoming the next president is all about the influence of incumbency or stronger external force where the common stances taken by the selected presidential aspirants. The paper concludes that campaign declarations are full of stance taking. It also recommends that studies should be conducted on those presidential declaration speeches from other linguistic perspectives.

Keywords: *Declaration Speeches, General Election, Nigeria, Stance and Engagement*

Introduction

Language use is a form of social practice as it relates to how it is employed in different communicative events and social situations. It serves as an important vehicle in sharing thoughts, ideas, and feelings from person-to-person, or from a person to a group of persons

(van Dijk 1997; Fairclough, 2001; Stevanant and Carreon, 2017). In political event, especially during the electioneering period, language use remains a crucial weapon in the hand of political actors; and its effective use has a great effect on the electioneering outcome.

Like elsewhere in the world, Nigeria is not left out in the act of politicking, especially among political aspirants. As the Nigerian 2023 General Election (henceforth GE) is approaching, a lot of candidates have come out and many are still expected to come and make their intentions known to the electorate. All these candidates have interests at different levels of political offices, ranging from the state house of assembly, national assembly, governorship as well as the presidential. All these candidates have different stances to show their intentions towards the Nigerian 2023 GE. Very importantly, the ability to wield the instrumentation of language by these aspirants towards convincing the electorate is very germane.

In the wake of election proper, often a year that precedes the electioneering period, the political aspirants will present themselves and declare their interests to the electorate, using different platforms. During this time, they do not only present themselves and declare their interests for different political offices they are vying for, they also engage the public, through language, on different issues of public concerns; especially those on wellbeing and welfare that tickle the interest of the electorate with the view to gaining their votes (Azuma, 2012). In this instance, stances are taken through language, knowing full well that what

they say and the manner with which it said is of utmost importance before the electorate (Berlin, 2020). It is on this backdrop that this study looks at stance taking in some 2023 Presidential aspirants' declaration speeches in Nigeria.

This present study looks at stances and engagement strategies taken by different presidential aspirants in Nigeria vying for 2023 presidential election in their declaration speeches. The aspirants that are of focus in this research are: Professor Yemi Osibanjo (current Vice President of the country); former Vice President Atiku Abubakar; Nyesom Wike (the incumbent governor of Rivers State), Rotimi Amaechi and former Governor of Lagos State, Bola Tinubu.

Existing literature and statement of the problem

Existing linguistic studies on political speeches have given bias to different areas of political events with little attentions paid to presidential declaration speeches by political aspirants. Such existing studies have paid attention to political speeches from the aspect of pragmatics (Wangatiah et al., 2016), aspects of lexis and discourse (Al-Faki, 2014; Al-Majali, 2015; Shardama, 2015; Kamalu and Iniworikabo, 2016), lexico-semantic feature (Oparinde et al., 2021) among others. While practically all of these works cited focus on the

speeches of the incumbent or former presidents, none is on presidential aspirants, which is the focus of this present study.

Shardama (2015) examines the 2015 inaugural speech of President Muhammadu Buhari of Nigeria. It is revealed, through the result, that an inaugural speech is delivered with the intent of unveiling the aspiration, plan and hope in the new government. This study is different from the present study as, while the former dwells on the already sworn in president, the present study dwells on the speech of the presidential aspirants.

Similarly, Kamalu and Iniworikabo (2016) carry out a study on the past Nigerian presidents Olusegun Obasanjo, Umaru Musa Yaradua and Goodluck Jonathan. Using Lakoff 's Conceptual Metaphor theory, the study reveals that metaphors are a great communication tool employed by these past presidents to communicate their plans and ideologies to Nigerians. Again, while this study looks at the speeches of the past presidents, this present study looks at the declaration speeches of the aspiring presidents and the stance made in those speeches. The study is however similar to the present one in term of the import of language in the hand of politicians.

Similar to that of Kamalu and Iniworikabo (2016) is Oparinde et al. (2021) who examine

the six Nigerian presidential speeches. The study reveals that Nigerian politicians make use of different lexical choices in achieving their political aims. Lexical choices such as pronouns, modalities, hyperbole, repetition and the use of metaphor are rhetoric strategies used by politicians as communication tools in passing their message across to the populace. Again, the presents study deviates from this study as the object of focus is the aspiring presidents.

In the same vein, Al-Majali (2015) studies the linguistic features in the political speeches delivered by the ousted presidents of Arab, Tunisian president, Zain Al-Abdeen Bin Ali, Egyptian president, Hosni Mubarak and the Libyan president, Muammer Al-Gaddafi, during the Arab Spring Revolution. The study found that the lexical choices found in those speeches such as repetition, synonymy, and hyponymy are used to achieve different political ideologies and strategies.

Kamalu and Agangan (2015) examine the presidential declaration of the former president of Nigeria, Goodluck Ebele Jonathan under PDP. The study used a qualitative method of data analysis. The presidential declaration of Goodluck Jonathan serves as data for the study. The study was anchored through the blending of CDA and Systemic Functional Linguistics to unearth the ideologies that are

embedded in the declaration. The result of the study shows that Jonathan deployed diverse rhetorical strategies to depict ideology. In addition, he used persuasive strategies to appeal ethno-religious sentiments in his declaration and there is the use of persuasive strategies to align to the suffering of the masses. Furthermore, the study also shows that the president reconstructed his childhood experience in order to manipulate the conscience of his listeners/readers. Finally, the study shows that the former president deployed legitimization strategies to threaten some groups like miscreants, criminals and corrupt individuals in the society.

Theoretical perspective

Stance and Engagement Theory by Ken Hyland (2005) was adopted for this study. The theory was propounded by Ken Hyland in 2005. Stance stands for writer-oriented features in interaction and the ways writers comment on the accuracy of a claim, the extent they show their commitment to it or the attitude they want to express to a proposition or the reader (Hyland, 2005). Stance can also be seen as attitudinal dimension and the use of features which indicate the ways writers present themselves and convey their judgments, opinions, and commitments. Writers or speakers can use stance to stamp

their personal authority over their arguments or step back and disguise their involvement in a proposition. According to Moini and Salami (2015:112-113) stance markers include:

(i) **Hedges** are linguistic terms such as possible, perhaps, might, which indicate writer's recognition about other people's opinion, and reduces his or her total commitment to a proposition.

(ii) **Boosters** unlike hedges, writers/speakers use boosters to show certainty towards a proposition. Boosters' devices include clearly, obviously, etc.

(iii) **Attitude markers** express the writer's opinion toward propositions that convey surprise, frustration, importance, agreement, and so on.

(iv) **Self-mention** is measured by the use of first person pronoun, "I" and possessive adjectives such as I, me, mine, and exclusive we, our and us to show explicit writer's presence in the text (Hyland, 2005).

Engagement is an alignment dimension where writers acknowledge and connect to their readers or listeners, recognizing their presence; carrying them along with their argument, focusing on their attention, acknowledging their uncertainties, including as participants and guiding them to the interpretation of whatsoever is being discussed (Hyland,

2005:177). Moini and Salami (2015:113-114) discussed the following as engagement markers:

(i) **Reader pronouns:** The most common features of reader pronouns, “you” and “your” are used to acknowledge reader/listener’s presence in discourse.

(ii) **Personal asides:** This allows writers to involve readers in a stream of discourse by interrupting the argument briefly just to offer a comment on what has been said.

(iii) **Directives:** Readers are instructed to do or view something in the course of the discourse in accordance with the way the writer determines it. Writer uses word like: to indicate an imperative (consider, note, and imagine); a modal of obligation (must, should, and ought) and through a predicative adjective expressing the writer’s judgement of necessity and importance

(iv) **Appeals to shared knowledge:** Through this, the writer tries to share ideas that his or her readers are aware of. ‘Sharedness’ is often used to bring in contested ideas into their argument.

(v) **Questions.** To arouse interest and curiosity of the readers over an argument by the writer or speaker, questions are used.

Methodology

The data for the study comprise the presidential declaration speeches of selected presidential aspirants. The aspirants used for the study are Abubakar Atiku, Peter Obi, Rotimi Amaechi, Bola Tinubu, Nyemso Wike and Prof. Yemi Osibanjo. Data for the study were drawn from the following online newspapers: *Business Day*, *Premium Times*, *The Nation* and *Daily Post*. The period covered was between January to April, 2022 before the primary elections of each party. This is the period when all the presidential aspirants made their intentions known to the public. The research design is both qualitative and quantitative. The quantitative research design was used in calculating the frequency of each stance and engagement tool identified in the declaration speeches. The analysis of the data is guided through Ken Hyland’s (2005) Stance and Engagement Theory. Some of the tools in stance and engagement were deployed to see how they help in depicting stances in the declarations of the aspirants. The breakdown of the declaration speeches is presented below:

- a. Daily Post March 27, 2022, Wike Nyemso Declares Presidential Ambition;
- b. Amaechi Rotimi’s Presidential Declaration, 9th April, Premium Times

- c. Presidential Declaration of Atiku Abubakar, March 23, 2022, Business Day).
- d. The Nation, January 11, 2020, Tinubu: my Presidential Ambition a Lifelong Dream;
- e. Presidential Declaration of Vice President Yemi Osibanjo, April 11, 2022, Premium Times) and
- f. Punch, March 24, 2022. Peter Obi joins 2023 presidential race

The data were subjected to discourse analysis in order to see how those stances are taken by the various presidential aspirants selected in the study.

Analysis and discussion

The stances taken in the presidential declarations of some aspirants towards Nigeria's 2023 General Election are presented in this section. The various tools of stance and engagement in the presidential candidates are analysed to verify various stances taken by most of them towards their ambition to become the next Nigerian presidents come 2023.

Stance and engagement tools in the declarations

In this segment, a tabular representation of the occurrence of stance and engagement tools as identified in the declaration speeches used is given below:

Table 1: Frequency of stance and engagement tools in the speeches

Stance/engagement tool	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Self-mention	57	35.84
Hedges	17	10.69
Boosters	20	12.58
Attitude markers	19	11.94
Question	7	4.40
Directive	6	3.77
Reader pronoun	10	6.29
Personal aside	6	3.77
Shared knowledge	17	10.69
Total	159	100

Based on the frequency and percentage of all the tools identified in the declaration speech,

self-mention has the highest with 57 representing 35.84%; hedges has 17 representing 10.69%; boosters, 20 representing

12.58%; attitude marker, 19 representing 11.94%; question, 7 representing 4.40%; directive has 6 representing 3.77%; reader

pronoun, 10 representing 6.29; personal aside, 6 representing 3.77%, while shared knowledge has 19 representing 10.69.

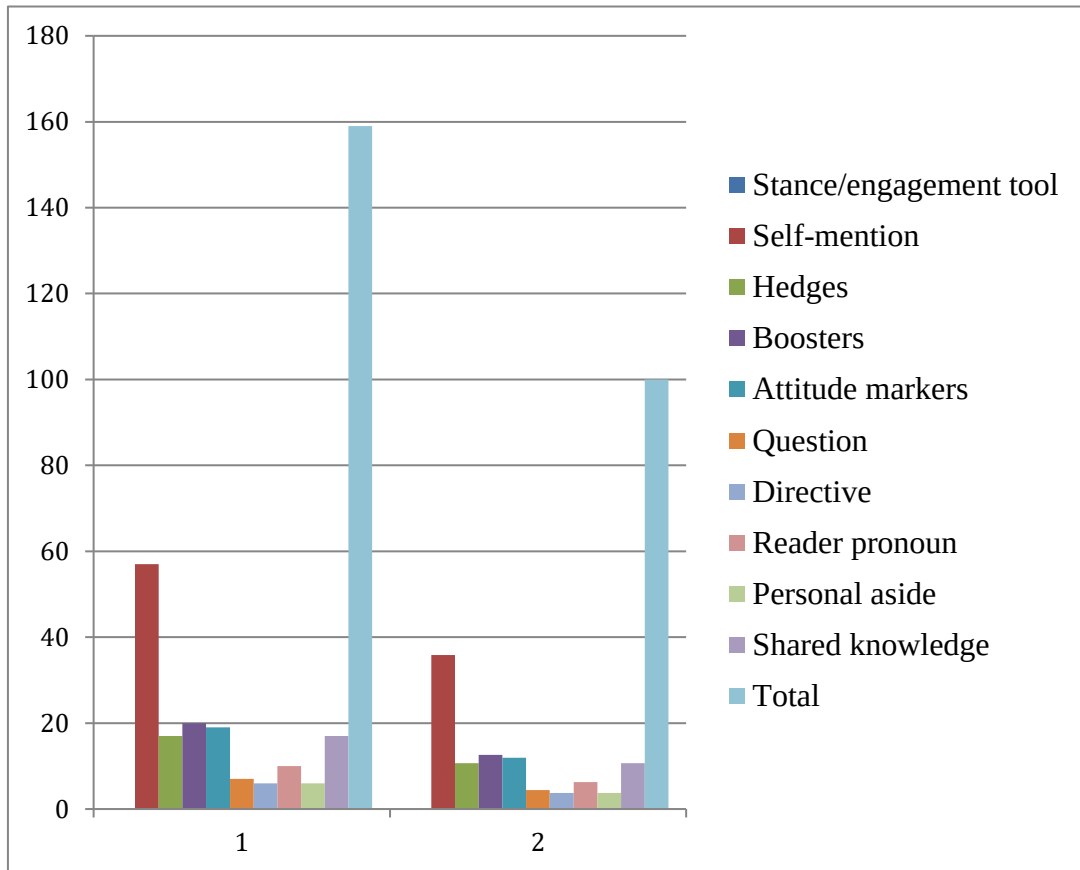


Figure 1: A chart representing frequency of each toll identified in the declaration

Winning the presidential seat is a battle

Virtually all the presidential aspirants take the stance that the presidential race is a battle. They see their opponents as common enemies; so they try their possible best to see that the images of their opponents are tarnished and presented their opponents as incapable, threatening and dissatisfactory.

Excerpt 1: No matter the darts and arrows that come **my** way, **I will** remain steadfast because the stakes are too high. **We** cannot afford to fail. **We** cannot afford to veer off (Amaechi Rotimi's Presidential Declaration, 9th April, Premium Times)

In the above excerpt 1, Amaechi sees himself as unbeatable, and he is ready to fight anything that comes his ways from being the next

president. Through the use of the self-mention, “my” is used to show his candidacy or ambition. The inclusive pronoun “we” shows the solidarity that he and his team members are set to do. It shows the race is a collective battle that must be fought cooperatively. Through the booster “will”, Amaechi indicates his certainty towards the proposition that the presidential race is a battle, and he will remain focused no matter the risk it involves. The use of idiom “the stakes are too high” is an example of aside to depict that the race is a risky one that must not be toyed with. The speaker sees the chance of allowing his opponents to win as a loss. Another candidate that shows that the presidential race is a battle is Alhaji Atiku Abubakar. This is exemplified in the excerpt 2 below:

Excerpt 2: They want **us** to distract **us** from holding **them** responsible for the insecurity and rising poverty. **They** want **us** to be facing each other and hating one another. **We should** focus on the issues not the differences. Let **us unite** and **fight our** common enemies....(Presidential Declaration of Atiku Abubakar, March 23, 2022, Business Day).

One of the main things that portray the above excerpt to be depicting politics as battle is where the speaker presented the opponent or what we can say opposition party. According to Hyland (2005:180), one of the ways writer

or speaker can show attitude is through comparison. The speaker uses the pronouns “they” “them” and “us”. The speaker took his stance that the upcoming election is a battle showing attitude that he and his supporters are better than the current the party leading the current government. The words “unite” and “fight” show agreement in terms of affective attitude portrayed in the declaration of Atiku Abubakar towards the 2023 General Election. Elements of self-mention in the declaration of Atiku Abubakar are the inclusive such as “us”, “we” and “our”, which show solidarity between the speaker and his supporters. The self-mentions are deployed to absorb the supporters into his vision. The booster “should” depicts the necessity in being focused towards the achievement of their goal, that is, winning the presidential seat. Lastly in the above excerpt, the speaker uses physical directives where he instructed his supporters to join hands and fight and also be focused in order to gain power come 2023.

Excerpt 3: The APC administration has **failed** in its fundamental responsibility of protecting the lives and properties of Nigeria. The **most significant** human right is the right to life, which has not been protected under the current APC administration. **Our** military forces are fighting on the front lines, without the equipment and morale. (Presidential Declaration of Atiku

Abubakar, March 23, 2022, Business Day).

The stance taking that winning the presidential election is a battle in excerpt 3. It is contextually explained based on what Hyland (2005) says that stance taking is understood in context. From the context in the above excerpt, we can see how Atiku is castigating the work of the present administration, pointing out the failure of his opponent. This proves that the best option is for Nigerians to vote him. Atiku sees the failure of the present administration in protecting lives and properties as a defeat, which he sees as it would make them to have hedge over their opponents.

Winning the presidential seat is all about antecedents and experiences

Leadership is truly about experiences and antecedents, especially in governance. Most people believe that an amateur cannot be given a public office to rule; else, he or she might ruin it. And as the saying that experience is the best teacher, people have experienced diverse leadership traits exhibited by past and present leaders. So, to occupy the number one office of the Federal Republic of Nigeria is not something that can be thrown away like that. This has made most aspirants to take stances on their experiences and antecedents in leadership in personal, private and public aspects.

Except 4: I did not come to this decision lightly. I have served **our** nation for the last seven years as a minister of transportation. For eight years before that, I served as governor of Rivers State. In the preceding eight years before that, I was speaker of the Rivers State House of Assembly. These 23 years of service have equipped me not **only** with great experience in governance and public service, but also compassion for the ordinary citizens of **our** dear nation. After more than two decades in the public arena,... I am compelled by the urgency of **our** present challenges to place **my** experience and proven capacity at the service of the nation at the highest level.... It is this combination of experience and patriotic passion that I bring to the table.... I have served in every level of government-local, state and federal. I have served as an executive-- as Governor of Rivers State and a legislator—as Speaker of the State House of Assembly.... As a speaker, I managed the legislative processes in difficult transition from military rule. As a governor, I defeated mercantile militancy and restored security. As a minister, I **can** modestly claim that I have justified the trust of Nigerians.... Have we achieved everything we set out to do? **Of course**, not! **Could we** have done more? Undoubtedly, there is **always** room for improvement. (Amaechi Rotimi's Presidential Declaration, 9th April, Premium Times).

One of the major stance tools deployed here is the self-mention which is demonstrated through the use of the first person pronoun, "I",

possessive adjectives, “my” and “our; especially through the use of “I” to stamp his present and authority that truly he has the experience needed to occupy the number one seat of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Also, through the use of “my”, the speaker adds credence to who he is as a result of his leadership experiences and he believes that those experiences have become part of his resume that would make his opponents to succumb and allow him rule the nation. Finally, on the aspect of self-mention, “our” is used to indicate solidarity with the electorate. This to take the electorate along that truly Nigeria needs his candidature to salvage it from the challenges that have bedeviled it for a long time. Another prominent feature of engagement portrayed by most aspirants is shared knowledge. Like in the above excerpt, the candidate brings in what Nigerians are aware of such as insecurity, economy meltdown, as well as the plight of most citizens who are now wallowing in abject poverty. The excerpt also depicts the sharedness of knowledge that both the speaker and the reader or listeners have on the current leadership of the country. The aspirant also makes use of question as a dialogical strategy to involve his participants in what he sets to do when he is voted in. The aspirant also uses question to depict the current level of what the current

administration is and he believes he will continue by the time he assumes office as the president of Nigeria. Considering the explanation on question as an engagement marker, Hyland (2005) opines that the question used by writer are rhetorical, which do not need the response of the reader who is the discourse participant. The speaker here employed this marker and asked question to bring the concept of continuity. He asked questions on the percentage of achievement of the present administration in which he is a cabinet member. He believes the administration has not achieved its goals, and the only way to achieve the set goals is by giving him the mandate to do so.

Excerpt 5: You and I know that Nigeria is in dire need of visionary leadership. **Our** fundamental principles and purpose as a nation have never been challenged as it is today. Presently, Nigeria is a sinking ship; it **must** be rescued urgently. That is why **I** am happy to announce my candidacy for the president of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, under the platform of Peoples Democratic Party. (Presidential Declaration of Atiku Abubakar, March 23, 2022, Business Day).

Like in excerpt 1, there is use of self-mentions to make the presence of the speaker known in the discourse. However, in the current excerpt, the speaker employs the reader pronoun, “you”

to stamp the presence of his supporters and the whole of Nigeria. The speaker brings in the presence of Nigerian to what is happening in the current administration where he believes that Nigeria needs leaders that are visionary like he is. He takes his stance to show that he has the experience to give Nigeria what is needed. That is, maintaining the principles and purpose of Nigeria. The speaker also deploys booster to show the urgency of why Nigeria needs his experience through the use of the modal verb “must”. Also, the excerpt also talks about the shared knowledge on the current situation of Nigeria. On the aspect of attitude marker, the speaker uses the verb “need” to show agreement that Nigeria is truly in need of leader with experiences to salvage it from total destruction.

The president should be someone who knows the plight of his people

Politicians would always be politicians; however, there are exceptional ones amongst them. Most politicians claim to have the people at heart but as soon as they are voted into public offices, they forget those who cooperatively stood for them in their moment of search for power. Considering the declarations of all aspirants, stances on the involvement of the populace in governance is emphasized. The people have been deceived, and after giving their trust to those politicians,

the reverse is the case. The stance taken by most aspirants for the office of the president which shows that they know the plight of the populace and the populace would be carried along in their administration is exemplified thus:

Excerpt 6: I’ve stood where **you** stand and sat where **you** sit. **I know** and **I understand our** hopes, aspiration and fears from a place of relatable proximity; and **I believe** that in those hopes and aspirations are the seeds for the great Nigeria that we all desire. **I believe** that the very reason why **the Almighty God** gave me these experiences, these insights and these opportunities, is that they **must** be put to the use of **our** country and its great people. (Presidential Declaration of Vice President Yemi Osibanjo, April 11, 2022, Premium Times).

The personal pronoun “I” in excerpt 6 has registered the speaker’s presence in the proposition that a president knows the plight of his people and includes them in the art of governance. The speaker, Professor Yemi Osibanjo, who is the current vice president of Nigeria, has registered his presence in his stance that he knows what Nigerians at home and in diaspora are feeling. The use of “know” and “understand” are attitude markers to express the writer’s opinion toward propositions that frustration and agreement on what Nigerians are passing through. It shows that there is agreement that the speakers know

what is happening and also shows how frustrated he is like any Nigeria. This is one of the main issues that characterise political aspirants. They claim to know and understand what befalls the majority of the population, but by the time they gain power, those attitude towards the needs of the citizens become mirage. The inclusion of “God Almighty” portrays attitude marker which has to do with the disposition Osibanjo and other aspirants have towards God. He claims that his experiences, insights and opportunities to rule were given to him by God. One thing about Nigerians and most Africans is their belief on the God factor; they believe on His superiority and so by the time He is mentioned, everything is accepted. So, the speaker takes his stance through attitude marker to show that as an aspirant, he knows what is happening in Nigeria and believes that such opportune time is given by God. Lastly, the use of the modal verb, “must” indicates the use of booster to show certainty over a proposition Prof. Osibanjo has towards the use of his experiences, insights and opportunities to harness the course of governance in Nigeria if given the opportunity to rule. Another excerpt that shows the presidential race is a battle can be seen in the speech of Wike Nyesom as provided below:

Excerpt 7: To remove APC from power, I’m the person who **can** tell **them** enough is enough. **We must** take this power and I’m ready to take it for PDP.... **God** is with **us** that is why APC keeps failing every day. (Daily Post March 27, 2022, Wike Nyemso Delcares Presidential Ambition).

Attitude through the use of God shows the disposition that there is God whom men believe to be superior and helps men to fight against their enemies. The above attitude shows that PDP members claim that God has been with them, and that is why their enemies, members of APC are not progressing in their leadership. The booster “must” shows necessity and certainty that there has been as war amongst all the political parties in Nigeria, especially APC and PDP. The speaker, Governor Wike Nyesom involves his supporters and the entire membership of PDP to fight for the power to be restored to them. And also, through self-mention, Wike uses “I” to show his presence and personal ability to represent the party, with the target of taking back the power from APC. “We” and “us” as self-mentions are stance strategies used by the Wike to show solidarity that the fight for the restoration of power back to PDP is not an individual effort but a collective one. So, all the excerpts extracted from the presidential declarations of Amaechi, Atiku, and Wike show that the presidential race for the

forthcoming 2023 General Election is a battle that must be fought.

Becoming the next president is all about the influence of incumbency or stronger external force

This stance taken from the declaration of all the aspirants shows that leadership in Nigeria is about whom you know, which is “godfatherism”. Most of the aspirants either show affinity to either the incumbent government or one political godfather. Examples of excerpts extracted from the declarations of some presidential aspirants which depict the stance taken on becoming the next president depends on the power of incumbency and external force are given below.

Excerpt 8: I’ve informed the president of **my** intention, but I’ve not informed Nigerians yet. **I** am still consulting and **I** have no problem consulting. I’ve not set a parameter of limitation to the extent of how many people **will I** consult (The Nation, January 11, 2020, Tinubu: my Presidential Ambition a Lifelong Dream).

Excerpt 8 above has shown that for one to become a leader in Nigeria, one must be sure of the backings of some political lords or be a loyalist of the incumbent government. Tinubu made use of self-mention to tell the populace that he has informed the president of Nigeria,

President Muhammad Buhari, who has given him confidence that he would be the next president. He also mentioned the strategy he has put in place to gain the acceptance and support of some influential people when it comes to politics in Nigeria. Funnily enough, he used the self-mention to tell his readers that consulting Nigerians is not a problem. This could be that he does not need their endorsement because those whom he has set to see seem more important than the masses. This is because whether the electorate agree or not, as long he has the approval of those people he claims will not turn his request down, he will become the next president by all means.

Nigeria needs to be restructured

The situation of Nigeria is neither new to the politicians nor the electorate. Everyone is aware that Nigeria truly needs to be restructured in terms of education, agriculture, revenue derivation, economy, and even leadership. So, most of those politicians do come under the auspices of restructuring Nigeria in all sectors. The excerpt below shows that stances are taken that Nigeria truly needs to be restructured.

Excerpt 9: The Nigeria **I will** lead **will** create jobs, boost **our** economy, and improve education. **If** I have the opportunity, **I will** turn around the country for the better. **I will** move Nigeria from a consuming nation to a productive

nation. As a Nigerian, I want all parts of the country to be secured. I'm not aspiring for a political position, but to serve the country (Punch, March 24, 2022. Peter Obi joins 2023 presidential race).

The most prominent stance tool deployed in the above excerpt is the shared knowledge. All the aspects mentioned by the aspirant in the above excerpt are not new to Nigeria. Nigerians truly know that the only way to salvage this country from where it is today is by having a leader who will revitalize sectors like education, economy, health, technology, power, transportation and so on. The aspirant takes stance that Nigeria will be restructured if given the opportunity to rule. The use of booster "will" seems to be prominent in the excerpt. This is used to depict the aspirant's certainty of what he sets to do if given the opportunity to rule Nigeria. Furthermore, another tool deployed in taking stance that Nigeria needs restructuring is through the attitude marker by the speaker, where he said that he does not want to serve as a president but a servant of the masses. He sees the only way to restructure Nigeria is when you take the form of servant hood and ignore the prestige that comes with your position as the president, as this would help you to know the need of your masters, the masses. The use of "if" as an indication of adverbial subordinate clause of

condition shows attitude marker of Obi towards the proposition that he will restructure Nigeria. The stance taken on the need to restructure Nigeria shows that if he is not given the mandate, what he sets to do for Nigeria would not be realisable.

Conclusion

So far this study has investigated the various stances taken in the presidential declaration speeches of some aspirants in Nigeria towards the 2023 General Election. The findings of the study reveal that based on the frequencies of the stance and engagement tools, self-mention has the highest with 57 representing 35.84%, while directive and personal aside have the lowest frequencies with 6 representing 3.77. It was also revealed that the stances taken by the presidential aspirants are winning the presidential seat is a battle; winning the presidential seat is all about antecedents and experiences; the president should be someone who knows the plight of his people; becoming the next president is all about the influence of incumbency or stronger external force and Nigeria needs to be restructured. The study also revealed that those presidential aspirants use stance and engagement tools like self-mention, hedges, boosters, attitude markers, shared knowledge and reader pronoun to take their various stances in their declarations. The study concludes that the political speeches of

political aspirants in Nigeria are characterised with lots of stances taken by them on their goals to be elected into public offices through the use of various stance and engagement

tools. The study recommends that more should be investigated on political speeches surrounding 2023 General Election in Nigeria.

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