

Person Deixis as Discursive Practice in Nigeria's "June 12" Conflict Rhetoric

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Abstract

Drawing on the "June 12" political crisis in Nigeria, this study analyses the speeches of some political figures in the vanguard of the unprecedented power tussle between the military and civilians in Nigeria's political history between 1993 and 1998. The paper applies the tools of Critical Discourse Analysis to examine person deixis as a discursive strategy appropriated for ideological purposes in the power play. The study reveals that by deploying person deixis in the conflict rhetoric, the political figures seek to reproduce 'dominance' in a bid to control the cognition and actions of their audiences.

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1. Introduction

According to Yule (1985: 99), deictic expressions generally are "[...] bits of language which we can only understand in terms of speaker's intended meaning". To Renkema (2004: 121), "[d]eictic words are words with a reference point that is speaker- or writer-dependent and is determined by the speaker's or writer's position in space and time". Simply put, the reference of such expressions cannot be determined without knowing the extra-linguistic context of the utterance (who uttered them, where and when). They are generally classified into: person deixis referring to interactants in a communicative event, e.g., *I, we, you, he, she, it, they*; place deixis referring to spatial relations in a communicative event, e.g., *here, there, this, that*; and temporal deixis referring to time relations in a communicative event, e.g., *now, then, yesterday, tomorrow*.

For our present purposes, we focus on person deictic elements (realised by using personal pronouns) and their rhetorical uses. It is interesting that the classification of

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person deixis on the basis of number and person – first person *I* (singular) and *we* (plural); the second person *you* (singular) and *you* (plural); and the third person *he*, *she* and *it* (singular) and *they* (plural) – is purely a grammatical issue. For, according to Chen (2009: 27), “[t]his [...] does not mean that you cannot use the plural form of the first person when you alone are speaking. We may flout the regulation of person and number, thus giving rise to signs of rhetorical motivation”.

Kuo (2002: 30) indicates that “studies of political language have explored how politicians from various parts of the world select and distribute pronouns for political and personal purposes”. In political speeches, personal pronouns are often used as a form of address, either to refer to the audience, the speaker or the opponent. Beyond the referential function, it has been found that politicians tend to “manipulate pronouns to develop and indicate their ideological positions on specific issues” (Wilson 1990: 46). Thompson (1990) cited in Hart (2005: 9) sees ideology as a study of “the ways in which meaning is constructed and conveyed by symbolic forms of various kinds”. Thus, discourse is shaped by relations of power and invested with ideologies.

Allen’s (2007) study of pronominal choice in campaign speeches in Australian political discourse investigates the pragmatics of pronominal choice and the way in which politicians construct and convey their identities and those of their parties and opponents within political speeches. Taking six speeches by John Howard and Mark Latham across the course of the 2004 federal election campaign, the researcher examines the ways in which pronominal choice indicates a shifting scope of reference to create pragmatic effects and serve political functions. Allen (2007: 2) observes:

Politicians, when making speeches during an election campaign present positive aspects of themselves and negative aspects of their opponents. One way of doing this is by selectively using personal pronouns. The personal pronouns chosen can be used to refer to themselves and to others, and to evoke multiple identities of themselves and others, presented from a range of perspectives. The pronominal choices politicians make serve persuasive and strategic political functions.

Kuo’s (2002) study on the uses of second-person singular pronouns in Chinese political discourse is based on videotaped data from two televised Taipei mayoral debates that took place in 1998. The study, which examines the communicative functions of the second-person singular pronoun **ni** ‘you’, focuses on how three mayoral candidates’ use of **ni** reflects their attitudes and relations toward the other

participants as well as their perceptions of the interactive goals of the speech activity. The analysis found that the functions of **ni** in the two debates are very different. In the first debate, more than sixty per cent of the occurrences of **ni** are used by the three debaters either to address the audience/voters or to refer to an indefinite person, thereby establishing solidarity with the audience or voters. In contrast, more than eighty per cent of the occurrences of **ni** in the second debate are used when debaters address their opponents directly to challenge or attack them.

With regard to the use of personal pronouns in Nigerian political discourse, Adetunji's (2006) study of the inclusion/exclusion dichotomy reflected in the use of deictic expressions in Nigeria's former President Olusegun Obasanjo's speeches deserves attention. The study examines, among other deictic expressions, the use of person deixis in political discourse, focusing on two thematically and contextually different speeches of President Obasanjo. The first speech, which was delivered at Harvard University, USA in year 2000 entitled "Nigeria, Africa and the World: A New Dawn", and the second speech, which was on the declaration of a state of emergency in Plateau State, Nigeria in May 2004, are analysed. The study finds that **we** as the commonest person deictic in the first speech was deliberately employed by the speaker to convince and manipulate the audience to reason like him and help him in sharing the load of responsibility. In the second speech where there is the preponderance of **I**, the speaker speaks from a personal point of view, trying to verbalise a particular conviction.

From the foregoing, we can establish that in political rhetoric, the relationships among participants in the discourse situation are mediated by personal pronouns. Citing Chilton and Schaffner (1997: 216), Awonuga (2005: 111) explains that such pronouns "delineate a social 'space' in which people and groups have a 'position'". This motivation brings to the fore the focus of this study: the deployment of person deixis as discursive practice in the speeches of some key actors in Nigeria's "June 12" conflict rhetoric.

2. Nigeria's "June 12" Political Crisis

After long years of military rule and the general expression of people's dissatisfaction with military regime and consequent craving for democratic governance, President Ibrahim Babangida, Nigeria's military ruler between 27th August 1985 and 26th August 1993, embarked upon a transition programme that was to usher in a civilian government after his eight-year rule as military leader. The democratisation process culminated in the conduct of general elections in 1993. The presidential election which was the climax was conducted on 12 June 1993 and was widely acclaimed to be Nigeria's freest and fairest election, not only by local assessment but by international standards. To the disappointment of most people, the

election which was presumably won by the business mogul, Chief M. K. O. Abiola of the Social Democratic Party, was annulled by the military government. This action was strongly condemned as a great setback to the institution of democracy in Africa's most populous Black country.

In the heat of the ensuing political imbroglio, President Ibrahim Babangida unconstitutionally instituted an Interim National Government (ING) and handed over the reins of power to Chief Ernest Shonekan. Chief Shonekan had barely spent three months in office when his unconstitutional government was overthrown by General Babangida's close military aide, General Sani Abacha, on 17 November 1993. With the enthronement of another military regime while there were spirited efforts to validate the annulled presidential election, the hope of instituting the much-coveted democratic governance was dashed. Consequently, the presumed winner of the election, Chief M. K. O. Abiola, with the support of pro-democracy groups challenged the military government. Thus, the "June 12" political conflict is a watershed in Nigeria's political history, as civilians had to challenge the military over the acquisition and retention of power. Although June 12 1993 was a day on which a presidential election was actually held in Nigeria, it has since assumed symbolic status as a signifier for the attendant struggle for the entrenchment of democratic governance in Nigeria, hence the tag "June 12".

3. Data for the Study

The data for the study are drawn from the speeches of Ibrahim Babangida, Sani Abacha and M. K. O. Abiola who were the main actors in the "June 12" political conflict. So, the speeches they made reflect the problems attendant to the struggle for power between the military and civilians. The maiden speech of each of the actors in reaction to the "June 12" crisis is considered for this study, viz. Babangida's "Expediency and the Path of Honour" (an address to the nation on the occasion of the annulment of the presidential election of 12th June 1993), Abiola's "A Deliberate Intention to Insult and Ridicule the Entire Nigerian People" (being a text of Abiola's press statement on the annulment of the election) and Abacha's "Child of Necessity" (maiden broadcast to the nation on 18 November 1993). Apart from these maiden speeches, Babangida's "Crisis and the Search for Peace I: Dialogue with State Governors" and "Stepping Aside for Peace and National Concord" (address to the National Assembly on 17th August 1993) are also considered. For M. K. O. Abiola, his speeches "Salute to the People" and his momentous "Epetedo Declaration" are sampled. And finally, we sample Abacha's speech "The Big-Stick Declaration" of Wednesday 17th August 1994 in which he ruled out the possibility of actualising the "June 12" mandate.

The data are sampled from books and magazines. These sources are, no doubt, second-hand material compared with first-hand material of the anthology/anthologies of the speeches of each of the speakers in form of memoir(s). We are constrained to rely on the former sources in view of the transient roles of the speakers in the conflict, especially the untimely deaths of Sani Abacha and M. K. O. Abiola. In Babangida's case, however, anthologies of his speeches exist in volumes edited by Sam Oyovbaire and Tunji Olagunju. The first two volumes entitled *For Their Tomorrow, We Gave Our Today* do not include speeches of the "June 12" crisis. Therefore, we use Volume III entitled *Crisis of Democratisation in Nigeria: Selected Speeches of IBB*.

4. Theoretical Framework

Hoepfner (2006: 4) argues that, "Discursive practices establish, conceal or transform power relations between those involved in a specific discourse". Hence, we apply the tools of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), bearing in mind van Dijk's (2001: 353) position that critical research on discourse needs to satisfy a number of requirements, among which are: (i) rather than merely describe discourse structures, it tries to explain them in terms of properties of social interaction and especially social structure; and (ii) more specifically, CDA focuses on the way discourse structures enact, confirm, legitimate, reproduce, or challenge relations of power and dominance in society.

CDA is an orientation towards language which highlights how language conventions and language practices are invested with power relations and ideological processes which people are often unaware of. Wodak (1999) quoted in Hoepfner (2006: 5) says: "The aim of Critical Discourse Analysis is to unmask ideologically permeated and often obscured structures of power, political control, and dominance, as well as strategies of discriminatory inclusion and exclusion in language in use". Writing on language-power relations, Wodak (2002: 11) posits:

The constant unity of language and other social matters ensures that language is entwined in social power in a number of ways: language indexes power, expresses power, is involved where there is contention over power and where power is challenged.

Since power is a property of relations between social groups, institutions or organisations, social power is defined in terms of the control exercised by one group or organisation (or its members) over the actions and/or the minds of (the members of) another group, thus limiting the freedom of action of the others, or influencing their knowledge, attitudes or ideologies (van Dijk, 1993a). Social power is defined in terms of 'control': groups that have power control not only the action but also the cognition of other groups. The exercise of power usually presupposes mind

management, involving the influence of knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, understanding, ideologies, norms and values. The relevance of the cognitive dimension of control is central to the discussion of CDA. For it is argued that modern and more effective power is mostly cognitive and enacted by persuasion, dissimulation or manipulation, among other strategic ways to change the mind of others in one's own interests (van Dijk, 1993b).

Therefore, when powerful speakers enact or exhibit power based on privileged access to public discourse and communication as evidenced in the case of the "June 12" crisis, there is need to know how the speakers are able to persuade and influence their audiences, by the gentle stroke of subtle linguistic form(s). In view of the fact that "texts are often sites of struggle in that they show traces of differing discourses and ideologies all contending and struggling for dominance" (Wodak, 2002: 10), we attempt to forge meaningful links between linguistic forms, speaker intent and political goals within the context of the social action in which the discourse is embedded. In this regard, we hinge the analysis of the discourse on Locke's (2004: 38) view: "CDA's concern is with the opacity of texts and utterances – the discursive constructions or stories that are embedded in texts as information that is readily available to consciousness. Analysis is a method of dealing with this opacity." Wodak (2002: 10) lends credence to this view when she says: "One of the aims of CDA is to 'demystify' discourses by deciphering ideologies."

5. Discussion

In this section of the study, we focus on four categories of person deixis that the speakers try to manipulate for political effect in their speeches.

5.1 First Person Plural Pronominal Forms

The first category that the speakers tactically deploy in the discourse is that of the first-person plural subject/object, reflexive and possessive pronominals: **we/us**, **ourselves**, and **our** respectively. As forms of address system, such pronominals are deictic devices performing certain pragmatic functions. Brown and Gilman (1972: 252), while pointing out the discursive practice of using such pronominals, write:

The interesting thing about such pronouns is their close association with two dimensions fundamental to the analysis of all social life – the dimensions of power and solidarity. Semantic and stylistic analysis of these forms takes us well into psychology and sociology as well as into linguistics and the study of literature.

It is pertinent to note that the dimensions of power and solidarity hinted at by Brown and Gilman (1972) above are integral to the speakers' use of such pronominals in the discourse. Consider the following excerpts:

- (i) We must not deviate from the issue before us as duly identified. We must not allow ourselves to be misguided into fratricidal conflict [...]. We must eschew undue selfish motives, self-interest and sectional group interests and pursue with vigour national interest which is central to our country's democratic aspirations.

(Babangida, "Crisis and the Search for Peace I", *Selected Speeches of IBB*, Vol. III, 1996: 54)

- (ii) Nigeria is the only country we have. We must solve our problems ourselves. We must lay very solid foundation for the growth of true democracy. We should avoid any ad hoc or temporary solutions. The problems must be addressed firmly, objectively and with all sincerity of purpose.

(Abacha, "Child of Necessity", *Newswatch*, November 29, 1993: 18)

- (iii) People of Nigeria, these are challenging times in the history of our continent, Africa, and we in Nigeria must not allow ourselves to be left behind. Our struggle is the same as that waged by the people of South Africa [...]. We in Nigeria are also fighting to replace MINORITY rule, for we are ruled by only a tiny section of our armed forces. Like the South Africans, we want MAJORITY rule today [...].

(Abiola, "Epetedo Declaration", *Tell*, July 20, 1998: 20)

One striking discursive practice that cuts across the three excerpts cited above is the speakers' use of the plural first-person pronominals (**we, us, our, ourselves**). This creates the impression of a symmetrical relation that holds among a people fighting the same (political) cause, which is presented in such a way that the interest of the country matters most. Meanwhile, each of the speakers has a distinct ideological position for which he seeks the support of Nigerians. Thus, Babangida, Abacha and Abiola adopt the rhetorical strategy of solidarity engineering. The use of the plural first-person pronominals as a solidarity-engineering tactic respectively by Babangida and Abacha in excerpts (i) and (ii) above brings to bear the inspirational function that language serves in the army. Amafah (1990: 75) argues that the inspirational function of language in the army is "desired to boost the morale of soldiers, soldiers mobilised towards the achievement of a goal through an appeal to some corporate ideals (e.g.,

masculinity, *esprit de corps*, national survival, etc". The speakers' transference of military ideals to national politics would give the audience the impression that they are committed to such ideals in the same manner in which they are duty-bound to uphold them in the military circle.

In addition, the coalescence of voices in the plural first-person pronominal forms in relation to encoding of power deserves attention. In excerpts (i), (ii) and (iii) respectively, Babangida, Abacha and Abiola use the modal auxiliary *must* with the plural first-person pronominal form **we** to encode power and control. Each of them presents his speech in such a way that he coalesces the voice of self, that is, the speaker's voice, with the voice of the audience (society), thereby giving the impression that he has the backing of the Nigerian people to speak on their behalf. This rhetorical style dates back to the ancient Roman Empire when the emperor's consistent pronoun style gave away his class status and political views. Writing on the emperor's use of the plural first person pronominal forms, Brown and Gilman (1972: 254) explain:

An emperor [...] is the summation of his people and can speak as their representative. Royal persons sometimes say 'we' when an ordinary man would say 'I' [...]. The usage need not have been mediated by a prosaic association with actual plurality, for plurality is a very old and ubiquitous metaphor for power.

This viewpoint corroborates that of Arendt (1970: 44) who writes:

Power corresponds to the human ability not just to act but to act in concert. Power is never the property of an individual; it belongs to a group and remains in existence only so long as the group keeps together. When we say of somebody that he is 'in power' we actually refer to his being empowered by a certain number of people to act in their name.

From the views expressed above by Brown and Gilman (1972) and Arendt (1970), there appears to be an intrinsic link between the encoding of power and the expression of solidarity in the speakers' use of the plural first-person pronominals, geared towards the attainment of collective goals. To this end, Habermas (1977: 4) argues:

The fundamental phenomenon of power is not the instrumentalisation of 'another's' will, but the formation of a 'common' will in a communication directed to reaching agreement [...]. 'Power' would then mean the consent of the governed that is mobilised for collective goals, that is, their readiness to support the political leadership [...].

It is imperative to note that there are some limitations to Habermas' view here. First, although the audiences (or the people) are given the impression of being mobilised towards the attainment of collective goals, we should not gloss over the possibility of the speakers' attempt to satisfy their own (selfish) ends/personal goals which would run counter to the people's will. This is based on the fact that political intentions are often inscrutable. Second, pronominal forms have a way of alienating and assimilating the other. For instance, Babangida's and Abacha's use of the plural first person pronominal forms as "inclusive devices", Oha (1997) argues, may be face-threatening to those groups who might not want to identify with Babangida and Abacha, on the one hand, and their respective regimes and political programmes, on the other, especially the Yoruba ethnic group that appeared to be most aggrieved on account of the annulment of the June 12, 1993 presidential election. Also, Abiola's coalescence of the voice of self with the voice of the people, using the plural first person pronominals, could threaten the face of the ethnic groups that might not want to identify with the "June 12" cause. To this end, Oha (1997: 46-47) argues:

To include one who does not want to be included, or to attribute responsibility to one who does not identify with a cause seems to agree with the design of military dictatorship. The plural first person pronominals are, therefore, tactical means of assimilating the other and making a single voice (of the dictatorship) appear to be plural.

Although it is only Babangida and Abacha that are military, we may not be able to exonerate Abiola (a civilian) from the use of this strategy because he too could have imbibed the military dictatorial tendency. Generally speaking, however, the speakers' dictatorial tendency seems to be predicated on the monologic nature of the speeches in which the speakers' perspectives and convictions are forcefully presented to their respective audiences. Thus, the "one-sidedness of the flow of information seems to satisfy power demands" (Oha, 1994: 117); for political speakers' privileged access to and control of public discourse is a major resource for political manipulation.

At this juncture, it is pertinent that we pay attention to Babangida's recourse to the use of 'exclusive we' in the face of widespread condemnation of the annulment of the "June 12" election. He explains:

- (iv) We have had to turn around at the presidential election because we had to be wiser for the nation than for ourselves and the presidential candidates. There is no denying the fact that the nation matters more than individual ambitions and friendship.

("Crisis and the Search for Peace I", *Selected Speeches of IBB Vol. III*, 1996: 140-141.)

The use of “we” in this excerpt gives the impression that the cancellation of the “June 12” presidential election was the decision of a group and not that of an individual. This strategy of complete self-effacement and attempt to pass the buck to a collective group is a popular rhetorical strategy in political discourses, as it shields the leader from direct attacks on his/her person. Babangida’s appeal to group responsibility here is questionable if we recall that the orientation of the military is the supremacy of the view of the most senior officer. With regard to the decision to annul the election, one cannot be so sure that just a single person (the leader of the military government) did not take the decision, only for the ruling body (National Defence and Security Council) to rubberstamp it. After all, in military circles, the word of the superior officer is law; the subordinates have to “obey the last order”, as popularly expressed in military parlance.

We also find out that while Babangida and Abacha were being criticised for having taken actions that threatened the entrenchment of democracy in Nigeria, they also tried to show that they had a stake in the development of the country like any other Nigerian. So, in the conflict rhetoric, they constantly refer to Nigeria as “our country” and “our fatherland”, and the people, “our people” and the ethnic groups, “our various ethnic groups”. By using the determiner **our**, each of them tries to whip up patriotic sentiments to give the impression that they too have the interests of the country and the people at heart. Judging them, therefore, as having taken certain actions that would adversely affect the interests of their country and the people, for whom they supposedly have strong emotional attachments, is tantamount to hurting their sense of patriotism.

But we have to note that since these speakers control the discourse, such a linguistic form readily provides an escapist route for them to explain away their actions as having been taken in “national interests”. In fact, it is ritualistic in political discourses that no matter how desperately a leader is pursuing a self or group interest, the moment they use **our** to show a collective sense of belonging, it takes the discerning audience to figure out traces of deceit in such a linguistic manipulation. In this sense, meaning becomes slippery, as it is difficult to differentiate personal interest or group interest from the much-touted “national interests”.

5.2 First Person Singular Pronominal Forms

Besides the speakers’ use of the plural first person pronominal forms, the transmutation of identity signalled in the discourse through their shift from plural first-person pronominals to singular first-person pronominals is noteworthy. In this wise, Brown and Gilman (1972: 253) contend that “a man may vary his pronoun style from time to time so as to express transient moods and attitudes”. Consider the following:

(v) Let me confess that the many and varied attacks hurt me personally and expectedly my family [...]. My worry in the past few weeks has been that the attacks directed at my person and the innocent members of my family may deter other patriots who genuinely wish to offer themselves for service to the father land to **parry** [sic] a while.

(Babangida, “Stepping Aside for Peace and National Concord”
Selected Speeches of IBB, Vol. III, 1996: 166)

In excerpt (v) above, Babangida uses the first person singular pronominals object/possessive (**me/my**) to narrow down identity. This expresses a momentary shift of mood which reflects a particular attitude or emotion, giving the impression that Babangida wants to personalise the problem occasioned by the annulment of the “June 12” election. This is a characteristic disposition he assumes in the conflict rhetoric in an attempt to possibly detract from the magnitude and national dimension of the crisis. Elsewhere, he laments:

(vi) The implication of the conception of politics in the first-person singular, and the problem it has created for current efforts at evolving an acceptable solution to the political impasse is to make me, **General Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida**, the issue and hence the focus of all possible ways to the resolution of present impasse. [emphasis in original]
 (“Stepping Aside for Peace and National Concord”, *Selected Speeches of IBB* Vol. III, 1996: 165)

Here, Babangida still emphasises the personalisation of the problem but he seems to play to the gallery, trying to impress the audience with the “game” he plays in, and with, language with his linguistic analysis of pronominal forms, particularly his identification of the first person singular, at the expense of addressing issues or facing facts. This hints at the fact that in some situations political speeches are not necessarily meant to inform or reveal to the audience hidden facts but to gloss over the issue at stake, and project the image of the speaker as an intellectual. In this instance, although we may not doubt Babangida’s knowledge of and competence in linguistic analysis, the trappings of the erudition of (ghost) speech writers specially trained in such an art cannot be ruled out.

As part of the use of the first person singular pronominals to personalise the problem of the annulment of the election, Babangida frequently uses the pronoun **I** with such verbs as **believe**, **wish** and **feel** in the discourse. According to Quirk *et al.* (1985: 202), such stative verbs ‘denote “private” states of mind which can only be subjectively verified’. It is noteworthy that Babangida ruled for eight years and experimented with varied transition programmes culminating in the conduct of “June 12” presidential election. Thus, Nigerians would have appreciated a successful

transition to a civilian government, thereby showing that Babangida's expressions of wishes, feelings and beliefs were, in the nick of time, translated to tangible and realistic political results beneficial to the polity and the people. Interestingly, barely two months to his avowed date of leaving office in the wake of the cancellation of the June 12 presidential election, he still committed himself:

(vii) In annulling the presidential election, this administration was keenly aware of its promise in November, 1992 that it would disengage and institute a return to democracy on 27 August, 1993. We are determined to keep that promise. Since this transition and any transition must have an end, I believe that our transition programme should and must come to an end, honestly and honourably.

(“Expediency and the Path of Honour”, *Selected Speeches of IBB* Vol. III, 1996: 134)

Elsewhere in the conflict rhetoric he boasts:

(viii) I believe that at the exit of this administration from power, we would leave behind for posterity a country with an economy the structures of which have been turned around for good.

(“Expediency and the Path of Honour”, *Selected Speeches of IBB* Vol. III, 1996: 133)

While Babangida is pontificating here about the economic base of the country, the audience would rather be interested in the political structure he was leaving behind that would sustain and consolidate the economic base. This is because no matter how economically viable the country was at the point of his leaving office, the political brouhaha that he left behind would mess it up in no time. Therefore, his expressions of personal views and opinions appear to be mere rantings.

The construction of identity in Babangida's use of the first person singular pronoun contrasts with that of Abiola. While Babangida tries to deflect individual responsibility in the annulment of the election and seeks complete self-effacement, Abiola tries to project his own identity as a victim of injustice in order to draw people's sympathy:

(ix) As I speak today, I am by the infinite grace of God, and the wishes of the people of this country, the President-elect of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. I am the custodian of a sacred mandate, freely given, which I cannot surrender unless the people so demand [...].

(Abiola, “A Deliberate Intention to Insult and Ridicule the Entire Nigerian People”, cf. Olanrewaju, 1999: 72)

Here, Abiola's predilection for the first person singular pronominal is expected, as he would like to parade himself as the proud (presumed) winner of the election which was cancelled by the military government. By assuming this posture, he brings to the fore his social role in the vanguard of the crusade against the annulment of the election. In spite of his preference for this pronominal form which is ego-boosting, his counting on the wishes, cooperation and support of the people to claim the mandate is noteworthy. For instance, he resolves not to betray the trust reposed in him by the Nigerian people. Thus, he gives the impression that he is not a 'lone-ranger' in the struggle. Elsewhere, he assures the people:

- (x) I am going to struggle with you for the materialisation of the mandate of 12 June for the benefit of our nation and its people.
("Salute to the People" *African Concord*, October 1993: 64)

Hence, the equation of **I** and **you** in the excerpt above to fabricate **we** is suggestive of collective responsibility. As a victim of perceived injustice that needs the support of the people, Abiola just has to say this because people would like to hear such. Saying what will interest the people is a strategy of the political speaker who would construct a positive image of himself/herself to help to actualise his/her goals.

For Sani Abacha, his use of the first person singular pronoun **I** in his maiden speech as Head of State deserves attention. For he constructs for himself the image of a concerned Nigerian citizen who would respond to the challenge of serving the country in the face of very serious threats to the polity.

- (xi) SEQUEL [sic] TO THE RESIGNATION OF THE FORMER Head of the Interim National Government and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces, Ernest Shonekan, and my subsequent appointment as Head of State and Commander-in-Chief, I have had extensive consultations within the Armed Forces hierarchy and other well-meaning Nigerians in a bid to find solutions to the various political, economic and social problems which have engulfed our beloved country and which have made life most difficult to the ordinary citizen of this nation.
(Abacha, "Child of Necessity", *Newswatch*, November 29, 1993: 18)

His messianic posture evidenced in the use of the first person pronominals **I** and **my** in this extract is to give the audience the impression that his taking over the reins of power as Head of State from the Chairman of the Interim National Government, Chief Ernest Shonekan, was not to serve any self interest. But we know, considering the slippery nature of political discourse that it is difficult to separate personal from national interests.

5.3 Second Person Pronominal Element

At this point, it is germane that we pay attention to the speakers' deployment of the second person pronominal **you** in such expressions as: "as you all know"; "you are all (living) witnesses"; "you may wish to recall"; "as you are aware"; "as you may be aware"; "permit me to remind you"; "as you are all now aware"; and "you will recall that [...]" in the conflict rhetoric. All the three speakers have a predilection for the use of this pronominal form couched in the above expressions. To all appearances, its use sheds light on what is known in discourse analysis as the notion of "shared knowledge" or "assumed common ground" or "presupposition" "defined in terms of assumptions the speaker makes about what the hearer is likely to accept without challenge" (Givon 1979a: 50; quoted in Brown & Yule 1983: 29). Hence, the speakers tend to justify whatever claims they make with regard to the conflict, as they presuppose that the audience appreciate and share such claims.

Pragmatically, the use of **you** in such expressions underlines the crucial role discourse plays in eliciting the consent of others. Such a manipulation fits into Nader's (1995) notion of "coerced harmony", explained in terms of "the ways in which the powerful force those with less power to agree to a consensus, or the appearance of it, although it may not be in the latter's interests" (Lakoff 2001: 313). Allen (2007: 4) wraps up the rhetorical function of **you** in political discourse, saying: "For politicians, one advantage of presenting their propositions as common sense is that it makes it more difficult to question what they are saying." Thus, by appropriating the pronoun **you** in the conflict rhetoric, Babangida, Abacha and Abiola subject their audiences to divergent ideological positions for which the people have to make either an informed or an uninformed choice depending on their ideological bent or their discerning spirit. Abusing the sensibilities of the people by positioning the discourse in such a way that the people are torn between opposing forces and "voices" scrambling for their minds resonates with the role of discourse in the (re)production of "dominance" defined by van Dijk (1993a: 84) thus: "*Dominance* is here understood as a form of social power abuse, that, as a legally or morally illegitimate exercise of control over others in one's own interests, often resulting in social inequality."

5.4 Third Person Plural Pronominal Form

The pronominal form **they** also serves some rhetorical functions in the discourse of the "June 12" crisis, as each of the speakers tries to portray a group of people (the perceived opposition) in a particular light in order to further reinforce their messages to the audiences. Let us consider the following excerpts:

- (xii) In recent times, our country has been inundated by the sporadic rise of unregistered groups seeking to play the role of political associations. Such groups have wantonly and recklessly paraded themselves as

advocates of democracy. They create the erroneous impression of commanding national spread whereas they are local, sectional, economically motivated and ethnic in their composition and orientation.

(Abacha: "The Big-Stick Declaration", *Tell* August 29, 1994: 8)

We find out in the excerpt above that the major political propaganda technique employed by Abacha to run down the opposition groups is "name-calling", as those who are agitating for the de-annulment of the June 12 election are portrayed in a negative light. This is a rhetorical weapon of distancing that group from his audience while trying to endear himself to them. In particular, there is an allegation levelled against the opposition which touches on a very crucial but delicate issue which has become ritualistic in the political discourse of post-colonial Nigeria. Trying to engineer ethnocentric emotion against those calling for the de-annulment of the election is rhetorically compelling.

It is interesting to note that his recourse to the issue of ethnicity in a pluri-ethnic society such as Nigeria could be a potent scoring point for the speaker who wishes to alienate the oppositions' goals from the ever ethnic-conscious audience. However, as Oha (1997) observes, political public speaking involves subjecting the audiences to the "weight" of words to influence their views and attitudes on certain political issues without the speakers' bothering about how such groups weigh or carry the weight of their words. Thus, ethnicity has become a manipulative weapon of political deceit in the hands of political speakers to score cheap political goals in a pluri-ethnic society such as Nigeria. So, in such a complex society, Oha (1997: 45-46) argues that "if there is anything the ethnic groups in Nigeria, particularly the "minorities" would like to hear said, it is that they must be protected within the nation, and that their rights as co-equals with other ethnic groups must not be denied."

In a similar vein, Babangida vilified the groups agitating for the de-annulment of the June 12 election:

(xiii) We have in the past few weeks witnessed the highly provocative, divisive and potentially destabilising designs of the so-called custodians of democracy, good governance and human rights associations or groups [...] they push for their private, parochial and self-serving agendas on our urban streets and pages of newspapers taking with them the innocent and the gullible. They threaten fire and brimstone. They tread the path of confrontation and sometimes treason. They are a small group, but they make the most noise like the proverbial empty barrel. Their patriotism is suspect especially in their reliance on external base for power.

("Stepping Aside for Peace and National Concord", *Selected Speeches of IBB* Vol. III, 1996: 168)

Babangida's reference to the numerical strength of the opposition smacks of the diminutive portrayal of the "enemy" in political rhetoric, where the impression is always given to the audience that the opposition is a negligible few whose views will invariably be unpopular. Besides, it is an attempt to conjure up the popular 'us-them' dichotomy in political discourses where the speaker attempts to draw a battle line between his or her own group and that of the opposition. Usually, the "**they**" group is negatively labelled so that the audience could pitch their tent with the speaker. But we must note here that such adjectives as "private", "parochial", and "self-serving" used by Babangida to vilify the opposition have meanings in the construction of reality favourable only to the speaker's dominant group. To the other group (the opposition) and their apologists, their agendas could be public, broad-based and selfless.

Abiola's use of **they** is interesting in two dimensions. First, he uses the pronoun to refer to the military, as he also engages in the political ritual of vilification of the opposition:

(xiv) We are tired of the military's repetitive tendency to experiment with our economy. Today, they say: "No controls". Tomorrow, they say: "Full controls". The day after, they say: "Fine tuning". The next day, they say: "Devaluation". A few days later, they say: "Revalue the same naira upwards again" [...]. All we can see are the consequences of this permanent game of military "about-turns": high inflation; a huge budget deficit; enormous foreign debt; repayment burden; dying industries; high unemployment and a demoralised populace.

(“Epetedo Declaration”, *Tell*, July 20, 1998, p. 20)

Abiola's portrayal of military's role in governance as 'military about-turns' deserves analysis. In the military parlance, "about-turn" is a command to soldiers on parade to turn round and face the opposite direction. This is the literal sense of the use of the lexical item. However, in the conflict rhetoric, 'about-turn' is used as a parody which assumes a metaphorical significance. In this regard, military "about-turns" refer to the inconsistencies in the military's system of governance. This is an attempt to picture the military as not being able to make steady progress in governance, as they had to turn around (as they do on the parade ground) to take steps in the opposite direction.

We have to comment here that Abiola's picture of the military appears to be an oversimplification of the role of the military in governance. A good number of soldiers are intellectuals and they know a lot about governance, their incursion into politics and the mode of acquiring power notwithstanding. Are civilians necessarily experts or saints in politics? Have civilians not functioned as military apologists,

sycophants and accomplices? These are issues that might never have crossed Abiola's mind or which he deliberately glosses over for ideological reasons.

The other interesting dimension in which Abiola uses the pronoun **they** is with regard to the Nigerian people who voted for him in the "June 12" presidential election:

(xv) The people of Nigeria have spoken. They have loudly and firmly proclaimed their preference for democracy. They have chosen me as their president for the next four years. They have determined that 27 August, 1993, shall be the terminal date of military dictatorship in Nigeria. On that date, the people of Nigeria, through their democratic decision of 12 June 1993, expect me to assume the reins of government. I fully intend to keep that date with history.

("A Deliberate Intention to Insult and Ridicule the Entire Nigerian People" cf. Olanrewaju, 1999: 72)

It is common knowledge that Nigerians voted across regional, religious and ethnic divides in the election that Abiola presumably won. However, the moment it was annulled, the struggle for its validation became an ethnic issue championed by the Yoruba, although there were some men and women from other ethnic groups that sympathised with the perceived "Yoruba agenda". Apparently, by using the pronoun **they** in the extract above to refer to all Nigerians across the ethnic divide, as opposed to only the sectional group that was then still supporting him after the elections had been cancelled, Abiola gives the impression that he still had the full support of people nationwide. But the truth of the matter is that it was only the Yoruba ethnic group that championed the cause to have their own "son" as the president of the country for the very first time.

6. Conclusion

This study has attempted an analysis of the discursive practice of appropriating person deixis for political effect in the conflict rhetoric of Nigeria's "June 12" crisis. Applying a critical discourse analytical approach, it tries to unmask varied political goals which the speakers strive to achieve with their control of the discourse, and consequent management of the minds of the audiences, in the manner that would serve the interest of each of them in the conflict situation. An insight is provided in this paper into how the conflict rhetoric is positioned and how such positioning serves the speakers' interests and undermines those of their hearers. The study lends credence to McGregor's viewpoint that "[o]ur words are politicised, even if we are not aware of it, because they carry the power that reflects the interests of those who speak" (McGregor 2003: 2).

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