



Contempt Co-Construction in Selected Facebook Respondents to Covid-19 Victims In Nigeria

**OGUNDELE,
Toyin Ph.D.**

Department of Languages (English Unit)
Nigerian Army University,
Biu, Borno State.

toyinogundele86
@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Contempt means to despise, deride, lookdown on, indicating the feelings that someone or something is worthless or beneath consideration. In this paper, therefore, contempt co-construction presupposes any instance of language use that are jointly negotiated by Nigerian Facebook users to vitiate, deride, despise, or to express disgust about the conducts and actions of Nigeria Elitist class, especially political office holders, perceived as being selfish and truly undemocratic. Undoubtedly, a lot of works on Covid-19 have been done since its outbreak in Nigeria. These cover the works done by Chinenyenwa, Adeleye and Tauseef's (2020) on COVID-19 and Nigeria: putting the realities in context; Whenayon, Olumuyiwa and Rohina's (2020) COVID-19 Outbreak Situation in Nigeria and the Need for Effective Engagement of Community Health Workers for Epidemic Response; Amzat, et al., (2020) early socio-medical response to COVID-19 in Nigeria in the first 100 days after the index case; Kalu's (2020) study that examines COVID-19 in Nigeria: a disease of hunger, and a host of others. However, Covid-19 works that directly centre on contempt and how it is constructed among Facebook respondents to Covid-19 victims are scarce, if there is any at all. Therefore, this work examines the contempt as co-constructed among Facebook respondents to Covid-19 victims in Nigeria. This is with a view to identifying and discussing shared issues for which the victims are held in contempt and the linguistic resources that indexed them. Data were collected through purposive

sampling of some Facebook users during the outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic in Nigeria, covering March-July, 2020 through the Android phone; while the data were subjected to content analysis. Six national issues for which the Nigerian politicians are held in contempt have been identified in the discourse. They are election, hunger, tribute/death, social infrastructure, economy and security. The co-constructed contempt to Covid-19 victims in Nigeria by Facebook users at the outbreak of the pandemic, through lexical and grammatical resources are influenced by the shared national issues in the discourse. Thus, there is a close link between the co-constructed contempt and the linguistic resources that indexed them, the understanding of which provide access to information about the feelings of Nigerians towards the neglect of their leaders in providing them social services for which they were elected into the office.

Keywords: Contempt, Co-construction, Covid-19 Victims, Nigeria, Facebook

Introduction

Contempt means to despise, deride, lookdown on, indicating the feelings that someone or something is worthless or beneath consideration. In this paper, therefore, contempt co-construction presupposes any instance of language use that are jointly negotiated by Nigerian Facebook users to vitiate, deride, despise, or to express disgust about the conducts and actions of Nigeria Elitist (political office holders) as regards the way they are handling national issues. However, this uncomplimentary trait is hardly talked about brazenly on social media until the outbreak of Corona Virus otherwise known as COVID-19 in Nigeria.

COVID-19, as we all know is a deadly disease that has been ravaging the whole world since the tail end of 2019 (Kalu, 2020), and spread to Nigeria in March, 2020. Since its outbreak, Nigerians have been contending with a lot of hardship, covering election rigging, illness, security challenges, infrastructural decadence, poverty among others. All these triggered the reaction of some Nigerians on Facebook, where they use language to express their feelings, regarding their new life experience at the outbreak of Corona Virus in Nigeria.

Undoubtedly, a lot of works on Covid-19 have been done since its outbreak in Nigeria. These cover the works done by Chinenyenwa, Adeleye and Tauseef's (2020) work on COVID-19 and Nigeria: putting the realities in context; Whenayon, Olumuyiwa and Rohina's (2020) COVID-19 Outbreak Situation in Nigeria and the Need for Effective Engagement of Community Health Workers for Epidemic Response; Amzat, et al 's (2020) early socio-medical response to COVID-19 in Nigeria in the first 100 days after the index case; Kalu's (2020) study that examines COVID-19 in Nigeria: a disease of hunger, and a host of others. However, Covid-19 works that directly centre on contempt and

how it is constructed among Facebook respondents to Covid-19 victims are scarce, if there is any at all. Therefore, this work examines the contempt as co-constructed among Facebook respondents to Covid-19 Victims in Nigeria. This is with a view to identifying and discussing shared issues for which the victims are held in contempt and the linguistic resources that indexed them.

The study adopted Locher and Watts (2005, 2008) Relational work theory as theoretical framework, as the theory profoundly examines the concept of impoliteness which is very central to the analysis of the data used for this study.

Data were collected through purposive sampling of some Facebook users during the outbreak of Covid-19 in Nigeria; and were subjected to content analysis. The co-constructed contempt among the Facebook respondents at Covid-19 victims in Nigeria is influenced by the context of the discourse. Thus, there is a close link between the contempt co-constructed and the linguistic resources marking them, the understanding of which facilitates the understanding of some topical issues in Nigeria.

Objectives

The objective of this study is to examine the contempt that are co-constructed by Facebook respondents at Covid-19 victims in Nigeria. This is with a view to:

- a. identifying and discussing shared issues for which the victims are held in contempt.
- b. discussing the linguistic resources that project the co-constructed contempt.

Methodology

The data utilized for this study consist of purposively sampled written comments of Facebook respondents to Covid-19 victims in Nigeria. These comments which were extracted from Facebook platform were obtained through Android Phone. We disposed favourably to this platform as it is more popular and reliable compared with the rest of the social media. The data which were collected between March and April 2020, during the lockdown, arising from coronavirus ravaging the world were written down for the convenience of analysis. However, twenty four out of thirty comments were utilized for this paper. This is because, besides our limited space in a paper of this kind, they are the ones that are found to be mostly promising for the analysis. The comments that merited our selection were then utilized as the data for this study. Shared issues for which Covid-19 victims are held in contempt were noted and used for the analysis. Also noted and utilised for the analysis are the linguistic forms that project the co-constructed contempt.

Literature Review

Chinenyenwa, Adeleye and Tauseef's (2020) work centre on COVID-19 and

Nigeria: putting the realities in context. The paper attempts an overview of COVID-19 in the Nigerian setting, observing that Nigeria is just experiencing the direct effects of this pandemic, having recorded her index case in February 2020, with an increasing number of cases every day and a current case fatality ratio of 0.03 as at 13 April 2020. According to this study, although the recorded cases may seem low, it has been forecast that Africa will have some of the worst effects of this disease by the end of the pandemic, relying on the African countries fragile health systems and this remains a source of concern, especially in the event of increased outbreaks. The paper concludes that there is an urgent need to put into perspective these realities peculiar to Africa including Nigeria and explore available collective measures and interventions to address the COVID-19 pandemic. As can be seen this study is not targeted at the victims of Covid-19 in Nigeria, which make it different from our study.

Whenayon, Olumuyiwa and Rohina (2020) examine COVID-19 Outbreak Situation in Nigeria and the Need for Effective Engagement of Community Health Workers for Epidemic Response. The study aims at describing the current situation of the outbreak in Nigeria and argues the need for effective engagement of community health workers for an appropriate response to COVID-19. Based on some articles reviewed, the findings revealed possible evidence of ongoing and increasing community transmission of COVID-19 infections, inadequate testing capacity and overwhelming of health resources. The study also reveals infection of several health workers in the face of existing critical skilled health workforce shortage. With surging of new COVID-19 cases and a huge number of contacts to be traced, the study recommends that the government needs to promptly bring community health workers on board, deploy rapid epidemic intelligence and scale up the use of mobile Apps for contact tracing. The study observes that, this will result in an effective and coordinated response to the ongoing outbreak, sustain routine health services especially at the community level, reduce morbidity and mortality, and preserve health indices gains already made in the health system. As is the case in the preceding study, Whenayon, Olumuyiwa and Rohina (2020) differ from our study as it is not premised on contempt co-construction of Covid-19 victims in Nigeria.

Amzat, et al (2020) assess the early socio-medical response to COVID-19 in Nigeria in the first 100 days after the index case. The paper employs analytical methods and collates data from various media reports and official sources. The findings show that (1) the incidence of COVID-19 grew steadily in Nigeria, moving from an imported case and elitist pattern to community transmission, with the case fatality standing at 2.8% (2) the country recorded an upsurge (52% of total cases) in the transmission of COVID-19 during the short period the lockdown was relaxed. The study suggests a concise response framework to highlight some specific multisectoral responses to the pandemic: a combination of social and medical responses to a large extent will help Nigeria curtail the

spread of the virus. The paper concludes that the potential of overwhelming COVID-19 is still imminent in Nigeria as the country is attempting to hurriedly open the economy, which could sacrifice public health gains for temporary economic gains. Still, this study is not premised on contempt co-construction of Covid-19 victims in Nigeria, as is the case in this study.

Kalu (2020) examines COVID-19 in Nigeria: a disease of hunger. He gives an overview of Nigeria in terms of a population of over 200 million people, making it one of the most populous black nations worldwide. Kalu says that, as with the rest of the world, Nigeria is currently dealing with the coronavirus disease (COVID-19), which made the government to lock the entire country. Kalu (2020) informs that shortly after the order was announced by the President, Muhammadu Buhari, there was uproar among the citizens due to a myriad of concerns among which is the poverty, as over 40% of its citizens are living below the poverty line. Therefore, a large proportion of the population, especially in the commercial hub of Lagos, lives on daily income with no savings to act as a financial buffer during the lockdown. The study observes that, the prospect of staying at home could, therefore, lead to another problem: hunger. Like the studies reviewed before this one, Kalu (2020) is a total departure from this study, as the focus is not on contempt co-construction of Covid-19 victims in Nigeria.

Yu-Jiun, Ching-Sung, & Yi-Chi. (2020) take an overview of the outbreak of COVID-19 which broke out in late December 2019 from Wuhan, China, and resulted in a formidable outbreak in many cities in China and expanded globally, including Thailand, Republic of Korea, Japan, United States, Philippines, Viet Nam, and Nigeria. The paper observes that, currently, there is no definite treatment for COVID-19 although some drugs are under investigation. The paper recommends that physicians should be aware of the travel or contact history of the patient with compatible symptoms, to promptly identify patients and prevent further spreading. This study too is not based on contempt co-construction to Covid-19 victims.

As we can see from the reviewed carried out that the studies mentioned above revolve around Covid-19 related issues. However, none of them is able to address the co-constructed contempt directed at the victims of Covid-19, especially in Nigeria. This, thus provides a yawning gap to be filled. This study, therefore, examines the contempt co-construction among Facebook respondents to Covid-19 victims in Nigeria.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical Framework deployed to the analysis in this study is Locher and Watts's (2005) Relational Theory. This theory redresses the inadequacies in Brown and Levinson's facework theory that deals only with the mitigation of face-threatening acts and not a theory of politeness. Therefore, the theory fails to account for those situations in which face-threat mitigation is not a

priority, e.g., aggressive, abusive or rude behaviour as is the case in the present study where the Facebook respondents are brazenly demonstrating their displeasure, anger, protest at their leaders for failing to improve their lives contrary to their (leaders) promises during electioneering campaign.

Consequently, Watts (1992, 2003), Locher (2004) propose the notion of relational work as a process of defining relationships in interaction. Locher and Watts (2005) posit that the term relational work is preferred to facework because it foregrounds the fact that discourse participants “invest work” in interaction. They also argue that the term highlights the relations that interlocutors share with each other, and this is not limited to politeness, but covers the entire spectrum of interpersonal communication. Relational work captures the role and essence of context in the negotiation of (im) politeness rather than the inherent investiture of (im) politeness on some linguistic items or expressions, unlike the narrow perspective of Brown and Levinson’s (1978/1987) facework. It relates to the interpersonal level of communication rather than the ideational level of communication (Locher 2006). This implies that it deals with language not only as a means of communication, but also as an instrument in shaping relationships since human beings rely on one another for the realisation of their goals and aspirations in socio-discursive encounters, which is what the concept of co-construction represents in this paper. This accounts for why relational work has been described as the “‘work’ individuals invest in negotiating relationships with others” (Locher and Watts 2005). The negotiation of these relationships reflects in the confirmation or rejection of “power differences, closeness and distance, or attributes of a particular face that the interactants present” (Locher 2006) in different communicative encounters. Locher and Watts (2008) also refer to relational work as “all aspects of the work invested by individuals in the construction, maintenance, reproduction and transformation of interpersonal relationships among those engaged in social practice.”

It is pertinent to add here that the underlying theoretical concept upon which relational work is built is face (Locher 2006); but unlike Brown and Levinson the relational work theorists combine both the cognitive and social aspects of face. They hold that face is inherent in all social interactions, and it is discursively negotiated in situated interactions. They hold that face is inherent in all social interactions, and it is discursively negotiated in situated interactions.

Relational work is based on three main idealizations. These are polite, impolite, or politic behaviour which, in the framework of relational work, depends largely on the norms (experiential or social) and expectations of interactants in a speech event. These norms and expectations are acquired over a period of time, and are constantly in a flux, as they are not static; hence, the discursive negotiation of (im) politeness (Watts 2003; Locher and Watts 2005, 2008).

Polite (face-enhancing) behaviour could roughly be described as the salient behaviour that is positively evaluated by interactants in an ongoing social interaction which is a “behaviour in excess of politic behaviour. it is that linguistic and non-linguistic behaviour that is positively considered by discourse participants to be beyond what is appropriate, and which is discursively negotiated in a particular interaction.

Impolite (face-damaging or face-challenging) behaviour is the salient form of social behaviour that is negatively evaluated to be against the canons of acceptable and appropriate behaviour operative for the ongoing social interaction (Watts 2003). In other words, it relates to the behaviour “that is perceived by participants to be inappropriate behaviour,

The concept of politic refers to the type of relational work that accounts for an utterance that is neither polite nor impolite; it “is that behaviour, linguistic and non-linguistic, which the participants construct as being appropriate to the ongoing social interaction. The construction may have been made prior to entering the interaction, but it is always negotiable during the interaction, despite the expectations that participants might bring to it” (Watts 2003).

As revealed in the data used for this study, all the interlocutors on Facebook share relations with each other, hence, the discursive negotiation of impoliteness that are brought to bear on the analysis of data in this paper, which takes the form of contempt. For example, they are all Nigerians, they are feeling the agony of the lockdown arising from the government at the wake of Covid-19, they are experiencing diverse suffering from their elected representative as a result of corruption etc. The combination of all these ineptitude and insensitivity of government which affect all of them make them to discursively negotiate impoliteness which makes them to be contemptuous about the government and its obnoxious policies.

However, we can see that the discursive enterprise of these interlocutors on Facebook reflect a social behaviour that could be negatively evaluated to be against the canons of acceptable and appropriate behaviour operative for this social interaction. This is because, the group of people they are using language to attack are constituted authority that deserve their respect and decorum; they are supposed to be praying for them and not cursing them. That the reverse is the case makes this social interaction an impolite one that take the form of contempt that is co-constructed (by the Facebook respondents) at the victims of Covid-19 in Nigeria. Thus, Locher and Watts’s (2005, 2008) relational theory is engaged for this paper because it provides us with a robust concept of impoliteness in discursive social interaction to account for the element of contempt that are co-constructively negotiated in this discourse.

Analysis and Discussion of Findings

This section of the paper analyses the data to reveal various category of contempt that are co-constructed by the Nigerian Facebook respondents to

Covid-19 victims in Nigeria.

As the data reveal, six categories of co-constructed contempt have been identified in the discourse. They are election, hunger, tribute/death, social infrastructure, economy and security. These constitute the topical issues, shared by the facebook respondents, for which the Nigerian politicians should show responsibility of tackling, failure of which sparked contempt against the government at the outbreak of Covid-19. They are discussed in turn below:

1. Election Issue

Election indicates the selection of some people into public offices through ballot system to represent the interest of the electorates. In Nigeria, these public offices include: Office of the President; Office of the Governor; National Assembly, comprises of Federal House of Representatives and House of Senate; State Houses of Assembly; Office of the Chairman of Local Government and Office of the Councilor. In all these offices, Some Nigerians through Facebook medium at the outbreak of Covid-19, tactically deploy their contempt at the government for its failure to provide effective modus operandi to execute credible elections into all the public offices mentioned above. The Texts below illustrate this clearly:

Text 1: Just a pity! The politicians cannot share sanitizers and nose covers now they will share rice during election time. *Awon ole.*

Text 2 .For the first time, Nigerian politicians are waiting for a result they can't rig. It is either POSITIVE or NEGATIVE. No inconclusive, and no appeal. And you must go to jail for at least two weeks. God is wonderful. COVID-19 is a leveller... no shoot

The text above tactically refers to the Nigeria messy political contexts where winning election depends on the amount of things the contestants can share. These cover money, bags of rice, vehicles and what have you. Because it is all these that characterise the election setting in Nigeria, a knowledgeable person that has nothing to share hardly wins any election, thereby, leaving the public offices to be occupied by miscreants. The exclamatory utterance, *Just a pity!* is a marker of contempt, which is an impolite act, used to express disappointment at the ways politicians result to sharing items to induce the electorate to vote for them.. The Actor, *The politicians* as deployed in the text, indicates that the contempt is directed at the Nigerian politicians over their attitude of not being able to distribute *sanitizers* and *nose covers* which are some of the Covid-19 preventive measures. *Sanitizers* are the liquid-like items to rub palms, and serve as an ingredient against Covid-19 while *nose covers* is the small cloth-like flap used to cover both mouth and nose to guide against contracting Covid-19 through sneezing and coughing.

The Facebook users jointly understand the poverty level of the Nigerians, and by that, they expect the political class to distribute these items freely. The deictic item, *now*, is a reference to *Covid-19* period, when the citizens ought to feel the generosity of the Nigerian politicians by giving them sanitizers, nose masks and other Covid-19 preventive materials free of charge. That this is not so, is highly contemptuous. This contempt is reinforced by “*they will share rice during election time*”. It then means that it is only during the election that politicians remember the electorates, and not when in plague, as is the case of Covid-19 period. The show of deep contempt can be seen in the text: *Awon Ole!* This is a Yoruba expression, meaning *Armed Robbers!* As such, Nigerian politicians are likened to armed robbers, under which, “*thugs, marauders, gangsters, fraudsters etc*” are subsumed.

Similarly, Text 2 illustrates another instance of contempt against the Nigerian political class. As indicated in the Text, Nigerian politicians have a characteristic eagerness to await the results of an election that can ultimately be rigged, the act that depict the Nigerian election as a fraudulent one. The disjunct, *For the first time* (Text 2) indicates the time of Covid-19. As the data reveal, apart from this time, there has not being any other time that the politicians are put into the same test as the general masses and this marvels the citizenries. *a result* in Text 2 is a marker of Covid-19 results which is either POSITIVE or NEGATIVE. This implies that it cannot be rigged like regular elections. These items are foregrounded through capitalization to strengthen the inability of politicians to doctor Covid-19 results, as they normally do to normal elections, an act for which they hold Nigerian politicians in contempt. Another instance of election malpractices for which politicians are held in contempt is depicted by the adjectival item: *inconclusive*, meaning that the election is not complete as recorded in some parts of the country in the past. Inconclusive election arises from a situation that the larger percentage of Nigerians describes as a ploy by politicians to fraudulently rig themselves into public offices.

Also revealed in the data is the *court action* that characterizes the Nigerian electoral processes. This is seen in the choice of the item *appeal*. Thus, in the context of Nigerian electoral processes, no matter how clean the conduct of an election is, it would still be challenged. Thus, a winner does not always emerge until the results of the elections are challenged, first at the election petition tribunal; then, at the Appeal Court, and finally at the Supreme Court. However, as is the case in Covid-19 situation, the politicians are being held in contempt when the speaker says *No inconclusive, and no appeal*. This implied that they cannot appeal the results of Covid-19 if contracted; neither could they render the results inconclusive as done in normal election.

“*Jail*” in “*And you must go to jail for at least two weeks*” is a marker of “being in isolation”, “quarantine”. Thus, a person that has contracted Covid-19 would be secluded from the society to avoid community transmission of the

disease. The modal: “*Must*” as used here indicates that no option is provided for the victims of Covid-19, who are being perceived as the politicians; and... “*for at least two weeks*” indicates the least duration that the victims must be quarantined from the public. Thus, the speaker is contemptuously saying that, it is now the turn of the politicians to be confined like the general masses during normal illness. As such, it is to the utmost relief of the speaker in Text 2 that Covid-19 provides the politicians with the platform where they can experience suffering like the common man. This position is attested to with the deployment of the relational process when the speaker says “*God is wonderful. COVID-19...*” is a leveller

Also that Nigerian electoral issues are characterized by “shooting” in order to ease manipulation is attested to by the deployment of the item “*no shoot*” in Text 2. This means that the politician cannot doctor the result when they are tested positive to Covid-19 through shooting as they do in regular election when the results are not favourable. This of course, is a contemptuous act.

2. Hunger

Apart from the bad electoral processes for which the Nigerian politicians are being held in contempt, hunger is frowned at and condemnable. As known, the first psychological need of individual is food security, which is an antidote to hunger. And as an adage says, an hungry man is an angry man. As revealed in the data, only the influential people can afford three square meals a day, leaving the general masses suffering because of their inability to afford quality food. The politicians are held in contempt over this, as shown in the data below:

Text 3:

Stay inside, no coming out, stay save, wash your hands, no one gives us food, no money, no soap. We go come out oo! *Hunger dey*

Text 4:

LOCKDOWN EXTENSION WITHOUT FOOD TO EAT. OUR GOVERNMENT DIDN'T LIKE US B4. WHEN WE DIE OF HUNGER, SEBI THEY WILL RULE OVER GHOSTS (Asserting Act). (Bad Leader)

Text 5:

February was 4 valentine, March 4 Quarantine, as people were forbidden to go out now, April will be 4 Pregnantine (Sa)

Text 6:

There is something kills more than Coronavirus, who knows it? Mr. hunger.

The speakers in Text 3-6 above unanimously protest against hunger, with holding politicians in contempt over non providence of food during the lockdown. In Text 3 above, the speaker is frowning at the directive of the government to obey Covid-19 rules, some of which include “self isolation”(as marked by the items *Stay inside, no coming out, stay save*) and “use of sanitizers and water” for hand-washing as marked by the items *wash your hands*. This situation culminated into some states being locked down in Nigeria. The speaker is, thus, justifying his protest against the directive of the government on the ground that the government is making life difficult for the people by not providing them with the means of livelihood among which are food and money to buy food to reduce hunger. That the speaker is contemptuous about the government directives is reinforced by the utterance in Pidgin, “*We go come out oo!*”, which is a violation of government directive; and thus, a contemptuous expression. The expression (in Pidgin) “*Hunger dey*” is utilized by the speaker to demonstrate that the people are being starved with food; and in Text 6, the honorific item *Mr* in, *Mr Hunger* represents a contempt of the whole situation, as the speaker describes *hunger* as more deadly than Coronavirus. To heighten this contempt, the speaker utilizes the rhetorical device *who knows it?* to which he himself respond by saying, *Mr Hunger*. Thus, if the hunger is constructed as killing compared with Covid-19, it means people would undermine the publicity given to Covid-19 while the quality of life of people is low arising from hunger.

Thus, instead of providing food for the people, the government is asking them to be isolated by remaining indoor, the act that depicts callousness and hatred for the people. More contemptuous is the decision of the government to extend the lockdown. The foregrounded expressing in Text 4: LOCKDOWN EXTENSION WITHOUT FOOD TO EAT indicates that people are tired of staying at home without food. They expect the government who decides to lock them up to provide them with foods. That the government does not show this gesture makes the people to have the impression that the government deeply hates them as indicated by the foregrounded item: OUR GOVERNMENT DIDN'T LIKE US B4 (Text 4). The foregrounded expression WHEN WE DIE OF HUNGER, SEBI THEY WILL RULE OVER GHOSTS represents a sharp condemnation of how the welfare of the Nigerian citizens is being handled by the government. “SEBI” is a discourse marker, used to elicit contempt at the failure of the government (marked by THEY) to provide its citizens (indicated by THEY) with food, failure of which may result in death by hunger. This will have attendant consequence on the government governing (marked by RULE) on empty population (indicated by GHOSTS).

In Text 5, we can see some instances of mockery of Covid-19 situation with attendant contempt at the government as marked by slangish expressions. The valentine day is usually slated for the month of February (February 14, to be precise), March 4 Quarantine indicates the time Nigeria started to experience

Coronavirus as a result of which many people of note were isolated (quarantine) for some weeks to determine their status. Those that were quarantined cut across those traveling from abroad such as USA, U.K South Africa (where the rising incidence of Covid-19 cases was very high). The utterance: *as people were forbidden to go out now, April will be 4 Pregnantine* further intensifies the contempt. Because people started to be quarantined in March, *April will be 4 Pregnantine* implies the aftermath effect of the lockdown, is pregnancy. This is because, couples who have been staying apart before, arising mostly from different work locations, are being forced by Covid-19 to stay together.

3. Contempt Associated with Politicians Tribute and Death

That the high percentage of Covid-19 victims that experienced death comes from the politicians is not an overstatement. Instead of the respondents paying genuine tribute to the dead ones, the reverse is the case. This is a clear demonstration of extreme contempt act.

Text 7:

It is not proper to mock the dead, so I pray that his soul find rest but whatever a man sows, so shall he reap.

Text 8:

RIP Baba, his death is a lesson for all of us.

Text 9:

RIP. Spend Nigeria money in heaven

Speakers in Text 7 - 9 above co-construct contempt acts, an indication of impoliteness as implied in Locher and Watts's (2005) relational theory. The Texts betray tribute paid to a high rated politician that contracted Covid-19 and died in the process. This contempt arises from diverse integrity failures associated with the ways the victim administered his office. The utterance, *It is not proper to mock the dead* (Text 7), indicates that mocking of the dead is happening somewhere. The choice of, "*It is not proper*", indicates that the context of mourning does not naturally agree with mocking, and that that all the speakers defy this indicate contempt which is an extreme form of impoliteness, going by the relational theory of Locher and Watts (2005). The speaker offers a prayer as expected of somebody with genuine mourning when he says "*so I pray that his soul find rest*". But, this genuine prayer assumes a dimension of contempt, as the intention is contrasted when the speaker says: *but* in "*but whatever a man sows, so shall he reap*". Similarly, the speaker in Text 8, equally prays for the deceased when he says *RIP Baba*. However, this prayer is a contemptuous one as can be seen in the statement that follows: *his death is a lesson for all of us* in Text 8, which is a statement of caution to the

people against excesses of office. The speaker in Text 10 also aligns with the previous speakers in offering prayer for the deceased when he says *RIP Baba*. However, this prayer assumes a dimension of contempt by the time he says *Spend Nigeria money in heaven*. This means the speakers are angry about corruption perpetrated by public officers in Nigeria, the consequence of which lead to the impoverishment of Nigerian masses.

Other instances of mockery of the dead victims can be found in the Texts below:

Text 10:

Na so all of them go dey die one by one. Amen.

As shown in the data above, hearing about the death of anyone in government is received with cheers! Testifying to this is the speaker in Text 10 when he expresses happiness at the death of a notable Nigerian public officer. The speaker in the Text above, utilizing pidgin, resorted into cursing by openly wishing the public officers dead. He even says *Amen* which is a spiritual invocation for the acceptance of the curse by God. As can be seen, this is the extreme level of contempt, which is a form of impolite. The speaker in Text 11 is not spared from making contempt when he says:

Text 11.

This is the end of everything, our politician, beware!

This is the end of everything in the Text above means *death*; and the utilization of the nominal *our politicians*, indicates a reference to the Nigerian political class. He issues a note of warning to them by the choice of the item *beware!* which is an adjective choosing to caution the politicians against their excesses in all ramifications. This caution assumes the dimension of contempt and impoliteness.

In Text 12 below, we can equally see a contempt act associated with mocking the dead ones among the political class. In the Text, the speaker deploys metaphor to express his contempt when he says:

Text 12:

Corona Virus is very respectful. The only disease that came into the country and went to greet the leaders first

As revealed above, that the speaker is eulogizing the Corona Virus is marked by *Corona Virus is very respectful*. One may ask about the purpose for this eulogy? And this is found in the fact that from the time immemorial, only the commoners have been killed with different kind of preventive ailments with reckless abandon, sparing the influential people in Nigeria. But with the

outbreak of Covid-19, the first target is the influential people. This is marked with the personified expression... *and went to greet the leaders first*. To greet, generally, is an act of giving a word of welcome. However, here, it is a personified expression implying *kill*; and those targeted first by Corona Virus to be killed are the *leaders* that are preponderantly politicians.

As co.-constructed by the Facebook users, the politicians are the ones that spread Corona Virus to the shore of Nigeria, as they are the ones that always traveled abroad unrestrictedly. The text below suffices:

Text 13:

One funny thing about this Corona is that, it knows *those* who allowed its entry, now it is visiting *them* one by one. I dey my farm.

As is the case in Text 12, the speaker in Text 13 personifies Corona Virus with an indication of subtle contempt. Ideally, *funny* means amusing which is used in comical situation. However, as it is now associated with the issue of death, its use is very incongruous, and depicts contempt. *It knows those who allowed its entry, now it is visiting them one by one* in Text 13 above is a personification. The pronominal *It* as used here indicates Corona Virus, *those* and *them* (deictic elements) refer to the politicians. As such, the speaker is contemptuously saying that the politicians are the ones that brought Corona virus to Nigeria, and ironically they constitute the first target to be killed and not the common masses, as marked by *I dey my farm*.

This position is more amplified in Text 14:

Text 14: Our senators and MHR have paid their prices for COVID 19. A round of applause.

The speaker in Text 14 above brazenly refers to an important arm of government *Our senators and MHR* (Members of House of Representatives) as those that fall victim of Covid-19. To *pay price* means “to die”. This means there are some honourable members that die of Covid-19. As we can see, this is a contempt act. This contempt is more pronounced when the speaker is applauding them by saying *A round of applause!* which generally means “praising”. However, in this situation it depicts contempt which is an impolite act and not politic.

4. Contempt Associated with Social Infrastructure

Social infrastructure constitutes the basic amenities needed for the operation of a society. This covers road construction, health services, education and what have you. As revealed in the data, virtually all these aspect of lives in Nigeria have been bastardized, arising from bad leadership styles. Thus, the Nigerian leaders saddled with the responsibilities of providing the aforementioned services, dead and alive are jointly held in contempt by the

Facebook respondents. The following examples suffice:

Text 15:

They failed to fix up a good hospital in Nigeria, now they are the first partaker of their greed and selfishness

Text 16:

Bizarre! Aso Rock Clinic without single Ventilator

Aso Rock Clinic Budget (2015-2018)

2015 ₦ 3.94 Billion

2016 ₦ 3.87 Billion

2017 ₦ 3.20 Billion

2018 ₦ 1.03 Billion

Yet, no single Ventilator. Nothing to handle a single case of COVID-19

Text 17:

I learnt *someone* is coughing and sneezing persistently at Oyo Government house!!! Me...A dey watch (Declaring) (healthy living-hospital)

Text 18:

If this virus didn't start from countries abroad, this man wouldn't have died now; but because there was no country to run to, he had to resort to fatherland and manage with the neglected underdeveloped health sector....and the man died!

The speakers in Text 15-18 above jointly hold a contemptuous view on the victims of Covid-19 in Nigeria, castigating, mocking, disdain and lambasting them over the deplorable state of the social amenities in Nigeria of which they ultimately become victims. The choice of the pronominal and possessive references *they* and *their* in Text 16, and indefinite pronoun *someone* in Text 17 refer to the public office holders in Nigeria. *They failed to fix up a good hospital in Nigeria* (Text 15), *Bizzare! Aso Rock Clinic without single Ventilator* (Text 16) are markers of the deplorable state of the Nigerian hospitals which ought to have been properly managed by the Nigerian government.

Of particular reference is the speaker in Text 17 that expresses uncanny, weird, odd and strange happening at the situation of things at the Aso Rock Clinic, describing it as shameful for lack of equipment for Covid-19 treatment. Despite the huge budget on the Aso Rock Hospital from 2015-2018 as indicated above, the Clinic has no *single Ventilator*. Ventilator means a medical appliance for artificial respiration, and constitutes the most important equipment in the treatment of Corona Virus. Surprisingly, as revealed in the data, no single one is found in Aso Rock Clinic to handle a single case of the pandemic, as indexed by *Nothing to handle a single case of COVID-19* (Text 16). It is this that baffles

the speaker when he expresses surprise by saying *Bizarre!* which is a marker of contempt.

As can be inferred, in the utterance of the speaker in Text 18, the Covid-19 victims must have disappointed the Nigerian citizens in terms of non fulfillment of their promises one of which is quality health delivery that is in deplorable condition

Ironically, it is this deplorable hospital which they have to access for survival when contracted Covid-19. The subordinate clause *If this virus didn't start from countries abroad* in the Text means that the virus started from abroad such as UK, UAE, China, USA etc where politicians always run to access quality health services because those countries have good hospitals. It therefore means that, if the virus starts from Nigeria, definitely, these people would not hesitate to travel out to access health services, leaving the populace to be consumed by Covid-19 in Nigeria *but because there was no country to run to* they have to stay in Nigeria. This is marked by the utterance... *he had to resort to fatherland* (Text 18). By staying in Nigeria means accessing deplorable health services usually meant for ordinary Nigerian citizens. This is indexed by...*and manage with the neglected underdeveloped health sector* (Text 18)...The adjectives: *neglected* and *underdeveloped* are note worthy in this utterance. The adjectival, *Neglected*, assists us to understand that the public figures in Nigeria have abandoned the health sector by not providing them with enough facilities. Arising from this, the sector is now in a deplorable and weak state as indexed by the choice of the item *underdeveloped*. The consequence of this, is the death of many public officers, as shown in the utilization of the item: *...and the man died* (Text 18).

5. Contempt Associated with Economic Mismanagement

Economic mismanagement constitutes various ways by which resources meant for social infrastructural development are siphoned and diverted into private use. As such, the outbreak of Corona Virus provides the Facebook respondents with the opportunity to comment on some topical issues in Nigeria, including economic related issue for which the facebook interactants contemptuously hold the government as being liable. The Texts below illustrate this better:

Text 19:

I don't have much to offer you since you finally kpeme the gate off. Hell is open for you and other bad leaders.

Text 20:

Oga bye bye. Have they bury you with the money

Text 21:

This Lockdown is boring, no money, please who can lend me \$30k, I

want to go on holiday in Heaven

The speakers in Text 19-21 similarly express their contempt at the various ways in which the Nigerian leaders are diverting money for private use. Speaker in Text 19 is happy at the death of a public officer through Corona Virus. The use of the slangish expression “*Kpeme the gate off*” in “*since you finally kpeme the gate off*” indicates stringent economic measures adopted by the government to prevent money from circulating freely to the public. Describing the leaders connected with this act as bad, he raises curses on the public officers over corruption as indicated in his speech when he says, “*Hell is open for you and other bad leaders*”. The choice of the pronoun “*you*” means that the speakers have a particular politician in mind, while the choice of the noun “*Hell*” indicates agony and suffering at the demise of the politicians in reference. As can be inferred in this Text, a public figure has just passed on over which the people are happy because of his corrupt act, and does not spare other leaders in similar acts (and *other bad leaders*). The same thing holds in Text 20 when the speaker says “*Oga bye bye*”. *Oga* as used here means a particular public officer while “*bye bye*” is an expression of bidding a person farewell. However, not that the person in question travel to another place; the person died of Corona Virus. Wishing a person farewell to heaven is an extreme form of contempt which is not polite.

Holding similar contempt is the speaker in Text 21 when he says “*This Lockdown is boring, no money, please who can lend me \$30k, I want to go on holiday in Heaven*”. Here, the speaker is expressing his concern over the lockdown imposed on the country, describing it as *boring*, arising from lack of money. When the speaker says “*no money*”, he is indirectly castigating the government over corruption. This becomes apparent when he says “*please, who can lend me \$30k? I want to go on holiday in Heaven*”, which has an undertone of contempt. Because heaven is connected with death, which means the speaker is happy at the death of a particular public officer. As the act of lending is connected with money, which means the speaker is indirectly saying that people are suffering as they don’t have money, and this makes them to go borrowing. This is, perhaps, caused by mismanagement connected with constant oversea holiday traveling through which public money is being siphoned from the public treasure.

Other instances of co-constructed contempt connected with economic mismanagement and its attendant consequence on the Nigerian masses can be found in the speech of speakers in the following texts:

Text 22:

The poverty Virus does not appear on TV because it does not kill the rich.

Text 23:

Whoever scored 25 in JAMB should call me in order to get scholarships to USA and China.

The speaker in Text 22 is talking on poverty suffered by the masses which government is not sensitive to. By saying “*The poverty Virus does not appear on TV*”, the speaker is being contemptuous at the suffering meted on the populace by the government which is the direct consequence of their mismanagement. By describing poverty as a *Virus* the speaker is attaching more importance to it than Corona Virus. However, the fact that government does not acknowledge it (Poverty Virus) because it is not publicized on the Television shows the insensitive of the government to poverty ridden masses. As revealed in the Test, this insensitivity is aggravated as the politicians are not affected by poverty. Indexing this is the statement, “*it does not kill the rich*”. Perhaps, they are stupendously rich. This richness is believed to have stemmed from the public money siphoned into their private covers.

In Text 23, the speaker is indirectly contemptuous of the politicians that found comfort in sending their wards abroad to study at huge cost. This cost is affordable as they have siphoned public fund, leaving Nigerian public schools unattended to. But they found it impossible to send their wards abroad for schooling as Covid-19 is seriously raging in those countries.

6. Contempt Connected with Security

Security as we all knows forms the pivot on which a nation rests. Because of its importance, huge amount of money is always being appropriated to it in Nigerian budget. Despite this, the nation is far from being secured from banditry, herdsman clashes, kidnappers, *Boko Haram*, etc. Acknowledging the fact that the primary responsibility of the government is to secure the nation and its citizens from both internal and external threat, the speakers are holding the government in contempt for not being alive to this onerous responsibility. This is illustrated in the Text below:

Text 24:

Honestly, I had to ask God for forgiveness because I have never rejoiced over anyone's dead but *this one*. I always had the believe that he was acting more as the president while ... is just a figure head and coming from ..., they didn't put more efforts to tackle Boko Haram. At a point, it seemed as if they sacrificed their states for the cause. Anyway, we all must die one day! Rest in peace

7. Conclusion

This paper has examined the contempt co-construction among selected Facebook respondents to Covid-19 victims in Nigeria. These victims

are preponderantly politicians who were either quarantined or died of Coronavirus pandemic. Thus, they are the target of attack, protest, contempt and scorn by Nigerians on the Facebook platform who share similar agony of the government insensitivity to their plights in areas such as credible election, social infrastructure, food and shelter, security, buoyant economy, among others.

References

- Ajisejiri, W. S., Odusanya, O. O. and Joshi, R., (2020). COVID-19 Outbreak Situation in Nigeria and the Need for Effective Engagement of Community Health Workers for Epidemic Response. In *Journal of Global Biosecurity*, Vol 1(4), p. None. DOI: <http://doi.org/10.31646/gbio.69>
- Amzat, J., Aminu, K., Kolo, V. I., Akinyele, A. A., Ogundairo, J. A & Danjibo, M. C (2020). Coronavirus outbreak in Nigeria: Burden and socio-medical response during the first 100 days. In *international Journal of Infectious Disease (Perspective)* | Vol. 98: 218–224; doi: 10.1016/j.ijid.2020.06.067
- Brown, P. & Levinson, S. (1987). *Politeness: Some Universals in Language Usage*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Kalu, B. (2020). COVID-19 in Nigeria: a disease of hunger. In *Lancet Respiratory Medicine Journal (Spotland)*. Vol.8. Issue 6, P556-557. DOI:[https://doi.org/10.1016/S2213-2600\(20\)30220-4](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2213-2600(20)30220-4)
- Locher, M. A. (2006). Polite behavior within relational work: The discursive approach to politeness. In *Journal of Multilingua*. Vol. 25 (3): 249-267.
- Locher, M. A. & Watts, R. J. (2005). Politeness theory and relational work.. In *Journal of Politeness Research*. Vol.1 (1): 9-33.
- Ohia, C., Bakarey, A. S. & Ahmad, T. (2020). COVID-19 and Nigeria: putting the realities in context. In *international Journal of Infectious Disease (Perspective)* |. Vol.95. Pp 279-281, DOI:<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijid.2020.04.062>
- Watts, R. J. (1992), 'Linguistic politeness and politic verbal behaviour: reconsidering claims for universality', in Watts, R., Ide, S. and Ehlich, K. (eds.), *Politeness in Language: Studies in its History, Theory and Practice*, Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, pp. 43–69.
- Watts, R. J. (2003). *Politeness*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Wu, Yi-Chia; Chen, Ching-Sunga; Chan, Yu-Jiuna,b,c,*
- Yu-Jiun, C., Ching-Sung, C. & Yi-Chi, W. (2020). The Outbreak of COVID-19: An overview. *Journal of the Chinese Medical Association: Vol.83-Issue 3. Pp217-220* doi: 10.1097/JCMA.000000000000270

