

## ENGLISHIZATION AND THE DISCURSIVE CONSTRUCTIONS IN SOCIAL MEDIA DISCOURSES OF THE #ENDSARS PROTEST IN NIGERIA

Gabriel B. Egbe

Veritas University, Abuja Nigeria

Corresponding author: Gabriel B. Egbe, Veritas University, Abuja Nigeria

E-mail: [egbeg@veritas.edu.ng](mailto:egbeg@veritas.edu.ng)

Volume 7

Number 1

September 2022

Page 567-577

### Abstract:

The social media has become a potent digital tool to make strong political and social statements globally especially with the internationalization of English. This has been underscored by the #EndSARS protest in Nigeria. The protest, led mainly by Nigerian youths, remains one of the most sweeping social media activism in the history of the country. The reverberations and revolts which accompanied the initially peaceful protest have brought to the fore the power of the social media. This study identifies the discursive strategies and semiotic resources deployed during the #EndSARS protest to underscore the role of English in the construction and counter construction of discourses. Using Critical Discourse Studies and Multimodal Discourse Analysis, the paper interrogates about 30 purposefully sampled posts from selected WhatsApp platforms during the protests. The study argues that the social media affords users a platform to communicate without the gatekeeper constraints of mainstream media to create group membership, spread ideologies, and to draw national and global attention using the medium of English to cut across geo-political and linguistic boundaries. The study also reveals that while the initial #EndSARS protest constructs an organized, peaceful, and regenerative group of young Nigerians in search of a better Nigeria, a Nigeria of progressive and savvy minds, the counter discourse celebrates disruption, destruction, and death yielding the negative construction of hoodlums, arsonists, looters, and criminals which the #EndSARS protest was supposed to interrogate and repudiate thus temporarily entrenching the status quo and the mentality of business-as-usual in Nigeria.

### Keyword:

Discursive Constructions; Englishisation; Social Media Discourses; #EndSARS Protest



Cite this as: Egbe, Gabriel B. (2022). Englishization and the Discursive Constructions in Social Media Discourses of the #EndSARS Protest in Nigeria

English Journal Literacy Utama,

<https://doi.org/10.33197/ej lutka. vol7. iss1. 2021. 2655. 4585>

### Article History:

Received: 19 July 2022; Revised: 14 August 2022; Accepted: 3 September 2022

## INTRODUCTION

Anti-establishment protests are not contemporary realities orchestrated by individuals and groups to make statements and voice concerns in the course of human history. Many countries at one time or the other have experienced such mass movements or demonstrations by some individuals or groups. What appears novel however are the means and media of such protests, the intensity and spread of such crises as well as the repercussions on the cohesive ties of societies. Some of the protests may start as a local crisis but through the medium of the social media and English as a medium of communication become not only national crisis but a global concern.

Beginning from the Arab Uprisings of 2010-2012 wherein the social media was used to mobilize, communicate and coordinate the activities of the uprisings, the Arab Spring, as it was christened, became a contagious revolutionary protests sweeping across the Middle East and North Africa from Tunisia with what looked like a normal anti-government protest. What has become the Syrian Civil War which started on March 15, 2011 with major unrest in Damascus

and Aleppo has its roots in the Arab Uprisings. From 2015-2020 the world was confronted by the European Union migrant crisis occasioned by those fleeing war and conflict in the Middle East and Africa, a crisis which bears some of the scars of the Arab Uprisings. In fact, it was images of a three-year old Alan Kurdi who drowned in the Aegean Sea in 2015 and that of Omran Daqneesh soaked in dust and blood in 2016 as conveyed by social media globally that brought to the fore the EU “refugee crisis” (Sajir & Aouragh, 2019). The European Union Referendum of June 2016 with regard to Brexit is another anti-government protest which underscores the power of the social media and the medium of English to raise massive public concerns. All the scenarios sketched above have one thing in common: they all emphasize the role of the internet, mobile phones and social media with English as the chief means of communication. In all of these crises, the focus was on young protesters mobilizing, communicating and coordinating in the streets with smart phones in hand.

This is the backdrop that provides the trigger to understand the #ENDSARS protest in Nigeria which clearly resonates and resurrects the other crises globally. What has come to be known as EndSARS protest started in 2017 when some Nigerian youths opened the hashtag to share their experiences on different forms of violence and harassment by a unit of the Nigerian Police Force (NPF) known as the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS). The choice of some Nigerian youths to use the social media especially Twitter (This social media app was banned in Nigeria in June 2021) to register their voice on the excesses of members of the SARS unit can be seen as drawing impetus from other social media mediated protests mentioned earlier. However, it was not until October 3, 2020, following a widely shared video of police officers suspected to be personnel of the SARS unit killing an unarmed man, snatching his car, and speeding off with the car that many young Nigerians trooped to Twitter to begin a 14-day protest calling for the disbandment of SARS and comprehensive reforms in the NPF (See: Nairametrics #EndSARS: A Day-by-day timeline of the protest that has brought Nigeria to its knees). What started as a peaceful demonstration using online activism and physical peaceful protests in some Nigerian cities especially Lagos and Abuja was hijacked by other elements following the suspected killings of some protesters on October 20, 2020 at the Lekki Tollgate in Lagos, regarded as, the epicenter of the #ENDSARS protests in Nigeria. The burning and looting of properties of some prominent political individuals as well as government buildings were aftermath of what had otherwise been a movement to reform the Nigerian Police Force, ensure freedom of expression, respect for human rights, and a general call for a more responsive government and governance.

From the foregoing, rise in anti-establishment sentiments using the social media as a tool and English as the de facto lingua franca for cross-language communication online is an increasing phenomenon that draws discursive analysis and linguistic investigation. To this end, this paper attempts to address the following questions with regard to the #EndSARS protest in Nigeria:

- i. What discursive representations are encoded in the #ENDSARS protest discourses in terms of the actors, actions, reactions (counter discourses), purposes, and legitimations?
- ii. What discursive strategies and semiotic resources are employed in the #ENDSARS protest as English discourse in the social media?
- iii. How might these discursive representations/constructions be interpreted for the future of Nigeria?

It is estimated that apart from dedicated news sites, social media is the second most important place people discover news online (Ofcom 2017 as cited in Hanska & Bauchowitz, 2017). Estimates show that 4.39 billion of the world population read, write, and communicate online with about 5.1 billion mobile users and 3.484 billion active social media users around the world (Warschauer, Jacob & Maamujav, 2021, p. 479). This is understandable because digital and social media have become part of the daily lives of many people globally. This has interrogated the conventional top-bottom communication approach where the establishment leads the communication to a bottom-up process as most people now use the affordances of digital communication tools to reach skew communication upwards. Digital and social media enable people ‘to spread their ideologies, reach larger audiences, or connect across geopolitical and linguistic boundaries’ (Khosravini & Unger, 2016). Digital and social media provide a democratic platform which facilitates across board communication without the constraints of the traditional gatekeepers of conventional media. Social media has the capacity to inform, frame issues and events, and to shape people’s perception of reality as well as social and political issues. As Tagg (2015) notes, social media users have become content ‘curators’, ‘distributors’ and ‘creators’ as well as what Kreis (2020) calls ‘prosumers’. The social media allow people to communicate and share information across social, geographical and linguistic boundaries using any of the social

networks such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, WhatsApp, Telegram, etc. Thus, it is possible for people to appropriate social media 'for subversive action to challenge power and lead to political change and social resistance' (Neumayer & Vahysson, 2015, p.4). This explains why some governments are apprehensive how social media is used and who and how much freedom of social media use should be allowed. In Nigeria for instance, Twitter was banned in June 2021 by the Nigerian government on the grounds that Twitter was being used for subversive acts by citizens and as at the time of writing, the ban is still in force although efforts are being made due to the pressure of citizens to lift the ban.

One of the affordances of the social media to frame, shape and spread certain viewpoints is the hashtag. The hashtag is often used to make tweets searchable by other users and to establish a community with similar values. Thus, 'hashtags are ideological resources that indicate identity, beliefs, and group membership' (Kreis, 2020, p.171) as well as a process of bonding around evolving topics of interest which Zappavigna (2011, p.800) calls "ambient affiliation". In this study, the analysis of the data collected will reveal how the ENDSARS hashtag frames social, political, economic, historical, and cultural contradictions of the Nigerian society and why the #ENDSARS was used as a metaphor for the disillusionment of Nigerians and the dissatisfaction with, and the failure of the Nigerian corporate system.

From a systemic perspective, language is social practice manifested in social behavior and linguistic activity. Language use is part of that social process (Machin & Mayr, 2012). The internationalization of English also known as Englishisation stands at the centre in the global use of that social practice. Following global use of English, it has become a linguistic capital for success and advancement worldwide. Although Cavanagh (2017) argues from the use of English in higher education instruction, the point that 'internationalisation' has recently become synonymous with 'Englishisation', what remains obvious is the fact that the internationalization of English is 'an integral part of the internationalization process' (p.13). Thus, English is the preferred language of protest because it is the dominant language in many domains such as technology, politics and entertainment and much of digital and social media practices. Across the globe, when the choice of a language is needed to cross geopolitical, cultural and linguistic boundaries, English becomes the preferred language of choice especially in multilingual countries like Nigeria (Egbe, 2014). In fact, as Warschauer, Jacob & Maamujav (2021) observe, "there is no doubt that online Englishes are challenging prior notions of whom the language belongs to, whose voices are heard, and who contributes to knowledge formation and dissemination" ( p. 480). Online Englishes therefore are used for the construction of an imagined community of the oppressed, the brutalized, the downtrodden, and the voiceless. As Tagg (2015) aptly notes, English is a dominant language used in digital media and made more visible and used to communicate online. Kreis (2020) adds that 'social media users may also use English in order to claim group membership' (p.166). For Barton & Lee (2013), Lee & Barton (2009), and Tagg (2015), English is also used as a performative act in digital communication because of its 'ability to bring local issues to national or global attention' (p.195) especially as in the spread of ideologies such as the #ENDSARS in Nigeria.

English is a major resource in the social media. English words are used to construct the discourses such that in the words of Althusser (1971) cited in Chun (2020) as 'weapons, explosives or tranquilizers and poisons. Occasionally the whole class struggle may be summed up in the struggle for one word against another word. Certain words struggle amongst themselves as enemies' (p.200). The potency of the word is poignantly painted in the semiotic resources which this study also explores.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Two theoretical frameworks are adopted for data analysis. These are Critical Discourse Studies (CDS) and Multimodal Discourse Analysis. CDS or Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a recognized multi-faceted approach which focuses on the interplay between discourse, power and society and the construction, representation and reproduction of social structures. Three approaches dominate CDS-oriented analytic models. These are the Fairclough Model (Fairclough, 1985; Wodak & Meyer, 2009), van Dijk's Socio-cognitive Model (van Dijk, 1991, 1993), and the Wodak's Discourse-Historical Approach (Wodak, 1996; Wodak, 2005; Reisigl & Wodak, 2009; Wodak & Meyer, 2009). This study employs aspects of van Dijk's socio-cognitive model and Wodak's discourse-historical approach. In van Dijk's model, focus is on "stereotypes, the reproduction of ethnic prejudice and inequality, power abuse by elites and resistance by dominant group" (Okpeh, 2017, p.208) and this model is deployed in this study because it is a tool that helps in explaining "the role of discourse in (re) production and of dominance' (van Dijk, 1993,

p.249) and how social representations of the “others” are constructed through discourse (Kreis, 2020). Aspects of Wodak’s discourse-historical approach are also important in the analysis because of “its commitment to investigating social inequality as it is expressed, constituted and legitimized via language use” (Okpeh, 2017, p.211). The analysis which follows will identify and describe the social actors along the categories identified by Reisigl & Wodak (2009) below:

- i. Referential/Nomination: How is the other referred to?
- ii. Prediction: What qualities and characteristics are attributed to the other?
- iii. Argumentation: What arguments are used to support this characterization?
- iv. Perspectivization: From whose perspective are such descriptions and arguments expressed?
- v. Intensification/Mitigation: How are these utterances intensified or mitigated?

This study adopts a Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA) approach. Multimodality is “...the use of several semiotic modes in the design of a semiotic product or event, together with the particular way in which these modes are combined” (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2001, p. 20). In other words, multimodality amplifies the verbal-visual interface in the construction and interpretation of text. Diverse modes of text representation and wider communication are supported by digital and multimedia and mobile technologies through the social media in particular. Thus, since the social media are ‘inherently and substantially multimodal’ (KhosraviNik & Unger, 2016, p.211), the adoption of MDA for this study is understood. As Jewit (2014) argues, MDA “provides tools for analyzing and describing the full repertoire of meaning-making resources which people use to communicate” (p.15). It is important to note that since visual images are now an integral part of text production, and since “all discourses are inherently multimodal” (van Leeuwen, 2003), any analysis of social media text which does not pay attention to the multimodality nature of social media messages will be inadequate. This is underscored by the current attention paid to multimodal discourse in both academic research and practical application. This attention provides the justification why in this study, the written text is examined in terms of the image-text relation, font size and type, page-layout, the use of color as well as other the use of other semiotic resources including links used to communicate and share the ENDSARS protests messages on WhatsApp are considered.

### **Data presentation and findings**

The results of this study are presented in the following order: samples and brief description of selected #ENDSARS discourses are presented; some semiotic and multimodal resources are presented next; and selected #ENDSARS counter discourses are presented.

## **METHODS**

### **Data collection procedure**

The #ENDSARS started as a Twitter social media campaign. However, for the purpose of this study, social media chosen for this study are messages shared in some WhatsApp platforms which the researcher is a member. Specifically, four WhatsApp platforms were chosen which include: ESAN Family (This is a social media professional platform of the English Scholars’ Association of Nigeria (ESAN)); LITERACY NIGERIA (This is an academic and professional social media platform for literacy teachers and practitioners in Nigeria; it is a platform operated by the Reading Association of Nigeria, an affiliate of the International Literacy Association.); Basin Satellite Family (This is a social media neighborhood platform for residents of a satellite town in Calabar, Cross River State, Nigeria); and The Feretrum (This is a socio-intellectual social media platform of select academics and professionals).

Four semiotic resources and thirty written texts were selected for analysis using purposeful sampling. This choice of purposeful sampling was informed by the fact that the essence of the study was not to provide representativeness nor generalizations but to describe and understand human experiences (Miyahara, 2020) with reference to the #ENDSARS protest in order to discover what happened, the implication of the events, and the relationship connecting the occurrences from a linguistic perspective.

In the choice of the selected posts or tweets, the selection was purposefully guided in terms of (i) whether the post contains the linguistic features which the researcher is interested in, (ii) whether the post contains the discursive strategies of identity construction and counter-construction discourse and (iii) whether the post contains semiotic and multimodal resources. The four semiotic resources and thirty written texts selected include tweets or posts, some of which have emojis, images, videos, and links which underscore the multimodal nature of language and the affordances of social media which are ‘inherently and substantially multimodal’ (KhosraviNik &

Unger, 2016, p.211). The multimodal nature of language and the social media in particular underscore the fact that multimodality and the organization of the message in the social media are not only meaningful but also that the messages are 'constructed, shaped and influenced by cultural, historical, social, and situational contexts and conventions as well as technological affordances' (p.170-171). This awareness is necessary and justifies the choice of a multimodal discourse analysis frame for this study as well as provide the insight to analyze the messages in the context of a fractured and agitated Nigeria.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### *Sample 1*

Our FIVE (5) DEMANDS #5FOR5

This was a statement issued on the 11th of October, 2020 and signed by an unidentified Nigerian youth which became known as the "The five for five demands". However, this #5FOR5 demand will change a couple of days to a 12-point demand captured in sample 2 below.

### *Sample 2*

#### **NIGERIAN YOUTHS DEMAND 12 POINT AGENDA #ENDSARSNOW**

From an initial five for five demands, the list of demands grew to 12. This was signed by a group that christened itself "Concerned Nigerian Youths". In this list were the following requests: a call on the Nigerian President to address the youths physically not on television, the demand for the President to sign the Electoral Act Amendment Bill into Law within 30 days of the demand and the call on the President to remove all service chiefs and appoint new ones including the removal of the then Inspector General of Police and the then Honorable Minister of Police Affairs as well as the dissolution of the President's Cabinet among other sundry requests covering the slashing of the salaries of members of the national assembly. The 12th point demand was a call for the President to resign if he was unable to accede to all these demands.

From the 12-point demand, it became obvious that the #ENDSARS was growing into a movement larger than the initial hashtag of end SARS. This is what sample 3 reveals.

### *Sample 3*

**There is Expiring date to everything in life, even for decadence.**

**Welcome to END mantra 2020:**

**#END is now**

This demand which has no known author is a litany of hashtag ends which begins with #END.... With over 53 #ENDS, the door was open to add any demand. And the last line of the post clearly shows that while the list is endless, the end of the protest was to seek a new Nigeria as shown below:

**"#END protest is waiting for a New Nigeria, where the son of nobody can become somebody without knowing anybody.**

**We SEEK FOR A NEW NIGERIA!!!"**

### *Sample 4*

#endsars #endbadgovernment #endnigeria.

This post sums up the goal of the #ENDSARS protest and it resonates with the message of Sample 3 above. While some sympathizers may agree with the '#endsars' and '#endbadgovernment', '#endnigeria' has a ring of a total disintegration of Nigeria as a nation; a call a good number of Nigerians may not buy into easily.

### *Sample 5*

**#endSARS PROTEST IS THE FIRST DIGITALLY MANAGED RESISTANCE MOVEMENT IN NIGERIA?**

**Nigerian Govt had better giddy up... It would appear the endSARS protest is being run and directed DIGITALLY by the youths and it will be hard to stop and may become a protest like nothing we have ever seen on EARTH.**

Sample 5 shows that historically, Nigeria has never seen the like of #ENDSARS protest and that the aftermath of the crisis cannot be certain. The events that would follow and the concern expressed by some Nigerians as shown in sample 6 below points to a nation in dire straits.

*Sample 6*

**LEGISLATORS DEMAND JUSTICE FOR KILLINGS DURING #ENDSARS PROTESTS**

This post emanated from four serving Senators of the Federal Republic of Nigeria and seven serving Members of the House of Representatives who declared support for the ENDSARS protest. Samples 7, 8, and 9 below show further support from individuals and groups in Nigeria and abroad and the need for the government to act quickly and avert a brewing disaster.

*Sample 7*

**#EndSARS protests: Youth've lost confidence in government – Ifeanyi Ubah**

*Sample 8*

**#EndSARS Protest: A Demand for Justice and Transformation, By Jesuits**  
**<https://theyesng.com/endsars-protest-ademand-for-justice-and-transformation-by-jesuits/>**

This is one of the posts which comes with a link which shows the multimodal affordances of social media communication.

*Sample 9*

**EndSARS: We'll continue to protest until Buhari meets demands –Nigerians in Turkey**

This post highlights and represents the many voices from outside Nigeria which took up the protest in the social media across the globe.

*Sample 10*

**Arise O compatriots!!**  
**Nigeria is falling down!!**  
**Our youths have woken up.**  
**With tears we say #ENDSARSNOW.**  
**The labour of our protesters**  
**Shall never be in vain.**  
**It's time to fight for our RIGHT!!**  
**We are fighting for FREEDOM!!**  
**#ENDSSARS TOTALLY**

This is creative re-rendition of the Nigerian national anthem. It was a video of an emotionally charged young Nigerian lady dressed in a white blouse top and a green head gear as part of the multimodal affordances of the EndSARS discourses. The rephrasing of the national anthem with words of the #ENDSARS protest constructs a new discourse to redefine the current Nigerian state orchestrated by the youth protest.

*Sample 11*

THE KILLING OF THE #ENDSARS PROTESTERS WAS PREMEDITATED. NOT ONLY WERE THE CCTV REMOVED EARLIER IN THE AFTERNOON GOVERNMENT AMBULANCES CAME WITH THE SECURITY WITH WHICH THEY TOOK THE DEAD BODIES AWAY. THIS IS SAD AND SHAMEFUL. SANWO-OLU KILLED OUR YOUTHS FOR FIGTHING FOR A BETTER NIGERIA

*Sample 12*

**#LekkiMassacre: Nigerian Army Opens Fire On Peaceful #EndSARS Prostesters...**  
**<https://youtu.be/oLYqqSnxcuA>**

Samples 11 and 12 represent the sad moments of the #ENDSARS protests. Note the words of Sample 11 were all written in upper case. The events of the two samples were reported in the social media with gory pictures of the dead. Sample 12 in particular is a YouTube link which was reported as BLACK TUESDAY which was written in deep red against a black background with the Nigerian green-white-green flag to the left splashed in red. See Sample 15 for the images. We shall examine this in more detail when we present some of the semiotic resources.

**Some Semiotic Resources**

*Sample 13*





The image in Sample 13 depicts a young Nigerian whose mouth has been sealed by SARS written in uppercase black boldface with blood dripping from the two eyes stained in blood. From one of the blood-stained eyes, blood cascades down the cheek forming rivulet of blood around the SARS edges that seal the two lips. The young Nigerian has the Nigerian flag as a headgear to symbolize the irony and paradox of the brutalized citizen by state apparatus.

*Sample 14*



Sample 14 is a graphic representation of the Nigerian President who is presented in a whitewashed face with lips cast in red paint suggestive of blood with a smile which reveals a whitish dentition. Why the smile in lips soaked in blood? That seems to suggest that the President enjoys the blood bath in Nigeria.

*Sample 15*



Sample 15 is the image of four Nigerian flags, three of which are splashed in blood while the forth flag has the image of a wailing Nigerian child inserted in the centre of the Nigerian flag. This is part of the multimodal resource. See Sample 12 above.

*Sample 16*



Sample 16 may appear hilarious but it speaks to the fear of an uncertain future and deploys a language (Nigerian Pidgin), Nigeria's lingua franca, which arguably is the language of the masses and the language used to enhance social solidarity and to diffuse the social class barrier in Nigeria. Note the use of the red with the text 'SARS KILL' against the white background. The use of lower and uppercase letters is also a multimodal discursive resource.

#ENDSARS Counter Discourses

*Sample 17*

**EndSARS crusade and ill-prepared youths**

This post represents one of the counter discourses to the effect that Nigerian youths were ill-prepared to embark on the kind of crusade they were engaging in. It resonates the voices in some quarters in Nigeria to the effect that Nigerian youths are not adequately prepared to take up leadership positions in spite of the passage of a bill called 'Not Too Young to Run' by the National Assembly.

*Sample 18*

**Hoodlum Hired to Attack #EndSARS Protesters Reveals Sponsors**

This post indicates that the #ENDSARS protest was facing a threat by counter-forces. Attempts to frame counter discourse is brewing up as Samples 19 and 20 reveal.

*Sample 19*

**#EndSARS protest aimed at destabilizing North – Rep**

This post introduces a regional dimension to what was original seen as a national agitation. This may be as a result of the fact the protest was mainly in Lagos in the South and in Abuja, the Federal Capital Territory. This kind of thinking may have fueled the sentiments expressed in Sample 20 below.

*Sample 20*

**#ENDSARS: We condemn attempts by Southerners, Middle Belt to break the country**



Sample 20 is a counter discourse by a group that identifies itself as the Fulani Nationality Movement, (FUNAM). This Group accepted full responsibility for the attack by fire on protesters in Abuja. The Group went on to issue threats of more violence on the grounds that:

The #ENDSARS protest is a smokescreen to toppled (topple) the government of the day so as to imposed (impose) a government representing the interests of the South and Middle Belt.

We warn that these orchestrated campaigns are designed and conceived by Southern politicians to scuttle a democratically elected government.

Although the Group acknowledges that "President Mohammadu Buhari has not met the expectations of millions of Nigerians including millions of Fulani people", it avers that "there is no justification to violently overthrow this government".

## **Discussion**

From the samples presented, two kinds of narratives can be identified. The dominant discourse which represents the voice of the #ENDSARS protesters and those who support the protest on one hand, then the counter discourse which represents the voice of those opposed to the protest and the social actors who introduced violence to scuttle the initial peaceful protest. The two discourses create a polarity that produces the "we are right actors" and "others are wrong" and the demonization of "Others". It is the same polarity that will create the discourse of "peace" against the discourse of "violence" as well as the narratives of "force" versus "dialogue", and "acceptance" versus "denial".

The discursive strategies deployed in the two dominant constructions can be seen from the perspectives highlighted below.

Referential/Nomination: This refers to the nominals used to refer to self and others. From the samples, the plural first pronoun, 'we' is the most preferred linguistic choice to construct inclusiveness followed by the plural possessive 'our' and 'my' respectively. The choice of 'North', 'South', 'Middle Belt', 'Southern politicians', 'Sanwo-Olu' are all referents used either to construct the core constructs or the counter constructs.

Prediction: This refers to the qualities and characteristics attributed to self or to the other. The semiotic resources provide rich evidence of the qualities and characterization. For instance, Samples 13, 15, and 16 characterized Nigerian youths as people in pains, people wailing, and people who are apprehensive and uncertain about the future as depicted by samples 13, 15 and 16 respectively. Sample 14 demonizes the Nigerian president who is smiling with blood coated/stained lips. From the counter discourses, the following texts reveal how others are characterized. For instance, some elements from Northern Nigeria accuse those from the South and Middle Belt using the protest as a 'smokescreen', and as an 'orchestrated campaign', in 'the interest of the South and Middle Belt', 'to scuttle a democratically elected government', 'to violently overthrow this government', 'to break the country', and a protest aimed, 'at destabilizing North'. While the pro-protest actors regard 'others' as those 'hired to attack #EndSARS protesters'.

With regard to argumentation and perspectivization, not much evidence was seen from the data collected. But what is obvious is that the qualities and characteristics identified in predication draw from who is constructing the discourse. The #ENDSARS protesters for instance perceive the president as 'evil' and 'unresponsive' in spite of his efforts at addressing their demands. For those constructing the counter discourse, the #ENDSARS protesters are pretenders and mischief makers who are hiding under the protest as a ploy to execute their plans aimed at the northern elements who are in power.

Intensification/Mitigation: To demonstrate how utterances are intensified or mitigated, the #ENDSARS protesters used the strategy of exponentially increasing demands. From a five-point demand which the government responded, to a 12-point demand and to 53 demands and which kept increasing to a litany of demands that was not likely to end.

Whatever discursive strategy used by both the pro- and anti- #ENDSARS actors, the #ENDSARS main discourse is a discourse in favor of human rights; an agitation for freedom; freedom from pains, brutality, long suffering and repression; it is a call for more responsive governance at all levels; a call for a change in the socio-economic conditions of majority of the Nigerian people. It is a wakeup call to the realization that the world is experiencing a new dawn and that Nigeria needs to move with the call of globalization and global citizenship expressed in the medium of English.

It is within this context that one interprets the #ENDSARS protest as a genuine agitation to address some of the wrongs of the past. This thinking was acknowledged eloquently in the Presidential Address of October 22, 2020. The Nigerian President attested to the fact that the peaceful protest was hijacked by those with a counter discourse when he declared, "I must warn

those who have hijacked and misdirected the initial, genuine and well - intended protest of some of our youths in parts of the country, against the excesses of some members of the now disbanded Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS)" (para. 2). He added that "The choice to demonstrate peacefully is a fundamental right of citizens as enshrined in Section 40 of our Constitution and other enactments" (para. 4) adding that "As a democratic government, we listened to, and carefully evaluated the five-point demands of the protesters. And, having accepted them, we immediately scrapped SARS, and put measures in place to address the other demands of our youth" (para 5).

After this address including the admission of loss of innocent lives, the country was to witness sporadic spread of acts of violence, looting, arson, vandalism, and destruction of personal and public properties across many cities in Nigeria especially in the South. The breakdown of law and order was such that all the states where incidents were reported had to declare various forms of emergencies including curfews and restrictions of movement. At a point, it appeared as though the country was literally on fire.

The construction of a counter discourse of violence and lawlessness as opposed to the initial discourse of peaceful demonstration created a hiatus which pitched the government with some of the identified leaders and organizers of the protest. The reverberations of the protest have created a waiting time bomb of a possible implosion in the future. This is where there is need to reconstruct the initial #EndSARS protest which was organized, peaceful, and a regenerative movement by a group of young Nigerians in search of a better Nigeria, a Nigeria of progressive and savvy minds which has now been pitched against promoters of a counter discourse which celebrate disruption, destruction, and death. The new construct of youths as ill-prepared, intemperate, hoodlums, arsonists, looters, and criminals create a nervy scenario which interrogates the future of Nigerian youths and the Nigerian state.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study analyzed 20 purposively selected social media messages shared in four WhatsApp platforms on the #ENDSARS protest in Nigeria. The study acknowledged the critical role of the social media and the use of English as the mode and media to construct and share information and ideology across social and linguistic boundaries globally. The study also revealed the linguistic choices used by social actors in the protest to construct and counter construct discourses in the medium of English in addition to certain semiotic resources. It was shown that social actors used referential/nomination, predication, argumentation, perspectivization, and intensification/mitigation as discursive strategies in the #ENDSARS discourses. While this study is a critical and multimodal analysis of the #ENDSARS in Nigeria from an applied linguistic perspective, the social upheavals and tremors of the protest still lie as a waiting volcano in Nigeria if the underlying factors which precipitated the protest are not addressed beyond the linguistics.

## **REFERENCES**

- Cavanagh, C. (2017). The role of English in internationalization and global citizenship identity in South Korean higher education. Ph.D Thesis University of Southampton, Faculty of Humanities.
- Chun, C. W. (2020). Methodological issues in critical discourse studies. In McKinley, J. & Rose, H. (eds.). The Routledge handbook of research methods in applied linguistics. London, New York: Routledge, pp.199-210.
- Egbe, G. B. (2014). Language preference among Nigerian undergraduates and the future of English. *International Journal of English Language & Translation Studies*, 2 (4), 52-65.
- Fairclough, N. (1985). *Critical discourse analysis*. London: Longman.
- Hanska, M. & Bauchowitz, S. (2017). Tweeting for Brexit: How social media influenced the referendum. In: Mair, John, Clark, Tor, Fowler, Neil, Snoddy, Raymond & Tait (eds.) *Brexit, Trump and the Media*. Abrams academic publishing, Bury St Edmunds, UK, pp.31-35.
- Jewit, C. (2014). An introduction to multimodality. In C. Jewit (Ed.) *The Routledge handbook of multimodality analysis* (2nd ed., pp.14-27). New York: Routledge.
- Kress, G. & van Leeuwen, T. (2001). *Multimodal discourse: The modes and media of contemporary communication*. London: Arnold.

- Kreis, R. (2020). The role of language in social media during the European migrant crisis. In McIntosh, K. (ed.) *Applied linguistics and language teaching in the neo-nationalist era*. Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillian, pp. 163-188.
- Miyahara, M. (2020). Sampling: Problematizing the issue. *The Routledge handbook of research methods in applied linguistics*. London, New York: Routledge, pp.52-62.
- Okpeh, P. (2017). Critical discourse analysis: An overview. In Ibileye, G. (ed.) *Discourse analysis and pragmatics: Issues in theory and practice*. Lagos: Malthouse Press Limited, pp.201-214.
- Reisigl, M. & Wodak, R. (2009). The discourse-historical approach. In Wodak, R. and Meyer, M. (eds.) *Methods of critical discourse analysis*. London: Sage, pp.87-121.
- Sajir, Z. & Aouragh, M. (2019). Solidarity, social media and the "Refugee Crisis": Engagement beyond affect. *International Journal of Communication*, 3, 550-577.
- Nairametrics #EndSARS: A day by day timeline of the protest that has brought Nigeria to its knees <https://nairametrics.com/2020/10/25/endsars-protest-a-timeline-of-all-the-major-events-from-october-3rd/>)
- van Dijk, T.A. (1991). *News as discourse*. New Jersey: Erbanum.
- van Dijk, T.A. (1993). *Elite discourse and racism*. London: Sage
- van Leeuwen, T. (2008). *Discourse and practice: New tools for critical discourse analysis*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Warschauer, M., Jacob, S. & Maamujav, U. (2021). Online Englishes. In A. Kirkpatrick (ed.). *Routledge Hanbook of World Englishes*. Second edition. Pp. 479-493. New York: Routledge.
- Wodak, R. (1996). The genesis of racist discourse in Austria since 1989. In Caldas-Coulthard, R. and Coulthard, M. (eds.). *Texts and practices: Readings in critical discourse analysis*. London: Routledge, pp.129-149.
- Wodak, R. & Meyer, M. (2009). Critical discourse analysis: History, agenda, theory and methodology. In Wodak, R. and Meyer, M. (eds.) *Methods of critical discourse analysis*. London: Sage, pp.1-33.