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Introduction

The Journal of Issues in Language and Literary Studies (IL&LS) is a biannual peer-reviewed journal of Ajayi Crowther University, Oyo, focusing on essays and research works in linguistic theory, general language, and literary studies. Given the volume and quality of patronage from diverse backgrounds, as well as the acceptance of earlier editions published since 2013, the Journal has now evolved into a full-fledged, University-based, biannual journal, with reputable scholars serving as consultants. The establishment of the journal is considered a milestone, given the tremendous scholarly interest that English and Nigerian languages and studies of Literature in English and English Literature attract locally, nationally, and internationally at various academic fora.

Contributors are, therefore, invited to submit reports of original research for consideration in *IL&LS*. Preference shall be given to the presentation of new theories, as well as data-based papers.

Instructions for Contributors

The *Journal of Issues in Language and Literary Studies (IL&LS)* is a bi-annual (June and September) publication of the Department of English, Faculty of Humanities, Ajayi Crowther University, Oyo. The focus of *IL&LS* is to capture all levels of English usage globally, drawing from classical theories and principles of language, literature and linguistics, and with case studies, data and illustrations from activities, experiences and situations around the globe. In this regard, we welcome papers that cover the following areas:

a) General Linguistics- Psycholinguistics, Historical Linguistics, Computational Linguistics
b) English in Nigeria- History of English in Nigeria, Phonology of English in Nigeria, Morphological processes, Syntax, Semantics of English in Nigeria
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f) Oral Literature, Cultural Studies and the New Media
g) Postcolonial Literature, Migration and Globalisation
h) Medical Literature (representation of illnesses, diseases and therapeutics in literary texts)
i) Popular Culture (films, music and stand-up comedy)
j) Gender Discourse (with a focus on contemporary theories)
k) Literature and Law (recreation of legal and judicial matters in literary texts)
l) Literature and Environmental Studies
m) Any other topic(s) reflecting language, literature and linguistics not mentioned.

Note to Contributors

Language: This should be simple and communicative enough for the target audience (tertiary-level students, scholars, and researchers). Illustrations should be devoid of religious, political, racial, or gender colourations except where the context demands. Contributors should explain technical words, where applicable.

Structure and Formatting: The Title should be a brief phrase describing the paper's contents. The title page should include the authors' full names and affiliations, as well as the name of the corresponding author, along with phone and e-mail information. Present addresses of authors should appear as a footnote.

Referencing: Contributions can be in MLA or APA, depending on the contributor's choice.

Abstract: This should not be more than 300 words with no more than 6 Keywords.

Introduction: This should provide a clear statement of the problem, the relevant literature on the subject, and the proposed approach or solution. It should be understandable to colleagues from a broad range of scientific disciplines.

The volume of an article: A chapter contribution should be between 3000 and 5000 words, processed in MS Word format. All manuscript portions must be typed double-spaced, and all pages numbered starting from the title page.

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A list of non-standard abbreviations should be added. Generally, non-standard abbreviations should be used only when the full term is exceptionally long and often used. Each abbreviation should be spelt out and introduced in parentheses the first time it is used in the text.

Texts in Nigerian and other tonal languages should be tone-marked, and musical examples should be camera-ready. Except, when necessary, photographs and heavy graphic works should be avoided.

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Managing Editor

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Language as a Tool of Power and Control in Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* and Zaynab Alkali's *The Stillborn*: A Critical Discourse Analysis

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Abstract

This study examines how gendered power relations and resistance are discursively constructed in Buchi Emecheta's The Joys of Motherhood *and Zaynab Alkali's* The Stillborn *using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). While existing feminist scholarship on these novels has extensively explored patriarchy, motherhood, and female agency at thematic and ideological levels, limited attention has been paid to the specific linguistic mechanisms through which power and resistance are produced, normalised, and contested. This study addresses this gap by treating language as analytical data rather than illustrative support. Anchored in Fairclough's three-dimensional model of CDA, the study analyses selected excerpts that represent recurring interactional contexts such as marriage, authority, and social expectation. At the textual level, the analysis focuses on micro-linguistic features including declarative and imperative structures, modality, evaluative lexis, metaphor, and pronoun use. At the level of discursive practice, it examines interactional patterns, silence, and narrative framing through which male authority is legitimised and female voice is constrained or enabled. These patterns are further interpreted at the level of social practice in relation to patriarchal ideologies within Nigerian socio-cultural contexts. The findings reveal that in* ***The Joys of Motherhood****, patriarchal power is largely naturalised through unmodalised declaratives, possessive constructions, and metaphors that restrict female identity to relational and reproductive roles, while resistance is predominantly internalised and narratively contained. In contrast,* ***The Stillborn*** *increasingly foregrounds overt resistance through assertive declaratives, negation, and first-person pronouns that challenge male authority within dialogue. The study demonstrates that patriarchy and resistance in the novels are not merely thematic concerns but are discursively engineered through language, reinforcing the value of CDA for literary analysis.*

Keywords: ***Critical Discourse Analysis; gendered power; discursive resistance; Nigerian women's writing; literary discourse***

Introduction

Nigerian women's writing has consistently engaged with questions of patriarchy, gendered power, and female agency, particularly within the intersecting spaces of family, culture, and society. Works such as Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* and Zaynab Alkali's *The Stillborn* have

attracted sustained scholarly attention for their critique of women's marginalisation and the socio-cultural constraints shaping female experience. Much of this scholarship, however, has approached these texts primarily through thematic, ideological, or sociological lenses, often treating language as a transparent medium through which gender oppression is represented rather than as an active site where power is constructed, normalised, and resisted.

Language plays a central role in the organisation of social relations, particularly in patriarchal contexts where authority, obedience, and resistance are negotiated through everyday discourse. In literary texts, dialogue, narration, and figurative expression function not only to tell stories but also to encode ideological positions and power relations. As Fairclough (1995) argues, discourse is a form of social practice, shaped by and shaping social structures. From this perspective, the representation of patriarchy in literature cannot be fully understood without close attention to the linguistic choices through which dominance and resistance are enacted.

Although existing studies on *The Joys of Motherhood* and *The Stillborn* have examined motherhood, marriage, tradition, and female resistance, they largely privilege thematic interpretation over systematic linguistic analysis. As a result, the specific discursive mechanisms through which male authority is legitimised, female subordination is internalised, and resistance is articulated remain underexplored. This gap is particularly significant given that power in these novels often operates subtly through routine speech acts, metaphors, evaluative expressions, and narrative framing rather than through overt coercion alone.

This study addresses this gap by adopting Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as its analytical framework. Drawing primarily on Fairclough's three-dimensional model, the study examines how linguistic form, discursive practice, and social context interact to construct gendered power relations in *The Joys of Motherhood* and *The Stillborn*. Unlike studies that focus mainly on what the texts say about patriarchy, this analysis focuses on how language itself produces and sustains patriarchal ideology, as well as how it enables moments of resistance. By treating language as data rather than illustration, the study foregrounds micro-linguistic features such as declarative structures, modality, metaphor, evaluative lexis, and patterns of address.

The comparative dimension of the study further highlights differences in how power and resistance are discursively configured in the two novels. While both texts depict patriarchal dominance, Emecheta's narrative often represents resistance as internalised and psychologically mediated, whereas Alkali's work increasingly foregrounds overt linguistic challenge and collective female

assertion. Examining these contrasts at the level of discourse allows for a more precise understanding of how gendered power operates across different narrative strategies.

By offering a linguistically grounded, CDA-informed analysis of two canonical Nigerian novels, this study contributes to feminist literary scholarship by demonstrating that patriarchy and resistance are not only thematic concerns but are discursively engineered within the texts. It also extends the application of CDA within literary studies, reinforcing its value for analysing the subtle workings of power in fictional discourse.

Research Questions

1) How are patriarchal power relations linguistically constructed in *The Joys of Motherhood* and *The Stillborn*?
2) How are patriarchal power relations discursively normalised and presented as common sense in the selected novels?
3) What discursive strategies are employed to legitimise male authority and regulate female roles?
4) How is female resistance to patriarchal dominance linguistically realised in the novels?
5) In what ways do *The Joys of Motherhood* and *The Stillborn* differ in their discursive representation of power and resistance?

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to examine how language functions as a site for the construction, normalisation, and contestation of gendered power relations in *The Joys of Motherhood* and *The Stillborn* using a Critical Discourse Analysis framework.

The specific objectives are to:

i. Analyse the linguistic features through which patriarchal power is constructed in *The Joys of Motherhood* and *The Stillborn*.
ii. Examine how discourse practices in the novels normalise patriarchal power and present it as socially legitimate.
iii. Identify and analyse the discursive strategies that legitimise male authority and regulate female roles.
iv. Examine how female resistance to patriarchy is realised through specific linguistic and discursive choices.

v. Compare the two novels to determine similarities and differences in their discursive construction of power and resistance.

Literature Review

Feminist Readings of Nigerian Women's Writing

Scholarship on Nigerian women's writing has consistently foregrounded themes of patriarchy, motherhood, marriage, and female oppression. Studies on Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* frequently interpret the novel as a critique of the socio-cultural structures that confine women's identities to reproduction and domesticity (Kolawole, 1997; Nfah-Abbenyi, 1997). Nnu Ego's suffering is often read as emblematic of the contradictions of traditional expectations and colonial modernity, where women bear social responsibility without corresponding power or recognition.

Similarly, critical engagement with Zaynab Alkali's *The Stillborn* has focused on female agency, education, and resistance to patriarchal norms. Scholars highlight Alkali's portrayal of women who challenge restrictive gender roles through self-assertion and collective solidarity (Ogundipe-Leslie, 1994; Azuike, 2009). These studies commonly position *The Stillborn* as offering a more optimistic vision of female empowerment compared to earlier feminist narratives.

While these feminist readings provide valuable ideological and socio-cultural insights, they largely privilege thematic interpretation over linguistic analysis. Language is often treated as a transparent vehicle for conveying oppression or resistance, rather than as a structured system through which power relations are produced and negotiated. As a result, the specific discursive mechanisms that normalise patriarchy or enable resistance remain insufficiently examined.

Language, Power, and Patriarchy in Literary Studies

The relationship between language and power has been extensively theorised within critical linguistics and discourse studies. Scholars such as Fairclough (1995) and van Dijk (2008) argue that power operates not only through overt domination but also through routine discourse practices that shape social cognition and legitimise inequality. In literary contexts, discourse becomes a key site where ideological positions are encoded, reproduced, or challenged.

Some studies in African literary criticism acknowledge the role of dialogue, narration, and metaphor in reinforcing social hierarchies. For instance, analyses of Chinua Achebe's works demonstrate how proverbs, speech patterns, and narrative voice reflect hierarchical social

structures (Achebe, 1975). However, even within such studies, linguistic features are often discussed illustratively rather than systematically.

In the context of Nigerian women's writing, few studies move beyond broad observations about "language of domination" or "voices of resistance" to examine how specific linguistic choices, such as imperatives, modality, evaluative lexis, or metaphor, function discursively. This absence of micro-linguistic attention limits the explanatory depth of existing scholarship on gender and power in literary texts.

Critical Discourse Analysis and Literary Texts

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) offers a robust framework for addressing this limitation by conceptualising discourse as a form of social practice (Fairclough, 1995). CDA emphasises the interaction between linguistic form, discursive processes, and social structures, making it particularly suitable for examining how ideology and power are embedded in language.

Although CDA has been widely applied to political speeches, media texts, and institutional discourse, its application to literary texts remains comparatively limited, especially within Nigerian literary studies. Where CDA has been used, it is often employed loosely, without sustained attention to linguistic detail or theoretical justification. This has contributed to scepticism about its value for literary analysis.

However, scholars such as Toolan (2012) and Simpson (2004) demonstrate that literary discourse is not exempt from ideological structuring and can benefit from systematic discourse analysis. By examining how characters speak, how authority is framed, and how resistance is linguistically realised, CDA enables a deeper understanding of how fiction participates in social meaning-making.

A critical review of existing literature reveals three major gaps. First, studies on *The Joys of Motherhood* and *The Stillborn* overwhelmingly prioritise thematic and ideological interpretation, with limited engagement with language as an analytical object. Second, feminist readings often assume power relations as given, rather than examining how they are discursively constructed in specific interactional contexts. Third, comparative studies rarely analyse both novels using a shared linguistic framework, resulting in assertions of difference that are insufficiently demonstrated.

This study addresses these gaps by adopting a CDA-informed, micro-linguistic approach to the comparative analysis of *The Joys of Motherhood* and *The Stillborn*. By focusing on how power and resistance are enacted through concrete linguistic choices, the study advances feminist literary scholarship beyond thematic critique and demonstrates the analytical value of CDA for Nigerian literary discourse.

Positioning of the Present Study

By situating language at the centre of analysis, this study repositions the discussion of patriarchy and resistance in Nigerian women's writing. It contributes to existing scholarship by showing that gendered power relations in the selected novels are not merely represented but are actively produced, normalised, and contested through discourse. In doing so, the study bridges feminist literary criticism and Critical Discourse Analysis, offering a more linguistically grounded account of power in Nigerian fiction.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored in Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), with particular reliance on Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional model of discourse. CDA provides an appropriate theoretical framework for examining how language functions as a social practice through which power relations are constructed, legitimised, and contested (Fairclough, 1995). Rather than treating language as a neutral medium, CDA conceptualises discourse as an active site of ideological production, making it especially suitable for analysing literary representations of patriarchy and resistance.

Fairclough's model operates at three interconnected levels: the textual level, the level of discursive practice, and the level of social practice. At the textual level, attention is paid to specific linguistic features such as vocabulary choice, grammatical structure, modality, evaluative lexis, and figurative language. These features are not analysed in isolation but as resources through which characters enact authority, obedience, or resistance. In this study, textual analysis focuses on how imperatives, declarative structures, metaphors, and evaluative expressions encode hierarchical gender relations within the selected novels.

The level of discursive practice concerns how texts are produced, distributed, and interpreted within particular contexts. In literary discourse, this involves examining patterns of interaction between characters, narrative framing, and recurring modes of address that normalise or challenge

power relations. By analysing how certain forms of speech are repeatedly associated with male authority or female subordination, the study demonstrates how patriarchal discourse is reproduced as common sense within the fictional worlds of *The Joys of Motherhood* and *The Stillborn*.

At the level of social practice, discourse is situated within broader socio-cultural and historical contexts. The study relates linguistic patterns in the novels to patriarchal structures prevalent in Nigerian society, where gender roles are institutionally and culturally regulated. This level of analysis allows the study to connect micro-linguistic choices to macro-social ideologies without reducing literary discourse to mere social reflection.

CDA is particularly valuable for this study because it enables a systematic examination of how gendered power operates through routine and seemingly ordinary language. Unlike thematic or character-based criticism, which often assumes the presence of patriarchy, CDA reveals how power is linguistically engineered and sustained through everyday discourse practices. It also provides analytical tools for identifying moments where dominant discourse is disrupted, negotiated, or resisted.

Although CDA has been more commonly applied to non-literary texts such as political speeches and media discourse, its application to literary texts is justified because fiction is also a form of discourse embedded in social relations. As Toolan (2012) and Simpson (2004) argue, literary language is ideologically patterned and therefore amenable to critical linguistic analysis. This study adopts CDA not as a rigid formula but as a flexible analytical framework that allows for close attention to language while remaining sensitive to narrative and cultural context.

By integrating Fairclough's model with feminist concerns about gender and power, this framework enables a linguistically grounded analysis of patriarchy and resistance in Nigerian women's writing. It thus aligns with the study's aim of moving beyond thematic interpretation to demonstrate how language itself functions as a site of domination and contestation in *The Joys of Motherhood* and *The Stillborn*.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design grounded in Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to examine how language constructs and negotiates gendered power relations in Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* and Zaynab Alkali's *The Stillborn*. CDA is employed not as a general interpretive stance but as a systematic analytical approach that treats language as data and foregrounds the relationship between linguistic form, discourse, and social context.

Research Design

The study is qualitative and interpretive, focusing on close textual analysis of selected excerpts from the two novels. This design is appropriate because the study seeks to uncover how patriarchal authority and resistance are discursively produced through language rather than to quantify patterns of usage. CDA provides the analytical tools required to examine the subtle and routine ways power is embedded in literary discourse.

Data Selection

The data consists of carefully selected excerpts from *The Joys of Motherhood* and *The Stillborn*. Excerpts were chosen based on explicit, predefined criteria rather than intuition. Selection focused on passages that:

i. involve direct interaction between male and female characters;
ii. depict moments of authority, command, judgement, or resistance; and
iii. recur across the texts in comparable social contexts such as marriage, family obligation, and communal expectation.

This purposive selection ensures that the data are representative of recurring discursive patterns through which gendered power is enacted, while allowing for meaningful comparison between the two novels.

Analytical Procedure

The analysis follows Fairclough's three-dimensional model of CDA. At the textual level, the study examines specific linguistic features including sentence types (imperatives and declaratives), modality, evaluative lexis, metaphors, and pronoun use. These features are analysed to show how authority, subordination, and resistance are linguistically encoded.

At the level of discursive practice, the study investigates how these linguistic choices function within patterns of interaction and narration. Attention is paid to who speaks, who is silenced, how commands and evaluations circulate, and how repeated discourse patterns normalise patriarchal relations or open space for challenge.

At the level of social practice, the findings are interpreted in relation to broader patriarchal structures within Nigerian society. Linguistic patterns identified in the novels are connected to cultural norms governing gender roles, marriage, and authority, without reducing literary discourse to mere social reflection.

Comparative Strategy

A comparative approach is adopted to ensure analytical balance. Similar discursive situations in both novels are analysed using the same linguistic parameters. This allows differences in the representation of power and resistance to emerge from language use rather than from thematic assertion.

Analytical Rigor

To maintain analytical rigour, the study limits the number of excerpts analysed, prioritising depth over breadth. Each excerpt is subjected to detailed linguistic analysis, ensuring that interpretations are grounded in observable textual features. This approach responds directly to critiques of impressionistic or overly thematic literary analysis.

Data Analysis and Discussion

This section presents a Critical Discourse Analysis of selected excerpts from *The Joys of Motherhood* and *The Stillborn*. In line with Fairclough's three-dimensional model, the analysis proceeds from textual features to discursive practice and finally to social practice. Textual examples are cited not as illustrations of pre-existing themes but as linguistic evidence through which power relations and resistance are discursively constructed.

Textual Level: Linguistic Encoding of Patriarchal Authority

At the textual level, patriarchal power in *The Joys of Motherhood* is frequently realised through unmodalised declarative clauses and imperatives that define women's roles as fixed and non-negotiable. For instance, when Nnaife addresses Nnu Ego with statements such as *"You are my wife. I married you to look after me and my children"*, the declarative structure presents male authority as a statement of fact rather than opinion. The absence of epistemic modality (e.g. *may*, *might*, *I think*) forecloses negotiation and positions the speaker as the unquestioned source of legitimacy.

The possessive determiner *"my"* in *"my wife"* further encodes ownership, linguistically reducing Nnu Ego's identity to a relational function defined by male authority. This grammatical possession aligns with what Fairclough (1995) describes as the naturalisation of dominance, where power is embedded in routine linguistic forms that appear ordinary and unremarkable.

Similarly, evaluative metaphors reinforce patriarchal expectations. Expressions equating womanhood with fertility, such as references to childlessness as incompleteness, operate through

metaphorical reduction. By mapping a woman's value onto biological productivity, such metaphors discursively erase alternative female identities. Importantly, the ideological force of these metaphors lies not in their explicit hostility but in their presentation as cultural common sense.

In *The Stillborn*, comparable moments of authority occur, but the linguistic patterning differs. Male characters initially deploy imperatives and categorical statements: *"Your duty is to follow, not to ask questions",* which rely on role assignment through nominalisation (*duty*) and negation (*not to ask*). However, Alkali's female characters increasingly respond with counter-declaratives such as *"I am not a child"* or *"You do not decide my life"*. The repeated use of first-person pronouns and negation marks a clear linguistic shift from compliance to resistance.

Discursive Practice: Interaction, Silence, and Voice

At the level of discursive practice, power is sustained not only by what is said but by who is permitted to speak and how. In *The Joys of Motherhood*, female speech is often restricted to internal monologue or silence. For example, moments of frustration are frequently narrated rather than spoken, as in descriptions where Nnu Ego "said nothing" while inwardly questioning her fate. Linguistically, this pattern creates an asymmetry between male externalised authority and female internalised resistance.

This containment of female voice functions discursively to normalise patriarchy. Because resistance rarely enters dialogic exchange, it lacks social consequence within the narrative. The repeated separation between thought and speech ensures that patriarchal discourse remains publicly unchallenged, reinforcing its ideological dominance.

In contrast, *The Stillborn* restructures discursive participation. Female characters increasingly articulate dissent aloud, directly addressing male authority figures. When Li states, *"I will not live my life according to your expectations"*, the utterance performs resistance as a public act. The declarative structure, combined with future modality (*will not*), signals intention and resolve rather than emotional reaction. Discursively, such moments disrupt established interactional hierarchies by refusing silence.

Social Practice: Ideology, Culture, and Gender Norms

At the level of social practice, these linguistic and discursive patterns reflect broader patriarchal ideologies within Nigerian society, where marriage and motherhood are central markers of female

identity. In *The Joys of Motherhood*, the linguistic normalisation of female sacrifice mirrors a cultural context in which women are socialised to endure rather than confront injustice. Power operates through what is linguistically routine, not exceptional.

In *The Stillborn*, the emergence of assertive female discourse corresponds to shifting social realities, particularly the influence of education and changing gender expectations. Language becomes a site where alternative social identities are imagined and articulated. Resistance, therefore, is not merely thematic but socially grounded and linguistically enacted.

Comparative Discussion: Discursive Configurations of Resistance

While both novels depict patriarchal domination, the difference lies in how resistance is discursively configured. *The Joys of Motherhood* encodes resistance primarily through internal cognition and narrative commentary, limiting its transformative potential. *The Stillborn*, by contrast, foregrounds resistance through direct speech, negation, and assertive modality. These differences are not abstract but linguistically traceable, demonstrating how discourse shapes the scope of female agency.

Conclusion

This study has examined how gendered power relations and resistance are discursively constructed in Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* and Zaynab Alkali's *The Stillborn* through the analytical lens of Critical Discourse Analysis. By focusing on linguistic form rather than thematic assertion, the study demonstrates that patriarchy in the selected novels operates through routine and often unmarked language choices that present domination as natural, expected, and culturally legitimate.

The analysis shows that in *The Joys of Motherhood*, patriarchal authority is primarily encoded through unmodalised declarative structures, possessive constructions, and evaluative metaphors that restrict female identity to relational and reproductive roles. These linguistic features work together to normalise male dominance and limit women's access to discursive space. Resistance, where present, is largely confined to internal monologue and narrative mediation, which reduces its social impact within the fictional world. Linguistically, this internalisation of resistance reinforces the stability of patriarchal discourse by preventing confrontation.

In contrast, *The Stillborn* exhibits a gradual but significant shift in discursive patterning. Female characters increasingly deploy assertive declaratives, negation, and first-person pronouns to

articulate resistance publicly and explicitly. These linguistic strategies disrupt established interactional hierarchies by challenging male authority in dialogue rather than in silence. The analysis demonstrates that resistance in *The Stillborn* is not merely ideological but is linguistically realised through specific grammatical and interactional choices.

By grounding interpretation in micro-linguistic analysis, this study advances feminist literary scholarship beyond broad thematic critique. It shows that gendered power and resistance in Nigerian women's writing are not only represented but are discursively engineered through language. The application of Fairclough's three-dimensional model further illustrates how textual features, discursive practices, and social ideologies intersect in the construction of gender relations. The study thus contributes to the growing body of work that integrates Critical Discourse Analysis into literary studies, particularly within African contexts. It demonstrates that literary discourse, like institutional or political discourse, participates actively in the production and contestation of social power. Ultimately, the findings reaffirm the centrality of language in shaping gendered realities and highlight the importance of linguistically grounded analysis for understanding the dynamics of patriarchy and resistance in Nigerian fiction.

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Restoring Nigeria's Weakening Norms and Values through Folktale-Based Counselling and Linguistic Renewal

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Abstract

In an era of intensifying global interconnectedness, the erosion of societal norms in modern Nigeria emerges as a systemic consequence of marginalising indigenous moral frameworks amidst the destabilising friction of globalised modernity. This normative vacuum, manifested in the rise of hyper-individualistic ideologies, declining communal ethics, and a collapse in academic discipline, demands a paradigm shift from reactive Eurocentric counselling toward a proactive model where the practitioner functions as a cultural mediator. By synthesising the psychodynamics of orality with sociocultural development theories, this position paper advocates for the revitalisation of Nigerian folktales as culturally grounded therapeutic tools within an Ethical Ontogeny framework. The study proposes the Orality to Cognition O C Protocol to operationalise the aesthetic power of oral tradition across domestic, institutional and digital spheres, facilitating a strategic migration of heritage into AI-driven platforms. This approach establishes the

cognitive infrastructure essential for ethical reasoning, behavioural regulation and identity formation, effectively countering digital trends that subvert traditional authority. By treating the folktale as a dynamic speech act, the counsellor bridges ancestral heritage with modern psychosocial imperatives, offering a sustainable pathway for restoring moral consciousness and ensuring that Nigerian youth emerge as ethically grounded, communicatively proficient and culturally resilient global citizens.
Keywords**: **Ethical Ontogeny Linguistic, Renewal Afrocentric Counselling, Multimodal Pedagogy, Digital Heritage Migration

Introduction: The Pedagogy of the Folktale

Oral literature in Nigerian societies serves as a structured moral discourse through which children and adolescents internalise ethical norms and socially sanctioned behaviours. Far from being mere entertainment, these narratives constitute informal yet systematic mechanisms for moral education, social cognition, and the formation of communal identity. Within the framework of contemporary counselling psychology, such constructs are reconceptualised as culturally grounded therapeutic tools capable of facilitating moral reasoning within familiar heritage frames.

The enduring efficacy of these narratives lies in their dual capacity to delight and instruct, embedding ethical logic within a cultural resonance that appeals even to those youth who might otherwise resist formal restraint or discipline. This pedagogical power, however, faces a profound systemic disconnect from the prevailing social climate. While societal norms and values have traditionally been upheld in Nigeria through oral traditions that prize integrity and social responsibility (Adeate, 2023), these frameworks are increasingly marginalised by the pressures of globalised modernity.

This erosion is most visible in the decline of communal and family values. Nwankwo (2022) argues that the respect for elders and community authority, once a hallmark of Nigerian tradition, is rapidly declining. Online spaces enable youths to ridicule leaders, question cultural practices, and adopt hyper-individualistic ideologies. This weakening of parental control is evident in the conflicts between digital savvy youths and their less technologically literate parents, often manifesting in viral social media trends that mock cultural practices, such as prostrating before elders in Yoruba tradition. While critical questioning of traditions can be healthy, the wholesale rejection of communal norms risks undermining intergenerational solidarity.

This discourse asserts that the erosion of such values represents more than a mere moral decline; it signifies a profound linguistic and cognitive fracture precipitated by the fragmentation of the oral traditions which historically facilitated ethical enculturation. The pedagogical efficacy of the folktale remains evidenced across the diverse ethnic landscape of Nigeria, where specific narrative

genres function as indigenous curricula for character development. Among the Yoruba, the *Alọ́* folktale often centres on the trickster figure, *Ìjàpá* (the tortoise), to deconstruct the tension between individual cunning and communal wisdom, reflecting the *Ìwà Pẹ̀lẹ́* (gentle character) ethic articulated by Abimbola (1975).

Conversely, the Igbo *Álọ́* serves as a medium for instilling *Ezigbo Àgwà* (good behaviour), frequently employing the *Mbe* (tortoise) stories to illustrate the inevitability of justice within a cosmic order (Emenanjo, 1977). In Northern Nigeria, the Hausa *Tatsuniyoyi* traditionally utilise the character of *Gizo* (the spider) to navigate complex social hierarchies and reinforce the traditional code of *Kunya* (modesty and shame). By reclaiming these "village square" discourses, the counsellor can bridge the intergenerational gap, restoring the communal "we" in an era of digital isolation.

The Friction of Globalised Modernity: A Systemic Erosion of Normative Baselines

Despite the historical robustness of Nigeria's indigenous frameworks, the contemporary social landscape is defined by a profound and systemic weakening of traditional value systems. This study contends that such a decline is not merely an incidental byproduct of chronological progression but a direct consequence of the abrasive friction between indigenous moral philosophies and the encroaching forces of globalised modernity. As the communal structures that once facilitated the oral transmission of heritage narratives are dismantled by rapid urbanisation and the nuclearisation of the family, a normative vacuum has emerged.

In this void, the ethical vocabulary of the youth is no longer authored by the community but is increasingly shaped by deregulated digital spaces. These mediated environments frequently prioritise immediate gratification, materialism, and radical individualism over the communal integrity and civic duty championed by ancestral heritage (Adeate, 2023; Ojo & Afolabi, 2025). This transition represents a structural reconfiguration of the adolescent social world, where the global village of the internet replaces the local village square as the primary source of moral authority.

These varied ethnic traditions spanning the Yoruba *Alọ́*, the Igbo *Álọ́*, and the Hausa *Tatsuniyoyi* converged historically as a unified pedagogical system, despite their linguistic distinctions. This system functioned as an indigenous curriculum that prioritised communal discipline and established the structured environment essential for ethical enculturation through concepts such as *Ìwà Pẹ̀lẹ́* and *Kunya*. However, the displacement of these native linguistic systems by a

predominantly Eurocentric educational and counselling apparatus has exacerbated a profound sense of cultural alienation.

By marginalising the mother tongue as the primary vessel for the performative speech acts inherent in folktales, the educational and social systems have inadvertently severed the cognitive linguistic link between the adolescent and their moral compass. This displacement of indigenous language does not merely represent a loss of vocabulary; it signifies a systemic dismantling of the auditory and conceptual framework required to internalise societal values. Consequently, the adolescent is left without the primary semiotic tools needed to navigate complex ethical landscapes, resulting in a profound disconnection from the communal identity that once anchored personal conduct. Consequently, the observed surge in academic indiscipline and social delinquency quantified by the 2025 Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB) data, where 1.5 million candidates failed to achieve a baseline score of 200, is reinterpreted here as a symptomatic response to this systemic cultural uprooting. This failure is less a reflection of intellectual capacity and more a manifestation of a collapse in personal accountability and ethical ontogeny, which is the developmental journey of becoming a moral agent.

Hence, this paper argues that the restoration of Nigeria's weakening norms is contingent upon a deliberate linguistic renewal within the counselling profession. Because the "village square" has been replaced by the "global village" of the internet, the adolescent is no longer anchored by the auditory and communal markers of indigenous identity. Therefore, any attempt at social restoration that relies solely on Western remedial models is likely to remain superficial, as it fails to address the underlying linguistic fracture at the heart of the Nigerian psyche.

True attitudinal transformation necessitates a return to the pedagogy of the folktale, where the counsellor transcends the role of a mere clinician to act as a cultural mediator. By reclaiming these indigenous narratives as therapeutic speech acts, the practitioner bridges the gap between ancestral heritage and the psychosocial requirements of the present day. This linguistic renewal facilitates the reconstruction of the cognitive infrastructure required for ethical reasoning, ultimately reintegrating the Nigerian youth into a coherent and culturally legitimate moral order.

The Ethnolinguistic and Ecological Architecture of Ethical Ontogeny

The critical review of the theoretical framework serves as the intellectual engine of this position paper, establishing that the restoration of Nigeria’s normative fabric is contingent upon a sophisticated understanding of how oral traditions fundamentally reconfigure human

consciousness. This discourse asserts that moral erosion is primarily a cognitive linguistic phenomenon, requiring a robust synthesis that accounts for the intersection of sound, social mediation, and systemic ecology.

The psychodynamics of orality, as articulated by Walter Ong (1982), provide the seminal foundation for this position through the concept of the interiority of sound. Ong asserts that sight situates the observer outside what they perceive and effectively isolates the individual. Conversely, sound pours into the hearer and incorporates the listener into a communal unit. In the Nigerian context, the spoken folktale is not merely a carrier of information but a performative event that binds the counsellor and the client in a shared temporal space. By reintroducing these oral narratives, the practitioner leverages this interiority to repair fractured social identities. This establishes a cognitive infrastructure where the adolescent moves away from the atomised self of digital consumption toward a connection with the communal whole. In the Nigerian context, the spoken folktale is not merely a carrier of information but a performative event that binds the counsellor and the client in a shared temporal space. By reintroducing these oral narratives, the practitioner leverages this interiority to repair fractured social identities, establishing a cognitive infrastructure where the adolescent moves away from the atomised "I" of digital consumption toward a connection with the communal "we". Recent neuroeducational scholarship reinforces this, suggesting that rhythmic storytelling activates the default mode network essential for social cognition and moral imagination (Okeowo, 2025). Thus, the folktale serves as an auditory anchor in a world increasingly dominated by the fragmented visual stimuli of globalised media.

Building upon this auditory foundation, the sociolinguistic perspective of the Ethnography of Communication (Hymes, 1974) identifies folktales as active linguistic events rather than static relics. According to this framework, every narrative performance is governed by specific rules of interaction that define the relationship between the individual and the collective. Narrative discourse performs a vital moral function by enacting social consequences within the storyline, thereby guiding the ethical judgment of the listener through vicarious experience. This functional role is further clarified by Sociolinguistic Variation Theory (Labov, 1972), which illustrates how specific linguistic registers and narrative structures reflect societal expectations. When the adolescent engages with the folktale, they are participating in a linguistic apprenticeship. As noted by Adesehinwa (2025), the immersive performative aspects of the folktale create psychological

impressions more resilient than didactic instruction, facilitating a "relational healing" that aligns with indigenous caregiving practices.

The bridge between language and moral agency is further fortified by Vygotsky's (1978) Sociocultural Theory, which posits that higher mental functions, including ethical reasoning and self-regulation, originate through social interaction mediated by cultural tools. Language is the primary semiotic tool in this process. When the village square discourse is silenced by Eurocentric educational models, the adolescent loses the mediators required to internalise complex moral values. The reintegration of folktales provides a culturally congruent Zone of Proximal Development where the counsellor, acting as a More Knowledgeable Other, facilitates the journey of the adolescent toward moral maturity. This experience, framed within an Ubuntu-based counselling model, functions as the primary vehicle for moral apprenticeship, shifting psychological health from an individualistic pursuit to a communal responsibility (Adesehinwa, Olawoyin, & Ogunlehin, 2025).

The theoretical synthesis of this framework necessitates a critical situating within Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory to account for the prevailing systemic rupture within the Nigerian adolescent experience. This model, which situates the individual at the nexus of concentric layers of influence, ranging from the Microsystem of family and school to the Macrosystem of cultural values and global ideologies, provides the structural logic for understanding the current normative decline. In the Nigerian context, the relevance of this ecological architecture lies in the profound disharmony currently occurring between these developmental layers. Traditionally, the Macrosystem of indigenous ethics was filtered through the Microsystem of moonlight storytelling, creating a harmonious environment for moral apprenticeship through a robust Mesosystem linkage.

However, contemporary trends indicate that the Macrosystem is now dominated by uncurated digital influences that bypass parental mediation, effectively creating a virtual microsystem that promotes social media addiction and poor study habits (Olubela & Iyunade, 2025). This systemic fracture leads directly to the moral disorientation and academic commitment collapse noted in recent scholastic observations (Adeate, 2023). By utilising the folktale as a therapeutic speech act, the practitioner initiates a deliberate ecological restoration, repairing the damaged Mesosystem by reconnecting the home, the school, and the ancestral heritage. This intervention transforms the counselling space into a restorative environment where the adolescent can reconcile their digital

reality with their cultural identity, thereby establishing the cognitive anchors required for ethical ontogeny.

This ecological realignment ensures that the restoration of Nigeria's norms is not a matter of isolated moral exhortation but a systemic task of linguistic renewal and cognitive restructuring. By reinforcing the linkages between the adolescent's immediate environment and the broader cultural heritage, the framework secures a sustainable pathway for character development within a globalised world.

Consequently, the counsellor's intervention must be viewed as an ecological restoration. By utilising the folktale as a therapeutic speech act, the practitioner restores the meso-linkage between the home, the school, and the ancestral heritage. This multidisciplinary framework justifies the position of the paper that the restoration of Nigerian norms is not a matter of moral exhortation but is a task of linguistic renewal and cognitive restructuring. The framework asserts that the rehabilitation of societal values requires a fundamental rebuilding of the mental and communicative processes through which the adolescent engages with the world.

Building upon this multidisciplinary framework, the practitioner employs the Orality to Cognition (O-C) Protocol to operationalise these theoretical insights. This clinical framework serves as the primary vehicle for cultural mediation, transitioning abstract principles into a structured therapeutic process. The protocol functions by externalising the adolescent's internal conflicts through the medium of the folk narrative, thereby bypassing the defensive mechanisms often triggered by direct, Western-centric remedial questioning. In this context, the counsellor does not merely listen but actively facilitates a reflective engagement where the client deconstructs the ethical dilemmas faced by characters, mapping these fictional consequences onto their real-world social interactions.

The Orality to Cognition (O-C) Protocol: Clinical Application

This methodological transition from ecological theory to clinical praxis is realised through the Orality to Cognition O C Protocol, a structured intervention that transforms the counsellor into a cultural mediator. By operationalising the previously established theoretical architecture, the protocol functions as the primary vehicle for cultural mediation, transitioning abstract principles into a systematic therapeutic process. The protocol functions by externalising the internal conflicts of the adolescent through the medium of the folk narrative, thereby bypassing the defensive mechanisms often triggered by direct Western-centric remedial questioning. In this context, the

practitioner does not merely listen but actively facilitates a reflective engagement where the client deconstructs the ethical dilemmas faced by characters and maps these fictional consequences onto real-world social interactions.

This clinical application directly addresses the systemic fracture between the indigenous macrosystem and the modern microsystem by providing a culturally congruent zone of proximal development. Through the O C Protocol, the counsellor scaffolds the journey of the adolescent toward moral maturity, ensuring that the interiority of sound and the performative power of the spoken word translate into tangible behavioural regulation. Ultimately, this structured engagement ensures that the restoration of Nigeria's norms is achieved not through external moral exhortation, but through a profound linguistic renewal that reshapes the cognitive and ethical landscape of the contemporary youth.

By operationalising the psychodynamics of orality, this protocol seeks to mend the systemic fracture between the adolescent's internal moral compass and the external cultural macrosystem. The process is not merely a retelling of stories but a strategic deconstruction of narrative logic designed to bypass the psychological resistance often encountered in Western-centric therapeutic models.

The initial stage of the protocol, Narrative Immersion, re-establishes the "auditory anchor" essential for communal identity. During this phase, the practitioner utilises the rhythmic and performative elements of indigenous orality, usually incorporating the call-and-response motifs characteristic of the *Alọ́* or *Álọ́* to engage the client's social cognition. This immersion serves to quiet the "atomised I" of digital consumption and activate a collective consciousness. As the client enters this shared temporal space, the counsellor introduces the Critical Deconstruction phase. Here, the focus shifts to the ethical "turning points" within the story, where characters like *Ìjàpá* or *Mbe* must navigate the tension between individualistic greed and communal responsibility.

During this deconstructive phase, the practitioner facilitates the client's journey through the Zone of Proximal Development, as established by Vygotsky (1978). By analysing the fictional consequences of a character's subversion of communal norms, such as the permanent physical scarring of the Tortoise, the adolescent can safely explore the weight of their own choices without the threat of direct accusation. This externalisation allows the youth to map the narrative logic of the folktale onto contemporary challenges, such as academic integrity or digital conduct. This phase is essential for building the cognitive infrastructure required for self-regulation and ethical

reasoning, which recent Nigerian studies identify as critical deficits in the modern adolescent (Olukunle & Aderoju, 2025).

The protocol culminates in Heritage Integration, where the linguistic and moral renewal achieved within the counselling session is extended into the adolescent's wider ecological layers. The counsellor facilitates a dialogue that translates the "ancient vocabulary" of the folktale into "modern civic duty," ensuring that the ethical enculturation is not viewed as an archaic relic but as a dynamic tool for navigating 21st century social hierarchies. By bridging ancestral wisdom with the psychosocial requirements of the present, the O-C Protocol ensures that the restorative process remains culturally legitimate and sustainably anchored within the Nigerian psyche.

This clinical approach directly addresses the "mediational rupture" identified in the theoretical synthesis. It moves beyond superficial remedial measures to foster a permanent attitudinal transformation that is linguistically congruent and ecologically grounded. Through the O-C Protocol, the counselling room is transformed into a modern village square, securing the transmission of values that are essential for both individual psychological health and national development.

Case Illustration: The Tortoise Metaphor and the Cognitive Internalisation of Social Ethics

The application of the Orality to Cognition O- C Protocol is best illustrated through the analysis of the tortoise archetype, a central figure in Nigerian trickster narratives. In a clinical setting, the practitioner utilises the tale of the tortoise and the communal feast to externalise the adolescent's struggle between selfish impulse and communal obligation. By navigating the narrative arc where the greed of the tortoise leads to social ostracisation or physical injury, the client engages in a vicarious rehearsal of social consequences. This clinical metaphor allows the adolescent to deconstruct the hyper-individualistic tendencies fostered by modern digital spaces without the defensiveness triggered by direct moral correction. Through this narrative praxis, the counsellor facilitates a linguistic renewal where the client adopts a new vocabulary of accountability, effectively bridging the gap between ancestral wisdom and contemporary social responsibility.

To operationalise the Orality to Cognition O C Protocol, the practitioner must strategically select narratives that offer a transparent ethical architecture for deconstruction. A seminal narrative for this purpose is the tale of The Greed of the Tortoise and the Dog's Secret, which provides a potent moral rehearsal for the adolescent navigating the pressures of globalised modernity. The narrative depicts a devastating famine where the Tortoise discovers the Dog's secret path to a celestial farm

of abundance. Driven by individual gluttony, the Tortoise manipulates the Dog to gain access but eventually violates the communal trust by attempting to hoard the celestial bounty. His refusal to heed warnings leads to public exposure and a physical fall, symbolised by his permanently cracked shell.

For the counsellor, this story serves as a sophisticated clinical metaphor for the hyper-individualistic ideologies prevalent in contemporary digital spaces. The shattered shell of the Tortoise is reconceptualised as a psychological mirror through which the adolescent can examine the long-term repercussions of antisocial conduct such as digital fraud, bullying, or academic dishonesty without the immediate threat of personal indictment. By utilising this third-party character, the practitioner effectively bypasses the ego defensiveness typical of the adolescent developmental stage. This externalisation allows the client to navigate complex behavioural disturbances within the safe space of ancestral logic, where they act not as a defendant but as an analytical observer of the logic of consequence.

During the deconstructive phase of the protocol, the practitioner prompts the client to identify the fracture points in the logic of the Tortoise. This dialogue targets the cognitive linguistic link between individual choice and communal survival. For instance, when an adolescent struggling with academic discipline analyses the failure of the Tortoise to adhere to a shared covenant, they are effectively rehearsing the internalisation of institutional norms. This process aligns with the findings of Adesehinwa et al. (2025), who posit that indigenous metaphors provide a more resilient psychological impression than Western-centric remedial instruction. The Tortoise's secret path thus becomes a prompt for students to debate the ethics of resource sharing and integrity during a national crisis.

Furthermore, the shattered shell metaphor provides a visual and auditory anchor for the concept of relational repair. The adolescent learns that while restoration is possible, the integrity of the social contract is indelibly changed by acts of subversion. This linguistic renewal ensures that the moral vocabulary remains grounded in the cultural reality of the client while addressing the high-stakes requirements of national development and civic responsibility. Consequently, the folktale is transformed from an archaic relic into a dynamic clinical text, securing an enduring attitudinal transformation that is both culturally legitimate and psychologically profound. This implementation ensures that the transition from ecological theory to practical policy is seamless, persuasive and rigorously aligned with the central thesis of national renewal.

The tortoise metaphor functions as a sophisticated mediational tool that bridges the gap between abstract communal ethics and the concrete reality of the contemporary adolescent. By externalising moral conflict through a familiar cultural archetype, this illustration buttresses the position of the paper through four distinct clinical advantages. It facilitates nonconfrontational therapy by bypassing the adolescent resistance and ego barriers typical of Western remedial models while providing cognitive anchoring through imagery, such as the shattered shell, which serves as a permanent mental anchor regarding the consequences of subverting social contracts. Furthermore, the protocol enables linguistic renewal by offering a culturally congruent vocabulary to address modern vices like digital fraud and academic indiscipline, ultimately achieving systemic restoration. By shifting the treatment of behavioural disturbances from external punishment to the logical consequences within a communal ecology, the framework ensures a sustainable psychological transformation.

Strategic Implementation: The Multimodal Framework for Ecological Restoration

The restoration of Nigeria's weakening norms cannot be confined to the clinical setting alone; rather, the framework must operationalise the aesthetic and performative power of oral tradition across three distinct yet intersecting spheres of the adolescent ecology. By synchronising the domestic, institutional, and digital environments, the practitioner ensures that the development of moral agency is reinforced at every level of social interaction. This multimodal approach transforms the folktale from a static narrative into a dynamic tool for systemic ethical reconstruction.

The Domestic Sphere: The Foundational Site of Moral Apprenticeship

The revival of parental storytelling within the domestic sphere aligns with the Yoruba ethical maxim, *Ilé la ti ńkọ́ èṣọ́ ròde*, the principle that character and social decorum are forged within the home before they are exhibited in the public square. This stage of implementation seeks to re-establish the family unit as the primary site of moral apprenticeship. By equipping parents with the linguistic tools to facilitate moonlight tales in a contemporary context, the framework mends the systemic fracture in the microsystem identified in the 2026 baseline. This domestic reinforcement ensures that children are socialised into communal values before they encounter the deregulated influences of the peer group, creating an early cognitive anchor that resists the pull of radical individualism.

The Institutional Sphere: Curricular Integration and Narrative Therapy

Within the institutional sphere, the framework advocates for the formal integration of the Orality to Cognition (O-C) Protocol into school guidance and counselling programmes. Practitioners here move beyond traditional remedial roles to use Narrative Therapy as a vehicle for Kohlbergian moral reasoning. By facilitating classroom debates centred on the ethical dilemmas of folktale characters, students are provided with a structured moral rehearsal for real-life decision-making.

This institutional approach addresses the academic commitment collapse noted in recent JAMB data by fostering personal accountability through vicarious experience. The folktale thus becomes an indigenous curriculum for character development, bridging the gap between abstract civic education and lived ethical reality.

The Digital Sphere: The Multimodal Multiplier

Recognising the 2026 digital baseline, the framework posits that indigenous heritage must be strategically migrated into AI-driven platforms and animated participatory media. Rather than viewing technology as an inherent threat to traditional values, this position paper conceptualises the digital sphere as a multimodal multiplier of cultural norms. By retaining essential call-and-response motifs within interactive digital formats, technology is transformed from a source of normative erosion into a pedagogical instrument.

Interactive AI applications can be designed to offer moral branching paths, requiring the user to navigate the same ethical turning points found in the *Alọ́* or *Tatsuniyoyi*. This ensures that heritage remains a dynamic and linguistically congruent vehicle for transmitting societal values in the 21st century. Through this digital migration, the interiority of sound once exclusive to the physical village square is extended into mediated spaces, securing an enduring attitudinal transformation that is both technologically adept and ethically anchored.

Strategic Recommendations: Points for Reform

To move from the conceptual framework to national impact, the following itemised recommendations are proposed:

Curricular Mandate: Integrate the O-C Protocol into the National Civic Education curriculum to institutionalise indigenous moral reasoning as a core academic requirement.

Professional Certification: Task the Counselling Association of Nigeria (CASSON) with certifying practitioners as Cultural Mediators through specialised Afrocentric narrative therapy workshops.

Ethical Tech Investment: Launch government-backed Ethical Tech grants to incentivise the migration of folktales into interactive AI and animated participatory media.

Parental Apprenticeship: Standardise monthly school workshops to revive the home (*Ile la ti nko eso rode*) as the primary site of moral apprenticeship and linguistic renewal.

Data-Driven Pilots: Deploy intensive folktale-based interventions in high-risk academic zones identified by 2025/2026 scholastic performance data to prove the protocol's efficacy in reducing delinquency.

Conclusion: The Mandate for National Renewal

The Nigerian counsellor occupies a vital intersection where cultural heritage and psychological science converge to address the systemic rupture in national values. By reclaiming the pedagogy of the folktale, the profession moves beyond westernised remedial models toward a profound linguistic renewal that restores the cognitive infrastructure of moral agency. This approach leverages the performative power of oral tradition to mend the ecological systems anchoring youth to their community, effectively transforming the clinical space into a modern village square. Consequently, this cultural reintegration ensures the emergence of a generation that is both technologically adept and ethically resilient. Further empirical study is necessary to evaluate the longitudinal impact of AI-mediated indigenous storytelling on neuroplasticity and moral decision-making in contemporary Nigerian adolescents.

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Tithing and Persuasive Discourse in Nigerian Pentecostal Sermons: A Socio-Cognitive Critical Discourse Analysis

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Abstract

This study investigates how tithing is discursively constructed and legitimised in Nigerian Pentecostal sermons through a socio-cognitive critical discourse analytical framework. While scholarship on Nigerian Pentecostalism has examined prosperity theology, church growth, and religious economy, limited attention has been paid to the specific linguistic strategies through which financial obligation is framed, normalised, and sustained in sermon discourse. This study addresses this gap by analysing persuasive language used in sermons that explicitly focus on tithing. Data consists of purposively selected sermon excerpts publicly available on YouTube and on the official media channels of prominent Nigerian Pentecostal preachers. Only sermons where tithing constitutes a central thematic focus were included, ensuring analytical relevance. The study adopts van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach to Critical Discourse Analysis to examine how discourse structures, cognitive framing, and ideological positioning interact in shaping congregational interpretation and response. Analysis reveals recurring persuasive strategies, including scriptural recontextualisation, fear appeals, testimonial legitimation, authority construction, and discursive closure. At the macro level, tithing is framed within a prosperity-centred religious ideology that links financial obedience to divine favour and spiritual legitimacy. At the meso level, rhetorical devices and directive speech acts position preachers as authoritative interpreters of divine instruction. At the micro level, lexical choices, metaphors, modality, and pronoun usage reinforce obligation, urgency, and compliance. The study demonstrates that tithing in Nigerian Pentecostal sermons is not merely a theological practice but a discursively organised system of persuasion through which belief, authority, and financial commitment are constructed and maintained. It contributes to scholarship on religious discourse, pragmatics, and African Pentecostal communication by foregrounding language as a central mechanism in the production and circulation of religious authority.

Keywords**:** *Critical Discourse Analysis; tithing discourse; linguistic persuasion; Pentecostal sermons; socio-cognitive approach*

Introduction

Pentecostalism has emerged as one of the most influential religious movements in contemporary Nigeria, shaping spiritual practices, social relations, and public discourse. Central to its expansion is sermon discourse, which serves as a primary medium for communicating doctrine, reinforcing behavioural expectations, and shaping congregational belief systems. Among the recurring themes in Nigerian Pentecostal preaching, tithing occupies a prominent position, often framed as both a spiritual obligation and a pathway to divine favour and material prosperity. Through sermons, religious leaders construct theological meanings, negotiate authority, and guide congregational responses using persuasive language that reflects broader socio-religious ideologies (Gifford, 2004; Ukah, 2008; Asamoah-Gyadu, 2013).

Existing scholarship on Nigerian Pentecostalism has largely focused on prosperity theology, religious economy, and the socio-political influence of Pentecostal leaders. Studies demonstrate that financial giving is frequently embedded within doctrines of faith, obedience, and divine reward, while media technologies have expanded the reach and impact of Pentecostal preaching (Kalu, 2008; Ojo, 2006; Asamoah-Gyadu, 2013). However, despite these contributions, limited attention has been paid to the linguistic mechanisms through which tithing is discursively constructed and legitimised in sermon discourse. In particular, there remains a lack of micro-level analysis of how persuasive strategies operate within sermons to shape belief, reinforce authority, and guide congregational behaviour.

Sermon discourse functions as more than a vehicle for transmitting doctrine; it is a site where language operates as a strategic resource for constructing social reality. Critical discourse scholars emphasise that language shapes ideology, influences cognition, and sustains power relations within social institutions (Fairclough, 1995; van Dijk, 2008). In religious settings, discourse often legitimises authority, constructs moral obligations, and reinforces communal identities (Wodak & Meyer, 2001). Through rhetorical devices, evaluative language, scriptural interpretation, and directive speech acts, preachers frame financial giving as morally necessary and spiritually consequential.

This study examines how tithing is constructed as persuasive discourse in Nigerian Pentecostal sermons using van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach to Critical Discourse Analysis. It focuses on sermon excerpts in which tithing constitutes a central theme, analysing how language legitimises financial obligation, reinforces religious authority, and shapes interpretive frameworks among

listeners. The study aims to identify the discursive strategies through which tithing is framed and sustained, and to explain how these strategies are realised through linguistic choices and rhetorical organisation.

The significance of the study lies in its contribution to discourse-oriented scholarship on religion and language in Africa. By foregrounding linguistic analysis, it demonstrates how persuasive authority is produced through discourse and highlights the role of language in shaping belief, compliance, and contemporary Pentecostal practice.

Research Questions

1) What linguistic and discursive strategies are used in Nigerian Pentecostal sermons to construct and legitimise tithing as a religious obligation?
2) How are these strategies realised through specific language features such as lexical choice, metaphor, modality, pronoun use, and directive structures in sermon discourse?
3) How do these linguistic constructions reinforce religious authority, shape ideological meanings, and influence cognitive models of obligation and compliance in tithing discourse?

Review of Literature

Pentecostal preaching, prosperity, and giving in Nigeria

Studies of Nigerian Pentecostalism consistently show that sermon discourse is central to how Pentecostal movements define spirituality, discipline members, and popularise prosperity-oriented doctrines (Kalu, 2008; Ojo, 2006; Ukah, 2008). Within this landscape, teachings on giving, especially tithing and seed-sowing, are frequently framed as covenantal obligations linked to divine reward, wellbeing, and social mobility (Gifford, 2004; Asamoah-Gyadu, 2013). The prosperity message, therefore, operates not only as theology but also as a persuasive communicative project that constructs moral obligations around money and faith.

Empirical work on tithing/seed-sowing debates and prosperity claims

Recent scholarship continues to interrogate the place of tithing and seed-sowing in Nigerian Christianity, often highlighting how such practices become focal points of doctrinal dispute and institutional power. For example, Akabike (2021) examines how tithing/seed-sowing narratives are tied to assumptions about prosperity and salvation within contemporary Nigerian Christianity.

Aruku (2024) similarly underscores how interpretations of tithing generate contestation and social pressure within church communities, indicating that giving is sustained not only by doctrine but also by collective expectations and moral surveillance. Although much of this line of work is theological or socio-ethical in orientation, it supports the argument that "giving" discourse remains a contested and socially consequential domain of Pentecostal communication.

Discourse-oriented studies on Nigerian Pentecostal sermons

More directly relevant are linguistic and discourse studies that show how Pentecostal sermons rely on recurring rhetorical and pragmatic resources to persuade audiences. Akinwotu (2021), for instance, demonstrates that Nigerian Pentecostal sermons deploy rhetorical questions, directives, metaphors, repetition, and experiential narratives to achieve conviction and mobilise listeners. In a related discourse tradition, Okpeh (2022) shows how metaphor in Nigerian Pentecostal discourse encodes ideologies (e.g., materialist, retributive, rebirth ideologies) and contributes to meaning-making beyond literal interpretation. Collectively, these studies establish that Pentecostal preaching is a strategic discourse space where language choices matter for belief formation and behavioural compliance.

Critical Discourse Analysis, authority, and persuasion in religious discourse

CDA scholarship treats discourse as a site where ideology and power are reproduced through seemingly "ordinary" language practices (Fairclough, 1995; van Dijk, 2008; Wodak & Meyer, 2009). Within religious contexts, authority is often performed through discursive control: speakers frame interpretations as unquestionable, restrict counter-readings, and present compliance as morally necessary. Van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach is particularly relevant because it links discourse structures to cognition, explaining how repeated framing can shape audience mental models about obligation, legitimacy, and consequence (van Dijk, 2008).

Although existing Nigerian Pentecostal scholarship has examined prosperity teaching and debates about giving, and discourse studies have documented rhetorical resources in sermons, limited research has systematically mapped tithing discourse onto clearly specified CDA levels (macro/meso/micro) while also explaining how such discourse shapes cognitive models of obligation and compliance. This study fills that gap by analysing tithing-focused sermons as persuasive discourse, showing how strategies are linguistically realised and how they function ideologically and cognitively within Nigerian Pentecostal preaching.

Theoretical Framework: Socio-Cognitive Critical Discourse Analysis

This study is anchored in van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach to Critical Discourse Analysis, which conceptualises discourse as a structured social practice that both reflects and shapes ideology through cognition (van Dijk, 2008). The framework is suitable for sermon discourse because preaching is designed to influence belief, secure commitment, and regulate conduct; these outcomes depend on how listeners interpret messages, internalise evaluations, and accept authority claims.

The framework is operationalised across three mutually informing levels:

1) **Macro level (social context and ideology):** Analysis identifies the ideological frames that organise tithing discourse, especially prosperity logics that link giving to divine favour, protection, and "open heavens." At this level, the study examines how tithing is framed as covenantal duty, moral legitimacy, and spiritual security, and how dissent is treated as dangerous or rebellious (van Dijk, 2008).
2) **Meso level (discursive strategies and interactional control):** This level focuses on the persuasive strategies through which preachers manage agreement and regulate congregational response. Strategies expected in the data include *scriptural recontextualisation, fear appeals* (curse/robbery frames), *testimonial legitimation, authority construction* (spiritual fatherhood, divine mandate), and *discursive closure* (statements that foreclose debate). These strategies align with sermon persuasion patterns documented in Nigerian Pentecostal discourse research (Akinwotu, 2021).
3) **Micro level (linguistic realisation):** Analysis attends to the language forms through which strategies are executed: imperatives and directives, modal verbs (certainty/necessity), evaluative lexis (dishonest/robber/blessed), metaphor (curse, windows of heaven, robbery), pronoun positioning (we/you/they), code choice (e.g., Pidgin for intimacy and alignment), and rhetorical questions that guide interpretation.

By linking discourse to cognition, socio-cognitive CDA enables the study to explain not only *what* is said about tithing but *how* repeated framing shapes mental models of obligation, blessing, and consequence among listeners (van Dijk, 2008). This makes the framework especially appropriate for analysing tithing sermons where persuasion depends on moral evaluation, fear/hope framing, and the legitimisation of authority.

Methodology

Research design

The study adopts a qualitative discourse-analytical design. It analyses tithing-focused sermon discourse as linguistic data, using socio-cognitive CDA to examine how ideology and authority are constructed and how meaning is shaped for audience uptake (van Dijk, 2008).

Data source and selection

Data were drawn from publicly accessible video sermons available on YouTube and official media channels of selected Nigerian Pentecostal ministries. YouTube was chosen because it functions as a major circulation space for Pentecostal preaching and provides access to naturally occurring sermon discourse in extended persuasive form. Sampling was purposive and guided strictly by the research focus. Sermons were included only where tithing constituted the central theme of discourse. The selection was limited to sermons delivered by widely recognised Pentecostal leaders whose messages are routinely disseminated in the public domain. This criterion ensured both data accessibility and relevance, without implying representativeness of all Pentecostal preaching. The study is concerned with linguistic patterns in sermon discourse rather than the personal identities of individual preachers or their ministries.

Sermons were included only when:

- tithing/offerings/financial giving constituted a central theme (not incidental mention);
- the sermon contained extended persuasive moves (argumentation, directives, warnings, testimonies);
- the recording was available in full and sufficiently clear for transcription/analysis;
- The preacher had substantial public visibility, indicating high discursive reach in the public domain.

Preacher inclusion rationale

The study does not claim that the selected preachers represent all Pentecostal traditions. Rather, they function as high-visibility sites of public sermon discourse where persuasive patterns are strongly institutionalised and widely circulated. This aligns with discourse research that treats influential communicators as key producers of widely reproduced discursive norms (Fairclough, 1995; van Dijk, 2008).

Temporal scope and transparency

The study is not designed as a diachronic analysis. Its primary concern is recurring persuasive patterns in tithing discourse rather than change over time. Nonetheless, the dataset is restricted to publicly accessible sermons within a clearly defined retrieval window to ensure transparency and replicability.

Data handling and ethics

Because the data are publicly available sermons disseminated for open viewing, informed consent is not typically required for textual analysis. However, the study maintains ethical caution by focusing on discourse patterns rather than personal attacks, avoiding defamatory claims, and ensuring accurate contextual representation of excerpted materials.

Analytical procedure

Analysis proceeds in four steps:

1) **Transcription and excerpting:** tithing-focused sermon segments were transcribed and segmented into analysable units (key claims, directives, warnings, scriptural interpretations, testimonies).
2) **Strategy identification (meso-level):** persuasive strategies were coded (e.g., fear appeal, scriptural recontextualisation, testimonial legitimation), consistent with sermon strategy patterns noted in Nigerian sermon research (Akinwotu, 2021).
3) **Linguistic analysis (micro-level):** each strategy was examined through its linguistic realisation: lexis, modality, metaphor, pronouns, code choice, and rhetorical structure.
4) **Ideological and cognitive interpretation (macro + socio-cognitive):** findings were interpreted in relation to broader prosperity ideology and the cognitive models constructed for listeners (van Dijk, 2008).

Data Analysis

This section presents a critical discourse analysis of purposively selected Nigerian Pentecostal sermon excerpts in which tithing constitutes the central theme. The analysis applies van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach to examine how language operates as a persuasive resource in shaping belief, reinforcing authority, and guiding congregational behaviour. Attention is given to the interaction between macro-level ideological framing, meso-level discursive strategies, and micro-

level linguistic features such as metaphor, evaluative lexis, pronoun positioning, modality, and directive structures. By foregrounding how meaning is constructed within sermon discourse, the section demonstrates how tithing is framed as a spiritual obligation, moral duty, and pathway to divine favour. The focus is therefore not on theological correctness but on the linguistic organisation of persuasion within contemporary Pentecostal communication.

Fear Appeal and Moral Threat in Tithing Discourse

A recurring persuasive strategy in the sermons analysed is fear appeal, where non-payment of tithes is framed as spiritually dangerous and morally condemnable. Through lexical choice, metaphor, and declarative constructions, sermon discourse constructs a moral universe in which financial giving becomes a protective act against divine punishment.

Consider the excerpt:

"It is a dangerous thing to have a curse on your head… Every robber who robs God of his tithe and offering is under a curse."

Here, the lexical item *dangerous* establishes a climate of threat, while the metaphor *"curse on your head"* transforms spiritual consequence into a personal burden. The criminalising expression *"robber who robs God"* redefines non-payment as theft rather than omission. Repetition of the lexical root *rob* intensifies culpability and positions congregants as offenders violating divine ownership. The possessive construction *"God of his tithe"* presupposes that tithe inherently belongs to God, thereby presenting giving as an obligation rather than a voluntary offering.

The utterance is expressed in unmodalised declarative form, which gives it epistemic authority and frames it as unquestionable truth. The clause *"is under a curse"* operates as a categorical judgement, leaving little room for negotiation. Discursively, the warning links non-compliance with punishment and constructs obedience as a strategy for spiritual safety.

A related framing appears in another excerpt:

"If God curses you, to whom will you run? It is a dangerous thing to rob God."

The rhetorical question anticipates and suppresses dissent by implying that divine punishment is unavoidable. Repetition of *danger* reinforces urgency, while *robbing God* again criminalises non-

payment. The interrogative structure creates psychological engagement but directs the listener toward a predetermined conclusion: compliance.

Ideologically, these constructions sustain a prosperity-punishment binary in which financial obedience guarantees protection while resistance invites affliction. Within a socio-cognitive perspective, repeated exposure to such discourse may shape mental models in which tithe payment is perceived as necessary for spiritual security. Fear therefore operates not merely as emotional rhetoric but as a discursive mechanism for legitimising authority, guiding behaviour, and aligning economic practice with religious obligation.

Scriptural Recontextualisation in Tithing Discourse

A dominant persuasive strategy in the sermons analysed is the recontextualisation of scripture, whereby biblical narratives and verses are reframed to present tithing as a timeless, divinely mandated practice. Rather than treating scripture as open to multiple interpretations, sermon discourse selectively reinterprets biblical events to construct tithing as a fixed moral and spiritual requirement for contemporary believers.

Consider the excerpt:

"Adam touched the tithe… God said This one is yours, but this is mine."

This utterance reinterprets the Genesis narrative by equating Adam's disobedience with the withholding of tithe. The verb *touched* functions metaphorically, implying transgression and relocating a primordial act of disobedience into the domain of financial obligation. The possessive contrast *"this one is yours, but this is mine"* foregrounds divine ownership and frames tithe as sacred property. Through this grammatical pattern, financial giving is constructed not as optional generosity but as restitution of what already belongs to God.

Discursively, scripture is not quoted for reflection but recontextualised as instruction. Elements of biblical narrative are reconstructed to support contemporary doctrinal emphasis, collapsing historical distance and positioning present-day congregants within the same moral framework as biblical figures. Ideologically, this framing constructs continuity between ancient divine command and modern financial practice, thereby legitimising tithing as part of an unbroken spiritual order.

A related example extends scriptural authority through direct citation:

"Jesus said, this ought you to have done and not to leave the other undone."

Here, quotation functions as legitimising discourse. The modal construction *ought* signals obligation, while attribution to Jesus transforms the statement from pastoral interpretation to divine mandate. The declarative form restricts alternative readings and positions compliance as alignment with sacred instruction. Scripture is thus reinserted into contemporary economic discourse as prescriptive authority.

Another instance counters dissent through historical framing:
"It is not part of the law Christ redeemed us from… Abraham paid tithe before the law."

This construction invokes a pre-law origin for tithing, presenting it as transcending theological debates about Mosaic law. The contrastive structure *"not part of the law… before the law"* operates argumentatively, anticipating objections and neutralising them through declarative certainty. Tithing is thereby positioned as universal and doctrinally uncontested.
Analytically, scriptural recontextualisation functions as a key persuasive mechanism in tithing discourse. Linguistic features such as possessive pronouns, modal verbs, and declarative structures establish authority and minimise interpretive flexibility. At a broader level, scripture is reframed as directive discourse that guides congregational behaviour and reinforces an ideology of divine ownership and prosperity-oriented obedience. Repeated exposure to such framing may encourage listeners to internalise tithing as historically grounded, spiritually mandated, and morally necessary, thereby sustaining institutional authority and financial practice.

Testimonial Legitimation in Tithing Discourse

Another recurring persuasive strategy in the sermons is testimonial legitimation, where personal success stories and experiential narratives are used to validate tithing. Rather than relying solely on doctrinal claims, the discourse mobilises lived experiences of the preacher or other believers to demonstrate the perceived efficacy of financial obedience. Testimony thus functions as a discursive resource that transforms belief into "evidence."

Consider the excerpt:
"Many have tithed their way into greatness in life… John D. Rockefeller began tithing from a small salary and became a billionaire."

This utterance frames tithing as causally linked to material success. The expression *"tithed their way into greatness"* employs a journey metaphor that presents giving as a pathway to achievement. Evaluative lexis such as *greatness* and *billionaire* foregrounds material prosperity, while the declarative structure presents the claim as factual rather than interpretive. The reference to Rockefeller functions as an appeal to authority, creating an analogy between religious giving and capitalist success and implying that disciplined tithing produces economic transformation.

A second example illustrates how local testimonies strengthen persuasion:
"I know someone who started tithing here with a small income and now earns millions."

Here, proximity enhances credibility. The phrase *"I know someone"* personalises the narrative, while *"started here"* situates the testimony within the same religious community. The lexical contrast between *small income* and *millions* constructs a transformation narrative that emphasises upward mobility. The simple declarative form presents the outcome as established truth, encouraging listeners to interpret their own circumstances as potentially reversible through obedience.

A further testimonial draws on collective experience:
"There are amazing testimonies in this place… strange breakthroughs and divine ideas come through tithing."

The plural *testimonies* suggest widespread validation, while the adjective *amazing* heightens emotional engagement. The phrase *"in this place"* reinforces communal legitimacy, implying that evidence is observable within the congregation. Metaphorical expressions such as *divine ideas* blend spiritual and material aspirations, presenting prosperity as both sacred and attainable.
Analytically, testimonial legitimation operates as a bridge between doctrine and lived experience. Linguistically, it relies on evaluative lexis, declarative certainty, and narrative sequencing to construct credibility. Discursively, testimonies function as social proof, shifting persuasion from command to demonstration by showing what happens to those who tithe. Ideologically, these narratives reinforce a prosperity orientation in which financial obedience is linked to material reward and spiritual favour.
Within a socio-cognitive perspective, repeated exposure to testimonial narratives may shape mental models that associate tithing with success, upward mobility, and divine approval. Financial

giving is therefore framed not only as a religious duty but also as a practical pathway to personal transformation and collective aspiration.

Authority Construction in Tithing Discourse

A further persuasive strategy evident in the sermons is authority construction, where preachers position themselves as divinely sanctioned interpreters of scripture and custodians of spiritual truth. Through relational metaphors, directive speech, and epistemic certainty, sermon discourse establishes hierarchical authority and frames compliance as necessary for spiritual legitimacy.

Consider the excerpt:

"Your pastor has superior authority… he is your spiritual father."

This utterance constructs authority through relational and hierarchical framing. The possessive structure *"your pastor"* personalises leadership while asserting control, positioning the preacher as guide and overseer. The comparative adjective *superior* establishes a hierarchy of spiritual knowledge, implying privileged access to divine instruction. The metaphor *"spiritual father"* is particularly significant; kinship metaphors naturalise authority by embedding it within familial relations where obedience is culturally expected. Through this framing, congregants are positioned as dependents whose spiritual well-being is mediated through pastoral guidance.

At the linguistic level, the declarative form presents authority as an established reality rather than a negotiable claim. The absence of modality reinforces epistemic certainty, while the metaphorical framing evokes emotional attachment and trust. Discursively, interpretation of scripture shifts from individual understanding to institutional mediation, centralising authority and framing obedience as moral obligation.

Authority is further reinforced through directive speech:

"Look at the person telling you not to pay tithe… look at his results."

The imperative *look* functions as a directive that controls audience interpretation. Rather than encouraging independent evaluation, the discourse guides listeners toward a predetermined conclusion that critics of tithing lack credibility. The phrase *"his results"* invokes material success as a marker of spiritual authenticity, reinforcing the prosperity logic that links wealth with divine approval. Repetition of the imperative intensifies interpretive control, while evaluative framing

delegitimises dissent. Authority is thus constructed through contrast, positioning preachers as credible and critics as ineffective.

Another instance frames authority as spiritual mediation:
"If your parents curse you, your pastor can cancel it… But if God curses you, to whom will you run?"

Here, the pastor is positioned as an intermediary between divine power and human vulnerability. The modal verb *can* attribute supernatural capability to pastoral authority, while the rhetorical question eliminates alternative sources of protection and reinforces dependency on institutional leadership. Declarative and interrogative forms combine to produce urgency and reliance, encouraging trust in pastoral guidance.

Analytically, authority construction operates as a central mechanism in tithing discourse. Linguistic resources such as possessive pronouns, kinship metaphors, imperatives, and declarative certainty establish credibility and regulate interpretation. Discursively, authority is enacted through directive speech and credibility contrasts that position preachers as reliable guides and dissenters as untrustworthy. Ideologically, the discourse sustains a hierarchy in which spiritual leadership is presented as necessary for moral order and financial obedience. Within a socio-cognitive perspective, repeated exposure to such constructions may shape mental models in which pastoral authority is perceived as legitimate, protective, and divinely endorsed, thereby embedding tithing within a relational structure of obedience and trust.

Discursive Closure in Tithing Discourse

A major persuasive strategy observed in the sermons is discursive closure, whereby sermon discourse forecloses debate, suppresses alternative interpretations, and presents tithing as a non-negotiable spiritual requirement. Through absolutist statements, directive formulations, and unmodalised claims, compliance is constructed as the only legitimate response.

Consider the excerpt:
"Anyone who is not paying tithe is not going to heaven. Full stop."

This utterance exemplifies discursive closure through categorical assertion. The pronoun *anyone* universalises the claim, eliminating exceptions, while the negative construction *"is not going"*

links non-payment directly to eternal consequence. The unmodalised declarative structure presents the statement as absolute truth rather than doctrinal interpretation. The phrase *"full stop"* functions as a discursive terminator, signalling finality and discouraging further reflection or challenge. Through this framing, theological complexity is reduced to a single behavioural requirement.

Closure also operates through dismissal of dissent:
"Some say tithe is old… don't listen to them."

Here, alternative interpretations are introduced only to be rejected. The phrase *"some say"* minimises opposing views, while the imperative *"don't listen"* instructs congregants to disengage from alternative perspectives. The directive structure regulates interpretation and reinforces pastoral authority by limiting cognitive autonomy.

Another instance illustrates closure through moral framing:
"Every time you touch your tithe, you are living in dishonesty."

The lexical item *dishonesty* reframes non-payment as ethical failure rather than theological disagreement. The habitual construction *"every time"* intensifies culpability, presenting non-compliance as repeated moral violation. Evaluative lexis positions dissenters as ethically compromised, while the declarative form removes interpretive ambiguity. By shifting the issue from theology to morality, the discourse renders opposition difficult to defend.
Analytically, discursive closure functions as a regulatory mechanism that stabilises tithing discourse and restricts theological negotiation. Linguistic resources such as universal pronouns, declarative certainty, evaluative lexis, and directive structures construct finality and authority. Discursively, dissent is suppressed, and alternative interpretations are delegitimised, reinforcing a binary between authorised teaching and unacceptable deviation. Ideologically, obedience is framed as a condition for salvation, while resistance is associated with moral and spiritual failure. Within a socio-cognitive perspective, repeated exposure to such discourse may shape mental models in which questioning is discouraged, and compliance becomes normative. Tithing is thus internalised not merely as doctrinal instruction but as an unquestionable component of faith practice, embedded within a structure of authority, morality, and belief.

Analytical Synthesis: Interplay of Strategies in Tithing Discourse

The analysis shows that tithing discourse in Nigerian Pentecostal sermons operates through an interrelated system of persuasive strategies rather than isolated rhetorical moves. Scriptural recontextualisation provides doctrinal legitimacy; fear appeals regulate behaviour; testimonial narratives offer experiential validation; authority construction stabilises interpretation; and discursive closure suppresses dissent. Together, these strategies create a cohesive discursive environment in which financial giving is framed as spiritually necessary, morally justified, and socially endorsed.

At the macro level, the sermons construct a prosperity-oriented ideology linking obedience to tithing with divine favour, protection, and material success. Financial giving is embedded within a moral framework that defines compliance as faithfulness and resistance as spiritual risk, thereby aligning economic behaviour with religious identity.

At the meso level, the strategies operate interactively. Scriptural references ground theological claims, fear appeals intensify urgency, and testimonial narratives reinforce credibility. Authority construction centralises interpretation within pastoral leadership, while discursive closure limits alternative readings. These strategies reinforce one another to sustain a coherent, persuasive structure.

At the micro level, linguistic features such as imperatives, evaluative lexis, metaphors, pronoun positioning, and unmodalised declaratives guide interpretation and regulate emotional response. Repetition and consistency enable these patterns to shape cognitive alignment between preacher and audience.

From a socio-cognitive perspective, repeated exposure to such discourse contributes to mental models through which congregants interpret obligation, prosperity, and spiritual legitimacy. Tithing becomes framed not merely as a financial practice but as a necessary component of faith tied to protection, blessing, and belonging. This synthesis highlights how ideology, authority, and language converge to sustain persuasive religious communication.

Conclusion

This study examined how tithing is discursively constructed and legitimised in Nigerian Pentecostal sermons using a socio-cognitive critical discourse analytical lens. Through analysis of purposively selected sermon excerpts, it showed that financial giving is sustained not only through

theological instruction but through structured persuasive discourse in which language shapes belief, reinforces authority, and guides congregational behaviour.

The findings indicate that tithing discourse operates through recurring strategies, including scriptural recontextualisation, fear appeal, testimonial legitimation, authority construction, and discursive closure. At the macro level, these strategies collectively reinforce a prosperity-oriented ideology linking financial obedience with divine favour, protection, and spiritual legitimacy. At the meso level, discourse regulates interpretation through rhetorical control, directive speech, and credibility framing. At the micro level, linguistic features such as metaphor, modality, evaluative lexis, and pronoun positioning generate persuasive force and limit interpretive flexibility.

Within a socio-cognitive perspective, repeated exposure to such discourse contributes to mental models that associate giving with blessing, protection, and moral alignment. Tithing is thus framed not merely as a financial practice but as a necessary component of faith and belonging.

The study contributes to research on religious discourse, pragmatics, and African Pentecostal communication by foregrounding language as central to the production of religious authority. By situating tithing within the interaction between discourse, cognition, and social context, it demonstrates how sermon language shapes moral expectation and behaviour.

Although limited to publicly accessible sermons and selected high-visibility preachers, the study underscores the importance of examining religious communication as a discursive system through which obligation, authority, and belief are constructed and sustained.

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Pragmatic Analysis of Hate Speech Directed at Transgender People on Selected YouTube and TikTok Channels

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Abstract

Hate speech presents significant challenges to social cohesion, the protection of fundamental human rights, and democratic values, particularly in rapidly circulating digital media. While existing scholarship has examined online hate speech against various marginalised groups, comparatively limited attention has been paid to hate speech targeting transgender individuals on video-based platforms such as YouTube and TikTok. To address this gap, this study investigates 20 purposively selected video excerpts (12 from YouTube and 8 from TikTok), chosen for their relevance to discussions of transgender issues and the presence of potentially hateful discourse. The videos were transcribed and analysed using a qualitative descriptive design informed by Searle's (1969) framework of illocutionary speech acts to examine speakers' communicative strategies and intentions. Findings show that the videos predominantly employ assertive, expressive, and directive acts to convey negative attitudes, reinforce stereotypes, and promote discriminatory viewpoints toward transgender individuals. The analysis also identifies recurring features across both platforms, including derogatory expressions, demeaning characterisations, and exclusionary rhetoric, illustrating how hate speech is discursively constructed and normalised in user-generated content.
***Keywords**: Transgender, hate speech, YouTube, TikTok, speech acts, illocutionary acts.*

Introduction

Hate speech undermines societal cohesion, democratic values, and human rights, fostering intolerance, prejudice, and discrimination (Scutari, 2012). It is increasingly pervasive in online spaces such as Facebook, Twitter, TikTok, and YouTube, where it dehumanises and bullies individuals or groups based on perceived differences. Wulandari (2022) likens hate speech on social media to "the internet rifle," and Banks (2010) notes that the anonymity and mobility of the internet make harassment commonplace. Social media can propagate sexual assault, stalking, harassment, and hate speech both online and offline (Kennedy & Taylor, 2010). Scholars have highlighted its harmful effects (Citron, 2011; Bliuc et al., 2018; Gagliardone et al., 2016; Willard, 2007; Meibauer, 2013).

Video-based platforms like YouTube and TikTok are particularly vulnerable to hate speech. Chen (2021) and Barnett (2007) argue that video facilitates the spread of hate content, while research shows that YouTube videos frequently contain abusive materials (Doring & Mohseni, 2019; Kopecky et al., 2020; Moor et al., 2010). TikTok also hosts content that discriminates against marginalised groups, including violent white supremacy, which remained largely unnoticed until recent reports (Christopher, 2019; Chen, 2021; Weimann & Masri, 2020). Politically motivated hate speech is especially destructive, promoting exclusion, discrimination, and even violence (Kinney, 2008).

Transgender individuals are common targets of hate speech, including insults, slurs, mockery, and dehumanisation, leading to mental health issues such as depression, anxiety, and self-harm (But et al., 2022; Grant et al., 2011). Hate speech also restricts access to healthcare, jobs, and education, exacerbating social inequalities. United Nations (2020) identifies hate speech as encompassing discrimination, incitement, defamatory language, hostility, prejudice, bullying, and demeaning language. Balancing the right to free speech with protection against hate speech is complex but essential, particularly for vulnerable groups like transgender people.

Historically, transgender individuals held respected roles in many communities as spiritual leaders, healers, and teachers (Feinberg, 2013), but have faced stigmatisation, exclusion, and demeaning labels (Joseph, 2016). Recently, linguistic scholars have increasingly examined hate speech from a pragmatic perspective (Alabi & Ayeloja, 2017; Dhayef & Ali, 2020; Culpeper, 2021; Oktaviani & Alam, 2022; Benki et al., 2022). Pragmatic analysis allows an understanding of how hate speech

functions in context, such as performing harmful acts, reinforcing stereotypes, and inciting violence, while revealing communicative strategies, forms, and intentions behind it.

Despite the growing body of research on social media hate speech against transgender individuals (But et al., 2022; Stefanita & Buf, 2021; Silva & Silva, 2021; Kalia, 2022; Yuliyanti et al., 2020), studies examining the pragmatic aspects of such hate speech on YouTube and TikTok remain limited. While some research has investigated extreme forms of hate speech (O'Connor, 2021), cross-cultural patterns (Jaszczyk-Grzyb et al., 2023), or covert/ironic expressions (Baider & Constantinou, 2020), little attention has been given to the communicative strategies employed by creators of hate speech videos on these platforms. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the pragmatic strategies of hate speech targeting transgender individuals on YouTube and TikTok, using a qualitative approach to systematically identify, analyse, and interpret such content. The findings are expected to contribute to the literature on pragmatics, online communication, hate speech, and transgender studies.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

This study aims to investigate hate speech directed at transgender people in selected YouTube and TikTok videos from a pragmatic lens, to identify the communicative strategies used to perpetuate hate speech. To achieve this aim, the specific objectives are:

1. To identify and analyse hate speech directed at transgender people in selected YouTube and TikTok videos.

2. To analyse the communicative strategies employed in the selected YouTube and TikTok videos that perpetuate hate speech against transgender people from the point of view of Searle's Illocutionary Acts.

Studies on Hate Speech against Transgender People

Huertas Medina (2021) examined how British newspapers represent transgender identities using Critical Discourse Analysis and found that derogatory expressions such as "fake woman" and "abomination" were recurrent, positioning transgender people as deviant and illegitimate. While this study usefully demonstrates how transphobia is discursively constructed in traditional media, it remains primarily concerned with patterns of representation at a macro-discursive level and pays limited attention to the micro-pragmatic mechanisms through which such meanings are enacted in

interaction. Furthermore, its focus on print journalism overlooks the dynamic, multimodal, and interactional nature of contemporary digital communication, where speakers actively perform hate through strategic speech acts. Unlike Huertas Medina's reliance on CDA alone, the present study complements critical concerns with a pragmatic perspective by employing Searle's speech act framework to examine how illocutionary force, rather than representation alone, functions in the production and circulation of hate speech on YouTube and TikTok.

But et al. (2022) analysed Pakistani television comedy shows to examine how humour frames transgender people and concluded that comedic discourse frequently portrayed them as unintelligent and socially marginal. While the study provides useful evidence of how humour can function as a vehicle for stigma, its reliance on scripted broadcast performances limits its ability to account for the spontaneous, interactive, and unpredictable nature of online communication, where meanings are negotiated in real time among diverse audiences. Consequently, the study offers limited insight into the pragmatic mechanisms through which hostility is enacted in everyday, user-generated discourse.

Kalia (2022) extended the investigation of transgender representation into digital culture by analysing memes on Instagram and Reddit through a multimodal discourse framework, demonstrating how irony and humour contribute to the normalisation of stereotypes. Although this study is methodologically closer to the present research in its focus on digital media, it remains primarily concerned with visual-semiotic and humour-based interpretation rather than the pragmatic force of utterances. As a result, it does not fully explain how hostility is linguistically performed through illocutionary acts in interactive platforms such as TikTok and YouTube.

From a socio-political perspective, Stakic (2011) showed that Serbian nationalist discourse constructs transgender and LGB identities as threats to national cohesion, while Silva and Carvalho (2023) argued that covert hate in Portugal, often masked as humour or backhanded compliments, can be more damaging than overt attacks. These studies make important contributions to understanding the ideological foundations of hate speech; however, they operate largely at a macro-discursive level and do not systematically examine the micro-pragmatic strategies through which such ideologies are enacted in everyday online communication.

In addition to representational and ideological analyses, research has also focused on the consequences of hate speech. Stefanita and Buf (2021) demonstrated that exposure to online hate increased depression, anxiety, and social isolation among transgender individuals, while Akmese

and Deniz (2017) linked hostile media portrayals to real-world discrimination, violence, and even murder. Although these studies compellingly establish the psychological and social harm of transphobic discourse, they are primarily outcome-oriented and do not interrogate the linguistic and pragmatic structures through which hostility is produced in the first place.

In all, existing scholarship has significantly advanced understanding of how transgender people are represented in media, how ideology shapes transphobia, and how hate speech affects lived experiences. However, these studies tend to privilege either ideological analysis, multimodal interpretation, or psychological consequences at the expense of a detailed examination of the pragmatic mechanisms that make hate speech actionable and persuasive in interaction. Addressing this gap, the present study adopts Searle's (1969) speech act framework to analyse how hate is not merely represented but actively performed through illocutionary strategies in purposively selected YouTube and TikTok videos.

Studies on Hate Speech on Social Media

Existing research on online hate speech provides valuable insights into the forms, ideological underpinnings, and consequences of hostility directed at transgender individuals. Silva and Silva (2021), for instance, investigated Facebook comments using content analysis and categorised hate into insults, mockery, discrimination, and victimisation. Their study offers a useful typology of online hostility; however, it remains primarily descriptive and does not employ a theoretical framework that interrogates the illocutionary force of comments. Unlike the present study, which adopts Searle's (1969) speech act theory to analyse how hostility is pragmatically constructed, Silva and Silva's work does not examine how specific linguistic strategies perform or reinforce prejudice.

On YouTube, Yuliyanti et al. (2020) applied speech act theory to analyse comments on political content, finding that assertive and expressive acts dominated hostile discourse. Wulandari (2022) similarly focused on political debates, highlighting the use of declarative moods and explicit evaluations to delegitimise opponents. While both studies share the present study's pragmatic orientation, they differ theoretically in that their primary concern is political communication rather than identity-based hostility, and methodologically in that they focus on political comment threads rather than transgender-directed hate on social media platforms. TikTok has also been studied as a site of online hostility. O'Connor (2021) identified extremist ideologies, threats, and calls to violence circulating on the platform; Ria and Setiawan (2023) categorised TikTok hate into insults,

slander, and humour; Alfarisi (2023) highlighted mockery, defamation, and taboo expressions; and Suha and Sudarwati (2021) explored how parody and memes embed hate speech in popular culture. While these studies demonstrate the prevalence of hostility on TikTok, they are largely descriptive, lacking a theoretical framework that addresses the pragmatic mechanisms of speech. By contrast, the current study applies speech act theory to examine how illocutionary strategies actively construct transgender-directed hate, combining a theoretical lens with methodological attention to multimodal social media interactions.

Other studies have focused on covert or responsive strategies in online discourse. Baider and Constantinou (2020) argued that irony can function as covert hate, masking prejudice beneath humour, and Sim et al. (2020) demonstrated that counter-speech on YouTube may deter hate, depending on the speaker's perceived authority. While these studies are theoretically aligned with discourse and interactionist perspectives, they differ from the present research because they neither centre transgender-directed hate nor systematically analyse the illocutionary strategies that make online hostility persuasive and socially reinforced.

Research has also addressed the consequences of hate speech. Stefanita and Buf (2021) demonstrated that exposure to online hate increases depression, anxiety, and social isolation among transgender individuals, and Akmese and Deniz (2017) linked hostile media portrayals to real-world discrimination, violence, and even murder. Although these studies highlight the seriousness of online hostility, they differ from the present study both theoretically and methodologically: they focus on psychological and social outcomes rather than the pragmatic linguistic structures that generate hostility, whereas the current research investigates how speech acts function to perform and perpetuate hate on YouTube and TikTok.

Overall, these strands of literature indicate that transgender individuals are targeted through overt (insults, slander, threats) and covert (humour, parody, irony) forms of online hate. While some prior studies have applied speech act theory, they have largely focused on political discourse or descriptive typologies, and few have examined transgender-directed hate on interactive, multimodal platforms. The present study addresses these gaps by integrating Searle's (1969) speech act framework with a focus on transgender-directed hostility to analyse how illocutionary strategies operate in real-time social media communication and thereby extend both the theoretical and methodological scope of online hate speech research.

Theoretical Framework

Speech Act Theory

Most pragmatists believe that the study of speech acts is central to pragmatics; hence, any consideration of language in context is influenced by this theory for the sake of explicitness. As one of the major theories of pragmatics, speech act theory was founded by J. L. Austin in 1962 and further developed after his death by J. Searle in 1969. Pragmatics, in explaining underlying meanings of context-related features of language, incorporates concepts such as the cooperative principle, relevance theory, and speech acts. Of these, *speech acts* have been isolated for the present study because they account for how assumptions and ideas are interpreted in relation to discourse participants and the linguistic choices that constrain, structure, and influence communication. As a subfield of pragmatics, speech act theory examines how words are used not only to present information but also to perform actions. The theory holds that utterances can achieve locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary functions in both spoken and written texts. The concept of speech acts has been described differently by various scholars. Ezeifeka (2018) notes that researchers accept that expressions themselves constitute activities with profound consequences for the listener (p. 50). Similarly, Birner and Betty (2013) argue that uttering something is equivalent to doing something, with conveyed utterances being essential to the actions performed. In the same vein, Mey (2001) posits that verbal actions alter the existing state of affairs (p. 95). By uttering an expression, speech is performed, and this can trigger an action in the hearer's mind.

Scholars have also explored the application of the theory. Jacobs (1989), for instance, examined speech acts in relation to arguments, emphasising that they provide a favourable framework for studying the practical organisation of arguments (p. 346). He further affirmed that Searle developed *felicity conditions* to classify, analyse, and evaluate speech acts, thereby improving language performance and meaning (Searle, 1969, 1975). These conditions are essential in determining the illocutionary point, the central meaning the speaker intends to convey.

Searle's View on Speech Act Theory

John Roger Searle expanded Austin's concept of speech acts in 1969. He argued that speaking a language is essentially performing a speech act. According to Searle (1969), such acts include making statements, issuing commands, asking questions, and making promises. These are guided by specific rules that govern the use of linguistic elements (p. 16). He noted that every linguistic

communication encompasses speech acts, with the basic units of communication being not symbols or words in isolation, but their formation within the performance of a speech act (p. 16). Searle explained that a speech act consists of propositional content (used to refer and predict) and illocutionary force, which together define communication. He further asserted that saying something in a particular context and for a particular purpose constitutes a speech act (Searle, 1969, p. 19).

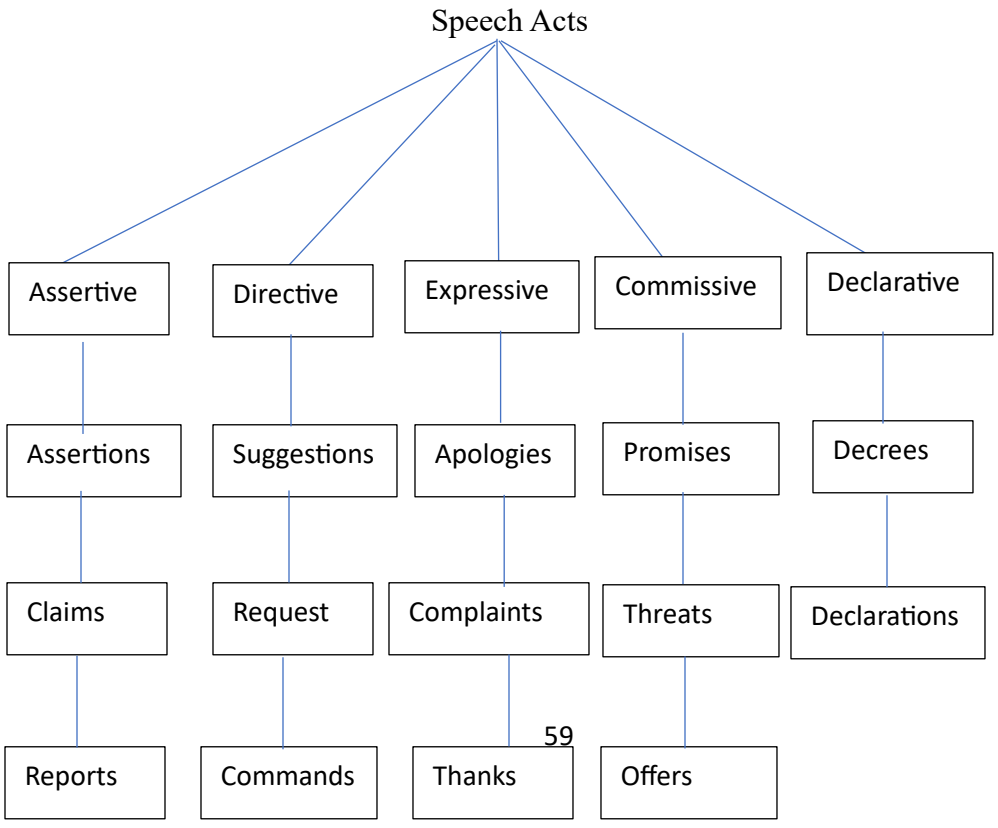
Searle's Classification of Speech Acts

According to Searle, cited in Sihombing et al. (2021), there are three main types of speech acts:

1. Locutionary acts (the act of making a meaningful utterance)
2. Illocutionary acts (the act performed in saying something, i.e., the intention of the speaker)
3. Perlocutionary acts (the consequential act of saying something)

Austin (1962) noted that all utterances could simultaneously accomplish these three functions. For illocutionary acts, however, Searle (1983) and Usman (2017, p. 14) emphasised that they must be performed *intentionally*.

Austin (1962) also proposed a taxonomy of illocutionary acts, dividing them into verdictives, expressives, commissives, behabitives, and exercitives. Searle later revised this framework, classifying them into assertives (or representatives), directives, commissives, expressives, and declarations.



(Searle, 1976)

- Assertive/Representative: binds the speaker to the truth of what is said, informing listeners of facts or persuading them of certain beliefs. It involves utterances based on observation or conviction. Verbs include *predict, report, describe, inform, assert, deny, claim, conclude, suggest,* and *believe* (Hidayat, 2016).
- Directive: performed by the speaker with the intention that the listener takes action, such as *asking, demanding, suggesting,* or *challenging*. Akinwotu (2013, pp. 48–49) explains that directives seek to get the hearer to do something, including acts such as *commanding, warning, disagreeing,* and *pleading*.
- Commissive: commits the speaker to a future action, typically involving *promises, pledges, threats,* or *offers.* These are common in both educational and non-educational contexts, with verbs like *promise, vow, swear,* and *pledge.*
- Expressive: conveys the speaker's psychological state or attitude, such as *thanking, apologising, congratulating,* or *condoling.*
- Declarative: changes the external status of a situation solely by being uttered. Schane (2008) notes that declaratives often operate within institutional contexts, such as *blessing, firing, baptising,* or *excommunicating.* For instance, "Bless you that you are still safe from tragedy" implies divine preservation despite danger.

This theoretical framework is justified for the present study because it provides a nuanced understanding of illocutionary forces and communicative intentions underlying hate speech. It reveals how language is employed to assert, direct, declare, commit, and express attitudes or emotions that perpetuate harm and discrimination against transgender individuals. By applying this framework, the study seeks to uncover the complex mechanisms of hate speech and its impact on the targeted community.

Research Methodology

Population of the Study and Research Design

The study population comprises hate speech videos directed at transgender individuals on YouTube and TikTok, from which a purposive sample of 20 video excerpts, consisting of 12 from YouTube and 8 from TikTok, was selected for analysis. A qualitative descriptive research design was adopted

to provide an in-depth examination of how these platforms are used in the construction and circulation of hate speech. The study is anchored in Searle's (1969) taxonomy of illocutionary speech acts, which guided the pragmatic analysis of the selected videos.

Data and Sampling Technique

The videos were selected through purposive sampling based on their explicit manifestation of hate speech directed at transgender individuals. The dataset comprises a total of 20 video excerpts, consisting of twelve from YouTube and eight from TikTok. The YouTube excerpts include multiple videos from @Mattwalsh specifically addressing transgender issues, as well as one video from @candaceowen. The TikTok excerpts were drawn from the accounts of @amalaekpunobi, @ryan_upchurch, @joeybtoonz, @piersmorgan, @michaelknowles, alongside other relevant creators whose content met the inclusion criteria. All selected videos were downloaded, carefully transcribed verbatim, and systematically prepared for interpretation and analysis. Purposive sampling was deemed appropriate for this study, as it facilitated the deliberate selection of data that directly aligned with the research objective of examining hate speech against transgender individuals on YouTube and TikTok.

Although the sample consists of 20 video excerpts (12 from YouTube and 8 from TikTok), this study prioritises depth of analysis over breadth. In qualitative pragmatic and discourse-based research, smaller, carefully selected datasets are appropriate for detailed interpretation of communicative. The selected excerpts were therefore sufficient for identifying recurring patterns in the use of illocutionary acts in hate speech directed at transgender individuals.

Method of Data Analysis

The analysis was conducted within a qualitative descriptive framework, a flexible and exploratory approach well suited for practice-based research. Hate speech instances in the videos were identified using the United Nations' (2020, pp. 10-16) categorisation, which includes: (a) discrimination, (b) incitement, (c) defamatory language, (d) hostility or violence, (e) prejudice, (f) demeaning or insulting language, and (g) bullying. In addition, Searle's (1969) classification of illocutionary speech acts was applied to examine the communicative strategies underlying the expression of hate speech.

Ethical Considerations

Given the sensitive nature of transgender identity and the harmful content analysed in this study,

several ethical considerations were observed. First, the study relies solely on publicly available YouTube and TikTok videos, which were accessed without interacting with content creators or audiences. No private or personal data was collected. Second, the analysis critically examines hate speech without endorsing or reproducing it uncritically; all offensive language is reported strictly for academic and analytical purposes. The findings are therefore framed with sensitivity to the lived experiences of transgender people and to contribute to scholarly understanding of online hate speech rather than perpetuate it.

Data presentation

For data presentation and interpretation, the study integrates the United Nations' (2020) categorisation of hate speech with Searle's typology of illocutionary acts- assertive, directive, commissive, expressive, and declarative- applied to selected YouTube videos from @MattWalsh and @CandaceOwens and TikTok videos from @amalaekpunobi, @ryan_upchurch, @joeybtoonz, @piersmorgan, and @michaelknowles.

Table 1: Identification of the Types of Hate Speech on YouTube Videos and their Communicative Strategies

S/N	Excerpts	Identification of Hate Speech	Communicative Strategies
1	All of that is completely bogus; they're not denied any of that at all… they are just attention-seeking narcissistic people.	Defamation	Assertive/Expressive
2	And the way to signal this allegiance is to constantly make gender-benders visible	Derogatory slurs	Assertive/Expressive/Directive
3	They're psychologically damaged. You can compare them to, you know, people who want to have sex with animals, literally.	Defamation	Assertive/Expressive

4	You can compare them to, you know, people who want to have sex with animals, literally.	Defamation/Dehumanization	Assertive/Expressive
5	She's an idiot, and she's an idiot for hire	Insult	Assertive/Expressive
6	which is how I know that Jeffery Marsh's Bottomless stupidity is unusual and possibly an indication of some sort of brain disease or trauma	Insult/Defamation	Assertive/Expressive
7	But in the meantime, what I can say is that ladyboy is cancelled and that'll do it for us for this portion of the show.	Derogatory slur	Declarative/Expressive
8	I don't even want to imagine what he'll look like when he's at his ugliest, documenting his creepy fetishised version of what it means to be a girl	Insult/Derogatory	Assertive/Expressive
9	That's because transgenderism runs exclusively on falsehoods, bad faith and emotional blackmail, and Mulvaney exemplifies all three.	Stereotype	Assertive/Expressive
10	I mean, it's complete and utter gibberish, and this is what happens when the transgender, perverted mindset runs riot. This is what it leads to: complete and utter insanity.	Derogatory slur/Stereotype	Assertive/Expressive
11	You are weird and artificial, you are manufactured and lifeless, you are unearthly and eerie, you are some types of human deepfake.	Insult/Derogatory/Stereotype	Assertive/Expressive

12	You are a man deprived of all the best qualities of men, but without any of the best qualities of women. Even your personality as a tranny is contrived; everything about you is fake.	Insult/Derogatory/Stereotype	Assertive/Expressive

Table 2: Identification of the Types of Hate Speech on TikTok Videos and their Communicative Strategies

S/N	Excerpts	Identification of Hate Speech	Communicative Strategy
13	I am not putting up with these transvestites	Insult/Derogatory/Stereotype	Assertive/Expressive/Directive
14	It does say that you are inherently confused and a freak	Insult/Dehumanization/Stereotype	Assertive/Expressive/Directive
15	Like what! You get an award for being confused. It's fucking weird…. With their weird voices	Insult/Mockery/Derogatory/Stereotype	Assertive/Expressive/Directive
16	It seems like trans people have a lot of mental problems. It seems very hard to find a transgender person who is mentally stable. It seems like the entire community is insanely plagued with perversion. And sadly, I don't think they can ever get help.	Insult/Mockery/Stereotype	Assertive/Expressive/Directive

17	These degenerates have a high sense of entitlement; they are practically suffering from self-delusion.	Derogatory slur/Stereotype	Assertive/Expressive/Directive
18	For the good of society, transgender people and transgenderism must be eradicated from public life.	Discriminatory/Stereotype	Directive/Assertive/Expressive
19	I'm sick of these men in dresses pretending to be women, all in the name of transgenderism. We need to stop playing their mental games.	Insult/Derogatory/Stereotype	Assertive/Directive/Expressive
20	The pronoun cult is a perverted community	Stereotype	Assertive

Discussion and interpretation of hate speech and its communicative strategies on YouTube

Across the 20 video excerpts analysed, three dominant patterns emerged in the use of illocutionary acts. First, assertive acts were most frequently employed to present negative claims about transgender individuals as factual and unquestionable. Second, expressive acts were consistently used to convey contempt, ridicule, and moral condemnation. Third, directive and declarative acts appeared less frequently but were strategically used to discourage acceptance of transgender identities and symbolically exclude them from legitimacy. These patterns suggest that hate speech against transgender individuals on YouTube and TikTok is not random but systematically constructed through recurring pragmatic strategies.

Excerpt 1

"All of that is completely bogus; they're not denied any of that at all… *they are just attention-seeking narcissistic people."*

Defamation, Assertive, and Expressive Functions

In Matt Walsh's YouTube video "Budlight Boycott," transgender people are generalised as narcissistic and attention-seeking, a harmful and inaccurate characterisation. Such labelling constitutes **defamation**, as it attacks reputation, scorns, and humiliates, aligning with Wulandari's (2022) definition of defamation as a form of character or reputation assassination.

The excerpt primarily functions as an **assertive illocutionary act**, presenting Walsh's claim that transgender marginalisation is "completely bogus" and framing the group as "attention-seeking narcissistic people" as factual rather than open to discussion. Simultaneously, it contains an **expressive element**, conveying contempt and disdain toward transgender individuals.

The communicative intention is twofold: to express scepticism about transgender visibility in brand endorsements and to discredit transgender individuals by portraying their claims as baseless and motivated by narcissism. Through these combined assertive and expressive acts, Walsh conveys his perspective while persuading his audience to dismiss transgender people, ultimately reinforcing prejudice and delivering a derogatory portrayal.

Excerpt 2: Derogatory Slur and Illocutionary Analysis

In the statement, "*And the way to signal this allegiance is to constantly make gender-benders visible*," the term "gender-benders" functions as a derogatory slur, framing transgender individuals as distorting or violating gender norms. Such language dismisses their gender identity, mocks nonconformity, and reinforces harmful stereotypes, reflecting transphobic attitudes and contributing to marginalisation.

The utterance primarily operates as an **assertive illocutionary act**, conveying the proposition that allegiance to transgender individuals is signalled by making them visible. Walsh presents this claim as factual, portraying transgender visibility as excessive, artificial, and ideologically imposed, thereby delegitimising recognition of transgender identity. Simultaneously, the statement carries **expressive force** through the slur "gender-benders," communicating ridicule, disdain, and contempt. It portrays transgender identity as invalid, laughable, or grotesque, revealing the speaker's negative attitude.

The utterance also contains an implied **directive act**. By framing visibility as the measure of allegiance, Walsh indirectly prescribes a course of action for audiences, corporations, or allies, suggesting that support is coerced conformity. This subtle directive discourages endorsement or normalisation of transgender visibility.

Overall, the statement combines assertion, ridicule, and indirect prescription, which creates a layered strategy that strengthens its derogatory effect, reinforces transphobic narratives, and undermines public acceptance of transgender identity.

Excerpt 3: Defamation, Dehumanisation, and Illocutionary Analysis

The statement, "*They're psychologically damaged. You can compare them to, you know, people who want to have sex with animals, literally,*" is both **defamatory** and **dehumanising**. It falsely portrays transgender individuals as mentally unstable and equates their identity with criminal and immoral behaviour, harming dignity, reinforcing stigma, and perpetuating harmful stereotypes.

Primarily, the utterance functions as an **assertive illocutionary act**, presenting the claim that transgender people are "psychologically damaged" as factual. This misrepresentation commits the speaker to the truth of a statement that is inaccurate and stigmatising.

Simultaneously, the comparison to bestiality carries **expressive force**, conveying contempt, disgust, and ridicule. This negative emotional attitude aims to delegitimize transgender identities and influence audience perception. By coupling a false assertion with a degrading analogy, the speaker employs a dual strategy: misrepresenting identity while expressing deep disapproval, encouraging prejudice, reinforcing stereotypes, and sustaining discriminatory narratives.

Excerpt 4: Defamation, Dehumanisation, and Illocutionary Analysis

In Candace Owens's YouTube video "The Worst," the statement, "You can compare them to, you know, people who want to have sex with animals, literally," constitutes severe **defamation and dehumanisation**. By equating transgender individuals with people who engage in bestiality, the speaker delegitimises their identity, undermines dignity, and reinforces harmful stereotypes that position them as deviant or immoral.

Primarily, the utterance functions as an **assertive illocutionary act**, presenting the comparison as a factual proposition, despite being inaccurate and offensive. Simultaneously, it carries **expressive force**, conveying disgust and contempt, ridiculing and demeaning transgender individuals. By combining assertive and expressive acts, the speaker creates a powerful discursive effect: the assertion misrepresents transgender identity, while the expressive component heightens contempt, inviting the audience to adopt a dismissive and hostile stance. This dual strategy legitimises prejudice and sustains discriminatory narratives, making the statement a particularly harmful example of online hate speech.

Excerpt 5: Insult and Illocutionary Analysis

In Candace Owens's YouTube video "The Worst," the statement, "She's an idiot, and she's an idiot for hire," exemplifies a **speech act of insult**. The repetition of "idiot" intensifies the attack on the target's intelligence, while "for hire" implies willingness to degrade oneself for financial gain or publicity. As Fortuna et al. (2020) note, insults are inflammatory comments aimed at undermining an individual's character and credibility.

The utterance functions primarily as an **assertive illocutionary act**, presenting Owen's judgment as a factual evaluation of Logan Brown, a transgender man, rather than a personal opinion. The use of indicative language reinforces this assertive quality. Simultaneously, it carries **expressive force**, as the repetition and addition of "for hire" convey disdain and contempt, signalling a strong negative attitude. By combining assertive and expressive acts, the statement performs a dual function: it asserts a claim about Brown's character while expressing contempt. This mixture of proposition and emotion strengthens the insult's impact, contributing to the wider discourse of marginalisation by portraying transgender individuals as unintelligent, disingenuous, or undeserving of respect.

Excerpt 6: Insult, Defamation, and Illocutionary Analysis

In Candace Owen's YouTube video *"The Worst,"* the statement, *"Jeffery Marsh's bottomless stupidity is unusual and possibly an indication of some sort of brain disease or trauma,"* exemplifies both **insult and defamation**. The phrase "bottomless stupidity" directly ridicules Marsh's intelligence, while the suggestion of "brain disease or trauma" extends into defamatory territory by falsely attributing a serious condition. Such remarks demean Marsh's dignity and perpetuate harmful stereotypes portraying transgender individuals as mentally unstable.

The utterance functions as an **assertive act**, with Owen presenting her negative evaluation as though factual, giving her insult the appearance of credibility. Simultaneously, it carries **expressive force**, as the language communicates contempt and disdain rather than neutral observation. By merging assertion with ridicule, the statement creates a hybrid speech act: it asserts a pseudo-diagnosis while expressing strong disapproval. This dual strategy not only demeans its subject but also reinforces broader narratives of abnormality and pathology, sustaining the delegitimisation of transgender identities in public discourse.

Excerpt 7: Derogatory Slur, Declarative and Expressive Force

In the statement, *"ladyboy is cancelled, and that'll do it for us for this portion of the show,"* the term **"ladyboy"** serves as a derogatory slur that mocks and diminishes transgender women or gender non-conforming individuals. Declaring the subject "cancelled" symbolically erases and delegitimises their identity, reinforcing exclusion and transphobia by trivialising their existence.

The utterance functions as a **declarative speech act**, attempting to enact symbolic exclusion by proclaiming "cancellation," even without institutional authority. At the same time, it carries **expressive force**, conveying disdain and ridicule that invites audience amusement or agreement.

By combining declarative and expressive elements, the statement ridicules, stigmatises, and symbolically silences transgender identity. It goes beyond a neutral remark, operating as a deliberate act of marginalisation within the wider discourse of transphobic rhetoric.

Excerpt 8: Insult, Assertive and Expressive Force

The statement *"I don't even want to imagine what he'll look like when he's at his ugliest, documenting his creepy fetishised version of what it means to be a girl"* constitutes targeted hate speech against Dylan Mulvaney. Terms such as "ugliest," "creepy," and "fetishised" attack her appearance, demean her behaviour, and portray her gender identity as pathological. This framing not only insults Mulvaney but also perpetuates transphobic stereotypes that invalidate transgender expression as deviant or inauthentic.

The utterance functions as an **assertive speech act**, as Walsh commits to the claim that Mulvaney's identity is merely a "fetishised version" of girlhood. By presenting this judgement as fact, he positions her self-expression as inherently invalid and seeks to persuade his audience to adopt the same negative view.

It also carries **expressive force**, conveying Walsh's disgust and contempt. Phrases like *"I don't even want to imagine"* reveal his revulsion and refusal to recognise Mulvaney's gender identity as legitimate. Overall, the statement combines insult, assertion, and expressive disdain to strip Mulvaney of dignity while reinforcing broader narratives that frame transgender identities as abnormal, illegitimate, or morally objectionable.

Excerpt 9: Stereotype, Assertive and Expressive Force

The statement *"that's because transgenderism runs exclusively on falsehoods, bad faith and emotional blackmail, and Mulvaney exemplifies all three"* constitutes stereotyping. It generalises

all transgender people as deceitful, insincere, and manipulative, erasing individual diversity and perpetuating harmful misconceptions that fuel stigma and discrimination.

It functions as an **assertive speech act**, since Walsh presents his sweeping judgement as fact. The emphatic use of *"exclusively"* frames transgender identity as entirely illegitimate, leaving no space for nuance and aiming to persuade the audience of its supposed falsity.

The utterance also carries **expressive force**, revealing Walsh's disdain and moral disapproval. By singling out Mulvaney as the embodiment of these traits, he intensifies ridicule and contempt. Overall, the statement merges stereotyping, categorical assertion, and emotional hostility to delegitimise transgender identity and reinforce discriminatory narratives.

Excerpt 10: Derogatory Slur, Stereotype, Assertive and Expressive Force

The statement *"it's complete and utter gibberish… when the transgender, perverted mindset runs riot… complete and utter insanity"* employs **derogatory slurs** that depict transgender identity as deviant, chaotic, and irrational. Phrases such as *"perverted mindset"* and *"utter insanity"* stigmatise transgender people and reinforce harmful narratives that delegitimise their experiences.

It also reinforces a **stereotype**, generalising all transgender individuals as morally corrupt and unstable. This sweeping categorisation erases diversity and casts transgender identity as inherently threatening.

As an **assertive speech act**, Walsh presents his claims as objective truth. The categorical phrasing *"this is what happens"* asserts that embracing transgender identity inevitably leads to "insanity," leaving no space for alternative interpretations.

Finally, the statement carries strong **expressive force**. Words like *"gibberish"* and *"insanity"* convey Walsh's contempt and disgust, making his utterance not just a judgement but an emotional rejection. Together, these elements merge derogation, generalisation, and hostility to delegitimise transgender identities and reinforce prejudice.

Excerpt 11: Insult, Derogatory Language, Stereotype, Assertive and Expressive Force

The statement *"You are weird and artificial… manufactured and lifeless… unearthly and eerie… some type of human deepfake"* is a direct **insult** aimed at stripping transgender individuals of dignity by portraying them as unnatural and unworthy of legitimacy.

It employs **derogatory language**, with terms like *"artificial," "lifeless,"* and *"deepfake"* reducing transgender people to fabricated imitations rather than authentic human beings. Such imagery dehumanises, delegitimises lived experiences, and reinforces exclusionary narratives.

The utterance also functions as a **stereotype**, generalising all transgender people as abnormal, eerie, and fraudulent. This essentializes a diverse group into a single negative frame, perpetuating harmful social misconceptions.

As an **assertive speech act**, the statement presents these descriptors as categorical truths about transgender identity, committing the speaker to a worldview that denies its authenticity.

Finally, it carries strong **expressive force**: words like *"weird"* and *"eerie"* reveal Walsh's disdain and contempt, transforming the claim into an emotional rejection. Together, the insult, derogation, stereotype, and expressive hostility work to dehumanise and delegitimise transgender existence.

Excerpt 12: Insult, Derogatory, Stereotype, Assertive and Expressive Force

The statement *"You are a man deprived of all the best qualities of men but without any of the best qualities of women, even your personality as a tranny is contrived, everything about you is fake"* constitutes a clear **insult**, directly attacking the target's dignity. The slur *"tranny"* and the claim that "everything… is fake" aim to humiliate by dismissing the person's entire existence as fraudulent.

It also functions as **derogatory speech**, systematically denying transgender authenticity. By presenting the subject as lacking both masculine and feminine virtues and reducing their identity to a "contrived" performance, the statement portrays transgender existence as artificial and unworthy of recognition.

The utterance further reinforces a **stereotype** by generalising transgender people as deficient "in-betweens" who embody neither gender's positive traits. This frames them as inherently inauthentic and illegitimate, sustaining harmful cultural narratives.

As an **assertive illocutionary act**, the speaker makes categorical claims, presenting "contrived" and "fake" as factual judgements rather than opinions. This commits him to the truth of these assertions and positions his evaluation as unquestionable.

Finally, the utterance carries **expressive force**. Words like "contrived," "fake," and the slur itself reveal contempt, disgust, and rejection. These expressive elements amplify the insult and derogatory content by exposing the speaker's deeply negative emotional stance.

In all, the utterance combines insult, derogation, stereotyping, assertion, and expressive hostility to deny transgender authenticity and reinforce stigma.

Discussion and Interpretation of Hate Speech and Its Communicative Strategies on TikTok

Excerpt 13: Insult, Derogatory, Stereotype, Assertive, Expressive and Directive Force

The statement *"I am not putting up with these transvestites"* is a direct **insult**, dismissing transgender people as intolerable and unworthy of respect. The use of the slur *"transvestites"* intensifies the harm, as the term is outdated and pejorative, historically used to stigmatise those who defied gender norms. Its use here functions as **derogatory language**, denying transgender people the right to self-identify and framing their existence as burdensome. The utterance also perpetuates a **stereotype** by portraying transgender individuals as inherently problematic and socially unacceptable. Such sweeping dismissal erases individuality and sustains cultural narratives that paint transgender identity as deviant.

As an **assertive illocutionary act**, the speaker makes a categorical claim of rejection, presenting intolerance as a factual stance. At the same time, it carries strong **expressive force**, revealing emotions of disdain and hostility through the phrase *"not putting up with."*

Finally, the utterance contains an **implied directive**: by publicly rejecting transgender people, the speaker encourages others to adopt similar exclusionary attitudes. Thus, the statement performs multiple functions: asserting belief, expressing contempt, and implicitly directing collective rejection, reinforcing prejudice and legitimising intolerance.

Excerpt 14: Insult, Dehumanisation, Stereotype, Assertive, Expressive and Directive Force

The utterance *"It does say that you are inherently confused and a freak"* is a clear **insult**, ridiculing transgender identity by equating it with abnormality and confusion. The words *"confused"* and *"freak"* function as **dehumanising labels**, stripping individuals of dignity and presenting them as less than human. This fosters an "us versus them" mentality that normalises exclusion.

The statement also perpetuates a **stereotype**, portraying transgender people as unstable or psychologically deficient. Labelling them *"freaks"* reinforces cultural myths of strangeness and monstrosity, delegitimising authentic identities.

As an **assertive act**, the speaker projects prejudice as though it were factual truth, while the emotionally charged language reveals an **expressive function**, communicating disgust and disdain.

At the same time, the utterance carries an **implicit directive**: by framing transgender people as confused and freakish, it subtly encourages rejection and marginalisation.

Overall, the communicative intention is to delegitimise and stigmatise transgender individuals by presenting them as abnormal and unworthy of respect, while reinforcing societal prejudice.

Excerpt 15: Insult, Derogatory Language, Stereotype, Assertive, Expressive and Directive Force

The utterance *"Like what! You get an award for being confused; it's fucking weird…* with their weird voices" functions as a direct **insult and mockery**, trivialising transgender experiences as attention-seeking and ridiculing both identity and speech. The repetition of *"weird"* dismisses their authenticity and turns their voices into objects of derision.

This choice of words represents clear **derogatory language**, framing transgender people as abnormal and unworthy of recognition. The claim that they are "confused" echoes a long-standing **stereotype** of instability, while mocking "weird voices" reinforces the false perception of transgender individuals as unnatural or deviant.

The utterance operates as an **assertive act**, presenting prejudice as fact, while the expletive and mocking tone reveal its **expressive function**, conveying disdain and ridicule. It also carries an **implicit directive**, signalling to the audience that transgender identities should not be respected or celebrated.

The overall communicative intention is to delegitimise and humiliate transgender individuals, positioning them as laughable and undeserving of recognition, while encouraging negative audience attitudes towards them.

Excerpt 16: Insult, Stereotype, Assertive, Expressive and Directive Force

The utterance *"It seems like trans people have a lot of mental problems… the entire community is insanely plagued with perversion… I don't think they can ever get help"* contains clear **insults**, portraying transgender individuals as irredeemable and morally corrupt. Phrases such as *"plagued with perversion"* and *"can never get help"* dehumanise them and mock their dignity.

It also promotes damaging **stereotypes** by equating transgender identity with mental instability and deviance. Claims that they "have a lot of mental problems" or that it is "hard to find a transgender person who is mentally stable" perpetuate the false notion that transgender existence is inherently pathological. The statement is primarily **assertive**, with sweeping generalisations

framed as factual observations, extending prejudice from individuals to the entire community. Its wording also carries an **expressive force**, revealing disgust and pity through phrases like *"insanely plagued"* and *"sadly."*

Finally, the conclusion that transgender people "can never get help" functions as an **implicit directive**, discouraging supportive action and legitimising social inaction. The overall communicative intention is to delegitimise transgender identities by portraying them as unstable, perverse, and beyond help, thereby fueling stigma and reinforcing exclusion.

Excerpt 17: Derogatory, Stereotype, Assertive, Expressive, and Directive Force

The utterance *"These degenerates have a high sense of entitlement; they are practically suffering from self-delusion"* employs a **derogatory slur** through the word *"degenerates."* This term dehumanises transgender people, portraying them as morally corrupted and undeserving of dignity. The claim of *"self-delusion"* further invalidates their identities as irrational or imaginary.

It reinforces **stereotypes** by generalising that transgender individuals are entitled, unreasonable, and disconnected from reality. Such broad assumptions erase individuality and cast the group in a negative light. The statement is framed as an **assertive speech act**, presenting prejudiced claims as factual judgements. Embedding a slur within this assertive form lends false credibility to bigotry by disguising it as reasoned evaluation. The **expressive force** is evident in the contempt communicated through terms like *"degenerates"* and *"self-delusion,"* which reveal disgust and scorn.

Finally, the utterance carries an implicit **directive** by discouraging recognition or respect for transgender identities, signalling to the audience that such individuals should be dismissed or marginalised. The communicative intention is to delegitimise transgender identities by framing them as corrupt, delusional, and socially problematic, thereby fueling stigma and justifying exclusion.

Excerpt 18: Discrimination, Stereotype, Directive, Assertive, and Expressive Force

The statement *"For the good of society, transgender individuals and transgenderism must be eradicated from public life"* is explicitly **discriminatory**, as it advocates the exclusion of transgender individuals from all public domains. The choice of *"eradicated"* dehumanises them, framing their existence as a societal threat that must be removed rather than recognised.

It draws on **stereotypes** by portraying transgender identity as inherently harmful, reducing diverse lives to a single narrative of disruption or moral corruption. This stereotype casts transgender people as incompatible with social well-being. The utterance functions primarily as a **directive speech act**. The phrase *"must be eradicated"* conveys compulsion, framed as a moral duty *"for the good of society."* This transforms prejudice into an apparent collective responsibility, intensifying the command by insisting on *total exclusion* from public life. There is also an **assertive dimension**, as the statement presents as fact the claim that society can only flourish by eliminating transgender visibility. Though rooted in bias, it positions this view as objective truth, giving bigotry a veneer of legitimacy.

Finally, the utterance carries an **expressive force**. The emotionally loaded term *"eradicated"* reveals deep hostility and contempt, moving beyond policy suggestion to outright rejection of transgender existence. The communicative intention is clear: to delegitimise transgender identity and incite its removal from public participation. By disguising exclusion as a moral necessity, the speaker both expresses hostility and pressures the audience to accept systemic erasure.

Excerpt 19: Insult/Derogatory, Stereotype, Assertive, Directive, Expressive

The statement *"I'm sick of these men in dresses pretending to be women all in the name of transgenderism; we need to stop playing their mental games"* is both **insulting** and **derogatory**. The phrase *"men in dresses"* reduces transgender women to caricatures, mocking their authenticity and denying their self-identified gender. Labelling them as *"pretending to be women"* frames their identities as fraudulent rather than genuine, while dismissing transgenderism as *"mental games"* pathologises and trivialises their existence. Together, these elements dehumanise transgender people by portraying them as inauthentic and socially disruptive.

The utterance also relies on **stereotypes**. It draws on the false image of transgender women as cross-dressing men, casts their identities as deceptive performances, and frames transgenderism as instability or manipulation. These stereotypes erase individuality and perpetuate damaging myths that undermine transgender legitimacy. The statement functions primarily as an **assertive speech act**, presenting the speaker's beliefs as fact. Claims such as *"men in dresses"* and *"pretending to be women"* are delivered categorically, leaving no space for alternative interpretations. By asserting that transgenderism is a *"mental game,"* the speaker portrays it as inherently irrational and deceptive. It also carries a **directive force** in the phrase *"we need to stop playing their mental games."* This is not merely a personal opinion but a prescriptive call to collective action. The use

of *"need to"* conveys obligation and urgency, urging the audience to reject transgender identities as a moral or social duty.

Finally, the utterance has an **expressive function**, most evident in *"I'm sick of."* This reveals the speaker's frustration, disgust, and rejection of transgender individuals. The expressive dimension intensifies the derogatory message by attaching strong personal hostility. The communicative intention is clear: to delegitimise transgender identities, pathologise their existence, and mobilise the audience toward intolerance. By blending insult, stereotype, and directive force with emotional disdain, the statement encourages exclusion and resistance to transgender inclusion.

Excerpt 20: Insult/Derogatory, Stereotype, Assertive, Directive, Expressive

The utterance *"The pronoun cult is a perverted community"* is both **insulting** and **derogatory**. The phrase *"perverted community"* functions as a moral slur, casting transgender and gender non-conforming people as corrupt or immoral. Likewise, *"cult"* implies secrecy, irrational devotion, and manipulation, stripping the group of legitimacy and dignity. It also perpetuates **stereotypes** by equating transgender advocacy with a "cult," portraying it as obsessive, irrational, and dangerous. Labelling the group as "perverted" reinforces the stereotype that gender diversity is immoral or deviant. Such sweeping generalisations erase individuality and reduce the community to caricatures of corruption and extremism.

The utterance is primarily an **assertive speech act**, treating prejudice as fact. Declaring that transgender communities form a "perverted cult" presents categorical claims rather than opinions, framing them as pathological rather than valid. Although presented as an assertion, it carries **directive force**. By branding the group as a "cult" and "perverted," the speaker implicitly instructs listeners to reject and shun transgender people and their advocacy. The implication is: do not align with or legitimise them.

Finally, the statement is also **expressive**, revealing contempt and moral outrage. The inflammatory terms *"cult"* and *"perverted"* communicate disgust and revulsion, making the hostility both personal and public. The communicative intention is to **delegitimise** and **stigmatise** transgender identity and pronoun advocacy by framing them as irrational, dangerous, and immoral. Beyond description, the utterance seeks to persuade listeners to adopt exclusionary attitudes and justify discriminatory behaviour.

The dominance of assertive and expressive illocutionary acts in the data can be attributed to their persuasive and affective functions. Assertive acts allow speakers to present transphobic claims as

objective truths rather than personal opinions, thereby enhancing their credibility among like-minded audiences. Expressive acts, on the other hand, serve to mobilise emotions such as disgust, contempt, and ridicule, which strengthen in-group solidarity among transphobic audiences while further dehumanising transgender individuals. This combination makes hate speech both cognitively convincing and emotionally charged, increasing its potential social impact.

Although similar illocutionary strategies were found across both platforms, there were notable differences between YouTube and TikTok. On YouTube, hate speech tended to be more elaborated, argumentative, and ideological, often embedded in longer political or cultural commentary, particularly in videos by Matt Walsh and Candace Owens. In contrast, TikTok excerpts were generally shorter, more direct, and relied more heavily on ridicule, mockery, and emotionally charged language, reflecting the platform's emphasis on brevity, virality, and performative expression.

Conclusion

This study extends scholarship on hate speech by investigating how it is directed at transgender individuals on YouTube and TikTok through the lens of Speech Act Theory. The findings reveal that hate speech across both platforms manifests through defamation, mockery, stereotyping, discriminatory remarks, and derogatory comparisons. On YouTube, figures such as Matt Walsh and Candace Owens employed assertive, expressive, and directive illocutionary acts to portray transgender people as attention-seeking, narcissistic, or morally deviant. On TikTok, speakers including Amala Ekpunobi, Ryan, Joey, Piers Morgan, and Michael Knowles similarly drew on assertives, expressives, and directives, often using stereotypes and dehumanising slurs to frame transgender people as unstable, confused, or perverse. Despite contextual differences, the communicative intent across both platforms remained consistent: to stigmatise, marginalise, and invalidate transgender identities.

These findings confirm and extend existing literature in several ways. Prior research has shown that hate speech frequently operates through derogatory labelling, humour, and stereotyping (Huertas Medina, 2021; But et al., 2022; Kalia, 2022). The current study reinforces these observations, but it goes further by revealing the pragmatic strategies, assertives, expressives, and directives through which such negativity is enacted in digital discourse. The results also resonate with socio-political framings in studies such as Stakic (2011) and Silva and Carvalho (2023), which highlighted how cultural ideologies sustain prejudice, including covert hate disguised as humour.

However, while those works focused on macro-level ideology, the present research demonstrates how such framings materialise in everyday online interaction. In addition, whereas earlier studies (e.g., Stefanita & Buf, 2021; Akmese & Deniz, 2017) emphasised the psychological and social consequences of hate speech, this study contributes by uncovering the pragmatic mechanisms that generate such hostility in the first place.

Ultimately, this research underscores that transgender individuals face persistent hostility in online spaces, consistent with broader findings on hate speech across both traditional and digital media. Yet it advances the field by foregrounding the illocutionary force of hate speech, showing how linguistic acts themselves function to legitimise prejudice. By situating this analysis within the fast-moving environments of YouTube and TikTok, the study not only affirms patterns identified in earlier scholarship but also offers new insights into how hate is pragmatically performed in contemporary digital interaction.

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The Phonological Adaptation of English Christian Names by Lagos Youth

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Abstract

Phonological adaptation of borrowed names is well-documented in language contact studies, where foreign forms are reshaped to fit the recipient variety's phonology (Rahim, 2006; Sicherl, 2015; Legbeti & Evbuomwan, 2024), yet youth-driven adaptation of English Christian names in urban Nigerian English remains unexplored despite nativisation patterns in minority languages and older speakers (Jowitt, 1991; Gut, 2004; Ogban, 2019). This study addresses this gap by investigating whether Lagos youths use original Standard English pronunciations or adapted forms of English Christian names and how they adapt them into Nigerian English. Employing a mixed-methods design with qualitative dominance, data were gathered from naturalistic observations in Lagos youth settings and elicited recordings of 20 participants (10 male, 10 female, aged 18–30) pronouncing 20 common Christian names, followed by perceptual phonetic analysis comparing Standard English IPA forms with realisations. Findings reveal a strong preference for adapted pronunciations, using systematic strategies: consonant substitution (e.g., Matthew./ˈmæθjuː/ → /ˈmatiu/), vowel strengthening, diphthong simplification, and cluster reduction, with complex names adapting more than familiar ones and elicited speech showing higher adaptation than spontaneous contexts. The study concludes that Lagos youths actively nativize English Christian names into Nigerian English, demonstrating dynamic phonological domestication driven by urban youth practices and advancing scholarship in World Englishes and onomastics.

***Keywords**: Nigerian English, phonological adaptation, Christian names, Lagos youth, World Englishes, Haugen's borrowing model*

Introduction

Phonological adaptation of personal names occurs when foreign names are reshaped to fit the recipient language's phonemic inventory, phonotactics, syllable structure, and prosody, influenced by cultural, religious, and sociolinguistic factors (Alababneh, 2021). In Nigeria, English Christian names (e.g., James, Mary, Michael) became widespread through colonial missionary activities, Bible translations, and Christianity, leading to nativization in Nigerian English via processes such as vowel epenthesis, consonant substitution (/θ/ → /t/, /ð/ → /d/), cluster simplification, and tonal reassignment (Legbeti & Evbuomwan, 2024; Ogban, 2019; Jowitt, 1991; Gut, 2004). Similar patterns appear cross-linguistically: Qur'anic names in English (Rahim, 2006), prestige borrowings in Slovene (Sicherl, 2015), biblical names in Manipuri (Oinam, 2018),

"Oshiwambonisation" in Oshiwambo (Mbenzi et al., 2024), and missionary adaptations in Xhosa (Futuse & Dowling, 2024).

Existing research focuses on adaptations in minority Nigerian languages (e.g., Ósósọ̀, Erei), elderly/rural speakers, historical/missionary contexts, or non-youth groups. They provide cross-linguistic and structural insights but neglect contemporary, youth-driven adaptations in Nigerian English. How Lagos youths reshape Christian names has not been examined, hindering knowledge of dynamic change in World Englishes and Nigerian youth language.

This study applies Haugen's (1950) Linguistic Borrowing Model, which describes borrowing in three stages: adoption (importation via Christianity/globalization), adaptation (phonological reshaping to Nigerian English rules), and integration (everyday use shaped by sociolinguistic factors). This framework, used in Nigerian contexts (Ogban, 2019), suits analysing youth variations in Lagos. The aim, therefore, is to investigate whether Lagos youths use original or adapted pronunciations of English Christian names and how they adapt those names into Nigerian English.

Review of Literature

Phonological and Morphological Adaptation of Names

When personal names move from one language to another, they usually change so that they fit the sound system and structural patterns of the receiving language. These changes allow the name to match the phonemes, syllable structure, stress or tone system, and word formation rules of the new language. In other words, adaptation is not random; it follows the internal logic of the language into which the name is borrowed.

Rahim (2006) provides a clear example in his comparative study of 92 Qur'anic names transferred from Classical Arabic into Standard English. He shows that Arabic sounds that do not exist in English, such as /ʔ/, /ħ/, and /ɣ/, are replaced with the closest available English sounds. In addition, syllables are reorganised to suit English phonotactic patterns, and stress is adjusted to follow English pronunciation rules. Many of these names entered English through intermediary languages such as Hebrew, Greek, Latin, and French, which further shaped their forms. Rahim concludes that these processes are systematic and rule-governed. Full preservation of the original pronunciation is uncommon and is mainly found among bilingual speakers who consciously maintain the religious or cultural prestige of the source language.

A similar pattern is observed by Sicherl (2015), who examines English personal names borrowed into Slovene from the 1970s onward. She explains that many English names gained popularity because of media influence, celebrity culture, and global fashion. While some names retain their English spelling to preserve a sense of foreign appeal, others are modified to reflect Slovene orthography. Regardless of spelling, pronunciation typically conforms to Slovene phonological rules. For instance, the English interdental sound /θ/ is often replaced with /t/, since Slovene does not have this sound. Her quantitative findings indicate that approximately 23 to 27 per cent of popular names retain noticeable foreign elements, especially in border regions. This demonstrates that sociolinguistic factors such as prestige, identity, and exposure to global culture influence the degree of adaptation.

Comparable tendencies appear in African contexts. Oinam (2018) analyses 64 biblical names in translations of the Bible into Manipuri and finds substantial influence from Hindi. Nearly half of the adapted forms reflect Hindi phonological patterns. The adaptation processes include substitution of unfamiliar sounds, such as rendering /θ/ as /th/ and /v/ as /b/, as well as restructuring syllables to match the preferred CV and CVC patterns of Manipuri.

In southern Africa, Mbenzi and colleagues (2024) describe the process of adapting Christian names into Oshiwambo, a phenomenon they refer to as "Oshiwambonisation." The process involves consonant substitution, prenasalization, weakening of consonants, and the addition of prefixes and suffixes. For example, the diminutive prefix *ka-* may be attached to a name, and vowel insertion is common to maintain open syllables. The researchers observe social variation in these patterns: bilingual and urban speakers tend to preserve more foreign features, whereas rural and monolingual speakers more fully integrate names into the local phonological system. These outcomes reflect historical language contact, first with German and Afrikaans, and later with English.

In the Nigerian context, Legbeti and Evbuomwan (2024) examine the adaptation of 40 English names by elderly speakers of Ósósọ̀. They report frequent vowel epenthesis, especially the insertion of /i/, to maintain a simple CV syllable structure and avoid consonant clusters that are not permitted in the language. Other processes include consonant substitution, deletion of problematic segments, and replacement of English stress with tonal patterns, since Ósósọ̀ is a tone language. Similarly, Ogban (2019) studies English loanwords, including proper names such as *Patrick* becoming *Patriki*, in Erei. Using a borrowing framework, he identifies vowel insertion,

consonant substitution, and cluster simplification as regular strategies shaped by religious influence, education, and sustained sociolinguistic contact.

Futuse and Dowling (2024) trace missionary-era borrowings into Xhosa, showing how Christian names were reshaped to fit the noun-class system and orthographic conventions of the language. Earlier borrowings were often fully integrated into Xhosa grammar, whereas more recent forms sometimes retain more features of the source language.

Across these studies, consistent adaptation strategies emerge. Borrowed names typically undergo substitution of unfamiliar sounds, insertion of vowels to break up consonant clusters, simplification of syllable structures, adjustment of stress or tone patterns, and morphological integration through affixation or shortening. Nevertheless, the extent of adaptation varies. In contexts where foreign names carry social prestige, partial preservation is common, as observed by Sicherl. In languages with strict phonological constraints, more extensive restructuring occurs, as demonstrated in the studies of Ósósọ̀ and Oshiwambo. Social variables such as age, bilingualism, literacy, and urbanisation also shape the outcome.

Within Nigerian English phonology, similar processes of nativisation are evident. Sounds such as /θ/ and /ð/ are frequently realised as /t/ and /d/, reflecting alignment with indigenous phonemic inventories, as noted by Jowitt (1991) and Gut (2004). These broader tendencies show that name adaptation forms part of a systematic restructuring process within Nigerian English, guided by local articulatory preferences and sociolinguistic realities.

Loanword Processes in Name Adaptation

Loanword theory generally treats personal names as lexical items that pass-through stages of borrowing, adaptation, and integration. Studies such as those by Ogban (2019) and Futuse and Dowling (2024) demonstrate that religious and cultural contact often motivates borrowing, while phonological, prosodic, and morphological systems determine how the borrowed name is reshaped. Adaptation typically occurs at multiple linguistic levels: individual sounds may change, syllable structures may be reorganised, stress may be replaced by tone in tone languages, and morphological markers may be added to fit the grammatical system of the receiving language.

At the same time, differences exist across communities. In some contexts, especially where global or colonial languages carry prestige, borrowed names may retain noticeable foreign features. In others, structural constraints lead to full assimilation into the local system. Social variation is also important. Younger, bilingual, and literate speakers often attempt to approximate the original

pronunciation more closely, whereas older or monolingual speakers tend to prefer fully nativized forms.

Although previous research provides valuable cross-linguistic insight into how names are adapted, relatively little attention has been given to youth-driven phonological adaptations in multilingual Nigeria. In particular, there is limited research on how urban Lagos youths reshape English Christian names within Nigerian English. The present study addresses this gap by examining these dynamics among youths in Lagos, thereby contributing to scholarship in Nigerian onomastics and World Englishes.

Methodology

This study adopts a mixed-methods design with qualitative dominance in order to examine how Lagos youths adapt English Christian names into Nigerian English. While the core objective is to identify and interpret phonological adaptation strategies, descriptive quantitative procedures (such as frequency counts, percentages and tables) were used to summarise recurring patterns. These numerical summaries are descriptive rather than inferential and serve to support, not replace, the qualitative phonological analysis.

The study was conducted in youth-dominated contexts within Lagos, Nigeria, including universities, churches, and social gatherings, to ensure authentic speech data. Twenty participants (10 male, 10 female) were selected through purposive sampling. Participants were between 18 and 30 years old, which defines "youths" in this study. They were primarily undergraduates and multilingual speakers with a Nigerian indigenous language as their first language and English as a second language acquired through formal education. All reported regular exposure to Standard English in academic contexts and frequent use of Nigerian English in informal interaction. This sociolinguistic profile is essential because pronunciation patterns are influenced by age, linguistic background, and exposure level.

The sample size of twenty is appropriate for the study's scope, which focuses on identifying systematic phonological patterns within a defined urban youth speech community rather than making nationwide statistical generalisations. Phonological processes typically display regularity, and detailed transcription-based analysis requires a manageable dataset to ensure depth and accuracy.

Data were collected in two phases. First, naturalistic observations of spontaneous name pronunciations were documented using field notes and audio recordings obtained with informed consent. Second, participants completed a controlled pronunciation task involving a standardised list of twenty common English Christian names containing phonological structures known to trigger adaptation. Recordings were made individually in quiet settings to ensure clarity.

Observer bias was minimised through the use of a standardised word list, consistent recording procedures, repeated listening during transcription, and systematic IPA-based analysis. Adaptation strategies were identified using a clearly defined coding framework to ensure consistency.

Data analysis proceeded in two stages. The first stage involved phonetic transcription of Standard English forms and comparison with Nigerian English realisations to identify adaptation processes. The second stage classified pronunciations into Standard English, Nigerian English, or hybrid forms, after which frequencies were calculated and presented descriptively. Ethical standards were observed through informed consent, anonymity, and restricted academic use of recordings.

Analysis of data

This section presents findings structured according to the first two research objectives, guided by Haugen's (1950) Linguistic Borrowing Model. The model frames the process as: adoption (initial importation of English Christian names via Christianity and globalisation), and adaptation (phonological reshaping to fit Nigerian English norms). The third aspect of the model, integration, is not applied in this study. First, the male and female names studied are listed in a table. Next, the standard English pronunciations of the names are present alongside their Nigerian English variants. Following this are tables presenting a statistical summary of participants' production of the names and the most common Nigerian adaptations of each word.

A List of Male and Female English Christian Names

Table 1: Twenty (20) Selected English Christian Names

Male Names	Female Names
Matthew	Elizabeth
Stephen	Deborah

Thomas	Esther
Nathaniel	Rebecca
Joseph	Ruth
Michael	Rachel
Gabriel	Hannah
Emmanuel	Joanna
Samuel	Phoebe
Paul	Sarah

Standard English Pronunciation and Nigerian English Variant(s)

Table 2a: Male Christian Names

Name	Standard English Pronunciation (IPA)	Nigerian English Adaptation(s) (IPA)
Matthew	/ˈmæθjuː/	/ˈmatiu/
Stephen	/ˈstiːvən/	/ˈstiːviːn/, /ˈstifiːn/
Thomas	/ˈtɒməs/	/ˈtɔmɑs/
Nathaniel	/nəˈθæniəl/	/naˈtaniɛl/, /neˈtaniɛl/
Joseph	/ˈdʒəʊzəf/	/ˈdʒosɛf/
Michael	/ˈmaɪkəl/	/ˈmaikɛl/
Gabriel	/ˈgeɪbriəl/	/ˈgebriɛl/
Emmanuel	/ɪˈmænjuəl/	/ˈimanwɛl/
Samuel	/ˈsæmjuəl/	/ˈsamwɛl/, /ˈsamuɛl/
Paul	/ˈpiːtə/	/ˈpita/, /ˈpitɛ/

Matthew

In Standard English, *Matthew* is pronounced /ˈmæθjuː/, with the interdental fricative /θ/ and the palatal glide /j/. Nigerian English adaptations, /ˈmatiu/ or /ˈmatu/, replace /θ/ with /t/, a common substitution due to the absence of dental fricatives in most Nigerian languages. The glide /j/ is often dropped, yielding a simpler vowel sequence. This reflects both consonant substitution and simplification of complex clusters.

Stephen

Standard English *Stephen* /ˈstiːvən/ contains the voiced fricative /v/. Nigerian English forms /ˈsti:vi:n/ and /ˈstifi:n/ show two strategies: in the first, a full long vowel is preserved and the final syllable strengthened with /i:n/; in the second, /v/ is replaced by /f/, a process of consonant substitution.

Thomas

The Standard English form /ˈtɒməs/ shows a short rounded vowel /ɒ/ and a schwa in the second syllable. Nigerian English /ˈtɔmɑs/ retains a full vowel /ɔ/ instead of schwa and lengthens the final vowel. This is an example of vowel strengthening and avoidance of reduced vowels.

Nathaniel

Standard English /nəˈθæniəl/ begins with a schwa and contains the interdental /θ/. Nigerian English forms /naˈtaniɛl/ and /neˈtaniɛl/ show two patterns: substitution of /θ/ with /t/ and replacement of schwa with a full vowel, either /a/ or /e/. This demonstrates consonant substitution and preference for open full vowels.

Joseph

In Standard English /ˈdʒəʊzəf/, the diphthong /əʊ/ is central. Nigerian English forms /ˈdʒosɛf/ replace /əʊ/ with a monophthong /o/ and shift the final schwa to /ɛ/. This shows diphthong simplification and schwa strengthening.

Michael

The Standard English /ˈmaɪkəl/ has a diphthong /aɪ/ and a schwa. Nigerian English /ˈmaikɛl/ maintains the diphthong but replaces schwa with /ɛ/, showing vowel strengthening.

Gabriel

Standard English /ˈgeɪbriəl/ contains a diphthong /eɪ/ and a schwa in the final syllable. Nigerian English /ˈgebriɛl/ replaces /eɪ/ with /e/ and schwa with /ɛ/, yielding a fully syllabic rhythm. This exemplifies diphthong simplification and syllable-timed rhythm.

Emmanuel

The Standard English /ɪˈmænjuəl/ features a reduced initial vowel /ɪ/ and a glide + schwa sequence. Nigerian English /ˈimanwɛl/ shifts stress to the initial syllable, replaces schwa with /ɛ/, and simplifies the glide cluster. This shows stress reallocation and vowel strengthening.

Samuel

Standard English /ˈsæmjuəl/ has the /juə/ sequence, which is complex. Nigerian English forms /ˈsamwɛl/ and /ˈsamuɛl/ simplify the glide and replace schwa with /ɛ/. This shows glide simplification and syllabic expansion.

Peter

The Standard English form /ˈpiːtə/ has a long vowel /iː/ and a final schwa. Nigerian English /ˈpita/ or /ˈpitɛ/ replaces schwa with full vowels /a/ or /ɛ/. This demonstrates avoidance of schwa and vowel strengthening.

Table 2b: Female Christian Names

Name	Standard English Pronunciation (IPA)	Nigerian English Adaptation(s) (IPA)
Elizabeth	/ɪˈlɪzəbəθ/	/eˈlizabɛt/, /eˈlizabɛθ/
Deborah	/ˈdɛbərə/	/ˈdebɔra/
Esther	/ˈɛstə/	/ˈɛsta/
Rebecca	/rɪˈbɛkə/	/ˈrebɛka/
Ruth	/ruːθ/	/rut/, /ruf/
Rachel	/ˈreɪtʃəl/	/ˈreʃɛl/, /ˈretʃɛl/
Hannah	/ˈhænə/	/ˈhana/

Joanna	/dʒoʊˈænə/	/dʒoˈana/, /ˈdʒwana/
Phoebe	/ˈfiːbi/	/ˈfebe/
Sarah	/ˈsɛərə/ or /ˈsɛrə/	/ˈsara/, /ˈsera/

Elizabeth

Standard English /ɪˈlɪzəbəθ/ contains both schwa and the interdental /θ/. Nigerian English forms /eˈlizabɛt/ and /eˈlizabɛθ/ replace the initial /ɪ/ with /e/, strengthen the schwa to /a/ or /ɛ/, and in one variant retain /θ/, while in another replace final /θ/ with /t/. The strategies are vowel strengthening and consonant substitution.

Deborah

Standard English /ˈdɛbərə/ ends with schwa. Nigerian English /ˈdebɔra/ replaces schwa with /a/ and inserts a rounded vowel /ɔ/, producing a fuller trisyllabic form. This reflects schwa replacement and syllabic expansion.

Esther

The Standard English /ˈɛstə/ ends with schwa. Nigerian English /ˈɛsta/ replaces schwa with /a/, demonstrating a **shift to full vowels**.

Rebecca

Standard English /rɪˈbɛkə/ contains a schwa. Nigerian English /ˈrebɛka/ replaces the initial /ɪ/ with /e/ and the final schwa with /a/. This shows vowel substitution and strengthening.

Ruth

The Standard English /ruːθ/ ends with interdental /θ/. Nigerian English forms /rut/ and /ruf/ replace /θ/ with /t/ or /f/, both common substitutions in Nigerian English. This is consonant substitution.

Rachel

In Standard English /ˈreɪtʃəl/, the diphthong /eɪ/ and final schwa are key. Nigerian English /ˈreʃɛl/ or /ˈretʃɛl/ simplifies the diphthong to /e/ or /ɛ/ and strengthens the schwa. The /tʃ/ may also weaken to /ʃ/ in one form. This illustrates diphthong simplification and vowel strengthening.

Hannah

Standard English /ˈhænə/ ends with schwa. Nigerian English /ˈhana/ replaces it with /a/, an example of schwa avoidance.

Joanna

The Standard English /dʒoʊˈænə/ features the diphthong /oʊ/ and schwa. Nigerian English /dʒoˈana/ or /ˈdʒwana/ simplifies the diphthong to /o/, deletes schwa, and sometimes compresses syllables with glide /w/. This shows diphthong simplification and cluster reduction.

Phoebe

Standard English /ˈfiːbi/ has the long vowel /iː/. Nigerian English /ˈfebe/ replaces the long vowel with a short /e/, showing vowel lowering and simplification.

Sarah

The Standard English /ˈsɛərə/ or /ˈsɛrə/ has either a diphthong or schwa. Nigerian English /ˈsara/ and /ˈsera/ replace these with full vowels, making all syllables clear. This is diphthong simplification and full vowel substitution.

Analysis of Participants' Pronunciation of Male and Female English Christian Names

The percentages in Tables 3a and 3b below represent the proportion of the 20 participants who produced either the Standard English pronunciation or a Nigerian English adaptation during the controlled elicited pronunciation task. For each name, the researcher listened to the audio recording of all 20 participants pronouncing that specific name. Each participant's production was classified into one of two categories: Standard English pronunciation or Nigerian English adaptation, meaning the realisation showed at least one clear adaptation strategy such as consonant substitution, vowel strengthening, diphthong simplification, or cluster reduction. If a participant produced multiple slight variants during repetition, only the most consistent or clearest token was coded to avoid double-counting the same speaker. The count for each category was then tallied, with the total always equalling 20 participants. The percentage was calculated using the formula of the number of participants in the category divided by 20 and then multiplied by 100, rounded to the nearest whole number for readability. This ensured that the Standard English percentage plus the Nigerian English adaptation percentage always summed to 100 per cent for each name. The column labelled "Common Variants Heard" simply lists the most frequent adapted realisation or realisations observed within the adapted group. All percentages are descriptive only, derived

solely from the elicited task data, and reflect direct coding from the individual recordings to provide transparency and consistency in linking the raw audio evidence to the summary figures in the tables.

Table 3a: Participants' Pronunciation of Male English Christian Names

Name	Standard English Pronunciation (%)	Nigerian English Adaptation (%)	Common Variants Heard
Matthew	25%	75%	/ˈmatiu/
Stephen	20%	80%	/ˈsti:vi:n/, /ˈstifi:n/
Thomas	30%	70%	/ˈtɔmɑs/
Nathaniel	15%	85%	/naˈtaniɛl/, /neˈtaniɛl/
Joseph	40%	60%	/ˈdʒosɛf/
Michael	50%	50%	/ˈmaikɛl/
Gabriel	35%	65%	/ˈgebriɛl/
Emmanuel	10%	90%	/ˈimanwɛl/
Samuel	25%	75%	/ˈsamwɛl/, /ˈsamuɛl/
Paul	45%	55%	/ˈpita/, /ˈpitɛ/

The statistical analysis of male names reveals a clear preference among Nigerian youths for phonological adaptations over standard English pronunciations. Names such as *Emmanuel* (90% adaptation) and *Nathaniel* (85% adaptation) show the strongest tendency toward Nigerian English forms, largely due to the simplification of complex syllable structures and the replacement of less familiar sounds such as /θ/. Similarly, *Stephen* (80%) undergoes consistent adaptation, where the voiced fricative /v/ is replaced with approximations like /f/ or lengthened vowels, aligning with common substitution patterns in Nigerian English.

By contrast, names like *Michael* (50%) and *Peter* (55%) display a more balanced distribution between standard and adapted forms, suggesting these names are widely recognised in both their international and localised versions. Interestingly, *Joseph* (60% adaptation) retains relatively

strong recognition of its standard form compared to other names, which may reflect its long-standing presence in both religious and cultural contexts.

The data indicates that the degree of adaptation is influenced by phonological complexity, the presence of sounds less common in Nigerian English, and the entrenched status of certain biblical names in everyday usage. Names with simpler phonemic structures or global familiarity (e.g., *Peter* and *Michael*) are more resistant to adaptation, while those with more marked or less common sounds (e.g., *Nathaniel*, *Stephen*, *Emmanuel*) are heavily localised.

Table 3b: Participants' Pronunciation of Female English Christian Names

Name	Standard English Pronunciation (%)	Nigerian English Adaptation (%)	Common Variants Heard
Elizabeth	20%	80%	/eˈlizabɛt/, /eˈlizabɛθ/
Deborah	25%	75%	/ˈdebɔra/
Esther	40%	60%	/ˈɛsta/
Rebecca	30%	70%	/ˈrebɛka/
Ruth	15%	85%	/rut/, /ruf/
Rachel	25%	75%	/ˈreʃɛl/, /ˈretʃɛl/
Hannah	50%	50%	/ˈhana/
Joanna	20%	80%	/dʒoˈana/, /ˈdʒwana/
Phoebe	10%	90%	/ˈfebe/
Sarah	35%	65%	/ˈsara/, /ˈsera/

The analysis of female names shows even stronger evidence of phonological adaptation than the male names. *Phoebe* (90% adaptation) and *Ruth* (85%) are among the most consistently localised, largely because of sounds like /θ/ and the initial /f/ in *Phoebe*, which are frequently replaced by more familiar Nigerian English sounds such as /t/ or /b/. Similarly, *Elizabeth* (80%) and *Joanna* (80%) undergo systematic adaptation, with simplification of stress patterns and vowel substitutions reflecting Nigerian English phonotactics.

In contrast, names like *Hannah* (50%) and *Esther* (60%) retain stronger ties to their standard English forms. This resistance to adaptation may be explained by their shorter syllable structures and relatively simpler phonemes, which align more closely with Nigerian English sound patterns. *Sarah* (65%) also shows partial preservation of its standard form, reflecting its strong biblical presence and familiarity across Christian communities.

The results suggest that female names containing marked phonemes or multi-syllabic complexity (e.g., *Elizabeth*, *Phoebe*, *Joanna*) are more likely to be adapted, while those with simpler, universally recognisable structures (e.g., *Hannah*, *Esther*) show greater stability. The strong tendency toward adaptation highlights the role of Nigerian English in reshaping name pronunciations to fit local phonological norms, while cultural familiarity serves as a stabilising influence for some widely used biblical names.

Discussion of Findings

The findings clearly show that Lagos youths predominantly use adapted pronunciations of English Christian names rather than the original Standard English forms, with adaptation rates averaging over 70% across the elicited data. This directly answers the study's sole objective: to investigate whether Lagos youths use original or adapted pronunciations and how they adapt those names into Nigerian English. The high proportion of adapted realisations confirms that adapted pronunciations are the norm among this urban youth group, while original forms are used less frequently and mainly for shorter or highly familiar names.

Guided by Haugen's (1950) Linguistic Borrowing Model, the results illustrate that the adaptation stage is the most prominent in this context. English Christian names have long been adopted into Nigerian society through Christianity and globalization, but Lagos youths actively reshape them phonologically to conform to Nigerian English rules. The main adaptation strategies include consonant substitution (particularly /θ/ → /t/ and /v/ → /f/ or vowel lengthening), vowel strengthening (replacing schwa /ə/ with full vowels such as /a/, /ɛ/, or /ɔ/), diphthong simplification (e.g., /əʊ/ → /o/, /eɪ/ → /e/ or /ɛ/), and cluster or glide reduction. These processes are systematic and driven by Nigerian English phonotactics, such as preference for CV syllable structures, avoidance of dental fricatives, and use of full vowels instead of reduced ones. Such patterns align with established features of Nigerian English (Jowitt, 1991; Gut, 2004) and echo name adaptation strategies reported cross-linguistically (Legbeti & Evbuomwan, 2024; Sicherl, 2015), but are here documented specifically in the speech of contemporary urban youths.

Names with phonological complexity or marked sounds showed the strongest adaptation (e.g., *Emmanuel* at 90%, *Phoebe* at 90%, *Nathaniel* at 85%, *Ruth* at 85%), where non-native features like interdental fricatives, schwa, or complex diphthongs were consistently replaced or simplified. In contrast, shorter or more familiar names exhibited greater retention of original pronunciations (*Michael* at 50%, *Hannah* at 50%, *Peter* at 55%), suggesting that cultural-religious entrenchment and phonological simplicity allow partial preservation of the standard form. Female names showed a slightly higher average adaptation rate (74%) than male names (70%), likely due to greater phonetic complexity in several multi-syllabic examples, though the difference is not substantial.

In summary, Lagos youths adapt English Christian names into Nigerian English far more than they retain the original pronunciations, employing predictable phonological strategies that reflect systematic nativization. While religious and cultural significance is preserved, the names are reshaped to fit the sound system of Nigerian English, demonstrating active domestication by this demographic. These results extend Haugen's model by showing the adaptation stage as dominant among urban youths and contribute to Nigerian onomastics and World Englishes by documenting contemporary youth-driven phonological change in a postcolonial multilingual setting.

Conclusion

This study examined how Nigerian youths adapt English Christian names into Nigerian English pronunciation, showing that the changes are systematic rather than arbitrary. The analysis revealed strategies such as sound substitution (e.g., /θ/ → /t/ or /s/), cluster simplification, and stress modification, all of which align names with Nigerian English phonological rules. Participant data confirmed that while a few names like *Peter*, *Michael*, and *Hannah* were often pronounced close to their Standard English forms; most were consistently localised into Nigerian English variants. These findings highlight that Nigerian English operates as a distinct system with stable pronunciation patterns and that Nigerian youths actively reshape global English names into forms that are both phonetically natural within their variety and socially meaningful in their cultural context.

Recommendations and Suggestions for Further Research

Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that greater attention be given to the role of Nigerian English in shaping the way English Christian names are used in everyday life. Teachers, church leaders, and community figures can promote awareness of both Standard English and

Nigerian English pronunciations, helping youths develop flexible competence depending on context. Linguists and educators should also consider these adaptations as part of legitimate language use, rather than errors, since they reflect systematic phonological processes.

For further research, future studies could expand the sample size to include youths from rural areas and different regions of Nigeria to capture broader variation. Comparative studies with other African countries where English coexists with indigenous languages may also reveal whether similar adaptation strategies occur. Additionally, acoustic phonetic analysis could be employed to provide more precise evidence of vowel quality and consonant substitution patterns, and longitudinal studies might explore how pronunciation practices change over time with increased exposure to global media. Such extensions would deepen understanding of how Nigerian English continues to evolve in contact with Standard English.

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The Pragmatics of Donald Trump's Declaration of Nigeria as a Country of Particular Concern (CPC) On 'X' In 2025

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Abstract

This study examines the pragmatics of Donald Trump's 2025 declaration of Nigeria as a Country of Particular Concern (CPC) on X, to investigate how the statement functions as a political speech act and what effects it generates. The research is anchored in Speech Act Theory, particularly J. L. Austin's distinction between locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary acts, and John R. Searle's classification of illocutionary acts into assertives, directives, commissives, expressives and declarative. A qualitative research design was adopted. The population consists of Trump's tweets on insecurity and international intervention, while two tweets were purposively selected as samples: the CPC declaration tweet and a tweet announcing an air strike in Nigeria. Data were collected directly from X and analysed using both tabular classification and descriptive interpretation to identify the dominant illocutionary forces and possible perlocutionary effects. The findings reveal that the CPC tweet is largely assertive, with one central declarative act that attempts to alter Nigeria's international status, while the air strike tweet is mainly assertive and commissive, with a limited expressive element. The study concludes that political tweets function as powerful performative acts capable of shaping diplomatic relations, influencing public perception and constructing political realities in the digital age.

Keywords: *Pragmatics, Donald Trump, Nigeria, Country of Particular Concern (CPC), 'X'*

Introduction

Language in political communication is rarely neutral; rather, it functions as a strategic instrument through which political actors frame realities, signal ideological positions, and influence audiences. In the contemporary digital era, this performative dimension of language has become even more pronounced with the emergence of social media platforms as arenas of political discourse. Platforms such as X (formerly Twitter) enable political figures to communicate directly with global audiences, bypassing traditional diplomatic and institutional channels. Consequently, political statements made on such platforms often operate not merely as expressions of opinion but as performative acts capable of shaping public perception, policy interpretation, and international relations.

Within this evolving communicative landscape, Donald Trump's 2025 post on X declaring Nigeria a *Country of Particular Concern (CPC)* represents a significant case of digitally mediated political discourse. The CPC designation originates from the United States *International Religious Freedom Act* of 1998 and is typically issued through formal diplomatic or institutional procedures by the U.S. Secretary of State. When such a designation is articulated through a social media post rather than through official diplomatic documentation, the communicative act acquires additional pragmatic significance. The platform environment introduces immediacy, mass visibility, and interpretive plurality, thereby transforming what might otherwise be a bureaucratic classification into a widely circulated political speech act with potential diplomatic and socio-political repercussions.

Scholarly studies on political communication have increasingly examined how social media reshapes political discourse and audience engagement. Research by Joe (2023), for example, demonstrates that Twitter functions as a hybrid space for policy signalling, political mobilisation, and image management among political actors. Similarly, Egielewa (2021) shows that statements by government officials on social media are frequently interpreted by audiences as strategic communicative acts rather than neutral information. Within the field of pragmatics, studies such as Uche (2019) have applied Speech Act Theory to analyse how political language performs actions such as legitimising authority, mobilising support, or framing crises. These studies collectively note the importance of examining political language as performative action within specific communicative contexts.

Despite these contributions, a notable gap remains in the literature. Existing studies on political tweets and digital political communication have largely focused on domestic political actors, campaign communication, or public engagement strategies, while pragmatic studies grounded in Speech Act Theory have mainly analysed formal speeches, policy statements, or institutional discourse. Consequently, limited scholarly attention has been given to how foreign policy classifications or diplomatic labels are articulated and operationalised through social media posts by transnational political actors, particularly when such statements target another sovereign state. Even less explored is how such posts function simultaneously as assertive, directive, commissive, or declarative speech acts within a digital diplomatic environment, and what perlocutionary consequences they may generate.

This study addresses this gap by analysing the pragmatics of Donald Trump's declaration of Nigeria as a Country of Particular Concern on X in 2025. Drawing on Speech Act Theory as developed by J. L. Austin (1962) and John R. Searle (1969), the study examines how the tweet operates as a performative linguistic act within contemporary digital political discourse. In particular, the research investigates how the utterance functions in terms of locutionary content, illocutionary force, and potential perlocutionary effects, and how these elements contribute to the construction of political meaning and diplomatic implications. Accordingly, the study is guided by the following objectives: to identify and classify the illocutionary acts present in Donald Trump's CPC declaration tweet on X, to analyse the pragmatic functions of these speech acts within the context of digital political communication, and to examine the potential perlocutionary effects of the declaration on diplomatic discourse, media interpretation, and public perception.

Literature Review

Conceptual Review

Pragmatics

Pragmatics has long been concerned with the relationship between language, context, and communicative intention. Rather than treating language as a neutral medium of description, pragmatic scholarship emphasises the performative and action-oriented nature of utterances within specific social contexts. Scholars in pragmatics argue that meaning is not solely derived from the linguistic structure of an utterance but also from the context in which it is used and the communicative intentions of speakers (Levinson 21; Yule 3). Consequently, pragmatic analysis

focuses on how speakers use language to perform actions and how listeners interpret those actions within particular social and cultural environments.

Classical pragmatic theory, particularly the work of J. L. Austin and John R. Searle, established the idea that utterances function as actions capable of producing institutional and social consequences. Austin's distinction between locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts shifted linguistic analysis away from purely semantic interpretation toward the examination of communicative force and social effect (Austin 94–101). Building upon Austin's work, Searle proposed a systematic classification of illocutionary acts into assertives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declarations, thereby providing a comprehensive framework for analysing how speakers perform actions through language (Searle 10–16). Through these contributions, Speech Act Theory demonstrated that language is fundamentally a form of social action rather than merely a tool for describing reality.

Although these foundational theories were originally developed in the context of face-to-face interaction, contemporary scholarship has increasingly explored their relevance in digitally mediated communication. The rise of social media platforms has transformed the communicative environment in which political language operates. Scholars in digital pragmatics argue that online discourse introduces new dynamics of audience participation, immediacy, and global circulation that intensify the performative character of language (Herring 5; Androutsopoulos 76). In digital communication environments, the boundaries between private expression and public discourse are often blurred, allowing brief textual statements to acquire wide political and social significance.

Consequently, political utterances on platforms such as X (formerly Twitter) function not merely as statements but as public acts capable of shaping political narratives, influencing media agendas, and generating diplomatic reactions (KhosraviNik 54). Within this evolving context, Speech Act Theory remains a useful analytical framework, although its application requires sensitivity to the communicative affordances of digital platforms. Recent studies of digital political discourse suggest that social media statements by political actors frequently combine multiple illocutionary functions, simultaneously asserting facts, signalling policy intentions, and mobilising audiences (Ott 63; Zappavigna 2). Political tweets, therefore, operate as condensed performative acts whose pragmatic force emerges not only from their linguistic structure but also from their visibility within networked communication environments.

Text

The concept of text has undergone significant theoretical development within discourse analysis. Early text-linguistic approaches emphasised structural properties such as cohesion and coherence, viewing texts primarily as organised sequences of linguistic units that achieve unity through grammatical and lexical relationships (Halliday and Hasan 4; Beaugrande and Dressler 3). While these frameworks provided valuable insights into textual organisation, later scholarship has questioned the adequacy of purely structural models for explaining how meaning emerges within broader communicative practices.

Halliday's systemic functional perspective reconceptualised text as language functioning within a social context, emphasising the relationship between linguistic form and communicative purpose (Halliday 10). From this perspective, texts cannot be understood independently of the social situations in which they are produced and interpreted. Language, therefore, operates as a resource for making meaning within particular contexts of use.

Fairclough extends this argument by situating texts within broader discursive events that include processes of production, distribution, and interpretation (Fairclough 71). According to Fairclough, discourse is not simply a linguistic phenomenon but also a social practice through which power relations, ideologies, and institutional structures are reproduced. In contemporary communication environments, these processes are especially visible within digital media, where texts are rapidly reproduced, commented upon, and reframed across multiple platforms.

Social media posts, therefore, represent a distinctive form of text whose meaning is shaped by networked circulation and audience interaction. Unlike traditional institutional communication, which often follows established bureaucratic channels, political communication on social media occurs within a highly visible public arena characterised by immediacy and interpretive plurality (boyd 8; Zappavigna 3). A single post may simultaneously address multiple audiences, including domestic supporters, international observers, and media organisations. For this reason, scholars increasingly conceptualise political tweets as discursive events rather than isolated textual artefacts (KhosraviNik and Unger 114).

Within this framework, the declaration of a country as a Country of Particular Concern through a social media post can be understood as a strategic discursive act that combines linguistic expression, institutional authority, and digital dissemination. Analysing such a post therefore

requires an approach that integrates pragmatic analysis with an understanding of digital political communication.

Empirical Review

Ott (2017), in his study titled *"The Age of Twitter: Donald Trump and the Politics of Debasement",* investigates how political actors use Twitter as a rhetorical and pragmatic tool in contemporary political communication. The study draws on rhetorical theory and political discourse analysis to examine the linguistic strategies employed in Donald Trump's tweets during the 2016 United States presidential campaign. Methodologically, the research adopts a qualitative discourse analytical approach, analysing a corpus of tweets posted by Trump and examining their rhetorical and pragmatic features. The findings reveal that Twitter enables political actors to deploy simplified and emotionally charged language that amplifies political messaging and shapes public discourse. The study concludes that social media platforms transform political communication by enabling direct, performative and highly visible statements that influence public narratives and media agendas. While Ott's work highlights the communicative power of political tweets, its focus is primarily rhetorical rather than pragmatic, leaving limited engagement with the classification of speech acts or the analysis of illocutionary force. This limitation suggests the need for studies that examine how tweets function as specific speech acts capable of producing diplomatic or political consequences, which is a concern addressed in the present research.

Manor and Bjola (2018) examine the relationship between social media and diplomatic practice in their work on digital diplomacy. Their study is grounded in communication diplomacy theory, which conceptualises diplomacy as a communicative practice shaped by evolving media technologies. The researchers employ a qualitative methodological approach, analysing digital communication strategies used by diplomats and political leaders across various social media platforms. Their findings demonstrate that social media has transformed diplomatic communication by allowing political leaders to engage directly with international audiences while bypassing traditional diplomatic channels. The authors conclude that digital platforms increasingly function as arenas for symbolic diplomatic acts that influence international perceptions and policy debates. However, their study primarily focuses on institutional diplomatic actors rather than the pragmatic structure of specific utterances made on social media. Consequently, although the research highlights the significance of digital diplomacy, it does not analyse how individual posts operate as performative speech acts. This gap indicates the importance of applying pragmatic

frameworks such as Speech Act Theory to examine how digital statements function as diplomatic or political acts.

Enli (2017) explores the role of social media in political communication in her study on mediated authenticity and populist communication. The research is informed by media discourse theory and political communication theory, focusing on how political leaders construct authenticity through digital platforms. The methodology involves qualitative content analysis of political leaders' social media posts, alongside interpretive analysis of audience engagement and media coverage. The findings indicate that social media enables political actors to construct an image of authenticity and directness that strengthens their connection with supporters. The study concludes that digital platforms encourage a personalised form of political communication that blurs the boundaries between institutional messaging and individual expression. Nevertheless, the study's emphasis on media representation and political identity means that it does not engage extensively with pragmatic theories of language use. In particular, the analysis does not address how specific linguistic structures perform institutional or policy-related actions within digital communication environments. This limitation reinforces the need for pragmatic analyses that focus on the communicative force of political statements in digital contexts.

KhosraviNik (2020) investigates the dynamics of political discourse on social media in his work on digital political communication and critical discourse analysis. The study is guided by Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and theories of digital discourse, examining how political narratives are constructed and circulated within social media environments. Methodologically, the research combines digital discourse analysis with qualitative textual interpretation, analysing online political statements and their circulation across digital networks. The findings reveal that social media platforms enable rapid dissemination of political narratives that can influence public perception and shape ideological debates. The study concludes that digital political discourse is characterised by high levels of visibility, rapid circulation and strong interpretive contestation among audiences. However, while the research provides valuable insights into the broader dynamics of digital discourse, it focuses more on ideological framing than on the pragmatic structure of individual utterances. As a result, the role of speech acts in shaping political meaning within digital communication remains underexplored.

Tagg (2022) examines the pragmatics of digital communication in her study on digital pragmatics and online discourse. The research is grounded in pragmatic theory and discourse analysis, with

particular attention to how context, audience and technological affordances influence meaning in online communication. The methodology involves qualitative analysis of digital texts across various social media platforms, focusing on how communicative intentions are realised in short textual forms. The findings show that digital communication often compresses complex communicative actions into brief textual statements that nonetheless carry significant pragmatic force. The study concludes that digital platforms amplify the performative nature of language because messages are instantly visible to large audiences and may trigger immediate reactions and reinterpretations. Despite these insights, the study examines online communication broadly rather than focusing specifically on political discourse or diplomatic communication. Consequently, the pragmatic implications of politically significant statements on social media remain insufficiently explored.

Taken together, these empirical studies demonstrate that social media has fundamentally transformed political communication by enabling political actors to disseminate highly visible and strategically framed statements to global audiences. Existing research has examined rhetorical strategies, audience engagement and the broader dynamics of digital political discourse. However, much of this scholarship either emphasises media effects or focuses on discourse structures without systematically applying pragmatic frameworks to analyse how political statements perform institutional or diplomatic actions. In particular, limited attention has been given to how political tweets invoking formal policy classifications function as speech acts within international political discourse. The present study therefore builds on the insights of previous research while addressing this gap by applying Speech Act Theory to analyse Donald Trump's declaration of Nigeria as a Country of Particular Concern on X, thereby contributing to the growing scholarship on digital pragmatics, political discourse and digital diplomacy.

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in Speech Act Theory, developed by J. L. Austin (1962) and later refined by John R. Searle (1969), which explains how language performs actions within social and institutional contexts rather than merely conveying information. Austin introduced three dimensions of speech acts: the locutionary act (the production of a meaningful utterance), the illocutionary act (the communicative force such as asserting, requesting, or declaring), and the perlocutionary act (the effects an utterance produces on audiences, such as persuasion or information). Searle expanded the theory by classifying illocutionary acts into assertives,

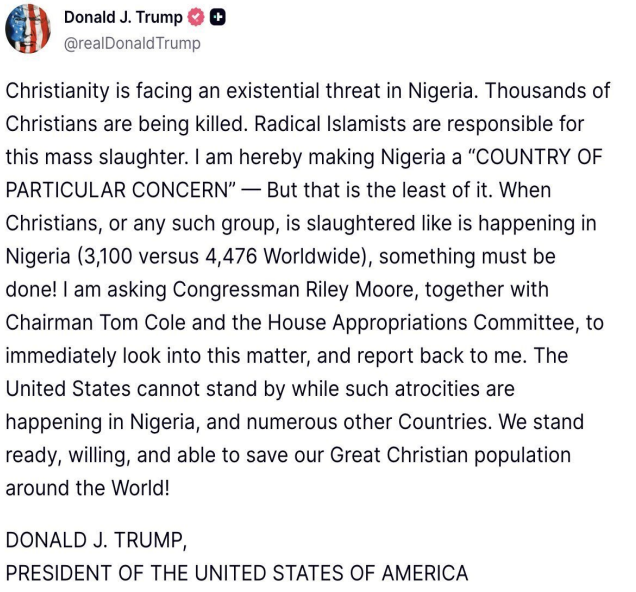
directives, commissives, expressives, and declarations, and by introducing felicity conditions, which refer to the contextual and institutional requirements for a speech act to function effectively. Although Speech Act Theory was initially developed for face-to-face communication, contemporary scholars have extended it to digital communication, where political statements on platforms such as X can quickly reach large audiences and shape political narratives and diplomatic discourse. Studies show that tweets by political leaders often combine several communicative functions, simultaneously asserting information, signalling policy intentions, and mobilising supporters. Consequently, understanding political tweets requires considering both their linguistic structure and their communicative context, including the speaker's authority, the digital platform, and the broader socio-political environment. In this study, Speech Act Theory provides the framework for analysing Donald Trump's declaration of Nigeria as a Country of Particular Concern on X, enabling the identification of dominant illocutionary acts and the interpretation of the tweet as a symbolic declarative act with potential perlocutionary effects on diplomatic discourse, media framing, and public perception. By integrating classical speech act theory with insights from digital discourse research, the framework helps explain how political tweets function as performative communicative acts that shape political meaning and international discourse in the digital age.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design to analyse political discourse within its socio-pragmatic context. The data consists of Donald Trump's posts on the social media platform X (formerly Twitter) concerning insecurity, religious freedom, and international intervention. The dataset is treated as an open-ended digital corpus due to the dynamic nature of social media communication. Using purposive sampling, two tweets were selected for detailed analysis: the tweet declaring Nigeria a "Country of Particular Concern" (CPC) and another referring to a United States air strike in Nigeria. These tweets were chosen because they represent significant political discourse events, with the CPC tweet transforming a formal diplomatic classification under the United States International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 into a public social media declaration, while the air strike tweet communicates military action and foreign policy directly to a global audience. Data were collected through direct textual extraction from the X platform to preserve the original wording and stylistic features. The analysis combines tabular classification and qualitative interpretation: first, the tweets were segmented and classified according to Searle's

categories of illocutionary acts: assertives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declaratives, to identify dominant communicative forces; second, a pragmatic interpretation examined how the tweets function within their socio-political context, including their speaker intention, institutional authority, audience orientation, and potential perlocutionary effects in media and diplomatic discourse. Through this approach, the study shows that Trump's tweets operate as performative political speech acts that shape public perception, diplomatic relations, and international discourse about Nigeria.

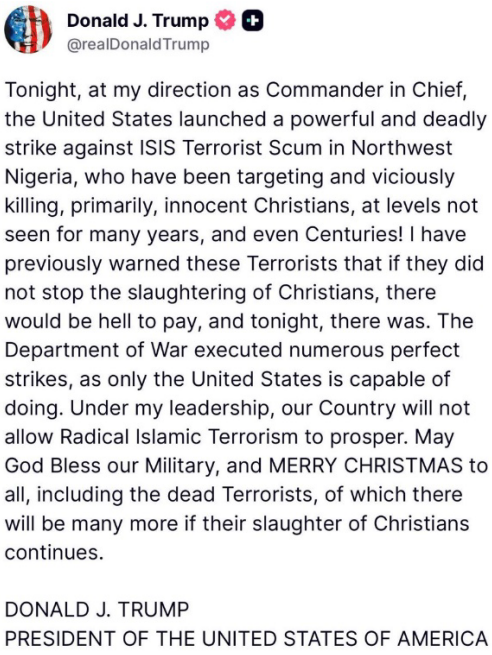
Data Presentation



Donald J. Trump
@realDonaldTrump

Christianity is facing an existential threat in Nigeria. Thousands of Christians are being killed. Radical Islamists are responsible for this mass slaughter. I am hereby making Nigeria a "COUNTRY OF PARTICULAR CONCERN" — But that is the least of it. When Christians, or any such group, is slaughtered like is happening in Nigeria (3,100 versus 4,476 Worldwide), something must be done! I am asking Congressman Riley Moore, together with Chairman Tom Cole and the House Appropriations Committee, to immediately look into this matter, and report back to me. The United States cannot stand by while such atrocities are happening in Nigeria, and numerous other Countries. We stand ready, willing, and able to save our Great Christian population around the World!

DONALD J. TRUMP,
PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA



Donald J. Trump
@realDonaldTrump

Tonight, at my direction as Commander in Chief, the United States launched a powerful and deadly strike against ISIS Terrorist Scum in Northwest Nigeria, who have been targeting and viciously killing, primarily, innocent Christians, at levels not seen for many years, and even Centuries! I have previously warned these Terrorists that if they did not stop the slaughtering of Christians, there would be hell to pay, and tonight, there was. The Department of War executed numerous perfect strikes, as only the United States is capable of doing. Under my leadership, our Country will not allow Radical Islamic Terrorism to prosper. May God Bless our Military, and MERRY CHRISTMAS to all, including the dead Terrorists, of which there will be many more if their slaughter of Christians continues.

DONALD J. TRUMP
PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Data Analysis

Table 1: Illocutionary Act Analysis of the CPC Declaration Tweet

S/N	Excerpt	Assertive	Directive	Commissive	Expressive	Declarative
1	"Christianity is facing an existential threat in Nigeria."	✓	*	*	*	*

2	"Thousands of Christians are being killed."	✓	*	*	*	*
3	"Radical Islamists are responsible for this mass slaughter."	✓	*	*	*	*
4	"I am hereby making Nigeria a 'COUNTRY OF PARTICULAR CONCERN'."	*	*	*	*	✓
5	"But that is the least of it."	✓	*	*	*	*
6	"When Christians, or any such group, are slaughtered like is happening in Nigeria (3,100 versus 4,476 Worldwide), something must be done!"	✓	✓	*	*	*
7	"I am asking Congressman Riley Moore, together with Chairman Tom Cole and the House Appropriations Committee, to	*	✓	*	*	*

	immediately look into this matter and report back to me."					
8	"The United States cannot stand by while such atrocities are happening in Nigeria and numerous other Countries."	✓	*	✓	*	*
9	"We stand ready, willing, and able to save our Great Christian population around the World!"	*	*	✓	*	*
	Total	**6**	**2**	**2**	**0**	**1**

Interpretation of Table 1: CPC Declaration Tweet

The table indicates that the CPC declaration tweet contains a mixture of assertive, directive, commissive and declarative speech acts. However, the pragmatic significance of the tweet becomes clearer when the utterances are examined in their sequential and discursive context. The tweet is structured as a carefully organised rhetorical narrative that progresses from problem construction to policy signalling.

The opening statement, "Christianity is facing an existential threat in Nigeria," performs an assertive function, but its significance lies in the framing strategy embedded within the utterance. The phrase "existential threat" introduces a highly intensified lexical framing that elevates the situation beyond a routine political or security concern. The term "existential" suggests a danger to the survival of an entire religious community, thereby positioning the issue as a civilisational crisis rather than a localised conflict. Through this framing, the speaker constructs the

communicative context in which subsequent claims and actions become justified. In pragmatic terms, the assertion establishes the presupposition that a severe crisis already exists, thereby inviting the audience to accept the need for urgent intervention.

The second statement, "Thousands of Christians are being killed," reinforces this crisis narrative through the strategic use of quantitative reference. Although the statement functions as an assertive speech act, the invocation of large numbers operates rhetorically as a persuasive device. Statistics in political discourse frequently serve to amplify urgency and credibility, even when the precise sources of the numbers are not specified. By presenting the killings in numerical terms, the speaker strengthens the perception that the situation is both widespread and systematic. This use of quantification contributes to the construction of moral urgency and prepares the ground for policy-related claims later in the tweet.

The third statement, "Radical Islamists are responsible for this mass slaughter," introduces a significant ideological dimension to the discourse. The phrase "Radical Islamists" identifies a specific out-group as the perpetrators of violence, thereby constructing a clear moral dichotomy between victims and aggressors. The lexical choice "mass slaughter" further intensifies the emotional and moral framing of the situation. Through this language, the tweet establishes a narrative of religious victimhood and assigns explicit responsibility to an ideologically defined adversary. This construction of in-group and out-group identities is a common strategy in political discourse, as it simplifies complex conflicts into morally polarised categories that are easily recognisable to audiences.

The next statement, "I am hereby making Nigeria a 'Country of Particular Concern,'" represents the central performative moment in the tweet. The presence of the performative marker "hereby" signals that the utterance is intended to function as a declarative speech act. In traditional institutional settings, declarations require specific authority and procedural legitimacy to successfully alter institutional realities. Within this tweet, the speaker invokes the language of formal diplomatic designation while communicating through a social media platform. This creates a hybrid form of performativity in which institutional language is deployed within the informal communicative environment of digital media. The declaration therefore functions symbolically as an attempt to reposition Nigeria within a global human rights discourse.

The statement "But that is the least of it" introduces an important rhetorical transition in the tweet. While the earlier assertions construct a narrative of religious persecution, this sentence signals that

the situation is even more difficult than previously stated. The phrase operates as a discursive intensifier that sustains audience attention and heightens the perception of crisis. Pragmatically, it prepares the audience for further claims and reinforces the sense that the issue demands immediate attention.

The next segment of the tweet states, "When Christians, or any such group, are slaughtered like is happening in Nigeria (3,100 versus 4,476 Worldwide), something must be done." This statement combines assertive and directive elements while simultaneously employing statistical comparison. The inclusion of the figures "3,100 versus 4,476 worldwide" functions rhetorically as an attempt to contextualise the Nigerian situation within a broader global framework of religious violence. By juxtaposing national and global figures, the speaker suggests that Nigeria represents a disproportionately severe case. This comparative framing strengthens the argument that intervention is justified. The phrase "something must be done" introduces a directive dimension, though the specific action remains undefined. This form of directive allows the speaker to call for action while maintaining strategic ambiguity regarding the exact policy measures.

The subsequent statement, "I am asking Congressman Riley Moore, together with Chairman Tom Cole and the House Appropriations Committee, to immediately look into this matter, and report back to me," represents a more explicit directive speech act. Here, the speaker addresses specific political actors and institutional bodies, thereby transforming the tweet into a public policy signal. By naming individual officials and committees, the speaker demonstrates institutional awareness and reinforces the perception that the issue is being addressed within formal governmental structures. At the same time, the public nature of the tweet means that the directive is not directed solely at the named recipients but also at a wider audience that observes the interaction with the hope that the institution will come up with a piece to justify the claims in the tweet.

The statement "The United States cannot stand by while such atrocities are happening in Nigeria, and numerous other Countries" combines assertive and commissive elements. On one level, the statement asserts a moral judgement about the situation. On another level, it implicitly commits the speaker and the United States to some form of response. The phrase "cannot stand by" signals moral obligation and positions the United States as a potential protector within the international system. This framing constructs the country as a defender of persecuted religious communities, thereby reinforcing the speaker's political identity.

The final statement, "We stand ready, willing, and able to save our Great Christian population around the World," functions primarily as a commissive speech act. The phrase "ready, willing, and able" emphasises preparedness and determination, projecting an image of decisive leadership. At the same time, the reference to "our Great Christian population" extends the scope of the discourse beyond Nigeria to a global religious community. This rhetorical move constructs a transnational in-group identity that aligns the speaker with Christians worldwide. Through this strategy, the tweet appeals simultaneously to domestic supporters and international audiences who may identify with the religious framing of the issue.

When considered as a whole, the CPC declaration tweet reveals a carefully structured communicative strategy. The discourse begins with assertive claims that establish a narrative of crisis. These claims are reinforced through statistics, moral language and ideological framing. The tweet then moves towards institutional and political action through declarative and directive speech acts. Finally, it concludes with commissive statements that signal readiness for future intervention. The sequence of these elements demonstrates how the tweet functions as a strategic political performance designed to frame the situation in Nigeria, mobilise institutional attention and reinforce the speaker's leadership identity.

Table 2. Illocutionary Act Analysis of the Air Strike Tweet

S/N	Excerpt	Assertive	Directive	Commissive	Expressive	Declarative
1	"Tonight, at my direction as Commander in Chief, the United States launched a powerful and deadly strike…"	✓	*	*	*	*
2	"I have previously warned these Terrorists…"	✓	*	*	*	*
3	"If they did not stop… There	✓	*	✓	*	*

	would be hell to pay, and tonight, there was."					
4	"Under my leadership, our Country will not allow Radical Islamic Terrorism to prosper."	*	*	✓	*	*
5	"May God Bless our Military…"	*	*	*	✓	*
	Total	**3**	**0**	**2**	**1**	**0**

Interpretation of Table 2: Air Strike Tweet

The air strike tweet exhibits a different communicative structure, although it also reflects strategic use of speech acts and rhetorical framing. Whereas the CPC tweet constructs a narrative of crisis that justifies intervention, the air strike tweet focuses on the announcement and legitimisation of military action.

The opening statement, "Tonight, at my direction as Commander in Chief, the United States launched a powerful and deadly strike," functions as an assertive speech act reporting an action that has already occurred. However, the phrasing of the sentence reveals a strong emphasis on personal authority. The clause "at my direction as Commander in Chief" foregrounds the speaker's institutional role and establishes a clear connection between leadership authority and the military operation. This formulation positions the speaker as the central decision-maker responsible for the action.

The adjectives "powerful" and "deadly" also contribute to the rhetorical construction of the event. These evaluative descriptors emphasise the effectiveness and strength of the operation. Rather than presenting the strike as a neutral military report, the language highlights its decisive and forceful character. This rhetorical strategy reinforces the image of a leader who is capable of taking strong action against perceived threats.

The statement "I have previously warned these terrorists" introduces a narrative of prior deterrence. By referring to earlier warnings, the speaker constructs a chronological sequence in which military action appears as a justified response rather than an immediate or arbitrary decision. The use of the term "terrorists" also functions ideologically by categorising the adversary within a globally recognised framework of security threats.

The following statement, "If they did not stop… there would be hell to pay, and tonight, there was," further reinforces this narrative of justified retaliation. The phrase "hell to pay" is a strongly idiomatic expression that conveys severity and inevitability. Within the discourse, it functions as a rhetorical device that emphasises the consequences of defying the warning issued by the speaker. The reference to "tonight" reinforces the immediacy of the action and highlights the fulfilment of the earlier threat.

The next statement, "Under my leadership, our Country will not allow Radical Islamic Terrorism to prosper," functions primarily as a commissive speech act. The phrase "under my leadership" again foregrounds the personal authority of the speaker, while the commitment to preventing terrorism from prospering signals a long-term policy stance. The ideological framing of "Radical Islamic Terrorism" mirrors the earlier construction of adversaries in the CPC tweet, reinforcing the broader narrative of a global struggle against terrorism.

The final statement, "May God Bless our Military," functions as an expressive speech act. Although brief, the invocation of divine blessing introduces a moral and symbolic dimension to the discourse. By aligning the military action with religious approval, the speaker frames the operation as morally justified and worthy of collective support. This type of expressive statement also strengthens emotional solidarity between the speaker, the military and supportive audiences.

Taken together, the air strike tweet performs several communicative functions. It reports a military operation, legitimises the action through references to prior warnings, reinforces ideological opposition to terrorism and expresses moral support for the armed forces. The combination of assertive, commissive and expressive speech acts allows the tweet to simultaneously inform, justify and emotionally reinforce the narrative of decisive leadership. From a broader pragmatic perspective, the tweet functions as a performance of authority that communicates strength, moral legitimacy and continued commitment to security objectives.

Discussion of Findings

The analysis of the selected tweets shows that political communication on digital platforms operates as a complex form of pragmatic action rather than simple opinion expression. Although the classification of illocutionary acts identified dominant categories, the deeper analysis reveals that the tweets combine narrative framing, ideological positioning, and symbolic policy signalling, indicating that political tweets function as strategic communicative events within wider political and diplomatic contexts. A key finding is the strategic use of assertive speech acts to construct persuasive narratives, particularly through lexical choices such as "existential threat," "mass slaughter," and numerical statistics that frame Nigeria's situation as an urgent moral crisis and legitimise subsequent policy-oriented speech acts. The study also highlights how declarative authority interacts with digital communication, as the declaration of Nigeria as a "Country of Particular Concern" represents a performative diplomatic act carried out through a social media platform, demonstrating how political actors can perform symbolic diplomatic actions outside traditional institutional channels and address international audiences through what may be termed a transnational digital speech act. In addition, the tweets employ ideological framing by constructing a moral dichotomy between an in-group associated with Christianity and an out-group associated with terrorism or radicalism, thereby simplifying complex socio-political realities and mobilising ideological support. Commissive speech acts further reinforce political leadership by projecting commitments to protect Christians and combat terrorism, shaping public perceptions of authority and responsibility. The analysis also shows that the perlocutionary effects of the tweets extend beyond the text itself, as their circulation through media networks contributes to wider narratives about religious persecution, international security, and diplomatic relations. Overall, the findings demonstrate that political tweets function as multifunctional speech acts that simultaneously perform narrative construction, ideological positioning, and symbolic diplomatic action, thereby extending the application of Speech Act Theory to the networked communication environment of social media.

Conclusion

This study examined the pragmatics of Donald Trump's declaration of Nigeria as a Country of Particular Concern on the social media platform X using Speech Act Theory as the analytical framework. The findings show that the tweets function as complex speech acts that combine assertive, directive, commissive, and declarative elements to construct political meaning and signal

policy positions. Rather than merely conveying information, the tweets employ strategic narrative framing, ideological positioning, and symbolic institutional language to influence public interpretation and diplomatic discourse. In particular, the declaration of Nigeria as a Country of Particular Concern demonstrates how digital platforms can be used to perform symbolic diplomatic acts that were traditionally carried out through formal institutional channels. The study contributes to scholarship in digital political pragmatics by showing that the analytical categories of Speech Act Theory remain relevant for understanding political discourse in social media environments when considered within the context of networked communication and global audiences. It also contributes to emerging discussions on transnational speech acts by illustrating how political actors use digital platforms to address both domestic and international audiences, thereby shaping global narratives about other states. Overall, the research highlights the importance of analysing political communication on social media from a pragmatic perspective, since digital platforms have transformed the ways political leaders express authority, frame issues, and signal policy intentions. The study therefore recommends that future research examine larger corpora of political tweets or conduct comparative analyses across different political leaders and geopolitical contexts in order to further understand how digital media is reshaping political communication and diplomatic interaction in the contemporary global environment.

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'We didn't arraign a minor': Disclaimer strategies in the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission's rejoinders.

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Abstract

Crime-fighting institutions in Nigeria are those institutions constitutionally empowered to combat crimes in their different forms and shades. Extant studies on crime-fighting institutions in Nigeria have focused more on the Nigeria Police, with particular emphasis on police-suspect interactions. However, very little scholarly attention has been paid to the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) saddled with the responsibility of fighting economic and financial crimes, particularly from the linguistic perspective. This study, therefore, from a linguistic lens, investigates disclaimer strategies in EFCC's rejoinders, to demonstrate how the Commission deploys linguistic-discursive resources for institutional image repair Data comprised 20 randomly sampled selected press releases (rejoinders) issued between 2019 and 2024, as elicited from the Commission's website, and other online news or social platforms, including the Nairaland, the Pointblank news, The Vanguard, and Sun news online. With analytical insights from Dijk's (2004) critical discourse analysis and Mey's (2001) pragmatic act theory, findings show that refutation and deresponsibilisation, allusion to institutional professionalism, and indirect accusation are discursive disclaimer strategies which EFCC's rejoinders are replete with. These discursive strategies ride on counterfactuals, lexicalisation, evidentiality, positive self-representation, and negative other-representation for pragmatic effects. Inherent in these discursive resources are the practs of blaming, enjoining, condemning, praising and threatening.

Keywords*: EFCC, rejoinders, discursive strategies, Dijk's critical discourse analysis, Mey's pragmatic act*

Introduction

Prominent among the various socio-economic issues Nigeria has had to battle with in its over sixty-four years of independence is corruption, largely rooted in financial crimes of varying dimensions (Oji, 2024). In fact, in Obuah's (2010) view, corruption has remained a cancerous issue Nigeria is bedevilled with. It ranges from money laundering to cyber scam, embezzlement and mismanagement of public and private resources. For instance, Osmond et al. (2023: 80) note that

in Nigeria, money is laundered 'through currency exchange shops, stock brokerage houses, casinos, automotive dealerships, and trade firms. Similarly, as noted by Okoye and Gbegi (2013), the activities of banks and government institutions in Nigeria are characterised by fraudulent transfers and withdrawals, illegal use of overdraft, granting of unauthorised loans, and illegal conversion of pension funds, among others. The spate of corruption in Nigeria explains why Transparency International, for instance, in 2006, ranked Nigeria 146 out of 163 countries on the transparency index, and in 2007 ranked 148 (Obuah, 2010). Undoubtedly, the prevalence of criminality/corruption in the Nigerian space and the urge to save the image of the country, especially in the comity of nations which uphold the principles of 'systemic integrity', must have informed former President Olusegun Obasanjo's move and eventual establishment of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (henceforth, EFCC), saddled with anti-graft responsibilities in the country.

Since its establishment, the EFCC has been involved in the fight against financial crimes and corruption in the country, investigating, arresting and prosecuting financial crime suspects in the country. However, in spite of its 'efforts' at ridding the Nigerian space of corruption or financial crimes, there have been reports of shady dealings, partiality, unprofessionalism, and involvement in violations of citizens' rights in its operations. For instance, the leadership of the Commission has been described as lacking confidence and thus ineffective in fighting corruption (Nwoba & Nwokwu, 2018); lacking integrity (Enweremadu, 2010), and being a political tool in the hands of a ruling political party to witch-hunt political opponents and parties (Dike, 2005). A new dimension to this array of accusations in recent times comes in the form of public outcry, condemning the sense of unprofessionalism, shady dealings, extortion and exploitation by some officials of the Commission. In fact, there have been allegations from the general public of some EFCC operatives engaging in transactional interactions with cyber scammers, otherwise known as Yahoo Yahoo Boys, in the country. Accordingly, men of the Commission, under the guise of searching for cyber scammers, raid pubs, club houses, and hotels, during which they engage in anti-human rights practices, all with the intention of exploiting Yahoo Yahoo Boys.

Against this backdrop, the EFCC, through its spokespersons and representatives, usually releases rejoinders, disclaiming the various allegations against the Commission and its personnel. While extant studies, largely in law (Obuah, 2010); finance (Okoye & Gbegi, 2013; Ogbeiyuluumanhonlen, et al, 2020); sociology and economy (Yahaya, 2005); and public

administration (Bello & Cosmas, 2022), have explored aspects of the modes of operation of the Commission, its efficiency in fighting corruption, as well as its challenges, very little attention has been paid to the linguistic practice of the Commission. In particular, to the best of our knowledge, apart from Sunday and Fagunleka's (2024) exploration of an aspect of linguistic resources in the context of the activities of the EFCC, no serious research attention has been paid to the linguistic investigation of rejoinders by the Commission. In particular, no attention has been given to the exploration of the forms and use of disclaimer strategies in the Commission's rejoinders. This study, therefore, explores disclaimer strategies in selected rejoinders by the Commission, with a view to demonstrating how such strategies are used for positive institutional image projection, geared towards sustaining the confidence of the general public in the Commission.

The EFCC: Its establishment and objectives

The Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) was established on April 16, 2003, under the administration of former President Olusegun Obasanjo (Bello & Cosmas, 2022). As noted by Sunday and Fagunleka (2024), the Commission was established partly in response to pressure from the Financial Action Task Force on Money Laundering (FATF), which had classified Nigeria among the countries not working within the purview of the international community's moves to combat money laundering. As claimed by Bello and Cosmas (2022), the EFCC was primarily given the mandate to prevent, investigate and prosecute persons involved in economic and financial crimes in Nigeria (Bello & Cosmas, 2022: 121). As such, the EFCC 2002 Act provides the legal framework for its operations and operationality. With this Act, the Commission is empowered to see to the investigation, prosecution and execution of financial and economic crimes against individuals, corporate bodies and national communities. Dike (2005) reports that, since its establishment, the Commission has been persistent in its investigation and prosecution of different kinds of crimes involving persons or systems charged with financial crimes. As such, the Commission reportedly has an impressive record of several cases of convictions on money laundering and oil pipeline vandalism (Akinpelu, 2021) and recovery of assets worth billions of Naira (Nzejekwu, 2011). In spite of its impressive fight against corruption and corrupt practices in Nigeria, the EFCC has been reported to be faced with a series of systemic problems and challenges (Bello & Cosmas, 2022). Some public analysts have argued that the Commission is more often than not an instrument of victimisation in the hands of the presidency (Bello & Cosmas, 2022). As observed in Bello and Cosmas (2022), there are arguments and insinuations that the political

interference and the immunity clause enjoyed by some elective political office holders in Nigeria have constituted a major impediment to the effectiveness of the EFCC in its fight against corruption. There are also insinuations and allegations of corruption and corrupt practices against members of the Commission. For instance, an acting Chairman of the Commission, who served between 2015 and 2021, was suspended by former President Buhari on account of allegations of corruption and power abuse (Bello & Cosmas, 2022). Apart from these researched and documented issues the Commission is contending with, there are arrays of public and institutional issues the Commission is faced with, largely informed by the public's perception of many operatives of the Commission as being corrupt, high-handed and unprofessional in their modus operandi. This explains why there have been constant and occasional calls and cries from different quarters for the need to overhaul the system and tame the perceived excesses and unprofessional tendencies of some officers of the Commission.

Exploring economic and financial crimes, criminality and the EFCC

According to Ribadu (2004), economic crimes are defined as human activities pertaining to the violation of the economic laws of a country. They are illegal or immoral acts that have negative economic consequences and are punishable by law (Sunday & Fagunleka, 2024). Financial crimes, on the other hand, revolve around the illegal conversion of another person's property to one's personal use and advantage (Eiya & Otaloe, 2013). As reported by Ubeku (1991), the scope of financial crimes extends to embezzlement, theft or stealing of state funds. It also involves the siphoning and stashing away of funds in foreign banks. Perpetrators often see themselves as sharp, smart, intelligent and crafty (Ubeki, 1991, cf. Sunday & Fagunleka, 2024: 316).

Given the central role the EFCC plays in the fight against crime and criminality in Nigeria, scholars from different disciplinary perspectives have explored different phenomena in relation to the Commission. Prominent in this regard are Yahaya (2005), Obuah (2010), Okoye and Gbegi (2013), Osmond et. al (2023), Bello and Cosmas (2022), and Ogbeiyuluumanhonlen et al (2023), among others. Yahaya (2005) harps on the efforts of the EFCC in curbing financial crimes in Nigeria. Yahaya (2005) notes that, in spite of the EFCC's crime-fighting efforts, financial crimes remain a serious threat to Nigeria. This, accordingly, has hampered the country's growth and development. Obuah (2010) reinforces the observation by Yahaya (2005) that financial crimes remain unabated in Nigeria despite EFCC's activities. Obuah further argues that the nature of the country's political landscape is a major factor that has made the EFCC ineffective in its fight against financial crimes.

These studies have commendably foregrounded the issues affecting the efficiency of the EFCC. While the current study shares the same institutional context with Yahaya (2005) and Obuah (2010), it is radically different from these studies in that, while they (Yahaya, 2005, and Obuah, 2010) are situated within the financial and legal contexts, the current study is situated in linguistics. Within the disciplinary context of economics, Okoye and Gbegi (2013) examine the impact of fraud and financial crimes on Nigeria's economy. They conclude that fraud and related financial crimes have significant impacts on the country's economy. Bello and Cosmas (2022) and Osmond et. al (2023) support the views of Okoye and Gbegi (2013) on the impacts of financial crime on the growth of Nigeria's economy. As mentioned earlier, the current study, although it explores an EFCC-related phenomenon, is different from these studies in that it provides a linguistic dimension to the operations of the EFCC. Sunday and Fagunleka (2024), the closest to the current study, revolves around the identification and discussion of how social actors are discursively represented in news reports on economic and financial crimes. The current study, however, is essentially different from Sunday and Fagunleka's work in that, beyond the representation of social actors in crime-related news reports, the current study delves into how the EFCC deploys linguistic-discursive resources in disclaiming public allegations against the Commission and its personnel.

Lazarus and Button (2022) analyse Twitter users' reports on the style of operation of EFCC operatives across the different regions of Nigeria. They observe that there is a disparity in the manner in which the operatives of the Commission handle crime suspects across the different regions of the country. For instance, they reported that, while offenders in the Southern part are made to face the full wrath of the law when arrested, offenders in the Northern part are treated with leniency. Lazarus et. al (2022) further maintain that the EFCC is guilty of discriminatory treatment of crime suspects across the country. While Lazarus and Button's (2022) and Lazarus et al's (2022) studies focus on accusations against the EFCC, the current study focuses on how the Commission deploys language resources to debunk and disclaim various accusations against it.

In this regard, the current study falls within the same scope as other similar crime-related linguistic studies (Ajayi, 2016, 2019; Akinrinlola, 2016; Osisanwo & Adegbosin, 2023) (although these studies are accusatory in nature, subtly indicting some officers of the Nigeria Police, another crime-fighting institution, of being high-handed, discriminatory and sometimes unprofessional in their engagements with crime suspects). The current study, unlike the extant linguistic-oriented ones, is remediative in its approach, focusing on how the EFCC employs discursive resources to remedy

the negative image embedded in the accusations against it and its personnel. The questions then addressed in this study are: (1) what are the disclaimer strategies used by the EFCC in its rejoinders?; (2) how do the identified disclaimer strategies used to achieve the positive self-representation (projecting the positive image of the Commission), and negative other-representation (foregrounding the negative image of the perceived 'enemies' of the Commission); and (3) what pragmatic functions do the linguistic resources employed for disclaiming perform in the Commission's rejoinders?

Analytical tools: van Dijk's (2004) model of CDA and Mey's pragmatic acts

Weiss and Wodak (2002) argue that critical discourse analysis (henceforth CDA) originates from classical rhetoric, text linguistics, socio-linguistics, applied linguistics and pragmatics. In the view of van Dijk (1998; 2001), CDA is a tool that construes language as a form of cultural and social practice. It is an approach that gives room for the description and interpretation of social life, as represented in talk and texts. Echoing the position of van Dijk, Fairclough (2001) submits that analysts using the CDA approach in their analyses are primarily concerned with teasing out the socio-cultural assumptions and ideologies inherent in all forms of language people deploy. Although there are different approaches to the CDA, van Dijk's (2004) model, given its relevance, is favoured in this study. Dijk's (2004) model of the CDA advocates two major discursive ideologies that affect language use, namely positive self-representation (semantic macro-strategy of in-group favouritism) and negative other-representation (semantic macro-strategy of derogation of the out-group) (Ajayi & Ademola, 2020). These two approaches are identifiable through: the analysis of actor description, authority, burden (Topos), categorization, comparison, consensus, counterfactuals, disclaimer, euphemism, evidentiality, example/'illustration, generalization, hyperbole, implication, irony, lexicalization, metaphor, self-glorification, norm expression, numbergame, polarization, Us-Them, populism, presupposition, vagueness, and victimization (van Dijk, 2004). This analytical approach is used in this study to tease out elements of positive self and negative other representation in the sampled rejoinders.

In addition to van Dijk's (2004) CDA approach highlighted above, this study also draws analytical insights from Mey's pragmatic act theory. Mey's pragmatic act theory accounts for the workings of the contextual resources in the EFCC disclaimers/rejoinders, as well as explicating the pragmatic functions inherent in them. Mey (2001: 43) explains that context goes beyond mere reference. Accordingly, context is action. Context revolves around what things are for, what gives

our utterances their true pragmatic meaning, and gives room for them to be construed as true pragmatic acts (Mey, 2001: 43; Olajimbiti & Adesina, 2021: 77). Conceptually, at the heart of Mey's pragmatic act theory is the notion of pragmeme (situation-derived meaning). The notion of pragmeme is divided into two parts: the activity and the textual parts. This is schematically illustrated below:

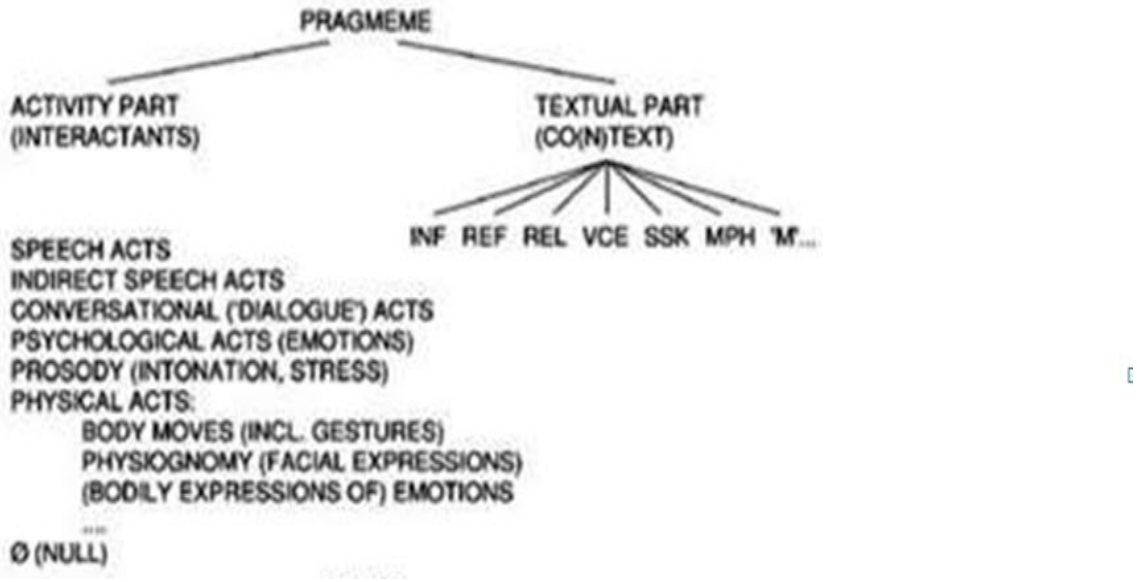

Figure 1: Mey's Pragmatic Acts Model (2001:222)

As evident from the schema above, the activity part of pragmeme comprises speech acts, indirect speech acts, conversational (dialogue) acts, psychological acts, prosodic acts, and physical acts. The textual part is made up of context elements such as inference (INF), reference (REF), relevance (REL), voice (VCE), shared situational knowledge (SSK), metaphor (MPH), and metapragmatic joker (M). The cross-level relationship between the textual and the activity parts produces a pract or an allopract 'which is an instantiation of a pragmatic act…every pract is at the same time an allopract' (Mey, 2001: 221). Capone (2005) provides a further insight into the workings of the notion of pragmeme. He notes that understanding pragmeme is succinct on the societal dimension of utterance interpretation (Olajimbiti & Adesina, 2021: 77). In his argument, Capone submits that utterance interpretation is beyond the meaning of the literal context. It involves how society understands such an utterance in a generalised situation understood by the participants in an ongoing interaction. Capone, however, emphasises the fact that utterances carry

literal meanings which cannot be totally neglected. Accordingly, meaning can be obtained in addition to the literal meaning through recourse to the situation or context wherein such utterances are produced. Our position in this study aligns with Capone's submission. We argue in this study that lexical choices with referential meanings act upon situational contexts to generate contextual meanings in the EFCC's disclaimer news reports. This analytical tool is useful in unpacking and contextualising the pragmatic functions of the discursive resources used in the identified disclaimer strategies.

Methodology

This study adopts the qualitative research design. Data were elicited from over 20 purposively sampled press releases by the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission, released to disclaim and debunk accusations of unprofessionalism, corruption, brutalisation, and violation of human rights. Data were sourced from the Commission's website and other online news or social platforms, including Nairaland, Pointblank News, The Vanguard, and Sun News Online. The press releases covered the period between 2019 and 2024, during which there was a surge in public outcry against the activities and modus operandi of the EFCC in the country. Upon a critical perusal of the 20 initially sampled rejoinders, a pattern revealing a similar style, texture, and use of linguistic resources was established. Hence, to avoid repetition, five rejoinders were randomly sampled and presented as data for analysis. Data were subjected to pragmatic analysis, with particular reference to Dijk's (2004) critical discourse analysis and Mey's (2001) pragmatic act theory. While the former was useful in relating to the discursive resources for pursuing disclaimer in the releases, the latter was useful in teasing out the pragmatic functions of the linguistic-discursive resources deployed for achieving disclaimer in the texts. Odebunmi's (2006) shared cultural knowledge, in addition to Mey's pragmatic act theory, was also useful in engaging the cultural aspects of the sampled data.

Disclaimer Strategies in the EFCC's rejoinders

This section of the study addresses the data presentation and analysis. The disclaimer strategies are thematically identified, and the discussion is guided by analytical insights from Dijk's CDA and Mey's pragmatic acts theory. Four disclaimer strategies, refutation (and deresponsibilisation), allusion to institutional professionalism, and indirect accusation are identified in the sampled data. These are discussed below.

Refutation and and deresponsibilsation

In the submission of Tippett (2010), refutation engages, challenges, and remediates common misconceptions. Important components of refutation, in line with Guzzetti's (2000) submission, are 'the statement of a commonly held misconception, and explicit refutation of that misconception with an emphasis on the currently scientific explanation (Tippett, 2010: 3), although there is a possibility of a third one: a signal or cue that alerts the reader to the possibility of another conception (Maria & MacGinitie, 1987). Dereponsibilisation, on the other hand, revolves around the practice of avoiding responsibility. It is encoded in a text linked with 'weakened responsibility' (Caffi, 2007: 67). Accordingly, deresponsibilisation is often deployed by a speaker to avoid conflict or 'discursive crisis' (Caffi, 2007). Our conceptualisation of dere-responsibilisation in this study is likened to what we call 'passing the buck' in an unambiguous manner. These two strategies are used complementarily by the EFCC in their press releases, as evident in Excerpt 1 below:

Excerpt 1

> "In a press release dated July 11, 2023, the ages of all the convicts, including Odeh's, were not stated. For the purpose of clarity, Odeh is 19 years old. All the false narratives being bandied about in some section of the social media that he is seven years old should be ignored.
>
> "The EFCC did not "parade" the convict, and it was a court of law that rightfully convicted him. Facts are sacred. Information about the offence, prosecution, conviction and sentence of Odeh is on all social media platforms of the EFCC. The public is enjoined to ignore any hoopla connected to his conviction."
>
> https://www.thecable.ng/we-didnt-arraign-a-minor-efcc-clarifies-conviction-of-19-year-old-internet-fraudster/amp/

The excerpt above revolves around reports and accusations across different sections of the public, especially on different social media platforms targeted at the EFCC, condemning the purported arraignment of a suspected cyber scammer purported to be a minor. This accusation thrives on Nigerians' shared situational knowledge (SSK) of who a minor is and how such should be treated in the context of the law. A minor, alternatively referred to as a child, according to the Child Rights Act (section 277) (as enshrined in Nigeria's 1999 Constitution as amended), is a person under the age of eighteen years. Minors are underage, teenagers, young persons and adolescents (Onuche &

Onuche, 2021). Following this position of the law regarding a minor in the Nigerian context, the allegation levelled against the EFCC is a serious one that inferentially (INF) constructs the Commission as one that does not have regard for the country's constitution. Apparently, from the response of the Commission, it has been accused of 'parading' and 'arraigning' a minor. Making recourse to Dijk's notion of evidentiality, the Commission disclaims the accusation of parading and arraigning a minor, making evidential mention and reference (REF) to the suspect's age (19) to counter the notion that he is a minor. Evidentiality is also evoked where the Commission refers to 'social media platforms' where details concerning the offence, prosecution, and conviction of the said convict could be accessed. The strategic sequencing of the nominal choices: *offence*, *prosecution, conviction* and *sentence*, pragmatically foregrounds the Commission as one that has not taken the law into its hands, but one that has only allowed the judicial process to take its natural course.

In pursuance of the above, the Commission makes recourse to the tenets of dere-responsibilisation. In particular, it passes the buck of sentencing the accused, making reference (REF) to the court of law as being responsible for the conviction: 'it was a court of law that rightfully convicted him'. However, the Commission, although diresponsibilises the act of parading or sentencing the said 'minor' as reported in the allegation it is responding to, demonstrates its identification with the conviction of the accused through lexicalisation as evident in its choice of the lexical resource 'rightfully'. The choice of 'rightfully' is predicated on the inference (INF) drawn from the Commission's position that the court followed every process of the rule of law, including giving the accused and his cohorts a fair hearing in arriving at their convictions. In this disclaiming exercise, the Commission operates within the ambit of Dijk's positive self-representation discursive phenomenon. As a follow-up to the 'setting the record straight' effort of the Commission, the Commission employs the practs of blaming and enjoining in addressing the media, and the masses/public, respectively. With respect to the former, the Commission blames 'some section' of the media of reeling out false information to the public, claiming the convict's age is 7 instead of 19. With regard to the latter, the Commission, practing enjoining, enjoins the public to ignore the information reeled out by the 'blamed section of the media', and regard such as fake and untrue.

Excerpt 2

> The Economic and Financial Crimes Commission, EFCC, has debunked as false, news making the rounds that one of its prosecutors was offered a bribe over the Malabu OPL 245 fraud case leading to the dismissal of the charges against a former Attorney General of the Federation and Minister of Justice, Bello Adoke and others by a Federal Capital Territory High Court.
>
> Speaking on the alleged bribing of its official, the EFCC says, its intention to review or appeal the case "has no nexus whatsoever to the spew of speculations imputing compromise by parties to the charge, currently making the rounds in some sections of the media." In denying the narrative of compromise, the anti-corruption agency further said, " The EFCC is not obliged to embrace such narratives as it neither accused any of the parties of any unsavoury conduct nor made any conclusive statements about any investigation on the matter."
>
> Malabu Case: EFCC debunks allegations of bribery of its official, mulls appeal – The Sun Nigeria (sunnewsonline.com)sunnewsonline.com/malabu-case-efcc-debunks-allegations-of-bribery-of-its-official-mulls-appeal/

The excerpt above centres around an allegation of bribery against a prosecutor representing the Commission in a corruption case against a former Attorney General of the Federation and Minister of Justice. According to this allegation, the bribery allegedly involving the Commission's prosecutors explains why the case against the alleged Attorney-General and Minister of Justice was dismissed. In its response, the Commission employs refutation to disclaim the allegation, reinforcing its position to review and appeal the judgment. According to the Commission, the decision to appeal the case 'has no nexus whatsoever to the spew of speculations imputing compromise by parties to the charge, currently making the rounds in some sections of the media'**.** Evidently from its response, the Commission had been accused of compromise, especially since its prosecutor had been fingered in a corrupt practice, a position it finds untenable, hence its strong refutation. In the refutation efforts, reference (REF) is made to some undisclosed 'sections of the media', as spewing out speculations and untrue information about EFCC's stance on the said case. Correcting the misconception with an emphatic 'scientific explanation', the Commission,

employing Dijk's counterfactual discourse resources, claims that: ''EFCC is not obliged to embrace such narratives as it neither accused any of the parties of any unsavoury conduct nor made any conclusive statements about any investigation on the matter." In this text, the Commission performs the pragmatic acts of absorbing, dissociating and distancing itself from claims being promoted on social media that it has compromised, hence the dismissal of the allegation against the alleged Attorney-General. Of course, the action of the social media promoters of this claim, when viewed within the confines of Mey's notion of pragmeme, is predicated on the shared situational knowledge among Nigerians that the political class often uses the instrumentality of the law to perpetrate all manner of corruption, possibly including twisting the course of justice.

Indirect accusation

According to Castor (2015), accusations are statements or assertions that 'another has done something wrong' (p. 1). Accusations manifest in different forms, including indirect statements, questions, and nonverbal cues (Castor, 2015). As assertions, accusations erect social reality and profile actions as violations of the social and moral order. Accusations indict the agency, blaming or holding the questioned for wrongdoing. Accusatory discourse can manifest in ordinary day-to-day conversations and institutional discourse. In this regard, Ajayi (2016; 2019) mentions accusatory interrogatives as an information-seeking tool the Nigeria Police, as an institution, employs in police-suspect interactions. Evident in Castor's conceptualisation of accusation is that it could be direct or indirect. In the data sampled in this study, we see instances of indirect accusation. These are discussed accordingly.

Excerpt 3

> The Economic and Financial Crimes Commission, on Wednesday, said ex-Kogi State governor, Yahaya Bello, who is accused of N80.2bn fraud, had ridiculed the Nigerian justice system by failing to present himself for trial in court. The EFCC acting Zonal Director, Benin Zonal Command, Mr Effa Okim, stated this during a familiarisation visit to the Delta State Council of the Nigeria Union of Journalists in Asaba, Delta State capital. The EFCC is having a running legal battle with Bello over alleged N80.2bn fraud. Following a failed attempt to arrest him and his repeated absence from court for his arraignment, the EFCC declared Bello wanted, while the Nigerian Immigration also placed the governor on a watchlist. When asked on Wednesday why the EFCC had yet

to arrest Bello weeks after he was declared wanted, an irate Okim claimed that the ex-governor was being shielded by the system.

"**This is the last question I expected because the shame is on all of us. Is that a question I should answer alone? It's not me, it is the Federal Republic of Nigeria," the EFCC zonal director said. "That politically-exposed Yahaya Bello, whose crime has been traced to him by allegation and has been invited by EFCC to come and explain, and for months he is acting drama and we are all here wanting to ask questions! The shame is our own shame! "Can't we catch him? We can, but do we go all out to catch him? Do we need to do that when he has his masters? Can't they call him and tell him, 'You are disgracing Nigeria'? What are you telling the world? Tell him to go and explain himself like others have done."Where are the ministers? Where are Yahaya Bello's colleagues, even in his hiding? So, Nigerians can't tell him 'This is not fair, go and report; they are not going to kill you'? But people are still eating and dining with him**."

Okim said beyond legality, there was a moral aspect of the case. "**Where has morality gone before legality that we can't summon that man and tell him to go and report himself to the EFCC? Some persons are writing, supporting him, while some are criticizing the commission. "The problem is our own problem that borders on Nigeria's image. Our children are watching their parents behave like children. "To me, the truth has vanished. Even in Animal Farm, this will not happen, that a man who was part of the system that was a custodian of our culture, rules and laws can behave like this and you are asking questions.** "**The media should come out for the first time to harmonise, criticise that action and forget about prosecution but tell him to make himself available; thereafter we know what to do**." Okim said the criminal justice system had been ridiculed by the actions of Bello, "**And because we respect the law, we want to go by the process, that we are inhibited that does not make us weak**."

https://pointblanknews.com/pbn/exclusive/n80bn-fraud-efcc-accuses-colleagues-others-of-shielding-yahaya-bello/

The central figure in the excerpt above is Yahaya Bello, the immediate past governor of Kogi State (who governed the state between 2016 and 2024). Upon the completion of his tenure as governor, Yahaya Bello has been accused of mismanaging a huge amount of money to the tune of over eighty billion naira (80,000,000,000) by the EFCC. He has then been invited by the EFCC for questioning regarding the accusation, but Yahaya Bello has been evasive, using all kinds of strategies to evade the 'long hand' of the Commission. However, many Nigerians, making recourse to the shared situational knowledge (SSK) on how political actors in the country use their political connections and influence to bury off corruption cases against them in the country, have been using different platforms including the social media to accuse the political system of the country of 'protecting' Yahaya Bello. This is in line with the observation of Yahaya (2005) and Obuah (2010), who have argued that the political landscape of the country has greatly affected the efficiency of the EFCC. This is particularly in tandem with insinuations that the EFCC is a political tool that is only being used by the political party in power to witch-hunt political enemies; as such, any political office holder who is in the good books of the power of the day is shielded against the probing hands of the EFCC (Yahaya, 2005; Obuah, 2010).

In the particular 'rejoinder' interview presented above, a prominent zonal coordinator (representative) of the EFCC, simply captured as Okim, reacts to a subtly indicting question as to why it has been difficult to 'arrest Yahaya Bello even two weeks after he has been declared wanted'. The representative of the Commission, understanding this question as one that has a tone of indictment and complicity, disclaims any sense of complicity on the part of the Commission, using several discursive resources. First, in line with Dijk's conceptualisation, the representative employs the in-group identification first-person personal pronoun (object) discourse resource '*us'* (as a disresponsibilisation strategy) to blame not being able to arrest the suspected culprit, Yahaya Bello, on the EFCC, and the general Nigerian system: 'This is the last question I expected because the shame is on all of us. Is that a question I should answer alone? It's not me, it is the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

Ajayi and Filani (2014), Ajayi (2020), and Akinmameji (2020), for instance, have demonstrated how the pronominal system can be used in mapping in-group and out-group identity construction in discourse. In this process, language is used to achieve the 'we versus them' dichotomy in discourse. In this regard, the representative of the Commission, rather than accepting the blame, which is the Commission's, spreads the blame and 'shame' on all and sundry, and particularly the

Federal Republic of Nigeria. To drive home his 'spread-the blame-equally' goal, he makes recourse to rhetorical questions as a linguistic resource to put the blame more on the 'system' than the EFCC. He asks: Can't we catch him? We can, but do we go all out to catch him? Do we need to do that when he has his masters? Can't they call him and tell him?**',** among others in this regard. The inclusive '*we'* represents the zonal coordinator and the EFCC as an institution, while the pronoun '*they'* represents Yahaya Bello and his allies. In these questions, the zonal coordinator particularly blames 'Yahaya Bello's masters', who are subsequently captured in the pronoun '*they'*.

Although the zonal coordinator has not mentioned specific names in his speech, using Mey's SSK, Yahaya Bello's masters could be inferred (INF) to be the 'strong and powerful' members of the political figures who have used their political influence to shield him from the EFCC. Relying on inference (INF), the zonal coordinator indirectly accuses some political bigwigs in the country of frustrating the efforts of the Commission to ensure Yahaya Bello is made to face the full wrath of the law. Here, the zonal coordinator practs indicting. He indirectly indicts the political system of the country rather than blaming the EFCC for the inability to arrest Yahaya Bello. The choice of lexical items such as '*ministers'*, '*some persons'* and '*people'* is a deliberate lexicalisation strategy to foreground the fact that some 'powerful and influential' figures in the Nigerian system, especially those in the corridor of power, are the ones making the job of the EFCC in arresting Yahaya Bello difficult.

Riding on Odebunmi's shared cultural knowledge (SCK) among Nigerians of how typically in the past, many Nigerian cultures would not want to identify with a character in the shade of Yahaya Bello, because they valued honesty, integrity, good character and making wealth through decent and honest means, the zonal coordinator laments, and condemns Yahaya Bello's allies, particularly querying how they have not allowed the sense of integrity and honesty encoded in the cultures of the various cultural groups in the country guide their handling of the Yahaya Bello case. By inference (INF), as could be teased out from the lamentation of the zonal coordinator, no man with conscience, integrity, and any sense of moral rectitude should identify with Yahaya Bello, but unfortunately, the reverse is the case. In the last line of the text, the zonal coordinator employs the positive self-representation discourse resource, depicting the EFCC as an institution that is not weak but one that respects the law '…we respect the law, we want to go by the process, that we are inhibited that does not make us weak'**.**

The choice of the verbal groups: *respect, go by the process, and are inhibited*, following Dijk's (2004) CDA, constitutes a pragmatic move to construct the Commission as a law-abiding, rule-guided, and constitutionally empowered institution which is only facing contextual limitations in carrying out its duties.

Allusion to institutional professionalism

The word "professionalism" derives from the word profession (Evetts, 2011). Thus, according to Lester (2010:2), a profession *'*is a reasonably well-defined occupation that meets a defensible set of criteria for being a profession, whether those are derived from a social construct, trait or sociological perspective'. Daniel and Rose (1991: 439) submit that professionalism suggests specialised knowledge which results from formal education and training. Essentially, professionalism is conceptualised in terms of the principles and values that guide public service delivery. Its attributes include loyalty, diligence, transparency, efficiency, effectiveness, impartiality, and commitment, etc., and these are achievable through formal processes of education and training (Daniel & Rose, 1991). As noted by Hughes and Hughes (2013), self-regulation is an essential component of professionalism.

As observed in our sampled data, allusion to institutional professionalism is another disclaimer strategy employed by the EFCC to disclaim accusations from the general public and sustain the public's confidence in it. This is illustrated below:

Excerpt 4

> The Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) **has denied** allegations of brutality during a recent sting operation in Akure, Ondo State. In a statement issued on Sunday, EFCC spokesman Dele Oyewale, said the video evidence purporting to show brutality by its operatives was 'stage-managed' and 'false'. Oyewale's words**: "**The Commission wants the public to discountenance the trending video as it may have been stage-managed to achieve motives that are unclear. "The Commission will subject this video to forensic analysis to establish its falsehood and prepare a case against purveyors of this distasteful stunt. "The Commission wishes to state that no suspect was assaulted, brutalised or subjected to any dehumanising treatment during the Saturday operation. "It is also false that tear gas was fired at the crime scene. Our personnel do not use tear gas during sting operations. The Standard Operating Procedure of the EFCC **forecloses** the

> use of brute force or unprofessional conduct in the course of any operation. The EFCC is **a civilised law enforcement agency** with optimal respect for human dignity and the rule of law."
>
> 'Brutality claim during Akure raid false' — EFCC debunks video evidence - Vanguard News (vanguardngr.com)

The central focus of the text presented in Excerpt 4 revolves around the alleged unprofessional conduct of men of the Commission in Akure, Ondo State, Southwestern Nigeria. Both the conventional and social media were agog with reports and counter-reports of officials of the EFCC raiding a popular pub in the city, where they allegedly brutalised, assaulted, and violated the fundamental human rights of Nigerians in the pub. In an attempt to disclaim this allegation, the Commission, in its statement as captured in the bolded part of the excerpt above, denies the allegation and urges the general public to 'discountenance' same. Alluding to institutional professionalism, the Commission, employing Dijk's positive self-representation, projects itself as an institution that knows what to do with the specific situation at hand. In particular, the Commission mentions the very video in which the 'false' message and images of the purported act of unprofessionalism being perpetrated by officials of the Commission are being bandied, will be subjected to forensic analysis to establish the 'falsehood' therein. With this claim, the Commission constructs itself as an institution that has both the technical and professional wherewithal to make informed judgments based on scientific processes. As such, it projects itself as a Commission that applies a sense of technical know-how instead of brawn in its operations. Using Mey's pract, the Commission resorts to the pract of threatening where it states unequivocally that those behind the false videos in circulation would be dealt with, using the instrumentality of the law. In doing this, the Commission constructs itself as an institution that does not take law into its own hands, but one that makes recourse to the appropriate legal systems in the country to guide its actions and operationality. This is contrary to the commonly held notion (Mey's SSK) among Nigerians that the EFCC is an institution that abuses its authorities, subjects people to victimisation, and ultimately violates people's rights by engaging in indiscriminate arrests and mal-handling of suspects and non-suspects, alike.

Through lexicalisation involving the foregrounding of lexical choices such as '*brutalised'*, *assaulted***, or** *subjected to any dehumanising treatment',* the Commission maintains its actions are not characterised by dehumanising treatments as claimed in the purported viral video. Making

recourse to Dijk's counterfactuals, the Commission reiterates: ''The Standard Operating Procedure of the EFCC forecloses the use of brute force or unprofessional conduct in the course of any operation. The EFCC is a civilised law enforcement agency with optimal respect for human dignity and the rule of law". With this counterfactual discursive strategy, the Commission counters the claim being bandied around that its personnel are unprofessional, uncivil, and brutish in their public engagements. This discourse move aligns with Dijk's notion of positive self-representation. The inference (INF) drawn from the position of the Commission as described above is that the EFCC, contrary to the image of a lawless and unprofessional institution being constructed of it by some section of the Nigerian society, is a law-abiding and highly professional system. This sense of institutional professionalism also features prominently in the excerpt presented below:

Excerpt 5

> "For the avoidance of any doubt, the EFCC wishes to categorically state that it is compliant with all provisions of law, and has no intention to stoke misunderstanding over requests from the office of the Attorney-General and Minister of Justice. "Furthermore, the commission's mandate, operational philosophy, the conduct and pronouncements of its officials, do not countenance any activity on the fringes of the law. "It is therefore, untenable for there to be any suggestion that the commission or its principal officials are either in conflict with or readying for "showdown" with the AGF or other officials of government.
>
> "Any such conflicts being paraded in the media exist only in the apparently fertile imaginations of corrupt elements, angling to knock heads together in furtherance of their own pro-corruption agenda.
>
> EFCC debunks face-off with AGF - Vanguard News (vanguardngr.com)

In the excerpt above, the EFCC tries to disclaim the notion that the Commission is in a power tussle with the serving Attorney-General and Minister of Justice of the country. Against insinuations and allegations that the Commission was contesting an official request of the said Attorney-General and Minister of Justice, the Commission, in this rejoinder, constructs itself as such that is compliant with the provisions of the law, and as such does not have any reason to be

at loggerheads with the Attorney-General of the federation whose conducts are expectedly presumed to be guided by the provision of the law. Foregrounding a sense of institutional professionalism, which situates well within the context of Djik's positive self-representation, the Commission refers (REF) to its mandate and operational philosophy.

Accordingly, by its institutional 'mandate and operational philosophy', the Commission and its officials conduct themselves, linguistically, operationally, and professionally in manners that do not contravene the law. In this regard, while employing the *positive self-representation* to project itself as being highly professional, the Commission employs the *negative other-representation* in constructing the individuals who are purportedly insinuating conflicts between the Commission and the Attorney-General. As such, negative lexical choices such as '*fertile imaginations'*, '*corrupt elements', ' angling to knock heads'* and '*pro-corruption*' are nominal groups deployed to construct these individuals and their interests. 'Fertile imaginations' connotes baseless insinuations; 'corrupt elements' describes the promoters of such insinuations as unscrupulous individuals whose words should not be reckoned with; 'knock heads' describes the insinuators as unreliable, and 'pro corruption' suggests individuals whose actions are against the collective growth of the nation.

In doing this, positive self-representation versus negative-other representation dichotomisation, the Commission practs condemning, criticising, and rebuking on the part of the purveyors of the debunked 'fake' information, and praising, lauding, and commending on its (the Commission's) part.

Conclusion

The study set out to investigate disclaimer strategies in the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission's rejoinders. Working within the ambit of van Dijk's (2004) critical discourse analysis and Mey's (2001) pragmatic act theory (with the inclusion of Odebunmi's (2006) notion of shared cultural situation), the study identified refutation and deresponsibilisation, allusion to institutional professionalism, and indirect accusation as discursive disclaimer strategies EFCC's rejoinders are replete with. Refutation and disresponsibilisation combine to counter the information and allegations the Commission considers untrue. In particular, they are used in instances where the Commission is alleged to have usurped the authorities of other institutions (such as the court) in the country. This strategy allows the Commission to counter a 'wrong' position, provide the 'true' alternatives, and set the record straight. Allusion to institutional professionalism allows the

Commission to evoke the ethical principles guiding the modus operandi of its personnel. With this strategy, the Commission foregrounds its sense of methodicity, scientificity and above all professionalism. Indirect accusation is deployed to indict the Nigerian system for the perceived failure of the Commission. As such, the strategy condemns, albeit indirectly, the individual and institutional systems, making it difficult for the Commission to effectively carry out its constitutionally backed role of fighting financial crimes in the country.

These discourse elements ride on linguistic resources such as counterfactuals, evidentiality, positive self-representation, and negative other-representation. Inherent in these discursive resources are the practs of blaming, denying, enjoining, condemning, praising and threatening, which are pragmatically used by the Commission to positively project itself, and negatively project its perceived 'adversaries'. The study demonstrates how language plays a vital role in institutional image remediation enterprise. Although it sits well within the context of extant crime-fighting institutional discourse, it, unlike extant studies, which are largely indicting in orientation, is remediative in its approach.

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Realisation of English Pure Vowels by Selected Senior Secondary School Students in Kaduna State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study investigated the realisation of some pure vowels of English by selected Senior Secondary School students in the Kaduna South Local Government Area of Kaduna State, Nigeria. Three objectives guided the investigation, namely, to identify and classify the types of errors made by the selected students in the realisation of English pure vowels, to determine the frequency and distribution of such errors, and to propose effective strategies and interventions for improving the production of English pure vowels among senior secondary school students. A cross-sectional survey research design was adopted to obtain data from a sample of 80 students selected through a random sampling technique from four secondary schools: Government Day Secondary School Maraban Rido, Government Secondary School Sabon Tasha, Government Secondary School Television, and Government Secondary School Kakuri. Two instruments were developed and used for data collection: the Single Pronunciation Test and the Oral Test on Connected Speech. The instruments were validated by experts in Test and Measurement from the University of Jos, and reliability was ensured through a pilot study involving a different set of students. Transcription of data followed IPA conventions, while data were analyzed using simple percentages to determine the frequency and distribution of errors. Findings revealed that students struggled significantly with the pronunciation of less familiar English pure vowels such as /ə/, /ɜ/, /ʌ/ and /ɔ:/, often committing substitution and distortion errors. These errors negatively affect oral communication by reducing intelligibility and causing misunderstanding in both academic and social interactions. The study recommends, among other things,

early and explicit instruction in the pronunciation of English vowel sounds, particularly those absent in local Nigerian languages.
Key Words: English pure vowels, Senior Secondary School students

Introduction

The English language holds a crucial position as Nigeria's official language and also serves as a teaching subject across the various levels of education in Nigeria. As a subject, English Language education typically covers multiple aspects, including grammar, vocabulary, reading comprehension, writing, speaking and listening skills. An important aspect of the English Language curriculum is the development of oral communication skills, aiming to enhance students' ability to express themselves fluently, engage in discussions and deliver presentations confidently. To achieve such communication proficiency in spoken English requires a deliberate acquisition of the sounds of the language, of which vowels are vital components.

The English language is known for its complex vowel sound system, consisting of a variety of distinct sounds that play a crucial role in pronunciation and comprehension. English has approximately 20 vowel sounds, which can be classified into short vowels, long vowels, and diphthongs. There is also a marginal group of vowels known as triphthongs. Mastering the English vowel sounds is essential for both native and non-native speakers, as it significantly impacts pronunciation accuracy, word recognition and fluency in spoken English. However, learning to use the different categories of English vowels by non-native speakers such as Nigerians poses significant challenges of articulation and intelligible communication. This is because many Nigerian languages do not have such a large vowel inventory. For instance, Hausa has a total of 12 vowels (Ellis & Tomlinson 101), while Igbo has eight (Igboanusi 47-48). Yoruba, like Hausa, also has 12 vowels consisting of seven oral and five nasal vowels (Agoke n.p). If such inventories of maximally 12 vowels are compared to English with about 25, then we are looking at an extra 13 vowels of English to acquire by a Nigerian speaker from any of these linguistic backgrounds. But the situation is more complicated than this as some of the vowels of English are absent in Nigerian languages.

The concept of pure vowel sounds refers to the idealised, distinct and unchanging sounds produced when pronouncing individual vowels in isolation. In linguistic terms, pure vowels are also known as monophthongs. These sounds are characterized by a single, steady-state articulation without any significant movement or glide. In English, pure vowel sounds are represented by specific

symbols in the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) to provide a standardised way of representing and transcribing speech sounds. However, it is important to note that in natural speech, pure vowels are influenced by various factors such as adjacent consonant sounds, stress patterns and regional accents. As a result, the actual pronunciation of vowel sounds can vary significantly, leading to slight modifications or deviations from the pure vowel ideal. The English monophthongs are /iː/, /aː/, /ɔː/, /uː/, /ɜː/. /ɪ/, /e/, /æ/, /ɒ/, /ʊ/, /ʌ/ and /ə/.

Errors in the realisation of pure vowel sounds among senior secondary school students can stem from various factors and have a significant impact on their pronunciation and language proficiency. One common source of errors is the influence of regional accents and local languages, as students may carry over phonetic patterns and pronunciation habits from their mother tongues. This can lead to deviations from the Standard English vowel sounds and affect intelligibility (Gbenga 91). Additionally, limited exposure to spoken English outside the classroom, lack of explicit instruction on vowel sounds, and insufficient practice opportunities can contribute to errors. Students may struggle with accurately producing and distinguishing between different vowel sounds, resulting in mispronunciations and difficulties in conveying meaning effectively.

This study aims to investigate errors in the realisation of English pure vowel sounds among senior secondary school students in Kaduna South Local Government Area of Kaduna State. Its objectives are:

i. to identify and classify the types of errors made by the students when producing pure vowels of English.
ii. to determine the frequency and distribution of such errors.
iii. to propose effective strategies and interventions for improving the production of English pure vowels among senior secondary school students, particularly in Kaduna South LGA and other parts of Nigeria.

The study is limited to selected senior secondary school students in Kaduna South LGA of Kaduna State. The study focuses specifically on errors made by these students in the realisation of the pure vowels of English; that is, all twelve pure vowels of English. In addition, the study does not cover errors associated with consonant sounds or other aspects of pronunciation beyond pure vowels. Also, students from other regions in Nigeria or educational levels are outside the scope of the study.

The significance of the study essentially lies in its identification of the specific articulation challenges faced by students in Kaduna South Local Government Area in the production of English simple vowels and the common errors associated with such production. This has pedagogical implications in terms of remediation programmes that can be put in place by education stakeholders. For instance, the findings can guide language teachers in designing targeted instructional strategies to improve learners' pronunciation and overall communication skills. It can also serve curriculum developers, policymakers, and school administrators in refining English language curricula, teacher training programmes, and resource allocation for effective language teaching.

Literature Review

Different definitions of the concept of error have been developed from different perspectives. Basically, these definitions contain the same meaning, while the differences lie only in the ways they are formulated. Two definitions of errors are given here. First, an error is a systematic deviation; when a learner has not learnt something and consistently gets it wrong (Ibrahim 207). Secondly, an error is a systematic deviation from the norms of the language being learned. Errors in various forms are important sources of information about foreign language acquisition, because they demonstrate conclusively that learners do not simply memorise the target language rules and then reproduce them in their utterances. They indicate that learners construct their own rules based on input data and that, in some instances at least, these rules differ from those of the target language learners (Jaja 79). Corder (53) uses the term 'erroneous' to mean those utterances which are either superficially deviant or inappropriate in terms of grammar. He distinguishes between mistakes, lapses and errors. They correspond to what he calls pre-systematic, post-systematic, and systematic errors. Pre- systematic errors are those committed by learners while they are trying to come to grip with a new point. Post-systematic errors occur when learners temporarily forget a point that has been previously understood. Systematic errors are those which occur when learners have formed inaccurate hypotheses about the target language.

Corder (76) states that an objective of the error analysis is to explain errors both linguistically and psychologically in order to help the learners study. Systematic errors should be looked for, so that the rules can be observed. This is a difficult task because learners may be highly inconsistent in their errors. The same errors can be viewed from various perspectives. For example, a learner's native language has only one way of referring to the future time, while the target language has

three ways of referring to the same. Learners gets into problem in trying to arrange the sentence and consequently commit some errors.

Corder (55) classifies errors in terms of the difference between the learners' utterance and the reconstructed version. In this way, errors fall into four categories: omission of some required element; addition of some unnecessary or incorrect element; selection of an incorrect element; and disordering of the elements. He includes the linguistic level of the errors under the sub- areas of morphology, syntax and lexicon. Errors according to Corder (62) are breaches of the code of a language. He explains that errors are "deviant structure "or "unacceptable utterance" that signify imperfect knowledge of the linguistic code. This implies that errors are committed by those who are not well grounded in the structure of the language. He differentiates errors from mistakes. According to him, all learners and users of a language are prone to mistakes, which are slips and minor lapses due to fatigue, haste, nervousness or uncertainty, or when attention is divided or when we are absorbed in some linguistic activity. Mistakes are typically random and are readily corrected by the learner when their attention is drawn to them. Errors, on the other hand, are systematic and consistence deviances that reflect a defect in knowledge.

There are many studies on error analysis bordering on sound production in English as a Second Language (ESL) contexts, such as Nigeria. For example, Asonibare (2025) studied vowel articulation errors in Nigerian secondary students' spoken English. Her research subjects included selected S.S.1 students of Army Day Secondary School, Sobi, Kwara State, Nigeria, with a focus on the articulation of English pure vowels. Data were collected through voice recordings of twenty respondents during informal interviews and analysed using an error analysis approach. The study identified errors in the articulation of five vowels [ə, ʌ, æ, ɜː, ɔː] and found that vowel errors were most frequent in [ə] and [ʌ], with substitution and omission as the dominant error types. The findings suggest that the respondents struggle with some vowels of English. While Asonibare's work is similar to this, the linguistic contexts as well as the choice and number of respondents vary. The current study looks at English users in Kaduna state and analyses the 12 pure vowels of English instead of the five. This will broaden Asonibare's findings in terms of generalisations regarding errors associated with English vowels across geographical regions in Nigeria.

Similarly, Adeniyi (2023) assessed English pronunciation errors among senior secondary school students in Kwara State using a descriptive survey design. 12 schools were sampled from the Senior Secondary Schools in the state, while 120 students served as respondents. The major

findings of the study revealed that most of the students 78 (65.0%) committed segmental errors, and a significant difference existed between students' pronunciation errors based on the teacher's gender. While students' gender, school type, parents' educational qualification and school location have no significant difference. While Adeniyi's work focused on general pronunciation errors in Kwara State, the present study is concerned with specific errors of vowel articulation in Kaduna State.

Other studies such as those of Iyere (2015), Okhuosi (2021), and Hassan and Hasan (2022), also examined pronunciation errors but differ from the present investigation in terms of scope, location, methodological approach, choice of respondents, and underlying causes of errors. This study hopes to bridge this gap by investigating the specific challenges faced by students in Kaduna South and identifying the unique factors influencing their errors in the use of English pure vowel sounds.

The study used insights from the Error Analysis (EA) framework, which was developed by Pit Corder. It was later elaborated by Corder and Richards. EA posits that learners' errors are systematic, meaningful windows into the developing interlanguage rather than random "mistakes." Core principles include: (1) errors arise from identifiable sources—interlingual transfer (L1 influence), intralingual/developmental factors (overgeneralization, simplification, faulty rule formation), teaching/orthographic interference, and performance constraints; (2) errors should be studied through a rigorous sequence: data collection → error identification → description (linguistic level) → classification (by type/source) → explanation (causes) → evaluation (gravity/pedagogic priority); (3) errors have diagnostic value (how learners learn) and prognostic value (what to teach next). Within phonology, EA treats recurrent segmental and suprasegmental deviations as rule-governed patterns in the learner's system, not isolated slips, and links them to articulatory, perceptual, and inventory differences between target and source languages.

Applied to the present study, EA guides the entire research design. First, a corpus of students' productions using word lists, minimal pairs, carrier sentences, and short reading passages targeting English monophthongs was compiled. Secondly, tokens were recorded and transcribed with IPA. Next, the errors were identified and classified into types: vowel substitutions, centralisation, tense–lax and length, reduction in unstressed syllables, and hypercorrections or spelling-driven realisations. Then the sources of errors were explained by testing hypotheses about L1/L2 inventory mismatches, grapheme–phoneme interference, teaching input, and prosodic load.

Pedagogically, EA motivates targeted interventions: articulatory instruction with vowel charts, minimal-pair perception–production drills, feedback focused on high-impact contrasts, and re-assessment to confirm change. Thus, EA provides both the theoretical lens (errors as systematic interlanguage evidence) and a practical methodology for diagnosing and improving learners' realization of English pure vowels in this context.

Research Procedure

The study used a cross-sectional survey method in order to collect data from the sample selected to analyse the errors in the use of English pure vowels. The population of the study comprise all the SSS 2 students of Kaduna South Local Government Area of Kaduna State, from which the sample population was selected. The total population is 3310. The sample of the study consists of 80 SSS 2 students selected randomly from four selected secondary schools, namely Government Day Secondary School Maraban Rido (A), Government Secondary School Sabon Tasha (B), Government Secondary School Television (C), and Government Secondary School Kakuri (D). The simple random sampling technique was employed since it gave every student in the population the chance of being selected. This helped to minimise bias and ensure representativeness of the sample.

The SSS 2 students were selected because they had completed basic English in SSS 1 and were not yet busy with final exams in SSS 3, making them suitable for testing oral English skills. It was assumed that their English Language teachers had taught them oral English over the years. Also, the four schools were selected in view of the ethnic and linguistic heterogeneity of Kaduna South. This mix makes it easier to assess students from different ethnolinguistic backgrounds. Consent of the various school administrators was sought in collaboration with the English teacher, who is part of this research team, before the tests were administered to the selected students.

A pronunciation test was used as research instrument in collecting data for this investigation. The test instrument is a word list of twelve words in which the 12 pure vowels of English are embedded. Eight of the words are monosyllabic, two are disyllabic, and two trisyllabic. The test was designed to assess the students' accuracy in producing and recognising each of the pure vowels. The words and the target vowels for each are presented in Table 2. The test was administered to all four selected schools in the local government area within two weeks. Twenty students were selected from each of the four secondary schools.

Each student was given the word list to read aloud while the researchers recorded their production using a phone recorder. It takes an average of 15 seconds at a normal speech rate to read the entire word list. The environment for the data collection was conducive and secluded to minimise distractions and noise. The student's productions were then transcribed after careful auditory perception using A. C. Gimson's IPA model of phonetic transcription. Scoring was done based on the correct or incorrect realisation of each pure vowel by the students. Thus, for the vowel /i:/ produced by 80 students, scoring could be 20/60 for correct and incorrect, respectively. The percentages for correct or incorrect production were calculated based on the scores. So, for 20 correct realisations of the sound /i:/, the percentage is 20/80x100 = 25%. These are reflected in Table 2. The three researchers combined their individual skills and experience as English language teacher and researchers to do the rating, while data were analyzed descriptively using simple percentages and tables.

Results

Table 1: Respondents' Degree of Performance

Schools	Degree of Performance by Students		Total
	Able	Not Able	
A	14 (70%)	6 (30%)	20
B	13 (65%)	7 (35%)	20
C	8 (40%)	12 (60%)	20
D	12 (60%)	8 (40%)	20
Total	**47 (59%)**	**33 (41%)**	**80**

Key:

School A: Government Day Secondary School Maraban Rido

School B: Government Secondary School Sabon Tasha

School C: Government Secondary School Television

School D: Government Secondary School Kakuri

Table 1 presents the degree of students' performance across the four schools (A, B, C, and D). Each school had 20 students assessed, contributing equally to the total sample size of 80 students.

The table indicates that School A had the highest percentage of students classified as "able" (70%), followed by School B (65%), School D (60%), and School C with the lowest (40%). Overall, 47 students (59%) across all schools were deemed "able" in their overall value performance, while 33 students (41%) were "not able". This suggests that while a majority demonstrated acceptable value performance, there remains a significant proportion who did not.

Table 2: Production Test Result

S/No	Words	SBE Pronunciation	Vowel Sounds	Number of Correct Productions	Percentage	Number of Incorrect Productions	Percentage
1	amoeba	/ə'mi:bə/	/i:/	20	25	60	75
2	Can	/kæn/	/æ/	32	40	48	60
3	Village	/'vɪlɪʤ/	/ɪ/	56	70	24	30
4	Water	/'wɔ:tə/	/ə/	16	20	64	80
5	clerks	/kla:ks/	/a:/	72	90	8	10
6	etiquette	/etiket/	/e/	56	70	24	30
7	curse	/kɜ:s/	/ɜ:/	24	30	56	70
8	tomb	/tu:m/	/u:/	36	45	44	55
9	fork	/fɔ:k/	/ɔ:/	16	20	64	80
10	Yacht	/jɒt/	/ɒ/	20	25	60	75
11	could	/kʊd/	/ʊ/	80	100	-	-
12	Study	/stʌdi/	/ʌ/	32	40	48	60

From the table above, item 1 on the table indicates that 20 participants representing 25% realised the sound /i:/ correctly in the word "amoeba" /əmi:bə/, while 60 participants representing 75% realised it incorrectly. This shows that most of the participants failed to realise this vowel correctly. In item 2, the table shows that 32 participants representing 40% realised the vowel /æ/ "can" /kæn/ correctly, while 48 participants representing 60% mispronounced it. This shows that most of the participants also failed to realise this vowel correctly. Item 3 indicates that 56 participants representing 70% correctly articulated the short vowel /ɪ/ in "village" /'vɪlɪʤ/, while 24 participants representing 30% incorrectly produced it. This implies that most of the participants

realised the vowel correctly. Item 4 on the table indicates that 16 participants representing 20% correctly realised the schwa sound in the word "water" /wɔ:tə/, while 64 participants representing 80% incorrectly realised it. This shows that most of the participants failed to correctly realise /ə/. Item 5 on the table indicates that 72 participants representing 90% produced the sound /a:/ correctly in the word "clerks" /kla:ks/, while 8 participants representing 10% incorrectly produced it. This implies that this vowel was well articulated by the participants. Item 6 on the table shows that 56 participants representing 70% correctly realised the sound /e/ in the third syllable of the word "etiquette" /etiket/, while 24 participants representing 30% incorrectly realised it. This shows that most of the participants passed the pronunciation test for this sound. Item 7 on the table indicates that 24 participants, representing 30%, produced the vowel /ɜ:/ in the word "curse" /kɜ:s/ correctly, while 56 participants, representing 70%, did not produce it correctly. This implies that most of the participants failed to articulate this vowel correctly. For item 8 on the table, 36 participants representing 45% correctly articulated the long vowel /u:/ in the word "tomb" /tu:m/, while 44 participants representing 55% articulated it incorrectly. This indicates that most of the participants failed to correctly realise this sound.

For item 9, 16 participants representing 20% realised the sound /ɔ:/ correctly in the word "fork" /fɔ:k/, while 64 of them representing 80% realised it incorrectly. This also indicates that most of the participants failed to correctly realise this vowel. Item 10 on the table indicates that 20 participants representing 25% produced the short vowel /ɒ/ in "yacht" /jɒt/ correctly, while 60 of them representing 75% incorrectly produced it. This shows that most of the participants failed to produce this sound correctly. Item 11 on the table indicates that all the 80 participants representing 100% correctly realised the vowel /ʊ/ in "could" /kʊd/, indicating that all the participants passed in the realisation of this sound. For last item in the table, 32 participants representing 40% correctly realised the vowel /ʌ/ in the word "study" /stʌdi/, while 48 of them representing 60% incorrectly realised the sound. This shows that most of the participants failed in the correct realisation of this vowel.

Findings and Discussion

From Table 2, the following findings were made from the assessment of the performance test. It was found that the students had more challenge with eight of the pure vowels of English, namely /i:, æ, ə, ɜ:, ɔ:, u:, ɒ, and ʌ/. The less challenging and problematic pure vowel sounds were /ɪ, a:, e, and ʊ/. 75% of the participants could not pronounce "amoeba" with the long pure vowel sound /i:/

but realised it as /e/. This results in a more open realisation of the sound from its natural close position in native English speech. It was observed that a greater number of the students were not familiar with the letter combinations for this vowel in English. For the tense vowels, the following were problematic as revealed in the test:/iː, ɔː, uː and ɜː/ Most students pronounced the word "fork" as /fɜːk/ instead of /fɔːk/. This may be caused by wrong pronunciation inherited from their primary school when they were taught phonics by their teachers. The lax vowels which constituted a problem to them include /æ, ɒ, ʌ and ə/. Considering individual words in which the phonemes are found, most students could not have a correct response to the pronunciation of words like yacht, can, study, and water.

From the findings and based on the objectives of the study, it is seen that the students' errors in the realisation of English pure vowels derived essentially from intralingual errors. These errors, also referred to as "developmental errors" or "fossilized errors", arise from incomplete or inaccurate knowledge of the target language. These errors occur within the target language system itself. This situation is responsible for the three error types identified from the analysis, namely vowel substitution, centralisation, and length neutralisation. Vowel substitution errors were attested in following cases: /e/→/iː/ in "amoeba"; /ɔː/→/ɜː/ in "curse"; /ɒ/→/uː/ in "tomb"; /ɜː/→/ɔː/ in "fork"; /aː/→/ɒ/ in "yacht"; /ɒ/→/ʌ/ in "study". Errors involving centralisation of vowels include /iː/→/e/ in "amoeba"; /ɔː/→/ɜː/ in "curse"; /ɒ/→/ʌ/ in "study", while errors of length neutralisation include /iː/→/e/ in "amoeba"; /ɒ/→/uː/ in "tomb". These findings align with the observations of Asonibare (2025) who reported early-stage fossilization as the cause of the recurring, unmonitored patterns observed from the data of her study. She also indicated that vowel pronunciation difficulties among learners are primarily linked to grapho-phonological interference, first-language influence, and inadequate phonetic instruction.

In terms of the frequency and distribution of errors based on the second objective, the results show that substitution errors accounted for the most frequent error types. Also, certain pure vowel sounds, such as /iː/, /uː/, /ʌ/, and /ɒ/, were particularly prone to mispronunciation, while others like /ʊ/ in "could" were generally well-articulated, with 100% accuracy among students. This suggests that familiarity with certain vowel sounds, perhaps due to their higher frequency in everyday English usage, may contribute to better performance, with a corresponding tendency of poor performance in less frequent or absent vowels. This is consistent with Usoro's (2023) findings,

who suggested that a reason for his respondents' poor performance in realising some pure English vowels is the absence of such vowels in their L_1.

Furthermore, the results show that errors regarding pure vowel pronunciation significantly impacted students' communication proficiency, which could lead to misunderstanding and reduced clarity in speech. For instance, mispronouncing "curse" /kɜːs/ as /kɔːs/, "tomb" /tuːm/ as /tɔm/, or "fork" /fɔːk/ as /fɜːk/ could change the meaning of words entirely or cause listeners to misinterpret the speaker's intent. This finding aligns with that of Usoro (2023), who suggested that the result of mispronunciation is distortion of information, with adverse implications for international communication. Based on the error analysis provision, the data from this study underscore the need for targeted pronunciation instruction that addresses these vowel sound challenges to enhance the overall communicative competence of not just the senior secondary school students in Kaduna South LGA but also other learners of English across different educational levels in Nigeria.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, it is concluded that senior secondary school 2 students in Kaduna South LGA face significant challenges in producing English pure vowels like /iː, æ, ə, ɜː, ɔː, uː, ɒ, and ʌ/ due largely to insufficient oral English training. It was observed through the investigation process that the difficulties stem from delayed or absent foundational pronunciation instruction at the primary school level, leading to persistent articulation errors and generally poor communication in the use of some English pure vowels.

Recommendations

In view of the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

i. Students should be taught correct pronunciation of English vowels as a second language at an appropriate time before late adolescence. This is because it is difficult to learn pronunciation effectively at a later stage in life.

ii. More attention should be paid to those vowels which are not present in most Nigerian languages, like /ɜː, ʌ, and ə/. For instance, the schwa vowel /ə / which is rarely used in Nigerian spoken English should be critically taught. The difference in length should be emphasised.

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Critical Appraisals of Aesthetic Tools in Contemporary Nollywood City Films

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Abstract

This study is a critical exploration of social characteristics as aesthetic tools for viewers' fancy and attraction in Nigerian city films. Aesthetics is any creative strategy employed by culture producers to win consumers of cultural products such as films. The study is guided by Roman Jakobson's Formalist Theory, which pays attention to the functionalities of the inner properties of creativity. Contemporary Nigerian filmmakers pay attention to city films for economic reasons driven by the need to survive the harsh Nigerian economy. The filmmakers identify the vibrant population blocs and glamourise their social traits for attraction and fantasy. Such population blocs include people of Westernised consciousness, who glamourise Occidental grandeur; the Gen Zs, who are counter-culture; the Yahoo Boys, who flaunt ill-gotten wealth; the Olosho Girls (social media baddies), who sexualise; and Street Boys and Girls, who sensationalise lexicons of self-adulation or expletives. Strategic attraction of viewers through aesthetic resources is necessary for these filmmakers to gain patronage and survive the declining Nigerian economy. However, the deployment of these social characteristics as aesthetic tools has been interpreted as the filmmakers' promotion of negative aspects of Nigerian society. However, this social aesthetic strategy and practice may not abate anytime soon.

Key Words: *Film aesthetics, Social characteristics, City film genre, Nollywood, Yahoo Boys*

Introduction

The significance of aesthetics in films, as art productions, cannot be overemphasised. Aesthetics is the set of features of an object that make it artistic. Süzeni (2020) maintains that the art of aesthetics in society can create positive effects, especially by making common objects more appreciated and desired. Similarly, Brielmannand and Pell (2018) aver that aesthetics is particularly concerned with the perception and appreciative evaluation of the artistic piece. They further opine that aesthetics is qualitative in nature, noting that it acknowledges the supremacy of

beauty. These perspectives on aesthetics point to the appreciation of art's values, with the essence being the derivation of sensory, psychological, or psychic pleasure and satisfaction by the receiver or consumer of a work of art. This goes to show that as important as the contents or signification of a work of art is, so also important is the manner of expression, that is, the resources employed for the realisation of the magnitude or intensity of impact on the consumption of artistic works. Makers of films in Nigeria have come to realise the importance of aesthetics, particularly in filmic artistry. They have therefore been sensitive to aesthetic resources in their works. The consciousness of Nigerian filmmakers of the importance of appreciating artistic works has especially been necessitated by the need to cope with a harsh economy. The strategies employed by modern filmmakers to present films to consumers in Nigeria as cultural products are peculiar. This has ignited the curiosity for this study. Such strategies have evoked curiosity because they are multidimensional.

The focus of this study is to explore how film practitioners in the Nigerian film industry go about the manifestations of aesthetics in contemporary Nollywood films with emphasis on multidimensionality pronounced in its cosmopolitanism, film variation, and semantics. The study focuses on the manifestation of aesthetics within the city film subgenre in the societal context. Films from Nigeria could be divided into two along the temporal trajectory. These include traditional films and city films. The former portrays cultural practices indigenous to the people of Nigeria across the regions of Nigeria that Nollywood portrays. The latter genre, city films, reflects the modern West-oriented social system and characteristics of the Nigerian people. These two dichotomies are depicted respectively by (for example) mud houses, cultivated or uncultivated land, and mansions of Western architecture, expensive cars, electricity and a sophisticated transportation system and services. It has been observed that of these two genres, however, the city film genre has a higher prevalence in Nigeria these days.

Local knowledge of the Nigerian social system, which includes activities in the film industry in the country, shows that the films that derive their subjects from city life in Nigeria are noted to be many more than those on life in the hamlets, depicting Nigerian country life decades or centuries ago. There are some justifications for this phenomenon. These include a higher population in the city, a higher geriatric demographic distribution in the villages, and vibrant economic buoyancy in the city. This is because in Nigeria, today, there are more riches in the city centres than in the countryside. This is according to the National Bureau of Statistics (2022). The bureau has further

asserted that Multidimensional poverty is higher in rural settlements of Nigeria because 72% of people in villages are poor, whereas the figure is 42% in urban centres. This goes to suggest that Nigeria's city population is denser, more vibrant, and varied; varied in the context that there are different groups or classes with common traits, identities, and ideologies.

The aesthetic constituents in the Nollywood city films are strategically initiated to meet the expectations and yearnings of the different demographic blocs in the Nigerian social system. This is the effect and application of the Functionalist Theory in this study. Such groups include the Gen Zs, street urchins, women-traders, artisans, taxi-drivers, cult groups, *Hook Up* Girls, political jobbers, fake lifers, land grabbers, the been-tos, shylocks, *Yahoo* swindlers, and so on. In this study, an attempt has been made to illustrate the different social conditions and demographic blocs. This, together with the Functionalist Theory, is an attempt to account for the identified social groups that have occasioned the choices of certain aesthetic tools in the representative city films as follows.

Methodological Approaches

There are certain strategic methods and tools that have been employed in this study for achieving the core goal of the study efficiently. The first of such tools and strategic approaches is qualitative research with emphasis on the analytical and interpretive methods. By this, inferences and conclusions are derived through the rationalisation of the available social details related to the primary goal of the study. In addition, triangulation of other tools was used. The 2025 Nicole Jose's model of Functionalist Theory was adopted. The selection of the research was through purposive sampling. Additionally, YouTube was considered to be the appropriate choice both for universal accessibility and abundance as an internet host of film resources. The appreciable View performances of the films on YouTube were also given due consideration. The researcher has employed all these methods in order to ensure the logicality of research claims and the acceptability of the conclusion in the study.

General and Contextual Perspectives on Aesthetics in Artistic Works

In this section of the study, the general and contextual views of aesthetics are examined. First, the general view of aesthetics is that it is important in any work of creativity, as asserted in this study. The importance that aesthetics asserts could be seen as emanating from the impact it generates on the audience, the ultimate consumer of the creative works. Owing to this, many scholars have

expressed opinions on aesthetics in artistic works. Some of the enunciations of the scholars are evaluated in the context of films at this juncture of the study. First of all, aesthetics has been looked at as a phenomenon and the property of an artistic work which has psycho-psychic implications. This is the crux of Jiang's (2021) assertion that the aesthetic induction strategy of aesthetic film refers to the planner's understanding of beauty seen in the use of the creative resources that culminates in inner feeling known as aesthetic feeling. He further opines that the aesthetic feeling brings about the audience having feelings from the experience of beauty, ensuring inner satisfaction, including a sense of harmony, as well as enjoyment of the spirit of beauty. The significance of aesthetics for inner satisfaction is further underscored by Aniukwu (2021), who bemoaned filmmakers' exclusion of aesthetics in Nollywood productions at different stages, which could be achieved through strategic use of camera works, sound systems, and applications of costumes for film aesthetics. Petrovici and Ivan (2019) also highlight the emotional or psychic significance of aesthetics in the language context. This is seen in their assertions that art films have a peculiar aesthetic language through strategic linguistic resources, and this mandates hermeneutical involvement of the viewer either emotionally or intellectually. Odedina lends strong credence to these perspectives on the psycho-psychic power of aesthetics in films in the postulation that films have the power to evoke viewers' emotions in the process of entertaining and communicating the filmmaker's imagination.

The psychic impact of aesthetics in films, noticeable in the foregoing, is what Franco (2023) sees as a film's emotional life. He opines that the aesthetic value itself is the positive quality perceived by viewers in the significance they experience. The core viewpoint by Franco is that film emotional life, so far as it is important to the *discovery* or the *evaluation* of the viewer's human nature of emotion. He concludes that such experience is in the progress it represents concerning resourcefulness as emotional subjects directed toward the actualisation of the ideal life of the individual. Furthermore, there are the social contexts of film aesthetics. In this context, the aesthetics of film is looked at from the social significance of aesthetic strategies in films. To this extent, Li (2024) contends that films can be constructed such that content can focus on and address social phenomena such as class division. In Li's perspective, the themes of films can reflect social class based on accusations levelled in relation to the suffering of the lower social class, which is not uncommon, and the crux of the director's strategies is to express concerns for the people in the lower class and also concerns for class divisions.

Secondly, aesthetics is contrived in this study as any tool or resource that elicits attraction, fancy/fantasy, and hedonistic sensation. To this end, the study conceives and applies social characteristics as aesthetic strategies, constructed and used as resources to elicit the attraction of potential viewers of Nigerian films in the city-film subgenre. At this juncture, it is imperative to assert that the emotional and psychological dimension to the consumption of aesthetic values in work ofart such as film is germane to the social dimension to aesthetic consumption as the core of this study. That is, these perspectives lend credence to the focus of the study which is the special consideration by makers of city films in Nollywood for the emotion and psychology of the different social groups and generations in the contemporary Nigerian municipal society. This is illustrated in the study with the aesthetic properties extracted from representative city films in modern Nollywood.

Situating the Concept of 'Social' in the Context of this Study

The word-concept *"social" is contextually conceived in this study*. For the purpose of this study, *social is* not intended to mean the geopolitical zones of Nigeria, government or governance, including the economic activities. Rather it signifies the general consciousness of the different groups bound together by orientations, beliefs, practices, habits, or ideologies that are city-oriented. The focus of this research is to examine how the orientations of the populations in these blocs are considered by Nollywood filmmakers in determining the content of their works and the tools of expression. That is, social indicates the philosophies, ideologies and practices of the different demographic groups in Nigerian society, especially as these groups are critical factors in film consumption in Nigeria in modern times.

Sociology of Nigerian Film Productions

The Nigerian films could be categorised in terms of the genres necessitated by demographic indices. To this end, the genres of Nigerian films, broadly speaking, include, but are not limited to, City Films and Culture Films. City Films are films about the city life of Nigerian and address social topics relating to the modern Nigerian city experiences, and such topics related to the Youth culture. These, in no particular order, include Western characteristics seen in enhanced feminine glow, architecture, opulent lifestyle, and the been-*to* accent. Others topics include the orientations of the social groups such as the Gen Zs, the Lambda culture, the *Japa* syndrome, Yoruba Demons practices, the Sugar Daddy syndrome, the clubbing habits, the *Yahoo Yahoo* Syndrome, the Hook

Up phenomenon, the Single Mother syndrome, side-*chicking*, *Street Boys and Girls* culture, as well as street-life ideologies such as the *Marlianism*. On the other hand, Culture Films are a genre of film productions set to address critical cultural concerns in society such as the promotion of culture, most noticeable in culture indigenisation advocacy. Such films are mostly set in the countryside with such features as lush forests, mud houses, and rustic simplicity. It should be stated that city films are far more than cultural films, and the preference of the filmmakers is due to some factors. There is more opulence in the city, and there is poverty in rural Nigerian society. In addition to this, there are more youth in the city than in the rural areas in Nigeria. The mercantilist expectations of the filmmakers are satisfied by the riches in the city and the high population of the vibrant section of the population, the youth, in the city. This accounts for the proliferation of city films in Nigerian film industry in contemporary times.

Analytical Illustrations with Representative Films

The focus of the paper in this section is to investigate the tools and resources of aesthetics in Nigerian city films. The investigation is in the social contexts. That is how social factors and phenomena arouse inner emotions, psychic lulling, and sensory satisfaction in viewers. This is in such a way as to meet the epicurean yearnings of the viewers. To undertake this, specific contemporary Nigerian city films are accessed on YouTube and relevant social circumstances in the films are analysed. The analyses are subsequently redirected towards asserting the crux of the study. The perspectives are broadly divided into Western features, Conceptual Phenomena, linguistic tools, and cinematic framing. These are discussed in detail further.

Western Physical Glamour as an Aesthetic Resource in Nollywood City Films

"Western physical glamour" here means those items of modern times which are products of Western technology. These include, but are not limited to, modern cars, modern houses, infrastructure for modern living styles, human dressing and so on. These become aesthetic in the context that they are resources of attraction and fantasy for a target population among Nigerians. These features are copious and strategically situated in many Nollywood films of the city films sub-genre, as illustrated forth. The first city film that affirms the featuring of items of Western sensation as aesthetic strategies is *One Way Traffic* by Vincent Nwachukwu. *One Way Traffic* belongs to the city film subgenre because it addresses the lifestyles of the city people in Nigeriain the contemporary times. The sensation intent of the filmmaker begins with the first themed display-

scene, which features modern architecture, high-rise buildings, wide clean streets, lush vegetation, as well as cars zooming past. All these give an aura of modern neighbourhoods.

The neighbourhoods of these descriptions are much desired in Nigeria. Such communities are choice areas of Lekki, Victoria Garden City, Victoria Island, and many others in Lagos, including many of such in Port-Harcourt, Abuja or Kano. They are expensive areas where many privileged city people, such as celebrities, reside. Indeed, a Nigerian celebrity is not considered a true celebrity if he or she does not reside in these choice areas because the neighbourhoods are opulent communities. To this end, many city people in Nigeria fantasise about conspicuous consumption such as intimidating modern houses, expensive cars and restricted or gated settlements as a sign of social class. This lifestyle is a source of attraction and fantasy to the city dwellers. The filmmaker is conscious of this social phenomenon, and this explains the strategic insertion of this themed scene-display at the initial point in the film.

These resources of Western glamour are complemented by the strategic display of human sheen and sensation noted in feminine glow and masculine attraction. These two human features are as much motivated by Western consciousness as they are perceived in Nigeria. The feminine glow is noted in the chemically-enhanced (toned) light skin, enhanced long hair and Western accent of Bolu in scenes one, two, and 4 and more especially when this is considered in the context of scene two, where cars are strategically placed in clean streets where Bolu is taken in an exotic black Toyota saloon car. This scenario is a sensation to many city people in Nigeria. To an individual in the West, this may be regular because the West is a developed continent with sustainable cities where streets are clean, cars are super-clean, streets are wide, and buildings are tall and beautiful. Such an individual may consider the city features highlighted above as ordinary. However, these features are sources of sensation. Many modern Nigerian women make efforts to tone their skin, wear long hair and ride expensive cars in a gentrified location.

In the same vein, the featuring of Bolanle Ninalowo in the first scene is strategic. It is for the optimisation of his 6-pack figure, enhanced by gym tools, as this is a major attraction among many city women in Nigeria. This 6-pack attraction leads to another film for the study, In *His Bed* by Ariyike Oladipo. In this city film, Tosin, Yinka's wife, declares to him, "Lounging is not going to bring your six- packs. Okay?" And when Yinka asks, "Who cares?" Tosin retorts, "I do, I actually do. I like you all buffed and ripped and sexy". Tosin's attraction to a masculine physique is an expression of the social reality in Nigeria, where many women are fascinated by a masculine 6-

pack body build. Furthermore, in the film *In His Bed*, Western material items, facilities and objects are copious and methodically infused for aesthetic attraction. In this particular case, the theme display scene is an airport, the Murtala Mohammed International Airport, Lagos, with the loud humming of aircraft engines in the background. After this themed scene, there is the carousel area of the airport where travellers are waiting while their bags are being conveyed to them. The scene that follows this is the display of a state-of-the-art bridge in an eyebrow area of Lagos overlooking the ocean. At this stage, the loud humming of the aircraft has diffused into a British accent phone conversation. This is followed by the elegant sheen of a slim lady, Tosin, with long hair, skimpy dresses, and glossy facial paintings. Each of these features is a source of attraction and fantasy to most of the vibrant city people in Nigeria, and such attraction is the cardinal essence of any aesthetic style and tools. It needs to be asserted that the conceptions of the city people in this study emphasise the youth, adults with youth sensation consciousness, and the geriatric demography with Western orientation. It de-emphasizes puritanical religiousness. The validity of this is noted in the fact that the Nigerian youth in religious circles have modernised or Westernised religious behaviour and characteristics. This is a phenomenon that has been motivated and enhanced by the digital revolution. This is corroborated by Kanu et al (2024), who have noted that "the proliferation of digital media has ushered in a paradigm shift, which obviously goes beyond geographical boundaries and granting Nigerian youth unparalleled access to a wealth of information and religio-cultural experiences". This has enabled the infiltration of Western lifestyle into Africa, Nigeria inclusive. These features being analysed in this film are the characteristics of modern religion, especially among the youth and the adults of liberal religious mindset.

Aesthetic manifestation through the features cited occurs in a number of varied ways. The first is that, in Nigeria today, the phenomenon of *Japa*, the phenomenal Westward migration rush to escape the harsh economic conditions in Nigeria, is a fervent desire among the people, especially among the youth in the country. As a result of this desperate desire, anything that relates to westward relocation is an attraction for both psychic and psycho sensation, as this is conceived by the Nigerian population as a signal of accomplishment. The filmmaker is aware of this social consciousness and this is a motivation for opening the film with a scene showing an airport and aircraft. In the same vein, the filmmakers are aware of the Nigerians' inordinate rush for money Emeh et al (2023). This is the justification for the filmmaker's show of elite lifestyle. Furthermore, the elegance of the slim lady could be looked at in Nigerian social context, as many Nigerian ladies

in the city go to great lengths to look slim, wearing Brazilian human-hair wigs. Therefore, Tosin is a metaphor for and a crafted source of imagination and fantasy for many Nigerian ladies. These features therefore serve aesthetic purposes of attraction and regaling in the film, *In His Bed,* as the film establishes relevance with the viewers. All these are expressions of Western consciousness, and such are marks of civilisation and social empowerment among Nigerians in the present time. This awareness and intentional consciousness have motivated the filmmaker to infuse these features strategically in the film as sources and tools of attraction, fantasy, imagination and inner satisfaction in the audience, the viewers.

Phenomenal Human Character as Aesthetic/Attraction Tools

At this juncture in the study, research focus shifts to how the conceptual-phenomenal behavioural patterns of the blocs of the people in society. Focus is also on how such behavioural patterns are a major consideration in filmmakers' construction of the contents of their films in the city-film subgenre. There are many of such human social characters. There are as many such as there are the number of different social blocs. The filmmakers often target and reflect the social cultures of the social blocs of people that have substantial memberships. The representations of the cultures of these social groups usually evoke attraction, a sense of belonging, sensation, fantasies or laughter as the case may be. Each of these impacts of the strategic representation of the attributes of the social blocs is a psychic and psychological output. The representations are therefore aesthetic deliberately crafted by the filmmakers in order to win the segment of the population in focus in a given situation. Some of these social blocs and attributes are evaluated at this juncture, and the first to be evaluated is the strategic representation of the attributes of the Nigerian Gen Zs as can be seen in the film *Gen Z Challenge by* Chika Ike. The Gen Z in Nigeria exhibit counter-culture attributes to a near-rebellion extent.

Meduna (2024) comments on the counter-culture disposition of Gen Zs, asserting that **in** her own reality, Nigerian Gen Zs feel as if they were strangers in their own homes. She believes that the unique challenges the generation faces are exceptional. She takes pride in Gen Z children. They possess a mentality different from the typical moralistic Nigerian cultural upbringing. She goes further to aver that it is evident that Gen Zs significantly differ from the past social generations, such as the boomers or Gen X, and what matters to older generations in terms of relationships and culture is of a different essence to Nigerian Gen Zs. They have the inclination to please their group orientation on social issues, and this leads to their collective consciousness. Such consciousness

that Meduna is alluding to includes an easy life, high fashion noted in piercings, mail earrings, dreadlocks, slim feminine body structure, expensive human-hair wigs, clubbing as well as resort parties, including affinity to the internet. This is the representation in this film. We see four young female Gen Zs who see modelling as a profession. They are staying at a hotel, having parties, and riding horses on the beaches. Their male counterparts hang around as directors and photographers. There is so much glamour around them. The skimpy dresses and the glamour of expensive accommodation and beach experiences are veritable means of fantasy to the Gen Zs who are massive in population, surpassing 57 per cent of the population, according to Amuge (2022). The filmmaker needs this population for the mercantilist essence. The tastes and consumption patterns of Gen Zs are, therefore, highly invaluable to the filmmaker in order to be popular and attain huge sales. This may not be the case if the film were about the rustic cultures of the village youth.

Another source of aesthetics in the city film genre in Nigeria is the foolishness of the rustics in the city. That is how the subalterns behave in the city where they serve as gatekeepers, gardeners, cooks, or drivers. Their attributes, such as low reasoning, city life ignorance, rivalry among them, mode of dressing, and lifestyle, are sources of laughter to the viewers. The scenes of the subalterns are strategically inserted into city films as interludes or comic relief to amuse the viewers. The rustic attributes of the subalterns in the city, locally or overseas, are intended to be flavors to the core motifs of Nigerian city films. This is illustrated in the city film *Osuofia in London* by Nkem Owoh. In this film, the artistic representation of the foolishness of the rustic subaltern is the major creative attraction. All centres on Mazi Osuofia, who lives in the village but whose brother invites him to London. The potential travel is a breakthrough because in Africa, travelling to the West is seen as a breakthrough, and this is why the rates at which young Nigerians embark on travels overseas are indeed alarming Akpomedaye (2021). Such forced travels embarked upon by the youth are known as *ja pa* in Nigerian local parlance. Okunade and Awosusi (2023) say that in recent times, ja pa describes the alarming frenzy for over-migration by the Nigerian youth. They opine further that *japa* is a new coinage for describing the over-migration trend of Nigerians to Europe or the West in general. This point of Osuofia's travels to London is where the artistry for aesthetic intent begins in the film. The dressing for the journey is a combination of an old ash-coloured suit, a traditional African cap, and the hems of the trousers are tucked into the socks. Arriving in London, while in a Limousine car, he put his big bag beside him on the back seat. He

sits spreading his whole body across the seat as a mark of maximising enjoyment. He also utters the following on his arrival at Heathrow Airport:

> Wow, a European coming to pick me at the airport. Brilliant. Please, leave my bag alone. I will follow you. … Limousne? So, this is my brother's car. Don't rush me. What God created this beast of a car? It has got mirror in it!

These comments are expressions of rustic ignorance and innocence that culminated in foolery, as seen in Osuaofia's placing a heavy bag on a limousine seat, his waving at passers-by from a moving car, and his resting his legs on the car's compartments. These acts are to regale the civilised elite, and this is an aesthetic essence and function. This genre of film act is not targeted at the village audience in that the acts become aesthetic when they are interpreted by the elite class. There are hardly any ways by which the uneducated population would be able to interpret the act as odd because they too are likely not aware of elite culture which makes the attributes of Osuafia odd. Therefore, it is in the context of city culture that the attributes become aesthetic.

Another attribute of the subaltern aesthetics is name-dropping. This takes the form of the subaltern jester identifying with the gentrified social class for social relevance. This is a common practice in the Yoruba wing of Nollywood and is illustrated in Baba Suwe's comic artistry. To illustrate this, the film *Larinloodu2*is cited. In the film, Baba, who is on a vendetta visit to his former landlord, vituperates as a kickback at his former landlord, engaging in name-dropping to validate his newfound opulence. He does so thus:

> You need to see the calibre of people who graced my party. Minister came. Tinubu came. Lam was present. Governors of Ondo and Ekiti State were also present… I did not know before that Tinubu is such an amiable person. Even Lam was well-behaved. All of them were present, and I served them.

This excerpt is dense with copious political name-dropping, and this is strategic, aesthetically. These include the jester's status symbols, identification with the political party and the personality in power, and cultural balance. The personalities alluded to in the excerpt are the current governor at the time, and political figures have cronies and ardent followers. There is a tendency that these followers are pleased and are positively disposed to the film. This is a result of the hero-worshipping of their benefactor. In Nigeria, political allegiance is profound and total because of

the political gains the followers aspire to get from their godfathers, whose influence is absolute. Thompson (2020) has corroborated the absoluteness of political godfathers in the assertion that:

> He belongs to a mafia that superintends over who gets what, when and how in the chess game of politics. So powerful is he that he can pick up a politically embryonic individual from nowhere and shore up his political capital in the twinkling of an eye in the estimation of the voting public.

In this vein, Baba Suwe's reference to the Ondo, Ekiti, Oyo and so on is for the excitement of the indigenes of these Southwestern Nigerian states among the Yoruba, who are competitively proud of their subcultures. Such name-dropping of the symbolic figures from each of these states, which are subcultures in the Yoruba nation, is for cultural aesthetics for the regaling of the cultural imagination of the people.

In addition to these socially mediated tools of aesthetic regaling in the city context discussed so far, another social aesthetic strategy in the modern city Nigerian film subgenre is the portrayal of the lifestyles of people engaged in certain social maladies. The focus for illustration is on cubing behaviours among Nigerians and the Yahoo Yahoo culture among Nigerian youth. Indeed, clubbing is a global phenomenon as a means of relaxation, but the way it is practised in Nigeria is peculiar. The hallmark of clubbing in Nigeria includes popping the champagne, high consumption of expensive alcohol, lewdness, and excessive spending of currencies. Also, the *Yahoo Yahoo* culture is particularly among the male Nigerian youth, which manifests in cyber fraud, and this has yielded so much too so many male youth and adults in Nigeria. One of these is Ramon Olorunwa Rasak, also known as *Hushpuppi* according to the United States Attorney's Office (2022). These two social maladies are perpetrated by a huge population in Nigeria. Willie-Nwobu (2024) describes the huge population of perpetrators of *Yahoo Yahoo* social malady and crime as the army of *Hushpuppi*'s acolytes who disdain hard work but have a voracious appetite for expensive lifestyles.

As a result of this, filmmakers target such a huge population for their sales. This is why filmmakers represent the attributes of such culture, and such representations are a source of excitement for, validation of and identification with the huge population. This is illustrated in two cardinal films, one for each of the two social maladies so identified earlier. The first film to be considered is *Yahoo Boy* by Anaele Dominic Ugochukwu. This film exhibits the lifestyle of typical Nigerian

boys engaged in internet fraud. The opening scene is a vivid representation of the expensive and fun-driven life of the typical Yahoo boys in Nigeria, and because of this, the first scene is strategically positioned as the first scene for the potentially striking effects it would have on the population of the orientation showcased in the scene. In this scene, there is an explicit display of profligacy and debauchery. Huge amounts of cash are thrown into the air. New currency notes are sprayed onto topless girls. This happens as the girls wiggle their buttocks to the lewd songs in the background. There is also a display of many bottles of expensive alcoholic drinks, and heavy smoke of substances such as, in local parlance, Loud, Ice, and so on. This is as the puffing of smoke and the wiggling catch up with the frenetic background music, which reads "party all night long, we will party all night long." This type of lifestyle is the dream of the population bloc of this orientation, and portraying this lifestyle as vividly as this evokes excitement in such people. Such a vivid representation also convinces the general viewers of the originality of the film. In both ways, the viewers' attention is captured, with consequential effects of fantasy and regaling across the different classes of viewers, respectively.

The Olosho tradition is the female social malady perpetrated by young Nigerian girls. It takes the form of the potent commercialisation of sexual escapades in exchange for money and a fast, fun-filled life. This is characterised by several traits. These include a huge, sensational Social Media presence where their body features are flaunted for randy patronage. They engage in excessive consumption of alcohol and substances as part of nightlife. They designate themselves and are referred to by the public as "baddies". However, concerns have been raised about the population and activities of the "baddies". For example, Itodo (2024) reports that Nollywood actress and prolific film producer Funke Akindele has voiced her concerns about the 'baddies' trend prevalent among ladies on social media in modern Nigeria. He discloses that the record-breaking producer expressed she's worried about the "baddies" because she feels that Nigerian ladies have to be more than the practice of flaunting body features and endowments, as well as the luxurious lifestyles of the baddies on social media. Itodo states that Akindele disclosed her displeasure with the daddies' activities while she was speaking in a recent TV interview with Arise TV. This *Olosho* social malady is rife in the major cities in Nigeria, but it is essentially prevalent in Lagos, the Southwest region. It is a social malady that many young Nigerian girls engage in as a profession (Essien et al, 2022). It is a demographic bloc which constitutes a viable clientele for the filmmakers. This explains why a scene which vividly depicts the typical messiness of the life of *Olosho* girls is made

the first scene in Temidayo Babatunde's film *Olosho Five Million*. It should first be asserted that Yahoo Boys and *Olosho* girls are in sync. They patronise each other as it is a question of lazy fun-loving girls (*Olosho Girls*) preferring spenders of free money (Yahoo Boys) to hard-working men. This monetary gratification is seen in the title of the film itself, and the film is so titled as a source of excitement and attraction. The combination of these two demographic blocs is a huge market for the Nigerian filmmakers. This is why their culture is aptly captured in scene one, which is a night club engulfed in wild life reflecting randy behaviours, wild drinking, frenetic erotic dances, topless dressing, as well as heavy smoking. All of these usually culminate in sexual patronage. This is the case with Kolade (male) and Anjola (female) in this film.Both meet each other at the club described. They end up together in Kolade's home. Though the filmmaker attempts to preach morality in the film, such is overshadowed by the strategic promotion of debauchery in the film, which is undertaken for striking impact on the population of this culture and orientation.

Criticism

This practice by Nigerian filmmakers of strategically portraying negative culture at the beginning of films has always resulted in adverse social implications. This is because, oftentimes, the excitement generated as the outcome of the deployed aesthetic resources override the rectitude that the filmmaker may want to advance in the subsequent scenes of the film. In fact, the proliferation of the *Yahoo c*ulture and the *Olosho* practices could be, in part, attributable to the digital presentation of these reverse cultures.

Peculiar Semantics as Aesthetic Resources in Nigerian City Films

Another notable tool of aesthetic in contemporary Nigerian city film is peculiar word choices. This is in the context of the exhibition of the deployment of coinages, jargons, argots and phraseologies. Such an exhibition is identification with the demographic blocs that use such peculiar semantics. This is as popular among the vibrant Nigerian population in the city, where there is a higher manifestation of wealth and economic power to spend freely. There is a huge reflection of many Nigerian social groups through their peculiar words or slogan in contemporary Nigerian city films. This is a way of eliciting the fantasy and imagination of these groups. It is underscored that the choice of words of Gen Z varies from one social experience and engagements to another. The first social groups in Nigeria whose word choices are examined as aesthetically represented in Nigerian city films is Uche B and Onwuka's *The Gen Z Wife*. In the city film, the viewer learns about the

marriage realities of two Nigerian Gen Zs. The peculiar words include Amanda's "wifey me" in "Maybe one day, when you are ready to wifey me". Amanda also refers to her hubby/boyfriend as "babe" and "baby". She also vituperates in the common language and terminologies of Nigerian Gen Zs, thus "It is not your fault. I am tired. What is it? Why are you screaming? Don't stress my life, abeg." Amanda uses these linguistic items in different situation and to achieve divergent purposes in the film. "wifey me" is considered a funky lexical substitute for "marry me". Nigerian Gen Zs, male especially female's use "babe" to refer to their lover rather than the conventional sweet-nothing such as "honey" or "sweetheart". Amanda's vituperation above comes when hubby complains that the house is too dirty as domestic item are scattered all over the place. Each of the lines in the vituperation signifies Nigerian female Gen Zs' sense of superiority to hubbies and that their beauties are inestimable. The non-readiness of the female Gen Zs to perform domestic duties which include cleaning and cooking is visible in the vituperation. There is also the intent to frustrate her boyfriend referring to the complaint as "screaming", and the word *abeg* is marker of emphasis for the intention of insult evocation. These words and expressions are peculiar to the Nigerian Gen Zs. The goal of this description is not to judge the Gen Zs in Nigeria as to the correctness or rightness of their behavior or orientation. Rather the goal is a mimetic reflection on the language of this social group. As it is, these words and the attitudes they reflect are likely to satisfy the yearning and expectations of the Gen Zs in modern Nigeria. This attracts and wins them over because the new-found attitude of the Gen Zs in Nigeria is a social ideology, a movement of a sort. Therefore, when they witness such philosophies being showcased, such may be interpreted as belief in or identifying with the social group and their ideology.

Another social group in Nigeria whose peculiar register shall be considered in this study is the Street Boys and Girls. Street boys and girls are the very young Nigerians who are usually not gainfully employed and whose activities are characterised by group rivalry, tension, conflict, and clashes, as well as street Lordship and heroism. As a result of this, their linguistic choices are expletives, curses, and coined panegyrics. This is because they need tools to weaken and override their street rivals and to indicate that they are tough men or women. Street boys and girls' groups emerge on the streets and in neighbourhoods. Street boys and girls, popularly known as Area Boys and Area Girls, constitute a huge population in Nigeria today. Olugbile (2024) has noted that the population of area boys and girls has grown. Statistics indicates an increasing percentage of street boys, comparable to the *almajiri* population in the North, and this group is made up of young

people especially in Southern Nigeria. Though area boys are alleged to constitute a menace in society, irrespective of this claim, this study focuses on the language of this social bloc. Such language use is the slogan of the circle, known as *Lambda,* which is the term used to designate the language of false personality, hero-worshipping, rated identity, fantasy of life, and deceit. This is to make the user more than they really are. Owing significantly to the huge population of Area Boys, filmmakers see their subculture as a huge market. Many Nigerian films have reflected this consciousness, but illustrations shall be drawn from Adunni Ade's *Osanle Omo Ghetto*. The film opens with commotion from the fisticuffs between rival Area Boys and Area Girls wielding weapons. After the arrival of the police has doused tensions, the viewer hears the *Osanle* Group saying:

> Me, Osanle 1! Whoever underrates me shall be burnt even before the soup is cooked … I feel you … You are honored. Mosquito, as I am looking at you and Defense Minister, you put my mind at ease. …. You are too much. No one dares to dare you…. You are our mother. … Say Mama, I am with you, 24/7. I am available for you. I will run errands for you beyond expectations… My Mother, Defense Minister is telling you that no one will near you in this area. If they bring war, don't worry, go and sleep, always strong and ready.

A critical scrutiny of the word choices and phraseologies of this excerpt indicates that there is a huge hero-worshipping which presents *Osanle*, the group leader, as larger than his/her worth. Each of the followers is also presented as a supper being. It needs to be stated that these words make sense only when they are uttered in a given atmosphere. The atmosphere is constituted by the presence at their coven (known, in local parlance, as*abete*). They also raise both their hands, stump their feet, smoking substances, and drink alcohol. These attributes are exciting to many young Nigerian street dwellers, with modifications from region to region. The filmmaker's resolve to make a film on the Area Boys and Area Girls is an act of identification with the class of people especially the culture, which is underscored as the film begins with a street war. A group of people are proud of this attribute and is the target of the filmmaker for tremendous sales.

A Criticism of the Social Characteristics as Aesthetic Strategies in Contemporary City Films

It is critical to assert at this juncture of the study that the resources of aesthetics identified so far are facilitators of psychic and sensory fantasy in the consumption of city films in Nigeria. Indeed, they are efficient in entertaining either a segment of the population or the Nigerian people at large. They excite. They lull. They evoke emotions. They lure viewers into streaks of sensory euphoria and psychic hysteria, culminating in emotional satisfaction. To this end, one may argue that these aesthetic strategies are effective in contemporary Nigerian city films. However, this efficiency is only in the context of the filmmakers' mercantilist goal. This argues that the adoption of these social and artistic tools for epicurean purposes is detrimental to the sanctity of Nigerian society. It should be asserted that the aesthetic analysis throughout this study has inimical consequences on the areas of Nigerian society concerned. For example, the aesthetic tools in the Western context in Nigeria, as earlier analysed, do not benefit the Nigerian society in terms of the indigenisation of the Nigerian local culture for externalisation, which, if achieved, will lead to the home-grown progress of the nation. This is in the context that Nigerian cultural resources will continue to be jettisoned. Yet, culture remains a vital means through which the country can develop (Erhun, 2015; Akanle, 2012; Ningi, 2018).

In addition to this, the glamorization of Western features and development matrices in Nigerian city films widens the gap between city dwellers and city centres. Such a wide gulf will result in continued obscurity of Nigerian cultural society. Also, the attitudes of Gen Zs are counter-cultural and rebellious (Schrager, 2022). Similarly, the *Lambda* (expletives of deceit) of Street Boys and Girls is a glamorization of hooliganism, and it is capable of distorting the natural sensibility of the vibrant population who are the youth. This is dangerous for the sustainability of Nigeria’s future. To the extent that they are true, so also is the promotion of other segments of Nigeria being showcased through the promotion of their subcultures. Such is capable of worsening the state of delinquency in the country. The attention that the filmmakers are paying to the *Yahoo tradition* and the *Olosho practice* glamourises the social maladies. The social aesthetics as adopted by the Nigerian filmmakers is a promotion of vengeance and vendetta. All these potential vices are being jettisoned by the filmmaking practitioners and sacrificed for the pecuniary intention and gain of the filmmakers.

In Conclusion

The social behaviours and semantics are creative resources that have been utilised by contemporary city filmmakers in Nigeria. This is for aesthetic attraction and fantasy to sustain the loyal patronage of different social groups as a reflection of the principles of the Functionalist Theory in the discourse. Such patronage is beneficial to film practitioners in terms of financial rewards. However, these strategies that the Nigerian filmmakers have adopted could be described as injurious to the social good. In itself, drawing on the social context as a resource for aesthetic purposes is not a vile practice. However, the selection of the kind of social ramifications to draw from is the main hindrance. The areas selected from for aesthetic intention are the social negatives. For example, many Africans still believe that Westernisation is cultural infiltration which should be resisted because they are of the view that Westernisation would continue to dwarf local cultures (Clifford, 2018). This paper holds that this perspective, as held by some Africans such as university academics, government institutions as well as the monarchical institutions, is a denial of the mimetic realities. This is because Western features are palpable on the continent, especially in Nigeria. Also, many Africans especially Nigerians rush to Western embassies for visas to relocate to the West. This contradiction is the order of the day in Nigeria at the moment. Other areas glamourised in the Nigerian city films include the *Yahoo* practice, the *Olosho* menace, the Street Boys and Girls strife and so on, which constitute social dangers and unrest. To the extent that glamourising them, which is identification or endorsement, is a license for social recklessness. Another disservice of the filmmakers' social aesthetic strategies is the relegation of the rural community, thereby widening the economic gap between the city and rural areas in Nigeria. However, the filmmakers may be absorbed by this indictment. This is on the basis that their activities are business-oriented. This requires that they adopt whatever non-criminal strategies would make them attract their clients for the consumption of their products. This will keep them afloat in business after all the current Nigerian economy is so weak, harsh and debilitating (Dike, 2014; Adesina, 2012). The exploitation of the social characteristics of a social group who are considered a menace is a moral question. This indeed justifies the professional aesthetic strategies of the Nigerian filmmakers of the city film genre.

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Against Silence: Confessional Poetry as a Form of Resistance in Postcolonial Nigeria

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Abstract

This paper explores Nigerian confessional poetry as a form of socio-political resistance. Drawing on postcolonial theory, trauma studies, and Michel Foucault's conception of power, discourse and counter-memory, this paper argues that the confessional mode transforms personal pain into a political act. Nigerian confessional poems foreground experiences of familial rupture, domestic violence, body vulnerability, and psychological trauma, exposing how patriarchal authority, colonial legacies, and socio-economic precarity converge to regulate silence and obedience. Methodologically, the study adopts a qualitative textual analysis of selected Nigerian confessional poems, combining close reading with theoretical interpretation. Poems are examined through a postcolonial and Foucauldian analytical framework to identify recurring thematic patterns, such as trauma, memory, silence, and resistance, and to interrogate how poetic language and imagery produce counter-discourses against dominant cultural and political structures. By articulating what is culturally repressed or socially taboo, Nigerian confessional poetry disrupts dominant narratives that privilege communal harmony over individual truth. The poetic 'I' functions not as narcissistic self-display but as a resistant subject who reclaims agency through testimony. The act of confession becomes an ethical intervention, creating a counter-archive that resists historical erasure and challenges the normative construction of masculinity and nationhood. The paper concludes that Nigerian confessional poetry emerges as a radical practice that reclaims voice, memory, and the body, asserting the personal as an indispensable site of political resistance in contemporary Nigerian society.
Keywords: *Nigerian Confessional Poetry, Resistance, the Body, Trauma, Postcolonial Theory*

Introduction

Nigerian poetry has historically served as a powerful medium of resistance, responding to colonial domination, political repression, military dictatorship, economic instability, and social injustice. From the early nationalist and modernist interventions of poets such as Wole Soyinka, Christopher Okigbo and J.P. Clark to those of the alternative generation such as Niyi Osundare and Tanure Ojaide, Nigerian poetry has often addressed collective trauma through myth, symbolism, and communal voice. In more recent decades, however, Nigerian poets have increasingly adopted the confessional mode, foregrounding personal experience, memory, and vulnerability. Far from signalling a retreat into private subjectivity, Nigerian confessional poetry represents a strategic reorientation of resistance – one that locates political struggle within the intimate space of the body, family, and psyche.

Confessional poetry, as a literary mode, is commonly associated with mid-twentieth-century American poets such as Robert Lowell, Sylvia Plath, and Anne Sexton. It is characterised by autobiographical candour, emotional intensity, and the articulation of experiences traditionally considered private or taboo, including mental illness, domestic conflict, sexuality, and violence. While critics have often accused confessional poetry of narcissism or excessive individualism, such critiques fail to account for how the mode functions in postcolonial contexts. In Nigeria, confession is not merely self-expression; it is an act of defiance against cultural, political, and historical structures that enforce silence.

Silence occupies a complex role within Nigerian society. It is frequently valorised as a marker of respect, communal harmony, and moral discipline, particularly within patriarchal family structures. Children, women and subordinate subjects are often socialised into silence as a form of obedience. Nigerian confessional poetry resists this logic by insisting on speech where silence is expected. As Michel Foucault argues, power operates through discourse by regulating what can be spoken, who may speak, and under what conditions (Foucault 53). From this perspective, confession becomes a counter-discursive practice – a means of exposing the hidden operations of power within everyday life.

Nigerian confessional poetry transforms the poetic 'I' into a resistant subject who speaks from within systems of domination rather than outside them. The self that emerges in the poems written by these young men and women is often wounded, fragmented, and traumatised, yet it refuses erasure. Sidonie Smith & Julia Watson note that autobiographical and confessional modes function as acts of self-authorisation, particularly for subjects historically denied narrative agency (Smith and Watson 25). In Nigeria, confessional poetry and personal testimony become a form of historical evidence, challenging official narratives that prioritise national progress, masculinity or communal stability over individual suffering.

Postcolonial theory provides a crucial framework for understanding this resistance. Frantz Fanon's work on colonial violence demonstrates how domination extends beyond physical control to shape the psychological and emotional life (Fanon 141). Although Nigeria is formally postcolonial, the lingering effect of colonial governance – bureaucratic violence, economic exploitation, and cultural alienation – continues to structure everyday experience. Nigerian confessional poetry exposes how these macro-histories are lived at the micro-level, particularly within domestic

spaces. Abuse, fear, poverty, and emotional deprivation are revealed not as isolated personal failures but as symptoms of broader structural violence.

Trauma theory further illuminates the aesthetic strategies of Nigerian confessional poetry. Cathy Caruth argues that trauma disrupts linear temporality, returning belatedly and insistently through memory and narrative (Caruth 18). This disruption, as will be shown presently, is evident in the fragmented imagery, abrupt shifts, and nonlinear recollections that characterise many Nigerian confessional poems.

Analysis of Poems

J.K. Anowe has emerged among his contemporaries as the most sustained and rigorous practitioner of confessional poetics in contemporary Nigerian literature. His poems draw deeply from lived experience – youthful precarity, desire, mental strain, and encounters with state power – transforming private pain into public testimony. Rather than confessionalism as mere self-exposure, Anowe's practice functions as a mode of resistance, where the speaking self-confronts capitalism, religious authority, and postcolonial surveillance. In his poem, "Love in the Time of Arrests", Anowe stages intimacy against the intrusive apparatus of state control, dramatising what postcolonial theory identifies as the afterlife of colonial discipline within the modern nation-state. He writes:

> The orderlies come in their tens
> I am just one man –
>
> On poet
>
> honed to one poem
> that is the sentence of my life.
>
> Or where it departs.
>
> 25 with no job prospects
> I lie – palpable.

The speaker's age – "25 with no job prospects" – anchors the poem in postcolonial economic disenfranchisement. This line gestures toward the failures of post-independence governance, where neoliberal capitalism exacerbates youth unemployment and renders young bodies disposable. Scholars like Achille Mbembe argue that such conditions create necropolitical spaces where the state governs not by fostering life but by deciding who may be exposed to death, abandonment, or institutional violence (Mbembe 11-40). The poet's inertia "I lie palpable" suggests both physical vulnerability and political exposure, a body available for discipline.

At the poem's core is a criminalisation of being. The speaker is "Just one man/one poet honed to one poem that is the sentence of my life", collapsing the distinction between artistic expression and juridical punishment. The word 'sentence' functions doubly: as a grammatical unit and a legal penalty. This slippage foregrounds what Frantz Fanon describes as the colonial – and postcolonial – state's tendency to interpret expression from marginalised subjects as threat rather than creativity (Fanon 141). The poet's very existence becomes prosecutable, suggesting that to speak, love or imagine otherwise is already an offence. The next section of the poem goes thus:

> On my mother's couch
>
> The same one we've sat on to blame stuff
> on the government
>
> or rumpled our skins dry – humping on –
> complaining of things we wish didn't exist
> Like capitalism
> Or God, or the hairline between.
>
> & they come – the orderlies, in their tens
> in pressed-out uniforms cassock white.
>
> They come.

The lines above depict a domestic space – the mother's couch – that initially appears as refuge but quickly becomes precarious. The couch carries layers of postcolonial inheritance: it is a site of intergenerational frustration where blame is 'stuff[ed] on the government' and of forbidden

pleasure, where lovers 'rump' their skins in defiance of social and moral surveillance. The mother's couch thus becomes a microcosm of the postcolonial nation: inherited, overburdened, intimate, yet never secure from intrusion.

The lover's complaints – capitalism – or God. Or the "hairline between" – signals a critique of both global economic systems and metaphysical authority, implicating imported ideologies alongside local structures of belief. Capitalism here is not abstract but embodied in joblessness and arrested futures; God represents moral regulation often weaponised by the state to justify repression. The "hairline between" suggests the thin, often indistinguishable boundary between economic and spiritual domination in postcolonial societies.

The arrival of "the orderlies" marks the poem's most significant engagement with state violence. Notably, they are not named as police but as orderlies, a term associated with hospitals and care. This euphemism exposes what Michel Foucault identifies as disciplinary power disguised as benevolence. (Foucault 66) The state presents coercion as treatment, arrest as care. Their "pressed-out uniforms cassock-white" merge religious imagery with institutional authority, recalling how colonial regimes fused church and state to legitimise domination. The whiteness of the cassock evokes both purity and historical colonial whiteness, reinforcing symbolic power even in a postcolonial setting.

Perhaps the poem's most haunting moment is the lovers' preparation for self-harm. The persona writes:

> Because there's nowhere to go.
> We ready our razors, unhinge ourselves
>
> Forearm to wrist –
> The way wind chimes must open
> to catch wind
>
> our pains' lash threshold
> inviting them to enter.

The lovers' act in the above lines can be read not simply as despair but as a radical reclaiming of agency. In a context where the state claims total access to the body, self-wounding becomes a

tragic form of resistance – a refusal to let the state be the sole author of pain. Mbembe's necropolitics is again relevant here; when life is already governed by death, the subject's relationship to self-destruction changes politically (Mbembe 11-40). The simile – "the way wind chimes must open to catch wind" introduces a paradoxical beauty to this violence. It suggests that suffering is rendered meaningful only by exposure, that the body must open – be cut, be broken – to be heard. This metaphor aligns with postcolonial aesthetics that turn wounded bodies into sites of testimony, insisting that pain itself speaks when speech is policed.

Finally, the poem's title "Love in the Time of Arrests" echoes Gabriel Garcia Marquez's "Love in the Time of Cholera", replacing disease with detention. Arrests become the defining condition of the era, a social epidemic that structures intimacy. Love here is not escapist but insurgent: it exists within repression, not beyond it. The poem suggests that loving under such conditions is itself a political act, an insistence on humanity where the state recognises a threat.

Another poet whose poetry operates powerfully within the confessional mode is Romeo Oriogun. This poet uses personal disclosure both as an aesthetic strategy and as resistance, particularly from a queer subject position in a very hostile socio-cultural landscape. His work foregrounds intimate experiences of desire, shame, faith, family and bodily vulnerability, transforming the private life of a queer Nigerian subject into a site of public speaking. In poems such as those in "Sacrament of Bodies", Oriogun confesses not to seek absolution but to expose the violences – religious, familial, and state–sanctioned – that structure queer existence in Nigeria. In one of his poems, "Coming Out", he writes:

> The woman on the bar stool knows your body
> Is a journey into songs,
> The door into a moth flirting with fire
> Which means there's a pretty boy
> Living under your skin.
> I do not wish to come to you
> But I can't help it
> You look drunk like a man
> Seeking a way out of himself
> Or a way into the beginning of his voice.

The title of the poem "Coming Out" is already ironic within the Nigerian context. Unlike Western liberal narratives, where coming out implies self-actualisation, here it signals exposure to violence. The lines above stage confession as something that happens involuntarily – "I do not wish to come to you/but I can't help it" – suggesting that desire exceeds repression even when the cost is death. As Leigh Gilmore argues, confessional speech often occurs under conditions of threat, where telling the truth risks punishment rather than liberation (Gilmore 75). This is especially apt in Nigeria, where queerness is criminalised and publicly vilified. Confession here is not about claiming identity but about bearing witness to danger.

The body in the poem is figured as music, journey, song. This metaphor does crucial political work. In Nigerian society, queer bodies are frequently reduced to 'acts' or 'sins'. By contrast, Oriogun insists on the body as expressive, creative, and sacred. The line "your body knows how to beat a path/through hell and back" reframes queer existence as endurance rather than deviance. Judith Butler's notion of precarious life helps illuminate this: some bodies are more exposed to violence because they are denied social recognisability (Butler 18). The poem makes the queer body visible while simultaneously acknowledging that visibility is unsafe. Confession thus becomes a double bind – necessary for selfhood, dangerous for survival. The poet writes:

> The city knows how to kill a man like you
> and on the face of some men
> I can see you burning.
> Tonight, you take your first step into music
> Saying your body knows how to beat a path
> through hell and back,
> saying angels do not die in song.
> You are daring like a throat accepting the fire
> of tequila. Across you in a dark booth,
> I want to scream silently.
> Do not dance
> do not give in to the wild beat
> flowing through your heart.

"The city knows how to kill a man like you" is one of the poem's most explicit political lines. Violence is not accidental or individual; it is systemic and urban, embedded in social space. This point aligns with Ato Quayson's reading of postcolonial cities as sites where modernity amplifies vulnerability rather than alleviating it (Quayson 17). The speaker's repeated warnings – "Do not dance", "Come into the dark" are not acts of shame but strategies of care. Silence and darkness, often critiqued as repression, are reimagined as protective tactics. bell hooks reminds us that silence can function as survival rather than submission under hostile conditions (hooks 57). Here, withholding confession is itself a form of resistance. The speaker continues:

> But you are dancing like a boy drowning inside
> his blood and all my body
> can do is pray your soul's into a bird's wings
> and hope the wind call you home
> Do you know the first thing about fire?
> Have you seen a mouth calling God
> Only to find a body rising in smoke?
> The city does not want
> to hear your song flowing through a bird,
> they don't want you dancing in the light.

Religious imagery saturates the poem – angels, God, worship, sacrament. But religion is not a refuge; it is a language hijacked by danger. The image of 'a mouth calling God/only to find a body rising in smoke' indicts Nigerian religiosity that condemns queer bodies while claiming moral righteousness. Chukwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi's critique of moral absolution is relevant here: she notes how religious ideology often overrides compassion in favour of social conformity (Ogunyemi 56). Oriogun reclaims worship as embodied love "– let me sing/the night through your body/ like a man learning how to worship God / in a strange land." This is a confession turned into counter-theology. Oriogun's poem exemplifies self-confessional poetry as a form of resistance under duress. It refuses the fantasy that truth is always liberating. Instead, it reveals confession as a dangerous, tender, and necessary act in a society structured to punish difference. By transforming queer desire into song, prayer, and warning, Oriogun's poem insists that speaking – even softly, even from the dark – is itself an act of defiance.

Another poet whose poetry exemplifies confessional writing as both an intimate mode of self-exposure and a radical queer intervention within Nigerian and diasporic literary spaces is Logan February. February is a non-binary poet who has published three poetry chapbooks and a full-length volume of poetry, "In the Nude" (2019). Drawing unapologetically on personal experiences of desire, trauma, faith, exile, and psychic fracture, February turns the lyric 'I' into a site where private pain intersects with structured violence – homophobia, religious orthodoxy, and the afterlives of colonial codes. Their confessional voice is marked by emotional nakedness and stylistic urgency, often collapsing the boundaries between prayer, love poem, and lament, so that queerness is articulated not abstraction but as lived, wounded, and desiring flesh. In their poem, 'Bright Cataclysm', February deepens – and sharpens – the project already underway in Oriogun's "Coming Out", using self-confessional poetics not simply to narrate psychic distress but to contest the conditions that produce and deny it, especially within a Nigerian social order that treats fear, queerness, medication, and vulnerability as moral aberrations rather than lived realities.

From its opening – "my shirt is dancing around my body/ so I think maybe today is the day" – the poem foregrounds the body as a sensitive barometer of crisis. Confession here is incremental, almost hesitant, refusing the dramatic arc often expected of "trauma narratives". The poet writes:

> My shirt is dancing around my body
> so I think may be today is the day
> if I could count the degrees, I would
> but let's just say its been a really hot week.
> a hibiscus wilted & a truck
> flipped over & a humming bird died.
> It was so small, its endless colors pooling
> around its feathers. I was too scared
> to run my pale thumb across its beak.
> I think it's the violence, mostly but also my
> Pills aren't working.

At first glance, the poem appears intimate and diaristic: a body overheated, a mind unravelling, a voice confessing fear. Yet read through a postcolonial lens, the poem reveals how private breakdown is shaped by structural violence. The opening line quoted earlier links bodily discomfort to existential dread. Heat here is not merely meteorological; it evokes infrastructural

failure, climate precarity, and urban exhaustion common in postcolonial spaces where the state is unstable – or unwilling – to provide stable conditions of life. Confessional poetry in this context does not celebrate inferiority; it documents exposure. Leigh Gilmore notes that confessional speech in trauma contexts often functions as survival language, marking the limits of what the self can endure (Gilmore 43). The speaker's uncertainty "If I could count the degrees, I would" signals not confusion but a refusal of the rational metrics through which suffering is often minimised.

The poem's catalogue – a hibiscus wilted & a truck flipped over & a humming died" – collapses scales of disaster. Domestic, infrastructural, and ecological breakdown co-exist without hierarchy. This flattening is a hallmark of postcolonial reality, where catastrophe is not exceptional but ambient. The truck accident evokes failed road infrastructure; the wilted hibiscus suggests environmental stress; the dead humming bird introduces fragility into a landscape of excess heat and violence. This is not a metaphorical stress; it mirrors Nigerian lived experience, where violence, insecurity, police brutality, climate stress, road deaths, and state neglect coexist on the same psychic field. Ato Quayson's notion of postcolonial nervous conditions is useful here; the subject's anxiety is not private pathology but a rational response to systemic precarity (Quayson 65). The speaker's fear – "I think it's the violence, mostly" – is precise, not vague. Confession becomes a way to name causality in a society that prefers to spiritualise or individualise distress. The speaker continues:

> Any good doctor would see me & ask
> If I've heard of euthanasia.
> I imagine I'd run out of his office, naked,
> With my hair troubled. I'm afraid, too, of dying
> The world is ending itself anyway. If I could
> count the time, I'm not sure I would. Just
> look up, watch for the steady strike of lightning.
> It's pretty scary, isn't it? But also, its pretty
> I'm thinking awful things again – rattlesnakes
> coiled around the crackling power lines.
> Hold me, Doctor. Show me mercy.

The line "my pills/aren't working" exposes a fraught relationship with psychiatric care. In Nigeria, mental health infrastructure is limited, stigmatised, and often treated as an important Western

framework unsuited to "African realities". Yet the poem refuses romantic alternatives. Instead, it indicts the failure of care, not the desire for it. The imagined doctor who might suggest euthanasia dramatises an ethical abyss. The persona's wish is not a literal wish for death but a critique of medical systems that manage suffering rather than alleviate its causes. Michel Foucault's argument that modern institutions regulate life by deciding whose pain is tolerable resonates here (Foucault 66). The speaker's fantasy of fleeing the doctor's office naked underscores a refusal to submit fully to institutional authority – even when seeking help.

Fear saturates the poem. The repetition of fear without apology resists Nigerian cultural scripts that equate fearlessness with moral strength, masculinity or faith. The poem's ending – "hold me, Doctor. Show me your mercy" is not submission but a demand. Mercy is trained as relational, not divine or disciplinary. In a society where mercy is often outsourced to religion or postponed to the afterlife, the speaker insists on immediate human care. Ultimately, February's "Bright Cataclysm" exemplifies self-confessional poetry as a mode of resistance against Nigeria's society's regimes of silence, endurance and moralisation. By articulating fear, medication failure, and suicidal ideation without narrative resolution, the poem refuses the social demand that suffering must either be cured, hidden or made inspirational.

The last poet to be studied in this essay is Saddiq Dzukogi, whose poetry also operates within a confessional mode but shaped by Islamic spirituality, ethical introspection, and the pressures of contemporary Nigerian life, especially that of the north. His poetry, as seen particularly in his celebrated work, "Your Crib, My Qibla" (2021), foregrounds the vulnerable self – one that doubts, prays, falters and hopes – using confession not as self-indulgence but as a moral and spiritual reckoning. Drawing on Islamic imagery, ritual, language, and the rhythms of supplication, Dzukogi situates personal experience within a larger metaphysical framework where faith is continually tested by loss, political violence, poverty, and grief. The lyric 'I' in his poems becomes a site of accountability, speaking honestly about fear and inadequacy while seeking divine presence and mercy. "A House that Does Bad Things to Me" is a ferocious example of Dzukogi using the confessional mode as a form of resistance. He writes:

> The universe grinds my body into a white horse,
> Mushrooms down my throat, hands
> heavy on the door, through which
> same world came to me. I am inside

the fire, big as floodwater,
clinging to every part of my bones,
memories set my hair ablaze,
it's Eid, let's sacrifice
this girl's neck, the ram
loses blood to a thirsty government.

From its opening line – "The universe grinds my body into a white horse" – the poem establishes the body as a site of cosmic and political violence. The body is not metaphorically wounded; it is ground down, processed by forces larger than the individual. In postcolonial terms, this grinding evokes the historical machinery of empire and its afterlives – extractive, indifferent, relentless. The body becomes terrain, much like the colonised land itself. Frantz famously describes the colonised body as the first site upon which domination is enacted and naturalised (Fanon 43). The poem extends that logic into the postcolonial present, showing that violence has not ended – it has only changed language.

As a confessional act, the lines above refuse the privacy of pain. The speaker does not say 'I suffer', he says 'the universe does this to me'. confession thus externalises causality, rejecting the moral framework that would individualise or psychologise his suffering.

One of the poem's most searing moments occurs in its use of Islamic sacrificial imagery:

Its Eid, let's sacrifice
this girl's neck, the ram
that loses blood to a thirsty government

Above, religious ritual is exposed as a symbolic cover for state violence. The girl's body replaces the ram, revealing how sacrifice in postcolonial societies often falls on those with the least power – women, the poor, the marginalised. This again recalls Achille Mbembe's theory of necropolitics, referenced earlier in this essay: that modern states tend to assert sovereignty by deciding who may live and who must die, often cloaking this decision in moral and sacred language (Mbembe 11-40). As a confession, the lines above are profoundly heretical. The speaker does not confess sin to religion; he confesses religion's role in sin. In the Nigerian context – where religious authority frequently shields political violence from critique – this is an act of immense resistance. The poem

breaks a powerful silence by naming faith not as a refuge but as a mechanism. The speaker continues:

> The world does bad things to me, a girl –
> my body, a bloody terrorist, ravaged
> by gun-heads and godheads
> I feel the unending opinions of a ghost, I am
> going to write about my mouth,
> the great sorrow it speaks
> in the name of prayers all over, my blood
> is a homage to Allah, the soldiers
> who broke the door, dumped pieces of themselves
> inside a womb, hospital submerged
> in the water of negligence
> what do you want to remember?
> What about the house where you stripped
> me of dignity, a world
> that does bad things to me.

As earlier stated, there is a radical reversal of sacrificial logic in the poem. The girl is both offering and victim; religion becomes a vocabulary through which state violence launders itself. In Nigerian society, particularly in contexts where Islam and Christianity are mobilised as moral authorities, questioning religious ritual is taboo. The persona's confessional speech violates the taboo. Michel Foucault's analysis of confession as a technology of power is inverted; instead of confessing sins to be absolved, the persona confesses what power has done to her (Foucault 51). Her blood becomes "a homage to Allah" – not as devotion, but as a bitter irony. One of the poem's most harmonising passages reads:

> The soldiers
>
> who broke the door, dumped pieces of themselves
> inside a womb.

The line above collapses rape, invasion and occupation into a single act. The house, the body, and the nation are indistinguishable. Nigerian feminist critics have long noted how women's bodies

become collateral terrain in moments of political terrain. Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi argues that African women's suffering is often narrated as incidental to the national struggle rather than central to it (Ogunyemi 226). Dzukogi's poem refuses that marginalisation. The poet adopts the persona of a girl in the poem to make it function as counter-history. The womb remembers what the nation refuses to archive. By placing the female body at the centre of religious ritual, military aggression, and national neglect, Dzukogi exposes how power survives by consuming vulnerable lives.

Conclusion

To sum up, Nigerian confessional poetry reimagines resistance not through grand revolutionary proclamations but through the persistent courage to tell the truth within social conditions that often punish honesty. These poets suggest that the articulation of personal pain—particularly when such pain is shaped by queerness, religious tension, gendered vulnerability, or economic marginalisation—constitutes a deeply political gesture. By reclaiming confession from its historical associations with punishment, religious discipline, and colonial authority, contemporary Nigerian poets transform it into a subversive literary strategy that bears witness, exposes injustice, and insists on survival. In this way, Nigerian confessional poetry emerges as a powerful aesthetic practice that restores voice to silenced experiences, preserves memory, and foregrounds the body as a critical site through which personal testimony becomes an enduring form of political resistance in contemporary Nigerian society.

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An Analysis of Mood Structure in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half Of A Yellow Sun*

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Abstract

This study investigates how mood is deployed in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Half of a Yellow Sun. The study examines the types of mood structures used in the text and explores how mood contributes to unveiling power relations, emotional state and ideological meaning with a view to accounting for the linguistic resources that reflect characters' attitudes, social roles, and psychological states which contribute significantly to the interpersonal metafunction of language in the text. Ten (10) excerpts randomly drawn from the novel were analysed using the lens of Halliday and Matthiessen's (2004) Systemic Functional Grammar framework for analysing mood. The study adopts a qualitative descriptive method. The findings reveal that Adichie deploys the use of declarative, interrogative and imperative mood, and in the text, mood is highly context-based. In domestic settings, mood choices function as instruments for shaping hierarchy, intellect, and identity negotiation among characters. In military and political contexts, mood becomes a vehicle of ideology, propaganda, and institutional authority. Overall, Adichie shapes interpersonal dynamics and projects ideological positions in the narrative. The study concludes that mood serves as a linguistic resource through which this construction of power and authority during the Biafran struggle is demonstrated in the text. This study contributes to the growing field of literary linguistics by offering a detailed, functional analysis of how mood encodes interpersonal meanings in an African literary context.
Keywords: *Mood structure, Half of a Yellow Sun, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Civil War Literature*

Introduction

Literary works are not produced in a vacuum. At the centre of social depiction in texts is the use of language (Bamgbose and Ohwojevwe, 2018; Timehin, 2024). Language functions not merely as a means of communication but also as a crucial instrument for shaping human experience, identity, and ideology. Eggins (1994), as cited by Robert (2020), emphasises that language is

inherently functional, with its use oriented towards meaning-making that is contextually bound by social and cultural factors. This functional perspective highlights the significance of choice in the construction of meaning. Similarly, Herbele (2000) underscores that systemic functional linguistics (SFL) examines language within specific cultural and situational contexts, focusing on variables such as the participants involved, the communicative setting, and the medium employed. Within literary discourse, these contextual dynamics become particularly salient, as authors purposefully employ linguistic resources, especially mood, to construct and reflect characters' attitudes, social relationships, and psychological states. This linguistic choice is central to the interpersonal metafunction of language, as articulated by Halliday and Matthiessen (2014), which encapsulates the roles and relationships between interlocutors and the nature of the message exchanged. Olurotimi (2022) has submitted that meaning hardly makes sense outside the context of communication.

This is evident *in Half of a Yellow Sun* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, a novel marked by rich dialogue and emotionally charged interactions within the context of the Nigerian-Biafran war making it suitable for examining how mood choices reveal characters' attitudes, power relations, and psychological states. Every text is a creative product of a writer's effort aimed at expressing a line of thought, revealing the events or experiences of what happens or had happened around him or her (Bamgbose and Gabriel 2017). *Half of a Yellow Sun* recounts the reality of the Nigerian Civil War from Adichie's authorial perspective.

Mood, as a central component of the interpersonal metafunction, plays a significant role in expressing the speaker's stance, intention, and level of engagement with the listener. It serves as a linguistic mechanism through which interpersonal relationships are negotiated and meaning is constructed in interaction. Osisanwo (2004) examines how the presence or absence of the Subject element in a clause influences the classification of clause types, particularly within the structural framework of English grammar. This structural variation directly impacts the realisation of speech functions. Halliday and Matthiessen (2004) define mood in terms of grammatical configurations that correspond to specific speech functions, namely, declaratives (used to make statements), interrogatives (used to ask questions) and imperatives (used to issue commands). These mood types determine the nature of speech roles, especially whether the speaker is giving or demanding either information or goods and services. From a complementary perspective, Palmer (2001) offers a nuanced definition of mood, viewing it as a grammatical category that encodes the speaker's

attitude toward the proposition expressed in a sentence. He conceptualises mood as "grammaticalised modality," thereby highlighting its role in systematically embedding speaker stance within grammatical structures. Greenbaum and Nelson (2002), as cited in Adejare (2014), affirm that mood is expressed through verb forms and reflects the speaker's attitude toward the proposition. This view aligns with the broader systemic functional perspective that sees mood as central to the interpersonal metafunction of language, particularly in shaping interaction and expressing speaker stance. Hence, mood is pivotal in enacting social interaction because it allows speakers to adopt and assign speech roles such as giver or demander and thereby shape the interpersonal dynamics of discourse. Structurally, mood is realized through the interaction of the Subject and Finite elements, which together form what Halliday (1994) captures as the Mood element whereas Eggins (2004), and Opara (2005, cited in Nwabueze, 2018) refer to as Mood block, while the remainder of the clause constitutes the Residue. This Mood–Residue configuration is essential for identifying clause types and interpreting how interpersonal meanings are grammatically encoded. As such, mood is not merely a formal grammatical feature but a dynamic system of choices through which speakers adopt and assign roles, negotiate authority, and shape interactional meaning. Within the realm of literary discourse, mood serves as powerful linguistic tools that enable writers to construct layered meanings and to convey characters' psychological orientations, social relationships, and degrees of power or vulnerability. Through strategic deployment of mood types, authors are able to encode not only what is said but also how it is said, thereby enriching narrative texture and character development. In *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006), Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie demonstrates a sophisticated command of this linguistic resource. She skillfully employs mood to portray the emotional complexity and evolving interpersonal dynamics among her characters, set against the backdrop of the Nigerian-Biafran War. Adichie's use of this feature reveals how deeply intertwined language is with identity, resistance, and the socio-political realities her characters navigate. Therefore, mood not only functions as a grammatical element but also serves as key narrative strategy for articulating nuanced dimensions of human experience in conflict ridden contexts. For this reason, the present study adopts the mood system as a key analytical tool for examining how Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* contributes to the construction of interpersonal relationships, the expression and contestation of authority, the negotiation of social and personal roles, and the portrayal of internal conflicts among characters. Such an approach demonstrates how language, operating within

Halliday's interpersonal metafunction, is used not only as a vehicle for narrative progression but also as a subtle means of shaping interpersonal meanings, reflecting ideological positions, and capturing the emotional complexity of human experience in a war-torn context.

Despite extensive scholarship on *Half of a Yellow Sun,* most studies emphasize its historical representation (Akpome, 2013), politeness phenomenon (Obasi & Okoro, 2022), feminist lenses (Feghabo, 2022; Bamgbose and Akhaiyea, 2026), perspective of war (Jacob and Uzomah,2022) pervasive corruption and postcolonial themes, Ordu and Odukwu, 2022), with limited attention to the linguistic construction of interpersonal meaning. Notably, there is a gap in systematic application of Halliday's mood system to analyse how relationships, power, and emotions are encoded in Half of a Yellow Sun. This gap calls for a linguistically grounded approach that moves beyond thematic interpretation. Given the novel's dialogic nature and focus on conflict and identity, mood analysis provides an effective framework for examining how interpersonal relationships are negotiated. This study therefore applies the mood system within Halliday's interpersonal metafunction to show how language functions as a strategic resource for expressing social roles, power relations, and psychological tension.

Literature Review

The concept of mood has attracted considerable scholarly attention in linguistic and literary discourse, particularly for its role in encoding interpersonal meanings. Okafor & Issife (2017) explore a functionally oriented stylistic analysis of President Buhari's inaugural speech. By quantifying mood and modality and linking them to discourse purposes, information sharing, promise delegation, national unity, they underscore how linguistic form reflects leadership stance and rhetorical strategy in political contexts. With a declarative mood rate of 97%, imperatives account for only 2.54%, and there are no interrogatives or modulated interrogatives found in the speech, this reveals an informational tone with minimal direct exhortation. . The minimal imperative use (<3%) and absence of interrogatives signal distance from participatory discourse, affirming the speech's top–down orientation. In both studies, mood is central to revealing speakers' psychology and purpose. Nevertheless, Okafor & Issife (2017) analyse a formal political speech, a real-life communicative act intended for national/international audiences. Whereas this present study deals with a fictional narrative genre with imagined interactions, which allows for more emotive, psychological, and nuanced uses of mood. Okafor & Issife (2017) demonstrate how these linguistic elements operate in the context of political discourse using Halliday's

interpersonal metafunction as a key framework. The present study builds upon these earlier works by applying Halliday's interpersonal metafunction framework to literary narrative, offering a more nuanced interpretation of how mood reflects ideological tension and emotional depth in Half of a Yellow Sun. This positions the study as a meaningful contribution to the growing intersection of linguistics and literature.

Likewise, mood functions as an essential linguistic tool for constructing interpersonal meanings, revealing characters' psychological states, social relationships, and ideological positions. Scholars like Nweke 2024 and Madu et al 2022, investigate mood system within literary texts, emphasizing their significance in shaping thematic development and narrative voice. To start with, Nweke (2024) investigates how language, particularly through the Mood system is used to construct conflict, power relations, and emotional distance in marital discourse within selected Nigerian dramatic texts. Drawing on Halliday's interpersonal metafunction, the study shows how Nweke grammatical choices reflect interpersonal tensions in conversations between spouses. The findings show that mood choices in conflictual discourse are not neutral but rather serve as strategies of assertion, control, or negotiation. For example, male characters often deploy imperatives and declaratives to impose authority or assert traditional gender dominance, while female characters respond through interrogatives and counter-declaratives, reflecting resistance or negotiation. The key differences between the two studies lie in their scope of thematic focus. While Nweke's study centers on gender and marital conflict within the context of drama, the present study explores socio-political conflict and identity construction in a novelistic narrative. In the same vein, Madu et'al's (2022) study is grounded in Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG), using its ideational metafunction (transitivity system) and interpersonal metafunction (mood system) in two texts. The authors find that both novelists deploy appropriate actors, processes, and goal participants in transitivity structures that vividly portray societal issues. In *Waiting for an Angel*, processes foreground exploitation and corrupt governance; in *Forlorn Fate,* they depict environmental devastation and socioeconomic decline. They show that the declarative mood dominates, supporting a descriptive, testimonial style. Mood choices support character positioning and ideological viewpoints, reinforcing themes such as voicing the oppressed or exposing injustice. Their study and the present study contribute meaningfully to literary linguistics; however, the present research only accounts for mood in Chimamanda Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun.*

Since its publication, *Half of a Yellow Sun* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie has attracted extensive scholarly attention across multiple disciplines. Ordu and Odukwu (2022) explore the pervasive theme of corruption as represented in *Half of a Yellow Sun,* foregrounding how Adichie critiques institutional and individual moral decay within the narrative of the Nigerian-Biafran War. In terms of findings, Ordu and Odukwu reveal that Half of a Yellow Sun presents corruption in multiple dimensions: political, educational, military, and personal. The authors opine that Adichie portrays these acts of corruption not in isolation but as interconnected practices that degrade the moral fabric of society. Both studies analyse *Half of a Yellow Sun* and explore power and ideology, but while Ordu and Odukwu (2022) focus on corruption through a postcolonial thematic lens, the present study examines how power, attitude, and interpersonal meanings are linguistically constructed using Halliday's SFG. Conversely, Feghabo (2022) emphasises the valorisation of womanhood and the definition of female identity in Nigeria. Feghabo (2022) examines how *Half of a Yellow Sun* celebrates womanhood within the contexts of war, family, and national identity. His findings reveal that Adichie places women, particularly Olanna and Kainene, at the center of both domestic and national struggles, portraying them as emotionally resilient and intellectually strong. Rather than idealising them, Adichie presents complex female characters who balance vulnerability with strength. The study concludes that the novel valorises African womanhood, challenges stereotypical representations, and affirms women's vital role in social and national reconstruction. Both studies present Adichie's feminism as constructive and historically grounded. In contrast, the current study adopts a linguistic perspective, employing Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar to explore how mood encode interpersonal meanings. Despite their differing methodologies, all three studies highlight Adichie's engagement with power, agency, and socio-political critique.

The body of scholarly work on Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* reflects the novel's rich thematic complexity and its relevance to discourses on war, identity, gender, politics, and language. However, despite the breadth of these contributions, there remains a significant gap in understanding how language in *Half of a Yellow Sun* functions as a resource for enacting interpersonal meaning and negotiating power. This study addresses that gap by applying Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar specifically the interpersonal metafunction on mood, to examine how mood operates in the novel. In doing so, it offers a linguistically grounded perspective on how

Adichie's characters use language to perform social roles and express ideological positions within the socio-political context of war and identity.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework adopted for this investigation is Halliday and Matthiessen's (2014) Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) on the interpersonal function of language, precisely the mood aspect. In SFL, the concept of mood is central to the interpersonal metafunction, which focuses on how language is deployed to enact social relationships, express attitudes, and negotiate roles between participants in a communicative event. Halliday and Matthiessen (2014) emphasise that the interpersonal metafunction enables speakers and listeners to use language as a resource for giving or demanding a commodity, whether that commodity is information or goods and services. This orientation places mood at the very heart of interactive discourse, since it provides the grammatical foundation through which speech roles are established and exchanges are negotiated. Halliday and Matthiessen (2014) define mood as agrammatical configurations that correspond to specific speech functions through giving and demanding information, giving and demanding goods and services. This definition highlights the fact that mood is not simply a syntactic arrangement of words, but a grammatical configuration that reflects the speaker's intended speech function, realised through systematic choices in clause structure. These choices are

Motivated by tenor, the relationship between participants, and reflect how language functions as a resource for making meaning rather than as a static set of syntactic rules. Halliday and Matthiessen (2014) identify several major clause types based on mood: declarative, interrogative, imperative, and exclamative, each associated with particular speech roles and functions. Declarative clauses are typically used to make statements and are structured by the sequence Subject + Finite. For instance, the girl has carried the load to the room. Interrogative clauses, on the other hand, are used to ask questions and may be subdivided into yes/no interrogatives (e.g., Have you eaten?) and WH interrogatives (e.g., Who took the book?). Their structure typically involves either Subject–Finite inversion or the presence of a WH-element. Halliday and Matthiessen (2014) further categorise declaratives and interrogatives as clauses of exchange, since they involve the giving and demanding of information. Exclamative clauses, such as What a good boy you are!, share structural similarities with WH-interrogatives but are distinguished by their expressive and affective functions. Imperative clauses are used to issue commands, requests, or offers. They often omit the Subject or include it as a vocative or implicit pronoun (e.g., Go out of the class!). The verbal group

in imperative clauses typically appears in the base form, uninflected for tense, while the Subject if expressed, is usually you, me, or us (e.g., Let's go). Halliday and Matthiessen (2014) observe that the imperative mood is primarily associated with the exchange of goods and services, and therefore operates with a distinct system of person. Examples include: Go out of the class! (Command) Please, pass the cup on the table. (Request) Shall I carry your bag for you? (Offer) In each of these cases, the speaker adopts a speech role that requires a complementary role from the addressee, thereby facilitating a negotiated interaction. Beyond clause type, mood also reflects the speaker's stance or attitude toward the proposition. Palmer (2001) defines mood as a grammatical category that expresses the speaker's attitude toward the likelihood, necessity, or desirability of the proposition. Following Palmer, Osisanwo (2004), classifies mood into two broad categories: the indicative mood, which conveys factual statements or beliefs, and the imperative mood, which is employed for issuing commands, offers, or requests.

Overall, the theory guides the analysis by segmenting excerpts from Half of a Yellow Sun into clauses and identifying their Mood structure (Subject and Finite). It also provides the basis for interpreting how mood choices encode speech roles, power relations, and characters' attitudes in the text.

Methodology

The data for this study consists of ten (10) excerpts selected from *Half of a Yellow Sun* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. The novel was divided into its four structural parts, from which excerpts were randomly sampled to ensure representativeness across different stages of the narrative. The choice of ten excerpts is considered adequate for this study, as it adopts a qualitative descriptive approach that prioritizes in-depth linguistic analysis over large data quantity. The selected excerpts are sufficiently rich in dialogue and narrative interaction to reveal patterns in the use of mood for interpersonal meaning. The study employs a qualitative descriptive research design, grounded in Halliday and Matthiessen's (2014) Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG), with particular focus on the interpersonal metafunction and the mood system. The data are primary, as they are drawn directly from the novel. The selected excerpts were segmented into clauses classified into declarative, interrogative, exclamative and imperative types based on their structural patterns. Finally, the mood types were interpreted in terms of their interpersonal functions.

Data Analysis

The analysis highlights how characters express attitudes and negotiate relationships through mood choices. Through a close analysis of selected excerpts, the study uncovers how linguistic choices such as mood, through its types, contribute to the novel's thematic depth, character development, emotional resonance and evolving interpersonal dynamics among her characters, set against the backdrop of the Nigerian-Biafra war. The following Excerpts from Chimamanda Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* exemplified the mood types.

Declarative

Declarative is the category of clause that expresses statements that give information and is realised by subject followed by finite.

Excerpt 1

Olanna: "Your mother made a scene."

Odenigbo: "You're angry" "Nkem, I didn't know you'd take this so seriously. You can see that my mother doesn't know what she's doing. She's just a village woman."

Olanna: "You never talk about your mother; you've never asked me to come to Abba with you to visit her."

Odenigbo: "Oh, stop it, Nkem. It's not as if I go that often to see her and I did ask you the last time but you were going to Lagos." (pg 130)

Interrogative

Interrogative clauses are used to ask questions. Interrogative clauses are subdivided into yes/no interrogatives (polar questions) and WH-interrogatives. Their structure typically involves either Subject–Finite inversion or the presence of a WH-element. Chimamanda Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* contains interrogative clauses that explore tension as depicted below.

Excerpt 2

Nigerian officer: "Why do you still have Biafran number plates? Are you a supporter of the defeated rebels?" (pg 500)

Imperative

Imperative clauses are used to issue commands, requests, or offers. They often omit the Subject or include it as a vocative or implicit pronoun. The excerpt below justified this.

Excerpt 3

Mohammed: "Stay here" Muhammed said, as he stopped the car outside Uncle Mbaezi's compound." (pg 183)

Mohammed pushed her (Olanna) into the car and then went around and got in *"*Keep your head down!"

Mohammed said,"Don't raise your face*!"* (pg 184)

Analysis

Excerpts 1 to 3 examine discourses on tension from the text. In *Half of a Yellow Sun,* Chimamanda Adichie masterfully crafts discourses of tension through the interplay of emotional states, narrative shifts and the backdrop of the Nigerian Biafra War. Chimamanda uses subtle hints and ominous events to build tension, depicting the impending doom of the war. In excerpt 1, all the seven mood clauses in the dialogue between Olanna and Odenigbo are declaratives conveying feelings of unease, caused by Mama (Odenigbo's mother). In Olanna's utterances, the Mood elements consist of the Subject "Your mother" and the Finite "made," "You + do" (implicit Finite) and "you + have," respectively, forming declarative clauses that serve as an accusation, criticism and complaint. Similarly, Odenigbo's responses contain the Subjects "You, I, you, my mother, she, and Finite "are, did, would, can, is" accordingly. They are statements that give information about the speakers' emotional stance, generating discourses on tension. The clause 'Your mother made a scene' is a declarative but interpersonally an indirect accusation whose tone implies Olanna's hurt. The calm form hides emotional strain, which intensifies mood tension. Again, the clause "You never talk about your mother." "You've never asked me to come to Abba with you" are declaratives that expresses emotional exclusion. The repetition of 'never' reinforces grievance and disappointment. Olanna's use of declarative statements shows controlled anger. Her assertive propositions indicate a mood choice that reflects contained emotion, which heightens the tension. For Odenigbo, the clause "You're angry" is a statement that functions as an observation. "I didn't know you'd take this so seriously." / "You can see that my mother doesn't know what she's doing." / "She's just a village woman." These are defensive declaratives. Odenigbo uses these statements to justify rather than empathise with Olanna, subtly invalidating her feelings. This exchange exemplifies mood of tension through declarative conflict. Both characters use declarative clauses, not confrontation, but their declaratives function as emotional weapons, revealing a symmetrical

relationship of equal power through a rational, intellectual exchange between lovers. Both Olanna and Odenigbo speak in statements;

The declarative mood becomes a vehicle of emotional conflict, revealing the fragility beneath their intellectualised love.

However, in excerpt 2, the mood types of the two clauses are interrogative, and the function is demanding information while challenging Odenigbo. In the Nigerian officer's speech, the Mood element consists of the Subject "you" and the Finite "do," with the WH-element "Why" preceding the Finite, marking it as a WH-interrogative. Again, in the second clause, the Mood element is composed of the Subject "you" and the Finite "are," The Finite "are" precedes the Subject "you," indicating Subject–Finite inversion typical of yes/no interrogatives. The Nigerian officer's use of interrogative mood shows power assertion that creates intense political tension. The use of "Why" implies fault-finding, and the label "defeated rebels" carries derogatory and politically charged meanings, heightening the emotional and ideological tension. The officer's tone is confrontational and authoritative, thereby generating anxiety in the listeners. Hence, the power relation between the Nigerian officer and Odenigbo is asymmetrical; the officer is in control. Through these interrogative clauses, Chimamanda portrays how language becomes a tool for dominance and humiliation, reflecting the imbalance of power between victors and vanquished. Excerpt 3 carries imperative clauses that illustrate protective situational control that enacts temporary power asymmetry. Mohammed's commands signal a protective directive to ensure Olanna's safety. His action of pushing her into the car depicts urgency and protection; however, it suppresses Olanna's agency, making her a passive recipient of commands. Mohammed's negative imperative 'don't raise your face " serves as a command as well as a prohibition, portraying a stronger warning that forbids an action that could expose her to danger, which generates more tension. The interpersonal function is temporarily asymmetrical. Mohammed's dominance emerges from a desire to protect Olanna rather than to control her socially. Olanna's silence and passivity reflect shock and compliance, portraying her as traumatised and dependent. Chimamanda demonstrates how imperatives express authority, urgency, and protection under tense circumstances.

Declarative

Excerpt 4

Chief Okonji: "Look, you don't have to work at the ministry. I can appoint you to a board, any board you want, and I will furnish a flat for you wherever you want" (pg 48)

Chief Okonji "I love you, believe me. I really love you." (pg 49)

Interrogative

Excerpt 5

Ojukwu: "What shall we do? Shall we keep silent and let them force us back into Nigeria? Shall we ignore the thousands of our brothers and sisters killed in the North?" Are you prepared? Are you prepared?" (pg 211)

Imperative

Excerpt 6

Crowd:" Ojukwu, nyeanyiegbe! Give us gun! Iwe di anyi n' obi! There is anger in our hearts! Ojukwu, give us guns! Ojukwu, nyeanyiegbe!". (pg 211)

Analysis

Furthermore, excerpts 4 to 6 portray discourses on persuasion and reassurance in the text. Linguistically, persuasion and reassurance often manifest through declaratives, interrogatives, and imperatives. In *Half of a Yellow Sun*, Chimamanda uses the interplay of mood, persuasion, and reassurance to capture the emotional and political tensions of the Biafra War. Through her characters' speech and thoughts, she explores how language functions both as a tool of power and a means of comfort. She uses the interpersonal metafunction of language to reveal how her characters navigate authority, belief, love, and fear. Again, how they persuade, console, and reassure one another while confronting loss and chaos is illustrated by these excerpts. The mood type in excerpt 4, Chief Okonji's speech, is declarative. In "you don't have to work at the ministry, "the Subject you and Finite do (realised as "don't") form the Mood element (you+do) that offers reassurance. The statement is giving information and making offers. Chief Okonji uses inducement in an attempt to persuade Olanna. The subject finite structure "I can appoint...", "I will furnish..." are declarative clauses that indicate ability and power to provide opportunities and certainty that gives reassurance, respectively. The modal verbs "can" and "will" function persuasively; they tempt Olanna by offering material benefits and comfort, in the second speech ", I love you." Believe me, I really love you.". the Subject "I" combines with an implicit Finite "do" to form (I + do), indicating declaratives that express emotional persuasion. "Believe me" functions persuasively, urging emotional acceptance.

Chimamanda uses declarative mood as a reassuring persuasion to reveal social power through the character of Chief Okonji. In contrast, the four clauses in excerpt 5, Ojukwu's speech, are interrogatives. His rhetorical questions are not just requests for information, instead, they are persuasive appeals used to stir emotion and evoke moral reasoning. The Subject "we" and Finite "shall" form the Mood element (we + shall), marking a WH-interrogative that demands reasoning. The subject -finite inversion "shall we" and "are you" form the Mood elements (we + shall) and (you + are), function as yes/no interrogativs. Ojukwu uses the repeated Interrogatives "Shall we…?" to emotionally persuade the crowd to resist oppression. His interrogative clauses reflect powerful persuasion. Similarly, Ojukwu repeated the interrogative "Are you prepared?" functions as persuasion. He challenges the crowd to internalise responsibility and provokes a call for action. Adichie uses language to dramatize the power of leadership and conviction during the Biafra struggle. Next, the dominant type of mood in excerpt 6, the speech of the crowd is imperative. The implicit subject (you) and the Finite (give) form (you+give). The imperative chant from the crowd, "Give us guns!", functions as a demand for weapons and an expression of urgency, desperation, and persuasion. The crowd's language is persuading Ojukwu by emotional pressure and collective unity, appealing to his leadership response. The declarative "There is anger in our hearts!" is informative. It gives justification for their demand through emotional reasoning. In Chimamanda Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun,* she uses this scene to reflect the voice of the masses in the Biafran struggle. The crowd demonstrates collective emotional power, showing agency rather than passivity.

Declarative

Excerpt 7

Nnaemeka's father: "We waited for him to return from the North and he did not return, so we had a funeral. We buried an empty coffin." (pg 204)

Excerpt 8

Narrator: "It was Okeoma's appearance, back at the home, that brought Ugwu out of his imagined world. Okeoma looked nothing like Ugwu remembered: the untidy hair and rumpled shirt of the poet were gone. His smart- fitting army uniform made him look straighter, leaner and
the sleeve had a skull-and- bone image next to the half of a yellow sun.... Ugwu wanted to hug him too, because Okeoma's laughing face brought back the past with such force that for a moment,

Ugwu felt as if the room blurred with the rain-holder's smoke was the living room on Odim Street." (pg 247).

Interrogative

Excerpt 9

Richard: "Can I have some of Kainene's photographs? The album on the shelf in the study?" (pg 512)

Excerpt 10

Olanna: "Why don't we talk any more, Kainene?" "I just want to know why we don't talk anymore." (pg 136)

Analysis

In addition, excerpts 7 to 10 reflect discourses on melancholy and nostalgia. In *Half of a Yellow Sun,* Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie constructs a pervasive mood of melancholy and nostalgia that mostly depicts the psychological and emotional aftermath of war, loss, and disillusionment. The melancholy and nostalgia in the text are both personal and collective as portrayed through characters like Olanna, Kainene, Richard, and Nnemeka's father. These excerpts justified discourses on melancholy and nostalgia. In excerpt 7, there are four declarative clauses from Nnaemeka's father's speech, each with a subject and finite structure. The Subject "we" and Finite "did" (past tense realised in "waited") form the Mood element (we + did). In "he did not return," the Subject "he" and Finite "did" (realised as negative "did not") form (he + did). Similarly, in "we had a funeral," the Subject "we" and Finite "did" (past tense in "had") form (we + did), while in "We buried an empty coffin," the Subject "we" and Finite "did" (past tense in "buried") form (we + did). The function is to give information about the tragic event of Nnaemaka's death. His father's statements convey a sequence of grief, loss, unfulfilled hope and resignation, which intensifies the melancholy. Chimamanda uses the repetition of "we" which represents collective community grief, to reveal how language enacts social relationships and "empty coffin" deploys the finality of their resignation, thus, heightens the melancholy. She also uses his statements to reflect the pain of absence and the unfulfilled expectation of the return of loved ones in a chaos situation like the

Biafra War, which resulted in powerlessness, replacing the authority of a father's voice with the quiet dignity of sorrow.

In furtherance, the three clauses in excerpt 8 are declaratives with Mood elements consistently realised through Subject–Finite structures. They give information that express inner emotion. Through the narrating voice, the clause "Okeoma looked nothing like Ugwu remembered." The Subject "Okeoma" and Finite "did" (in "looked") form (Okeoma + did), while "Ugwu remembered" contains (Ugwu + did) showcase Ugwu's nostalgic feeling manifested through the contrast between past and present Okeoma. In the clause "Ugwu wanted to hug him", the Subject "Ugwu" and Finite "did" (in "wanted") form (Ugwu + did), and "wanted" expresses a longing for lost intimacy in Ugwu's heart. Lastly, Okeoma's laughter brought back past social memories that made Ugwu reminisce their living room at Odim5 Street, Nsukka. All these reminiscences are the basis for a nostalgic mood. Chimamanda Adichie illustrates how the war has transformed individuals and ideals. Okeoma, a poet, has become a soldier, technically from intellectuals into instruments of war. Conversely, for excerpt 9, the clause is in interrogative mood. The speech function is a request. It carries emotional and interpersonal meanings that reflect melancholy and loss. The question "Can I have some of Kainene's photographs? contains the Subject "I" and Finite "can" form the Mood element (I + can), with Finite preceding the Subject, marking a yes/no interrogative which indicates Richard seeking permission to keep memories of Kainene. The question is filled with grief and emotional paralysis. Chimamanda through Richard's speech reflects emotional emptiness following the disappearance of characters during the Biafran War. Likewise, in excerpt 10, the clause is interrogative. The Subject "we" and Finite "do" (realised in the negative form "don't") form the Mood element (we + do), with the WH-element "Why" marking it as a WH-interrogative. The clause is not only seeking information but is also emotionally charged, expressing nostalgia and a longing for reconnection. Olanna expresses yearning for the lost sisterly bond with Kainene. Chimamanda portrays nostalgia as an emotional negotiation of reconciliation and love in fractured human relationships.

Analysis and Discussion

Findings from this study reveal that mood in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* is highly context based and functions as a key resource for enacting interpersonal meanings. In domestic settings, language functions as an instrument for shaping hierarchy, intellect, and identity negotiation. Odenigbo's declarative assertion that his mother "does not know what she is doing" demonstrates the use of mood to encode emotional authority and dominance over Olanna positioning himself as a moral and intellectual superior. In contrast, Ugwu's responses, often

realised through compliant declaratives and minimal interrogatives, reflect submission and gradual socialization into elite discourse. This aligns with Haliday's view that mood choices encode role relation, here marking unequal power distribution and class distinction within the household. Findings also reveal that within family interactions, mood operates as a tool for enacting social bonding, reprimand and familiarity. Exchanges among Olanna, Kainene, and Aunty Ifeka demonstrate how conversational questioning creates interpersonal closeness, guidance, and shared emotional space. Next, in intimate and emotional contexts, the finding shows that mood expresses emotional conviction, comfort and personal agency. Odenigbo's reassurance to Olanna, "You are safe now", illustrates the interpersonal function of declarative mood as an act of giving emotional support, reinforcing Halliday's notion that language enact social relationships, thereby restoring psychological stability and reaffirm trust. Similarly, Olanna's assertive declaratives signal independence and agency, demonstrating how mood choices can reflect shifts in interpersonal roles, particularly in the construction of female autonomy and self-definition.

Furthermore, in intimate interactions, mood expresses protective authority and emotional urgency rather than domination. Mohammed's imperative speeches convey protective authority and emotional urgency rather than domination, underscoring the context sensitive realization of interpersonal meanings. In contrast, in military and political contexts, mood becomes a vehicle of ideology, coercion, intimidation, and institutional authority. Interrogatives and imperatives are deployed to intimidate and enforce compliance, reflecting the asymmetrical power relations and aligning with Halliday's perspective of mood as a carrier of role relations. Finally, in wartime context, declaratives convey grief, fear, identity preservation and loss of agency illustrating how language reflects disrupted interpersonal relations under condition of trauma. Statements made Characters like Nnemeka's father reflect quiet sorrow and emotional paralysis amid war's devastation.

Conclusion

This research contributes to the growing field of literary linguistics by investigating how mood encodes interpersonal meanings in an African literary context. It depicts how Adichie uses subtle grammatical features to reflect psychological tension, power negotiations, and ideological conflict among characters in *Half of a Yellow Sun*. In addition, the study develops a replicable analytical framework for examining interpersonal meaning in postcolonial narratives, highlighting the role of language in shaping character relationships and ideological perspective. Hence, the research

contributes to existing knowledge by deepening the application of Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar to African literary texts through the analysis of mood operation in *Half of a Yellow Sun.*

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Ethical Healthcare Policies in Ladipo Akinkugbe's *Footprints and Footnotes*

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Abstract

Footprints and Footnotes chronicles the life experiences of Ladipo Akinkugbe, an Emeritus Professor of Medicine, highlighting his dual contributions to medicine and education. This study examines the ethical and humanistic dimensions of medical practice through a literary lens, using non-fictional narratives grounded in personal experience and historical context. This research identifies the inadequate diffusion of medical resources and health policies as contributing to public unawareness of the impact of medical errors. It critiques the perception of medical caregiving as a favour rather than a duty, leading to systemic issues and medical errors affecting lives. This study advocates for a society that fosters healthy living and ethical policies as a fundamental right. Acknowledging the core principles of healthcare ethics, the research adopts Bankowski's Medical Ethics and Lejeune's Autobiographical Pact as a theoretical framework on the literariness of the autobiography and the physician's moral responsibilities, encompassing advocacy, technical expertise, citizenship, moral agency, and policy implementation. Overall, the study highlights the intersection of literature and medicine in advocating for holistic healthcare ethics and policies that promote societal well-being.

***Keywords**: Ethics, Ladipo Akinkugbe, Healthcare, Societal well-being*

Introduction

There is no gainsaying the fact that patients require more healing than fixing the biological body. Moreso, while technical skills are requisite in the professionalism of a doctor, certain codes, rules and ethics determine the regulation of a physician's practice, which ensures the safety of the patient. As Piemonte (2017) asserts, medicine is laden with existential questions that border on the meaning of life and death; ultimately, the human being is the one whom medicine serves. Given this, without people in need, medicine and healthcare would cease to exist. This aligns with the Hippocratic Oath, an official document that outlines the ethics of medicine as established by Hippocrates, the Greek physician and father of medicine (Omobowale, 2003; Kekeghe, 2022). Highlighting that human beings are the overall essence of medical practise, ethical principles become paramount and essential for a successful humanistic approach. Medical ethics are values and moral practices that govern the medical profession. They include beneficence, non-maleficence, patient autonomy, and justice (Beauchamp, 2013; Berdine, 2015). Omobowale (2006) analyses the impact of literature in promoting ethical standards that guide the professional

conduct of healthcare providers in medical practice. Using stories and narratives, he offers insights into the moral complexities of illness, care, and healing, which help practitioners develop empathy, integrity, and a deeper sense of responsibility, thereby upholding humane and patient-centred care. Here, narratives are more than just scribbled words; they serve as explicit and compelling vehicles through which meanings are attributed to experiences, allowing individuals to vicariously partake in the experiences of others. The enduring impact of encounters or experiences lingers within an individual's psyche until it is articulated in written or spoken form. These experiences transform into a repository of knowledge when recounted, as reflected in the prevalent Yoruba adage affirming that 'there is nothing new under the sun, underscoring the relatability of shared human experiences (Singer & Bluck, 2001; Ntinda, 2020). In this context, narratives articulate coherent, cohesive ideas deemed significant enough to warrant repeated expression.

Lejeune (1989) defines autobiography as “a retrospective prose narrative written by a real person concerning his or her own existence, focusing on his individual life and in particular on the development of his personality”. This underscores the reliability and verifiability of the autobiography as a genre in literature. Initially associated with public figures, autobiographical writings have evolved to include memoirs, historical accounts, and eyewitness narratives. This expansion emphasises the public significance of the author's account rather than the prominence of the author or writer. Notably, the genre has expanded to encompass medical narratives, in which physicians, patients, and caregivers share experiences that are profoundly important in medical practice and training. Non-fictional narratives such as Ulla-Carin Lindquist's "*Rowing Without Oars*" (2004) and Paul Kalanithi's "*When Breath Becomes Air*" (2016) provide insights into patients' struggles and physicians' experiences. These narratives contribute to medical education, offering valuable perspectives on ethical dilemmas and conflicts encountered in the field. Medical doctors' autobiographies further shed light on the challenges and experiences within the discipline. Scholarly works such as McLellan (1996), Jon (2001), Omobowale (2003), Kekeghe (2018), amongst many others have played significant roles and posited veritable and viable positions around the discourse of medical representations in literature such as the representation of physical and mental health conditions by writers in their fictional narratives, patient writers' portrayal of disease and psychological trauma and the psychiatric conditions in selected Nigerian literary texts, and ethical issues of Medicine. This research contributes to knowledge by deepening ethical representations in a medical autobiography. The primary selection criterion is that the

autobiography expressively discusses ethical challenges in medical studies, which are foundational to medical practise. Moreover, the text engages salient issues that are central to this study. It investigates how humane or paternalistic the role of physicians is in contemporary society, the multiple roles of the physician in upholding humanistic tenets in medical practise, and it points out factors that might have contributed to the alarming rate of failure and the unempathetic state of the medical field in Nigeria.

Theoretical Framework

This research adopts an eclectic approach which combines Bankowski's Medical Ethics and Lejeune's Autobiographical Pact. This is to foreground the relationship between literature and medicine: this study is not merely a repository of medical experiences but a study of an autobiographical narrative that accounts for life writing and narration.

Autobiographical Pact

Autobiography, as a genre of literature, has been the subject of numerous discussions and postulations by scholars and has been assigned certain deliberative features. While some consider it to be a novel, others consider it an essay or a biography. Phillip Lejeune defined the genre of autobiography to clarify the intricacies. He described the autobiography as ″a retrospective prose narrative written by a real person concerning his own existence, where the focus is his individual life, in particular the story of his personality" (1989:4). This validates that works that do not appropriate these features are not qualified to be referred to as an autobiography. Jenny Fredman, in his essay, *Autobiography and the Theme of Otherness in J.M. Coetzee's Boyhood: Scenes from Provincial Life,* asserts that "All autobiography is storytelling, all writing is autobiography"(2007, i). This assertion might not be completely true, given Phillip Lejeune's definition above. While stories can be referred to as the biographies of the protagonist, that does not necessarily mean it's the biography of the narrator. Therefore, the narrator and the author may not be identical.

Philip Lejuene, the proponent of this theory, asserts that given the name autobiography, it must follow this equation: author = narrator = character. The character here also refers to the protagonist. Relationships with other characters and individuals will definitely arise. Still, the autobiography must be centred on the protagonist, who is also the author and narrator of the experiences in the text. In the case of a pseudonym in an autobiography, the author must be willing to provide a reason for the pseudonym, so it doesn't change identity or experiences. Only that the name

sometimes validates the recipient of the experience. While an autobiographical novel consists of both personal and impersonal narratives of the author, a memoir consists of a personal narrative of the author at a particular period of his time. The autobiography doesn't favour such features. Likewise, it is quite easy for a novel to imitate an autobiography, given the content and narratives. And every outstanding feature that the autobiography adopts can also be adapted by the novel. Still, the strong determining factor of the autobiography remains the author, who must also be the narrator and the protagonist. However, critics had stated that the author should be the one to decide what form or structure he wants his autobiography to be written in, as opposed to Lejuene's strict and rigid definition of 'prose narrative', affirming that if an author wants his life story to be written in lines and stanzas, it should be, regardless of the narratological structure.

Medical Ethics

Zbigniew Bankowski defines medical ethics as "the ethical principles that govern professional conduct in medicine". This implies the obligations of the physician toward the patient as well as some obligations towards other physicians, and he affirmed Bioethics "as a term used to distinguish traditional medical ethics from ethical issues that arise from recent progress in biology and medicine" (Bankowski, 1989). However, recent studies have not only acknowledged bioethics as a distinguishing factor between traditional medical ethics and modern progress in biology and medicine, but rather as a set of moral principles, beliefs, and values that guide us in making choices about medical care. Prominent among its features is the ability to guide the behaviour of healthcare professionals to always act in the patient's best interests. A nation's or community's health policy is a means of controlling the social uses of its medical knowledge and resources.

The core principles of healthcare ethics include autonomy, beneficence, competency, and power. Bankowski goes further to saddle the physician with levels of moral responsibility that physicians should exercise when making decisions and preferences essential to policy formation and operation. They include:

- The physician as the patient's advocate
- The physician as a technical expert
- The physician as a citizen
- The physician as a moral agent
- The physician implementing health policies

Accordingly, Bankowski identifies multiple ethical roles the physician must inhabit in the formulation, implementation, and evaluation of healthcare policies. These responsibilities underscore the physician's obligation to function not merely as a healthcare provider but as an active ethical agent within society.

Who is Ladipo Akinkugbe?

Oladipo Akinkugbe was a distinguished Nigerian physician, scholar, and administrator, widely regarded as a pioneer of hypertension and nephrology in Nigeria and across Africa. Born in Ondo, southwestern Nigeria, to Chief David and Chief Grace Akinkugbe, he was educated at Government College, Ibadan, before studying medicine at University College, Ibadan, and the London Hospital Medical School. He obtained his MB BS in 1958 and a Diploma in Tropical Medicine and Hygiene from the University of Liverpool in 1960. After his internship at King's College Hospital and further training in London, he earned a DPhil from the University of Oxford in 1964 for his seminal work on *Angiotensin and the kidney* under Sir George Pickering, later strengthening his expertise through a Rockefeller Foundation fellowship.

Akinkugbe became a professor at 35 and dean of the Faculty of Medicine, University of Ibadan, at 37. He was best known for translating laboratory and epidemiological research into clinical practice relevant to African populations, particularly recognising infections and hypertension as key contributors to renal disease in the developing world. He published over 100 peer-reviewed articles, edited journals, and contributed extensively to textbooks on medicine, nephrology, and administration. His influence on medical education was profound: he trained the first generation of indigenously trained Nigerian nephrologists, many of whom became leading figures nationally and internationally.

Beyond medicine, Akinkugbe played a pivotal role in higher education governance. He served as the foundation vice chancellor of the University of Ilorin, vice chancellor of Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, pro chancellor of the University of Port Harcourt, chairman of the University College Hospital management board, and chairman of the planning committees for Ondo State and Abuja universities. He was also the foundation chairman of the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board, shaping Nigeria's university admissions system.

He received numerous honours, including Nigeria's National Order of Merit, Commander of the Order of Niger, Commander of the Federal Republic, and Côte d'Ivoire's Officier de l'Ordre Nationale. A respected Christian, philanthropist, and cultural bridge-builder, he was devoted to

intellectual life, service, and humility, leaving an enduring legacy in African medicine and education. (Curled from https://history.rcp.ac.uk/inspiring-physicians/oladipo-olujimi-akinkugbe)

The Physician as the Patient's Advocate

The American Medical Association (AMA) endorsed a commitment in its Medicine's Social Contract in 2001, which states that physicians must 'advocate for the social, economic, educational, and political changes that ameliorate suffering and contribute to human well-being.' Similarly, the American Board of Internal Medicine (2002) called for 'commitment to the promotion of public health and preventive medicine, as well as public advocacy on the part of each physician' in its charter on medical professionalism. Each of these commitments reflects that the role and interest physician's role and interest as an advocate should stem from a moral perspective and from the profession's responsibility. Given that the technical aspects of the profession are open to them and they are in the best position to relay the medical aspects of issues to patients, their trust is highly valued. As Akinkugbe points out:

> Sir Horace was a remarkable clinician, and the story of his choice as Queen's physician is instructive. In his younger days, the palace had been making a discreet search for a first-rate physician, and Horace Evans was one of many summoned to the bedside of Queen Mary. He was said to have insisted on a full examination of the chest in the normal way (which was to remove all clothing) while his other colleagues were content with examining with lingerie and other bed accoutrements in place. (55-56)

In line with Philippe Lejeune's concept of the autobiographical pact, the excerpt derives credibility from the implicit agreement that the author, narrator, and implied witness operate within the same identity framework. Akinkugbe's narration here serves as a testimonial narrative, even though he was not the protagonist; his testimony helps drive home the medical ethics of his professional experience. Lejeune's framework accommodates not only strictly personal memories but also professionally inherited narratives that shape the author's identity and ethical orientation. Ladipo Akinkugbe gave insight into the importance of the doctor earning the patient's trust as he narrated the exploits of Sir Horace Evan at the London Hospital. Ladipo was assigned to Sir Horace in his first medicine posting, and it was recounted that in his younger days, the palace had been on a discreet search for a first-rate physician, and Horace Evans was summoned alongside many other

doctors. However, he singled himself out by insisting on a full examination of the chest in the normal way (which was to remove all clothing), as opposed to his colleagues, who were content with the lingerie and other bed accoutrements in place. This audacity impressed the Queen most especially as his diagnosis was accurate and his treatment was highly effective. This, in itself, is a form of patient advocacy, specifically beating all odds in ascertaining accurate, precise diagnoses and prescribing fast-acting, beneficial treatment. Irrespective of one's status or calibre, everyone deserves the privilege of trusting the physician with their body to administer the right treatment.

Piemonte (2017) discusses extensively the role that a physician's competence, demeanour and approach played in his father's open-heart surgery. He mentioned that the physician was very competent, experienced and busy, a professional and an expert. However, the way the physician attentively listened and exuded confidence and humility while communicating with the family clearly expresses trust. Most importantly, showing that trust is not just earned because of the doctor's competence but also because of the physician's compassion and effective communication, which often puts the patients and family members at rest.

Corroborating the essence of the patient as an advocate, Zbigniew Bankowski (1989) remarks that the physician who offers to treat or help a sick person is especially bonded to the patient. He (or she) invites the patient's trust that he will be competent and will place that competence at the patient's disposal. However, we understand that advocacy is beyond this in our contemporary society. This advocacy was extensively discussed in the 'Two Seminal Symposia Spanning Two Decades' as written by Ladipo Akinkugbe in his text *Footprints and Footnotes*. Ladipo scribbled his experiences in his commitment to health standards in the nation. In alignment with Nigeria's Third National Development Plan in 1973, he planned a conference tagged 'Priorities in National Health Planning', where issues and matters relating to the health sector were greatly delved into. This validates the distinct and additional approach to the physician as the patient's advocate. Given the fact that the doctor is not just technically competent in discharging his duties but also sponsoring the alleviation of sickness and diseases in society, thereby merging discharging healthcare with a greater course.

The physician's advocacy is at the crux of alleviating suffering and threats to human health, thereby promoting social, economic, educational, and political changes. As argued by Gruen et al (2004), physicians ought to take a more civic role in championing better health care. Therefore, physicians must expand beyond the confines of their sphere of influence, which is mainly the day-to-day

practice of medicine, into the public space, not for power's sake but for the greater good of the community, of which the patient is a part. The result of this feat will be ridding the present patients of unnecessary mental and emotional suffering, coupled with the health challenges they already have, preventing future public health issues, and eventually, there will be a restoration of trust in the medical profession. This is because stereotypes and conventions are quick to emanate; these stereotypes only demand and require to be done for a certain period, and they become acculturated into the system, thereby becoming so intense that it will take a long time to break or change. It is also possible that physicians defy the previous order and raise a banner of activism and advocacy for the patient, whilst still discharging
their medical activities.

The Physician as a Technical Expert

The sanity of any society is largely dependent on how solid and reassuring its biomedical policies stand. Medical deficiencies wreak heightened havoc compared to any other deficiencies; this is because a medical deficiency or inadequacy has just two chances, which are either death or medical complications. Regrettably, neither of these chances comes at a low price. Given this, the formulation of health policies to equip and put medical personnel in check, to acquaint the public with their medical rights and privileges in relation to medical personnel, will be a great step in the right direction.

> For a long time to come, the need to produce sufficient members of health personnel to meet their present and future needs necessitates stepping up the recruitment of trainees in all categories of health manpower. Such new recruitment (health auxiliaries) and the existing paramedical cadre will need to be given more relevant training than they receive under the present scheme to maximise their capacity and function. They should also be oriented concurrently towards rural and urban, preventive and curative approaches to health care delivery. (202)

The authority of the excerpt above anchors on life writing as described by Lejeune, as he asserts that clinician burnout, emotional detachment, and apathy are not merely individual failings but structural consequences of healthcare systems that prioritise technical output over the moral and existential realities of illness and death. Akinkugbe speaks not as an abstract commentator but as a physician administrator whose lived experience authorises his prescriptions for healthcare

reform. When medical training and practice neglect the emotional, ethical, and developmental needs of clinicians, physicians risk becoming technically proficient yet morally disengaged practitioners. Ethical healthcare policy, therefore, cannot be limited to improving patient–practitioner communication alone; it must also safeguard the physician's professional integrity, emotional resilience, and reflective capacity.

Within this ethical framework, the physician's role as a technical expert extends beyond diagnostic and procedural competence to include responsibility for shaping humane systems of care. The urgent need to expand the health workforce through increased recruitment of trainees, health auxiliaries, and paramedical staff must be accompanied by training models that emphasise ethical awareness, contextual responsiveness, and interdisciplinary collaboration. When health personnel are inadequately prepared or narrowly trained, the technical burden falls disproportionately on physicians, exacerbating burnout and undermining ethical practice. To this, Ladipo Akinkugbe argues that the neglect of the government in responding to imperatives by the Minister of Health at the time was indistinct. "*We convinced him that it was about time all stakeholders in health took a look at our efforts so far and see how best we could reorder our priorities to meet contemporary challenges*" (89).

This initiative resulted in the booklet *The Present Status of Medicine in Nigeria* and the 1973 conference *Priorities in National Health Planning*, underscoring the need for continuous professional self-evaluation as a core duty of physicians as technical experts. The medical profession must intentionally assess its progress, identify shortcomings, and set priorities that advance ethical healthcare policies and national development. Central to this responsibility is medical education, as the quality of student intake largely determines the calibre of physicians produced; admission processes must therefore be rigorous, transparent, and complemented by interviews to assess candidates' motivation and ethical disposition. Piemonte (2017) argues that the medical practise must break free from the fast-paced world and reorient caregivers and trainees back to the connection that makes genuine care possible.

This aligns with recent studies indicating that medical errors rank as the third leading cause of death in the United States, yet fewer than ten per cent of such errors are reported. When this is considered in relation to Nigeria, where robust and comprehensive medical data systems are largely absent, the scale of unreported errors is likely far greater and more alarming. Against this backdrop, Akinkugbe argues for closer scrutiny of the quality of student intake into medical

schools as a critical step toward reducing medication errors, diagnostic failures, and inappropriate radiology-laboratory investigation requests. These errors have persisted largely because perpetrators are rarely subjected to legal consequences, allowing the problem to flourish. While compensation, accountability, and retribution remain recognised legal responses to medical errors, Akinkugbe ultimately warns that contemporary health failures represent a troubling legacy that must not be permitted to persist into future generations.

Sustaining the physician as a technical expert within ethical healthcare systems requires policies that recognise medicine as both a scientific and moral practice. By aligning workforce expansion with ethical training, emotional support, and contextual competence, healthcare systems can protect clinicians from burnout while ensuring that technical expertise serves humane, equitable, and socially responsive care. This shows that autobiographical writings beyond personal anecdote can also influence policy articulation where the lived experiences is expressed through informed intervention in societal issues.

The Physician as a Citizen.

Medicine is a microcosm of human existence, encompassing birth, death, illness, suffering, isolation, fear, love, and care (Piemonte, 2017). Those engaged in medical practice are continually confronted with these dimensions of the human condition, reminding us of the fragility of health, our interdependence, and the possibility that life as we know it can unravel at any moment. Before being a physician, one is first a citizen, and medical practice operates within the broader fabric of society. It is this civic responsibility that exposes the physician to the dilemmas, limitations, and unrealised potential of the people, and it is this relationship, as a member of the community, that ultimately motivates and gives meaning to the physician's professional roles.

> Our main thrust was to define the conditions that come under the heading of Non-Communicable Disease, and these comprise: High Blood Pressure, Ischaemic Heart Disease leading to Heart Attacks, Diabetes Mellitus, Mental Illness, Asthma and Allied Respiratory Disorders, Epilepsy, Road Traffic Accidents (223)

Through the use of 'our' in the excerpt above, Akinkugbe consistently identifies himself as an author, narrator and participant, although extended into collaborative medical research here. The use of "our" does not break the autobiographical pact here; rather, it extends the use of "I" into a collective autobiographical subject. The research cited above was conducted by a multidisciplinary

team of clinicians, public health experts, epidemiologists, and experienced field and laboratory specialists to produce an accurate diagnosis of the population's health status. The findings revealed that one in ten Nigerians over the age of fifteen has hypertension, a condition that cuts across socio-economic class, affecting the very poor and the very rich alike. It was found to be more prevalent in urban than rural areas, and more common in both the arid northern regions and the southern rainforest belt than in the middle savannah zones. Alarmingly, fewer than one-third of affected individuals are aware of their condition, and of those who are aware, fewer than one-third receive adequate treatment. These findings provide a critical backdrop for understanding the physician's role as a citizen, enabling a grounded, evidence-based engagement with public health challenges while resisting the oversimplifications and generalisations often made by lay perspectives.

Although the physician often performs roles that align closely with the interests of the state, this does not negate or diminish his obligations as a citizen. Contributing to the well-being and progress of society does not absolve the physician of civic responsibility; rather, it reinforces the need to uphold ethically sound and morally grounded values alongside professional duties. The physician's role as a citizen is consistent with social contract theory, which provides a framework for harmonious social relations and has emerged as a philosophical foundation for communal responsibility in early societies. As Bankowski observes, "The duty to act as a technical witness in policy formation does not exempt the physician from obligations as a citizen. Thus, he must favour morally sound policies, and oppose those that are immoral" (1989:5). This underscores that the physician's responsibility extends beyond patient advocacy and policy formulation to include personal adherence to, and critical engagement with, societal policies, particularly where ethical considerations are at stake.

The Physician as a Moral Agent

The physician's moral agency extends beyond civic engagement into clinical practice, where the principles of autonomy, beneficence, nonmaleficence, and justice form the foundation of patient care. However, modern medical practice increasingly requires navigating ethical complexities that transcend these principles. Akinkugbe illustrates this with a conversation with the Nigerian president,

> Mr President, as a physician, a thought occasionally flashes through my mind, and it is this: 'Suppose you suddenly faint and slump back in your chair as we speak. I know you might say you are no longer in control of yourself, but in the

melee that follows, where would you like to be taken (240)

Within Lejeune's framework, the excerpt above does not necessarily claim verbatim accuracy; Lejeune identifies it as the autobiographer's commitment to truthfulness of meaning. Akinkugbe posed the question in the quotation above to the president, who was momentarily taken aback and finally answered, saying, '*I will not wish to be taken out of the country*' (241). Akinkugbe then answered him, '*In that case, President, you will be dead!*' This dumbfounded the president, and he went ahead to ask, 'What about UCH?' Akinkugbe continued and said UCH is now a shadow of itself. This question came from a patient-centred heart that needed a viable way of redirecting the attention of the government to the health sector of the country at the time. Such scenarios demonstrate that technical skill alone is insufficient; moral discernment, contextual insight, and professional courage are essential to protect patient well-being, especially in resource-constrained environments. In contemporary times, medical innovation, including IVF, genetic therapy, physician-assisted suicide, and organ transplantation, has further heightened the ethical responsibilities of the physician, emphasising the need for curricula that integrate moral, technical, and societal considerations rather than focusing solely on content acquisition.

Historically and philosophically, medicine has been regarded as both a science and a moral enterprise. Edmund Pellegrino emphasised that medicine is not merely a skill or an art but a vocation grounded in ethical responsibility, in which the physician's commitment to human flourishing guides clinical decision-making. Similarly, Erwin H. Ackerknecht underscored that medicine deals not merely with biological entities but with human beings endowed with free will and moral agency. These perspectives frame medical practice as inherently moral, demanding attention to both the technical and ethical dimensions of care.

Central to the physician's moral agency is the Hippocratic Oath, which has historically shaped medical accountability since its emergence around 400 BC. The oath emphasises selflessness, commitment to patient welfare, the ethical transmission of medical knowledge, and the rejection of exploitation, positioning moral integrity as inseparable from clinical expertise. Although contemporary ethical debates, such as those surrounding legalised abortion and physician-assisted suicide, challenge aspects of its traditional formulation, the Hippocratic Oath continues to function as a foundational ethical framework that anchors professional responsibility in patient-centred care. As Akinkugbe observes, earlier medical practice reinforced this ethical commitment through institutional discipline, punctuality, and rigorous professional standards; however, the erosion of

morale and infrastructural support in modern healthcare systems undermines these ethical obligations, revealing the interdependence of institutional structures, professional conduct, and moral accountability. It advocates for a holistic understanding of the patient's history, fears, and lived realities, without which medical authority risks becoming exploitative or detached. Consequently, technological advancement in medicine must remain ethically grounded to preserve the dignity, well-being, and humanity of the patient.

The Physician and the Implementation of Health Policies

Ladipo Akinkugbe highlights the concept of a "revisit" as a crucial tool for ensuring that health policies are properly followed by healthcare personnel, thereby promoting accountability. Twenty years later, in 1992, a Symposium Revisit was held at the same venue, the Conference Centre of the University of Ibadan. Over a hundred participants attended, including fifteen individuals who had been part of the 1973 symposium. The purpose was to assess progress made over the two decades in areas such as primary and secondary health care, health research, and funding of health, amongst many others. One significant outcome of this revisit was a publication documenting the extent of policy implementation, as well as areas still requiring attention. The book was titled *Nigeria's Health in the 90s: A Symposium Revisit*.

The implementation of health policies is essential to the effective delivery of a nation's healthcare system. A health system encompasses the organisations, institutions, and resources committed to ensuring the successful provision of healthcare, including financial frameworks, human resources, and physical infrastructure. Healthcare policy, meanwhile, extends beyond national law and can be understood as the strategic decisions and actions designed to achieve specific health objectives in society. Through effective policy implementation, existing inequities and inequalities in healthcare delivery can be addressed. Implementation involves the processes that follow the enactment of policy, ensuring that objectives move from theoretical goals to practical outcomes.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that Ladipo Akinkugbe's *Footprints and Footnotes* operates at the intersection of literary expression and biomedical discourse, revealing that medical practice is not only a scientific endeavour but also a profoundly narrative and ethical one. While the application of Zbigniew Bankowski's medical ethics provides a useful framework for examining the roles and responsibilities of the physician, Lejeune's Autobiographical Pact further highlights that such

ethical concerns are meaningfully articulated through the form and structure of autobiographical narration, where it establishes authority through the convergence of the author, narrator and protagonist as one grounding the reflections in lived experience and reinforcing the reader's trust in referential truth. The study underscores that the life and career of a physician, exemplified through Ladipo Akinkugbe's experiences, illuminate the intricate interplay between medical expertise, moral responsibility, and civic duty. By examining the ethical complexities of clinical practice, the research highlights how physicians navigate the dual imperatives of advancing patient care and upholding societal values, demonstrating that technical proficiency alone is insufficient without moral discernment. The work further illustrates the vital connection between literature and medicine, showing how narratives can inform and shape ethical decision-making in healthcare. Ultimately, the study affirms that physicians operate not only as healers and technical experts but also as moral agents whose practice influences and reflects the ethical standards of society, calling for healthcare policies and education systems that consistently foster integrity, accountability, and compassion.

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Framing Leadership and Identity: A Critical Discourse Analysis of French and Selected African Leaders in RFI Headlines

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Abstract

This study examines how political leadership is linguistically constructed in French-language headlines published by RFI between September and December 2025. While existing research has identified asymmetries in global media representations of Western and African political actors, limited attention has been paid to how such differences are realised at the level of headline discourse within a single international broadcaster.

The study compares how Emmanuel Macron and selected African leaders are represented within a single international broadcaster. This level of analysis remains underexplored in existing research. A corpus of forty purposively sampled headlines is analysed to identify patterns in agency attribution, transitivity, modality, and crisis-related framing.

The findings show systematic differences in the linguistic construction of leadership. Macron is predominantly represented as an individualised and active agent performing deliberate actions, whereas African leaders are more frequently represented within institutional, collective, or crisis-related contexts, where agency is more distributed or backgrounded.

These patterns indicate that headline-level linguistic choices contribute to differentiated representations of political authority and contextual stability, highlighting how micro-level discourse structures can reflect broader asymmetries in international news coverage.

Keywords: *political leadership, identity, RFI, agency, media framing, news headlines*

Introduction

In contemporary digital news environments, political communication is increasingly shaped by condensed textual formats circulating rapidly across mobile platforms and algorithmically curated feeds. Among these, headlines are particularly influential, functioning not only as summaries but as primary interpretive frames that shape audience understanding of political events and actors at first glance (Tandoc, Thomas, & Bishop, 2021; Bennett & Pfetsch, 2018). Their brevity

necessitates selective representation, foregrounding certain aspects of events while omitting others.

Framing theory explains how this selectivity operates in news discourse by emphasising specific elements of reality, including actors, actions, and evaluative cues (Entman, 1993; Chong & Druckman, 2007; Chadwick, 2017). In headlines, this process is intensified by space constraints, requiring journalists to compress complex events into short textual forms through strategic linguistic choices. Thus, agency attribution, transitivity, and modality become central to representations of political leadership (Bednarek & Caple, 2017; Machin & Mayr, 2023; Richardson, 2017).

These linguistic choices are not neutral but are shaped by broader patterns in global news production. Studies in international communication show that African political leaders are more often associated with instability or crisis-related events, while Western leaders are more frequently represented as active decision-makers engaged in policy or strategic action (Waisbord & Mellado, 2014; Thussu, 2018; Wasserman, 2020). Such differences are reproduced through routine discursive practices, including agency assignment, actor foregrounding, and event framing (van Leeuwen, 2007; Wodak & Meyer, 2009). Media discourse in African contexts also reflects ideological contestation and reinforces structural power relations (Muringa & Adjin-Tettey, 2025). Despite extensive research on media framing and global representation, few studies have examined how a single international broadcaster constructs political leadership across Western and African contexts at the headline level within the same temporal frame.

This study addresses that gap by examining how Radio France Internationale constructs political leadership in French-language headlines published between September and December 2025. Comparing representations of Emmanuel Macron and selected African leaders, it analyses agency attribution, transitivity, modality, and crisis framing to identify how linguistic choices shape representations of political authority and contextual stability.

Research Objectives

In order to operationalise the study within a Critical Discourse Analysis framework, the following objectives guide the analysis.

1. To examine how political leadership is constructed in RFI headlines through linguistic features such as agency, transitivity, and syntactic structure.

2. To compare the representation of Emmanuel Macron and selected African political leaders in terms of agency allocation, process types, and voice (active/passive).
3. To analyse how modality and lexical choices contribute to the framing of authority, responsibility, and crisis in the two corpora.
4. To interpret how these linguistic patterns shape differentiated constructions of political identity and leadership within a geopolitical context.

Literature review

Headlines as sites of meaning and ideological construction

Headlines are central to news discourse as condensed textual forms that both summarise and shape the interpretation of events. Though brief, they are ideologically dense because they foreground particular actors, actions, and perspectives while omitting others (van Dijk, 1988; Bednarek & Caple, 2017). Rather than merely reporting events, headlines actively construct meaning by guiding readers' first impressions of political reality (Dor, 2003; Carvalho, 2008). Recent studies confirm that headlines are strategic sites of ideological negotiation. Haimed (2024), for example, demonstrates how newspaper headlines in the US, UK, China, and Russia framed the US withdrawal from Afghanistan and the Taliban takeover according to competing geopolitical interests. Similarly, Sharifah Nadia et al. (2025) show that Malaysian news headlines on social media licensing employed evaluative language, metaphor, and actor representation to reinforce dominant governmental narratives.

Discourse scholars argue that headlines perform ideological work through lexical selection, syntactic structure, and emphasis, shaping perceptions of power, legitimacy, and responsibility (Fairclough, 1995; Fowler, 1991). In digital news environments, where audiences often engage primarily with headlines, these compressed forms play an even greater role in framing political meaning (KhosraviNik, 2017). Omoke (2025) further demonstrates how metaphorical framings in Kenyan newspaper headlines construct politics as war, governance as illness, and protest as disruption, reinforcing elite-centred narratives.

Framing evaluation, and agency in leadership representation

Research on media framing provides insight into how such representations are constructed. Framing theory explains how media texts select and emphasise particular aspects of events to promote specific interpretations (Entman, 1993; Chong & Druckman, 2007). In political news,

these choices shape audience understanding of actors, actions, and legitimacy (Lecheler & de Vreese, 2019). Bust, Whyle, and Olivier (2023), for instance, show that South African media framed National Health Insurance policy through neoliberal, biopolitical, and corruption discourses, influencing public trust and policy legitimacy.

To explain how such representations are linguistically realised, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is particularly useful. CDA emphasises that grammatical structures are not neutral but construct social meaning and power relations (Fairclough, 1995; Wodak & Meyer, 2009). Within CDA, transitivity analysis reveals how agency is distributed across actors (Halliday, 1994; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). Studies show that transitivity patterns can foreground some actors as decisive agents while backgrounding others through passive or relational constructions (Machin & Mayr, 2023; van Leeuwen, 2008). Recent studies reinforce this insight. Ikuelogbon, Idowu, and Aloba (2025) reveal how hate comments during Nigeria's 2023 presidential election used transitivity and derogatory labelling to deepen ideological polarisation, while Elewa (2025) demonstrates how Arabic media discourse constrains the agency of "majorities" through negative collocational and grammatical patterns.

Media representation, geopolitical context, and identity construction

Media representations of political actors are shaped by broader institutional and geopolitical contexts. Studies in international communication show that global news often reflects existing power relations, influencing how regions and leaders are portrayed (Thussu, 2018). Western leaders are more often represented through narratives of stability and strategic action, whereas African leaders are frequently associated with crisis and governance challenges (Wasserman, 2020). Recent studies support this pattern. Muringa and Adjin-Tettey (2025) show that South African media framed Ramaphosa as economically stable while portraying Dlamini-Zuma as ideologically threatening. Similarly, Haimed (2024) demonstrates how global powers' headlines framed the Taliban takeover in line with national interests.

Social Identity Theory further explains how repeated linguistic patterns contribute to distinctions between "in-groups" and "out-groups" (Tajfel, 1978; Turner et al., 1987). In media discourse, this often appears through positive self-representation and problem-oriented representations of others (van Dijk, 2006; van Leeuwen, 2008). Despite these insights, few studies have examined how a single international broadcaster represents Western and African political leaders within the same temporal frame at the level of headlines.

This study addresses that gap by combining framing theory and Critical Discourse Analysis to examine how leadership is constructed in headlines published by Radio France Internationale, with a comparative focus on Emmanuel Macron and selected African leaders.

Theoretical framework

This study is grounded in Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as its primary analytical framework. CDA is concerned with how language functions as a form of social practice through which power relations, ideologies, and social inequalities are produced and reproduced in discourse (Fairclough, 1995; Wodak & Meyer, 2009). Rather than treating language as neutral, CDA assumes that linguistic choices such as vocabulary selection, grammatical structure, and thematic emphasis contribute to the construction of social reality in specific ideological directions.

Historically, CDA emerged in the late twentieth century through the work of scholars such as Norman Fairclough, Ruth Wodak, and Teun A. van Dijk, building on earlier traditions in critical linguistics. Its central principles include the view that discourse is socially constitutive, that power relations are embedded in language, and that analysis should reveal how seemingly neutral texts contribute to the maintenance of social structures and hierarchies. In media discourse, this means examining how news texts construct representations of actors, assign responsibility, and frame events in ways that may reflect broader institutional or geopolitical dynamics.

Within CDA, this study adopts Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional model as an organising framework. The model distinguishes between textual analysis (linguistic features such as vocabulary, grammar, and syntactic structure), discursive practice (processes of production and interpretation within institutional settings), and social practice (broader socio-political and ideological contexts in which discourse is embedded) (Fairclough, 1992, 1995). The textual level is prioritised in this study because headlines are highly condensed linguistic forms in which meaning is primarily constructed through grammatical choices such as agency assignment, voice, and modality. The discursive level is reflected in the role of Radio France Internationale (RFI) as an international media institution shaping news production, while the social level provides the geopolitical context within which patterns of representation are interpreted.

Complementing Fairclough's macro-structural approach, Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) provides the micro-linguistic tools for analysing how meaning is constructed at the clause level. Central to this study is Halliday's transitivity system, which explains how processes, participants, and circumstances encode actions, events, and states in discourse

(Halliday, 1994; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). Through transitivity analysis, headlines are examined in terms of how agency is assigned or suppressed through material, relational, verbal, and mental processes.

In addition, Halliday's concept of modality is used to analyse how degrees of certainty, obligation, and authority are linguistically expressed. Modal choices and evaluative verbs are treated as linguistic resources through which headlines construct levels of commitment and stance. Together, transitivity and modality enable a systematic link between grammatical form and ideological meaning.

By integrating Fairclough's macro-level framework with Halliday's micro-linguistic tools, this study examines how headline discourse constructs political actors at the level of grammar while simultaneously situating them within broader ideological and geopolitical contexts. This combined approach allows for a detailed analysis of how linguistic choices in RFI headlines contribute to patterned representations of leadership, agency, and institutional power.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design grounded in Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to examine how political leadership is constructed in news headlines. The approach focuses on the close linguistic analysis of textual features such as agency, transitivity, modality, and syntactic structure, supported by simple frequency counts to identify recurring patterns.

Data source and corpus selection

The data for this study were drawn from Radio France Internationale (RFI), an international news broadcaster publishing French-language news content. The study focuses specifically on headlines published on RFI's official website between September and December 2025.

The overall population consists of RFI headlines published during this period that reference political leaders. From this population, a sample of 40 headlines was selected using purposive sampling. This sampling strategy was used to ensure that only headlines directly referring to identifiable political leaders in contexts of governance, elections, diplomacy, or crisis were included.

The corpus is divided into two groups:

i. 20 headlines referring to Emmanuel Macron

ii. 20 headlines referring to African political leaders

The African sample includes leaders from multiple countries to reflect regional diversity. These include figures such as Félix Tshisekedi, Alassane Ouattara, Paul Biya, and Bassirou Diomaye Faye, among others. In total, the African subset represents multiple national contexts rather than a single country case.

The selection ensures functional comparability by focusing on headlines where leaders are referenced in relation to political action, decision-making, or institutional processes.

Analytical procedure

The analysis was conducted through a systematic examination of each headline based on key linguistic features derived from CDA and Systemic Functional Linguistics.

Each headline was analysed according to the following criteria:

i. Agency and subject position: whether the political leader appears as the grammatical subject or whether agency is assigned to institutions, groups, or events

ii. Process type (transitivity): classification of verbs into material (action), relational (state), or verbal (speech-related) processes

iii. Syntactic voice: whether the headline is constructed in active or passive form

iv. Modality: the presence of strong, neutral, or mitigated expressions indicating certainty, obligation, or stance

v. Crisis-related language: identification of explicit terms associated with instability (e.g., coup, conflict, emergency)

vi. Lexical emphasis: presence of evaluative or strategic terms related to authority, governance, or power

Rather than relying on abstract classification categories, the analysis involved direct classification of linguistic features within each headline, followed by comparison of patterns across the two groups. Frequency counts were used to support the qualitative analysis by indicating how often specific features appeared within each subset. These counts do not constitute statistical testing but serve to highlight observable tendencies in representation. Furthermore, the analysis is primarily conducted at the textual level, in line with Fairclough's CDA framework, with particular emphasis on grammatical structure and lexical choice. However, the interpretation of findings considers the broader institutional context of RFI and the geopolitical positioning of the actors represented.

Data analysis and presentation

This section presents the linguistic analysis of the dataset, focusing on how political leadership is constructed in headline discourse. The dataset consists of 40 French-language headlines published by Radio France Internationale (RFI) between September and December 2025, comprising 20 headlines referring to Emmanuel Macron and 20 referring to selected African political leaders. Each headline was examined based on clearly defined linguistic features:

i. subject position (who appears as the grammatical subject),

ii. process type (type of action or state expressed by the verb),

iii. syntactic voice (active or passive),

iv. lexical choices (including crisis-related terms and indicators of power), and

v. modality (degree of certainty or authority expressed).

The results are presented in Table 1 and analysed below.

Table 1: Comparative linguistic features in RFI headlines (Macron versus African leaders)

Analytical variable	**Category**	**Macron (n=20)**	**African leaders (n=20)**
Agency realization (subject position)	Named the leader as the subject	19 (95%)	9 (45%)
	Institutional/collective subject	0 (0%)	7 (35%)
	Event/passive/state subject	1 (5%)	4 (20%)
Process Type (Transitivity)	Material processes	11 (55%)	9 (45%)
	Verbal processes	8 (40%)	6 (30%)
	Relational/passive processes	1 (5%)	5 (25%)

Syntactic voice	Active	20 (100%)	14 (70%)
	Passive	0 (0%)	6 (30%)
Crisis lexicon presence	Present	1 (5%)	9 (45%)
	Absent	19 (95%)	11 (55%)
Lexical indicators of power and capacity	Financial quantification	2 (10%)	0 (0%)
	Strategic military reference	3 (15%)	0 (0%)
	Crisis-linked military terms	0 (0%)	6 (30%)
Modality and authority projection	Strong/assertive	9 (45%)	4 (20%)
	Mitigated/reportive	3 (15%)	8 (40%)
	Neutral/implicit	8 (40%)	8 (40%)

Presentation

Agency and subject positioning

Agency is primarily realised through subject position, since the grammatical subject typically encodes the main actor in a clause. As shown in Table 1, there is a clear contrast between the two corpora.

In the Macron dataset, 19 out of 20 headlines (95%) position the president as the grammatical subject. This is evident in examples such as « Emmanuel Macron menace la Chine de droits de douane sur ses produits » (*Emmanuel Macron threatens China with tariffs on its products*), « Emmanuel Macron appelle Xi Jinping à œuvrer à la fin de la guerre en Ukraine », and « Emmanuel Macron défend la souveraineté européenne face aux tensions commerciales mondiales ». In each

case, Macron occupies the initial subject position and is directly linked to an action-oriented verb (menace, appelle, défend). Even when contextual elements precede the clause (e.g., « En visite en Chine, Emmanuel Macron plaide… »), the subject remains clearly individualised and foregrounded.

In the African dataset, subject roles are more varied. While some headlines foreground named leaders—for example, « le président Bassirou Diomaye Faye signe un décret pour réorganiser la primature » and « Félix Tshisekedi réclame la reconnaissance des génocides… »—others shift agency to collective or institutional actors. This is visible in « un collectif exige la libération du président déchu Mohamed Bazoum » and « des militaires annoncent… démettre de ses fonctions le président Talon », where the acting subjects are a collective group and the military, respectively. Event-centered constructions also occur, such as « les premiers résultats provisoires donnent Ouattara vainqueur » and « quatre généraux condamnés à de la prison ferme… », where the subject refers to outcomes rather than clearly acting individuals. In these cases, leaders appear as affected participants rather than primary agents.

Overall, the Macron corpus consistently centres agency on a single named actor, whereas the African corpus distributes agency across individuals, institutions, and events.

Process type (transitivity)

Transitivity concerns how actions, events, and states are represented through verb processes. Table 1 indicates that both corpora use material, verbal, and relational processes, but with different distributions.

In the Macron dataset, material processes are slightly dominant (11/20; 55%) and consistently present the president as the initiator of action. This is evident in « Emmanuel Macron menace la Chine… », « Emmanuel Macron propose… l'appui de la France… », and « Emmanuel Macron défend la souveraineté européenne… », where verbs such as menace, propose, and défend encode direct, goal-oriented action.

Verbal processes (8/20; 40%) also occur frequently, as in « Emmanuel Macron appelle Xi Jinping… », « Macron évoque une reprise du dialogue… », and « déclare Emmanuel Macron ». Although realised through speech, these still position Macron as an active source of the process.

Relational processes are minimal (1/20; 5%), indicating that Macron is rarely represented in terms of states or outcomes independent of action.

In the African dataset, material processes remain present (9/20; 45%), for example « le président Bassirou Diomaye Faye signe un décret… » and « Tshisekedi et Kagame signent un accord de paix ». However, this pattern is less consistent.

Verbal processes account for 6 cases (30%), as in « assure le président Talon… » and « le capitaine Traoré… vante son bilan sécuritaire ».

A key difference lies in the higher proportion of relational and passive-like constructions (5/20; 25%), including « Paul Biya a prêté serment… », « quatre généraux condamnés à de la prison ferme… », and « Mohamed Bazoum… détenu depuis juillet 2023 ». These structures emphasise states or outcomes rather than ongoing action, and the initiating agent is not always specified.

Thus, while both corpora include action-oriented representation, the Macron headlines maintain a stronger alignment between the leader and material processes, whereas the African headlines more frequently combine action with state-oriented representations.

Syntactic voice and responsibility allocation

Syntactic voice affects how responsibility is distributed within a clause. Active constructions present the subject as acting, while passive constructions foreground the affected participant and may omit the agent.

All Macron headlines (20/20; 100%) are constructed in the active voice. This is evident in « Emmanuel Macron menace la Chine… », «Emmanuel Macron annonce une aide internationale…», and «Emmanuel Macron promet un renforcement des capacités militaires…», where the subject is directly linked to an action verb. Across the dataset, Macron does not appear as the subject of a passive construction.

Even in reportive structures, the syntax remains active. For example, «Guerre en Ukraine: le plan de paix n'est “pas finalisé”, selon Emmanuel Macron» attributes the evaluation to Macron, while « …, déclare Emmanuel Macron » maintains him as the source of the statement.

In the African dataset, 14 headlines (70%) are active, such as «le président Bassirou Diomaye Faye signe un décret…» and «Tshisekedi et Kagame signent un accord de paix». However, 6 headlines (30%) use passive or reduced passive structures.

Examples include « quatre généraux condamnés à de la prison ferme… », where the sentencing authority is not specified, « Mohamed Bazoum… détenu depuis juillet 2023 », which foregrounds a resulting state, and « un proche de l’ex-président… nommé procureur de la République », where emphasis is placed on the outcome rather than the appointing authority.

These constructions shift attention from the agent to the result or affected participant. Compared to the Macron corpus—where responsibility is consistently explicit—the African corpus shows greater variation, with some structures leaving agency implicit.

Crisis lexicon presence

Crisis-related lexical items refer to words explicitly denoting instability or political disruption, such as coup d'État, mutins, détenu, condamnés, urgence, and génocides.

In the Macron dataset, such terms are largely absent (19/20; 95%). Most headlines focus on diplomacy, policy, or institutional action, as in « Emmanuel Macron défend la souveraineté européenne… », « Emmanuel Macron appelle à une réforme des institutions européennes », and « Emmanuel Macron réaffirme le rôle central de la France… ».

Only one headline references a crisis context: « Guerre en Ukraine: le plan de paix n'est "pas finalisé", selon Emmanuel Macron ». Here, guerre appears in the background framing, while the clause itself focuses on the status of a peace plan rather than describing Macron as embedded in crisis.

In contrast, crisis-related terms appear in 9 out of 20 African headlines (45%) and are often central to the clause. Examples include « tentative de coup d'État au Bénin » (*attempted coup in Benin*), « coup d'État en Guinée-Bissau », and « deux hauts gradés retenus par les mutins ». Other instances include « Mohamed Bazoum… détenu depuis juillet 2023 », « quatre généraux condamnés… », « la reconnaissance des génocides… », and « la CEDEAO se déclare en état d'urgence ».

In these cases, crisis vocabulary forms part of the main informational content rather than background context. Overall, crisis markers are both more frequent and more structurally integrated in the African corpus.

Lexical indicators of power and capacity

This category captures lexical items associated with economic strength, strategic capability, and institutional power.

In the Macron corpus, financial quantification appears in 2 headlines (10%), such as « …avec 4,2 milliards d'euros » (*with €4.2 billion*) and « …plus d'1,5 milliard d'euros ». These numerical expressions function as concrete indicators of economic capacity.

Strategic military references occur in 3 headlines (15%), including « Macron annonce un nouveau service national volontaire "purement militaire" » and « Emmanuel Macron promet un

renforcement des capacités militaires françaises en 2026 ». In these cases, military terminology is linked to planning and institutional development.

In the African dataset, there are no instances of financial quantification or comparable strategic capacity framing. Instead, military-related vocabulary appears in 6 headlines (30%), but primarily in crisis contexts, such as « tentative de coup d'État », « deux hauts gradés retenus par les mutins », and « coup d'État en Guinée-Bissau ».

Thus, while both corpora include references to power-related domains, the Macron dataset frames them in terms of capacity and planning, whereas the African dataset associates similar vocabulary with instability.

Modality and authority projection

Modality indicates degrees of certainty, obligation, or reported stance. Table 1 shows variation in how actions are presented across the two corpora.

In the Macron dataset, strong or assertive modality appears in 9 headlines (45%), as in « Emmanuel Macron menace la Chine… », « Emmanuel Macron promet un renforcement… », and « Emmanuel Macron défend la souveraineté européenne… ». Verbs such as menace, promet, and défend present actions as direct and authoritative.

Mitigated or reportive modality appears in 3 cases (15%), for example, « …selon Emmanuel Macron », which introduces reported rather than direct assertion. Neutral constructions account for 8 headlines (40%).

In the African dataset, strong modality appears in 4 headlines (20%), including « le président Talon assure que la situation est sous contrôle » and « le capitaine Traoré… vante son bilan sécuritaire ». However, mitigated or reportive forms are more frequent (8/20; 40%), as in « un collectif exige… » and « des réactions contrastées… », where information is presented through reported positions or collective perspectives.

Neutral constructions also account for 8 headlines (40%), such as « Paul Biya a prêté serment… » and « les premiers résultats donnent Ouattara vainqueur ».

Overall, the Macron corpus more frequently presents actions through assertive formulations, while the African corpus shows a higher proportion of reportive or mediated expressions.

Discussion of the findings

The analysis shows that differences in headline construction are not random stylistic variations but systematic linguistic choices shaping representations of political leadership within the same media institution. At the textual level, subject positions, process types, and voice reveal that the Macron corpus consistently encodes a single named actor as the grammatical centre of action, while the African corpus distributes agency across institutions, collective actors, and event-based constructions. In Hallidayan terms, the Macron headlines show a stable alignment between Actor and Process, whereas African headlines more often decouple action from a clearly identifiable initiating subject.

From a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) perspective, this pattern is ideologically significant because subject position is not merely grammatical but representational. Fairclough (1995) argues that recurring linguistic structures normalise particular representations. The concentration of agency in a named individual in the Macron dataset (95%) constructs leadership as individualised and action-oriented. By contrast, the African dataset presents a more heterogeneous configuration in which leaders appear alongside collective actors ("un collectif exige…") and outcome-based constructions ("quatre généraux condamnés…"). This redistributes agency across institutional and event structures, reducing the consistency with which individual leaders are foregrounded. Similar ideological positioning is evident in recent studies: Ikuelogbon, Idowu, and Aloba (2025) show how discourse structures in online political comments during Nigeria's 2023 election reinforced exclusion and opposition.

These findings align with research showing that headlines foreground some actors while backgrounding others (Fowler, 1991; van Dijk, 1988). However, this study extends that insight by demonstrating systematic foregrounding within a single broadcaster across comparable contexts. In line with Bednarek and Caple (2017), headlines are not neutral summaries but compressed sites of meaning. This also supports Haimed's (2024) finding that headline structures reflect ideological and geopolitical priorities.

Transitivity patterns reinforce this distinction. Both corpora contain material and verbal processes, but Macron headlines maintain a stronger link between the named leader and material processes of action. Verbs such as *menace*, *défend*, and *announce* position the subject as the initiator of goal-directed activity. In contrast, the African corpus contains more relational and passive-like constructions focusing on states or outcomes (*condamnés*, *détenu*, *nommé*). As Machin and Mayr

(2023) and van Leeuwen (2008) note, passivisation and nominalisation can background agency. Elewa (2025) similarly demonstrates how Arabic media discourse constrains agency through negated verbs and negative collocations. Importantly, this study does not claim African leaders are excluded from agency, only that agency is less consistently anchored to a single actor.

Syntactic voice contributes to this pattern. The Macron corpus is entirely active (100%), explicitly linking actions to subjects. The African corpus includes 30% passive constructions, where agents are omitted or backgrounded. As Fairclough (1995) notes, such structures can shift attention from responsibility to outcomes.

The clearest divergence appears in lexical framing. Crisis-related vocabulary occurs in 45% of African headlines compared to 5% in the Macron corpus. Terms such as *coup d'État*, *mutins*, *détenu*, and *urgence* often form the headline's core content, whereas Macron-related headlines emphasise diplomacy, institutional action, and policy. This resonates with studies showing that African political contexts are often associated with crisis narratives (Bunce & Franks, 2017; Nothias, 2018; Wasserman, 2020). Omoke (2025) similarly finds that Kenyan headlines frame politics through metaphors of war and disruption.

At the level of modality, the Macron corpus contains more assertive formulations (45%), with verbs such as *promet* and *défend* encoding authority, while the African corpus contains more mitigated or reportive structures (40%). Together, these micro-linguistic choices—subject position, transitivity, voice, lexical selection, and modality—produce differentiated representations of leadership. Within Fairclough's three-dimensional model, these textual patterns reflect recurring editorial practices and broader geopolitical representations. In line with Tajfel (1978), van Dijk (2006), and Muringa and Adjin-Tettey (2025), such patterns may subtly construct some actors as competent and authoritative, while situating others within crisis-associated contexts. Overall, the findings support CDA's central premise that grammatical and lexical choices are not neutral but systematically construct social meaning.

Conclusion

This study examined how political leadership is constructed in RFI headlines through patterns of agency, transitivity, syntactic voice, modality, and lexical selection. Based on a corpus of 40 headlines, the analysis identifies consistent structural differences in how leadership is grammatically encoded across the two datasets.

The Macron corpus is characterised by a stable configuration in which the named leader occupies subject position (95%) and is systematically linked to active material and verbal processes. This produces a recurrent subject–process alignment in which action is explicitly attributed to a single, identifiable actor. In contrast, the African corpus displays a more heterogeneous structure, where agency is distributed across named leaders, institutional actors, and event-based constructions. This distribution is accompanied by a higher proportion of passive forms (30%) and crisis-related lexical items (45%), indicating that leadership is more frequently embedded within outcome-oriented or context-driven structures.

These findings demonstrate that variation in leadership representation operates at the level of grammatical organisation rather than overt evaluation. The study therefore shows that subject positioning, process type, and lexical framing function as systematic resources for structuring visibility, responsibility, and contextual emphasis in headline discourse.

Contribution to knowledge

This study advances Critical Discourse Analysis by operationalising headline-level analysis through a defined coding matrix integrating subject position (agency), transitivity (process type), syntactic voice, modality, and lexical framing. These categories are applied systematically to a controlled corpus, allowing direct comparison within a single media institution.

Empirically, the study demonstrates that differences in leadership representation are realised through recurrent grammatical configurations, specifically, the consistent alignment of subject position with material processes in one dataset, and a more variable distribution involving passive constructions and crisis-linked vocabulary in the other. This shows how micro-linguistic features structure the visibility and attribution of action across comparable news contexts.

Methodologically, the study establishes a replicable procedure for headline analysis by combining qualitative CDA with explicit feature-based coding and frequency mapping. This enables transparent cross-corpus comparison while preserving fine-grained linguistic analysis, addressing the relative lack of systematic, headline-focused approaches in CDA research.

Limitation of the study

This study is limited by the scale and scope of its dataset. The analysis is based on a purposive sample of 40 headlines from a single media outlet within a defined four-month period and, therefore, does not aim at statistical generalisation. In addition, the focus on headline-level

discourse isolates highly condensed textual forms and does not account for how representations may be expanded or modified in full articles. Finally, the coding relies on manual classification of transitivity, modality, and voice, which, while allowing detailed linguistic analysis, would benefit from computational validation in larger corpora.

Recommendations

The findings indicate that grammatical structure, particularly subject positioning, transitivity patterns, and syntactic voice, systematically shapes how political actors are made visible or backgrounded in headline discourse. Because these features operate below the level of explicit evaluation, they can influence representation even in the absence of intentional bias. This creates a basis for recommending greater editorial awareness of how linguistic form contributes to framing.

Media practitioners should therefore pay closer attention to:

i. how consistently agency is attached to identifiable actors (e.g., subject position),

ii. how passive constructions may obscure responsibility,

iii. and how recurrent lexical environments (e.g., crisis-related terms) situate actors within particular contexts.

The rationale for this recommendation is not normative but analytical: the study demonstrates that these linguistic features produce measurable differences in representation within the same outlet. Increased reflexivity at the level of grammatical choice would therefore support more balanced attribution of agency across comparable political contexts.

For research, the study highlights the need to test the stability of these patterns across larger corpora, multiple media organisations, and longer timeframes. Integrating computational corpus methods with CDA would allow for validation of transitivity, modality, and lexical distributions at scale. Extending analysis beyond headlines to full articles would also clarify how initial framing at the headline level interacts with subsequent discourse.

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Appendix A — Complete list of Macron-related items (September - December 2025)

Seq. No.	Headline	Date	URL
1.	**Emmanuel Macron menace la Chine de droits de douane sur ses produits**	December 7, 2025	https://www.rfi.fr/fr/france/20251207-emmanuel-macron-menace-la-chine-de-droits-de-douane-sur-ses-produits
2.	**Emmanuel Macron achève sa visite en Chine sans obtenir**	December 5, 2025	https://www.rfi.fr/fr/asie-pacifique/20251205-emmanuel-macron-

	de concessions géopolitiques de Xi Jinping		achève-sa-visite-en-chine-sans-obtenir-de-concessions-géopolitiques-de-Xi-Jinping
3.	**En Chine, Emmanuel Macron appelle Xi Jinping à œuvrer à la fin de la guerre en Ukraine**	December 4, 2025	https://www.rfi.fr/fr/asie-pacifique/20251204-en-chine-emmanuel-macron-presse-xi-jinping-d-%C5%93uvrer-%C3%A0-la-fin-de-la-guerre-en-ukraine
4.	**En visite en Chine, Emmanuel Macron plaide pour un «rééquilibrage» des relations commerciales**	December 3, 2025	https://www.rfi.fr/fr/asie-pacifique/20251203-en-visite-en-chine-emmanuel-macron-plaide-pour-un-r%C3%A9%C3%A9quilibrage-des-relations-commerciales
5	**Guerre en Ukraine: le plan de paix n'est «pas finalisé», selon Emmanuel Macron**	December 01, 2025	https://www.rfi.fr/fr/europe/20251201-guerre-en-ukraine-volodymyr-zelensky-%C3%A0-paris-en-plein-va-et-vient-diplomatique
6.	**Madagascar: Emmanuel Macron propose au nouveau dirigeant malgache «l'appui de la France» pour la transition**	November 30, 2025	https://www.rfi.fr/fr/afrique/20251130-madagascar-emmanuel-macron-propose-au-nouveau-dirigeant-malgache-l-appui-de-la-france-pour-la-transition
7.	**France: Macron annonce un nouveau service national volontaire «purement militaire» dès l'été 2026**	November 27, 2025	https://www.rfi.fr/fr/france/20251127-france-macron-annonce-un-nouveau-service-national-volontaire-purement-militaire-d%C3%A8s-l-%C3%A9t%C3%A9-2026
8.	**France-Algérie: le président Macron évoque une reprise du dialogue avec Alger**	November 22, 2025	https://www.rfi.fr/fr/afrique/20251122-france-alg%C3%A9rie-le-pr%C3%A9sident-

			macron-%C3%A9voque-une-reprise-du-dialogue-avec-alger
9.	**Maurice: Emmanuel Macron confirme «un engagement fort dans l'océan Indien»**	November 21, 2025	https://www.rfi.fr/fr/afrique/20251120-maurice-emmanuel-macron-confirme-un-engagement-fort-dans-l-oc%C3%A9an-indien
10.	**Le président Emmanuel Macron muscle la défense spatiale française avec 4,2 milliards d'euros**	November 12, 2025	https://www.rfi.fr/fr/france/20251112-le-pr%C3%A9sident-emmanuel-macron-muscle-la-d%C3%A9fense-spatiale-fran%C3%A7aise-avec-4-2-milliards-d-euros
11.	**Grands Lacs: Emmanuel Macron annonce une aide internationale de plus d'1,5 milliard d'euros**	October 30, 2025	https://www.rfi.fr/fr/afrique/20251030-grands-lacs-emmanuel-macron-annonce-une-aide-internationale-de-plus-d-1-5-milliards-d-euros
12.	**France: Macron évoque un simple «report» de la réforme des retraites, incompréhension à l'Assemblée nationale**	October 22, 2025	https://www.rfi.fr/fr/france/20251022-france-macron-%C3%A9voque-un-simple-report-de-la-r%C3%A9forme-des-retraites-incompr%C3%A9hension-%C3%A0-l-assembl%C3%A9e-nationale
13.	**France: Emmanuel Macron «nommera un Premier ministre d'ici 48 heures»**	October 08, 2025	https://www.rfi.fr/fr/france/20251008-en-direct-s%C3%A9bastien-lecornu-m%C3%A8ne-les-derni%C3%A8res-tractations-pour-sortir-de-l-impasse-politique
14.	**Sur la télévision israélienne, Emmanuel Macron critique durement le gouvernement israélien**	September 19, 2025	https://www.rfi.fr/fr/moyen-orient/20250919-sur-la-t%C3%A9l%C%A9vision-isra%C3%A9lienne-emmanuel-macron-

			critique-durement-le-gouvernement-isra%C3%A9lien
15.	**Les Européens «prêts» à «apporter les garanties de sécurité à l'Ukraine», déclare Emmanuel Macron**	September 04, 2025	https://www.rfi.fr/fr/europe/20250903-les-europ%C3%A9ens-pr%C3%AAts-%C3%A0-apporter-les-garanties-de-s%C3%A9curit%C3%A9-%C3%A0-l-ukraine-d%C3%A9clare-emmanuel-macron
16.	**France: Emmanuel Macron présentera ses vœux pour 2026 en tant que président**	December 31, 2025	https://www.rfi.fr/fr/france/20251231-france-emmanuel-macron-pr%C3%A9sente-ses-v%C5%93ux-pour-2026-en-tant-
17.	**France: Emmanuel Macron réaffirme le rôle central de la France dans l'Union européenne**	December 22, 2025	https://www.rfi.fr/fr/europe/20251222-emmanuel-macron-r%C3%A9affirme-le-r%C3%B4le-central-de-la-france-dans-l-union-europ%C3%A9enne
18.	**France: Emmanuel Macron promet un renforcement des capacités militaires françaises en 2026**	December 18, 2025	https://www.rfi.fr/fr/france/20251218-emmanuel-macron-promet-un-renforcement-des-capacit%C3%A9s-militaires-fran%C3%A7aises
19.	**France: Emmanuel Macron appelle à une réforme des institutions européennes**	December 15, 2025	https://www.rfi.fr/fr/europe/20251215-emmanuel-macron-appelle-%C3%A0-une-r%C3%A9forme-des-institutions-europ%C3%A9ennes
20.	**France: Emmanuel Macron défend la souveraineté européenne face aux tensions commerciales mondiales**	December 12, 2025	fr/fr/france/20251212-emmanuel-macron-défend-la-souveraineté-européenne-face-aux-tensions-commerciales

Appendix B — Complete list of African leaders related items (September - December 2025)

Seq. No.	Headline	Date	URL
	Sénégal: le président Bassirou Diomaye Faye signe un décret pour réorganiser la primature	December 06, 2025	https://www.rfi.fr/fr/afrique/20251206-sénégal-le-président-bassirou-diomaye-faye-signe-un-décret-pour-réorganiser-la-primature
2.	**Niger: un collectif exige la libération du président déchu Mohamed Bazoum, détenu depuis juillet 2023**	December 12, 2025	https://www.rfi.fr/fr/afrique/20251212-niger-collectif-exige-libération-mohamed-bazoum-détenu-depuis-juillet-2023
3.	**Bénin: la situation est sous contrôle, assure le président Talon après la tentative de coup d'État**	December 7, 2025	https://www.rfi.fr/fr/afrique/20251207-bénin-la-situation-est-sous-contrôle-assure-le-président-talon-après-la-tentative-de-coup-d-état
4.	**Bénin: des militaires annoncent à la télévision publique démettre de ses fonctions le président Talon**	December 7, 2025	https://www.rfi.fr/fr/afrique/20251207-bénin-des-militaires-annoncent-à-la-télévision-publique-démettre-de-ses-fonctions-le-président-talon
5	**Burkina Faso: « Le Burkina Faso aujourd'hui est une vitrine », assure le capitaine Traoré qui vante son bilan sécuritaire**	December 11, 2025	https://www.rfi.fr/fr/afrique/20251211-burkina-faso-vitrine-assure-capitaine-traoré-qui-vante-son-bilan-sécuritaire
6.	**RDC: quatre généraux condamnés à de la prison**	December 6, 2025	https://www.rfi.fr/fr/afrique/20251206-rdc-quatre-généraux-condamnés-à-de-la-prison-ferme-suite-à-la-prise-de-goma-par-l-afc-m23

	ferme suite à la prise de Goma par l'AFC/M23		
7.	**Accord de paix RDC-Rwanda: des réactions contrastées dans la classe politique congolaise**	December 5, 2025	https://www.rfi.fr/fr/afrique/20251205-accord-de-paix-rdc-rwanda-des-réactions-contrastées-dans-la-classe-politique-congolaise
8.	**RDC-Rwanda: sous l'égide de Trump, Tshisekedi et Kagame signent un accord de paix**	December 4, 2025	https://www.rfi.fr/fr/afrique/20251204-rdc-rwanda-sous-l-égide-de-trump-tshisekedi-et-kagame-signent-un-accord-de-paix
9.	**RDC: Félix Tshisekedi réclame « la reconnaissance des génocides perpétrés sur le territoire congolais »**	September 9, 2025	URL: https://www.rfi.fr/fr/afrique/20250909-rdc-félix-tshisekedi-réclame-la-reconnaissance-des-génocides-perpétrés-sur-le-territoire-congolais
10.	**Cameroun: Paul Biya a prêté serment pour un huitième mandat de président** Date: 6 November 2025	November 6, 2025	https://www.rfi.fr/fr/afrique/20251106-cameroun-paul-biya-prêté-serment-pour-un-huitième-mandat-de-président
11.	**Élections au Cameroun: le RDPC au pouvoir obtient la majorité dans l'ensemble des dix régions**	December 4, 2025	https://www.rfi.fr/fr/afrique/20251204-élections-au-cameroun-le-rdpc-au-pouvoir-obtient-la-majorité-dans-l-ensemble-des-dix-régions
12.	**Côte d'Ivoire: le président sortant Alassane Ouattara en meeting**	October 12, 2025	https://www.rfi.fr/fr/afrique/20251012-cote-d-ivoire-presidentielle-ouattara-daloa-haut-sassandra-gbagbo-pdci
13.	**Présidentielle en Côte d'Ivoire: Alassane Ouattara,**	October 3, 2025	https://www.rfi.fr/fr/afrique/20251003-présidentielle-en-côte-d-ivoire-alassane-

	un technocrate devenu pilier de la politique		ouattara-un-technocrate-devenu-pilier-de-la-politique
14.	**Présidentielle en Côte d'Ivoire: les premiers résultats provisoires donnent Ouattara vainqueur**	October 28, 2025	https://www.rfi.fr/fr/afrique/20251028-présidentielle-en-côte-d-ivoire-les-premiers-résultats-provisoires-donnent-ouattara-vainqueur
15.	**Madagascar: le président dissout l'Assemblée nationale avant un vote le visant pour abandon de poste**	October 14, 2025	https://www.rfi.fr/fr/afrique/20251014-crise-à-madagascar-le-président-dissout-l-assemblée-nationale-avant-un-vote-le-visant-pour-abandon-de-poste
16.	**Guinée: le chef de la transition Mamadi Doumbouya fixe au 28 décembre la date de la présidentielle**	September 29, 2025	https://www.rfi.fr/fr/afrique/20250929-guinée-le-chef-de-la-transition-mamadi-doumbouya-fixe-au-28-décembre-la-date-de-la-présidentielle
17.	**Guinée-Bissau: un proche de l'ex-président Umaro Sissoco Embaló nommé procureur de la République**	September 7, 2025	https://www.rfi.fr/fr/afrique/20251207-guinée-bissau-un-proche-de-l-ex-président-umaro-sissoco-embaló-nommé-procureur-de-la-république
18.	**Tentative de coup d'État au Bénin: deux hauts gradés retenus par les mutins, libérés ensuite, retour au calme à Cotonou**	December 7, 2025	https://www.rfi.fr/fr/afrique/20251208-tentative-de-coup-d-état-au-bénin-deux-hauts-gradés-retenus-par-les-mutins-libérés-retour-au-calme-à-cotonou
19.	**Coup d'État en Guinée-Bissau: l'opposition demande à la CEDEAO de faire preuve**	December 10, 2025	https://www.rfi.fr/fr/afrique/20251210-coup-d-état-en-guinée-bissau-l-opposition-

	de la même fermeté qu'au Bénin		demande-à-la-cédéao-de-faire-preuve-de-la-même-fermeté-qu-au-bénin
20.	**La CEDEAO se déclare "en état d'urgence" (déclarations d'Omar Touray relevant directement les chefs d'État ouest-africains)**	December 10, 2025	https://www.rfi.fr/fr/afrique/20251210-la-cédéao-se-déclare-en-état-d-urgence

Helon Habila's *Travellers* as a Narrative of Trauma

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Abstract

The Study investigates Travellers using Laurie Vickroy's multidisciplinary interpretative framework to show how readers can meditate on a variety of human responses to trauma. Previous studies about trauma have emphasised the collective description of the experiences of victims as related to a common adversity or condition. This study focuses on the individual responses of characters to the trauma of voluntary or involuntary immigration. Engaging this framework, the experiences of major characters in Habila's Travellers are explored. The unnamed narrator in Helon Habila's Travellers occupies a vantage point which pulls the story together in unexpected ways, bringing the lives of different immigrants into view. This study employs a qualitative/descriptive method for the research. These migrants share the common experience of trauma as they grapple with the different conditions that plague them. This backdrop allows the reader to interrogate the physical, social and mental state of the characters. These characters include: the unnamed narrator, David/Moussa, Manu, Basma, Rachida and Omar, Karim Abdulbashir, and Juma. The study concludes that emigration to the Global North constitutes a location for psychoanalytic studies based on individually diverse experiences and responses, which can include drifting, repeating patterns, pragmatizing, protecting, rebellion and self-harm.
***Keywords**: Trauma theory, Helon Habila, Travellers, Global North, Global South*

Introduction

This study adopts Laurie Vickroy's multidisciplinary interpretative framework to show how readers can meditate on a variety of human responses to shock, beyond repression, trauma and repetition. Vickroy uses Mary Root's postulations as a clinical psychologist who explains that "experiences are insidious because they are endemic to particular class situations that are repeated in ways that maintain hierarchies of dominance" (132). This method places emphasis on the victim's experience of events rather than the events themselves.

Habila depicts the fragmented lives of global migrants from the global South not as an organic description of one great traumatic event but as fragmented narratives of people who respond to their experiences differently. This study draws upon the field of trauma theory to examine the circumstances of their social, political, economic, cultural and psychological realities. Habila's literary construction of different characters displays a realisation that personality types respond

differently to traumatic events. However, the binding force which draws them together is their varied experiences of migration and trauma. The fractured lives of the migrants are depicted practically in the manner in which Habila pieces the storyline together. In the beginning, it is predictable that the narrator is a privileged migrant, but a simple twist demotes him to the position of a refugee. This shift in rank is necessary for the narrator to experience firsthand the pain of an underprivileged migrant; in addition, it gives a glimpse of another subplot, which promises a happier ending.

Objectives of the Study: To investigate the specific causes of trauma to major characters in *Travellers*.

i. To identify their responses to these events using suppositions in trauma theory.

Trauma Narrative

An interrogation of trauma theory must recognise the contribution of its earliest theorisations, which include the foundational proponents from psychoanalytic theories. Other foundational writers have drawn from their work to propose a closer and more practical application of trauma studies to collective historical events. Most vocal among them is Cathy Caruth's *Unclaimed Experience Trauma Narrative and History* (1996) which draws its inspiration from psychoanalytic theories of forebears such as Freud and Lacan. Caruth reiterates Freud's vision of the history of trauma with close reference to the captivity of the Jews, the deeds of Moses and the description of what Freud calls "traumatic neurosis" this is explained as the symptom of the effect of a traumatic escape; for example, from an accident that an individual has experienced. There is a period of latency, when the effect is not apparent. Later, the psychical and motor symptoms appear, which can be ascribed to his shock of whatever happened at the time of the accident. According to Caruth: "For history to be a history of trauma means that it is referential precisely to the extent it is not fully perceived as it occurs; or to put it somewhat differently, that a history can be grasped only in the very inaccessibility of its occurrence." (17)

According to Craps Stef, trauma theory emerged, promising to infuse the study of literary texts with new relevance. He quotes Caruth's assertion about how "trauma forms a bridge between disparate historical experiences… listening to the trauma of another can contribute to cross-cultural solidarity, and to the creation of new forms of community" (46). But Craps argues that Caruth's own work failed to live up to the cross-cultural ethical engagement:

> Remarkably, however, the founding texts of the field (including Caruth's own work) largely fail to live up to this promise of cross-cultural ethical engagement. They fail on at least three counts: they marginalise or ignore traumatic experiences of non-Western or minority cultures; they tend to take for granted the universal validity of definitions of trauma and recovery that have developed out of the history of Western modernity; and they often favour or even prescribe a modernist aesthetic of fragmentation and aporia as uniquely suited to the task of bearing witness to trauma. As a result of all of this, rather than promoting cross-cultural solidarity, trauma theory risks assisting in the perpetuation of the very beliefs, practices, and structures that maintain existing injustices and inequalities (46).

Pederson Joshua (2018) refers to Dominick LaCapra's argument that texts featuring an indirect link to trauma might be thought of as partaking in a unique genre – one that LaCapra refers to as "traumatic realism" In this genre, metaphor mediates the relationship between reality and catastrophe. The second wave of theorists that Pederson identifies produced a variety of insights that alter and expand the understanding of the ways in which trauma and narratives interact. "Gabriele Schwab constructs a model that addresses transgenerational trauma in literature" (105), saying literary narratives may also pass trauma from generation to generation. The previous generations transmit unresolved conflicts to their descendants. These unintegrated traumas manifest themselves in texts like ghosts; unseen but not unnoticed in the texts of transgenerational trauma. The pains that pass from one generation to the next inflect narrative in terms of silence, disruption and indirection. Next, he discusses how Ilka Saal looks at different traumas which tend to link to one another in narratives. For Saal, it is indicative of our tendency to read a current trauma through the lens of a previous one.

More recent critics such as Michelle Balaev have proven that the newest criticisms have employed psychoanalytic and semiotic theories that restructure how trauma functions in literature. According to Balaev, "Many critics who address the rhetorical components of trauma explore both how and why traumatic experience is represented in literature by combining psychoanalytic theory with postcolonial theory or cultural studies" (3). Previous theoretical approaches showed restrictive and universal interpretations of trauma, which led to single conclusions about the nature of trauma. Balaev's collection of essays with different approaches to trauma shows that: "A single conceptualisation of trauma will likely never fit the multiple and often contradictory depictions of

trauma in literature because texts cultivate a wide variety of values that reveal individual and cultural understandings of the self, memory, and society" (8).

Vickroy's development of trauma theory is analytical of personalized responses to emerging catastrophic effects of war, oppression, poverty, colonisation and individual psyche. Some of her investigations have been geared towards the relationship between trauma and displacement, particularly when there is a traumatic separation from the homeland. Vickroy investigates the work of exiled Cuban writer, Reinaldo Arenas (1943-1990) as exemplary of how "the traumas of revolution, oppression and dislocation produce a fragmented, isolated and dissociated identity and an aesthetic sensibility compelled to both critique and reconnect to homeland (Vickroy, 2005, p.109)". In her *Reading Trauma Narratives* (Vickroy b, 2015), Vickroy combines multidisciplinary approaches to address a broad range of possible contexts and extensive ramifications of trauma, which focus on psychological research. This is because it considers the interrelationship of cultural, cognitive and physiological contributions to the production and evaluation of emotions. In her own words:

> Trauma fiction provides scenarios that confront readers with subjective endurance in the face of crisis and conflict, representing how defensive responses are created out of many types of wounding. This fiction also provides a contemplative and experiential link to traumatic processes (Vickroy, Trauma and Survival 24), effectively charting the remnants of characters' traumas and fear- producing associations, as well as the fixed ideas that help them cope. These texts involve readers in the worlds that traumatised individuals try to construct for themselves, where they build psychological defences against threats (Vickroy b, 2015, xi).

Vickroy's engages in a review of Svetlana Alexievich's work on trauma among the Soviet women veterans of World War II. She employs cultural, feminist and socio-political approaches to trauma to analyse Alexievich's process of helping women veterans claim their testimonial voices, revealing socially suppressed traumatic effects. Vickroy uses Alexievich's archive of testimonies to analyse the suppressed traumatic effects that are recognisable in their testimonies and how they individually manage to cope with these traumatic memories after many years. According to Vickroy:

> Though Alexievich has been accused of creating essentialist portraits of women as life-givers, the women also portray themselves this way, insisting that their strong sense of gendered identity and values, deeply embedded from their childhood, allowed them to survive war. This is an ironic response given that some women found self-worth and independence in wartime, revealing the complex mix of views of gender and war then. Testifying to trauma, especially from within a society that had downplayed its people's suffering, has important personal, cultural, and historical implications (Vickroy c, p.78).

Travellers

Habila's *Travellers* has received critical attention from various scholars. Helga Ramsey-Kurz (2020) pays attention to the embodied act of narration explored by Habila in *Travellers* as a mode of cultivating a compassionate understanding of forcibly displaced persons and their lifestyles in prolonged transit. Helga applied Judith Butler's postulations about the eradicated and unmourned "Others" in the narrative about refugee experiences. Habila's protagonist is seen as a person who learns to listen to other people's stories compassionately while distancing himself from the abstract projections of refugee subjecthood. Ramsey-Kurz's stance about the distancing of Habila's protagonist is arguable because the established system succeeds in muting his voice to the point of hopelessness, until the almost retired doctor at the camp takes special interest in his case. It is their special effort that restores him to his former level of the cosmopolitan migrant.

But Nadia's (2024) essay examines Habila's *Travellers* and Hamid's *Exit West* as literature about mobility that mirrors new directions and developments in the 21st century refugee novels. The so-called new nomad is seen as a person whose life is constantly tied to involuntary mobility and migration. The refugee as the new nomad in Europe stands out in contrast to the demonised representations of refugees in the media. According to Butt, Habila calls his characters 'travellers' and not refugees because they are ravaged by civil war, violence, oppression, genocide or economic depravity. In a study that adopted psychoanalytic theory to analyse events and personalities, Obakare Henry and Babogha Julius (2021) found that through the assemblage of binaries, the impacts of the refugee crisis on the migrant and host are equalised. The impact of the binaries was highlighted through the motifs of journey, suffering, resilience, adventure, lack and rejection. In *Travellers,* the position of migrant and host as being in a state of equalisation sounds exaggerated. Both host and migrant face similar struggles especially when seen from the point of

relationships, but the host almost always enjoys privileges above the migrant. For example, the three-year sentence given to Katharina for manslaughter after the death of Moussa. She had the opportunity to rebuild her life. It is questionable that a migrant would have been given the same sentence and leverage. During the conversation between the narrator and Abdulbashir, the narrator explains that: "A black person's relationship with Europe would always need qualification – he or she couldn't simply be native European, there had to be an origin explanation." (Travellers 165). The position of "other" is firmly placed upon the migrants.

Usoro Ekikereobong and Onyema Kikanwa (2024) adopted AtoQuayson's tenet in postcolonial theory about the myth of migrant utopia. The paper showed that the migration process is traceable to colonial systems. It showed that in *Travellers* references to other lands are equally barren. The paper gave focus to the illusion of a migrant paradise. In another study that contrasted Habila's *Travellers* and Chimamanda Adichie's *Americanah,* Akinsete Tolulope and Ojo Iyanuoluwa pay attention to the concept, place and essence of home as well as the forces behind the condition of the disenchantment experience as a reality of migration. Their paper adopted Bhaba's concept of the Unhomely and Said's Orientalism for the study. The findings revealed that the idea of home, migratory impulse and disenchantment are prevalent motifs in both novels. This motif is in tandem with the narrator's thoughts in *Travellers*: "What do deportees feel: relief, shame, anger? Surely, they must feel relief to be away from all that European suspicion and alienation? And yet, some of them, no sooner do they arrive than they begin to plot their return. It is as if some homing device, focused toward Europe, is implanted in their brains, and it never stops humming till their feet are on European soil (109).

Banita Gabriella's (2021) paper tackles the problem of refugees' representation by cosmopolitans. The relationship between the cosmopolitan protagonist and several refugees is scrutinised using Sam Durrant's description of "cosmopolitan privilege", which cannot truly reflect the struggles of the refugees. The protagonist in *Travellers* comes close to meeting this understanding when he accidentally becomes a refugee himself. Nevertheless, he has options that others cannot access. Banita believes that Habila has succeeded in achieving a self-critical recognition that shows a partial and tainted position about the plight of refugees.

Existing studies have focused on migration, identity and refugee representations in *Travellers*, often privileging thematic or ideological readings of the text. This study shifts attention to the differentiated psychological responses of individual characters to traumatic experiences. Drawing

on Laurie Vickroy's multidisciplinary model, the study analyses how diverse coping mechanisms – such as drifting, repetition, pragmatism, protection and rebellion and self-harm – are narratively constructed and experienced by characters.

Discussion

The individual stories which are portrayed in *Travellers* show a complex type of disillusionment that is highly personalised in nature. These personalised responses form the crux of this study about trauma in Habila's *Travellers*.

The Unnamed Narrator

The narrator in *Travellers* is a doctoral student who is striving to finish his dissertation about African history at the 1884 Berlin Conference. The unnamed narrator always experiences hesitation when he must decide to transition between geographical spaces. In his mind, he equates the experience of leaving, or departure, to death. He is to leave the US for Berlin with his wife, Gina, who had just won a scholarship. It should have been a welcome idea, because it would encourage him to resume his research, but he reflects: "Still I hesitated because I knew every departure is a death, every return a rebirth. Most changes happen unplanned, and they always leave a scar. (12)

His marriage to Gina soon faces its harshest challenge after Gina's miscarriage. He is expected to stand strong as a supportive husband to his wife. But the dynamics of the relationship have been reversed in this situation. Gina had always been the assertive and pragmatic wife, who turns over the facts of any matter to conclude. For the first time, Gina is emotionally, psychologically and physically vulnerable:

> ...something shifted in Gina. She stopped going out; she cried all day; she stopped eating. There wasn't much I could do; I sat by her side, held her hand. I reminded her we were still young and there'd be opportunities to try again...she turned her face to the wall and curled into a ball. Making herself smaller, like a tiny foetus (Habila 12)

The narrator starts drinking alcohol and the couple grow further apart until their separation. He seems to be adrift in life. Before his marriage to Gina, she had described him as having a fear of commitment. He occupies a privileged position as a cosmopolitan protagonist, but an invisible force always pulls him into the affairs of other less privileged migrants. This is how he meets

Mark, Eric, Stan and Uta. The initial trauma of losing his unborn child and being unable to find closure finds him drifting more deeply into the lives of others. The protagonist is incapable of protecting Gina from the vicissitudes of life, but he is available for others, who function as a distraction from the core problem in his marriage. He is soon invited to a protest, and he witnesses a riot staged by refugees. He continues in this pattern until his chance meeting with Portia who lives in the apartment next to him.

Again, he strikes a friendship, which later develops into a romantic relationship. Portia invites him to Basel and later to Lusaka. He is constantly running towards any outlet that can carry him along. After his refugee camp experience, he finally returned home to Nigeria. The process of recuperation becomes embarrassing, especially for his mother, who tells family and friends about how his wife will soon be joining him. Until finally, his father offers him his savings so that he can return and put his life in order.

Metaphorically, it is a state of disillusioned homelessness swirling away in whichever way the stormy sea of life is blowing. This cosmopolitan protagonist has not escaped homelessness despite his privileged position. He is just as troubled as the other migrants crossing the sea in dinghy boats. Bhaba's theorisation about unhomeliness applies to the unnamed narrator: "Although the 'unhomely' is a paradigmatic post-colonial experience, it has a resonance that can be heard distinctly, if erratically, in fictions that negotiate the powers of cultural difference in a range of historical conditions and social contradiction (Bhaba 142). This is graphically displayed when the narrator spends hours looking out to the sea in the refugee camp. Other inmates were watching and reliving the troubling memories of how their boats had capsized at sea; the narrator was also there, even though he had come to the North on a plane with a student's passport.

Response /coping mechanism

The unnamed narrator responds to the trauma in his private life by finding company with other less privileged migrants whom he meets in Berlin. His sense of direction is unfocused; therefore, he is easily dragged into other people's affairs as he directs his sympathy and time to others rather than the obvious relationship problem with Gina. His sense of drifting has the effect of destroying their relationship. According to a study conducted by Franz et al, Experiential Avoidance (EA) which is associated with trauma symptoms, is a condition where there is an avoidance in facing perceived traumatic experiences, especially during pregnancy. The study revealed thus:

> Trauma symptom's severity was associated with higher levels of EA across the 2 weeks; however, among women, the impact of trauma symptoms on EA was no longer significant when support from a partner was above average quality or higher…Conclusion: Findings highlight the protective role of high-quality support from intimate partners and suggest that trauma-related interventions targeting partner support processes, especially those implemented during pregnancy, might enhance recovery and prevent further distress and dysfunction among pregnant women experiencing trauma symptoms (Franz et al 2).

In Gina's case, it was the experience of a miscarriage. Partner support was especially crucial in her condition. When the narrator decided not to return to America with Gina, her hope is expressed simply in these words: "We used to be happy, she said. And I knew she meant before the miscarriage. 'I thought if we came to Berlin, together, away from everything…I thought Berlin would heal us' (Habila 69). The absence of the healing process destroys their relationship.

David/Moussa

David travels away from home at the age of nineteen. The fundamental family problem is the absence of their father, James Kariku who lives in self-exile. As a famous poet, James moves from one university to the other as an expert in African studies/literature. He refuses to recognize that his days of activism during Kuanda's dictatorial era has elapsed. He continues to move from one fellowship to the other in Global Northern universities. He is regarded in high esteem and treated with high reverence in these institutions. His family returns to Zambia but he stays on for another eighteen years. The dictator is gone, some of Jame's colleagues had died, retired or returned to their villages. But James Kariku keeps on fantasizing about his power and relevance in a country that has long forgotten him. The situation is described as follows:

> But the truth was that he had long ceased to be a poet, and most of the resistance was imaginary. But the people there, they loved it. They didn't care. They didn't even know where Zambia was on the map of Africa. As far as they were concerned, all of Africa was one huge Gulag archipelago, and every African poet or writer living outside Africa has to be in exile from dictatorship (Habila 140).

When he finally returns many people do not recognize him. He attempts to catch a plane without a visa, thinking that his reputation will be enough to let him get on a plane. Inadvertently his

absence has taken a toll on his children. David leaves home as an illegal migrant eking out a living as he travels along. He is working on Brigitte's father's farm when he meets her. They want to get married but he gets deported to Mali because that is where he claimed as his home country. He makes it back to Switzerland where Brigitte goes to meet him to contract their marriage. The union barely lasts two years when he begins to complain that she is too controlling. He meets Katharina at a carnival and the relationship leads to another marriage. Their union causes disagreement between Katharina's parents and friends but they protect themselves through isolation. Later on, Katharina discovers that his so-called family is an adoptive one. She identifies the hypocrisy of David always talking about the importance of family, yet being estranged from his own. He becomes religious and insists that Katharina joins him. He does not pay their bills but sends his own money to Mali. This leads to a confrontation where he threatens her with a knife. At this point, their relationship declines into a separation, and later a divorce. During an encounter at the train station, David tries to hug his ex-wife, who pushes him out of fear. He falls on the train track and is crushed to death.

David's tragic end marks the end of his escape from his real identity. He despises the fact that he is from a more privileged background than he wanted to appear. While James Kariku's wife and daughter strive to find closure after his death, David meets with the misfortune of an untimely death while trying to craft a new beginning. He adopts the name Moussa in his attempt to create his new self. He dislikes his father's abandonment of their family, but he inadvertently repeats the same pattern of abandonment.

Response /coping mechanism

David's response to his family's dysfunction is denial and escape. Interestingly, he is found to be repeating a similar pattern of family dysfunction to his father. According to Pederson Joshua (2018), Dominick LaCapra's argument that texts featuring an indirect link to trauma might be thought of as partaking in a unique genre – one that LaCapra refers to as "traumatic realism" in this genre, metaphor mediates the relationship between reality and catastrophe. The second wave of theorists that Pederson identifies produced a variety of insights that alter and expand the understanding of the ways in which trauma and narratives interact. "Gabriele Schwab constructs a model that addresses transgenerational trauma in literature" (105), saying literary narratives may also pass trauma from generation to generation. The previous generations transmit unresolved

conflicts to their descendants. These unintegrated traumas manifest themselves in texts like ghosts; unseen but not unnoticed in the texts of transgenerational trauma. The pains that pass from one generation to the next inflect narrative in terms of silence, disruption and indirection. Next, he discusses how Ilka Saal looks at different traumas which tend to link to one another in narratives. For Saal, it is indicative of our tendency to read a current trauma through the lens of a previous one.

Forter Greg's focus is on the tendency to concentrate on catastrophes that strike in a single moment while ignoring "structural" "insidious" trauma: persistent aching pain often related to enduring societal pressures – like racism or patriarchal oppression.' (107) His model suggests that such pain manifests itself in unique ways. He believes that if an author is to engage structural trauma in a text, he/she must provide deeper, more complex backstories for his characters that give insight into the ways these individuals are imbricated in a social network coloured by insidious trauma. This demands an introspective and deep insight into social history. James Kariku and David Kariku seem unable to settle into conservative family patterns even though they initiate marriages. The family's dysfunction is shown to proceed into a repetitive pattern.

Manu, Rachida, Basma and Omar

These characters are a family. Their movement to the North is motivated by increased racist violence which happened in Libya. Manu is a Libyan-born Nigerian. He was separated from his wife and son in a Germany-bound boat that capsizes. The wife, Basma, and son, Omar, are washed up on the southern Italian Coast. Basma and Omar are rescued by Matteo. But Basma loses her memory, and Matteo convinces her that he had travelled to her country before, and that his marriage proposal was rejected by her parents. He tells her that she is there because she had promised to return to him. Symbolically, the depiction of her effort to plant a rose garden that never flourishes is an indicator of the failure of the relationship. Basma later regains her memory and heads for Checkpoint Charlie.

Response /coping mechanism

In trauma studies, survival-oriented adaptation serves as defence mechanisms to shield individuals from emotional and psychological distress. From the beginning of their journey to the North, he knew that their journey could turn treacherous; therefore, he had a plan. Basma's loss of memory happens naturally as a psychological response to the trauma of their harrowing experience at sea.

This has been identified by theorists as repression. According to Shambavi Kumari, defence mechanisms serve a protective role by shielding individuals from emotional and psychological distress. Studies about defence mechanisms began as early as Sigmund Freud and psychoanalytic theory. Concepts such as repression and denial are unconscious mechanisms aimed at protecting the individual from anxiety and negative emotions. Other theorists built on Freud's work and expanded the understanding of the potential for maladaptive outcomes if used excessively or inflexibly.

> Defence mechanisms like rationalisation, intellectualisation, suppression, sublimation, and humour are often adaptive and do not typically require psychiatric treatment unless they are used excessively and interfere with daily functioning or relationships. It is important to remember that the use of defence mechanisms exists on a spectrum, and some degree of their use is a normal part of human psychology (Shambavi 7).

Manu manages trauma with practical survival skills rather than denial. His pragmatic approach is traced to his care for his daughter Rachida while managing a job as a bouncer at a nightclub and his cautious relationship with two women. However, he tells both women about his hope of being reunited with his wife, Basma. Manu believes that she is alive. "If she isn't he'd know, and if she is alive, she'd never rest until she finds them (Habila 83). Manu plans to reunite with his family specifically at Checkpoint Charlie, and it can be deduced that this works out as he had planned.

Karim Albashir

The narrator introduces the reader to Karim Albashir while on transit. Karim is from North Sudan but has settled in Somalia. He leaves Somalia because of the tribal wars and the different factions organised around family ties. His dilemma begins when the son of a warlord expresses interest in marrying his ten-year-old daughter. The young man and his gang use threats and intimidation to force an arrangement for the wedding. Karim methodologically escapes from Somalia the night before the wedding day. He attempts to settle into other countries with his growing family. His son, Mahmood, fell off a balcony of a poorly built apartment and sustained an injury. Karim can only find specialized care for his son in the North. He leaves his wife and daughters in Turkey and travels with his two sons, Fadel and Mahmood. Fadel gets embroiled in religious matters while in Bulgaria, and he reports that his father is a religious fanatic. Soon, Fadel leaves home with a religious group while his father is job hunting. Fadel is almost an adult, and Bulgaria's legal

counsel has declared that Fadel will remain in their custody until he reaches eighteen years and then will make his own decision.

Response /coping mechanism

Karim's response to traumatic events against himself and his family is resilience. According to Asteroid Health, the key factors that contribute to trauma resilience are multifaceted, but support from family and friends is fundamental to navigating adversity.

> Positive coping strategies are crucial for managing stressors effectively. Techniques such as mindfulness, problem-solving, and reframing negative thoughts empower individuals to transform adversity into opportunities for growth. Learning to view experiences through constructive lens can significantly contribute to one's resilience. Furthermore, maintaining a sense of self-efficacy is vital. It refers to the belief in one's ability to manage challenges effectively (Asteroid Health np)

Karim finds his way to the North as a medical tourist because of Mahmood's knee injury. He protects his girl-child from premature marriage and fights above all odds to find medical attention for his injured son. By the time Karim tells his story, he has travelled through Yemen, Syria, Turkey, Istanbul, Bulgaria, Basel, and is on his way to Germany because his lawyer has finally helped him acquire five-year asylum papers. He is hopeful that the rest of the family can join him. Karim maintains a clear focus and finally succeeds despite the periods of estrangement between himself and other family members. He is comforted by the action of his daughter who refuses a marriage proposal so that she does not leave her mother alone. All his actions are guided by his resilience to his responsibility of protecting and providing for his family.

Mark/Mary

Mark Chinomba is one of the migrants who came to Germany for studies. He meets the narrator when he responds to Gina's advert for migrants to pose for her portrait for the prize of 50 Euros. For no clear reason, Gina disqualifies Mark. The reader later finds out that her intuition is correct when it is revealed that Mark, unlike the other migrants, had won a scholarship to Germany. Mark's family history reveals that he had a misunderstanding with his father because of his choice of career. His preacher father appreciates his acting only in church; anywhere else is considered a sin. Mark's desire to study Theatre Arts in the university is not supported by his father, but he persists. While on scholarship as a film student to Berlin, he lives in a run-down church with his group of

friends. He mimics his father and deconsecrates the lectern with alcohol just to spite the memory of his father.

Forter Greg explains that psychoanalytic discussions about trauma in the works of Caruth move beyond its applicability to extreme cases such as the holocaust and other types of violations. He focuses on:

> ...the trauma induced by patriarchal identity formation rather, say, than the trauma of rape, the violence not of lynching but of everyday racism. These phenomena are indeed traumas in the sense of having decisive and deforming effects on the psyche that give rise to compulsively repeated and highly rigidified social relations. But such traumas are also so chronic and cumulative, so woven into the fabric of our societies, that they cannot count as "shocks" in the way that Nazi persecution and genocide do in the accounts of Caruth and others (260)

It is later revealed that Mark is actually a transgender person, who was called Mary back home in Malawi. To severe from her biological roots, she writes a letter to Malawi, posing as a friend and saying that Mary had died in an accident. She signs off the letter as Mark and starts living with that identity. During a protest at the refugee camp, someone pushes her off the roof, and she falls to her death.

Response /coping mechanism

Mark/Mary's personal story shows the effect of a dysfunctional relationship where parents insist on reliving their lives through their children. Her response to the pressure of reliving the life of her father is shown first as rebellion against all that her father stands for. She makes a mockery of everything her father believes in. Becoming transgender is the final straw that would break the already delicate relationship. The feigned letter that announces her death is meant to totally sever her relationship with the family. This pressure to conform becomes a trigger for rebellion, estrangement and untimely death.

Juma

Juma stumbles his way to the North while fleeing terrorism in Nigeria. After his arrest, he is kept at a detention camp where he is denied asylum. A group of activists fight against his deportation because his case had been appealed. With their assistance, he escapes the hospital where he is being force-fed with feeding tubes after he goes on a hunger strike. The city of London is divided

over his case. Some want him deported, while others believe that he deserves asylum. He has to be moved around by the so-called Guardians to avoid arrest. He is later traced, arrested and deported. In a twist of fate, the Nigerian government refuses to allow the plane permission to land, so it returns.

Juma's story highlights the plight of the victims of terrorism who flee their countries for safety. Their appalling conditions are painted vividly as pathetic and horrifying. His long letter to the narrator explains that he continues his hunger strike at the detention centre not willingly any longer, but because he has lost the ability to retain food and the will to live.

Response /coping mechanism

Juma draws attention to his plight by going on a hunger strike. This form of self-harm is meant to draw attention to the injustice of his deportation. The process takes a negative toll on his physical and mental health. DMT Fessler's paper discusses the ethical issues around the treatment of patients undergoing hunger strikes. They concern ethical decisions because of the conflict between a doctor's duty to life and their obligation to respect the autonomy of the patient. According to Fessler: "Investigators have noted that patients with often no previous history of psychiatric disorder may manifest megalomaniac and persecutory delusions, auditory hallucinations, somatisation, dissociation, suicidality, and confusion (243). Fessler reveals that the World Medical Association (WMA) instructs that physicians interview hunger strikers daily as the possibility of death draws closer, perhaps they may wish to revise their initial assessment about the value of hunger striking. As much as hunger striking is a physical resolve, it is also deeply psychological in nature. Juma explains that: "I told him I am fasting not because I want to any more, all that has lost meaning to me… I want the perfect food of the gods themselves, and they thought I was joking, but I am serious. I want perfect food, but where can I find it here on earth? (293) Juma's response to trauma is self-harm; in the end, he fails to cope, and he is depicted as gradually succumbing to death.

Findings

The findings of the study reveal that the major characters in Habila's *Travellers* had varied but personal traumatic experiences. Their responses to trauma include Experiential Avoidance, denial and repetition, adaptation and pragmatism, resilience, rebellion, and self-harm.

Conclusion

This study proves that the universalisation of trauma response is indeed questionable and erroneous. Some responses to trauma tend to be culturally driven. In Africa, the expected response to traumatic occurrences is the logical approach, like the comfort offered to Gina by her husband after her miscarriage. Such an approach is based on an African worldview on trauma, where, for instance, it is often assumed, with gratitude, that the death of a beloved family member may have been averted by the death of their animal. In a different cultural context, such rationalisation might sound dismissive to the grieving partner. This study shows that, while some responses can be culturally driven, others can be motivated by the personality of the individual involved. In Habila's *Travellers,* it is shown that trauma requires more specificity than lump descriptions and responses. Laurie Vickroy's focus on individual responses to trauma has illuminated a different angle to the study of Habila's *Travellers*. It has been revealed that differential responses to trauma are individualised.

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Hate Speech and Fake News in Nigeria

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Abstract

The research problem centres on how hate speech and fake news mutually reinforce one another to erode social cohesion and democratic stability in Nigeria, while scholarly understanding of their interaction remains fragmented and poorly supported by empirical data. The study's objective is to systematically review and synthesise existing scholarship to map dominant explanations, compare methodological approaches, and identify critical knowledge gaps. Methodologically, a qualitative systematic literature review was conducted, thematically analysing 45 peer-reviewed articles, policy documents, and institutional reports published between 2015 and 2024. The theoretical framework draws on Social Responsibility Theory, Technological Determinism, and Conflict Theory to analyse how historical ethno-religious divisions, algorithmic platform architectures, and political manipulation collectively fuel harmful content. Key findings reveal that Nigerian scholarship treats hate speech and fake news largely in isolation, lacks empirical audience-reception studies, and relies heavily on a narrow set of authors. The literature further exposes a tension between legislative deterrence and media literacy interventions, as well as weak and fragmented regulatory responses. The study concludes that an effective counter-strategy must balance precise legal sanctions with robust media literacy programmes, enforceable platform accountability, and community-driven counter-speech, all tailored to Nigeria's socio-political context and aligned with international human rights standards.

***Keywords**: algorithmic amplification, digital disinformation, media regulation, platform accountability, ethno-religious conflict.*

Introduction

Nigeria, Africa's most populous nation and a vibrant yet fragile democracy, confronts a mounting crisis: the entanglement of hate speech and deliberately false information (fake news) within its increasingly digitised public sphere. The country's rich ethnic, religious, and political diversity, while a source of resilience, also creates deep societal fault lines that are easily exploited through online communication (Chukwuma, 2020). The rapid expansion of mobile internet access and social media usage has transformed information flows, but it has also enabled harmful content to spread with unprecedented speed and scale, often outpacing traditional media gatekeepers and regulatory mechanisms (Pate, 2018).

A growing body of literature examines the manifestations and consequences of these phenomena.

Studies have documented the role of hate speech in triggering electoral violence (Higazi, 2016; Chukwuma, 2020), the algorithmic amplification of polarising content on platforms like Facebook and WhatsApp (Tufekci, 2017), and the regulatory challenges posed by Nigeria's fragmented legal framework (Ojukwu, 2019). International comparisons, particularly with Germany's Network Enforcement Act (NetzDG), have further illuminated the limitations of Nigeria's current approach (Schulz, 2022). However, despite these contributions, significant gaps persist. Most scholarship addresses hate speech or fake news separately, failing to capture their synergistic effects. Methodologically, empirical studies employing surveys, experiments, or ethnographic fieldwork remain rare; the field is dominated by legal analysis and textual commentary. Moreover, the discourse has been heavily shaped by a few frequently cited authors, resulting in theoretical repetition and a narrow analytical base. The rapidly evolving nature of platform algorithms and the shifting landscape of Nigerian disinformation, as witnessed in the 2023 general elections, demand more up-to-date and integrated scholarly engagement.

This study responds to these gaps by systematically reviewing and synthesising existing research on hate speech and fake news in Nigeria. The objectives are to: (1) map the thematic and theoretical contours of the literature; (2) critically compare authors, methodologies, and findings; and (3) identify knowledge lacunae that future empirical work may address. In doing so, the paper aims to provide a comprehensive analytical foundation for policy and further research.

Statement of the Problem

Hate speech and fake news are not novel to Nigeria, but their contemporary convergence on digital platforms has created a qualitatively new and severe threat to democratic governance, inter-group relations, and public trust. While national laws such as the Cybercrimes (Prohibition, Prevention, etc.) Act 2015 exists, enforcement remains inconsistent, and their definitions are often criticised for vagueness. Civil society organisations and international bodies repeatedly warn of the real-world violence, voter suppression, and communal polarisation that these communications generate. Yet, decades after the phenomenon gained academic attention, the knowledge base remains fragmented. There is no scholarly consensus on the relative efficacy of different interventions; few analyses rigorously connect conceptual models to empirical reality; and the few available datasets are often outdated. Consequently, policy-makers, platform operators, and civil society actors operate with limited evidence-based guidance. This study addresses the problem by critically consolidating what is known, exposing what is unknown, and proposing a structured

agenda for both research and practice.

Literature Review

Thematic Patterns and Authorial Perspectives

Pate (2018) provides an early comprehensive overview, arguing that hate speech and fake news are twin instruments used to manipulate political communication and undermine national integration. Chukwuma (2020) narrows the focus to the 2019 elections, demonstrating through content analysis how inciting language spread on Facebook and Twitter correlated with incidents of violence. While both authors underscore the disruptive power of social media, Pate leans towards structural-regulatory solutions, whereas Chukwuma emphasises the responsibility of political elites and the need for media literacy. A key disagreement centres on causation: Pate attributes the virulence of hate speech largely to technological affordances, while Chukwuma foregrounds historical ethno-political entrepreneurs. This tension is mirrored internationally; Schulz (2022), in her analysis of Germany's NetzDG, acknowledges the role of platform design but argues that stringent legislation can compel rapid content removal, something largely absent in Nigeria.

Methodological Differences and Limitations

Methodologically, the field is dominated by qualitative textual analysis and legal commentary. Pate (2018) relies on document analysis and case illustrations; Chukwuma (2020) conducts a structured content analysis of social media posts but does not engage with audience reception. Ojukwu (2019) offers a legal-doctrinal critique of Nigerian hate speech bills, highlighting First-Amendment-style concerns. Missing are large-scale quantitative studies, longitudinal tracking of content-reach, ethnographic explorations of how communities interpret inflammatory messages, and experimental designs testing the efficacy of counter-speech or media literacy interventions. Even the few quantitative efforts (e.g., surveys by NOIPolls, 2021) are descriptive and rarely peer-reviewed. This methodological narrowness limits the ability to establish causative links or to generalise findings.

Knowledge Gaps

Several gaps are evident. First, there is insufficient integration: no major study examines how hate speech and fake news interact – for example, how fabricated stories about Fulani herdsmen or Biafran agitators are weaponised with hateful rhetoric. Second, the literature largely overlooks the

encrypted platform WhatsApp, which a 2023 Afrobarometer survey identified as the primary vector of political misinformation among Nigerian adults. Third, recent developments – the 2023 elections, the post-#EndSARS disinformation campaigns, and the evolution of TikTok and Twitter (now X) – are under-represented in peer-reviewed outlets. Fourth, there is a striking absence of empirical work on the perspectives of content moderators, fact-checkers, or journalists operating within Nigeria. Finally, the repeated citation of Pate (2018), Chukwuma (2020), and a handful of other sources has created an echo chamber that stifles fresh analytical angles.

Theoretical Framework

This study draws on three interconnected theories that illuminate the production, amplification, and societal impact of hate speech and fake news in Nigeria.

Social Responsibility Theory posits that media institutions, including digital platforms, bear an obligation to serve the public good by disseminating truthful information, fostering pluralism, and avoiding harm (McQuail, 1987). Within this lens, the widespread circulation of unverified and hateful content represents a systemic failure of platform and media gatekeeping. The theory underpins the argument for proactive content moderation and ethical journalism.

Technological Determinism, as articulated by Williams (2003), asserts that communication technologies shape social structures and cultural norms. The rapid absorption of smartphones and algorithm-driven platforms in Nigeria has fundamentally restructured the public sphere. This perspective explains why the same messages that once circulated slowly through rumour now achieve instant, scalable virality, often prioritised by engagement-based algorithms (Tufekci, 2017).

Conflict Theory (Ritzer & Stepnisky, 2017) interprets hate speech and fake news as instruments of power, deployed by competing groups to mobilise supporters, delegitimise opponents, and control resources. In Nigeria's context, political and ethno-religious elites weaponise these tools particularly during elections and communal conflicts, deepening societal rifts for strategic gain.

Together, these theories frame the analysis that follows: the content originates from societal fissures (Conflict Theory), is supercharged by digital architectures (Technological Determinism), and persists because of the unfulfilled duties of information gatekeepers (Social Responsibility Theory).

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative systematic literature review to synthesise existing knowledge, critique methodologies, and identify gaps.

Research Design

A systematic review design was chosen to provide a rigorous, replicable, and transparent synthesis of scholarly and grey literature on hate speech and fake news in Nigeria.

Data Sources and Search Strategy

Literature was sourced from academic databases (Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar, JSTOR) and institutional repositories (Afrobarometer, NOIPolls, National Human Rights Commission). Search terms combined keywords: "hate speech" OR "incitement" AND "fake news" OR "misinformation" OR "disinformation" AND "Nigeria". The search covered publications from January 2015 to June 2024, capturing the period of rapid social media penetration and major electoral cycles.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Included materials were: (a) peer-reviewed journal articles, book chapters, and conference papers; (b) institutional reports with transparent methodology; (c) English-language publications; (d) works focusing substantively on Nigeria. Excluded were opinion editorials, blog posts without peer review, and studies where Nigeria was only a peripheral mention.

Sampling and Selection

Initial searches yielded 112 records. After removing duplicates, 87 records were screened by abstract. Full-text review of 55 documents resulted in a final corpus of 45 sources, selected purposively for their relevance, methodological diversity, and thematic contribution.

Data Analysis

The selected texts were analysed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Coding proceeded in three stages: open coding to identify initial concepts, axial coding to group related themes (e.g., origin narratives, electoral violence, regulatory tensions, platform architecture), and selective coding to integrate themes under the study's theoretical framework.

Reliability and Validity

To enhance trustworthiness, sources were triangulated by type (legal, empirical, theoretical) and

origin (local and international). The screening and coding processes were documented in an audit trail. Peer-reviewed journal articles formed the core of the analysis, supplementing insights from grey literature only where peer-reviewed evidence was sparse.

Analysis and Discussion

Findings from the literature synthesis are presented thematically, critically comparing authors and interpreting results through the study's theoretical framework.

The Origin of Hate Speech and Fake News in Nigeria

Scholars concur that contemporary hate speech and fake news are rooted in Nigeria's colonial and post-colonial fault lines (Mustapha, 2006; Pate, 2018). However, they differ on proximate drivers. Pate (2018) attributes the surge primarily to technological determinism: cheap data and social media platforms lowered entry barriers, allowing malicious actors to bypass traditional media gatekeepers. Chukwuma (2020) contends that political opportunism, particularly during electoral contests, is the primary motor, suggesting that technology merely amplifies a pre-existing supply of divisive rhetoric. Recent work by Nwosu and Okafor (2022) complicates this binary by documenting how economic incentives, such as click-based advertising revenue, encourage the production of sensational and often false content. This debate remains unresolved due to a lack of longitudinal content-monetisation studies. The Conflict Theory lens reveals that these origin stories are not mutually exclusive: historical grievances provide the raw material, political entrepreneurs supply the motive, and platform algorithms deliver the means of rapid dissemination.

Hate Speech, Elections, and Coexistence

The link between hate speech and electoral violence is strongly supported across the literature. Higazi (2016) demonstrates how online ethnic slurs preceded physical clashes in Kaduna and Bauchi during the 2011 post-election crisis. Chukwuma (2020) updates this pattern for 2019, showing that Facebook and WhatsApp messages explicitly urging voters to "defend" their ethnic homelands correlated with targeted attacks. A few studies, however, caution against over-linear readings: Okafor (2023) argues that while inflammatory speech heightens tensions, it alone is rarely sufficient to cause violence without pre-existing structural conditions such as youth unemployment and weak policing. This methodological disagreement underscores the need for multi-method research that combines content analysis with ethnographic fieldwork.

From a theoretical standpoint, Social Responsibility Theory is salient. Platforms failed to curb incendiary speech in time, allowing hostile mobilisation to proceed largely unchecked, a failure starkly contrasted with the German NetzDG, which mandates 24-hour takedowns of illegal hate speech (Schulz, 2022). The Nigerian context remains one of voluntary, inconsistent platform action, pointing to a governance gap that directly harms democratic integrity.

Hate Speech and Freedom of Expression

The tension between restricting hate speech and protecting free expression is a recurring theme. Ojukwu (2019) warns that Nigerian hate speech bills are dangerously vague, granting the state wide discretion to suppress dissent, referencing examples where journalists and activists were detained under cyber-crime laws. Conversely, Pate (2018) and Chukwuma (2020) advocate for legal reforms that target incitement to violence while protecting legitimate political speech, aligned with the Rabat Plan of Action's six-part threshold. Internationally, the German approach is often cited as a balanced model, yet Schulz (2022) notes that the NetzDG has been criticised for excessive platform censorship, a caution relevant to Nigeria's authoritarian tendencies. What is missing from the literature is a systematic audit of how existing Nigerian laws have actually been enforced – data that would move this debate from normative to evidence-based. The Social Responsibility Theory again frames the issue: both unrestrained hate speech and over-broad censorship harm society, so the responsible path lies in precise, proportionate, and transparent regulation.

Social Media as the Primary Engine

All reviewed sources agree that social media platforms are the dominant vectors of hate speech and fake news. Pate (2018) notes that WhatsApp, with its encrypted group chats, is particularly potent for spreading unverified rumours. Tufekci (2017) provides a global analysis of how algorithmic recommendations favour emotionally charged content, a pattern confirmed in Nigeria by Nwafor (2023), who found that false stories about Fulani banditry received 60% more engagement than factual reports. Yet, there is a methodological gap: almost no studies have direct access to platform data, relying instead on self-reported user behaviour or scraped public posts. This limits the validity of claims about algorithmic influence. Moreover, while the German NetzDG is held up as a model, the literature does not fully explore how a similar law could be operationalised in a multi-lingual, low-resource environment like Nigeria. The Technological

Determinism lens explains the infrastructural power of these platforms, but Conflict Theory reminds us that human agency decides to type and share hateful content, yet remains central; platforms are not autonomous actors but enablers.

Balancing Freedom and Democratic Responsibility

A small but growing body of work examines interventions beyond law. Akinlabi and Sokefun (2023) evaluate media literacy workshops in four Nigerian states and find modest improvements in participants' ability to identify fake news. Yet, no study has assessed the scalability or long-term retention of such programmes. Similarly, while fact-checking organisations like Africa Check are mentioned, their impact on belief change is underexplored. The literature therefore offers direction but little robust evidence of what works. The Social Responsibility Theory suggests that sustainable balancing requires a multi-stakeholder ecosystem where platforms, media, civil society and government each fulfil distinct but complementary roles, a vision that remains aspirational in Nigeria.

Overall, the analysis confirms that hate speech and fake news are mutually reinforcing phenomena. Fake news often provides the "factual" veneer that justifies hateful rhetoric, while hate speech increases the emotional resonance of falsehoods. Addressing them separately, as much scholarship implicitly does, is a significant shortcoming that future research must correct.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This critical review demonstrates that hate speech and fake news in Nigeria are serious, interwoven threats, sustained by historical divisions, amplified by digital platforms, and insufficiently responded to by fragmented regulatory and societal efforts. The literature, while illuminating key dynamics, remains limited in empirical depth, methodological diversity, and integration. The overdependence on a narrow set of Sources and the absence of data-driven analysis weaken the evidentiary foundation for policy.

Drawing on the evidence, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Refine Legal Frameworks: Enact legislation that precisely defines hate speech as incitement to violence or discrimination, incorporating the Rabat Plan of Action's criteria of severity, intent, context, and likelihood of harm. Avoid vague language that can be misused to suppress legitimate dissent.

2. Invest in Media Literacy: Scale up evidence-based media literacy programmes through schools

and community organisations, and subject them to rigorous impact evaluation. Digital verification skills should become a core competency.

3. Enforce Platform Accountability: Mandate transparency reports and establish local content moderation hubs, drawing lessons from Germany's NetzDG but adapted to Nigerian linguistic and cultural complexity. Regulators should set clear timelines and penalties for non-compliance.

4. Strengthen Ethical Journalism: Professional bodies and media owners should enforce codes of conduct that prioritise conflict-sensitive reporting and systematic fact-checking. Training curricula must integrate digital verification.

5. Support Counter-Speech and Dialogue: Invest in civil society-led initiatives that promote inter-group dialogue and produce counter-narratives celebrating Nigeria's diversity, with continuous monitoring of effectiveness.

6. Advance Research: Future studies should give priority to empirical methods (surveys, experiments, ethnography), interdisciplinary approaches, and integrated analyses of hate speech and fake news. PhD and grant-funded research must target the WhatsApp sphere, platform algorithms, and the perspectives of content moderators and affected communities.

By balancing fundamental freedoms with democratic responsibility, Nigeria can begin to dismantle the cycle of digital-age division and build a resilient, informed citizenry.

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(Wo)Manhood and Gender Ideologies in Islamic Nuptial Sermons among Yoruba Muslims in Southwestern Nigeria

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Abstract

Islamic nuptial sermons (khutbatu al-nikah) among Yorùbá Muslims in southwestern Nigeria represent a distinctive hybrid genre in which Qur'anic exegesis and Hadith are interwoven with indigenous proverbial wisdom. Despite the centrality of these sermons to marital socialisation, their role in constructing gender ideologies remains critically underexamined. The research examines ten wedding sermons, of which six excerpts were derived (khutbatu al-nikah), performed from 2020 to 2025, with the aid of Fairclough's tripartite framework of Critical Discourse Analysis for analysing the construction and legitimisation of masculinities and femininities. Metaphor, modality, transitivity, and intertextuality are selected for analysis. The result shows that a discourse of negotiated patriarchy operates in which men's authority is presented as a holy amanah (trust) as opposed to dominance, while femininity is established through derivation, emotional labour, and obedience using the rhetoric of love and compassion. Although the occasional relativising of male privilege occurs, gender hierarchy persists since it is double legitimized.
***Keywords**: Yorùbá Muslims, Khutbatu al-nikāh/Islamic nuptial sermons, Gender ideology, Critical Discourse Analysis*

Introduction

The Islamic nuptial sermon (khutbatu al-nikāh) among the Yoruba-speaking Muslims of Southwestern Nigeria is by no means a mere ritualistic exercise. It is a speech event where, in the name of the marital covenant, the sermon pronounces the moral foundation of marriage with all its attendant socio-moral obligations. In this context, gender is conceived not as a social construct open to bargaining but rather as a divine mandate that prescribes male behaviour as that of maintainer (qawwāmūn), provider, and custodian, while females are mandated to be submissive (mutī'āt) and peaceful emotional support. This is not to say that these gender definitions do not vary from situation to situation.

However, due to the important role played by marriage within Islamic social reproduction and the sermon's function as a discourse gatekeeping form which determines appropriate definitions of masculinities and femininities, the khutbatu al-nikāh in Yorùbá Nigeria has not received sufficient academic attention. Previous research on religion and gender in Nigeria has focused on Christianity – Pentecostal sermon rhetoric (Akinwotu, 2021), condolence message discourse (Ajayi & Akinrinlola, 2024), and discursive representation through mass media (Adebayo, 2017). Research on Islamic discourse has been preoccupied with political discourse, reformism, and, more recently, funeral sermons (Ajayi & Abubakar, 2025). No research work to date has attempted to explore gender ideology construction through marriage sermons. This is important for three reasons: first, marriage is the most important means of achieving gendered adulthood; second, the hyphenated nature of the Yorùbá Islamic discourse provides a singularly rich example of double legitimation (Qur'anic and indigenously sourced); third, at a time when there is obvious conflict around gender roles in Nigerian society, knowledge of how religious figures reconcile tradition and innovation is crucial.

To analyse these processes, this study applies the theory of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). CDA begins with the assumption that discourse does not function merely as representational but as constitutive; in other words, discourse does not merely reflect social reality but produces and legitimates it (Fairclough, 1995). Being a kind of social practice, discourse serves as a means of negotiation of belief systems, maintenance of power relations and naturalisation of ideologies. This point can be illustrated most clearly by looking at religion as a particular social domain. The language of religion is sacred and not only communicative. Religious discourse categorises social relations, sanctions social hierarchies and defines social identities (Omoniyi, 2016). Worldview

becomes naturalised in discourse through the presentation of socially contingent relations as divinely sanctioned self-evident facts. This process has important implications in relation to gender issues since gender roles as male dominance and female subordination become naturalised through discourses on masculinity and femininity, leadership and caring roles.

The Southwest region of Nigeria, home to the Yorùbá ethnic group, provides an interesting location for studying these dynamics. In the past, the Yoruba society was patriarchal, as shown by the traditional saying "Okùnrin ni olórí ilé", meaning that the man is the head of the family. This shows that male dominance was viewed as an act of nature rather than culture (Oduyoye, 1995; Oyewùmí, 1997). History shows that the spread of Islam among the Yoruba people began between the 14th and 15th centuries due to the trans-Saharan trade networks and contact with Hausa traders (Kane, 2003; Gbadamosi, 1978; Loimeier, 2013).In contrast to situations where Islam superseded the local tradition, the emergence of a unique Islamic-Yorùbá religious synthesis has resulted in the interpretation of Qur'anic doctrines through the prism of Yorùbá language. No example can demonstrate this better than the discourse of ceremonies – especially the Islamic marriage sermon. For the Muslims, the institution of marriage (nikāh) embodies both the covenant and contract aspects of a mithāq. The marriage sermon (khutbatu al-nikāh) becomes the space where this twofold nature of the institution manifests itself through discourse. Qur'anic verses, Prophetic traditions, and unique to the Yorùbá Muslims, indigenous proverbs all become part of the interpretive discourse. However, Blommaert (2010) warns that discourse is multilayered, with the speaker referencing multiple normative centres even when performing in a conservative register. The current conditions of educated women and economic empowerment bring about negotiations even in hierarchical discourse.

This study is driven by three research questions. Firstly, which linguistic devices (lexicalisation, metaphor, modality, and transitivity) do Yoruba Muslim men use in khutbatu al-nikāh sermons to construct their gender identities? Secondly, how does the preacher use the interplay of the Qur'anic verses, Hadiths, and Yoruba proverbs to generate power? Third, what gender relations model is created through this discourse approach, and how is hierarchy naturalised, mitigated, or contested? To answer these research questions, the current study makes use of Fairclough's (1995) three-dimensional framework of critical discourse analysis on a purposely selected corpus of ten khutbatu al-nikāh sermons performed between 2020 and 2025. The study analyses how Yoruba

Muslim imams linguistically construct masculinity and femininity, focusing not only on the reproduction of patriarchy but also on its mitigation and concession.

Utilising van Dijk's (1998, 2006) framework of the 'ideological square' and his socio-cognitive theory of discourse and manipulation, especially his discussion about how discourse influences the recipient's mind model by naturalizing power structures, we explore how hierarchy is moralized (responsibility instead of domination), romanticized (incorporated within the discourse of love and mercy), and naturalized (rooted in the mythic accounts of its divine creation). This research is an attempt to make contributions to three academic discourses: (a) the discourse analysis literature focusing on religion and gender issues, specifically outside Western societies; (b) the sociolinguistic analysis of Islam in Africa, which is poorly represented in contemporary discourse analysis literature; and (c) inter-disciplinary gender studies, by providing an empirical insight into how patriarchy is maintained through discourse in modern times despite women's resistance.

Literature Review

Religious sermons have undergone rigorous analysis from several perspectives about linguistic, pragmatic, and ideological aspects. In Nigeria, the predominant trend has been research on Christian denominations such as Pentecostal sermon rhetoric (Akinwotu, 2021) and condolences (Ajayi & Akinrinlola, 2024). Fewer efforts have been made to investigate the impact of sermons within the Islamic tradition concerning their effect on the social perception of gender issues. When discourses within Islam have been investigated, the emphasis has been put on politics and reforms, or on funeral services (Ajayi & Abubakar, 2025; Kane, 2003); there is practically no literature on nuptial sermons (khutbatu al nikāh), which is a neglected area despite the significance of the ceremony in question.

Islamic homiletic studies from an international perspective indicate that wedding sermons refer to such passages as Q. 4:1, Q. 4:21, and Q. 30:21, drawing attention to the religious, psychological, and sociological advantages of matrimony. Today's imams are confronted with the additional task of engaging with moral environments characterised by globalisation, including those regarding gender and women's issues (Stjernholm, 2020). Blommaert's (2010) idea of polycentricity can be used to analyse the preacher's ability to engage with the authority of scriptures, the Yorùbá culture, and modern gender sensitivities simultaneously. The result is a sermon that upholds hierarchy but also moderates and qualifies it.

The Qur'anic verses most frequently invoked in marital discourse, especially Sūrat al-Nisā' (4:34) and the creation narrative (4:1), have long been subject to interpretive contestation. A conservative interpretation of Q. 4:34 views the verse as establishing male guardianship (qiwāmah) based on ontological precedence and sustenance. Meanwhile, the Genesis account is viewed as establishing the female's ontological dependence on and subordination to the male. Yet other interpretations reveal that such understandings are a product of patriarchal presuppositions rather than a necessary conclusion drawn from scripture. This study therefore examines which interpretive possibilities are activated and which are foreclosed in Yorùbá Islamic nuptial sermons.

Turning to the local context, Yorùbá social organisation traditionally privileged seniority and lineage over binary gender hierarchy (Oyěwùmí, 1997). Oyewùmí argues that "woman" as a subordinate identity was a colonial imposition, complicating any simple narrative of "Yorùbá patriarchy." Nevertheless, as Oduyoye (1995) demonstrates, proverbs such as *"Okùnrin ni olórí ilé"* (the man is the head of the family) encode male headship as cultural common sense. The religion of Islam was established in Yorùbáland during the 14th to 15th centuries (Kane, 2003; Loimeier, 2013), bringing with it new discourses like that of qawwāmūn and darajah, concepts that fit into the preexisting logic of Yorùbá seniors and authorities. The Yorùbá people adopted the Islamic discourse selectively, using their local concepts to develop a syncretic religion (Opeloye, 2018). Syncretism is especially evident in marriage speeches, where Qur'anic texts are inserted into the proverbs of the Yorùbá people.

In addition, indigenous scholarship has also shed light on the disparity between the idealised conception of marriage in Islam and its contemporary manifestation among the Yorùbá people. Abubakar (2016) investigates the "missing links" between the marriage as envisioned by the Qur'an, which is founded on peace, compassion, and love (Q. 30:21), and the status of numerous Yorùbá marriages that are typified by discord and suspicion. This discrepancy highlights the need for researching the way sermonic speech acts reproduce, qualify, and naturalize gender ideologies. Likewise, the work of Oladosu-Uthman (2024) explores the gender dynamics in Islam, Vodun, and Sàngó religion in Yorùbáland and Lomé and demonstrates how patriarchal institutions use religion to suppress women. Faith-based toolkits developed for Nigerian religious leaders (Christian Aid, 2023) recognise the potential of sermons either to reproduce or challenge patriarchal norms on issues such as early marriage, girls' education, and reproductive health, further highlighting the policy relevance of analysing nuptial discourse on gender.

Research into the discourse of Islam in Nigeria is not very well developed yet. However, Ajayi and Abubakar (2025) have studied the discourses used in funerals, proving that discourse analysis can be applied to the study of such discourses in Nigeria. Amzat (2020) shows that preachers may act as agents of either social reproduction or change, underscoring the importance of examining not merely whether religious discourse reproduces hierarchy. Despite these contributions, the *khutbatu al-nikāh* remains conspicuously absent from the literature.

Five gaps thus emerge. First, CDA has barely been applied to Nigerian Islamic contexts. Second, the *khutbatu al-nikāh* has received no sustained analysis as a distinct genre. Third, no study examines how Yorùbá preachers navigate contested Qur'anic interpretation in live performance. Fourth, the discursive mechanics of Qur'anic-Yorùbá fusion have gone unexamined. Fifth, empirical studies of Nigerian Islamic discourse have completely overlooked nuptial sermons. The present study fills these gaps by applying Fairclough's (1995) three-dimensional model to a purposively selected corpus of Yorùbá Islamic nuptial sermons, examining how manhood and womanhood are discursively constructed, legitimised, and – in limited ways negotiated.

Theoretical Orientation

This research is based on Critical Discourse Analysis, which asserts that discourse constructs society while at the same time being constructed by it (Fairclough, 1995; van Dijk, 1998). Linguistic choices encode hierarchy, construct subject positions, and naturalize worldviews. Religious discourse is a dense site for such analysis because claims anchored in divine will "Allah says" resist contestation, presenting contingent gender arrangements as creational design. However, hegemony is never a total process; even conservative genres exhibit elements of negotiation (Fairclough, 1995). Fairclough's three-dimensional model organises analysis across three levels. The textual level examines lexicalisation ("protector," "source"), deontic modality ("must"), transitivity, metaphor, and presupposition as grammatical encodings of authority. The discursive practice level examines intertextuality incorporation of Qur'anic verses, Hadith, and Yorùbá proverbs and how preachers consolidate authority through strategic citation. The sociocultural practice level situates discourse within Yorùbá-Islamic patriarchy, examining naturalisation: rendering contingent arrangements self-evident, timeless, and divinely mandated.

van Dijk's (1998, 2006) ideological square provides analytic precision for representational asymmetries through four moves: emphasize positive ingroup/negative outgroup characteristics; de-emphasise negative ingroup/positive outgroup characteristics. Here, the square illuminates how

male authority is framed positively (responsibility, provision) while its coercive potential is backgrounded; female obedience is foregrounded as virtue while alternative subject positions are unavailable. Hierarchy is thus moralized: male dominance becomes duty; female subordination becomes virtue. Beyond the square, van Dijk (2006) offers a socio-cognitive theory of manipulation: dominant groups shape recipients' *mental models,* the knowledge, attitudes, and ideologies guiding social interpretation. The preacher's declarative tone, deontic modality ("must know"), and lack of politeness strategies are manipulation devices that influence listeners' mental models of marriage and authority, presenting dependence as divinely ordained.

Negotiated patriarchy, this study's central concept, names a discursive formation wherein gender hierarchy is moralised as sacred trust (*amānah*), romanticized through love (*mahabbah*) and mercy (*rahmah*), naturalised through origin narratives, and qualified through disavowals of tyranny while structural asymmetry remains intact. It is discursive accommodation: absorbing contemporary pressures by softening hierarchy's presentation while preserving its substance. The concept resonates with Blommaert's (2010) polycentricity: preachers orient to classical exegesis, contemporary sensibilities, and local expectations simultaneously. We approach *khutbatu al-nikāh* as a site of ideological production, making visible the linguistic infrastructure upon which marital patriarchy rests.

Methodology

This study is qualitative in nature, framed within the Critical Discourse Analysis approach. The research is not just interested in identifying what is said in Islamic nuptial sermons among the Yoruba; instead, it seeks to critically examine linguistic actions that construct, legitimise, and naturalise gender positions and the ideological orientations on which these actions were made. A purposive sample of ten sermons delivered between 2020–2025 was drawn from Southwestern Nigeria (Lagos, Ogun, Oyo, Osun, Ondo, Ekiti States). Inclusion criteria were: (1) delivery during formal nikāḥ ceremony; (2) explicit reference to Qur'anic verses or Ḥadith on marriage/gender; (3) identifiable Yorùbá linguistic features (though rendered in English); and (4) complete audio/video recording permitting verbatim transcription. Of thirty sermons initially identified through consultation with Muslim communities (the mosque and gatherings), ten sermons were selected to maximise variation in geographic setting (urban, semi-urban, rural). In qualitative CDA, sample size is determined by informational adequacy, rather than statistical representativeness (Fairclough, 1995; van Dijk, 2006). The ten sermons of between 15 and 30 minutes each yield

substantial data for analysis, which concurs with comparable Nigerian studies (Akinwotu, 2021; Ajayi & Abubakar, 2025).

The data were live audio recordings and stored audio recordings retrieved from mosque stores and Muslim community members. The sermons were anonymised; no personal details were kept. One of the researchers transcribed the sermons verbatim in the original language (English), including pauses and emphasis, code-switching, and quotations of the Qur'an. For analysis, the researchers operationalised Fairclough's (1995) model of the three-dimensional nature of discourse, accomplished at five different levels: Holistic familiarisation: listening to the original language of the sermons and reading translations, and developing analytic memos to determine recurring themes (Level 1); Textual analysis: microanalysis of linguistic features such as lexicalisation, deontic modality, transitivity, metaphor, and presupposition, content constituting the grammatical features of authority and dependency (Level 2); Discursive practice: investigation of intertextuality (which Qur'anic verses were used and which were not), interdiscursivity (elements of Islam and Yoruba), generic structure, and code-switching features (Level 3); Sociocultural practice: investigation of language in relation to Yoruba and Islamic patriarchy, focusing on naturalisation, legitimation strategies, manipulation of mental models (van Dijk, 2006) – that is, how sermonic discourse shapes recipients' cognitive frameworks to naturalise power relations – and negotiation (Level 4); Integration and synthesis: investigation of the relationships between the different levels of discourse (Level 5).

Ethical considerations were observed: obtaining consent to use live recordings; anonymisation of all data; a non-evaluative approach to the preachers as individuals (our focus is on discourse patterns, not moral judgement); clear differentiation between scripture and its use; and community engagement in which early results were shared with Islamic intellectuals and laypersons in Ibadan to polish our analysis.

Data Analysis

Man as the source and origin of humanity

Across the ten sermons, manhood is constructed as ontologically primary, the source of womanhood anchored in Q. 4:1 (creation from a single soul) and Q. 4:34 (men as *qawwāmūn*). Preachers invoke these verses not to emphasise shared humanity but to establish male precedence, recontextualising them through Yoruba formulations: *"ọkùnrin ni olórí ilé tí Ọlọ́hun fi ojúṣe ìdílé lé lọ́wọ́"* (the man is the head of the home entrusted by God). Lexically, "olórí" (head) and "ojúṣe"

(responsibility), along with metaphors such as "pillar," encode hierarchy through functional language rather than overt dominance. Authority is framed as obligation and burden, shifting male superiority into moral accountability. Modality further naturalises this construction: men *must* lead, provide, and protect, presenting leadership as a divinely mandated duty, not negotiable role. Thus, hierarchy is softened but preserved.

We turn to the excerpt below for discussion:

Excerpt 1: "…*Any woman who has gotten married and has become a wife must know that her husband is her source and she's created from a part of him*…"

Excerpt 1 constructs manhood as ontologically primary and divinely authorised within marriage. Through a narrative of origin that positions women as created "from" man, the sermon recontextualises Qur'anic cosmology into a hierarchical marital order. Rather than overtly asserting dominance, the discourse naturalises male authority by embedding it in theology and cultural common sense. As van Dijk (1998) argues, ideology is most effective when presented as self-evident truth rather than social construction. Here, male centrality is elevated to divine order, insulating it from contestation. The metaphor of "source" performs crucial ideological work. By positioning man as origin and sustaining force, the discourse constructs woman as derivative and relational rather than autonomous. This metaphor encodes asymmetry while appearing descriptive. Hierarchy is thus embedded semantically rather than declared explicitly.

Modality further reinforces authority. The expression "must know" functions as deontic compulsion, foreclosing interpretive flexibility and framing submission as obligation rather than choice. Fairclough (1995) notes that institutional religious discourse often operates through assumed authority rather than negotiated meaning. In this case, the prescriptive tone establishes epistemic control: the preacher speaks as custodian of divine knowledge, while women are positioned as recipients of that knowledge. Such control over "mental models," as van Dijk (2006) suggests, enables dominant groups to shape how subordinate groups interpret social reality. Notably, the utterance lacks mitigating politeness strategies. Brown and Levinson (1987) argue that direct impositions typically threaten negative face; however, in contexts of unequal power, such threats are normalised. Here, religious authority substitutes for interpersonal negotiation, allowing directive force to appear as moral guidance rather than coercion. The phrase "any woman who has gotten married" operates as a generalising device that erases individual variation and constructs wifehood as a standardised identity. van Dijk (2001) identifies such generalisation as a

common ideological strategy that suppresses agency and context. Through this linguistic move, dependency becomes a universal expectation attached to marriage itself.

Pragmatically, the statement functions as a directive speech act. While framed as instruction, its perlocutionary effect is the internalisation of subordination. In Austin's (1962) sense, the utterance is performative: it does not merely describe marital hierarchy but enacts it by establishing normative expectations. Repetition of the husband as "source" stabilises this hierarchy within lived marital consciousness. Culturally, the discourse resonates with Yoruba patriarchal structures in which lineage and male headship are historically valorised. As Oyewumi (1997) observes, African gender systems often intertwine cosmology, kinship, and authority, rendering male dominance culturally intelligible. When Islamic theology converges with Yoruba social norms, the result is a doubly legitimised discourse: hierarchy appears both divinely sanctioned and culturally authentic.

In sum, Excerpt 1 exemplifies how ideology operates discursively. Through metaphor, modality, generalisation, and performative force, gender hierarchy is rendered moral, spiritual, and natural rather than political, a process consistent with van Dijk's understanding of ideological reproduction through language.

Excerpt 2: "…*Allah says men should get married to women in His words and that He created us and created those we married, which are our wives from our ribs or our part of the body…*"

In Excerpt 2, the claim that Allah created wives from men's ribs constructs manhood as ontologically prior and divinely authorised within marriage. Male authority is not presented as a social arrangement but as a sacred origin. Through van Dijk's Critical Discourse Analysis, this formulation can be read as ideological practice: gender hierarchy is institutionalised by grounding it in divine authorship. The invocation "Allah says" functions rhetorically to foreclose contestation, relocating authority to an unquestionable source. As van Dijk (1998) argues, ideology is most powerful when anchored in external, sacred legitimacy. By mobilising Qur'anic imagery of women as derived from men, the sermon transforms social asymmetry into theological necessity.

The declarative tone further consolidates epistemic authority. The statement is delivered as revealed truth rather than an interpretive position; there is no modality signalling uncertainty or dialogic openness. Fairclough (1995) notes that institutional religious discourse typically assumes, rather than negotiates, moral authority. Here, assertiveness operates as epistemic control, positioning the preacher as mediator of divine knowledge and the audience, especially womenas

recipients. The absence of politeness strategies reinforces unequal power distance, as the utterance instructs belief rather than invites agreement.

In van Dijk's (2006) terms, such discourse influences "mental models," guiding how listeners interpret gender relations. The message resonates with Yoruba patriarchal norms that valorise male headship and lineage continuity, thereby reinforcing existing structures with religious validation (Oyewumi, 1997). Through sacred narrative, declarative authority, and cultural resonance, the excerpt discursively produces manhood as origin and epistemic centre of marriage, naturalising male dominance and rendering female dependency both divinely ordained and culturally intelligible.

Men as Moral Leaders and Custodians of the Family

Across the sermons, men are constructed as the moral and spiritual compass of the household, responsible not only for provision but for ethical direction. This representation draws on Qur'anic injunctions, particularly Suratul Nisah (4:34), where men are described as *qawwamun* (maintainers/guardians). In Yoruba Islamic discourse, this is rendered in culturally resonant terms: *"ọkùnrin ni olórí ilé, ṣùgbọ́n kì í ṣe olórí ika"* (the man is the head of the house, but not a tyrant). The qualification is significant. Leadership is affirmed, yet explicitly detached from cruelty, reframing hierarchy as disciplined stewardship rather than domination.

Moral headship is linguistically tied to character (*ìwà rere*), patience, and emotional restraint Quran 32:24, 3:134. Preachers foreground anger, harsh speech, and neglect as threats to marital stability, echoing Qur'anic exhortations to live with wives in kindness (*ma'ruf*) (Suratul Nisah 4:19). Expressions such as *"ọkùnrin rere ni ẹni tó fi ìwàpẹ̀lẹ́ darí ilé rẹ̀"* (a good man leads his home with gentleness) embed authority within affective ethics. Through such lexical choices, masculinity is moralised: power is legitimate only when tempered by self-control.

Excerpt 3: "…*The bride's parent returns the bride price to her husband's family, stating that they are not selling their daughter. It's not the right of the bride's parent to collect her Mahr (dowry).*"…

The excerpt above foregrounds the return of the bride price by the bride's parents, who insist they are "not selling" their daughter. By declaring that the bride's parents have no right to collect the *mahr*, the sermon establishes a moral boundary within marital transactions and positions the groom, and by extension men, as legitimate moral agents. What is framed as "not right" becomes

a discursive mechanism for defining proper conduct. As van Dijk (1998) observes, ideological discourse operates through moralisation, distinguishing acceptable from deviant practices to stabilise group norms. Here, returning the bride price is elevated as moral integrity rather than mere custom.

The categorical denial of parental entitlement is delivered without mitigation, reflecting the authoritative register typical of religious discourse, where legitimacy derives from divine law rather than interpersonal negotiation (Fairclough, 1995). The low use of politeness strategies reinforces this asymmetry: the issue is presented as doctrinal certainty, not open to debate. Pragmatically, the excerpt harmonises Islamic injunction with Yoruba ethical tradition. The customary act of returning *owo orí ìyàwó* (among some Yoruba) is rearticulated as alignment with prophetic precedent, thereby intensifying its legitimacy. Such convergence between religious doctrine and shared cultural knowledge strengthens ideological internalisation (van Dijk, 2006). While the sermon symbolically affirms women's dignity by rejecting commodification, it simultaneously consolidates male custodianship. Moral leadership in marital transactions is vested in men, who are constructed as guardians of integrity. Thus, even as the discourse protects women from symbolic sale, it reaffirms patriarchal authority by centring men as custodians of marital morality.

Men as the provider (Ólùpèsè)

In Islamic nuptial sermons among the Yoruba, manhood is centrally constructed around economic provision, encapsulated in the term *ólùpèsè* (provider). Financial responsibility is framed not merely as social expectation but as religious obligation grounded in Qur'anic authority. Suratul Nisah (4:34) designates men as maintainers of women "because they spend out of their wealth," a verse frequently invoked to anchor provision as a defining masculine duty.

This mandate is reinforced through culturally resonant metaphors: *"ọkùnrin ni òpó ilé; tí ó kùnà láti ṣe ojúṣe, ilé a dàrú"* (the man is the pillar of the house; if he fails in his duty, the house collapses). Provision is thus constructed as structural stability. Failure to provide threatens not only domestic comfort but moral order. Culturally, a man who neglects provision is labelled *"ọkùnrin tó kùnà nínú ojúṣe rẹ"* (a man who has failed in his responsibility), regardless of status. Marriage is thus discursively framed as intensifying, not diminishing, male accountability. Importantly, sermons caution against converting provision into domination. Suratul Talaq (65:7) is cited to stress fairness and compassion, echoed in the warning: *"ó yẹ kí o pèsè fún ìyàwó rẹ, kì í ṣe kó fi*

owó ní lára" (provide for your wife, not oppress her with money). Provision emerges as a spiritual obligation and moral performance of masculinity.

Excerpt 4:

"…*Men are the protectors and maintainers of women because God has given them more strength and because they have the primary responsibility of family maintenance…*"

Within Islamic nuptial discourse among the Yoruba, the excerpt constructs men as primary economic and physical providers, echoing the Qur'anic declaration that "men are the protectors and maintainers of women because God has given them more strength and because they bear the responsibility of sustaining the family." Male authority and financial obligation are thus grounded in divine endowment. By invoking God as the source of male capacity, the sermon frames hierarchy as sacred mandate rather than social arrangement. Such ideological grounding aligns power with moral and religious legitimacy, thereby stabilising marital norms (van Dijk, 1998). The tone is prescriptive and declarative, offering clear directives on gendered responsibilities. The repeated use of causal connectors such as "because" explicitly links divine will to social structure, naturalising male custodianship as logical consequence of theological order. The sermon therefore performs both instructive and legitimising functions: it not only outlines gender roles but sanctifies male guardianship as a religious duty. As van Dijk (2006) notes, discourse becomes particularly effective when it fuses cultural knowledge with sacred authority, enhancing ideological adherence. Culturally, the message resonates with Yoruba and Islamic expectations that men provide materially and ensure physical security. While women are affirmed as valued members of the household, they are positioned primarily as recipients of protection and care, reflecting a complementary gender ideology. The discourse thus promotes family stability while simultaneously consolidating male dominance, illustrating how religious and cultural narratives converge to reproduce patriarchal norms within Yoruba Muslim marriage.

Woman as Derivative and Dependent

Having examined how manhood is constructed through the lexical fields of origin, authority, and provision, this section turns to the corresponding construction of womanhood across the corpus. In the ten sermons analysed, womanhood is consistently framed through two interrelated discursive strategies: derivation (woman created from man) and dependence (woman's identity defined relationally through husband). These constructions are anchored in the Qur'anic creation

narrative (Sūrat al-Nisā' 4:1), which states that humanity was created from a single soul and its mate from it. Preachers routinely cite this verse not to emphasise shared origin but to establish male ontological priority and female derivation. Additionally, Yorùbá cultural wisdom is selectively invoked to soften dependency as complementarity rather than inferiority, while still preserving structural asymmetry. The following excerpt exemplifies how these theological and cultural resources are mobilised linguistically.

Excerpt 5:

"…Any woman who has gotten married and has become a wife must know that her husband is her source and she's created from a part of him. Almighty Allah said that there are two things between the husband and the wife, which are love and mercy. Those two phrases are what make marriage strong. In marriage, when there's no love and mercy, then the husband and wife are no longer married; they are just deceiving themselves because the essence of their marriage is already defeated…"

The excerpt constructs womanhood in (Islamic) marriage as relationally dependent and ontologically derivative. By asserting that a woman is created from a portion of her husband, the sermon invokes the Qur'anic creation narrative while reinterpreting it in ways that foreground male centrality. What appears as a theological explanation function ideologically: social hierarchy is presented as divinely ordained rather than historically produced. As van Dijk (1998) argues, such narratives naturalise power by embedding it within sacred origins, rendering hierarchy resistant to critique. Male precedence is thus framed not as argument but as theological reality. The address to women is straightforward and instructive, positioning them as recipients of revealed knowledge rather than co-constructors of meaning. Politeness strategies are minimal; the tone is paternalistic, and directives are framed as moral guidance. Assertions such as "a marriage without love and mercy is not a marriage" define legitimacy in categorical terms, narrowing interpretive space. Through presupposition, the sermon assumes that dependence on the husband is spiritually appropriate and that female identity is fulfilled within marriage. Couples lacking love and mercy are depicted as morally deficient, reinforcing normative expectations through moral judgment rather than explicit coercion—an instance of what van Dijk (2006) describes as the shaping of social cognition.

Discourse markers such as "must know," "Almighty Allah said," and "because" create a causal chain linking divine authority to social order. This rhetorical structure reduces ambiguity and

discourages alternative readings of the Qur'an that emphasise reciprocity rather than derivation. Culturally, the sermon resonates with Yoruba patriarchal categories in which the husband is *olórí ilé* (head of the home) and the wife's identity is linguistically relational. The insertion of origin imagery (*orísun*) consolidates male precedence, positioning womanhood as supported and defined through attachment. At the same time, the hierarchy is softened through appeals to love (*ìfé*) and mercy (*aánú*). This configuration aligns with what feminist scholars describe as benevolent patriarchy (Johri, 2023). van Dijk (2006) notes that ideology often couples inequality with moral justification, making asymmetry appear virtuous. Here, marriage without love is spiritually void, yet the premise of male origin remains intact, implying that female fulfilment is contingent upon sustained attachment to male authority. Scholars such as Wadud (1999) and Barlas (2002) argue that such readings reflect cultural interpretation rather than the Qur'an's broader ethic of mutuality. In this sermon, hierarchy precedes harmony; equality is secondary to male-centred origin narratives. Through religious language, cultural resonance, and implicit power assumptions, womanhood is constructed as relational and submissive. CDA, following van Dijk, illuminates how such discourse reproduces gender privilege under the guise of divine truth, moral care, and spiritual legitimacy.

Woman as restricted and submissive

This perception has generally been based on Qur'anic injunctions on matrimonial order, particularly (Suratul Nisa 4:34), which attributes leadership roles in the family set-up. Sermons tend to understand this verse as meaning that wives should be submissive and obedient to their husbands to ensure peace at home. Some interpretations of sermons put an accent on movement, speech, and decision-making restriction as an indication of ideal womanhood. This expectation of limited behaviour is supported with the help of Yoruba phrases such as "*Ìyàwó rere mọ́ àyè rẹ̀*" (a good wife knows her limits).In Yoruba Islamic culture, restriction is frequently introduced as a moral discipline and not punishment. The obedient woman is complimented as a stabilising power in the marriage, though such a framing can be oppressive to women when uncritically accepted.

Excerpt 6:

"…*When Adam saw her, he immediately felt attraction and connection towards her. This natural attraction between man and woman is God-given. Allah (SWT) decreed and created compassion and love between spouses at the dawn of human existence. Allah (SWT) says, 'And one of His Signs*

is that He created for you spouses from amongst yourselves so that you may find comfort in them, and He has placed between you compassion and mercy in this; surely in this are signs for people who reflect.' In this verse, God Almighty attributes the institution of Nikah as one of His signs, showing that the wife's role includes submission within a framework of love, mercy, and tranquillity…"

Excerpt 6 constructs womanhood in marriage as relational, affective, and implicitly oriented toward submission. Rather than framing obedience explicitly, the sermon situates the woman as the locus of male comfort, emotional fulfilment, and tranquillity. The cited Qur'anic verse: And one of His Signs is that He created for you spouses from among yourselves so that you may find comfort in them, and He placed between you affection and mercy" anchors this construction in divine ordinance. Marriage is thus presented as a sacred design structured around love and mercy, yet articulated within a gendered order that subtly privileges male centrality. By invoking the creation narrative of Adam and attributing its claims directly to the Qur'an, the sermon grounds its interpretation in sacred authority rather than opinion. As van Dijk (1998) notes, ideology is most potent when embedded in taken-for-granted narratives. Here, hierarchy is not argued; it emerges as a logical extension of divine intention. The tone is gentle and affective rather than overtly coercive. This softness performs ideological work: power asymmetry is obscured through compassion. Politeness strategies foreground emotional harmony instead of command, allowing hierarchical roles to appear nurturing rather than restrictive.

Submission is never directly demanded. Instead, the sermon constructs a moral universe in which it becomes inherent in divine love. Restriction is normalised by embedding it within positive emotional values. van Dijk (2006) describes such indirectness as characteristic of ideological discourse that achieves compliance without confrontation. Discourse markers such as "Allah decreed," "one of His Signs," and "so that you may find comfort" guide interpretation toward a predetermined conclusion: gender roles are divinely constructed and fixed. The repeated causal structures ("so that," "because") link creation to social arrangement, narrowing space for alternative readings emphasising reciprocity. Notably, tranquillity is framed as something the man finds in the woman, rather than a jointly produced state. The wife becomes *olùtùnú*, the bringer of calm (comforter), aligning with Yoruba ideals of femininity associated with *ìfaradà* (patience), *ìrẹ̀lẹ̀* (humility), and *ìgbọràn* (submission) (Oyewumi, 1997). Cultural resonance strengthens

acceptance: Qur'anic language converges with local patriarchal values, enhancing emotional and social legitimacy.

Ideologically, this configuration reflects what feminist scholars term romanticised submission (see Meeker et al., 2019; Garcia, 2021). Compassion and mercy soften, but do not dismantle, asymmetry. Through what van Dijk's ideological square would identify as emphasis on positive relational virtues and de-emphasis of structural power, male authority is backgrounded while female compliance is reframed as loving cooperation. Scholars such as Wadud (1999) and Barlas (2002) argue that Qur'anic love and mercy are reciprocal, not hierarchical. The sermon, however, selectively foregrounds meanings that reinforce patriarchal order, presenting them as fulfilment of divine design. This process exemplifies what Fairclough (1995) describes as the naturalisation of ideology through discourse: hierarchy becomes moralised, spiritualised, and rendered commonsensical within the language of love.

Woman as emotional and patient

Patience is a moral virtue that is rewarded by Allah (Suratul Zumar 39:10), and sermons tend to relate the virtue closely with the female gender when in marriage. This expectation is reflected in the Yoruba saying, "*Sùúrù obìnrin ni ọṣọ́ ilé*" (a woman's patience is the beauty of the home). Emotional expression is not denied patience, yet is the way to react to the marriage problems. This portrayal portrays women as emotional support systems whose stability holds the family together. Although it takes into consideration the strength of women, it also leaves an excessive burden on women to take the strain of marriage.

Excerpt 7:.*"...how women support the home with dignity and cooperation, how they should maintain faith, modesty and good character. Women are expected to treat their husbands with respect and kindness, to avoid belittling them, undermining him or speaking to him harshly. They are the source of comfort and tranquillity for the family, maintaining the sanctity of the home. Islam does not expect women to be slaves, overworked or oppressed, but sets balanced mutual rights like love, respect, communication, and privacy..."*

The excerpt constructs womanhood in marriage as emotionally centered, ethically regulated, and socially harmonising. Women are portrayed as dignified homemakers: cooperative, modest, religious, and respectful, whose conduct must avoid harsh speech or actions that might destabilise male authority. At the same time, the discourse explicitly rejects the claim that Islam reduces

women to slavery or oppression. Instead, it foregrounds reciprocity through love, respect, communication, and privacy. This dual framing elevates women morally while confining them within a narrowly defined emotional and relational sphere. The preacher adopts a justificatory tone that anticipates criticism, particularly feminist objections to conservative gender roles. By clarifying that Islam does not demand that women become enslaved or overburdened, the sermon presents gender hierarchy as humane and balanced. van Dijk (1998) notes that such defensive rhetoric typifies ideological discourse: dominant structures are preserved by being framed as fair and benevolent. Emotional labour is thus spiritualised and dignified, obscuring asymmetrical expectations. What appears as moral elevation simultaneously reinforces role limitation.

Politeness strategies are central to this construction of womanhood. Women are urged not to belittle, undermine, or speak harshly to their husbands. These forms of negative politeness position women as primary regulators of emotional tone within marriage. The burden of harmony falls disproportionately on them; they must manage not only their own emotions but also the affective climate of the household. In Brown and Levinson's politeness theory, such patterns signal unequal power relations, as the less powerful party expends greater effort in face maintenance and relational repair. Although the preacher avoids explicit commands such as "submit" or "obey," behavioural expectations are strongly implied. Compliance becomes normalised through shared moral assumptions rather than overt coercion. van Dijk (2006) describes this as implicit norm-setting, where ideology operates through common-sense formulations rather than direct instruction.

Discourse markers such as "women are expected" and "Islam does not expect" delimit acceptable roles while appearing explanatory. A key metaphor depicts women as the "source" of comfort and peace within the family. This imagery centres women emotionally yet assigns men the position of recipients rather than co-producers of care. Emotional restraint and endurance are presupposed as inherently feminine traits, aligning with van Dijk's notion of presupposition, whereby assumptions are treated as unquestionable truths. The expectation that women absorb emotional strain for marital harmony is presented not as social construction but as a natural order. Culturally, the sermon resonates with Yoruba ideals of *sùúrù* (patience), *ìrẹ̀lẹ̀* (humility), and *ìtọ́jú ilé* (home management). By embedding the Islamic nuptial sermon within these established values, the discourse gains cultural credibility and moral force. Resistance would appear as defiance of both religion and tradition. Ideologically, the passage exemplifies what can be termed emotional

domestication. Women are honoured symbolically, yet their worth is framed within the context of sustaining emotional equilibrium. Scholars such as Wadud (1999) and Barlas (2002) argue that Qur'anic ethics emphasise mutual emotional responsibility rather than gendered emotional labour. The sermon, however, selectively interprets these principles in ways that privilege female patience. Through ethical praise, affective language, and cultural normalisation, feminine virtues are constructed as indispensable to marital stability, thereby sustaining gender hierarchy in subtle, religiously sanctioned forms.

Findings

Four findings ensue from an analysis of ten khutbatu al-nikāh sermons among Yoruba Muslims in southwestern Nigeria. The man is placed as source (*orisun)*, head (*olórí)*, provider (*òlùpèsè)* and moral custodian, framed through responsibility and divine trust *(amānah)* rather than overt dominance. The woman is placed as derivative, submissive, patient (*sùúrù),* the latter constructed through presupposition and metaphor rather than explicit command. The asymmetry is structural: men act upon the world; women constitute the atmosphere within which men act. This hierarchy is presented as creational design and cultural inheritance. All sermons combine Qur'anic authority with proverbial wisdom (with Yoruba cultural imports) to create dual legitimation: gender hierarchy is at the same time divinely ordained (Q. 4:34, Q. 4:1, Q. 30:21) and culturally authentic; the husband is the head of the house, and the woman's patience is the ornament of the house ("Okùnrin ni olórí ilé," "Sùúrù obìnrin ni ọ̀ṣọ́ ilé"). The interdiscursivity is synthetic: Qur'anic concepts are expressed through Yorùbá categories; Yoruba proverbs (rendered in English) are invested with scriptural resonance. To resist male headship is to disobey divine fiat and to betray ancestral tradition.

Masculine dominance is modified by assertions of patriarchy and gentle models of prophethood. In contrast, feminine submission is idealised as involving affective notions of love (*ìfé*), mercy (*aánú*), and tranquility (*sakīnah, ìdùnú*). We can see these changes as reflecting modern influences, yet not a single sermon challenges masculine headship, Gender Polarisation of Qiwāmah, or Hierarchy as Divine Order. We can describe these discursive strategies as a negotiated patriarchy.

Conclusion

This research explores the discursive production of ideologies of gender in Yorùbá Islamic nuptial sermons, or khutbatu al-nikāh. Drawing on Fairclough's three-dimensional model of discourse,

this research critically analysed ten purposively selected khutbatu al-nikāh (sermons) from 2020 to 2025. The aim of this research was informed by the glaring gap in the critical discourse analysis of religious discourse, with a focus on nuptial discourse in Nigeria. While many CDA studies on religious discourse in Nigeria have focused mainly on Christianity, the study of Islamic religious discourse, especially khutbatu al-nikāh, which has a preconfigured speech situation for defining legitimate marital roles, has remained conspicuously neglected. This is surprising given the central place of marriage in Islamic social reproduction. As khutbatu al-nikāh fuses Islamic discourse with proverbial wisdom from indigenous cultures, it combines a preconfigured speech situation with a hybrid ideology of discourse.

Four main findings arose. First, manhood and womanhood are built up through complementary but hierarchical linguistic resources: men as source, head, provider, and moral custodian; women as derivative, submissive, patient, and emotionally sustaining. Second, this hierarchy is legitimised by means of dual anchoring in Qur'anic revelation and Yorùbá cultural tradition, an interdiscursive strategy that makes opposition simultaneously impious and culturally inauthentic. Third, the dominant discursive formation is negotiated patriarchy: hierarchy is qualified (male authority is not tyranny), romanticised (female submission is love and mercy), and moralised (headship is responsibility), yet structural asymmetry remains intact and uncontested. Fourth, the corpus displays systematic interpretive foreclosure: contested Qur'anic clauses are suppressed, egalitarian counter-readings are absent, and alternative marital formations are rendered discursively unavailable.

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Intertextuality in Judicial Reasoning of Selected High Court Judgments on Theft and Fraud Cases

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Abstract

This study investigates how intertextuality functions as a discursive mechanism in judicial reasoning within selected Nigerian High Court judgements on theft and fraud cases. Although previous studies have established that legal discourse is inherently intertextual, this research extends beyond the identification of citations and references to examine how intertextual practices construct judicial authority, institutional legitimacy, and ideological coherence in criminal adjudication. The study is anchored in Norman Fairclough's theory of intertextuality within the framework of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which views judicial texts as products of interconnected legal and institutional discourses. A qualitative research design was adopted, using four purposively selected Nigerian High Court judgements obtained from the Nigerian Weekly Law Reports (2022 edition). The published and transcribed judgements were selected because they are authoritative legal documents that preserve the reasoning processes of the courts. The data were analysed through qualitative intertextual and discourse analysis. The analytical procedure involved identifying intertextual markers such as legal citations, direct quotations, paraphrases, legal maxims, reported speech, and interdiscursive references, followed by an examination of their linguistic, ideological, and institutional functions within judicial reasoning. The findings reveal that intertextuality in judicial discourse extends beyond textual referencing, as judges strategically deploy intertextual devices to justify legal interpretations, reinforce doctrinal continuity, maintain institutional authority, and reproduce dominant legal ideologies. The study contributes to legal discourse scholarship by providing a critical discourse-oriented understanding of intertextuality in Nigerian High Court judicial reasoning.
Keywords: *Intertextuality, judicial reasoning, court judgement, legal discourse, criminal case.*

Introduction

Legal discourse represents one of the most institutionalised forms of language use because it performs authoritative, regulatory, and interpretive functions within society. Judicial judgements, in particular, are central to the operation of the legal system because they embody the process through which judges interpret statutes, evaluate evidence, apply precedents, and justify legal conclusions. Judicial reasoning therefore constitutes not merely a logical application of legal principles but also a discursive practice through which courts construct legitimacy, institutional authority, and coherence within the legal order.

Legal judgements are inherently intertextual because they constantly engage with prior legal texts, including statutes, constitutional provisions, precedents, legal doctrines, witness testimonies, and academic commentaries. In this sense, judicial reasoning does not occur in isolation but within an interconnected network of texts that shape legal interpretation and meaning. Intertextuality in legal discourse thus refers to the relationship between legal texts whereby judges draw upon earlier authoritative texts to justify decisions, reinforce institutional continuity, and maintain doctrinal consistency.

Although the intertextual nature of legal discourse has been recognised in foundational studies such as Fairclough (1992), Bhatia (1993), and Tiersma (1999), many existing studies have focused primarily on describing citation practices or identifying intertextual devices in appellate court judgements. Limited scholarly attention has been paid to how intertextuality functions ideologically and institutionally within High Court criminal judgements, particularly within the Nigerian legal context. Existing studies also tend to emphasise appellate courts while overlooking the High Court as the foundational site where judicial reasoning is initially articulated and legal doctrines are concretely applied.

This study therefore investigates intertextuality in selected Nigerian High Court judgements on theft and fraud cases to examine how judges strategically deploy intertextual resources to construct authority, justify legal reasoning, and reproduce institutional legitimacy. Unlike previous descriptive studies, this paper adopts a Critical Discourse Analysis perspective to explore how intertextuality performs ideological and institutional work within judicial discourse.

The study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What intertextual devices are employed in the selected High Court judgements?
2. How do these intertextual practices function within judicial reasoning?

3. In what ways does intertextuality construct legal authority, institutional legitimacy, and ideological coherence in judicial discourse?

The study focuses on four purposively selected Nigerian High Court criminal judgements involving theft and fraud obtained from the Nigerian Weekly Law Reports (2022 edition). These cases were selected because theft and fraud cases frequently involve intensive judicial interpretation of criminal statutes, evidential standards, and precedential authorities, thereby providing rich intertextual material for analysis.

The study contributes to legal discourse scholarship by shifting the discussion of intertextuality from a merely descriptive account of citation practices to a critical examination of how judicial texts reproduce legal authority and institutional power. It also contributes to Nigerian legal scholarship by foregrounding High Court judgements as important sites of discursive and doctrinal construction.

The contribution of this study is primarily analytical and theoretical because it extends Fairclough's intertextual framework into Nigerian High Court criminal discourse by demonstrating how intertextuality functions not merely as textual referencing but as a mechanism for constructing judicial power, legal legitimacy, and ideological continuity.

Literature Review

The concept of intertextuality was first introduced by Julia Kristeva (1966), who describes every text as "a mosaic of quotations" in which meanings emerge through relationships with other texts. Kristeva's formulation challenged the notion of textual autonomy by arguing that texts constantly absorb, transform, and recontextualise prior discourses. This foundational idea was further developed by Jonathan Culler (1976), who emphasised the relational nature of textual meaning, and by Roland Barthes (1977), who argued that texts are constituted through networks of prior discourses rather than individual authorship. Gérard Genette (1982) later expanded the discussion through the concept of transtextuality, which explains the multiple ways texts interact with and derive meaning from one another.

Within professional and institutional discourse studies, intertextuality became increasingly important in the late twentieth century. Devitt (1991) examined intertextual relations in tax accounting discourse and demonstrated that specialised texts interact with legal codes and institutional conventions to perform professional functions. Shortly afterwards, Norman

Fairclough (1992) incorporated intertextuality into Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), arguing that texts are shaped by prior discourses and that intertextuality serves as a mechanism through which institutions reproduce or challenge power relations and ideologies. Fairclough's perspective moved intertextuality beyond literary studies into broader social and institutional contexts. In the same period, Vijay Kumar Bhatia (1993) argued that legal discourse depends heavily on prior legal documents and institutional conventions to maintain continuity, precision, and authority, while Peter Tiersma (1999) observed that legal language derives legitimacy through repetitive and formulaic references to statutes, precedents, and institutional traditions.

Further studies in legal discourse continued to explore the role of intertextuality within institutional communication. Bhatia (1998) analysed legislative texts and identified major intertextual functions such as signalling textual authority, facilitating textual mapping, and defining legal scope. Although the study contributed significantly to legal discourse scholarship, its emphasis remained largely on legislative drafting rather than judicial reasoning. Similarly, studies such as Beaugrande and Dressler (1981), Bazerman (2003), and Duff (2002) reinforced the idea that texts operate within networks of prior discourses and institutional genres.

More recent scholarship has shifted attention toward judicial discourse itself. Udina (2018) investigated intertextual relations in Court of Appeal judgements and identified devices such as citations, quotations, and references as central features of judicial language. However, the study remained largely descriptive because it focused mainly on identifying textual devices without critically examining their ideological or institutional implications. Gennadyevna (2020) analysed coherence and intertextuality in the judgements of the European Court of Human Rights and identified informative, interpretative, and argumentative functions of intertextual inclusions. Breeze (2021) further explored the relationship between discourse, institutional legitimacy, and power within legal settings, arguing that judicial language functions as an important mechanism for sustaining legal authority. In the same vein, Trabulsi (2021) examined implicit intertextuality in legal written discourse and found that legal documents rely heavily on recurring rhetorical structures and institutional templates.

Contemporary studies have increasingly examined the ideological dimensions of judicial intertextuality. Amoakohene (2022) highlights how intertextuality contributes to the construction of ideological meaning within judicial texts, particularly through the selective incorporation of authoritative legal voices. However, the study pays greater attention to ideological representation

in judicial language than to the specific linguistic mechanisms through which intertextuality constructs institutional legitimacy in criminal adjudication. Similarly, Alcaraz and Hughes (2023) demonstrate that contemporary judicial reasoning relies on dynamic interactions between statutes, precedents, institutional discourses, and legal interpretations. While the study provides important insights into the evolving nature of judicial discourse, its analysis is largely situated within broader international legal systems and does not sufficiently address the peculiarities of Nigerian High Court criminal proceedings. In the Nigerian context, Emenike (2024) investigated intertextual representation in Nigerian appellate judgements and demonstrated that intertextual practices perform significant pragmatic and institutional functions in judicial language use. Nevertheless, the study focuses primarily on appellate courts and remains largely descriptive because it identifies intertextual practices without critically examining how such practices function ideologically to construct legal authority and institutional power at the High Court level, where judicial reasoning is initially articulated. Consequently, existing contemporary studies have not sufficiently explored how intertextuality operates simultaneously as a linguistic, institutional, and ideological strategy within Nigerian High Court criminal judgements.

Despite these contributions, a major limitation across much of the literature is the tendency to treat intertextuality primarily as a textual or stylistic feature rather than as a mechanism of institutional power and ideological reproduction. Many studies concentrate on identifying types of intertextual references without critically examining how judges strategically deploy such references to legitimise judicial decisions, reinforce institutional authority, and sustain dominant legal ideologies. This study therefore addresses these gaps by adopting Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis framework to examine intertextuality not merely as a textual phenomenon but as a discursive strategy through which legal authority and ideological legitimacy are constructed within Nigerian High Court criminal judgements.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored in Norman Fairclough's theory of intertextuality within Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Fairclough (1992; 2003) conceptualises intertextuality as the presence and transformation of prior texts within a new text. According to him, no discourse exists independently because texts are shaped by previous discourses, institutional practices, and ideological structures.

Fairclough distinguishes between manifest intertextuality and interdiscursivity. Manifest intertextuality refers to the explicit presence of other texts through quotations, citations, paraphrases, and references, while interdiscursivity refers to the mixing of different discourses and genres within a single text. In judicial discourse, manifest intertextuality appears through legal citations, references to statutes, precedents, constitutional provisions, and witness testimonies, whereas interdiscursivity emerges through the incorporation of legal, forensic, administrative, and economic discourses within judicial reasoning.

The relevance of Fairclough's framework to this study lies in its emphasis on the relationship between discourse, ideology, and institutional power. Judicial judgements are not neutral texts; they are institutional discourses that construct legitimacy and authority through selective engagement with prior legal texts. Judges rely on intertextual resources to present decisions as objective, rational, and legally inevitable. Through this process, judicial discourse reproduces dominant legal ideologies such as the rule of law, procedural fairness, and institutional continuity. Fairclough's framework also enables the study to move beyond descriptive identification of citations toward an examination of how intertextuality performs ideological work within legal discourse. By analysing the selection, framing, and interpretation of prior texts, the study uncovers how judges position themselves within established legal traditions while simultaneously shaping legal meaning.

Thus, Fairclough's theory provides an appropriate analytical framework for understanding judicial reasoning as a socially situated and ideologically mediated discursive practice.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design because the objective is to examine how intertextuality functions within judicial reasoning rather than to quantify textual patterns. The data consist of four purposively selected Nigerian High Court criminal judgements involving theft and fraud obtained from the Nigerian Weekly Law Reports (2022 edition).

The cases were selected purposively for three major reasons. First, theft and fraud cases frequently require detailed judicial engagement with statutory provisions, evidential rules, and precedential authorities, thereby producing intertextually dense judgements. Second, High Court judgements constitute the foundational level of judicial reasoning where legal principles are first interpreted and applied before appellate review. Third, the selected cases contain extensive judicial reasoning and sufficient intertextual material suitable for Critical Discourse Analysis.

The data comprise four Nigerian High Court judgements involving theft, fraud, forgery, conspiracy, and financial misappropriation. The selected cases include criminal prosecutions relating to forged financial documents, theft of industrial materials, evidential disputes, and fraud-related offences prosecuted by state and anti-corruption agencies. These judgements were selected because they contain extensive judicial reasoning and rich intertextual materials suitable for Critical Discourse Analysis. These cases were selected not because they are statistically representative but because they are information-rich texts capable of revealing how intertextuality functions within judicial reasoning.

The study relies on published and transcribed versions of the judgments because law reports provide authoritative and standardised records of judicial decisions. Published reports preserve the exact wording, citations, and reasoning processes of the courts, thereby ensuring textual accuracy and reliability for discourse analysis. In addition, the accessibility of law reports allows other researchers to verify and replicate the analysis.

However, the use of published judgements presents certain limitations. Editorial formatting in law reports may omit certain oral courtroom interactions and non-verbal communicative features that could enrich discourse analysis. Furthermore, although the dataset was expanded to four judgements, the study still prioritises depth of qualitative interpretation over statistical generalisation across all Nigerian High Court judgements. Nevertheless, qualitative discourse studies prioritise depth of analysis over numerical generalisation, and the selected cases provide sufficient material for examining the discursive functions of intertextuality.

The analytical procedure involved three stages:

1. Identification of intertextual markers such as legal citations, quotations, paraphrases, reported speech, legal maxims, and interdiscursive references.
2. Categorisation of these intertextual forms according to their linguistic and discursive functions.
3. Critical interpretation of how the identified intertextual practices construct judicial authority, institutional legitimacy, and ideological coherence.

The units of analysis include clauses, sentences, and textual excerpts containing explicit or implicit intertextual references. The analysis focuses not only on the occurrence of intertextual devices but also on how they function within the broader institutional context of judicial reasoning.

The study raises minimal ethical concerns because court judgements are public documents available for academic and professional use. Nevertheless, the study maintains academic integrity through accurate citation and faithful representation of judicial texts.

Analysis and Findings

Table 1 presents the major intertextual devices identified in the selected High Court judgements alongside their textual illustrations, discursive functions, and ideological implications within judicial reasoning.

Intertextual Device	**Textual Illustration**	**Discursive Function**	**Ideological/Institutional Implication**
Legal Citation	"In Aina v. Jinadu (1992) 4 NWLR [Pt. 233] 91, it was held that the offence of forgery is committed when a person knowingly makes a document or writing which is false…"	Establishes legal authority and supports judicial reasoning through precedent.	Reinforces the doctrine of stare decisis and presents judicial decisions as objective, legitimate, and institutionally grounded.
Citation of Statutes	"Section 364 of the Penal Code under which the Defendants are charged…"	Connects judicial interpretation directly to statutory authority.	Constructs the judgement as legally binding and rooted in formal legal institutions.
General Reference	"See Kasa v. The State (1994) LPELR–1671 (SC)."	Directs readers to prior judicial authorities without detailed explanation.	Sustains continuity within legal discourse and positions the judgement within an established legal tradition.
Paraphrasing	"The law is well established that the maker of a document is the proper	Simplifies and adapts earlier	Demonstrates judicial interpretive authority and enables

Intertextual Device	**Textual Illustration**	**Discursive Function**	**Ideological/Institutional Implication**
	person to tender it in evidence."	legal principles to the present case.	selective framing of legal meaning.
Direct Speech	"I am of the considered view that by this provision, the Court has power…"	Presents judicial opinion with precision and authenticity.	Enhances the persuasive authority of the judge and foregrounds institutional voice.
Reported Speech	"One Fidehs Omini, a police officer attached to SARS, testified as PW2…"	Reconstructs courtroom testimony and evidential narratives.	Controls representation of witness voices and legitimises judicial conclusions through selective narration.
Legal Maxim	"The confessional statement of a co-accused is no evidence against the other accused person…"	Invokes established legal doctrine and principle.	Reinforces procedural fairness and continuity of criminal jurisprudence.
Obiter Dicta	"Proof of actual agreement is not easy; thus, the courts usually consider it sufficient…"	Provides persuasive commentary beyond the ratio decidendi.	Extends judicial influence and shapes future legal interpretation.
Stylistic Pastiche	"Learned counsel contended that the Defendants' confessional statements were obtained under duress…"	Reproduces conventional legal style and courtroom language.	Aligns the judgement with institutional norms and conventions of judicial writing.

Intertextual Device	**Textual Illustration**	**Discursive Function**	**Ideological/Institutional Implication**
Interdiscursive Evidence	"There should be time log, a cargo manifest, a certificate of quantity transferred…"	Incorporates technical and forensic discourse into legal reasoning.	Constructs objectivity and enhances institutional credibility through expert knowledge.

The analysis reveals that intertextuality in judicial reasoning extends beyond textual referencing and functions as a mechanism of institutional authority, legal legitimisation, and ideological reproduction. Judges strategically deploy citations, statutory references, and legal doctrines to present judicial outcomes as objective and legally inevitable. Through these intertextual practices, judicial discourse reinforces continuity, consistency, and public confidence in the legal system.

Furthermore, the findings demonstrate that judicial reasoning is dialogic and cumulative. Judges negotiate legal meaning by selectively invoking, adapting, and recontextualising earlier legal authorities within contemporary judicial contexts. This confirms Fairclough's argument that intertextuality operates as a mechanism through which institutions reproduce dominant ideologies and sustain power relations.

Discussion

Intertextuality in judicial discourse extends beyond the mere presence of citations and references. In High Court criminal judgements, intertextuality functions as a discursive strategy through which judges construct legal authority, institutional legitimacy, and ideological coherence. The selected theft and fraud judgments demonstrate that judicial reasoning is fundamentally dialogic because judges continuously engage with previous legal texts such as statutes, constitutional provisions, precedents, legal doctrines, witness testimonies, and procedural conventions. This section therefore moves beyond the descriptive identification of intertextual devices to examine how such devices operate linguistically and institutionally within judicial reasoning.

Legal Citation as Institutional Authority

One of the most dominant intertextual features identified in the selected judgements is legal citation. Judicial citations function not merely as references to earlier authorities but as

mechanisms for legitimising judicial decisions. Judges rely on statutes and precedents to position their rulings within an already established legal tradition, thereby presenting decisions as objective and institutionally grounded rather than personally motivated.

For instance, in one of the theft cases, the court stated:

"Counts 4, 6, 8 and 10 – Forgery: Section 364 of the Penal Code under which the Defendants are charged reads: 'Whoever commits forgery shall be punished with imprisonment for a term which extends to fourteen years or with fine or with both.'"

This citation performs an authoritative function by grounding the judgement in statutory law. The judge invokes the Penal Code not only to define the offence but also to reinforce the legitimacy of judicial interpretation. Through this intertextual practice, the judgement derives authority from the legal system itself rather than from individual judicial discretion.

Similarly, the judgment cites previous cases:

"In Aina v. Jinadu (1992) 4 NWLR (Pt.233) 91, it was held that the offence of forgery is committed when a person knowingly makes a document or writing which is false with the intent that it may in any way be used or acted upon by another as genuine to his prejudice."

Here, the precedent functions ideologically to sustain the doctrine of stare decisis. By relying on prior judicial authorities, the court constructs continuity and predictability within criminal adjudication. This aligns with Fairclough's (1992) argument that intertextuality reproduces institutional power through selective incorporation of authoritative voices. The judgement therefore becomes part of a larger chain of legal discourse in which past decisions shape present interpretations.

Constitutional References and the Construction of Legal Legitimacy

The analysis further reveals that constitutional references are strategically deployed to construct procedural legitimacy and reinforce the judiciary's role as protector of fundamental rights. For example:

"It is a fundamental principle of the adversary adjudicatory system of our criminal jurisprudence that a person charged with a criminal offence shall be presumed innocent until proven guilty — see Section 36(5) of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999 (as amended)."

The intertextual reference to the Constitution performs several functions simultaneously. Linguistically, it foregrounds the constitutional basis of criminal justice. Institutionally, it

legitimises the court's reasoning by aligning the judgement with supreme legal authority. Ideologically, it reinforces liberal democratic values such as fairness, due process, and the presumption of innocence.

Rather than presenting the judgement as a personal interpretation, the judge frames the reasoning as constitutionally mandated. This demonstrates how intertextuality operates as a mechanism for institutional self-legitimation within judicial discourse.

Paraphrasing and the Adaptation of Legal Meaning

Paraphrasing is another major intertextual strategy observed in the selected judgements. Unlike direct citation, paraphrasing allows judges to reformulate earlier legal principles in ways that fit the present context while maintaining doctrinal continuity.

An example from the data states:

"The law is well established that the maker of a document is the proper person to tender it in evidence."

This statement paraphrases established evidentiary principles derived from earlier authorities without reproducing them verbatim. Through paraphrasing, judges simplify complex legal doctrines and integrate them seamlessly into judicial reasoning. The process enables the court to adapt prior legal knowledge to new factual circumstances while preserving institutional consistency.

From a discourse analytical perspective, paraphrasing also conceals the interpretive nature of judicial reasoning. The reformulated principle appears natural and universally accepted, thereby masking the ideological choices involved in legal interpretation. Fairclough (2003) explains that institutional discourse often naturalises certain assumptions through repetitive linguistic patterns. In this context, paraphrasing contributes to the normalisation of legal ideology within judicial discourse.

Direct and Reported Speech as Evidential Authority

The selected judgements also reveal extensive use of direct and reported speech, particularly in witness testimonies and judicial pronouncements. These forms function as intertextual incorporations of external voices into the judgement.

For example:

"Hon. Justice Sylvanus Chinedu Oriji submitted: 'I am of the considered view that by this provision, the Court has power to make an order for the sum of N124 million to be restored to the Defendants by the EFCC.'"

The direct quotation preserves the exact wording of the earlier judicial statement, thereby enhancing authenticity and authority. The quotation signals fidelity to legal precision and reduces the possibility of interpretive distortion.

Similarly, reported speech is used in witness narration:

"One Fidehs Omini, a police officer attached to the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS), testified as PW2. He told the Court that on the 9th of August, 2016, a case of conspiracy and theft was reported to the Police."

Here, reported speech enables the court to incorporate testimonial evidence into the broader narrative of judicial reasoning. It also demonstrates how judicial discourse accommodates multiple institutional voices, including police officers, counsel, witnesses, and previous judges. However, the judge ultimately controls which voices are foregrounded or marginalised, reflecting the hierarchical power relations embedded in courtroom discourse.

Legal Maxims and the Reproduction of Judicial Ideology

The analysis identifies the use of legal maxims and doctrinal formulations as another significant intertextual strategy. Legal maxims function rhetorically to present judicial reasoning as rooted in longstanding legal wisdom.

For instance:

"The law, however, is that the confessional statement of a co-accused is no evidence against another accused person unless adopted by word or conduct."

This formulation reflects the reproduction of inherited legal doctrine within contemporary adjudication. Such expressions appear objective and timeless, yet they embody ideological assumptions about fairness, criminal responsibility, and evidential reliability.

By repeatedly invoking these formulations, judges reinforce institutional continuity and preserve the authority of established legal traditions. Intertextuality therefore serves not only legal but also ideological functions within judicial reasoning.

Obiter Dicta and Judicial Persuasion

The judgments further demonstrate the strategic use of obiter dicta. Although obiter statements are not legally binding, they perform persuasive and interpretive functions within judicial discourse. For example:

"Proof of actual agreement is not easy; thus, the courts usually consider it sufficient if circumstances exist from which conspiracy may reasonably be inferred."

This statement extends beyond the immediate facts of the case to provide broader judicial commentary on criminal conspiracy. Through obiter dicta, judges influence future interpretations and contribute to the gradual evolution of legal doctrine.

The use of such commentary reflects the dialogic nature of legal discourse because judges anticipate future judicial engagement with their reasoning. Intertextuality therefore connects present judgements not only with past authorities but also with future legal interpretations.

Interdiscursivity and Cross-Disciplinary Authority

The selected fraud judgements reveal significant interdiscursive features, particularly through references to technical and commercial documentation. For example:

"There should be a time log, certificate of quantity transferred, cargo manifest, bill of lading, certificate of origin and ullage report to support a second STS."

This extract demonstrates how judicial discourse incorporates terminologies from maritime, commercial, and administrative discourses. Such interdiscursive practices broaden the evidential foundation of judicial reasoning and construct the court as an institution capable of evaluating specialised knowledge.

The integration of technical discourse also enhances the perception of objectivity and rationality within judicial decisions. By drawing upon external knowledge systems, judges reinforce the institutional authority of the judiciary and legitimise legal conclusions through specialised expertise.

Intertextuality and Judicial Reasoning

The findings demonstrate that intertextuality is central to judicial reasoning because legal judgements derive meaning through continuous interaction with prior texts. High Court judges do not decide cases in isolation; rather, they interpret statutes, evaluate precedents, incorporate testimonies, and adapt doctrinal principles to produce legally acceptable outcomes.

The analysis further shows that intertextuality performs important ideological and institutional functions. It sustains doctrinal continuity, reinforces judicial authority, legitimises legal interpretation, and naturalises dominant legal ideologies. Through intertextual practices, judicial discourse presents legal reasoning as objective, coherent, and institutionally grounded even though it involves interpretive and ideological choices.

This study therefore extends existing scholarship beyond descriptive classification of intertextual devices by demonstrating how intertextuality operates as a mechanism of power, legitimacy, and institutional reproduction within Nigerian High Court criminal adjudication.

Conclusion

This study examined intertextuality in selected Nigerian High Court judgements on theft and fraud cases using Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis framework. The findings demonstrate that judicial reasoning is fundamentally intertextual because judges constantly engage with statutes, precedents, constitutional provisions, witness testimonies, and institutional discourses in constructing legal decisions.

The study identified several intertextual devices, including legal citations, paraphrasing, direct quotation, reported speech, legal maxims, and interdiscursive references. However, beyond identifying these devices, the study demonstrated that intertextuality performs important ideological and institutional functions within judicial discourse.

Intertextual practices enable judges to construct legal legitimacy, reinforce institutional continuity, maintain doctrinal coherence, and reproduce dominant legal ideologies. Judicial reasoning therefore emerges not as an isolated intellectual activity but as a discursive process situated within an evolving network of authoritative legal texts.

The study contributes to legal discourse scholarship by moving beyond descriptive accounts of legal citation toward a critical examination of how intertextuality constructs judicial authority and institutional legitimacy. It also foregrounds the Nigerian High Court as an important site for analysing the discursive production of legal meaning.

In addition, the study demonstrates that intertextuality is not merely a stylistic feature of judicial writing but a mechanism through which courts sustain legal continuity, reinforce institutional power, and reproduce dominant legal ideologies within criminal adjudication.

The inclusion of four High Court judgements strengthens the analytical depth of the study by providing broader insight into intertextual practices across multiple criminal adjudication contexts.

Future studies may expand the dataset to include appellate and Supreme Court judgements across different legal domains to provide broader comparative insights into intertextuality within Nigerian judicial discourse.

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Purification, Militarism, and Youth Identity in the Obòkun Ritual Festival

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Abstract

Yorùbá festival scholarship has extensively documented deity-centred celebrations while neglecting ancestor-hero festivals that dramatise foundational martial narratives. The Obòkun Festival in Ìbòkun, Nigeria, commemorates a warrior-founder who combined healing and conquest, yet existing literature lacks a critical analysis of how such festivals construct youth identity through ritual performance. This study addresses this gap by examining the festival's triadic structure of purification, militarism and youth identity, arguing that these three elements operate dialectically rather than sequentially to produce gendered subjectivities and ensure intergenerational continuity. Employing ethnographic methodology grounded in participant observation, ritual analysis, and interpretive thick description, the study applies performance theory-specifically, restored behaviour, efficacy versus entertainment, and performance environment-as its analytical framework. Findings reveal that purification establishes the sacred architecture for martial memory; militarism provides the narrative core of ancestral heroism; and hierarchical youth incorporation ensures transmission through observation, apprenticeship and performance. The significance lies in recovering an understudied festival genre, demonstrating youth identity as performative achievement rather than demographic category, and offering an ethnographic case study of indigenous festival adaptation to modern pressures.

Keywords: *Obòkun Festival, Yorùbá culture, performance theory, ritual purification, youth identity*

Introduction

Festivals in Yorùbáland constitute complex ritual landscapes where history, spirituality and social order are continually re-enacted and reinforced. However, scholarship has disproportionately focused on deity-centred celebrations-the Ṣàngó festivals of kingship and lightning, the Èṣù rituals of crossroads and communication, the Ọ̀ṣun festivals of fertility and riverine reverence (Drewal, 1992; Apter, 1992; Barber, 2000). This emphasis has created a significant lacuna: the systematic neglect of ancestor hero festivals that dramatise foundational martial narratives and, more critically, the role such festivals play in constructing youth identity.

The Obòkun Festival in Ìbòkun, Ọ̀ṣun State, Nigeria, exemplifies this neglected genre. Rooted in the epic of Ajíbógun (later Obòkun), who fetched seawater to cure his father, Odùduwà, of blindness and subsequently conquered territory through martial prowess, the festival annually re-enacts a founding narrative that combines healing and warfare (Personal communication, 2024).

While existing ethnographic accounts describe the festival's origins and ritual sequences-from preparatory divination to the grand finale-they fail to address a fundamental question: how does this festival actively produce the gendered, age-graded subjectivities required for community continuity?

The problem is both empirical and theoretical. Empirically, we lack a detailed analysis of how purification rituals, martial performances and youth participation interrelate within a single festival system. Theoretically, festival scholarship has rarely engaged performance theory's capacity to explain how ritual transforms participants through 'restored behaviour'- the rehearsed, repeated and transmitted actions that Schechner (2003, p. 36**)** identifies as the core mechanism of ritual efficacy. This article addresses both deficits.

Existing scholarship on Yorùbá festivals falls into three overlapping traditions. The first ethnographic documentation provides valuable descriptions of ritual sequences, participant roles and material culture (Drewal & Drewal, 1983; Fadipe, 1970). This tradition establishes that festivals constitute 'performance environments'- landscapes inscribed with meanings activated through embodied action (Schechner, 2003, p. 124). However, documentation alone cannot explain how festivals produce identity. The second tradition, symbolic and structural analysis, interprets Yorùbá rituals as expressions of cosmological principles (Peek, 1991; Abimbola, 1976). Drawing on recent appropriations of Turner's (1969) concept of ritual as social drama, these studies illuminate how festivals resolve crises, negotiate liminality and reaffirm community values. However, Turner's framework, while foundational, emphasises structure and anti-structure without fully accounting for the repetitive, choreographed nature of performance that Schechner (2003) terms 'restored behaviour'. The third tradition, performance-centred analysis, has applied Schechner's theories to African rituals with productive results (Conquergood, 2013; Kuoppala, 2021). Schechner's (2003, p. 130) distinction between 'efficacy' and 'entertainment'-where efficacy rituals transform participants while entertainment performances merely please audiences-provides a crucial analytical tool.

What remains absent is an integrated analysis of how purification, militarism and youth identity co-constitute each other within an ancestor hero festival. The Obòkun Festival provides an ideal case because its triadic structure-purification rituals that establish sacred space, militaristic performances that re-enact conquest, and hierarchical youth incorporation that ensures transmission-exhibits what Schechner (2003, p. 245) identifies as the autopoietic

(self-reproducing) character of efficacious ritual systems. This article offers a dramaturgical analysis that moves beyond description to critical interpretation, arguing that the three domains form an autopoietic system: purification enables militarism by creating the sacred container for violent re-enactments; militarism shapes youth identity by providing a vocabulary of courage and collective defence; youth identity perpetuates purification through intergenerational transmission of ritual protocols.

Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative ethnographic research design grounded in performance studies and cultural anthropology, facilitating immersion in the ritual culture of the Ìbòkun people to investigate the dramatic aesthetics, purification rites, militaristic performances and youth identity construction within the Obòkun Festival. Participants were selected through purposive and snowball sampling, focusing on three principal figures who hold custodial, symbolic and performative authority: the Balórò (senior ritual custodian and chief priest), the Babòkun (the king, embodying Obòkun's authority during homage rituals), and Àyàntúndé (the master drummer who apprenticed from age seven and leads the talking drum ensemble). Additional ritual specialists, Olóríòrò (the Olórí ọdọ́), one of the nine virgins, and other chiefs were observed, and their public statements were documented through participant observation. Data collection employed multiple instruments: participant observation during festival ceremonies captured embodied practices, spatial dynamics and communal interactions through detailed field notes; unstructured interviews with the three principal participants were conducted in Ìjẹ̀ṣà and Yorùbá, then transcribed and translated into English, providing insider perspectives on ritual symbolism, dramatic aesthetics, martial chants and historical continuity; archival documentation included ethnographic records and photographs of ritual materials (ancestral sword, earthen pots, white costumes and Obòkun's statue), examined as performative texts; and oral texts were collected in the form of myths, storytelling, praise poetry, chants (such as 'Gidigbo gidigbo') and songs, transcribed, translated and subjected to literary analysis focusing on symbolism, metaphor, rhythm, repetition, call and response, and enactment. Data analysis proceeded through three stages: coding transcripts, observations and archival evidence into domains of purification, militarism and youth identity; mapping these codes onto Schechner's performance categories (restored behaviour, efficacy/entertainment, performance environment); and interpretive synthesis identifying dialectical interrelationships among the three domains. Validity was ensured through triangulation

of methods and member checking with the three principal participants. Ethical considerations followed standard anthropological practice: the festival is public and documented with community consent; informed consent was obtained from interviewed participants with assurance of anonymity; the analysis respects ritual secrecy regarding specific sacred formulas while analysing publicly observable performances; and participants' voices have been represented accurately without disclosing restricted knowledge.

Historical origin and dramatic plot

The Obòkun Festival's narrative core derives from the epic of Ajíbógun, the youngest son of Odùduwà, the mythical progenitor of the Ijeshas. When Odùduwà became blind, Ajíbógun journeyed to the coast, fetched seawater and restored his father's sight. In gratitude, Odùduwà offered him any reward. Ajíbógun requested a sword, which he used to conquer territory, found the settlement that became Ìbòkun and acquired the name Obòkun (Personal communication, 2024). This origin combines two heroic modalities: healer (through seawater) and warrior (through conquest). The festival annually re-enacts this duality over two days. The festival's dramatic structure unfolds in three stages, aligning with recent applications of Turner's (1969) social drama model. The Preparatory Day ritually prepares the community for the two-day festival and re-enactment. The Procession to Igbó Èkùn represents the remedial phase: participants journey to the Forest of Èkùn, a former battlefield, re-enacting Obòkun's martial conquests. The Grand Finale (Ìgbají) achieves reintegration: the king's blessing, the cane wrestling contest and communal celebration re-establish social order for another year.

Spatial narrative as a performance environment

The festival transforms Ìbòkun's physical landscape into what Schechner (2003, p. 124) terms a 'performance environment'-a space inscribed with meanings activated through embodied action. Three sites carry particular significance. Igbó Èkùn (Forest of the Leopard), the former battlefield, receives sacrifices to Ògún and marks the site of ancestral combat. Òkè-Ẹsẹ̀, where Obòkun first settled, represents the warrior founder's strategic foothold. Ìtaji, where the homage ritual occurs, re-enacts the submission of conquered peoples through the presentation of weapons. The procession routes connect these sites into a narrative geography. Participants walk paths that literally trace Obòkun's movements, performing what Schechner (2003, p. 124) calls 'differential space'—space that is simultaneously physical (actual locations) and symbolic (ancestral territory

claimed through conquest). When youth walk these routes carrying ritual objects, they inscribe embodied memory onto the landscape, learning through their feet what words alone cannot transmit (Mingon & Sutton, 2021).

Chromatic staging and visual semiotics

Plate 1: Balórò, Obòkun's chief priest (with feathered cap), the chiefs and the youth during the procession with Obòkun's statue (Photo by author, 2024)

The festival's colour code establishes a visual hierarchy distinguishing sacred from profane and ritual specialist from general celebrant. White attire dominates among ritual leaders: the Balórò, Babòkun (king) and the nine virgins all wear white. This chromatic choice signifies purity, spirituality and connection to Ọbàtálá, the orisha associated with white cloth and moral authority. By contrast, general celebrants wear vibrantly coloured Aṣọ Òkè, the patterned Yorùbá festive cloth. This visual staging creates what Schechner (2003, p. 78) terms a 'feedback loop' between performers and spectators: white figures moving through colourfully dressed crowds visually announce the sacred within the profane. The effect is dramaturgical-it trains spectators to read ritual significance through colour, establishing an embodied semiotic system that youth internalise through annual repetition.

Purification: Establishing Sacred Architecture

The most visible purification performance features nine virgins dressed in white wrappers, carrying earthen pots (òrù) filled with sacred concoctions. Their procession moves with controlled, deliberate movement-slow, synchronised steps, bodies held with poise and dignity-as they sprinkle purifying water at the king's palace and other sacred sites (Personal communication, 2024). Their virginity is not a personal attribute but a ritual requirement, as one virgin stated: 'When I carry the pot, I am not myself. I am carrying Obòkun's power through the town' (Personal communication, 2024). This statement exemplifies Schechner's (2003, p. 36) concept of 'restored behaviour': the young woman is not performing her everyday identity but a twice-behaved role-the virgin as ritual agent-that she inhabits only during festival time. The selection of nine virgins carries numerical significance. In Yorùbá cosmology, nine is associated with Ẹ̀ṣù's òtúrá méjì sign and with the nine-night cycles of funeral rituals (Drewal, 1992). Their liminal status-neither children nor fully adult women-makes them appropriate agents for boundary-crossing purification work.

Purification as an enabling condition

Crucially, purification is not an isolated ritual domain but the enabling condition for militarism. Ram sacrifice, weapon handling and combat mime all require purified contexts; otherwise, they risk attracting negative forces. The nine virgins' sprinkling creates a sacred architecture within which martial performances can occur without spiritual danger (Turner**,** 1969). Purification, therefore, establishes the container; militarism provides the content. This hierarchical relationship reflects the Yorùbá cosmological principle that ritual purity must precede any engagement with violent or chthonic forces (Abimbola, 1976).

Militarism: Dramatising Martial Memory

Plate 2: The youths engage in flogging games as an expression of militarism (Photo by author, 2024)

Cane wrestling as restored combat

The festival's most explicit militaristic performance occurs during the afternoon cane wrestling game. Young men, armed with ritually anointed sticks prepared by the Lóríòrò, engage in a physical contest of endurance, flogging one another while chanting a paradoxical combat song:

Gídígbò gídígbò, uré ni, ujà ni, uré ni, ujà ni
(Let's fight seriously, it is a game, it is a fight, it is a game, it is a fight)
Kó bá dùjà, ke dùjà
(If it turns to a fight, let it turn to a fight)

This chant exemplifies Schechner's (2003) concept of restored behaviour. The youth are not actually fighting to injure but performing 'fighting as ritual', where the paradox of 'game' and 'fight' dramatises the tension between play and real confrontation. The call-and-response structure creates communitas (Krause, 2020) among participants, transforming individual endurance into a collective display of martial solidarity. The winner remains alone on the field, re-enacting Obòkun's martial prowess. This solitary victory pose establishes hierarchy among youth while dramatising the community's ultimate reliance on male protection. As one chief observed, the ritual tests not only physical strength but also pain tolerance-enduring the flogger's sting

demonstrates a warrior's essential quality: remaining functional despite injury (Personal communication, 2024).

Battlefield cartography and spatial militarism

The festival's procession routes map martial history onto the physical landscape. The journey to Igbó Èkùn re-enacts the warrior founder's territorial expansion, with each step performing a claim to the land. This spatial narrative transforms walking into a martial act-participants literally retrace conquest routes, embodying the ancestors' movement through contested space (Schechner, 2003). For youth, this mapping serves a clear pedagogical function. Young men who walk these routes learn that territory was claimed through violence and must be defended through readiness. The landscape becomes a mnemonic device: every significant location activates stories of combat, sacrifice and ancestral protection. Over years of participation, youth internalise this martial geography without explicit instruction, learning through their bodies what maps could never convey (Mingon & Sutton, 2021).

Youth Identity: Intergenerational Transmission

The festival's engagement with youth operates within a structured hierarchy that respects elder authority while cultivating youthful participation. The homage ritual at Ìtaji explicitly stages this hierarchy: Olórí àgbà (head of chiefs) pays homage first, followed by Olórí ọdọ́ (head of youth), and finally Olórí ọmọdé (leader of children). This sequence communicates that youth occupy an honoured but subordinate position, establishing a clear generational progression. Youth observe elders performing ritual roles, learning correct procedures through what Schechner (2003, p. 236) terms 'training as performance'. Over successive years, observation transforms into embodied competence. A young man who begins as a spectator becomes a drummer's apprentice, then a dancer, and eventually, if chosen, a chief who handles Obòkun's weapons.

Musical Apprenticeship and Embodied Learning

Plate 3: The youth displaying drumming skills as they walk to the palace to welcome the king and visitors (Photo by author, 2024)

Youth participation in musical performance is essential to transmission. The talking drums that produce utterances such as 'Ọba ò, ọba l'áṣẹ' (A king, yes, a king has authority) require years of training to master. Àyàntúndé, the master drummer, reported beginning his apprenticeship at age seven, learning rhythmic patterns through bodily practice before achieving festival-level virtuosity. Similarly, the complex choreography of processional movements-two steps forward and one step backwards, accompanied by swinging hands—demands youthful energy and coordination. Older participants can instruct but cannot physically demonstrate these demanding sequences. The festival therefore depends on youth for its kinetic density, creating reciprocal dependence: youth need elders' knowledge, but elders need youth's bodies (Schechner, 2003).

Oral transmission and genealogical songs

Oral transmission through song further consolidates youth identity. Songs such as:

Song Text (Ijesha dialect)	Translation
Ọmọ Obòkun	The offspring of Obòkun
Ọmọ Olúbòkun èrò wọ̀tìrìtì	The offspring of Olúbòkun, the crowd walk en masse.

Song Text (Ijesha dialect)	**Translation**
Ọmọ elénì àtẹ́kẹ́	The offspring of the one who owns a permanent mat
Ọmọ elénì ẹwẹ̀lẹ̀	The offspring of the one who owns a well-woven mat

encode genealogical claims. When youth sing these texts, they perform their own identity as descendants of the warrior hero, internalising ancestral connection through repetitive vocalisation. The call-and-response structure of festival chants ensures youth participation even when they do not yet know entire texts (Finnegan, 2012). The chant 'A mọ̀ ha sorò ulé ria o' ('We come to do our household's tradition') functions as a meta-performance statement. Youth singing these words are not merely describing tradition but actively claiming it, asserting continuity through their vocal presence. This meta-statement transforms passive inheritance into active embodiment-tradition becomes something one does, not something one has (Barber, 2000).

The virgins as liminal youth figures

The nine virgins occupy a particularly significant position in understanding youth identity. As young women, they embody the community's reproductive future. Their white attire visually distinguishes them from both colourful celebrants and adult ritual specialists, reflecting their liminal status. Unlike the young men, whose martial performance emphasises physical endurance and public display, the young women's performance emphasises controlled movement, dignified bearing and spiritual efficacy. This gendered division of ritual labour reflects broader cultural expectations within Yorùbá communities (Fadipe, 1970) while simultaneously naturalising those expectations through sacred performance. Therefore, the festival does not merely reflect gender ideology but produces and legitimates it through ritual authority (Butler, 2023).

The Triadic Dialectic and Autopoietic System

Purification, militarism and youth identity do not operate in sequence but dialectically. Each domain enables, shapes and perpetuates the others in a recursive rather than a linear fashion. Purification enables militarism: ritual cleansing creates the sacred container within which violent re-enactments can occur without spiritual danger. Militarism shapes youth identity: martial performances provide a vocabulary of strength, courage and collective defence. Youth identity perpetuates purification: young drummers, virgins and dancers ensure that cleansing practices continue across generations. The hierarchical structure of homage-elders preceding youth, who in

turn precede children-ensures that each generation observes the protocols it will eventually inherit (Turner, 1969).

Efficacy over entertainment

From the perspective of Schechner's performance theory, the Obòkun Festival exemplifies 'efficacy' over 'entertainment' (Schechner, 2003, p. 130). Efficacy rituals transform participants; entertainment performances merely please audiences. The festival's efficacy operates on multiple levels: virgins become ritual agents rather than ordinary young women; youth become 'children of Obòkun' rather than demographic aggregates; the community becomes purified and protected. Participant transformation occurs through restored behaviour-annual repetition of choreographed actions that are 'twice behaved' (Schechner, 2003, p. 36). Moreover, spectators are not passive consumers but potential future participants. Children watching the homage ritual observe the hierarchy they will one day enter; young girls viewing the virgins imagine their own potential selection. The festival creates aspirational spectatorship, recruiting future generations (Schechner, 2003).

Autopoiesis and community reproduction

Together, purification, militarism and youth identity form an autopoietic system-self-reproducing through recursive performance. Purification creates conditions for militaristic performances that dramatise communal values. These performances attract and shape youth participants, who learn purification protocols through practice. Youth become adult practitioners who transmit technologies to the next generation (Rappaport, 1999). This autopoietic character explains the festival's endurance across centuries. The festival does not merely preserve tradition but actively regenerates it, a process Schechner (2003, p. 245**)** identifies as the core mechanism of ritual efficacy. The Yorùbá phrase 'A mọ ha sorò ulé ria o' captures this autopoietic logic: tradition is active practice requiring annual renewal. The festival's adaptability-incorporating jùjú music alongside ancient chants, adjusting to urban migration patterns while maintaining core structures-demonstrates autopoietic resilience rather than frozen preservation (Barber, 2000).

Gendered subjectivities as mutual constitution

The festival's construction of gender operates through mutual constitution rather than separate spheres. Young men's martial masculinity and young women's sacralised purity are not independent productions but interdependent performances. The male performance of combat

would be spiritually dangerous without female purification work; the female performance of purity would lack political significance without male martial display to complement it. This mutual constitution reflects broader Yorùbá cosmology, where physical protection and spiritual preservation are dual pillars of societal stability (Abimbola, 1976). Neither suffices alone; both are necessary. The festival, therefore, produces youth identity as always already gendered, always already relational, and always already embedded in communal rather than individual frameworks. Youth emerge from festival participation not as autonomous individuals but as embodiments of ancestral mandates, carrying both Obòkun's sword and the purifying pot (Drewal, 1992).

Conclusion

This article has provided the first sustained dramaturgical analysis of the Obòkun ritual festival, demonstrating three interconnected findings. First, purification, militarism and youth identity operate dialectically within an autopoietic system: purification enables militarism by creating sacred architecture; militarism shapes youth identity by providing a vocabulary of courage and defence; youth identity perpetuates purification through intergenerational transmission. Second, using Schechner's performance theory, the analysis has shown how the festival achieves efficacy through restored behaviour, performance environment and the efficacy/entertainment distinction, operating as a self-reproducing system that recruits youth into ritual agency through hierarchical incorporation and embodied learning. Third, gendered subjectivities are mutually constituted: martial masculinity and sacralised purity perform complementary functions within a single ritual logic, reflecting Yorùbá cosmology, in which physical protection and spiritual preservation are equally necessary for communal survival.

This study contributes to African performance studies, Yorùbá festival scholarship and youth identity research in three ways. It recovers an understudied festival genre-ancestor hero festivals-and provides analytical categories for comparative analysis. It demonstrates that youth identity is not merely a demographic category but a performative achievement produced through ritual participation, challenging passive models of cultural transmission (Butler, 2023; Mingon & Sutton, 2021). Finally, it offers an ethnographic case study of how indigenous festivals maintain core structures while adapting to modern pressures, demonstrating adaptive resilience rather than frozen preservation (Schechner, 2003).

The festival endures not because it is frozen in time but because it performs time, reproducing the past in the present for the sake of the future. The blood of sacrificed rams, the white garments of

virgins, the combat chants of youth and the voices singing 'Ọmọ Obòkun' converge in a ritual theatre that is both timeless and timely. In Ìbòkun each year, the ancestors return, the community gathers, and the children learn who they are. The youth who receive the flogger's sting, who carry the earthen pot, who drum the talking drum, who sing 'A mọ ha sorò ulé ria o'-they are not merely preserving tradition. They are becoming tradition, embodying in their young bodies the ancestral mandate that the community continues.

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Pragmatic Acts and Functions in Selected Divorce Proceedings in Oyo Town

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Abstract
In order to understand how litigants and attorneys strategically employ language to resolve marital disputes and sway court rulings, this study explores the pragmatic acts and communicative functions ingrained in divorce proceedings in Oyo Town. The study investigates how courtroom utterances function as socially situated actions shaped by institutional roles, procedural norms, and sociocultural expectations surrounding marriage and family responsibilities, drawing on Mey's Pragmatic Acts Theory (2001). Selected divorce proceeding excerpts from Oyo Town's High court make up the data, which are qualitatively analysed to find recurrent pragmatic acts and the contextual elements that allow for their interpretation. The analysis reveals three practices, and these include questioning/responding, complaining/justifying, and accusing. Similarly, three functions are revealed, and they are: Fact-establishing, grievance articulation, and blame-attribution functions. The findings further show that the interpretation of these utterances is deeply influenced by shared cultural ideologies concerning gender roles, family duties, and moral expectations within the Yoruba socio-cultural context. By highlighting the pragmatic mechanisms through which meaning and persuasion are constructed in divorce proceedings, the study contributes to the growing body of research on courtroom discourse and expands the application of this theory to institutional legal interactions in African contexts.
***Keywords**: Pragmatic Acts, State High Court, Legal Pragmatics, Respondent, Petitioner*

Introduction

One of the most emotionally charged types of institutional interaction occurs during divorce proceedings, where moral arguments, legal arguments, and personal narratives come together in front of judges (Gibbons and Matoesian, 2018). In this context, participants use deliberate language choices to describe marital disputes, protect their reputations, assign blame, and demand

justice. As a result, statements made in court serve as both intentional social actions and statements of fact to influence legal interpretation and decisions. As speakers use language to support their positions and refute opposing claims, institutional discourse frequently reflects intricate negotiations of meaning and power, according to contemporary pragmatic scholarship (Ilie 2018; Archer, Aijmer, and Wichmann 2020). Therefore, analysing the pragmatic aspects of divorce proceedings offers important insights into how legal actors use language to carry out tasks and handle conflict in the courtroom.

In interpreting meaning and communicative intent, pragmatics emphasises the significance of context. Mey's (2001) Pragmatic Acts Theory emphasises that the social roles of the participants and the circumstances in which they are produced give utterances their power. Statements often serve as acts of accusation, defence, justification, pleading, and narration in court proceedings. Institutional authority, procedural rules, and the unequal power dynamics between litigants, attorneys, and judges all influence these practical actions. According to recent studies (Archer, Aijmer, and Wichmann 2020; Heffer, Rock, and Conley 2019), participants deliberately use language to establish credibility, persuade legal authorities, and shape judicial perception, making courtroom discourse intrinsically strategic. In a similar vein, Ayodabo (2018) points out that pragmatic inquiry is especially useful for analysing how utterances function in socially regulated contexts where communicative intentions have concrete outcomes.

Within the socio-cultural setting of Oyo Town, these communicative practices are further influenced by local ideologies surrounding marriage, gender relations, and family responsibilities. As a historically significant Yoruba community, Oyo reflects cultural expectations that shape how marital conflicts are narrated and evaluated in public forums. Litigants often frame their testimonies in ways that appeal to shared cultural norms of respect, responsibility, and moral conduct, while judges interpret these narratives within both legal and socio-cultural frameworks. Recent scholarship on legal discourse in African contexts highlights how courtroom communication frequently reflects the intersection of formal legal procedures and culturally embedded communicative practices (Okoye 2018; Nartey and Yankson 2020). By analysing the pragmatic acts embedded in divorce proceedings in Oyo Town, this study seeks to uncover how linguistic strategies are used to construct identities, negotiate moral authority, and influence judicial outcomes within a culturally informed legal environment.

Literature Review/ Statement of the Research Problem

Recent years have seen an increase in interest in courtroom discourse, particularly in the field of legal pragmatics, which examines how language functions in legal institutions to serve social and procedural purposes. Communication in the courtroom involves more than just exchanging facts; it also involves using language strategically to negotiate responsibility, authority, and credibility. Heffer, Rock, and Conley (2019) point out that institutional roles, power dynamics, and procedural norms have a big impact on how people formulate their statements in court. In a similar vein, Archer, Aijmer, and Wichmann (2020) contend that pragmatic analysis makes clear how legal actors use language resources to convince others, support their positions, and create narratives. Although these studies provide valuable insights into the relationship between language and institutional authority, they are largely situated within Western legal traditions and therefore insufficiently account for the socio-cultural realities that shape courtroom interactions in African societies. Their analyses foreground institutional power but pay relatively little attention to how cultural norms, communal expectations, and moral ideologies influence litigants' linguistic behaviour in divorce proceedings. Consequently, while these studies successfully explain the strategic nature of courtroom communication, they leave a contextual gap that the present study seeks to address within the socio-cultural environment of Oyo Town divorce proceedings.

The concept of pragmatic acts in pragmatic theory offers a useful framework for examining the functional elements of speech in institutional contexts. Scholars emphasise that speakers' roles, intentions, and communicative expectations impact pragmatic acts, building on Mey's (2001) claim. According to Nartey and Yankson (2020), courtroom participants frequently employ tactics like accusations, denials, and explanations to influence how events are interpreted. Similarly, Ilie (2018) notes that legal discourse often involves pragmatic manoeuvring, in which speakers purposefully craft their narratives to assert authority, refute opposing viewpoints, and conform to legal norms. Mey's position is reinforced by Ilie (2018) and Nartey and Yankson (2020). However, these studies largely discuss courtroom communication from generalised legal perspectives without specifically interrogating the unique communicative complexities of divorce litigation. Divorce proceedings differ significantly from criminal or political discourse because they are deeply emotional, morally sensitive, and culturally mediated. Therefore, while these studies adequately explain strategic language use in institutional discourse, they do not sufficiently address how litigants in marital disputes employ pragmatic acts to construct victimhood, negotiate moral

innocence, and justify personal decisions before the court. This limitation justifies the application of Pragmatic Acts Theory to the present study.

The influence of power dynamics on courtroom interactions has also been emphasised by research. Litigants find themselves in relatively weaker positions within this communicative framework, while judges and legal professionals typically hold institutional authority. Gibbons and Matoesian (2018) explain that these imbalances influence the linguistic behaviour of courtroom participants, leading litigants to rely on narrative explanations or emotional appeals, while legal professionals use formal discourse patterns to maintain control over proceedings. These dynamics demonstrate how pragmatic acts serve as tools for negotiating authority and legitimacy in sociocultural and legal contexts. The impact of sociocultural context on courtroom communication, particularly in African legal settings, is closely linked to institutional power dynamics. Researchers have observed that formal legal procedures and deeply rooted communication practices interact in legal discourse in many African societies. According to Okoye (2018), courtroom interactions in African contexts are frequently impacted by social hierarchies, shared cultural expectations, and communal norms that influence how participants present their arguments and testimonies. In a similar vein, Nartey and Yankson (2020) contend that when narrating their experiences or defending their actions in court, speakers frequently refer to moral standards and culturally shared values. In divorce cases, where morality, gender roles, and family responsibilities have a significant impact on the language used to express and evaluate marital disputes, this interaction between legal procedures and sociocultural norms is especially noticeable. These studies remain broad in scope and do not specifically focus on divorce proceedings, where cultural beliefs about marriage, gender responsibility, child care, and morality become particularly prominent. Thus, while they successfully foreground the role of sociocultural context in legal discourse, they do not sufficiently explain how such contexts shape the specific pragmatic acts of accusing, complaining, justifying, and defending in marital conflict litigation. The present study therefore extends these discussions by examining how culturally embedded communicative strategies function within divorce proceedings in Oyo Town.

The importance of prosodic and paralinguistic components in courtroom discourse has also been examined in recent studies. Sogunro, Ayinuola, and Agboola (2024) explore the pragmatics of prosodic features, particularly how intonation conveys pragmatic meaning, in their analysis of a few courtroom exchanges. According to their findings, contextual cues and tone variations play

important pragmatic roles in courtroom interactions. Notably, it has been demonstrated that a variety of pragmatic implications, including commands, calls to order, questions, affirmations, warnings, comic relief, agreement, frustration or anger, instruction, clarifications, and expressions of shock or surprise, can be indicated by intonational patterns. This study shows that prosodic characteristics greatly influence meaning and promote interaction in courtroom settings, going beyond word choice. Their study broadens the understanding of courtroom communication beyond lexical choice by showing how prosody contributes to commands, warnings, clarification, agreement, and emotional expression. However, the study mainly concentrates on general courtroom exchanges and does not critically examine how prosodic features operate within emotionally charged divorce proceedings. In marital disputes, paralinguistic cues may function not only as interactional devices but also as indicators of emotional suffering, frustration, defensiveness, or attempts at persuasion. Therefore, although the study provides an important foundation for understanding prosodic meaning in courtroom discourse, it leaves unexplored the connection between prosodic features and the negotiation of marital responsibility in divorce litigation.

When examining courtroom discourse, these studies collectively highlight the importance of taking paralinguistic resources and socio-cultural context into account. They contend that legal communication includes prosodic cues and culturally aware communication techniques that improve statement interpretation and institutional interaction management, in addition to formal legal language. These insights are particularly relevant when analysing pragmatic acts in divorce proceedings, where speakers frequently use expressive tools and culturally rooted narratives to justify actions, articulate grievances, and negotiate responsibility before the court.

Divorce procedures in Nigerian courts have gotten comparatively little attention, despite the growing interest in legal pragmatics. The majority of current research has mostly focused on legislative communication, political discourse, or criminal trials. Our knowledge of how pragmatic acts operate in marital dispute litigation is lacking as a result of this oversight, particularly in culturally significant places like Oyo Town. This study contributes to broader conversations about language, law, and culture in African contexts and enhances scholarship on courtroom discourse by analysing these pragmatic acts in divorce cases.

Scholars of legal pragmatics focus on how courtroom discourse is influenced by institutional roles, participant power dynamics, and deliberate language choices. Heffer, Rock, and Conley (2019)

claim that courtroom interactions adhere to procedural norms and hierarchical authority, which affect how speakers tell their stories. Similarly, Archer, Aijmer, and Wichmann (2020) claim that legal actors purposefully use language strategies to persuade judges and bolster their claims. These points of view emphasise the significance of looking at courtroom communication from a pragmatic standpoint. Studies like this one have different analytical focuses even though they are situated within the courtroom context. This study distinguishes itself by concentrating primarily on pragmatic acts and functions, a subject that has not received enough attention in earlier studies. Furthermore, Ilie (2018) examined pragmatics perspective on legal discourse, and data were analysed to demonstrate pragmatic concepts such as persuasion, legal communication, and speech acts. This study and the current study are similar in so many ways, such as context, focus on legal discourse and the adoption of a pragmatic perspective to emphasise meaning making. The area of divergence is in the scope and the research designs of the researchers. Ilie's (2018) research adopted a theoretical and conceptual approach, while the current work adopted empirical data obtained from actual divorce proceedings.

Also, Chen (2018), Moeketsi (1999), and Widodo et al. (2025) examined language use in criminal trials; Conley & William (1998), Coulthard (2017), and Drew (1992) researched courtroom discourse; Walton (2008), Cotterill (2003), and Coulthard & Johnson (2007) examined legal context strategies and general institutional communication. These research studies shared context with the current research, but how litigants employ pragmatic acts like accusations, defences, and justifications during divorce proceedings in Nigerian courts has not received enough scholarly attention. This study aims to bridge this gap by looking at pragmatic acts and functions in divorce cases in Oyo Town.

Aim and Objectives

This research aims to explore the Pragmatic acts and functions in divorce proceedings in Oyo Town. The objectives are to:

iii. Identify the practs employed by individuals in the divorce proceedings in Oyo Town; and

iv. analyse the functions these practs serve in the selected divorce proceedings

Methodology

The data for this study were collected through purposeful sampling of divorce case files from the State High Court in Oyo. Two audio-recorded divorce proceedings in 2025 were observed by the researcher, which yielded texts for analysis. These audio-recorded proceedings were purposively chosen due to the richness of linguistic information that they contain in relation to the research goals. As this study uses the qualitative pragmatic framework, more attention was paid to in-depth analysis of information rather than its quantity. Various pragmatic moves, including questions, accusations, defences, pleas, explanations, and judges' remarks, among others, were found in the selected proceedings. Besides, they have been chosen for their clear recording, easy accessibility, and relevance to divorce courtroom communication in Oyo Town. The selected proceedings were manually transcribed through repeated listening to the audio recordings, with the utterances of parties being documented. The data were analysed using the pragmatic acts framework, with a focus on speech functions. The communicative intent, contextual meaning, and social roles of the participants were all carefully considered when analysing each statement. This analysis showed how language is used in the courtroom to negotiate roles and outcomes and carry out social actions. The study was carried out strictly in accordance with ethical guidelines. To protect people's privacy, all personal identifiers were removed, and the relevant court authorities granted access. The data was kept confidential and utilised exclusively for academic purposes. Overall, the methodology employed in this study demonstrates how pragmatic acts in divorce proceedings reflect broader social norms, power dynamics, and communication strategies within the cultural context of Oyo Town.

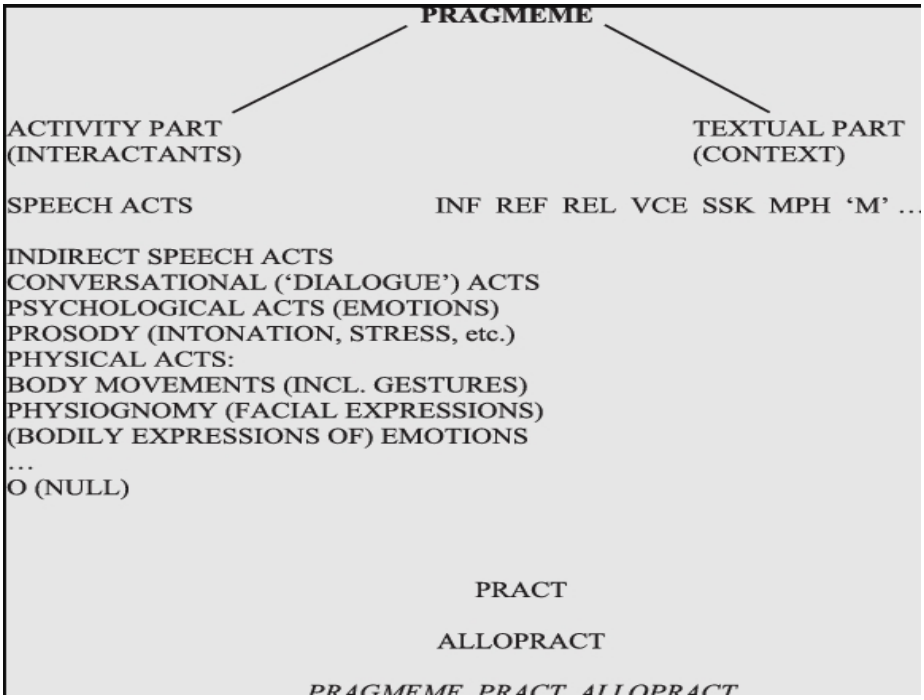
Theoretical Framework

The main theoretical framework for analysing communicative behaviour and meaning-making during divorce proceedings is pragmatic act theory, which was first presented by Mey in 2001. Pragmatic Act Theory situates language use within its sociocultural, situational, and contextual contexts, in contrast to conventional speech act theories. It emphasises how participants collaboratively create meaning in discourse through their shared background knowledge, culture, and situational realities rather than merely relying on linguistic forms. The concept of a pragmeme, a dynamic and context-specific unit of language use, is also introduced by the theory. Context-driven pragmatic acts, which include a range of communicative techniques like referring, inferring, implicating, presupposing, and attending to face needs, are how pragmemes are expressed.

A Model of Pragmatic

Both activities and textual practices that contribute to meaning are included in this theory. The activity exercises give language users a variety of communication options. With INF standing for inference, REF for relevance, VCE for voice, SSK for shared situational knowledge, MPH for metaphor, and M for a meta-pragmatic joker, the textual element emphasises the contextual elements that affect communication. Both the interactants and the environments in which they function are crucial to comprehending a pragmeme.

This theoretical framework is especially useful for examining the particular, situation-specific pragmatic tactics used by witnesses, attorneys, and litigants in divorce proceedings. Courtroom statements are viewed through the prism of pragmatic act theory as calculated actions intended to accomplish social objectives like blaming, defending identity, asserting rights, voicing complaints, or convincing the court. Gender relationships, power dynamics, sociocultural norms, and institutional expectations all frequently have an impact on these behaviours. This study attempts to clarify how pragmatic functions such as blaming, justifying, requesting, and asserting identity appear in the courtroom by using pragmatic act theory. This method reveals the social and ideological underpinnings of courtroom communication in a Nigerian context while also improving our comprehension of linguistic behaviour in legal contexts.



A Model of Pragmatic Acts (Mey 2001: 222)

Data Analysis

Introduction

The pragmatic acts ingrained in courtroom interactions during Oyo Town divorce proceedings are the main focus of this analysis. It focuses especially on how participants strategically employ language to carry out communicative actions in a legal setting. The study investigates how utterances function within their situational and institutional environments using Mey's (2001) pragmatic acts theory as the analytical framework. As a result, the analysis highlights the relationship between language choices, pragmatic purposes, and courtroom objectives.

Practs Inherent in the Selected Divorce Proceedings

Divorce proceedings involve a range of pragmatic acts through which participants present claims, challenge opposing narratives, and negotiate responsibilities. These three practs emerge from the interaction between petitioners, respondents, legal practitioners, and judges within the courtroom setting. The acts are shaped by legal procedures, power relations, and the communicative goals of the participants. Through these interactions, language performs specific pragmatic functions that contribute to the resolution of marital disputes.

1. Pract of Questioning/Responding

Questioning and responding represent a central pragmatic pattern in courtroom discourse, particularly during cross-examination sessions. Through this pract, legal practitioners seek clarification, elicit relevant information, and guide testimonies toward issues important to the court. The responses provided by litigants often serve to justify claims, explain circumstances, or support legal arguments. As a result, questioning and responding function as crucial mechanisms for constructing narratives and establishing facts in divorce proceedings.

Function of the Pract of Questioning/Responding

Fact-Establishing Function

The pract of questioning/responding performs a directive and fact-establishing function in courtroom discourse. Within the framework of Mey's (2001) Pragmatic Acts Theory, such utterances operate as institutional acts designed to elicit relevant information necessary for legal evaluation. Rather than serving as casual inquiries, questions posed by legal practitioners guide the flow of proceedings and prompt litigants to provide details that support judicial decision-making. Through this pract, the court obtains information about issues such as child welfare,

financial responsibility, and the duration of marital relationships. The responses provided by litigants also function as evidence that informs the court's assessment of parental obligations and marital responsibilities.

Excerpt 1

Lawyer: How much are you suggesting to the court to be the contribution of the respondent for the education and welfare of the child?

Petitioner: I want 200k per month. This will also cover the child's JSS3 exam fees

The statements made by the petitioner and a lawyer during a cross-examination session are reflected in these excerpts. The remarks include methods of questioning and answering that are mainly intended to obtain information that is essential to the court's decision-making process. They serve a purpose beyond simple inquiry, even though they are presented as interrogative sentences. These comments are appropriate given the larger context of courtroom discourse, where decisions about child custody, maintenance, and support are being made.

From a pragmatic perspective, this exchange exemplifies contextual adaptation, a crucial component of Mey's (2001) pragmatic acts theory. Using precise and institutional terms like "contribution," "respondent," and "education and welfare of the child," both speakers modify their language to fit the formal requirements of the courtroom. These word choices stress the gravity of the legal system and the impact of legal terminology. These statements represent a pragmeme about assessing parental responsibility in terms of pragmemes and practices. The practice of questioning serves as a means of obtaining information, and the answers have an informative and justifying function that helps the court assess the child's financial obligations.

Excerpt 2

Judge: How long did your courtship last?

Petitioner: One year, sir

According to the excerpt above, the judge's remark is an example of a questioning technique that is mainly used to obtain information. It seeks to compile precise background information about the couple's relationship history, especially with regard to the length of time they were courted prior to getting married. Such information may be crucial in a divorce case so that the court can assess the quality or depth of the couple's premarital relationship and determine whether there were early indications of instability.

"One year, sir" is the petitioner's succinct, courteous response that follows the cooperative communication principle. The petitioner satisfies the institutional requirements of courtroom discourse by politely and directly answering the question. This also shows an awareness of the power dynamics that exist in these kinds of settings, where the judge is in a position of superior evaluation. A common adjacency pair of question and answer in institutional discourse is highlighted by the dialogue's structure. The formal courtroom setting, where language must be precise, succinct, and relevant to the case at hand, also has an impact on this exchange.

2. Pract of Complaining and Justifying

Complaining and justifying are common pragmatic acts in divorce proceedings where litigants narrate experiences that explain the breakdown of their marriages. Through these practs, speakers present grievances while simultaneously providing reasons that legitimise their decision to seek separation. Such utterances combine emotional expression with attempts to persuade the court that the marital dissolution is justified.

Function of Pract of Complaining/Justifying

Grievance Articulation Function

This is a persuasive strategy through which litigants narrate personal grievances or complaints while legitimising their decisions or actions. Complaints reveal experiences of emotional, psychological, or moral suffering, thereby constructing a narrative of hardship that helps the court understand the causes of marital breakdown. At the same time, the justificatory element defends the speaker's actions, such as leaving the matrimonial home or seeking divorce, by presenting them as reasonable responses to intolerable circumstances. In pragmatic terms, these practs serve both expressive and argumentative functions, allowing the speaker to shift responsibility to the respondent while appealing to the court's sense of fairness and justice (Mey 2001).

Excerpt 3

> I left the house because of his constant threat, nagging and abusive nature to my life. Even me, I can't live with a lion

In light of a sociocultural and legal framework that recognizes abuse as a valid reason for separation or divorce, the aforementioned passage exemplifies the practical act of complaining and defending. By depicting the speaker as a victim and the respondent as unsuitable for friendship or family life, it draws on both interpersonal and institutional ideologies.

The statement essentially justifies the speaker's decision to leave the marital residence. Her decision is rationally justified by the statement, "I left the house because of his constant threats, nagging, and abusive nature towards my life," which frames it as an act of self-preservation rather than defiance or irresponsibility. The speaker presents herself as a victim whose departure was forced by unbearable circumstances by emphasizing ongoing emotional and psychological harm. This is consistent with what Mey describes as an act shaped by power dynamics and cultural expectations for survival and rooted in real-life social relevance.

Excerpt 4

> I was deceived into the marriage. He even lied about his genotype throughout our courtship.

This excerpt illustrates the pract of complaining and justifying. The petitioner accuses the respondent of deception regarding his genotype, an issue with serious health and marital implications in many Nigerian socio-cultural contexts. By emphasising this misrepresentation, the speaker frames the marriage as one founded on falsehood and betrayal. Pragmatically, the utterance serves both as a complaint and as a justification for seeking divorce. Within Mey's (2001) Pragmatic Acts Theory, the statement functions as a context-dependent pract that aligns with the courtroom activity of establishing responsibility for the marital breakdown while positioning the petitioner as a victim of deception.

Excerpt 5

> The foundation of this marriage is lies. I was deceived into the marriage. He lied about his genotype throughout our courtship, and I didn't get to know the truth until I gave birth to our first child when she was tested and she is SS

This narrative highlights the act of whining and rationalising. The petitioner claims that the respondent misled him about his genotype, which has serious implications for marriage and health in different sociocultural contexts in Nigeria. The speaker presents the marriage as based on deceit and lies by highlighting this falsehood. Practically speaking, the statement functions as both a grievance and a justification for filing for divorce. This claim functions as a context-dependent practice that aligns with the courtroom's role in assigning blame for the dissolution of the marriage while portraying the petitioner as a victim of deceit, according to Mey's (2001) pragmatic acts theory.

Excerpt 6

> See, when we were together, I felt completely alone. He is physically present but emotionally absent. He did not participate in the day-to-day care of our child, and didn't even provide any support expected of him.

The act of complaining is demonstrated in the excerpt above. It expresses a feeling of discontent that stems from emotional suffering. The emotional distress persists even though the complaint relates to a previous incident. This statement resulted from the speaker's experience of an emotional detachment within the marriage. The speaker's extreme psychological distress is made clear by this act. Additionally, the phrases "He did not get involved in taking care of our child daily" and "did not even give us help that he was expected to" shift the complaint from its emotional nature to a behavioural aspect. This is an action that is representative of what the complainant is experiencing and therefore serves to give evidence to his/her grievance. Negation is used effectively here to intensify the grievance by emphasizing non-involvement and complete lack of involvement. The phrase "expected of him" carries a lot of significance pragmatically speaking.

3. Pract of Accusing

Accusing is a significant pragmatic act in divorce proceedings, through which participants attribute blame to their spouses for behaviours considered responsible for the collapse of the marriage. Such statements highlight alleged misconduct and attempt to establish liability before the court, thereby influencing judicial interpretation of the dispute.

Functions of the Pract of Accusing

Blame-Attribution Function

Through accusatory statements, litigants highlight alleged misconduct such as violence, deception, or neglect to establish responsibility for the marital conflict. This pract strengthens legal claims by presenting the accused party as morally or legally culpable for the breakdown of the marriage. Accusations often involve evaluative and emotionally charged expressions that construct the speaker as a victim while undermining the credibility of the opposing party. Within the courtroom context, this pract therefore performs both persuasive and evidential functions aimed at influencing judicial judgement.

Excerpt 7

> She's highly disrespectful, cruel and proud. I am speaking from my experience of how she conducted herself in the relationship. There were numerous occasions where she spoke to me in a demeaning and dismissive manner, often in the presence of others, without regard for my feelings or dignity

Excerpt 7 emphasises interpersonal conflicts and assigns blame. It focuses on unfavourable characteristics and accusations and is evaluative in nature. The speaker's discontent or complaint about their spouse's actions or personality is reflected in the emotionally charged and judgmental language used. The speaker commits an act of accusation by calling the spouse "disrespectful", "cruel," and "proud." The clause "I am speaking from my experience of how she conducted herself in the relationship," serves as a credibility marker. On the pragmatic level, it builds epistemic authority by implying that the accusation is not an assumption, but one based on lived experience. Further, the assertion "there were numerous occasions where she spoke to me in a demeaning and dismissive manner" serves as the actual accusation. Words like "demeaning" and "dismissive" are evaluative in nature; they imply that there is something morally wrong about that behaviour in terms of expected respect between partners. Furthermore, "often in the presence of others" is an additional layer that adds weight to the accusation. It implies humiliation on the pragmatic level and thus increases the gravity of the offence committed. Lastly, "without regard for my feelings or dignity" can be seen as a normative appeal that highlights the violation of certain interpersonal cultural norms regarding respect and consideration in the context of a marriage.

Excerpt 8

> He sent me away from our matrimonial home after regular beatings and infliction of several life-threatening injuries on me.

By accusing the respondent of violent acts and wrongful expulsion, this statement fulfils its accusatory purpose. To emphasise the gravity of the alleged abuse, the petitioner highlights incidents such as "regular beatings" and "life-threatening injuries." This statement functions as a context-specific practice that creates a victimisation narrative and places blame for the marriage's breakdown, according to Mey's (2001) pragmatic acts theory. The statement aims to use the court's moral and legal judgment to resolve the conflict by drawing attention to harm and injustice.

Excerpt 9

> He is highly insecure and has trust issues. He is not fit to be a husband to any reasonable woman. These trust issues affected our communication and made it difficult to maintain a good relationship. Rather than addressing concerns calmly, he approached situations with hostility and suspicion, which led to constant fights

The act of accusation is explained in the passage above. It draws attention to the spouse's character defects, emphasising problems with trust and a high degree of insecurity. The passage undermines the spouse's role as a husband and makes a negative assessment of his suitability for marriage by attributing these flaws to him. The part "Rather than addressing concerns calmly, he approached situations with hostility and suspicion" carries more weight in terms of the accusatory intention. More specifically, this phrase introduces a contrast between two actions performed: one expected and normative (calmly addressing concerns) and another one being actually done. Besides that, the words "hostility" and "suspicion" contribute to moral evaluation and serve as an illustration of the speaker's negative attitude towards the respondent's behaviour. The sentence "which led to constant fights" provides justification for the speaker's grievance, hence constituting the essence of an accusing utterance. To be precise, in such moves, it is particularly important to justify the speaker's grievance since that would provide him with reasons to make accusations. In addition, the adverb "constantly" adds to the negative perception of the situation described in the accusation.

Excerpt 10

> He blocked every opportunity of joining the children in United Kingdom by intentionally refusing my invitation letter for the process of my visa

The excerpt above describes the spouse's actions to explain the act of accusing. It portrays the other party as purposefully obstructive and places deliberate blame in this situation. As the speaker presents herself as the one at a disadvantage, the passage constructs victimhood rather than merely describing it. By subtly requesting the court's intervention to rectify the alleged injustice, the statement functions as an appeal for justice. It emphasises conflict escalation, emphasising not only a disagreement but also a purposeful act of obstruction, which further complicates the speaker's accountability for the marriage's breakdown.

Distribution of Pragmemes and Their Communicative Goals in Selected Divorce Court Proceedings

S/N	PRAGMEME	GOAL	FREQ	%
1	How much are you suggesting to the court to be the contribution of the respondent for the education and welfare of the child?	Questioning	2	18. 2
2	How long did your courtship last?	Questioning		
3	I want 200k per month. This will also cover for the child's JSS3 exam fees	Responding	2	18. 2
4	One year, sir	Responding		
5	I left the house because of his constant threat, nagging and abusive nature to my life. Even me, I can't live with a lion	Complaining and justifying	2	18. 1
6	I was deceived into the marriage. He lied about his genotype throughout our courtship	Complaining and justifying		
7	See, when we were together, I felt completely alone. He is physically present at but emotionally absent. He did not participate in the day-to-day care of our child, and didn't even provide any support expected of him.	Complaining	1	9. 1
8	She's highly disrespectful, cruel and proud. I am speaking from my experience of how she conducted herself in the relationship. There were numerous occasions where she spoke to me in a demeaning and dismissive manner, often in the presence of others, without regard for my feelings or dignity	Blame	1	9. 1
9	He sent me away from our matrimonial home after regular beatings and infliction of several life-threatening injuries on me.	Accusing	3	27. 3
10	He is highly insecure and has trust issues. He is not fit to be a husband to any reasonable woman. These trust issues affected our communication and made it difficult to maintain a good	Accusing		

	relationship. Rather than addressing concerns calmly, he approached situations with hostility and suspicion, which led to constant fights			
11	He blocked every opportunity of joining the children in United Kingdom by intentionally refusing my invitation letter for the process of my visa	Accusing		
	TOTAL		11	100

This table presents a distribution of pragmemes used in divorce proceedings, revealing a predominance of conflict-driven communicative acts. The most frequent pragmeme is accusing, which accounts for 27.3% of the data, indicating that participants largely focus on attributing blame and establishing wrongdoing, particularly in statements detailing abuse, neglect, and obstruction of opportunities. This is followed by questioning and responding, each constituting 18.2%, reflecting the institutional nature of courtroom discourse where elicitation of information and direct answers are essential to legal proceedings. Similarly, complaining and justifying also record 18.1%, showing that participants not only express grievances but simultaneously legitimise their actions, especially in narratives of marital breakdown and personal safety. Less frequent are complaining and blaming, each at 9.1%, suggesting that while expressions of dissatisfaction and fault-finding occur, they are often embedded within broader accusatory or justificatory frameworks. Overall, the analysis demonstrates that divorce discourse is heavily characterised by defensive and offensive pragmatic strategies, with a strong emphasis on accusation and justification as participants negotiate moral and legal positioning before the court.

Findings

The pragmatic acts (practices) in Oyo Town's divorce process and their communicative functions in courtroom discourse have been studied in this paper. Participants use a variety of context-specific language strategies to make assertions, defend actions, and assign blame for marital failures, according to an analysis of courtroom data. Three primary pragmatic acts were found in the data: accusing, complaining/justifying, and questioning/responding. Litigants and legal professionals use these practices as strategic communication tools to shape identities, negotiate meaning, and impact judicial interpretation.

Establishing Facts through Questioning and Responding

One of the most noticeable pragmatic patterns in the data is the questioning/responding practice, especially during cross-examinations and judicial clarifications. The main purpose of this practice is to establish facts, which allows the court to obtain data pertinent to rulings. Judges' and attorneys' questions steer the proceedings in particular ways, requiring litigants to give crucial information about their financial responsibilities, marital history, and child welfare.

According to the study, these inquiries are more than just informal ones; they are structured communication efforts meant to obtain information that is pertinent to the law. Examples of the factual background required for a court's decision include questions about how much financial support a spouse is expected to provide for a child's well-being or how long the couple has been dating prior to marriage. The court can evaluate parental responsibilities, monetary contributions, and the type of marriage by using the litigants' responses as evidence. The hierarchical dynamics of courtroom discourse are also demonstrated by the pattern of questioning and responding. While litigants usually give succinct, courteous answers that adhere to courtroom norms, judges and attorneys have the institutional authority to ask questions. This exchange demonstrates how pragmatic acts operate within institutional frameworks, where language serves as both an evidential and procedural tool in the fight for justice.

The questioning and response strategies identified in the study are consistent with the views of Paul Drew (1992), who, in his study on courtroom cross-examination, observed that questioning in the legal context not only involves the process of seeking out facts but also of controlling the narrative and the interpretation by the institution.

These results also indicate that questions and responses in Oyo Town divorce cases are used for the purposes of exercising authority and creating facts.

Complaining and Justifying as Grievance Articulation Strategy

The practice of complaining and justifying, in which litigants recount marital problems and provide an explanation for their divorce request, is the other noteworthy pragmatic action found in the data. Speakers use this technique to express their complaints, explaining their moral, psychological, or emotional suffering while also defending their behaviour. Litigants can describe their struggles and how their marriages failed by filing complaints. Themes of emotional neglect, intimidation, dishonesty, or incompatibility are frequently at the heart of these stories. This

practice's justificatory component allows speakers to defend actions like moving out of the marital residence or filing for divorce by portraying them as appropriate reactions to unbearable situations. The analysis also reveals that this practice usually entails creating a victim narrative in which speakers portray themselves as people who have suffered for a long time in the marriage. Litigants try to convince the court that their actions were only driven by self-preservation or personal welfare by highlighting suffering and injustice. According to Mey's pragmatic theory, these kinds of statements serve as context-dependent practices that are influenced by the socio-legal norms that exist within the courtroom.

Further, the finding regarding complaining and justifying in this research also validates earlier academic views regarding the construction of narratives in legal discourse. According to Jacob Mey, pragmatic acts are social acts embedded within a particular context and shaped by institutional expectations, and this is clearly demonstrated by the way litigants use narratives of victimisation in seeking divorce. Moreover, the habit of justifying oneself using narratives of suffering, neglect, and intimidation is another validation of the views expressed by John Conley and William O'Barr (1998) concerning the strategic use of language in negotiations of credibility and social identity. Thus, the current research contributes further to existing studies by uncovering the role played by complaints and justifications among divorce litigants in Oyo Town in the negotiation of moral legitimacy.

Accusing as a Blame-Attribution Strategy

The third notable pragmatic act identified in the data is the act of accusing, which relies on a primary strategy of attributing blame. By placing responsibility on actions considered morally or legally unacceptable, litigants direct the blame for the marriage's failure toward the other party. Allegations of misconduct frequently appear in the data, including claims of abuse, neglect, disrespect, and deceit. Through these preemptive behaviours, speakers portray the respondents as the source of marital conflict. This tactic bolsters the speaker's legal position while undermining that of their opponent.

Moreover, the establishment of accusation as an attribution strategy is consistent with other scholarly findings on adversarial strategies used in legal processes. For instance, Walton (2008) explains that accusations play an essential role in arguing against claims from other parties while fortifying one’s own arguments with more evidence. Similarly, it is worth noting that the study is in line with the observations of Ilie (2018), who suggests that legal discourse is heavily pragmatic

in nature. Accusations of abuse, deception, and neglect made in this study are typical of the strategic construction of blame.

It should be noted that, contrary to other empirical works on the same subject, which mostly focus on criminal cases, this study is particularly concerned with divorce procedures in a Nigerian socio-cultural environment, such as Oyo town.

Conclusion

Using Mey's (2001) Pragmatic Acts Theory, this paper has investigated the pragmatic acts and their communicative roles in divorce cases in Oyo Town. The results show that courtroom discourse during divorce proceedings is highly strategic, with involved parties using contextual communication techniques such as questioning/responding, complaining and justifying, and accusing. There are several theoretical implications in the current study regarding legal pragmatics and discourse analysis. First, this paper shows that courtroom speech acts can be considered socially significant and are determined by the institution of law and interpersonal conflicts, as well as by cultural expectations of participants in the communicative process. Unlike most of the pragmatic studies conducted previously, this research shows how practs like questioning/responding, complaining/justifying and accusing are used in the emotionally laden environment of marital disputes. Secondly, the study significantly advances the knowledge of African legal discourse studies as it describes how Yoruba sociocultural ideologies about marriage, gender roles, morality, and other concepts affect courtroom discourse and its interpretation by the judge. From a practical perspective, the results of research will contribute to better comprehension of communicative strategies applied during divorce litigation, which can help in analysing litigants' speech acts by legal practitioners and discourse analysts. Future scholars may incorporate multimodal discourse analysis, corpus-based approaches, or gender-focused investigations to explore how non-verbal communication, frequency patterns, and gender ideologies shape pragmatic acts in courtroom discourse.

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Lexical Density in Age and Gender Variations of Selected Crime-Related Essays by Undergraduates in Southwestern Nigeria

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Abstract
This study was carried out to investigate the characteristics of age and gender in the crime-related essays of selected undergraduates in Southwestern Nigeria, with a view to determining lexical density. M.A.K. Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar was used as a framework and a descriptive design for the study. With a convenient sampling technique employed, three Universities in Southwestern Nigeria: University of Lagos, Akoka (federal); Adekunle Ajasin University, Akungba Akoka (state); and Crawford University, Igbesa (private), were chosen to represent different types of ownership. Forty-eight students, who were spread across the three Universities (four each from 100-400 levels), were purposively selected to write an essay on any of these four themes: Drug Addiction, Kidnapping, Robbery or suicide. The themes were selected due to their prevalence in Nigeria. Twenty-four (24) females and Twenty-four (24) males with predetermined ages from 16-18 and 19-21 were chosen. The data were subjected to stylometric and descriptive analyses. Findings reveal that female writings were characterised by drug addiction, while male writings were characterised by suicide. The mental process used by males in the 16-18 age bracket revealed that suicide victims react to depression by killing themselves to escape their predicament. Females in the 16-18 age bracket depicted drug addicted victims' illegal use of drugs, resulting in hallucinations and deteriorating health. The study revealed that Nigerian undergraduates' crime-related essays exhibited linguistic characteristics related to the age and gender of the students in terms of lexical density. The study provides data and enriches scholarship on corpus linguistics, forensic linguistics and other related research.
***Keywords**: Lexical characteristics, lexical density, essays, age and gender.*

Introduction

With the advancement in technology and artificial intelligence today, there is a rise in crime rates, and crime related researches are becoming of interest. This study investigates male and female writing styles and differences in language use in essays written by selected undergraduates from

the south-west on designated topics on social crimes. Many empirical studies have been conducted; some have examined phonological and lexical differences (Eckert, 1998), while others have focused on discourse function, such as compliments and apologies. Some other corpus-based research investigated the syntactic and lexical differences between sexes (Argamon et al., 2003). In order to get to know if men and women comprehend things differently and speak distinctively, a few of the findings of such studies have suggested that men and women use language differently, but others contend that the sex of a speaker and/or the hearer may have a greater impact on language behaviour. In order to ascertain how male and female students use language differently when assigned to write an essay of a specific length about a given topic, the primary focus of this study is on essays written by undergraduates of both sexes.

The specific aim of the study is to infer age and gender differences through undergraduate writings on selected crimes. The specific objectives of this study are, therefore, to: identify age and gender differences in students' writings, especially on crime-related themes; examine how students' lexical choice and structure of expressions reveal crime-related issues, and how their description aids the meaning explication process. The research question addressed is: What is the significance of gender and age differences in students' writings, especially on crime-related themes?

While research work on crime issues in the Southwestern part of Nigeria is necessary as crime is still prevalent, not many works on crime have emerged compared to the crime rate in the society. This study attempts to fill this gap against the backdrop of Stylometry and Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG), as it facilitates the application of lexical ingredients in writings on social crimes. Students, through their writings, reveal the environmental implications of the selected identified social crimes of kidnapping, suicide, drug addiction and robbery. Through the mode of discourse, the SFG ideational metafunctions, concerned with the expression of ideas and experiences, duly express the context of situation in order to make writings informative and meaningful simultaneously.

Literature Review

Existing research efforts dwell much on stylometric attribution of written documents, author profiling of age and gender data sets in selected languages. Koppel (2002) studied stylometric differences in blogging for gender and age group variation. The results were based on two mutually independent features. The first feature is the use of slang words, which is a new concept proposed for the stylometric study of bloggers, and it identifies slang as a non-dictionary word that has

evolved with time due to its frequent and popular usage. The second feature focused on variations in sentences of average length across various age groups and genders. The outcome of the experiment demonstrates how well these characteristics detect the demographics of bloggers.

Various author characteristics have been explored in textual datasets during the last two decades. Coupland (2007) and Juola (2007) explore educational background and educational level. Pennebaker (2003) summarises some of the linguistic features that characterise the personality of text authors. Specifically, the authors indicated the significance of articles, auxiliary verbs, conjunctions, particles, prepositions and pronouns in English. Holmes and Holmes (1998) defined features that quantify writing style, and this research approach is described as stylometry. In addition, many types of measures have been proposed: character frequency, sentence length, vocabulary richness functions, word frequency and word length.

Another related research to this study from the perspective of crime is LaGrange and Kenneth (1989). The study examines age and gender differences in perceived risk and fear of crime among selected residents in the United States. Women reported significantly greater perceived risk and fear of crime than men did. However, Steffensmeier and Allan (1996) examined gender and crime and suggested that the gender gap in crime is universal, as women are always and everywhere less likely than men to commit criminal acts. The authors examine patterns of females committing crime and then review the gender equality hypothesis that gender differences in crime converge as male and female roles become similar. Johannsen et al. (2015) present a cross-lingual syntactic variation over age and gender, which shows several age and gender-specific variations across languages. The study revealed that women are more likely to use conjunctions and write more than men. Also, younger users tend to write more than older ones.

The listed researcher's reviews are relevant to the study. From the stylometric view, Koppel (2002) looks at stylometric differences in blogging for gender and age group variation. Holmes (1985) expresses writing styles with a stylometry approach with sentence length, vocabulary functions and word frequency. Johanssen et al.'s (2015) presentation on specific syntactic variation differentiates age and gender writings through treelets (nouns, verbs and pronouns). The selected works reviewed above are relevant to the study in reference to data similarity. However, none of the works identified on age and gender above submitted any research work on undergraduate writings to infer age and gender differences through essays on selected crimes in Southwestern Nigeria.

Nevertheless, the identified research studies on age and gender in Southwestern Nigeria revolve around studies on career choice, mental health and body weight. But only a few studies emerged on crime issues. Examples of such are 'Stemming the Tide of Violence in Southwest Nigeria: The Role of Yoruba Indigenous Security System' (Adenuga et al., 2024). The paper investigates the roles played by officials of the Yoruba indigenous security systems in checkmating the rate of violent conflicts in the selected 64 rural communities in Southwest Nigeria. Gender Based Violence in Akungba-Akoko of Southwestern Nigeria: Are Men Victimised? Fayakinnu (2007) also attempts to identify the forms of domestic violence men experience from women (intimate partners), the prevalence rate, and the consequences of the violence on men's social well-being and psychological health. Research on Gender Disparity in Criminal Behaviour in Ado- Ekiti, Nigeria by Oluwadare and Agboola (2011) looked into disparity in the punishment given to males and females and recommended fair equality and treatment to both. These studies all came up with different approaches. Having reviewed the existing studies, this study adopts the Systemic Functional Grammar as the appropriate linguistic theory for adequate explanations of calculated age and gender for a symmetrical conceptualisation of the essays written by students.

Theoretical Framework

M.A.K. Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) is utilised all over the world, especially in language instruction because it investigates the ways in which language is employed in social settings to accomplish specific objectives. In terms of data, it examines the discourses that people produce, spoken or written, and the circumstances in which these texts are produced, rather than how language is processed or represented in the human brain. Given its focus on language usage, SFG gives language function more weight than language structure, or how a language is put together.

According to Eggins (2011: 206), the experiential function of language is released through the transitivity systems, in terms of participant, process and circumstances, employed by male and female students through the linguistic resources of language. In addition, Thompson (2004:30), in his description of the experiential functions of language, states that language is used to narrate our experience of the world, which includes the worlds in our minds. The exploration of experiential meanings is a major means of accounting for the ideational function of a text. Thus, the representational role of languages experiencing meanings, which enables us to encode the meanings of experience and paint representations of our reality, realises the scope of a discourse.

Textual spontaneity: Systemic Functional Grammar is interested in determining the spontaneity of a text by looking at the internal organisation of items used to project the communicative functions of a text. As an element of textual function, the spontaneity of a text is determined by focusing on its lexical density ratio. The potential usefulness of this statistical approach in this study helps to discover the degree to which each writer infuses each essay in his/her presentation with content words (lexical words) in proportion to grammatical words (function words). This helps the analyst to establish the ratio of information-carrying words employed for the realisation of the metafunctions of a text. To determine the degree of lexical density in a text, Halliday (1985:64) offers a hint. He defines lexical density as the ratio of the number of running words to the number of lexical items. Williamson (2014:1) quantitatively expresses this in a formula as shown: LD = Lexical density as a helpful indicator of the amount of information contained in a given text. A low lexical density suggests comparatively few information words, retrieved through a ratio of content words, whereas a high lexical density shows a large amount of information-carrying words (Williamson 2014:3).

Stylometry

Style, which is a product of the writer's unconscious tendency of choosing one form over several to convey the same idea, reflects aspects of the student's writing style. Despite speaking the same language, experimental data reveal that women and men communicate differently (Galasso and Nannicini, 2013). Similarly, female speech tends to have more verbs and shorter sentence structures, while male speech tends to have more lexical density, which frequently comprises longer phrases. This assertion could be confirmed by using the idea of stylometry.

McMenamin (2002:76) proposed quantitative and qualitative analyses in stylometry. Qualitative analysis is applied to describe how the writer’s linguistic features are identified while quantitative analysis implies that particular indicators are figured and then evaluated, for instance, by counting the relative frequency at which a feature occurs in a text.

Methodology

The descriptive design was used for the study to accurately and systematically describe the population and the situation, while also focusing on observation and description. Descriptive design is a mixed method that can collect both qualitative and quantitative data. With a review of existing literature, the operational model integrates the components of metafunctions in Systemic

Functional Grammar with aspects of how the stylometry tool evolved for the study. Textual metafunction has to do with the internal organisation and communicative nature of a text, and it is unveiled through textual spontaneity. Investigation into textual spontaneity helps to discover how the writers make their essays informative by calculating the lexical density of their writings. Lexical Density is measured to discover the proportion of lexical words in relation to grammatical words. Therefore, the theoretical approach reflects a view that each of those perspectives captures relevant word meanings in the writings. The appropriate research design for the study is descriptive. It is based on using a range of qualitative and quantitative research methods in gathering, analysing and presenting collected data. The study area was limited to Universities in Southwestern Nigeria. These are: University of Lagos, Lagos State; Adekunle Ajasin University, Akungba, Ondo State, and Crawford University, Igbesa, Ogun State. The lecturers of the participating students were consulted, and the writings were carried out as assignments, so as to get the desired results, since the topics were open-ended. The purpose of the survey and what the information would help to achieve were disclosed to the respondents. The selection of the respondents was motivated by the age brackets (16-18 and 19-21) and their gender (male and female). Essay questions on the following crime themes of kidnapping, suicide, robbery and drug addiction were examined, while essays with the absence of relevant choice of words and expressions were not examined for analysis in the study. From the age section, ages 16-18 from Adekunle Ajasin University (AAU) present 8 essays; 8 essays were gotten from Crawford University and 8 essays from the University of Lagos (Unilag). For Ages 19-21, (AAU) presents 8 essays; 8 from Crawford and 8 from Unilag. The total relevant essays collected from the 3 Universities were 48. On the gender section, males in AAU are 8; Crawford 8 and Unilag 8, and for females, we have 8 essays from AAU, 8 from Crawford and 8 from Unilag. Levels 100-400 essays were arranged in 4 sections, with 4 essays per level and 16 essays from each school. Departments of Business Administration and English in 2 schools produced 16 essays each, resulting in 48 essays.

Data Analysis and Discussion

Students' promotion of themes through lexical density: Age

The table below demonstrates the ratio at which each writer communicates through identifiable numbers of content/lexical items in selected crime titles. The tables below reveal the stylometry tool frequency that displays the information retrieved on suicide. This is relevant to the suicide

theme in the study, as it acknowledges the contributions of the students to the study and shows the age group with the highest frequency.

Table 4.1: Text 1 Writings on Suicide Ages, 16 -18

Word Class	**No. of content/function words**	**Total No. of words**	**Lexical density in percentage %**
Nouns	183	1,219	15.0
Verbs	175		14.3
Prepositions	126		10.3
Pronouns	54		4.4
Suicide: 19 -21			
Nouns	151	998	15.1
Verbs	89		8.9
Prepositions	108		10.8
Pronouns	30		3

Table 4.1 above shows the total number of words of respondents aged 16 -18 to be 1, 219 and the total number of words for respondents aged 19-21 as 998. These figures communicate the number of content and lexical items in the selected essays on the reasons people commit suicide. The nouns and verbs sections on the tables are important to the topic under discussion, because unique words associated with suicide, relating information about the topic, were realised and presented as content words in the word class sections. Pronouns relate to personal pronouns through which personalisation analysis was realised. Prepositions act as grammatical ties for connections within expressions, for meaning realisation in various expressions in each essay. However, the total number of words is more relevant when the content words are higher than the lexical words in each group. In Table 4.1, the following words were discovered in the essays gathered on suicide for respondents aged 16-18: Nouns, 183 words; verbs, 175 words; prepositions, 126 words; and pronouns, 54 words. In the lexical density section, the total number of nouns was 15 %, verbs 14.3%, prepositions 10.3% and pronouns 4.4%. Data on respondents aged 19-21 has the following sections: nouns, 151 words; verbs, 89 words; prepositions, 105 words; and pronouns, 30 words. The total number of all the words in the essays in this group is 998. The lexical density on nouns is 15.1%, verbs 8.9%, prepositions 9.8% and pronouns 3%. In the writings of respondents aged

16-18 years, the content words, which are information carriers, are higher with the addition of content percentage at 29.3% than the function words at 14.7%, expressing various reasons why suicide practices increase, therefore making their writing style more enlightening. Respondents aged 16-18 have higher lexical density than the respondents aged 19- 21. The next sections show columns for the selected themes.

Table 4.2: Text 2 Writings on Kidnapping, Ages 16-18

Word Class	**No. of content/function words**	**Total No. of words**	**Lexical density in percentage %**
Nouns	253	955	26.4
Verbs	155		16.2
Prepositions	03		0.31
Pronouns	27		2.8
Kidnapping: Ages 19-21			
Nouns	385	1,977	19.4
Verbs	213		10.7
Prepositions	220		11.1
Pronouns	49		2.4

Table 4.2 above reveals the total number of words for respondents aged 16-18 as 955, while the total number of words for respondents aged 19-21 is 1, 977. The nouns and verbs sections on the tables are key information carriers in the essays, because distinguishing words associated with kidnapping were realised and presented as content words in the word class sections. Pronouns relate to personal pronouns, through which personalisation analysis was realised. Prepositions act as grammatical ties for connections within expressions for meaning realisation in various expressions in each essay reviewed in this study. =In Table 4.2, the following words were extracted from kidnapping essays for respondents aged 16-18: nouns, 253 words; verbs, 155 words; prepositions, 03 words; and pronouns, 27 words. In the lexical density section, the total number of nouns is 26.4%, verbs 16.2%, prepositions 0.31% and pronouns 2.8%.

Respondents aged 19-21 have the following sections: nouns, 385 words; verbs, 213 words; prepositions, 220 words; and pronouns, 49 words. The total number of all the words in the essays in this group is 1,977. Nouns have 19.4%, verbs 10.7%, prepositions 11.1% and pronouns 2.4%.

In the writings of respondents aged 16-18 years, the content words, which are information carriers, are higher with the addition of content percentage at 42.6% than the function words at 3.11%, while respondents aged 19-21 presented a lower percentage of 30.1% on content words addition and 13.5% on function words addition in the essays. Respondents aged 16-18 have a higher percentage of content words, which are the information carriers that determine linguistic elaborateness and syntactic sophistication. Therefore, respondents aged 16-18 demonstrated higher lexical density in their essays on kidnapping in this section.

Table 4.3: Text 3 Writings on Drug Addiction, Ages 16-18

Word Class	**No. of content/function words**	**Total No. of words**	**Lexical density in percentage %**
Nouns	109	556	19.6
Verbs	53		9.5
Prepositions	25		4.4
Pronouns	5		0.8
Drug Addiction: Ages 19-21			
Nouns	328	1,635	20
Verbs	145		8.8
Prepositions	168		10.2
Pronouns	71		4.3

Table 4.3 displays the total number of words for respondents aged 16-18 to be 556 and the total number of words for respondents aged 19-21 as 1,635. Nouns and verbs associated with drug addiction were realised and presented as content words in the word class sections in the table above. Pronouns relate to personal pronouns through which personalisation analysis was realised. Prepositions act as grammatical ties for connections within expressions for meaning realisation in various expressions in each essay analysed in the study. In Table 4.3, the following words were gathered from drug addiction for respondents aged 16-18: nouns, 109 words; verbs, 53 words; prepositions, 25 words; and pronouns, 5 words. In the lexical density section, the total number of nouns gives 19.2 %, verbs 9.3%, prepositions 4.4% and pronouns 0.8%.= Respondents aged 19-21 have the following sections: nouns, 328 words; verbs, 145 words; prepositions, 168 words; and pronouns, 71 words. The total number of all the words in the essays in this group is 1,635. Nouns

are 20%, verbs 8.8%, prepositions 10.2% and pronouns 4.3%. In the writings of respondents aged 16-18 years, the addition of content words percentage produced 29.1% and the function words 5.2%. For those aged 19-21, the content words addition gives 28.8% and 14.5% on function words addition. The presentations on drug addiction are didactic, advisory and relevant. Nevertheless, respondents aged 19-21 have a higher lexical percentage of 29.1% in the content words.

Table 4.4: Text 4 Writings on Robbery, Ages 16-18

Word Class	**No. of content/function words**	**Total No. of words**	**Lexical density in percentage %**
Nouns	67	413	16.2
Verbs	86		20.8
Prepositions	52		12.5
Pronouns	54		13
Robbery: Ages 19-21			
Nouns	180	1,254	14.3
Verbs	137		10.9
Prepositions	123		9.8
Pronouns	106		8.4

Table 4.4 above reveals information on robbery. The total number of words for respondents aged 16-18 is 413, while the total number of words for those aged 19-21 is 1,254. The nouns and verbs sections on the tables are salient to the study because distinctive words associated with robbery were realised and presented as content words in the word class sections. Pronouns relate to personal pronouns through which personalisation analysis was realised. Prepositions act as grammatical ties for connections within expressions for meaning realisation in various expressions in each essay reviewed and analysed in the study.

In Table 4.4, the following words were extracted from writings on robbery by respondents aged 16-18: nouns, 67 words; verbs, 86 words; prepositions, 52 words; and pronouns, 54 words. In the lexical density section, the total number of nouns (67) divided by the total number of words (413) multiplied by 100 gives 16.2 %. The total number of verbs (86) divided by the total number of words (413) multiplied by 100 gives 20.8%. The total number of prepositions (52) divided by the total number of words (413) multiplied by 100 is 12.5%. And the total number of pronouns (54)

divided by the total number of words (413) multiplied by 100 gives 13%.

The following words were retrieved from robbery for ages 19-21: nouns, 180 words; verbs, 137 words; prepositions, 123 words; and pronouns, 106 words. In the lexical density section, the total number of nouns (180) divided by the total number of words (1,254) multiplied by 100 gives 14.3. The total number of verbs (137) divided by the total number of words (1,254) multiplied by 100 is 10.9. The total number of prepositions (123) divided by the total number of words (1,254) multiplied by 100 is 9.8. The total number of pronouns (106) divided by the total number of words (1,254) multiplied by 100 gives 8.4.

In the writings of respondents aged 16-18 years, the content words, with the addition of content percentage, produced 37%, and the function words at 25.5%. For those aged 19-21, the content words addition gives 25.2% and 18.2% for function words addition.

Respondents aged 16-18 have more content words through lexical patterns that are distributed adequately across their writings. Respondents aged 16-18 have more experiences with robbery issues, with 37%, than those aged 19-21, with 25.5% on content words in the study, presented through their experiential writing styles. The next section is about the gender analysis in the study.

Gender

The most researched social component in several fields that look at the relationship between language use and the social environment is gender. According to Bergvall (1998), sex and gender are both examples of socially constructed classifications. Indeed, it is said by many scholars that males and females differ in the usage of language (Tannen, 1990, Coates, 2007 and Smith, 2008). The tables below are representations of male and female writings from three different universities in Southwestern Nigeria.

Table 4.5: Text 5 Writings on Suicide: Males

Word Class	**No. of content/function words**	**Total No. of words**	**Lexical density in percentage %**
Nouns	209	944	22.1
Verbs	123		13.0
Prepositions	127		13.4
Pronouns	33		3.4
Suicide: Females			

Nouns	154	1,113	13.8
Verbs	108		9.7
Prepositions	110		9.8
Pronouns	86		7.7

Table 4.5 shows male writers with 994 total words and female writers with 1,113 words. The nouns and verbs presented in the tables above are key to the study because distinguishing words associated with suicide were realised and presented as content words in the word class sections. Pronouns related to each essay were analysed through personalisation. Prepositions act as grammatical ties for connections of various expressions in each essay analysed in the study.

In Table 4.5, the following words were recovered from male writers' presentations on suicide: 209 nouns, 123 verbs, 127 prepositions and 33 pronouns. In the lexical density section, nouns had 22.1%, verbs 13.0%, prepositions 13.4% and pronouns 3.4%. The following words were retrieved from female writers' presentation on suicide: nouns, 154 words; verbs, 108 words; prepositions, 110 words; and pronouns, 86 words. In the lexical density section, the nouns have 13.8%, verbs 9.7%, prepositions 9.8% and pronouns 7.7%. Both males and females revealed salient points, which are referred to as environmental stress, such as poverty, health challenges (e.g. HIV/AIDS), unemployment and low self-esteem, among others. It is noted, however, that male writers' choices of words reflected more content words, which are the information carriers. Thus, the lexical density of the content words' addition is higher in males (35.1%) than in female writers (23.5%). Hence, males have higher lexical density in this section on suicide.

Table 4.6: Text 6 Writings on Kidnapping: Males

Word Class	**No. of content/function words**	**Total No. of words**	**Lexical density in percentage (%)**
Nouns	220	964	22.8
Verbs	88		9.1
Prepositions	100		10.3
Pronouns	15		1.5
Kidnapping: Females			
Nouns	274	1,584	17.2

Verbs	181		11.42
Prepositions	182		11.48
Pronouns	51		3.2

In Table 4.6 above, male writers have 964 total words, while female writers have 1,584 words. The nouns and verbs presented on the tables above are essential parts of the study, because unique words associated with kidnapping were realised and presented as content words in the word class sections. Related pronouns were portrayed through personalisation examination. Prepositions, as grammatical ties for connecting various expressions, were assessed in the study.

In Table 4.6, the following words were recovered from male writers' presentation on kidnapping, with 220 nouns, 88 verbs, 100 prepositions and 15 pronouns. In the lexical density section, the nouns have 22.8%, verbs 9.1%, prepositions 10.3% and pronouns 1.5%. The female writers have a higher lexical density percentage in verbs, which is important in relating information about the essay. Also, pronouns and prepositions, which are used to provide grammatical ties among the content words, are also higher in female writings than in male writings. In Table 4.6, the following words were retrieved from female writers' presentations on kidnapping: nouns, 274 words; verbs, 181 words; prepositions, 182 words; and pronouns, 51 words.

The content words addition is higher in males, with 31.9%, than in female writers, with 28.6%. Hence, the male writers have higher lexical density in their styles of presentation on the issue of kidnapping.

Table 4.7: Text 7 Writings on Drug Addiction: Males

Word Class	**No. of content/function words**	**Total No. of words**	**Lexical density in percentage %**
Nouns	131	81	16.7
Verbs	71		9.0
Prepositions	66		8.4
Pronouns	22		4.4
Drug Addiction: Females			
Nouns	191	769	24.8
Verbs	73		9.4
Prepositions	53		6.8

Pronouns	28		3.6

Table 4.7 reveals that male writers have 781 total words, while female writers have 769 words on drug addiction. The nouns and verbs presented on the tables above are germane to the study because individual words associated with drug addiction were obtained and presented as content words in the word class sections. Pronouns associated with personalisation were realised in the essays. Prepositions, as grammatical ties for connecting expressions in each essay, are reviewed in the study. In Table 4.7, the following words were gathered from male writers' presentations on drug addiction: 131 nouns, 71 verbs, 66 prepositions and 22 pronouns. The table also shows their lexical density. Female writers' presentation on drug addiction has the following figures in word classes: nouns, 191 words; verbs, 73 words; prepositions, 53 words; and pronouns, 28 words. All facets of female writers' expression were present. While men tend to think about problems in a more detached manner, women are more sensitive to the immediate social and physical context (Heylighen and Dewaele, 1999:30). This would account for the social nature of a conversation and the simultaneous use of formal, in-depth speaking by women. There is, therefore, a wide justification that the writing styles of female writers are more explanatory of drug addiction than those of male writers. The content words addition is higher in females, with 34.2%, than in male writers, with 25.7%.

Table 4.8: Text 8 Writings on Robbery: Males

Word Class	**No. of content lexical words**	**Total No. of words**	**Lexical density in percentage %**
Nouns	115	865	13.2
Verbs	119		13.7
Prepositions	82		9.4
Pronouns	69		7.9
Robbery: Females			
Nouns	114	721	15.8
Verbs	80		11.0
Prepositions	81		6.8
Pronouns	61		3.6

Table 4.8 above presents male writers with 865 total words and female writers with 721 words on

robbery. The nouns and verbs presented in the tables above are important to the study because distinguishing words associated with robbery were discovered and presented as content words in the word class sections. Pronouns relate personal pronouns, relative pronouns and demonstrative pronouns, among others, through which personalisation characteristics were realised. Prepositions, as grammatical ties for connecting various expressions in each essay, were reviewed in the study. In Table 4.8, the following words were gathered from male writers' presentations on robbery, with 115 nouns, 119 verbs, 82 prepositions and 69 pronouns. In the lexical density section, the total number of nouns is .2%, verbs 13.7%, prepositions 9.4% and pronouns 7.9%.

Female writers' presentations on robbery have the following figures in the word classes: nouns, 114 words; verbs, 80 words; prepositions, 81 words; and pronouns, 61 words. In the lexical density section, the total number of nouns is 15.8%, verbs 11.0%, prepositions 6.8% and pronouns 3.6%. The approach attempted by the two groups shows that experiencing robbery attacks in Nigeria is not in favour of either gender. Presentation of higher lexical density in males with 26.9% than the female writers with 26.8%.

Findings

Respondents aged 16-18 have more information and are loaded with expressions revealing more content words through lexical patterns that are distributed adequately across their writings. Respondents aged 16-18 have more experiences with robbery issues, with 37%, than those aged 19-21, with 25.5%, on content words in the study, presented through their experiential writing styles. The next section is about stylometry gender analysis in the study. The writings of students on gender revealed differences through presentations on suicide, kidnapping, drug addiction and robbery. The group with higher percentages of content words and function words are revealed through each table. We can decode the gender with a higher percentage of content and function words in each title. Lexical words (Nouns and Verbs) and grammatical words (Prepositions and Pronouns) were the basis for the percentage analysis. The identified gaps in scholarship, which the study has pursued, revealed that previous studies used Profiling-UD, Universal dependencies, syntactic relations, lexical varieties and with algorithms obtained 80% accuracy and writing styles growing increasingly with males. This study advances with the application of metafunctions (textual spontaneity) and stylometry word-frequency as the driving force for linguistic analysis of the students' writings. Through the analysed data, it is established that we can infer age and gender differences through writing.

Conclusion

The study systematically and functionally explores stylometry and Systemic Functional Grammar in written essays presented by students to encode meaning in selected crimes. The study demonstrates the relationship between linguistic resources and word frequency in the various writings through the application of relevant linguistic tools. The presentations reveal that male students are more explorative and expressive, and their essays are more objectively written than female students do. Through stylometrical text evaluation, it is established that we can infer age and gender differences through writing. This study has examined students' essays from three Universities in Southwestern Nigeria. The study is, however, essentially descriptive. Further studies can consider writings on Suicide Notes using other analytical tools to investigate certain aspects of the writings and reasons people commit suicide. Furthermore, researchers can make theoretical constructs and conduct comparative analyses of the lexicogrammatical peculiarities of different notes.

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The Communicative Functions and Social Significance of Code-Switching and Code-Mixing Among Multilingual Undergraduate Students of Kaduna State University

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Abstract

This paper investigates the communicative functions and social significance of code-switching and code-mixing among multilingual undergraduate students at Kaduna State University (KASU) within Nigeria's complex linguistic landscape. The study employs a mixed-methods research design underpinned by Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT). Quantitative data were gathered from 400 structured questionnaires distributed via stratified random sampling across the faculties of Arts, Science, and Social Sciences. This is integrated with qualitative data from semi-structured interviews featuring 12 participants tracked via alphanumeric identifiers to ensure anonymity. Cross-tabulation analysis demonstrates that the majority of students (over 80%) code-switch or code-mix to emphasise key points, ensure clarity, and handle identity management. The study shows that Faculty of Science students rely most heavily on local codes to bridge cognitive gaps when processing abstract concepts, lower-level undergraduates use language alternation as a persuasive tool, and older, upper-level students shift codes to convey respect and navigate institutional hierarchies. The qualitative analysis reveals five core themes driving student linguistic behaviour, including emotional expression and affective clarity, identity management and cultural assertion, instructional clarity and cognitive processing, peer influence and social belonging, and cultural belonging and group solidarity. The paper highlights that while these practices encourage relational convergence and democratise peer learning, they also bring negative implications, such as the accidental social exclusion of non-Hausa speakers, the masking of deficiencies in standard global English proficiency, the reinforcement of rigid linguistic hierarchies, and increased risks of campus ethnic clustering. The study concludes that code-switching and code-mixing are complex, rule-governed communicative resources rather than signs of linguistic deficiency.

Keywords: *Code-switching, Code-mixing, Multilingualism, Communication Accommodation Theory, Kaduna State University.*

Introduction

Language is a fundamental resource for communication, identity construction, and social interaction. In multilingual societies such as Nigeria, speakers routinely draw on multiple linguistic codes to navigate diverse communicative contexts. With over 500 indigenous languages coexisting alongside English—the official language and primary medium of instruction—Nigeria presents a highly dynamic sociolinguistic environment (Fishman, 1972; Romaine, 1995). Within this context, code-switching and code-mixing have become widespread features of everyday discourse. Code-switching refers to the alternation between two or more languages within a conversation, while code-mixing involves the integration of elements from different languages within a single utterance (Gumperz, 1982; Muysken, 2000). Far from indicating linguistic inadequacy, these practices are now understood as systematic and purposeful communicative strategies that enable speakers to achieve clarity, express identity, and negotiate social relationships (Holmes, 2013; Wardhaugh & Fuller, 2015). In academic settings, particularly universities where different languages coexist, such strategies are also instrumental in enhancing comprehension, participation, and peer interaction.

Kaduna State University (KASU) exemplifies Nigeria's linguistic diversity and, hence, is a reflection of the country's broader multilingual society. While English serves as the official language of instruction, Hausa, Nigerian Pidgin, and other languages play significant roles in students' everyday interactions. Located in Kaduna, the institution sits at a unique ethno-linguistic crossroads in Northern Nigeria, drawing a student population that bridges the linguistically diverse Middle Belt and the Hausa-dominated far North. Consequently, undergraduate students frequently engage in code-switching and code-mixing across both formal and informal domains, adapting their language use to suit different communicative purposes and social contexts. Although previous studies have examined code-switching and code-mixing in Nigerian universities, much of the existing research has focused on general patterns or pedagogical implications, with limited attention to their combined communicative and social significance within specific institutional contexts, particularly in Northern Nigeria (Chukwu & Okonkwo, 2021; Musa & Adebayo, 2023). This gap underscores the need for context-sensitive investigations that foreground students' lived linguistic experiences. This study, therefore, investigates the communicative functions and social significance of code-switching and code-mixing among multilingual undergraduate students at Kaduna State University. Anchored in Communication Accommodation Theory (Giles et al.,

1973), it examines how students strategically deploy multiple languages to enhance understanding, express identity, and foster social cohesion within a linguistically diverse academic environment.

Literature Review

Code-Switching

Code-switching is broadly understood as the alternation between two or more languages within a single interaction. Gumperz (1982) defines it as the juxtaposition of elements from different grammatical systems within the same speech exchange, emphasising its structural and interactional nature. Similarly, Myers-Scotton (1993) views it as the use of multiple languages in a single conversation by bilingual speakers, highlighting both linguistic competence and communicative context. Expanding this perspective, Romaine (1995) includes variation in language, dialect, or style within discourse, reflecting the fluidity of real-life language use, while Wardhaugh and Fuller (2015) emphasise the alternation between languages or varieties during conversation, making the concept applicable to diverse multilingual settings. In essence, code-switching involves the strategic use of multiple linguistic codes within discourse, whether at the level of sentences, phrases, or conversations (Boro, 2020). It is particularly common in multilingual societies such as Nigeria, where speakers adjust their language based on context, audience, and communicative purpose (Ahmed & Yusuf, 2021). In academic settings like Kaduna State University, students employ code-switching as a functional communicative strategy to navigate both academic demands and social interactions.

Code-switching behaviours, according to Holmes (2013), can be broadly categorised into two primary types based on the motivation behind the linguistic transition. Situational Switching involves a code-switch triggered by observable changes in social context, such as participant dynamics, setting alterations, or topic shifts. Metaphorical Switching (or Code-Mixing) refers to quick transitions between language codes independent of context changes. This enhances communication through the symbolic meanings of both codes, forming complex social identities and requiring advanced bilingual proficiency.

Sociolinguistic code-switching serves various social and communicative functions, which Holmes (2013) categorizes into three primary dimensions: solidarity, social distance, and status; topic and referential functions; and affective functions. Within the first dimension, speakers utilise emblematic or tag switching by inserting interjections from another language to signal ethnic identity and solidarity, while also using deliberate switches to manipulate social distance by

aligning with different cultural values or shifting from a low vernacular code to a high standard code to transition from informal to formal communication. For topic and referential functions, bilinguals may employ topic-triggered switching to articulate specific subjects better in a particular language, or they may switch codes to accurately quote others and recite culturally specific proverbs to enhance message precision and signal identity. Finally, code-switching serves affective functions, allowing speakers to express strong emotions such as humour or dramatic effect, as well as convey authority and disapproval by transitioning to a formal, high-status variety that effectively highlights social distance.

Types of Code-switching

Contemporary studies categorise code-switching into three primary types based on structure and placement.

1. Extra-sentential code-switching involves inserting brief expressions from one language into a sentence framed in another. A common example among KASU students is the use of Hausa exclamations such as *walahi* in English sentences to express emphasis or emotion (Ibrahim & Haruna, 2023).
2. Inter-sentential code-switching occurs when speakers alternate languages between complete sentences. For instance, a student might say, "I will check the timetable later. Zan tafi gida yanzu," transitioning from academic talk to personal matters.
3. Intra-sentential code-switching, the most complex form, occurs within a single sentence and requires high linguistic competence to maintain grammatical and semantic consistency across languages. An example is: "The lecturer didn't come today, amma zamu still submit the assignment tomorrow," which blends Hausa and English seamlessly (Eze & Ogbonna, 2020).

Code-Mixing

Code-mixing is generally defined as the integration of linguistic elements from one language into the structure of another within a single utterance. Kachru (1983) describes it as the embedding of units such as words, phrases, and morphemes from one language into another, emphasising structural integration. Similarly, Muysken (2000) views it as the insertion of elements from one language into the grammatical framework of another. Bokamba (1989) extends this perspective by highlighting the simultaneous use of elements from two distinct grammatical systems within the same sentence and speech event, drawing attention to the role of context. In the same vein,

Hoffman (1991) and Wardhaugh and Fuller (2015) characterise code-mixing as intra-sentential language alternation, where speakers shift between languages at the word or phrase level, reflecting fluid bilingual competence. Overall, these definitions converge on the structural and grammatical nature of code-mixing, while giving comparatively less attention to its social and communicative functions. The conceptual overlap with code-switching further suggests that the distinction between the two remains theoretically contested in sociolinguistic research. Gardner-Chloros (2009) highlights that code-mixing necessitates significant linguistic awareness, particularly in bilingual or multilingual individuals in informal settings. It serves as a vital communication tool, reflecting the dynamic nature of language in various social contexts. Code-mixing is categorised into three main types: lexical, morphological, and syntactic.

Lexical Code-Mixing

Lexical code-mixing involves the insertion of single words, typically nouns, verbs, or adjectives from one language into the sentence structure of another (Ali Khan & Muysken, 2014). This is the most common type among KASU students and is often used to fill lexical gaps, add emphasis, or signal cultural relevance (Fanani & Ma'u, 2018). For example, a student might say, *"I'm not ready for the test; I haven't even read one chapter from the litattafai,"* blending English and Hausa terms in a single utterance.

Morphological Code-Mixing

Morphological code-mixing occurs when morphemes (the smallest grammatical units of meaning) from one language are attached to words or structures from another (Tappe, 2013). This type showcases the speaker's creative linguistic competence and is a marker of deeper language integration. A common example from student interactions is: *"We're submitting the assignment dama tomorrow, so I need to read-na hard,"* where "*read-na*" reflects the fusion of the English verb "read" with a Hausa possessive suffix "-na" (my reading).

Syntactic Code-Mixing

Syntactic code-mixing involves combining longer syntactic elements such as clauses or phrases from one language within the grammatical structure of another (Fanani & Ma'u, 2018). This may include verb phrases, noun phrases, or conditional structures. A student might say: *"This topic is confusing me; idan lecturer din bai kara explain ba, I will not pass,"* meaning "if the lecturer doesn't explain further."

Multilingualism

Multilingualism is generally understood as the use and interaction of two or more languages within individuals or communities. Fishman (1972) conceptualises it in relation to domains, emphasising the use of different languages across social settings such as home, school, religion, and government. Similarly, Romaine (1995) views multilingualism as the coexistence and functional use of multiple languages within a speech community, where language choice depends on context and communicative purpose. Holmes (2013) defines it more broadly as the use of two or more languages by individuals or communities, noting that multilingual competence may be active (speaking and writing) or passive (listening and understanding), and highlighting its normality in many societies. In the same vein, Wardhaugh and Fuller (2015) emphasise varying degrees of proficiency and context-dependent usage, while Edwards (1994) underscores the role of historical, political, and cultural factors in shaping the presence and interaction of multiple languages. Together, these perspectives present multilingualism as a dynamic and context-driven sociolinguistic phenomenon. One can therefore say that Multilingualism is a dynamic sociolinguistic phenomenon, characterised by the use of two or more languages by individuals or communities. It involves not only linguistic ability but also the functional distribution of languages across various social contexts, such as home and education, etc. This concept includes the interaction of languages within a community, where speakers may switch languages based on communicative needs.

Empirical Studies

Akinpelu and Yusuf (2020) explored the sociolinguistic functions of code-switching and code-mixing among university students in southwestern Nigeria, focusing on their use of Yoruba, English, and Pidgin English to enhance peer interactions. The qualitative study revealed that language alternation was common in informal settings, such as group discussions, facilitating rapport, identity assertion, and social cohesion. Students demonstrated adaptability in using their multilingual skills to navigate social contexts. However, the study acknowledged a gap in examining the impact of these linguistic practices on formal academic engagement and language policy. This research is pertinent for its insights into informal communication strategies in student life at KASU. Similar to Akinpelu and Yusuf (2020), the present study investigates the sociolinguistic functions of language alternation among university students. However, a major gap in their work is the exclusive reliance on qualitative methods and a geographical scope limited to

southwestern Nigeria. The current study addresses these gaps by shifting the scope to the unique ethno-linguistic crossroads of Northern Nigeria (KASU) and employing a robust mixed-methods design. It also explicitly utilises the Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) to systematically interpret how students converge or diverge linguistically.

Ibekwe and Alade (2021) investigated the use of code-switching in Nigerian tertiary institutions, focusing on how lecturers employ language alternation to aid students' learning. Their qualitative study revealed that lecturers often switch from English to local languages to clarify complex academic concepts, enhancing student understanding and involvement. Students participating in code-switching exhibited improved idea articulation and problem-solving abilities. However, the research highlighted a lack of institutional support and the absence of training or policies for multilingual teaching strategies. The findings are relevant to ongoing research at KASU, which examines the impact of code-switching and code-mixing on academic engagement in a multilingual environment. Both studies share a fundamental interest in the pedagogical value of code-switching within Nigerian tertiary institutions. However, the previous study primarily focused on lecturer-initiated code-switching using purely qualitative data collection tools. This leaves a gap in understanding student-initiated peer-to-peer language alternation and lacks quantitative validation. The current study addresses this methodological and scope-related gap by focusing squarely on undergraduate students' linguistic behaviours across different faculties.

Hajir and McInerney (2022) investigated code-switching and code-mixing among university students in the Middle East, focusing on Arabic and English interactions in higher education. Their mixed-method study used surveys and focus group interviews to assess how bilingual students adapt to an English-dominant curriculum while preserving their linguistic and cultural ties. They found that Arabic was frequently utilised in group discussions for complex academic topics, while code-mixing was prevalent in informal contexts, showcasing bilingual proficiency and socio-cultural adaptability. The study highlighted code-switching's dual role as both an academic support and a social strategy, helping students maintain peer solidarity in a multicultural university setting. Both studies share a fundamental interest in the pedagogical value of code-switching within Nigerian tertiary institutions. However, the previous study primarily focused on lecturer-initiated code-switching using purely qualitative data collection tools. This leaves a gap in understanding student-initiated peer-to-peer language alternation and lacks quantitative validation. The current

study addresses this methodological and scope-related gap by focusing squarely on undergraduate students' linguistic behaviours across different faculties.

Musa and Adebayo (2023) carried out a sociolinguistic analysis of code-switching and code-mixing among university students in Northern Nigeria. The study aimed to explore how students utilise language alternation to navigate interpersonal relationships, social norms, and inclusivity. Through qualitative methods, they found that students shifted their language use between Hausa, English, and regional languages, based on their audiences, including peers, lecturers, and administrative staff. Additionally, code-mixing was identified as a form of linguistic creativity, allowing students to create hybrid expressions that reflected their cultural identities. While the previous study shares a similar geographical scope (Northern Nigeria) and focus on inclusivity, its reliance on strictly qualitative data collection procedures limits the statistical generalisability of its findings. There is also a theoretical gap, as their descriptive approach lacks a structured framework to measure the social motivations behind these language shifts. The current study addresses this gap by introducing a rigorous quantitative procedure (400 questionnaires) alongside qualitative interviews. By rooting the analysis in CAT, this study moves beyond mere description to theoretically map out the specific variables of identity, social significance, and communicative functions across different student faculties.

Awal (2023) examined the sociolinguistic roles of code-switching and code-mixing in enhancing social cohesion and cultural continuity among multilingual Nigerian communities. Utilising qualitative discourse analysis, the study revealed that code-switching facilitates understanding and collaboration during group discussions, while code-mixing showcases bilingual proficiency and cultural expression. The research also highlighted concerns about the potential dilution of linguistic purity and the marginalisation of minority languages. Both the current study and the previous one emphasise the role of language alternation in fostering social cohesion within Nigeria. However, Awal's scope is excessively broad, focusing on general communities, and relies heavily on qualitative discourse analysis as the primary data procedure. This leaves a gap in understanding how these phenomena operate specifically within structured, formal academic environments. The present study fills this gap by restricting its scope to a specific institutional setting (KASU) and employing a mixed-methods framework rather than just discourse analysis. It integrates CAT to evaluate how academic pressures and institutional hierarchies specifically dictate students' communicative accommodation strategies.

Theoretical Framework

Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT), developed by Howard Giles in 1973, provides a valuable lens for understanding how individuals adapt their communication styles in multilingual contexts. This theory posits that people modify their speech, tone, or language depending on the social environment, often to bridge or highlight social differences. Howard Giles' Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) argues that communication is deeply influenced by social variables such as status, group identity, and power relations. According to CAT, individuals modify their communication styles through two primary mechanisms to navigate their cultural, academic, and social identities:

Convergence: This involves adapting language to align with conversational partners to foster rapport, reduce social distance, and promote inclusion (Almelhi, 2020). At KASU, students often switch from English to Hausa during informal interactions to connect with peers, build community, collaborate, and enhance group unity.

Divergence: This refers to the deliberate use of language to emphasise differences, assert individuality, or maintain social distance. At KASU, students may use English during formal discussions to signal authority, handle complex topics, and adhere to institutional standards. This approach allows them to distance themselves from informal communication to project a formal identity, thereby asserting social status and reflecting their academic or professional aspirations (Coupland & Jaworski, 2004).

Ultimately, CAT provides a vital framework for understanding the motivations behind code-switching within KASU's diverse student body, illustrating the complex relationship between individual identity and group dynamics. Furthermore, the theory highlights how these strategic linguistic shifts impact educational outcomes, as the ability to maintain English proficiency in formal settings remains directly linked to academic success.

Methodology

This study employed a mixed-methods research design to comprehensively investigate the language practices of undergraduate students at Kaduna State University (KASU). The quantitative component involved the administration of 400 structured questionnaires, which utilised Likert scale items that were distributed using a stratified random sampling method across the faculties of Arts, Science, and Social Sciences. The quantitative data were analysed to identify

statistical patterns and relationships regarding language alternation across different demographics. To complement the broader statistical data, the qualitative phase involved a semi-structured interview with 12 participants. To ensure a comprehensive representation that mirrored the quantitative sample, these participants were selected from varying academic stages (100 to 400 levels) across the Arts, Science, and Social Sciences faculties. To maintain strict participant anonymity throughout the study, all individuals involved in the qualitative sessions were assigned alphanumeric identifiers, such as INT003 and FGD1-P05, in place of their actual names. The qualitative sessions were audio-recorded, transcribed, and analysed using the Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) framework.

Data Presentation and Analysis

The presentation of data and analysis was done in two major segments. The first segment focuses on quantitative analysis, while the second segment focuses on qualitative analysis.

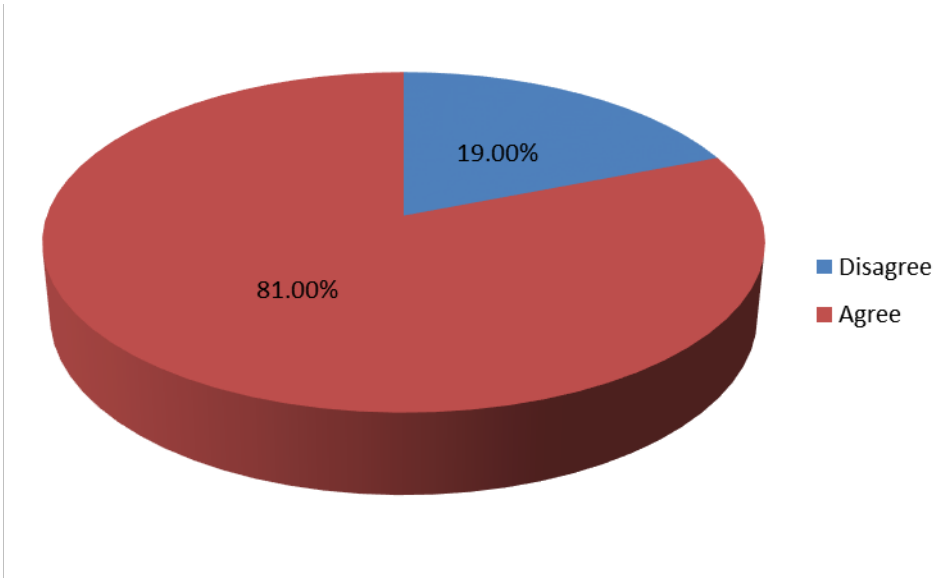
Section A: Quantitative Analysis

Communicative Functions and Social Significance

Table 1: I switch or mix languages to emphasise important points in a conversation.

RESPONSE OPTION	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE (%)
Disagree	76	19.00%
Agree	324	81.00%
Total	**400**	**100%**

Source: *Field Survey, 2025*



Demographic Variable	Category	Agree Frequency	Agree Percentage	Disagree Frequency	Disagree Percentage	Total Frequency	Total Percentage
Gender	Male	156	39%	51	12.75%	207	51.75%
	Female	164	41%	29	7.25%	193	48.25%
	Gender Subtotal	**320**	**80**%	**80**	20%	**400**	**100**
Age Group	Below 20	34	8.5%	12	3%	46	11.5%
	21–25	159	39.75%	38	9.5%	197	49.25%
	26–30	74	18.5%	23	5.75%	97	24.25%
	Above 30	51	12.75%	9	2.25%	60	15%
	Age Subtotal	**318**	**79.5%**	**82**	**20.5**%	**400**	**100**%
Faculty	Arts	91	22.75%	14	3.5%	105	26.25%
	Science	111	27.75%	47	11.75%	158	39.5%
	Social Science	110	27.5%	27	6.75%	137	34.25%
	Faculty Subtotal	**312**	**78%**	**88**	**22%**	**400**	**100**%
Level	100	46	11.5%	13	3.25%	59	14.75%
	200	91	22.75%	8	2%	99	24.75%
	300	93	23.25%	21	5.25%	114	28.5%
	400	91	22.75%	37	9.25%	128	32%
	Level Subtotal	**321**	**80.25%**	**79**	**19.75**	**400**	**100**

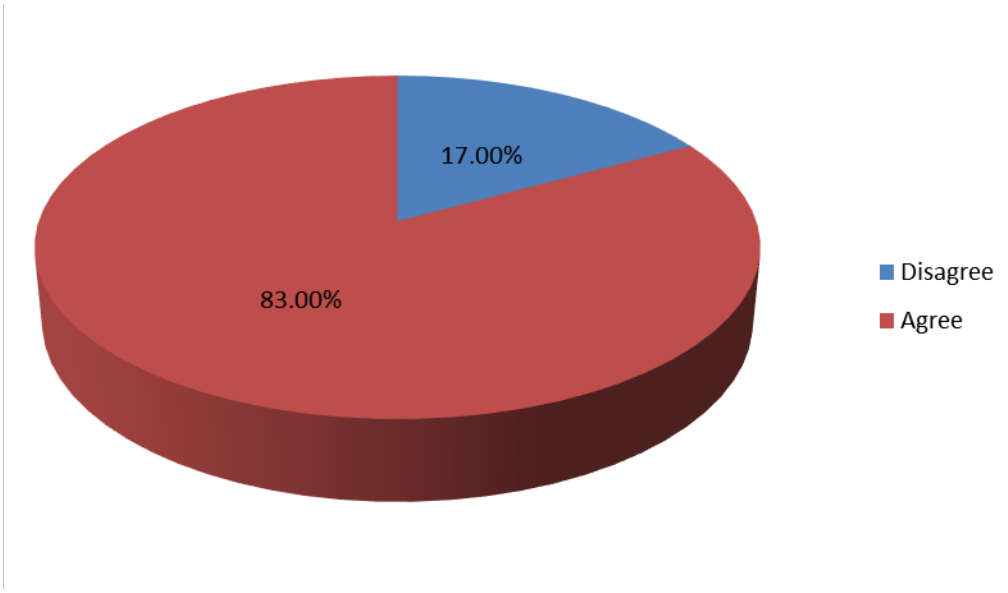
Table 1 shows that 81.0% of respondents agreed that they use language alternation to emphasise key points in conversations. It implies a high level of communicative competence, where speakers consciously manipulate language to achieve academic goals. This reinforces the idea that multilingual speakers possess functional sensitivity to the expressive strengths of each language. An examination of the demographic variables indicates a distinct pattern in how different subgroups utilise language alternation for emphasis. Specifically, students within the Faculty of

Science demonstrate the highest propensity for this practice, which may reflect a greater need to bridge conceptual gaps in highly technical subjects compared to their peers in the Arts and Social Sciences. Furthermore, the nearly equal distribution across genders suggests that the use of code-switching to underscore important conversational points is a universally adopted strategy that transcends male and female communicative differences. This practice, however, can affect formal English proficiency; a heavy reliance on local languages to articulate critical academic points may hinder students' long-term ability to emphasise and defend complex scientific concepts within standard global academic English frameworks.

Table 2: Switch languages to clarify something or to avoid misunderstanding.

RESPONSE OPTION	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE (%)
Disagree	68	17.00%
Agree	332	83.00%
Total	**400**	**100%**

Source: *Field Survey, 2025*



Demographic Variable	Category	Agree Frequency	Agree Percentage	Disagree Frequency	Disagree Percentage	Total Frequency	Total Percentage
Gender	Male	168	42%	44	11%	212	53%
	Female	156	39%	32	8%	188	47%

	Gender Subtotal	**324**	**81**%	**76**	**19**%	**400**	**100**%
Age Group	Below 20	36	9%	9	2.25%	45	11.25%
	21–25	158	39.5%	42	10.5%	200	50%
	26–30	77	19.25%	18	4.5%	95	23.75%
	Above 30	45	11.25%	15	3.75%	60	15%
	Age Subtotal	**316**	**79%**	**84**	**21%**	**400**	**100%**
Faculty	Arts	88	22%	20	5%	108	27%
	Science	123	30.75%	37	9.25%	160	40%
	Social Science	110	27.5%	22	5.5%	132	33%
	Faculty Subtotal	**321**	**80.25**%	**79**	**19.75**	**400**	**100**%
Level	100	48	12%	11	2.75%	59	14.75%
	200	88	22%	11	2.75%	99	24.75%
	300	90	22.5%	24	6%	114	28.5%
	400	96	24%	32	8%	128	32%
	Level Subtotal	**322**	**80**%	**78**	**19.5**%	**400**	**100**%

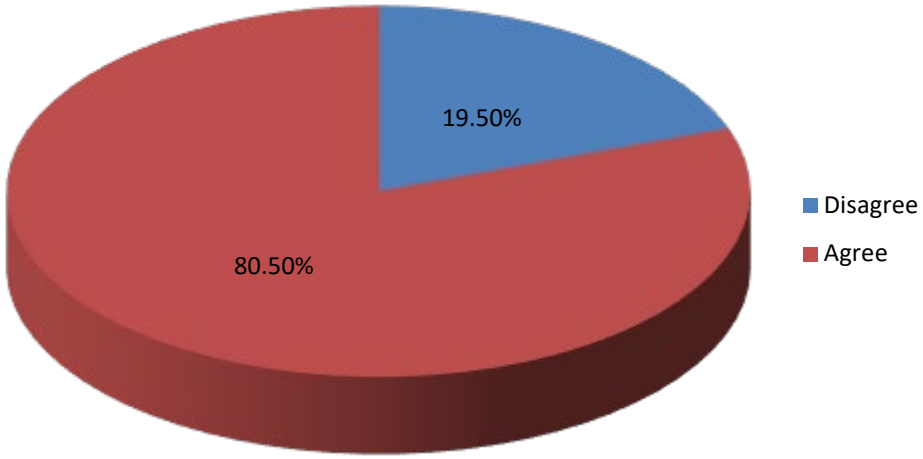
From Table 2, 83.0% of respondents agreed that they switch languages for clarity and to prevent miscommunication. This finding suggests that code-switching functions as a compensatory communication strategy, especially in a linguistically diverse environment. It implies that English alone may not always be sufficient for effective meaning-making, particularly for complex or culturally embedded concepts. Also, the reliance on language alternation for clarity presents observable variations across academic disciplines. Science students are the most frequent adopters of this strategy, likely due to the necessity of decoding complex, abstract course materials into more accessible local codes, a pressure less acutely felt in the Arts faculty. Meanwhile, the balanced gender representation further confirms that the drive to achieve communicative clarity

through code-switching is a shared academic coping mechanism, unaffected by gendered linguistic behaviours.

Table 3: Code-switching helps me be more persuasive or influential in academic discussions.

RESPONSE OPTION	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE (%)
Disagree	78	19.50%
Agree	322	80.50%
Total	**400**	**100%**

Source: *Field Survey, 2025*



Demographic Variable	Category	Agree Frequency	Agree Percentage	Disagree Frequency	Disagree Percentage	Total Frequency	Total Percentage
Gender	Male	161	40.25%	51	12.75%	212	53%
	Female	164	41%	24	6%	188	47%
	Gender Subtotal	**325**	**81.25%**	**75**	**18.75%**	**400**	**100**
Age Group	Below 20	35	8.75%	13	3.25%	48	11.25%
	21–25	143	35.75%	56	14%	199	50%
	26–30	69	17.25%	26	6.5%	95	23.75%
	Above 30	54	13.5%	4	1.%	58	15%

	Age Subtotal	**301**	**75.25%**	**99**	**24.75%**	**400**	**100%**
Faculty	Arts	96	24%	12	3%	108	27%
	Science	115	28.75%	46	11.5%	161	40%
	Social Science	105	26.25 %	26	6.5%	131	33%
	Faculty Subtotal	**316**	**79%**	**84**	**21%**	**400**	**100%**
Level	100	46	11.5%	13	3.25%	59	14.75%
	200	91	22.75%	8	2%	99	24.75%
	300	93	23.25%	21	5.25%	114	28.5%
	400	95	23.75%	33	8.25%	128	32%
	Level Subtotal	**325**	**81.25%**	**75**	**18.75**	**400**	**100**

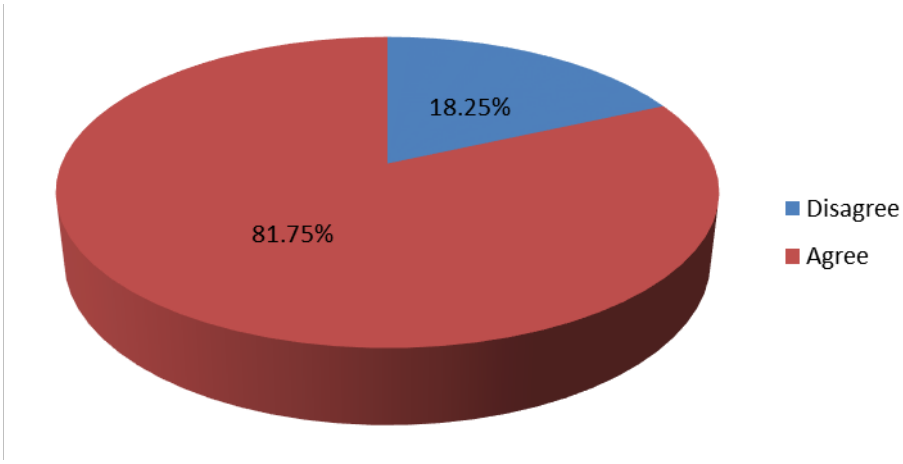
Table 3 indicates that 80.5% of respondents believe code-switching enhances their persuasive abilities in academic contexts. From other variables, a significant portion of this agreement stems from lower-level students (100 and 200 levels), suggesting that newer undergraduates view multilingual ability as a vital discursive advantage when navigating early academic deliberations. Furthermore, males (40.25% of the subset) show a strong inclination toward using language alternation to establish credibility. This indicates that age and academic standing are key determinants in using code-switching to navigate formality and respect. Older students and those in upper academic levels display a significant increase in this behaviour, reflecting a more developed understanding of the university's hierarchical structures and sociolinguistic expectations. This indicates that as students progress through the academic system, their linguistic choices become more calculated to navigate power dynamics between staff and the student body.

Table 4: Switch languages to show respect or formality when addressing certain individuals.

RESPONSE OPTION	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE (%)
Disagree	73	18.25%
Agree	327	81.75%

Total	**400**	**100%**

Source: *Field Survey, 2025*



Demographic Variable	**Category**	**Agree Frequency**	**Agree Percentage**	**Disagree Frequency**	**Disagree Percentage**	**Total Frequency**	**Total Percentage**
Gender	Male	161	40.25%	51	12.75%	212	53%
	Female	164	41%	24	6%	188	47%
	Gender Subtotal	**325**	**81.25%**	**75**	**18.75%**	**400**	**100**
Age Group	Below 20	35	8.75%	13	3.25%	48	11.25%
	21–25	143	35.75%	56	14%	199	50%
	26–30	69	17.25%	26	6.5%	95	23.75%
	Above 30	54	13.5%	4	1.%	58	15%
	Age Subtotal	**301**	**75.25%**	**99**	**24.75%**	**400**	**100%**
Faculty	Arts	96	24%	12	3%	108	27%
	Science	115	28.75%	46	11.5%	161	40%
	Social Science	105	26.25 %	26	6.5%	131	33%
	Faculty Subtotal	**316**	**79%**	**84**	**21%**	**400**	**100%**
Level	100	46	11.5%	13	3.25%	59	14.75%
	200	91	22.75%	8	2%	99	24.75%

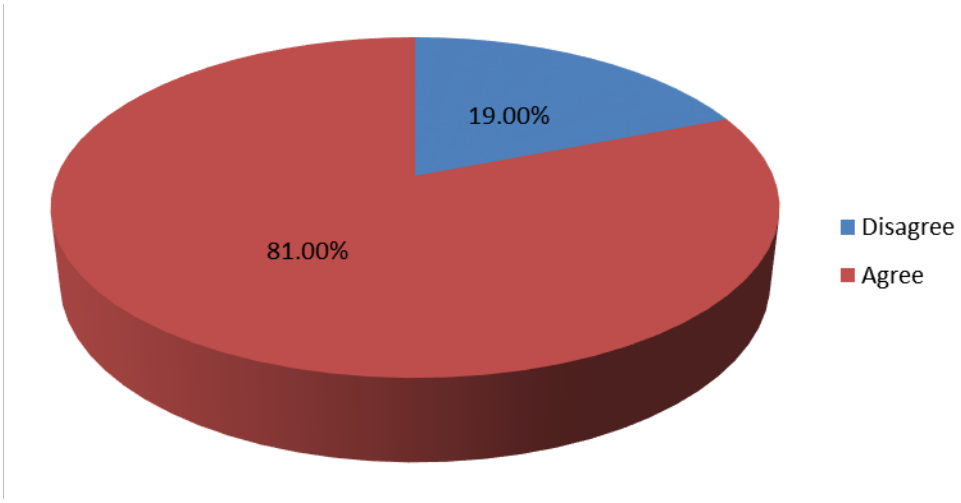
	300	93	23.25%	21	5.25%	114	28.5%
	400	95	23.75%	33	8.25%	128	32%
	Level Subtotal	**325**	**81.25%**	**75**	**18.75**	**400**	**100**

In Table 4, 81.75% of respondents agreed that they adjust their language to convey respect or maintain formality, particularly in academic or hierarchical settings. This implies that students are aware of sociolinguistic norms and power relations. Here, language choice becomes a marker of social positioning, where English is often associated with authority and formality, while local languages signal familiarity. The result suggests that students actively engage in communication accommodation, adjusting their speech to align with expectations of respect and hierarchy. This reinforces the idea that code-switching is not only functional but also socially regulated and context-sensitive. From the table, it is clear that older students (Above 30) and upper-level undergraduates demonstrate a heightened sensitivity to this practice. This suggests that as students mature and progress through the university system, they become more adept at navigating hierarchical relationships, associating English with academic authority and local languages with relational familiarity. However, the strict association of English with academic authority and local languages with relational familiarity serves to reinforce rigid linguistic hierarchies, potentially widening the social distance between university staff and the student body, and perpetuating the notion that indigenous languages lack formal institutional value.

Table 5: I use language alternation to add humour or create a relaxed social atmosphere.

RESPONSE OPTION	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE (%)
Disagree	76	19.00%
Agree	324	81.00%
Total	**400**	**100%**

Source: *Field Survey, 2025*



Demographic Variable	Category	Agree Frequency	Agree Percentage	Disagree Frequency	Disagree Percentage	Total Frequency	Total Percentage
Gender	Male	167	41.75%	47	11.25%	214	53.5%
	Female	161	40.25%	25	6.25%	186	46.5%
	Gender Subtotal	***328***	***82%***	***72***	***18%***	***400***	***100%***
Age Group	Below 20	38	9.5%	7	1.75%	45	11.25%
	21–25	169	42.25%	31	7.75%	200	50%
	26–30	76	19%	19	4.75%	95	23.75%
	Above 30	47	11.75%	13	3.25%	60	15%
	Age Subtotal	***330***	***82.5%***	**70**	***17.5%***	***400***	***100%***
Faculty	Arts	91	22.75%	17	4.25%	108	27%
	Science	131	32.75%	29	7.25%	160	40%
	Social Science	101	27.75%	31	5.25%	132	33%
	Faculty Subtotal	***323***	***80.75%***	**77**	**19.25**	**400**	**100**%
Level	100	53	13.25%	6	1.5%	59	14.75%
	200	87	21.75%	11	2.75%	98	23.75%
	300	91	22.75%	23	5.75%	114	28.5%

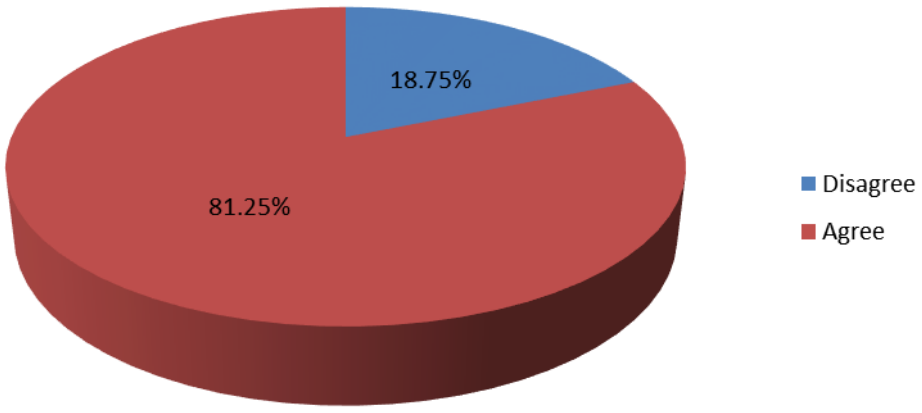
	400	98	25.5%	31	6.75%	129	32.25%
	Level Subtotal	**329**	**82.25%**	**71**	**17.75**	**400**	**100%**

Multilingual practices play a key role in creating socially cohesive environments, with 81.0% of respondents mixing languages to introduce humour or ease tension. Looking at the demographic spread, the use of code-switching and code-mixing for humour is notably concentrated among final-year students and those within the Faculty of Science. This pattern suggests that academic seniority and the high-stress environment of technical disciplines may foster a greater need for linguistic stress relief and informal bonding. Conversely, the uniform application across male and female demographics demonstrates that employing multilingual humour remains a collective mechanism for navigating the social pressures of campus life.

Table 5: I use indigenous languages in conversations to affirm my cultural background.

RESPONSE OPTION	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE (%)
Disagree	75	18.75%
++Agree	325	81.25%
Total	**400**	**100%**

Source: *Field Survey, 2025*



Demographic Variable	Category	Agree Frequency	Agree Percentage	Disagree Frequency	Disagree Percentage	Total Frequency	Total Percentage
Gender	Male	157	40.25%	55	12.75%	212	53%

	Female	161	41%	27	6%	188	47%
	Gender Subtotal	**325**	**81.25**%	**75**	**18.75**%	**400**	**100**
Age Group	Below 20	34	8.5%	11	2.75%	45	11.25%
	21–25	161	40.25%	39	9.75%	200	50%
	26–30	74	18.5%	21	5.25%	95	23.75%
	Above 30	54	13.5%	6	1.5%	60	15%
	Age Subtotal	**323**	**80.75%**	**77**	**19.25**	**400**	**100**%
Faculty	Arts	96	24%	12	3%	108	27%
	Science	118	29.5%	42	10.5%	160	40%
	Social Science	108	27%	24	6%	132	33%
	Faculty Subtotal	**322**	**80.5%**	**78**	**19.5%**	**400**	**100**%
Level	100	46	11.5%	13	3.25%	59	14.75%
	200	91	22.75%	8	2%	99	24.75%
	300	93	23.25%	21	5.25%	114	28.5%
	400	95	23.75%	33	8.25%	128	32%
	Level Subtotal	**325**	**81.25%**	**75**	**18.75**	**400**	**100**

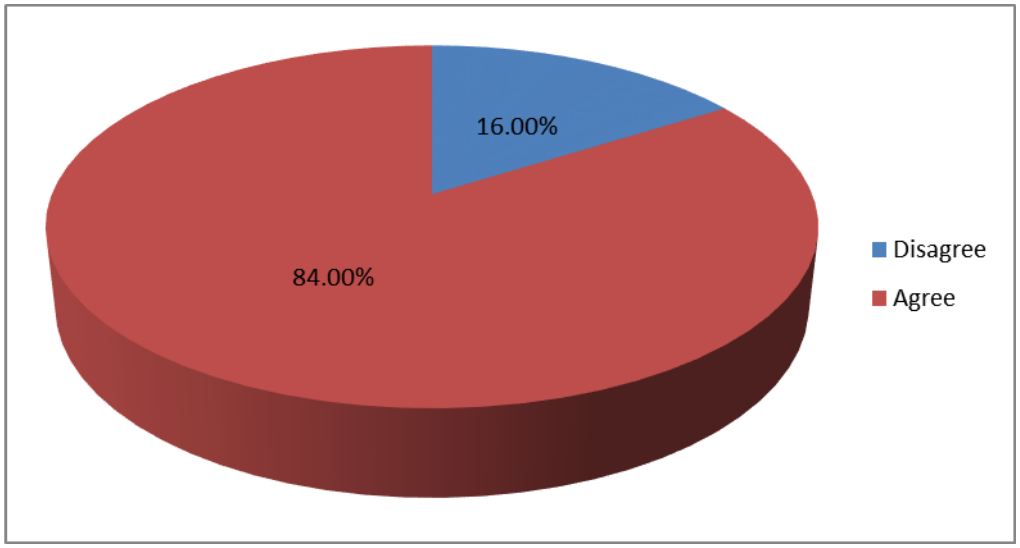
Language alternation functions as a symbolic link to cultural heritage, with 81.25% of students confirming they use indigenous languages to affirm their cultural background and feel connected to their roots. Cultural assertion through language is predominantly championed by the middle-aged bracket of the undergraduate population and is heavily concentrated in the Science and Social Science faculties. This suggests that language use is a deliberate act of identity construction and expression. Students' choice of codes is not meant only to communicate but also to project who they are. This implies resistance to the dominance of English, as students actively maintain their linguistic heritage. This distribution implies that students in these specific cohorts feel a stronger necessity to actively preserve and project their ethnic identities against the homogenising force of

standard academic English. The data reflects a demographic-specific resistance where certain faculties become hotspots for cultural representation and identity management. Conversely, a linguistic divergence for the sake of cultural assertion may reinforce ethnic divides on campus, potentially fragmenting the broader student body if localised identity management overshadows a unified academic culture.

Table 8: Mixing languages helps me maintain relationships with friends from different ethnic groups.

RESPONSE OPTION	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE (%)
Disagree	64	16.00%
Agree	336	84.00%
Total	**400**	**100%**

Source: *Field Survey, 2025*



Demographic Variable	Category	Agree Frequency	Agree Percentage	Disagree Frequency	Disagree Percentage	Total Frequency	Total Percentage
Gender	Male	161	40.25%	51	12.75%	212	53%
	Female	164	41%	24	6%	188	47%

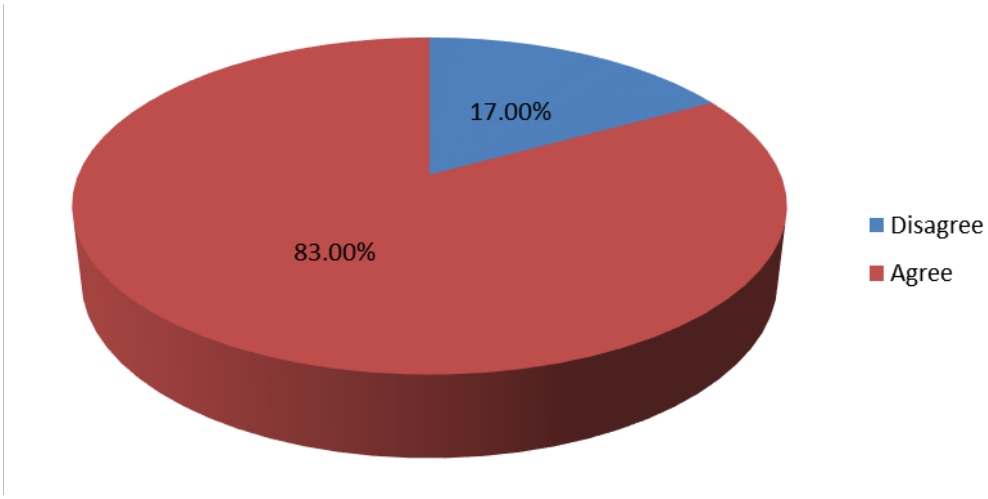
	Gender Subtotal	**325**	**81.25**%	**75**	**18.75**%	**400**	**100**
Age Group	Below 20	34	8.5%	11	2.75%	45	11.25%
	21–25	161	40.25%	39	9.75%	200	50%
	26–30	74	18.5%	21	5.25%	95	23.75%
	Above 30	54	13.5%	6	1.5%	60	15%
	Age Subtotal	**323**	**80.75%**	**77**	**19.25**	**400**	**100**%
Faculty	Arts	96	24%	12	3%	108	27%
	Science	118	29.5%	42	10.5%	160	40%
	Social Science	108	27%	24	6%	132	33%
	Faculty Subtotal	**322**	**80.5%**	**78**	**19.5%**	**400**	**100**%
Level	100	46	11.5%	13	3.25%	59	14.75%
	200	91	22.75%	8	2%	99	24.75%
	300	93	23.25%	21	5.25%	114	28.5%
	400	95	23.75%	33	8.25%	128	32%
	Level Subtotal	**325**	**81.25%**	**75**	**18.75**	**400**	**100**

Code-mixing is considered a vital tool for cross-cultural relationship-building, with 84.0% of respondents supporting this view. The demographic breakdown reflects a consistent distribution, indicating that male and female students across all faculties and academic levels universally utilise this strategy to navigate their heterogeneous environment. Positively, this practice serves as a vital bridge across ethnic and linguistic divides, promoting intercultural competence, social integration, and peaceful coexistence on campus. Nevertheless, some students may not be proficient in some codes used within the institution, and hence may be alienated.

Table 9: I feel more included in group conversations when others switch between English and local languages.

RESPONSE OPTION	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE (%)
Disagree	68	17.00%
Agree	332	83.00%
Total	**400**	**100%**

Source: *Field Survey, 2025*



Demographic Variable	Category	Agree Frequency	Agree Percentage	Disagree Frequency	Disagree Percentage	Total Frequency	Total Percentage
Gender	Male	164	41%	51	12.75%	215	53.75%
	Female	161	40.25%	24	6%	185	46.25%
	Gender Subtotal	**325**	**81.25%**	**75**	**18.75%**	**400**	**100**
Age Group	Below 20	34	8.5%	11	2.75%	45	11.25%
	21–25	161	40.25%	39	9.75%	200	50%
	26–30	74	18.5%	21	5.25%	95	23.75%
	Above 30	54	13.5%	6	1.5%	60	15%
	Age Subtotal	**323**	**80.75%**	**77**	**19.25**	**400**	**100%**
Faculty	Arts	110	24%	17	3%	127	31.75%
	Science	104	29.5%	42	10.5%	146	36.5%
	Social Science	103	27%	24	6%	127	31.75%

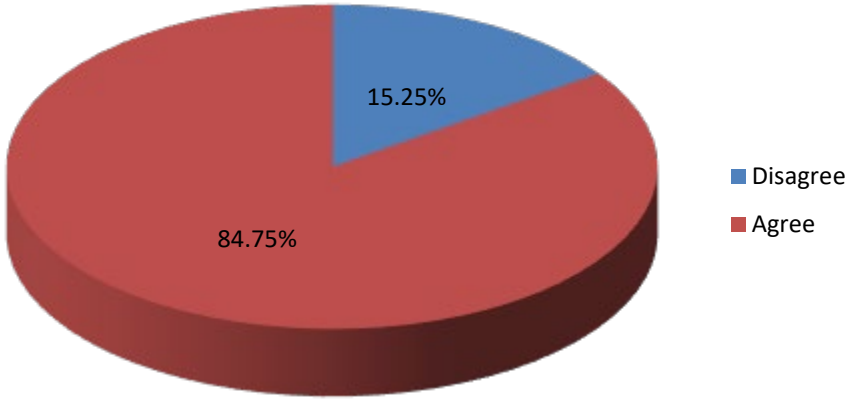
	Faculty Subtotal	**317**	**79.25%**	**83**	**20.75%**	**400**	**100%**
Level	100	38	11.5%	21	3.25%	59	14.75%
	200	85	22.75%	10	2%	95	23.75%
	300	92	23.25%	23	5.25%	115	28.75%
	400	99	23.75%	32	8.25%	131	32.75%
	Level Subtotal	**314**	**78.5%**	**86**	**21.5%**	**400**	**100**

Table 9 reflects that 83.0% of students feel socially included when others use code-switching in conversations. The result from the social variables shows that this sense of inclusion is strong across all academic levels, particularly among upper-level students. This finding indicates that code-switching functions as an inclusive communicative strategy, ensuring that more participants can engage meaningfully in conversations. This trend suggests that as students spend more time in the university environment, they become more deeply integrated into multilingual peer networks, making language alternation a crucial metric for their social belonging. The lack of significant gender disparity further emphasises that linguistic inclusivity is a broad-based demographic need rather than an isolated phenomenon. However, rigid use of a single language (especially English) may lead to exclusion or reduced participation. Therefore, multilingual practices help create a sense of belonging and psychological safety, which is crucial for both social interaction and collaborative learning.

Table 10: Language switching promotes social unity on campus despite cultural differences.

RESPONSE OPTION	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE (%)
Disagree	61	15.25%
Agree	339	84.75%
Total	**400**	**100%**

Source: *Field Survey, 2025*



Demographic Variable	Category	Agree Frequency	Agree Percentage	Disagree Frequency	Disagree Percentage	Total Frequency	Total Percentage
Gender	Male	167	41.75%	47	11.25%	214	53.5%
	Female	161	40.25%	25	6.25%	186	46.5%
	Gender Subtotal	***328***	***82%***	***72***	***18%***	***400***	***100%***
Age Group	Below 20	38	9.5%	7	1.75%	45	11.25%
	21–25	169	42.25%	31	7.75%	200	50%
	26–30	76	19%	19	4.75%	95	23.75%
	Above 30	47	11.75%	13	3.25%	60	15%
	Age Subtotal	***330***	***82.5%***	**70**	***17.5%***	***400***	***100%***
Faculty	Arts	91	22.75%	17	4.25%	108	27%
	Science	131	32.75%	29	7.25%	160	40%
	Social Science	101	27.75%	31	5.25%	132	33%
	Faculty Subtotal	***323***	***80.75%***	**77**	**19.25**	**400**	**100**%
Level	100	53	13.25%	6	1.5%	59	14.75%
	200	87	21.75%	11	2.75%	98	23.75%
	300	91	22.75%	23	5.75%	114	28.5%

	400	98	25.5%	31	6.75%	129	32.25%
	Level Subtotal	**329**	**82.25**%	**71**	**17.75**	**400**	**100**%

In Table 10, 84.75% of respondents believe that switching languages fosters campus-wide unity despite ethnic differences. This belief is common across genders, age groups, and faculties (Science 40%, Social Science 33%, Arts 27%). This suggests that multilingual practices serve as a unifying social force and support integration, countering the idea that linguistic diversity causes division. However, the slightly higher resonance among Science and Social Science students suggests that disciplines fostering intensive collaborative work may naturally encourage a stronger reliance on multilingualism for social cohesion. Overall, the demographic uniformity confirms that code-switching serves as a foundational element of campus unity across diverse student profiles.

Section B: Qualitative Data Analysis and Interpretation

This section discusses qualitative research findings from Kaduna State University involving semi-structured interviews and focus groups. The data analysis included transcription, open and axial coding for category development, and theme refinement, all interpreted through the Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT), which examines how individuals adjust their language to fulfil social expectations and communication goals.

Theme One: Emotional Expression and Affective Clarity

A key theme from the interviews and focus group discussions highlights the role of code-switching and code-mixing in expressing emotions authentically and clearly. Participants noted that their indigenous languages and Pidgin English allows for culturally resonant expressions that conveyed feelings more effectively than English. This strategy was employed in both informal and semi-formal settings, such as peer conversations and social media. When emotions were heightened, individuals instinctively used expressions from Hausa, Pidgin, or their native languages, often incorporating unique interjections and idiomatic phrases. For example, Participant INT003 from the Faculty of Social Sciences remarked:

"When someone says something funny or shocking, it's 'chai' that comes out first. It is not planned, it just happens. If I say 'oh my God' in English, it feels forced. But 'chai'—everyone knows I really mean it."

This sentiment was echoed in FGD1, where Participant FGD1-P05, a 200-level student from the Faculty of Arts, observed:

"Even during study group, when I want to explain something difficult, I will first say 'wallahi' to show I am serious. It carries more weight than just saying 'I swear' in English. Everyone takes you seriously."

Such emotionally charged expressions are examples of what Communication Accommodation Theory describes as affective convergence, a speaker's attempt to match the emotional tone and expectations of their interlocutor. The participants' consistent use of emotionally loaded expressions in their native tongues reflects an effort to make their feelings more accessible and impactful to those around them. This is not merely a stylistic choice but a culturally shaped communicative strategy grounded in shared experience and emotional resonance.

Theme Two: Identity Management and Cultural Assertion

A study on students at Kaduna State University reveals that code-switching and code-mixing are intentional practices used to assert cultural identities. Students switch to their mother tongue, local dialects, or Pidgin English as a way of preserving ethnic identity in a predominantly English academic environment. This practice aligns with the divergence principle of Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT), allowing students to resist the dominance of English, foster self-representation, and enhance cultural visibility. Such cultural assertions were noted to occur more in semi-formal, student-led situations, where there was greater freedom to diverge from strict language conventions. Participant INT010, a final-year student from the Faculty of Social Sciences, observed:

"I don't usually use Hausa in front of lecturers, but when we are presenting to our coursemates or doing tutorials, I start with Hausa sometimes. It makes me feel grounded and gives me confidence."

This insight highlights the way students manage multiple identities through code-switching, using English for academic performance while utilising their local language to express personal or group identity in more informal settings. This strategic language alternation underscores the complexity of identity negotiation in multilingual institutions, revealing that linguistic choices bear symbolic significance, particularly for students from underrepresented communities in formal academic discourse.

Interestingly, some students also used code-switching to resist linguistic dominance or to balance perceived power relations. For example, Participant INT004, a 400-level student from the Faculty of Social Sciences, remarked:

"Sometimes, if I feel that a lecturer or student is looking down on people who don't speak English fluently, I switch into my language to prove a point. It's my way of saying, 'I may not speak perfect English, but I am still intelligent and proud of my background.'"

Such moments of divergence are not about communication breakdown, but about resisting erasure and asserting identity on one's own terms. This reinforces CAT's understanding of divergence as a mechanism for reclaiming linguistic agency and cultural legitimacy. Through language, students at KASU engage in identity management, utilising code-switching and code-mixing not merely as reactions to external stimuli, but as assertions of ethnic pride and cultural authenticity. This sociolinguistic strategy is framed as a means of empowerment, allowing participation in academia while retaining cultural identity. This behaviour aligns with Communication Accommodation Theory, reflecting personal and symbolic choices influenced by various historical and social factors.

Theme Three: Instructional Clarity and Cognitive Processing

One significant theme from the qualitative data is the importance of code-switching and code-mixing in improving instructional clarity and cognitive processing. Participants indicated that their indigenous languages and Pidgin English were vital for understanding challenging academic concepts, particularly during self-study, peer group tutorials, and exam preparation. Many students often thought in their local language before expressing themselves in English, especially with complex theoretical material.

Across both interviews and focus groups, students indicated that this internal linguistic shift was not simply habitual—it was a deliberate learning strategy. Participant INT001, a 200-level student from the Faculty of Science, shared:

"When I am reading something difficult, especially in chemistry, I try to explain it to myself in Hausa first. Once I understand it that way, it becomes easier to remember and to write it in English later."

This behaviour illustrates intrapersonal accommodation, as defined by CAT, where language adjustments facilitate cognitive processing. Unlike interpersonal convergence, which seeks

audience alignment, intrapersonal convergence aligns the speaker's internal thoughts with external academic expectations. For multilingual students, using a familiar language can bridge comprehension and performance gaps.

The theme was particularly strong among students in technical disciplines or courses with abstract content. Participant FGD1-P01, a 100-level student from the Faculty of Social Sciences, explained: *"Our lecturers speak fast and use big grammar. If I try to understand in English only, I get confused. But when I break it down in Yoruba or Pidgin, it becomes clear. That is how I survive in engineering."*

Participants indicated that the classroom setting often dissuades visible code-switching; however, internal or peer-assisted code-switching is essential for effective learning. Students mentioned that when they provide answers in English, the conceptual formulation occurs first in their native language. Participant INT011, a final-year student from the Faculty of Social Sciences, observed:

"Sometimes, I translate questions in my head before answering. It's like a mental rehearsal. I think in Hausa or Pidgin, then change it to English so I can speak in class or write in the exam."

This insight highlights the significant effort multilingual students invest in adapting to formal academic standards amid linguistic diversity. Their strategic code-switching is deliberate, aiding comprehension, retention, and confidence in their academic performance.

Furthermore, on this theme, students noted that collaborative learning, particularly through group discussions and revision sessions, frequently depended on indigenous languages or Pidgin English to clarify and simplify content. Participant FGD2-P04, a student from the Faculty of Arts, stated:

3

"We don't usually speak English during tutorials. We use Pidgin and sometimes Igbo or Hausa, depending on who is there. That's the only way everybody will understand. If you insist on English, some people will just keep quiet and pretend."

This practical peer-level code-switching supports what CAT would classify as relational convergence, where speakers adjust their language to promote mutual understanding and group cohesion. It also suggests that language alternation serves both cognitive and participatory functions, making learning more democratic and less intimidating for those less confident in their use of English.

Notably, Students perceive bilingual literacy as essential for navigating academic tasks rather than undermining standards. However, they are concerned that reliance on indigenous languages could impair their English writing skills in exams. This reveals a tension between comprehension and assessment, aligning with CAT's concept of a push-pull dynamic where students juggle cognitive accommodation in one language while producing outputs in another for institutional requirements. This shows that code-switching and code-mixing are commonly employed by multilingual students of KASU to enhance instructional clarity and cognitive processing. This strategy helps reconcile academic demands with linguistic realities, demonstrating how accommodation functions both socially and psychologically. With this, students are able to thrive within a system that requires linguistic conformity while drawing on their multilingual background for comprehension.

Theme Four: Peer Influence and Social Belonging

Another prominent theme that emerged is that peer networks significantly influence students' language use in informal academic and social contexts. Students adjust their language—whether in English, Pidgin English, or indigenous languages to enhance clarity, foster relationships, and maintain group cohesion. This behaviour aligns with Communication Accommodation Theory, highlighting relational convergence as individuals adapt their speech to minimise social distance. For some students, code-switching is typically driven by social connection rather than conscious planning. Participant INT005, a 400-level student from the Faculty of Sciences, explained:

"When I am with my guys, we speak mostly Pidgin. If you speak too much English, they will just laugh and say you are forming. So to flow well, you have to blend your language with theirs."

This sentiment was echoed in FGD1, where Participant FGD1-P02, a 300-level student from the Faculty of Arts, shared:

"You can't go into a group that is speaking Hausa and start speaking pure English. Even if they don't say it, you'll feel like an outsider. But once you switch, it's like they accept you more."

The above accounts point out that code-switching serves both as a communication tool and a marker of group membership and social adaptability. It helps students establish in-group identity and is often seen as a social skill rather than a linguistic deficiency.

Participants noted a connection between peer language patterns and academic engagement, revealing that in student-led study groups or hostel discussions, the primary language used was

often a blend of English, Pidgin, and local languages, as this mix facilitated better understanding of concepts. Participant FGD2-P06, a student from the Faculty of Social Sciences, explained:
"Even when we are preparing for tests, we don't speak formal English. We use the language we are comfortable with—sometimes Igbo, sometimes Pidgin. Everybody contributes better that way. It is not about impressing; it is about understanding."

This observation highlights the influence of language choice in peer groups on academic participation, noting that students who feel linguistically excluded tend to withdraw from discussions, whereas those comfortable with the group's language are more likely to engage. Consequently, peer-influenced code-switching fosters both social inclusion and academic collaboration.

Theme Five: Cultural Belonging and Group Solidarity

The fifth major theme from the qualitative data highlights that code-switching and code-mixing enhance cultural belonging and group solidarity among Kaduna State University students. Participants noted that using indigenous languages in various settings fostered comfort, identity affirmation, and emotional safety, creating a sense of home and inclusion within the diverse university community.

Students view code-switching as both a communicative habit and a symbolic gesture that reinforces shared identity and group unity, as evident in the interview and focus group data. Participant INT008, a 400-level student from the Faculty of Sciences, shared:
"When I hear someone speak Tiv around me, even if I don't know them, it makes me feel at home. Immediately, I want to talk to them. It's like we already understand each other because we share something deeper."

This sentiment was shared by participants from linguistic minority groups, who felt that the presence of their language in a university setting helped address the invisibility they often faced. Participant FGD2-P01, a student from the Faculty of Social Sciences, noted:
"On campus, English is everywhere, but when we speak our own language—even just small—it reminds us where we come from. It creates that sense of pride and connection."

This behaviour illustrates CAT's concept of symbolic convergence, highlighting that language serves not just as a communication tool but as a means to express shared identity and strengthen

communal bonds. Students noted frequent code-switching in contexts like student associations and informal gatherings to enhance cultural identity and foster group cohesion.

Language alternation was vital for fostering cross-ethnic friendships, with participants noting that mixing languages like English, Hausa, and Pidgin in multi-ethnic groups helped everyone feel represented and valued. Participant INT007, a 300-level student from the Faculty of Science, explained:

"In my department, we are from different parts of Nigeria. So sometimes, I speak Hausa, sometimes Pidgin, sometimes just English. It helps everyone feel included. If I speak only one language, some people will feel left out."

This multilingual flexibility in CAT allows speakers to adjust their linguistic repertoire based on the identities and expectations of their interlocutors. Code-switching and mixing serve as social equalisers, lowering linguistic barriers and fostering a shared cultural space for easier interaction among students.

Language alternation is found to significantly enhance feelings of unity and emotional connection among students during informal campus events, such as sports and religious programs, as they engage in speaking their native languages and hearing familiar dialects. Participant INT009 described a similar experience during student union meetings:

"When we use different languages during union programs, people pay more attention. It shows we respect each other's background. Everyone feels they have a place in the school."

The above responses indicate that code-switching facilitates cultural inclusion and collective identification among students, enhancing communication rather than fragmenting it. Multilingualism fosters respect and mutual recognition within the diverse ethnic landscape of Nigerian universities, promoting openness and cultural sensitivity.

Among first- and second-year students adjusting to university life, familiar linguistic codes from peers and campus spaces significantly help reduce homesickness and foster social confidence. Participant FGD2-P07, a 100-level student from the Faculty of Arts, stated:

"At first, I felt lost. But when I met people from my state, and we started speaking our language, I became more relaxed. I didn't feel like a stranger anymore."

Therefore, code-switching and code-mixing among KASU students are crucial for fostering a culturally affirming and socially inclusive environment. These practices enable students to feel

validated and emotionally connected in a predominantly English-speaking institution. Analysed through Communication Accommodation Theory, these language alternation strategies are symbolic actions that enhance community, promote equity, and sustain cultural memory. The findings emphasise that code-switching enriches academic life as a dynamic expression of identity and solidarity in a diverse linguistic context.

Discussion of Findings

This study illustrates that language code-switching and code-mixing serve as a deliberate tool for communicative efficiency rather than a random linguistic breakdown. While the broad statistical trends indicate that students regularly rely on language mixing to clarify intentions, emphasise points, and inject humour into conversations, the qualitative insights reveal how this practice achieves affective convergence. Emotional expressions, cultural idioms, and colloquial exclamations carry an interpersonal depth and immediacy that formal English often fails to replicate. However, a significant drawback emerges within this social dynamic. When dominant regional codes like Hausa are used to drive humour and group bonding, they introduce a distinct mechanism of exclusion. Non-Hausa-speaking students face inadvertent marginalisation, and hence, what is intended to be a unifying social tool becomes an invisible boundary that separates in-groups from out-groups during informal campus interactions.

In academic contexts, the study highlights a strong connection between comprehension of concepts and multilingual flexibility. Quantitative patterns show that alternating codes enhance peer persuasiveness and collaborative learning, while the qualitative evidence clarifies that students engage in intrapersonal accommodation. They internalise complex academic concepts by translating them mentally into familiar indigenous languages or Pidgin English before reframing them for formal output. While this strategy democratises classroom discourse and lowers the performance anxiety associated with strict English-only instruction, it creates a long-term linguistic vulnerability. An over-reliance on local languages for internal processing can mask deficiencies in technical English proficiency. This mismatch becomes highly problematic during formal examinations and standardised assessments, where students must articulate complex, abstract, and theoretical ideas strictly within global academic English frameworks.

Language choice on campus is heavily tied to identity negotiation and situational awareness. Students frequently project their cultural backgrounds by embedding indigenous phrases into daily speech, using linguistic divergence as a tool for cultural self-assertion and resistance against

cultural erasure. On the contrary, there is a clear situational shift toward standard English when interacting with institutional authority figures, such as lecturers, to signal respect and maintain formality. While this shows high sociolinguistic competence, it inadvertently sustains an asymmetrical linguistic hierarchy. By reserving standard English exclusively for intellect, respect, and institutional authority, while confining indigenous tongues to informal or purely casual spheres, the campus community implicitly devalues local languages, reinforcing the notion that they lack formal academic and institutional worth.

Finally, the study demonstrates that multilingual practices are vital for building community within a highly diverse student population. The interview responses point to a widespread perception that language alternation bridges cultural gaps and builds social cohesion, while the thematic data highlight how peer expectations drive this behaviour. Students actively modify their linguistic choices toward relational convergence to secure a sense of peer validation and avoid social isolation. For newer students, hearing familiar linguistic codes creates a form of symbolic convergence that cushions the transition to university life, mitigates homesickness, and establishes a safe space. Profiles of campus interaction reveal, however, that this remains a double-edged sword; if these linguistic boundaries are not navigated mindfully, the reliance on distinct localised languages can trigger ethnic clustering, ultimately replacing institutional unity with fragmented sub-groups.

Conclusion

This study investigates the communicative functions and social significance of code-switching and code-mixing among undergraduate students at Kaduna State University. Anchored in the Communication Accommodation Theory, the research provides empirical evidence that language alternation in a multilingual academic setting is not an indicator of linguistic deficiency, but a complex, rule-governed communicative resource. A key contribution of this research is demonstrating how students utilise these linguistic strategies to successfully navigate institutional demands, utilising intrapersonal accommodation to enhance cognitive processing and instructional clarity. Furthermore, the study contributes to sociolinguistic understanding by showing how language mixing empowers students to manage their identities, assert cultural heritage, and foster campus-wide social unity.

Despite these contributions, the findings highlight potential limitations regarding the broader implications of these linguistic practices. While code-switching fosters immediate in-group solidarity, relying on specific local codes can inadvertently alienate and exclude non-native speakers during informal campus socialisation. Furthermore, utilising linguistic divergence primarily for cultural assertion carries the risk of reinforcing ethnic divides, which may fragment the broader student body. The study also acknowledges that a heavy reliance on indigenous languages to articulate academic concepts may conceal deeper issues in language policy and hinder students' long-term proficiency in standard global academic English.

Building upon these findings, future research should explore the integrated, long-term effects of code-switching and code-mixing on formal academic performance and institutional language policies in Northern Nigeria. Because students expressed concerns about the tension between conceptual comprehension and formal assessment, further studies could investigate how reliance on indigenous languages impacts students' English writing skills during examinations. Finally, subsequent research should more critically examine the negative consequences of language alternation, such as the reinforcement of linguistic hierarchies and social exclusion, to help develop more balanced and inclusive pedagogical frameworks for universities where many languages are spoken.

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Representations of Memory as Mediator of Postcolonial Trauma in Aminatta Forna's *The Memory of Love*

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Abstract

Existing studies have shown memory to be inseparable from the discourse of trauma. Memory has been treated mainly as a repository on which trauma thrives. However, its role as an interpretive and negotiating tool through which traumatic experiences within the postcolonial context are judged is often overlooked. Therefore, this paper examines how individual and collective memories are used to interpret characters' traumatic experiences in Aminatta Forna's The Memory of Love, using Pederson's theory of literary trauma as a framework. The novel is analysed through close reading. The study contributes to the argument that trauma is representable by showing ways in which memory is used to augment the narration of trauma within the postcolonial context.

***Keywords**: Postcolonial trauma, memory, narration, representation, mediator*

Introduction

Trauma is a broad subject and can be interpreted in various ways. However, within the postcolonial discourse, trauma, more specifically, is a collective, cultural, memory-driven experience of colonial violence and imperial histories of non-Western cultures (Andermahr 2). Postcoloniality as a concept overlaps with discourses on trauma (Ward 5), while trauma itself thrives on memory (Caruth 4). Postcolonial African literature often depicts dispossession, sociopolitical instability, cultural dislocation, historical violence and other expressions of trauma (Ward 14; Ajibola 2). Like many postcolonial African novels, Aminatta Forna's novel, *The Memory of Love*, depicts representations of traumatic events which characters not only experience, but interpret through cultural memory. Forna's novel is narrated against the backdrop of the Sierra Leone decade-long civil war, which itself is an expression of postcolonial trauma. Postcolonial trauma is not only the

kind of trauma that reminds the victim society of the atrocities of colonialism and imperialism, it also embodies the events, failures and processes that significantly affect the collective identity of the victim society owing to the residue of colonialism and the impact of imperialism (Visser 110). Forna's novel narrates experiences after the Sierra Leone civil war and interrogates the social and psychological effects of violence on individuals and the entire country. While novels like Alejandro Zambra's *Ways of Going Home* and Mbolo Mbue's *How Beautiful We Were* have engage the subject of memory as tool for building cultural identity, Forna's novel bears witness to the role of memory as a trauma site, and the power of narrative testimony to edit memory for self-exoneration as illustrated through the character of Elias Cole who attempts to hide his role in the student riot and the breaking of his family by telling his doctor only selected events from his past. Drawing from Joshua Pederson's literary trauma theory, this study carries out a qualitative analysis of Forna's novel for the purpose of examining the role of characters' memories in interpreting their experiences of postcolonial trauma.

Existing scholarship on the subject of memory in postcolonial trauma novels have examined the roles of memory as a repository of the past, a tool for preserving and erasing colonial histories (Mechkarini, Rutherford and Sebe 831), the transformation of traumatic memory into narrative memory (Mengel and Borgaza 62), impacts of colonialism on collective memory (Shamsan 29), and the intergenerational and intercultural nature of memory (Saxena 11). However, scant attention has been paid to the role of memory as a negotiation tool between the past and the present on the one hand, and self and community on the other hand, which are depicted simultaneously as memory's role in shaping characters' traumatic experiences in Forna's novel. By addressing this, this paper engages the concept of memory within the framework of trauma as an ethically sensitive negotiator of position as either perpetrator or victim, specifically in postcolonial trauma novels.

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

The centrality of memory to trauma has been engaged over time by various scholars who have established the relationship between the two concepts. The treatment of memory as an interpretive and negotiating tool within the purview of postcolonial trauma is often based on the collective nature of the traumatic experience. Therefore, collective memory correlates with postcolonial trauma discourse the way individual memory correlates with individual trauma in the larger trauma discourse. Brewin argues that memory is at the centre of the cause and healing of trauma, and that through intrusive thoughts, recollections and flashbacks, materials of traumatic memories are often

brought back to the mind (15). Crespo and Fernandez-Lansac examined the function of memory in recalling and narrating traumatic experiences. They found that although traumatic memories are fragmented and intense, narration from memory has therapeutic effects and fosters recovery (154). Cornejo and Badilla assert that collective memory is a significant factor in the interpretation of large-scale and historical trauma, for social healing and justice (2).

Literary trauma theory responds to the claim that "trauma creates a speechless fright that divides or destroys identity" (Balaev 149) and resists all forms of representation, including narration. It, therefore, is concerned with the literary depictions and expressions of trauma. Balaev defines trauma as "a person's emotional response to an overwhelming event that disrupts previous ideas of an individual's sense of self and the standards by which one evaluates society" (150). She also defined the trauma novel as "a work of fiction that conveys profound loss or intense fear on individual or collective levels" (150).

Caruth's work is taken to be a seminal and foundational work in the development of literary trauma theory. In this work, she examined the story of Torquato Tasso's Tancred and Clorinda and noted that after Tancred unwittingly sliced a tree with his sword after realising he had mistaken his lover, Clorinda, for an enemy soldier and killed her, "a voice that is paradoxically released through the wound" (Craps 15).

McNally, a trauma psychologist, contradicts some of the founding assumptions on which trauma theory was built. Trauma theory, from Caruth's claims, is built on the assumption that trauma is inexpressible and impossible to represent due to the effect the traumatic experience had on the mind of the victim, which causes a dissociation of memory from speech. McNally (29), in his *Remembering Trauma*, however, maintains that not only can trauma be remembered, but it can also be well represented in narration. Pederson observes that "As his critique unfolds, we also realise that McNally's work undermines the two most crucial tenets of Caruth's literary theory of trauma: the notion that traumatic memories are "unregistered" or 'unclaimed,' and the idea that traumatic memories elude straightforward verbal representation" (336). He maintains that traumatic experiences can be appropriately articulated verbally, which contradicts the argument about the fragility of traumatic memory. McNally places the notion of distorted memory of traumatic experiences against empirical findings and faults it, arguing that it is theoretical and divergent from empirical reality. Pederson explains that

> McNally disagrees, again citing numerous studies by other specialists for support: "Contrary to van der Kolk's theory, trauma does not block the formation of narrative memory. That memory for trauma can be expressed as physiologic reactivity to traumatic reminders does not preclude its being expressed in narrative as well (337).

In agreement with McNally, Pederson (338) presents three dicta that summarise his position: first, trauma is in the text itself rather than gaps in the text. Secondly, trauma can be found in augmented details in the text, and thirdly, temporal, ontological and physical distortions are veritable signs of the presence of trauma in a text. This implies that not only is it possible to represent trauma in a text, but it is also possible to make vivid and accurate, rather than vague, representations of such traumatic experiences.

Methodology

This study adopts the qualitative research method. Close reading grounded within the theoretical scope of trauma and postcolonial studies is deployed in gathering data. Using this method, the study examines how memory is used to alter history. Theoretical insights from trauma and postcolonial studies guided the analysis of the selected novel. The novel was chosen for its vivid depiction of memory as interpretive and narrative, as it is used to negotiate postcolonial trauma. Gayatri Spivak's notion of subalternity is adopted in this study to augment the discussion of memory's role in interpreting trauma in the selected text and to situate the study specifically within the confines of postcolonial trauma within the larger trauma framework.

Result and Discussion: the role of witnessing in the interpretation of trauma

In Aminatta Forna's *The Memory of Love*, Elias Cole narrates his past ordeal to his doctor, Adrian, who has come to Sierra Leone to spend some time. Elias is arrested and questioned after publishing an academic article suggesting policy change. This is where he meets Johnson, a cold police officer, to whom he later gives the names of students responsible for a protest on campus.

Kai, a surgeon, colleague and friend to Adrian, struggles with his trauma of the war during which he loses his sister and her husband. Although Kai tries to drown his thoughts in work, he still finds his mind consistently troubled by the growing number of psychiatric patients. Many of them are boys and young men who committed crimes during the war and lost their minds to drug addiction after the war.

Agnes, one of the psychiatry patients in the hospital where Kai works, experiences fugue shortly after the war. During the war, she lost two daughters and her husband. After the war, her first daughter returns home pregnant with her husband's killer. The novel ends with the death of Nenebah while she is pregnant with Adrian's child. Adrian returns to his failed marriage in England, and Kai is determined to survive amidst the chaos in Sierra Leone.

The temporal setting of the novel suggests that the country had been independent for a while. However, the novel makes other scant allusions to the legacy of colonialism in the country after independence. The civil war in the novel has its historical context in the civil war that occurred in Sierra Leone between 1991 and 2002. The civil war is closely tied to colonialism and is justified as a postcolonial trauma based on the ripple effects it had on collective memory after independence. Having been a colony between 1786 and 1808 (Land and Shocket 2), a protectorate between 1896 and 1936 (Ochiai 3), and a country since 1961, Sierra Leone has experienced trauma in different phases. The war was between the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) and the government of Sierra Leone led by Joseph Momoh at the time (Shaffer 590). The RUF were supported by the then Liberian president, Charles Taylor, who deployed soldiers in the National Patriotic Front of Liberia to boost the numerically weak RUF (Shaffer 588).

The arrest of Elias Cole also depicts the state of the country at the time. Johnson, a shrewd police officer who delights in playing with the minds of the people he interrogates, speaks with Elias after his arrest. Their conversation suggests that Johnson thinks of Elias as a political troublemaker or activist because of one of the papers he submits for faculty publication titled "Reflections on Changing Political Dynamics" (221), which proposes some review of the constitution. Johnson's suspicion of Elias as either an activist or a supporter of activism indicts the government for oppressing the people. The arrest of Elias further strengthens this indictment of the government as a body that silences the voice of activism, usually regarded as the voice of the people. This reflects Spivak's concept of subalternity, which she discusses as the exclusion and marginalisation of certain groups from dominant structures. Although Sierra Leone is an independent country in this novel, many voices of political activism are silenced. This is illustrated in both Julius' arrest and Ade's secret visit to Saffia many years after Julius' death. Julius is arrested and kept in custody because he is assumed to be a part of a political opposition against the government, whereas Julius is only a bold and carefree academic who expresses his voice through his academic publications

and activities on campus. Ade's visit also reveals that he escapes the country because he is also a target of the government.

Mamakay's explanation of the war to Adrian also shows that it was deeply political. She tells him that "'It was rage. It wasn't a war, what happened here, in the end. It was fury '" (Forna 266). She helps him to understand that the people were angry at their leaders for their uncomfortable lives, and although they take it out on thieves now and then, they eventually turn on the government in a civil war.

Narration and Traumatic Memory in Forna's *The Memory of Love*

Forna's novel depicts how the civil war traumatises characters. The civil war itself is a kind of postcolonial trauma because it is the response of rebel groups against neocolonialism, which not only reminds them of their colonial experiences, but also suppresses them politically, economically and socially. In representing trauma, Forna's novel weaves it intricately with dreams and other activities of the mind. This portrayal reechoes Barrett's claim that memories of past events often return in dreams (3).

This study adopts Pederson's literary trauma theory to analyse Aminatta Forna's *The Memory of Love*. Pederson's position against the submissions of literary trauma theorists like Caruth (1996) and Freyd (1996) hinges on McNally's argument against traumatic amnesia (96). Balaev (159) supports Pederson's claim that because trauma defies linguistic expression, it is represented in narratives with gaps, silence and other rhetorical strategies.

Traumatic memory often refers to the memory of a traumatic event. As a kind of memory, it is the recall of an event as though it is happening in the present. Schachtel defines memory as "a function of the living personality [which] can be understood as a capacity for the organisation and reconstruction of past experiences and impressions in the service of present needs, fears, and interests" (14). Van der Kolk states that traumatic memories are problematic because they are unreliable (59). But traumatic memory is not only unreliable, but it is also intrusive (Ehlers and Tanja, 405). For instance, the traumatic memory of Abass' father's death intrudes on Kai's sleep. The narrating voice notes that "Kai wasn't woken by dreams about the bridge, or even a dream at all. But a memory, a sudden intrusion of conscious thought upon his world of sleep" (300). In Elias' recount of the first time he makes love to Saffia, he also says that the memory of hearing Saffia and Julius make love the day of the first moon-landing is intrusive: "Instead I am remembering a day. A day when I drove from the university campus to a pink house on the hill

with a truckload of chairs for a party that evening. I cannot halt the memory. It enters my brain like a thief, slipping like the moonlight behind the blind" (Forna 304-305).

McNally undermines the idea that traumatic experiences significantly distort the memory of such experiences and impact narration with the impossibility of representation. He argues that traumatic experiences are remarkable enough to be remembered and narrated as they happened. The character of Elias Cole appears to give credence to McNally and Pederson's claim, going by how detailed and confident he is in his narration. He narrates each of his losses and how he walks through each of the experiences, leaving nothing out. Elias' careful editing of his narration from memory is possible because he remembers every detail of the events. Despite his intention to use narration to buy himself a good face, Elias' trauma was evident in his narration. The collective trauma of the society is also captured in Elias, Agnes and Kai's narrations.

In discussing the rationale behind the critique of trauma studies by postcolonial theorists and the contributors to the 2008 special issue of *Studies in the Novel*, Visser (2015) submits a different view on Caruth's assertion that the wounds of trauma are unknowable and inexpressible. Her interpretation of the assertion moves away from the notion of knowing and expressing traumatic wounds to knowing and expressing these wounds exactly as they happened. She argues that "Caruth's focus on the impossibility of exact and "ultimate" knowing does not oppose or contradict the notion that narrative is curative, and that trauma victims may come to terms with their traumatic experiences" (255). She supports her argument from trauma literature like Toni Morrison's novel *Home* and submits that literature "affirms growth and health to emphasise that recovery, despite traumatic wounding, is possible, and that trauma, although it stands outside precise representation, can be integrated" (255).

Visser also notes that debunking the existing notion that trauma is resistant to representation is an important part of the endeavour to decolonise trauma studies (252). Decolonising trauma studies is not only about making trauma studies accommodate the wounds of postcolonial societies, or an effort to fight for the recognition of non-Western cultures within trauma studies, it rather involves upturning the Eurocentric undertones of the tenets of the original theory. The emphasis of trauma studies, which is heavily influenced by Freudian perspectives on trauma, melancholia and stasis as the defining characteristics of the post-traumatic stage, makes postcolonial theorists reject or critique it. They argue that trauma can be cured by literature/narrative. Trauma studies, which has been accused of "threaten[ing] to reproduce the very Eurocentrism that lies behind those histories"

(Rothberg 28) that it claims to address, include the conversation of the possibility of healing trauma. Narratives that address colonial and postcolonial atrocities have also depicted the role of the narrative in the healing of these wounds. Her position on the matter suggests that she opposes the argument that trauma can be healed through the strategic use of narrative. To strengthen her argument, she refers to "Susan Y. Najita's *Decolonizing Cultures in the Pacific* initially [which] underwrites Caruth's rejection of narratives of recovery, which Najita terms the "fetishised narrative of complete recuperation" ([18], p. 63)" (256).

Ifowodo's position on the "knowability" (127) of trauma runs contrary to Caruth's and aligns more with McNally's and Pederson's. He states that "trauma is not beyond but is merely a more complex form of experience requiring a supple but equally complex theory to elicit its cognitive dimensions" (124-125). He argues further that instead of concentrating on theories that address or attempt to remedy the "unrepresentability" or "unknowability" of trauma, what should be the focus of trauma (and literary) theorists is "an adequate theory of reference" (127), for reference expresses the relation between language or any symbolic system and significant constitutive features of the world" (125). Leys's submission is in tandem with McNally and Pederson's. She notes that language can attest to the horrors of trauma, instead of opposing it (22). This implies that the horrors of trauma can be described in language and depicted in narration. The accuracy of the narration may be debatable, however.

Apart from foregrounding distressing traumatic experiences like deaths, destruction of properties, madness, protests, and sudden arrests, the novel portrays and engages the subject of postcolonial trauma by emphasising the significance of symbolic representation, narrative structures and how language is used in narrating traumatic experiences. From Elias' detailed narration of events, the novel suggests that memories of traumatic events can be recalled. McNally only critiqued the notion of traumatic amnesia, he did not quite argue against the fragmentary nature of traumatic memory owing to the intensity of the emotional and psychological effects. He argued instead that it is possible to recollect memories of traumatic events. However, Elias' memory of the traumatic events he narrated appears to suggest that traumatic memory, especially insidious trauma like the trauma of colonialism or a civil war, can be recollected in profound details.

Despite the seeming accuracy and detail of Elias' memory, his trauma finds expression in the structure of his narrative. The novel employs a narrative structure of time shifts and multiple narrative viewpoints. The narrative voice shifts between the author and Elias, and without prior

warning, the reader stumbles from one person's narration into the other and is only able to tell the difference from the information that is disclosed. The narrative styles reinforce the trauma of Forna's novel. The two narrators- Elias and an omniscient narrator- both bring home the trauma of the novel in their unique ways. While Elias relates his trauma in his stories, the presence of the omniscient narrator aligns with Morag's observation of a no-one's-narrative-view in trauma cinema, which is used to also accentuate trauma in films (97). The narration also shifts frequently from one point in the present to another in the past. An example is when a kite flies past the window as Adrian checks on Elias his patient, and seeing that he appeared to remember something when he sees the kite, he asks if the kite means anything to him. Elias, therefore, begins to describe his first kite, which his father bought for him, how he was forced to give it to his brother and how his brother becomes an invalid. The narration, therefore, takes a nonlinear approach, reflecting the fragmentation of traumatic memory instead of narrative gaps, echoing Pederson's argument

> … critics seeking to engage trauma in literature should turn their focus from gaps in the text to the text itself as the first generation of trauma theorists subscribe to an understanding of trauma as unspeakable, they gravitate toward textual lacunae in their readings. They are put in the quixotic position of searching for textual evidence of things that cannot be spoken. However, McNally's research suggests that traumatic memories are both memorable and speakable. Hence, a new generation of trauma theorists should emphasise both the accessibility of traumatic memory and the possibility that victims may construct reliable narrative accounts of it (338).

The narrative approach in the novel also buttresses Pederson's argument that narration can augment memory (339). This sharply contradicts the existing notion that traumatic memories are fickle, fragile, and hence vulnerable to manipulation and distortion. Pederson, quoting McNally, submits that "emotional stress enhances memory for the central features of the stressful experience. Stress does not impair memory; it strengthens it" (62). He agrees and further submits that "Traumatic memories, then, are not elusive or absent; they are potentially more detailed and more powerful than normal ones" (339).

The bulk and detail of Elias' narration totally contrast with what some trauma theorists like Caruth and Freyd would have expected from a victim of trauma. Pederson submits that instead of seeking a dearth of narration, critics should pay attention to an overload of narration (339). This implies that the victim of trauma is not only able to remember and narrate with words the traumatic

memory, but they are also able to narrate in detail and to recall sensory information, which further agrees with McNally's argument that the remarkable nature of the traumatic event is what makes it memorable rather than the opposite (30). Pederson submits that

> readers looking for representations of trauma may turn not to textual absence but to textual overflow, to event descriptions replete with detail. Further, as the readings below demonstrate, traumatic memory is often multi-sensory; victims may record not only visual cues, but aural, olfactory, tactile, and gustatory ones as well (339).

Conclusion

This study argues that memory is not merely a repertoire of past events but an interpretive mechanism by which characters in Aminatta Forna's *The Memory of Love* assess and negotiate post-war realities in postcolonial contexts. By using Pederson's literary trauma theory to analyse the trauma of civil war in the novel, this study demonstrated that trauma is recoverable and representable in augmented detail. This study, therefore, contributes to the discourse of memory within the framework of postcolonial trauma by portraying it as a concept that is more than a trauma site and as a mediator of the meaning of postcolonial trauma experiences.

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Sociopragmatic Orientations of Politeness Strategies in Chatham House Interviews of Selected Nigerian 2023 Presidential Election Candidates

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Abstract

This article examines politeness strategies deployed by Peter Obi and Bola Ahmed Tinubu in 2023 Chatham House interviews from a pragmatic perspective. Most of the extant engagements of these interviews tended towards general features of political communication, such as rhetorical strategies, framing, and issue positioning, without an in-depth examination of sociopragmatic orientations in which the political actors employ politeness strategically to achieve their communicative objectives. Geoffrey Leech's Politeness Principle and other pragmatic concepts served as the framework. Data were purposively gathered from the Chatham House interviews of Bola Ahmed Tinubu (December 22nd, 2022) and Peter Obi (January 16th, 2023), aired on YouTube (Arise TV). Findings of the study reveal four sociopragmatically constructed politeness maxims deployed by Obi and Tinubu. These are tact, generosity, modesty, and dere-responsibilisation-oriented maxim, deployed to convince Nigerians of their abilities to deliver unifying governance and adhere to the rule of law if elected as president of Nigeria. The two presidential candidates reveal specific areas of divergence and convergence in their linguistic choices while responding to questions during the Chatham House interviews to mitigate their face and that of the audience. Sociopragmatically oriented strategies of politeness offer a great privilege to political actors' identity. The study therefore recommends that public figures should equip themselves with politeness tactics to foreground their desired identity and project themselves as acceptable leaders in society.

Keywords*: Sociopragmatics, Politeness strategies, Dere-responsibilisation, Chatham House Interviews, Peter Obi and Ahmed Tinubu*

Background of the Study

Social-pragmatic orientations of politeness strategies encompass how speakers adjust their language based on social context, power dynamics and cultural norms to manage interpersonal relationships and "face" (self-esteem). These strategies, which are often classified into positive, negative, bald on-record, or off-record techniques, are chosen based on social distance, relative

power and the weight of the imposition, aiming to minimise conflict or show respect. Brown & Levinson (1987, p. 55).

Language is a phenomenon which continues to occupy a pride of place in the affairs of men. It can be rightly argued that the ability to sustain or threaten the peace, unity and stability of human society depends largely on the adequate or inadequate deployment of this divine linguistic ability. Human language operates in two important forms of usage: the spoken and written, with each form possessing different characteristics. According to Lemke (2005:7), communication is described as the social activity of making meaning with language and other symbolic systems in some particular kind of situation or setting. Lemke's view immediately raises the consciousness that language is one of the many ingredients required for effective communication. While the foregoing describes communication in relation to the context of usage, Lemke (2010:21) explained communication as a process which transfers information, messages, thoughts and ideas from a sender through a channel to a receiver. Thus, in a communicative act, the speaker considers the receiver in crafting his/her message. This viewpoint underlies the fact that humans have the unique ability to spice a communicative act with the necessary linguistic ingredients to ensure the success of the communicative activity.

One important question that has continually triggered academic interest among language scholars is the need to unravel the different underlying motives behind our use of language. In other words, language scholars have not only identified the creative tendencies of human language but have gone steps further by identifying and unraveling the pattern of usage and the attendant variables that contribute to the so-called linguistic creativity in a particular discourse genre. Focusing on the importance of language in political communication, Teng (2015) argued that every political objective- the articulation of a candidate's ideology as well as the superiority of his/her political arguments can only be expressed through the instrumentality of language. It is therefore apt to claim that in politics, language is actually deployed beyond its primary objectives of describing and explaining events. Its application extends to the secondary level, where political views and ideas are created. Political activities can be viewed as covering a wide range of communicative events.

Politeness, as conceptualised by Geoffrey Leech, plays a pivotal role in maintaining social harmony and navigating sensitive interactions. The Politeness Theory, which centres on the concept of "face," offers a framework for understanding how individuals mitigate Face-

Threatening Acts (FTAs) through strategies. This is particularly relevant in politics, where contentious topics risk damaging public faces.

Despite the extensive research on rhetorical strategies in political communication, there is limited exploration into how politeness strategies are deployed by political actors to navigate challenging questions and preserve their public persona. In high-stakes settings like international interviews, such as those conducted at the Chatham House, these strategies are even more critical as they shape not only domestic but also global perceptions.

The 2023 Nigerian presidential election highlighted the importance of effective political discourse. Two prominent candidates, Bola Ahmed Tinubu and Peter Obi, drew international attention for their distinct leadership styles and policies. Tinubu, noted for his economic reforms in Lagos State and strong political base, faced allegations of corruption and questions about his qualifications. Obi, on the other hand, earned recognition for his pragmatic approach and appeal among the youths, challenging the status quo as a Labour Party candidate.

Their interviews at Chatham House, a global platform known for candid discourse on pressing issues, provided a unique opportunity to analyse how both candidates employed politeness strategies to articulate their policies and manage face threatening acts, FTAs. These interviews presented both opportunities to connect with a global audience and challenges in navigating tough questions while preserving their political narratives.

This study, therefore, seeks to fill a gap in the literature by critically and pragmatically examining the sociopragmatics of politeness strategies employed by the two political actors during their Chatham House interviews. The study draws its resources from the frameworks of Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory and Leech's principles of politeness as it aims to provide insights into how politeness functions in Nigerian political discourse within a high-stakes, culturally diverse context.

Statement of the Problem

Nigeria has witnessed continuous democratic governance since 1994, after the return of Democracy from military rule. During that period, different governments were brought into power through elections and electioneering campaigns. However, thus far, violence usually erupts while politicians engage in political campaigns, as a result of which private and public properties are wasted, people's self-worth is compromised, long-established relationships are broken, and

sometimes even lives are lost. These occurred as a result of the use of provocative language that stirred violent and unlawful behaviour for political reasons.

Over the years, existing literature (Adegbija; 2004: Ayoola, 2019: Eiloghosa, 2024: Lydia & Mowarin, 2024; Oduola and Oshin, 2024) have tended to focus on more general features of political communication, such as rhetorical strategies, framing, and issue positioning, without delving deeply into the sociopragmatic orientations in which the political actors employ politeness strategically to achieve their communicative objectives.

Despite the influx of scholarly works on politeness in political interviews, as examined above, there is a conspicuous gap in the interrogation of the socio-pragmatic import of these politeness strategies in Chatham House interviews on presidential aspirants in Nigeria, just as this current study is devoted to doing. This study therefore explores the socio-pragmatic orientations of politeness strategies in Chatham House interviews of two selected Nigerian 2023 presidential election candidates, Peter Obi and Ahmed Tinubu.

Aim and Objectives

This study focuses on the sociopragmatic orientations of politeness strategies in Chatham House interviews of selected Nigerian 2023 presidential candidates. The following objectives of the study are set to:

i. Identify and discuss sociopragmatic strategies of politeness in the interviews.
ii. Compare and contrast the deployment of these strategies by the candidates; and
iii. Evaluate the pragmatic implications of these strategies for political discourse.

Scope of the study

This study focuses on two selected Nigerian political candidates who were interviewed at the Chatham House in London in the buildup to the Presidential elections of 2023, namely Peter Obi and Ahmed Tinubu. The choice of these selections was hinged on the unique political ideologies. Tinubu represents traditional politics that believes in the spirit of teamwork, while Peter Obi represents the voice of the youths; they both have conflicting political ideologies. The interviews span 2022 and 2023. This study is designed to examine the sociopragmatic orientations of politeness strategies in Chatham House interviews of selected Nigerian 2023 presidential election candidates because of the heightened political atmosphere as well as the evident deployment of

pragmatic strategies of politeness, which the two political actors (Obi and Tinubu) utilised in their interviews.

Significance of the study

The study valuably contributes to the pragmatic approach in the examination of orientations of politeness strategies used among the political actors during electioneering campaigns and interviews, as can be seen in the Chatham House 2023 presidential interviews. Political candidates usually orient their communication with politeness either consciously or unconsciously by deploying certain pragmatic strategies of politeness with the intention of gaining the interest of their electorate, especially among the international communities who become interested in the political leadership of Nigeria due to its place on the continent. The research essentially contributes to the existing literature on effective communication in political campaigns and how political actors deploy linguistic choices during interviews to protect their self-image.

Literature review

Studies on political communication, particularly media interviews (Daramola, 2008; Odebunmi, 2009; Friedman, 2022; Udoumoh, 2022; Abdulkabir, 2023; Oduola and Oshin, 2024; Agho, 2025), have been deeply examined from various perspectives. Daramola (2008), for example, took a general perspective on the political discourse in Nigeria, paying attention to the functional-semiotic investigation of the statements, responses and comments on national events and political changes. While this study concentrates on the inaugural speech of former military Head of State, Chief Ernest Shonekan, it helps to capture the essence of powerful speeches made in specific political contexts in response to political changes. Odebunmi (2009), which closely relates to this current research, undertakes an analysis of print media political interviews, dwelling on how linguistic politeness is exhibited in Independence Day speeches of past Nigerian Heads of State. Odebunmi's work, like this current study, deployed a combination of Leech's and Brown and Levinson's theories but did not engage live interviews as recorded in the case of Chatham House. Odoumoh's (2022) study focused on campaign speeches not interviews. The work, however, examines politeness manifestations in these campaigns. The difference between Odoumoh's research and this current work is hinged on the mode of the political discourses being campaigns and interviews, respectively. While Oduola and Oshin's (2024) recent paper examines Chatham House interviews, unveiling the construction of interest in Peter Obi's political expressions in pre-

election speeches, the question of politeness was never the focus of their study. Similarly, Agho's (2025) perspective on political discourse is distinct in considering voter behaviour underlined by ideologies projected in campaign speeches. This also further stresses the constant strategic use of language as a tool for navigating their way in public spaces.

Ayodabo (2007&2021) thinks that "hedging and politeness are discussed as essential aspects of the pragmatics of English usage." The paper concludes on the notes that hedging, as an aspect of politeness, can be successful to the extent that the textual and non-textual linguistic contexts offer substantial information to English language users.

From both the studies on political interviews and politeness, there seem to be an overly established lacuna in reconciling these areas in order to bring out how politeness is sociopragmatically oriented. This paper is therefore aimed at addressing the sociopragmatic orientations of politeness strategies in Chatham House interviews of Nigeria's 2023 presidential election candidates, Peter Obi and Bola Ahmed Tinubu, respectively.

Theoretical framework

The study principally leans on Geoffrey Leech's (1983) politeness maxims: Tact, Generosity, Approbation, Modesty, Agreement, and Sympathy. These maxims ensure the management of face in interaction. For instance, tact ensures the minimisation of cost to others while at the same time maximising benefits to others. Generosity minimises benefit to self while maximising cost to self, that is, taking responsibility. Approbation minimises dispraise to others while maximising the praise of others. Modesty maximises praise of self (self-praise) while minimising dispraise of self. Agreement maxim minimises disagreement between self and others, while maximising agreement. Finally, sympathy maxim minimises antipathy while maximising sympathy. Political communication revolves around compliance with these maxims in promoting and validating identity.

Early scholarly works on politeness can be traced to pragmatic scholars like Lakoff (1973), who proposed the rules: do not impose, give options and make the other person feel good, as reasons why participants in a communicative exchange may flout the Gricean maxims. Politeness is a feature of language use that is acquired through the process of socialisation. This is because, according to Holtgraves (2008:10), 'in our day-to-day communication, our words, both spoken and written, are typically directed at people who in their own rights are not abstract entities devoid of feelings, goals, thoughts and values'. Mills (2003:102) described politeness as "a

battery of social skills whose goal is to ensure everyone feels affirmed in a social interaction". Thus, Teng (2015:1689) explained that politeness can be viewed as a major part of a range of pragmatic strategies which can be included under the umbrella of conversation management or relational work. He opined that the politeness strategy is appropriate for any human communication that is goal-oriented. Fraser (1990) is concerned uniquely with scientific analyses of politeness as a general linguistic and pragmatic principle of communication, aimed at the maintenance of smooth social relations and the avoidance of conflict. Brown and Levinson (1987) submitted that politeness is an adornment of human language, more like an icing on the linguistic cake, while on the other hand, politeness can be viewed as an extremely fundamental aspect of human communication, one that language users will definitely be unable to do without.

Methodology

The research adopted a qualitative and descriptive approach to the interpretation of data. The purposive sampling technique was utilised to select from the 2023 Chatham House political interviews with Bola Ahmed Tinubu and Peter Obi, where both actors were meant to discuss their manifestos in the global space. The interviews lasted for the duration of about 1 hour and were transcribed by research assistants. The transcription was later evaluated by the researchers. These interviews were transcribed and qualitatively coded to reveal the politeness strategies. The research is saddled with the main objective of examining the deployment of the pragmatic strategy of politeness by the two aforementioned political actors during the 2023 presidential election. The corpus contains two strands of interviewed separately granted by Peter Obi and Ahmed Tinubu. Obi's full interview (including pre-interview speech) lasted for 1:12:04 minutes, while Ahmed Tinubu's full interview lasted for 1:09:25 (Including his pre-interview speech). However, the question-answer sections that constitute the sessions make the interest of this paper. A total of fourteen (14) interview excerpts were purposively extracted based on the prevalence of politeness resources and the presence of pragmatically charged deployment of language resources. Eight (8) of these excerpts emanated from Peter Obi, while six (6) were attributed to Ahmed Tinubu. The excerpts attributed to Tinubu include questions directed to Tinubu, which he reassigned to members of his team who went with him to the Chatham House. The top-down discourse analytical approach to the presentation and analysis of the selected data.

Analysis and Discussion of Findings

This section analyses the identification and discussion of sociopragmatic strategies of politeness in the interviews, compares and contrasts the deployment of these strategies by the candidates and examines the pragmatic implications of these strategies for political discourse.

Sociopragmatic strategies of politeness

Four sociopragmatic orientations of politeness strategies were identified: tact maxim of politeness, generosity, modesty, and deresponsibilisation. These are explicated within the provision of the principles of politeness.

Tact Maxim of Politeness in the 2023 Obi and Tinubu's Chatham House Interviews

The tact maxim of politeness hinges on the premise of maximising benefits to others rather than to oneself. Obi and Tinubu satisfactorily considered the masses the most important subjects in their 2023 pre-election interviews at the Chatham House. In their interviews, they gave due regard to Nigerians, respecting and seeing them as better than they are. They considered the electorate's power to make either of them the president of Nigeria. The linguistic act which shows politeness in their interviews are obtainable in the excerpts below:

Excerpt 1 (Obi):

Question: …, how do you intend to implement a pragmatic mechanism for dealing with those societal concerns different from the previous administration?

Response: So as an end, I appeal to all of you.

There is nothing more powerful than an idea whose time has come…

Excerpt 2 (Obi):

Question: …, if you become, or when you become president sir, could you tell us the sort of three things you would do in the first

Response: … the time today is to have competent leadership with character, commitment and compassion. And that's what Datti and I are offering you. It's going to be life streamed.

In Excerpt 1 above, Peter Obi uses an indirect act of appealing to minimise imposition, demonstrating tact politeness strategy to reassure the electorate of their relevance in bringing the

candidates into political offices and as such, uses the speech act of appealing to persuade the Nigerian voters to see the need to vote him (the interlocutor) into office. Also, to show Nigerians that he holds them in high esteem and places them above himself on the drawing table of governance, Obi appeals to Nigerians to consider voting for him in the election. Excerpt 2 hinges on the tact maxim, to maximise benefits to others rather than to interlocutors. The speaker deployed this through a linguistic choice of identifying the wants of the Nigerian populace, which is to have competent leadership that possesses the character, commitment and understands the people's needs, such as providing a better system that guarantees them true leadership.

Generosity Maxim of Politeness in the 2023 Obi and Tinubu's Chatham House Interviews

The generosity maxim of politeness stresses the principle of displeasing oneself with a view to pleasing others. Obi deployed the generosity maxim of politeness in his interview to please Nigerians locally and in diaspora who were anxious to hear from him the policies of his governance if voted into power as president in the 2023 general election. Epitome of the generosity maxim of politeness is evinced in Excerpt 3:

Excerpt 3(Obi):

Question: …, so further, how do you plan to quell the current ethnic tensions, insecurity ravaging our communities and consequently stagnating economic growth and development?

Response: …, And we would [sic], I've said it before, we would show compassion, we would show love, because there's nothing, you're a leader, don't go away when Bayelsa is under water, don't leave Jigawa to dive, don't say oh I cannot go to Southern Kaduna because there's a problem, don't … we would show compassion, we would lead from the front. We're not going to walk away…

Excerpt 4(Obi):

Question: …," insecurity is a major problem, what are your plans in tackling this? What are your plans in terms of security sector in Nigeria?"

Response: … and for me Borno is part of Nigeria. I don't want to tell people, oh Borno is insecure, Nigeria is insecure. Like I told the people in Christmas I spent my Christmas with IDP people in Makurdi at Christmas and in New Year, I was in another IDP camp in Abuja. And I've said to them, as long as Nigerians are in IDP, all of us are in IDP.

Excerpt 5(Obi):

Question: …, if or when you become the next president of Nigeria, would you seek to keep the

current central Bank governor or replace him?

Response: Let me come again go… people are talking about the central bank governor. The problem… first, let me assure you, central bank governor will maintain independence. He will be respected. And again, it is not the problem of the person there. Central bank have a role of monitoring policy. If I'm right. They have a physical space. It's like a, see football. When the person who is supposed to be in the physical space is no longer… it's like you go to a foot… football match and somebody who is supposed to play in a particular wing is no longer there. You find people playing various wing. The weakness of the physical space allows the monetary space to take over and is supporting if there's a weak governance structure. That is why we are able to do what we are sure of doing, where what is happening. So, if you are replacing Godwin and putting somebody with that level of rascality.

Obi's linguistics choices "we would show compassion", "we would show love", "you're a leader, don't go away", "don't leave Jigawa to dive", "don't say oh, I cannot go to Southern Kaduna because there's a problem", "we would lead the front", "we are not going to walk away" epitomised immense generosity of politeness in his interview as a presidential candidate. The linguistic choice was aimed at pleasing Nigerians who have suffered enough of neglect and abandonment, inordinate rule, security challenge, economic crunch, unemployment, hunger, mediocrity and a host of others. Obi maximised the cost of assuaging the pains of Nigerians to his, of the masses if voted into power in the election. This fulfills the condition of Leech's principle of politeness in relation to generosity maxim that states that the speaker must maximise cost to self, and minimise cost to others. Therefore, Obi's interview response has depicted him as generous leader deploying generosity maxim of politeness to communicate to his people. It can be further seen in the excerpt that the interlocutor empathise with the electorates who have suffered bad leadership immensely from the successive government and must be meticulous in the choice of who becomes the subsequent president. He stresses further that he feels what the people feel as he (the interlocutor) is not unaware of the security challenge bedeviling those in the far northern part of Nigeria. Hence in:

Obi in Excerpt 4 deployed the generosity maxim of politeness to sympathise with the victims who are the internally displaced persons in their various camp. The lexical choice deployed in the text such as the personal pronoun "I" and "all of us", implicitly connotes the speaker's inclusivity in

the challenging security situation across the Nigerian geographical space. This inclusive term is capable of making others feel appreciative of the speaker's empathy towards their predicament. The speaker in Excerpt 5 stresses the generosity maxim of politeness to sympathise with the masses on the rot within the financial institution, the Central Bank of Nigeria, whose governor is being blamed. The interlocutor deployed the speech act of assuring to show a strong commitment to addressing the problem. He also empathises with the Central bank governor by protecting his public face that he is not necessarily responsible for the decay in that sector; hence, he (speaker) metaphorically uses the "physical space" of a football match as a lexical choice that describes the scenario of a "weakness in the physical space to allow the monetary space to take over." Therefore, the speaker in the interview has depicted himself as generous candidate deploying generosity maxim of politeness to communicate to his people.

Modesty maxim of politeness strategy

The modesty maxim of politeness submits that the speaker should minimise the self-praise expressions and maximise the self-dispraise expressions. Obi and Tinubu abstained from self-boasting. They desisted from using personal first-person singular pronoun 'I' in the subjective case and "me" in the objective case where the need for the use of the grammatical units was inevitable. They applied the modesty maxim as they either used "we or us" in the subjective and objective cases to avoid self- boasting on the power and authority invested in them as political actors in Nigeria. They also substituted the possessive adjective "my" for "our" to claim that the seat of power belongs to Nigerians. Examples of modesty maxim in the interviews are:

Excerpt 6 (Obi);

Question: How do you deal with the legislators considering that Labour party not in control of the legislative arm of the government?

Response: When I was elected and sworn in as a governor, I had 30 house members not from my party, in fact no one from my party was involved. As long as you're pursuing what is right, everybody would go on with you, because the legislator has secured his place, he knows his people are without jobs and that's what he wants development, what else is he elected to do.

Excerpt 7(Tinubu):

Question: You've served two terms, Mr. Tinubu, already associated with government, why should you president?

Response: I've employed various hands in Lagos, whether you are from Lagos or not, I've encouraged private investment in Lagos more than any other part of the country. In fact, beating the federal in uh, uh, before we took over the reign of regime. Uh, mission, courage, and can-do attitude of an individual is self-given. And I believe I've earned that, throughout the country.

Excerpt 8 (Tinubu):

Question:

… And furthermore, there are issues at the moment running with regards to your identity and with your age, so, I wander if you could provide some clarity on those issues of your identity and age?

Response: In this excerpt, Bola Tinubu addresses questions about his citizenship and his educational background. He begins by referring to an unnamed rival who has been accused of not being a Nigerian citizen, but quickly distances himself from making it a political attack- "I didn't touch that area" He then turns the focus to his own credentials, stating that Illinois state University has confirmed his graduation and that he has now received a replacement degree certificate. He reinforces his credibility by noting that he trained as an accountant, has an "outstanding recording record", and reached the peak of his career in the private sector, ending with a rhetorical challenge- "who among them can brag about it?"

In Excerpt 6, Obi reflects on his time as the government of his state (Anambra), where he had members of the House of Assembly who were not from his party, yet he was able to work with them. The speaker deployed the modesty maxim of politeness to minimise the self-praise of what he can achieve as an individual but rather maximise the self-dispraise by using the second-person pronoun "you" and the third-person pronoun "he" to show that a leader should know what is right and do it. The interlocutor convincingly demonstrates a high degree of accountability as a leader who loves to do the right thing that will advance societal development, such as creating jobs for the unemployed. Obi demonstrated a mix of modesty and immodesty maxim in his use of "when I was a governor of Anambra state…" In the other way round where, the speaker maximises the self-praise expression and minimise the self-dispraise expression, one can say the immodesty maxim has taken place.

The interlocutor in Excerpt 7 deployed the immodesty maxim of politeness in maximising self-

praise expressions and minimising the self-dispraise expressions, thereby boasting about his self-achievement rather than allowing the Nigerian people to access his leadership achievements as a past governor of Lagos State. The use of the first-person singular pronoun "I' throughout the excerpt clearly indicates evidence of maximising self-praise (immodest) and minimising self-dispraise.

Tact maxim is at play in his linguistic choice presented in Excerpt 8; to avoid commenting on his rival's citizenship problem, he avoids a potentially face-threatening act that could be seen as personal mudslinging, thereby maintaining a certain level of political decorum. Immodest maxim was seen in "I have reached the pinnacle of my career in the private sector".

Dere-responsibilisation strategy as a Politeness Strategy for Self Minimisation

One major strategy deployed by Tinubu in the interview is that of deresponsibilisation, where the interlocutor uses the strategy of deresponsibilising by simply delegating his team members to respond to the questions raised by the interviewers. This strategy is neither rooted in Brown and Levinson's model nor in Leech's, yet the context of the interview projected it. This agrees with Caffi's (2002:118) description, "deresponsibilisation", that is, "*deresponsabilzzazione"* or "deresponsibilities" (2007:159), has to do with the act of avoiding responsibility, or a text associated with "weakened responsibility" (Caffi, 2007: 67). Deresponsibilisation is achieved when a speaker or rhetor consciously and/or deliberately avoids conflict, uses indirectness, and deploys politeness-induced vagueness, which Caffi (2002, 2007) labelled as "bush." This act symbolises Tinubu's leadership style. Delegating a question to a team member signals a collaborative governance model, which reassured the electorate that expertise will be shared and decisions will not be centralised in one person; he believes in teamwork. "The unbreakable team" It's not a sign of weakness in this wise, but framed positively as a demonstration of teamwork.

Excerpt 9 (Ben Ayade, for Tinubu):

Question 1: … what program do you have for our young people, as you know, eh, most political parties benefit from the, the… uh goodwill of the young people, and so, have you got plans that will generate training, you know…

Question 2: …so, what are your plans for, for youth, younger people? If you would like to answer the questions, Mr. Tinubu. Please, if we can keep quiet for one conversation here, thank you, go ahead.

Tinubu's response: Ah, let me want, ah (pauses) once and demonstrate here, one of those

philosophies, I want a job training that I believe, family is teamship (pauses) unbreakable team to demonstrate that, I will choose the first question assign it to Dele Alake.

And the second question, assign to Nasir El-Rufai

…and the third question, assign to Ben Ayade

In Excerpt 9, the speaker, Mr Tinubu, deployed the desresponsilisation strategy of politeness by assigning the interview questions that were meant for him to answer. Tinubu uses the moment to demonstrate that he values teamwork and will empower others to act. He shifts the audience's focus from avoidance to inclusivity. The speech act of assigning is used by Mr Tinubu to strategically shift the responsibility of answering questions to his team.

In Excerpt 9 above, Ben Ayade, responding to a question on youth development and inclusion as delegated by Tinubu, asserts that, youths are part of today; they are the greatest asset for tomorrow. We need to prepare them from now for our all-inclusive government and education policy. He affirms the value of youth as both present and future assets… he outlines policy intentions: to overhaul the education system, introduce student loans for all, reform the Almajiri system, build more schools, recruiting and train teachers, and integrate technology and broadband to prepare youth for governance and modern economic participation. Positive Politeness strategy is deployed, in the repeated emphasis on inclusivity "no one will be left behind" This phrase builds solidarity, appeals to shared values, and reassures both youth and other stakeholders that his administration will be accessible and fair.

Generosity maxim is evident in his promises to provide tangible resources: student loans, more schools, more teachers, more training and opportunities for youth to "govern" and develop technology languages on their own. These commitments project a willingness to invest in others' growth, prioritising the needs of the public over personal gain. The tact maxim of politeness is deployed when speaking about reforming the Almajiri system. This is a culturally sensitive subject, but he frames it as part of a broader educational overhaul, avoiding language that could stigmatise the communities involved while signalling intent for reform.

There is evidence of immodest maxim when he ties Lagos governor's success to his own governance Legacy in Lagos. This indirectly presents Tinubu as a capable leader with a track record of empowering youth and achieving development goals. The linguistic choice of referring to youth as "the greatest asset for tomorrow" is metaphorical; it elevates their values and future role in governance. He deploys inclusive pronouns ("we", "our") to foster a collective sense of

responsibility and shared ownership of the future.

It is pragmatically significant to political communication because the youths are seen not merely as voters but as stakeholders in governance.

Excerpts 10 (Alake for Tinubu);

Question: "…Central Bank of Nigeria tweeted that NNPC has not remitted one kobo of oil revenue in the past six month…, what is the solution to this very pressing problem?

To demonstrate the spirit of Teamship, Tinubu delegates the response to one of his team Members "Dele Alake" this act signified his preferred style of governance, which involves sharing responsibilities and trusting his team members to speak on his behalf. Dele Alake's answer, frames oil theft as a decades-old problem tied to Nigeria's security situation, and he outlines a "three-pronged approach" to address it through improved equipment, technology, and security reforms.

Excerpts 11(El-Rufai, for Tinubu):

Question: … I know we have remittances over $ 30 billion remitted to Nigeria from worldwide every year, and I do appreciate that the leaders do come here every electoral cycle to speak to us in diaspora, but we can't vote, is there any plan with regards to diaspora voting?

Tinubu addresses the issue of diaspora voting, electoral technology, and public trust in Nigeria's democratic process. He begins by referencing El-Rufai's comment that diaspora voters should be allowed to vote, linking their economic contributions through remittances, to their entitlement to political participation. He supports the principle, saying such rights should not merely be "approved but promoted" He then pivots to the current state of Nigeria's electoral system, expressing conditional trust in the electronic transmission process, while stressing the need to continue building public confidence before introducing mail-in ballots.

One clear politeness strategy at play in Excerpt 10 is "deresponsibilisation", a strategy that agrees with the description of Caffi (2002; 118). By assigning the first question to his spokesman, Tinubu avoids answering it personally. This is a form of avoidance strategy, but here it is framed positively as a demonstration of teamwork. This removes immediate personal accountability for the answer, while allowing him to model his claimed leadership style.

There are three discursive issues observed in Excerpt 11. First, political inclusion of the diaspora,

tied to the agreement maxim. Tinubu not only accepts the idea, but link it to economic contributions, giving it moral and economic weight. Second, is public confidence in electoral technology connected to tact maxim and positive politeness strategy, as he reassures the audience of progress while admitting that more assurance is needed. The third is balancing reform with stability, linked to sociopragmatic politeness, as he advocates for diaspora voting but defers implementation until the existing system is more robust. Mr Tinubu align with El-Rufai on this issue.

Agreement maxim is evident in Mr Tinubu's alignment with El-Rufai's stance by openly agreeing that diaspora voters deserve the right to vote. Approbation maxim Acknowledgement of the diaspora's contribution to Nigeria's economy through remittance. Positive politeness is reflected in his inclusive language "we are not losing confidence…" The tact maxim comes into play with how he addresses electoral shortcomings, rather than openly criticising the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC)

Comparison and contrast in the deployment of politeness strategies by Obi and Tinubu

The sociopragmatic orientations of politeness strategies in Chatham House interviews of selected Nigerian 2023 presidential election candidates (Obi and Tinubu) are entrenched within the individual style of leadership principles and experience. The strategy adopted by the candidates reflects either on the previous leadership position held and their achievements, and, in some instances, is based on the ethnic extraction from which the said candidate emanates. While both candidates deployed certain strategies of politeness, there are also instances where the candidates differ in their strategies of politeness principles. A major point of departure in their deployment of the politeness strategies as contained in the interviews is the direct approach strategy of Obi's responses to questions such as:

Excerpt 12(Obi):

Question: The activities of the IPOB in Nigeria is at an alarming rate every day, and with all the policies, beautiful ideas that you've listed down sir, without tackling head-on, they are impossible. So, one of the allegations given to you is that, you've not condemned the activities.

Response: For the issue of IPOB, many of you are not following me. Even yesterday, I spoke about Biafra being ended 53 years ago. It's all about the place in the space. I condemn all agitators, but in condemning, you have to look at what brought these agitations all over the

> place. It's not only IPOB, we have Yoruba Nation Movement, and we have all sorts… If you have 15% unemployment in Britain today, you're gonna have massive agitations, nobody will be able to have his house.

Excerpt 12 discusses the issue of ethnic agitation within the Eastern region in Nigerian society, as Obi is considered one who comes from the Eastern region, therefore faces the question of Biafra agitation to understand his position and stance on the contending matter. The use of the lexical choice "I" which is the first-person singular pronoun, orients to the concerns the interlocutor has on such issues as a person. The speaker "condemns all agitators. The use of the quantifier "all" orients to the indirectness in Obi's response to draw the Nigerian's attention to the fact that the issue of agitation is not peculiar to his ethnic extraction but a general one. Here, Obi deployed the sympathy maxim of politeness, which states that the speaker should minimise antipathy between oneself and others; rather, he/she should maximise sympathy between himself/herself and others. Obi sympathises with the various agitators across the regions of Nigeria and points out a common problem responsible for it, which is unemployment." To maintain his stance, he uses the speech act of condemning to express his position on the matter of agitations

Obi and Tinubu both deployed the modesty maxim of politeness, which emphasises that the speaker should minimise self-praise expressions and maximise self-deprecating expressions. An instance of this is contained in the excerpt below:

Excerpt 13 (Obi):

Question: Repaying the central bank debt by 19.5% interest rate. How do you plan to support the next generation by dealing with debt repayment crises? And also, how do you plan to deal with tackling financial transparency in Nigeria?

Response: I've governed a state for eight years and I've challenged everybody, Paul you were there, I've been the only Governor till today, the day I left office I was not owing salary, pension, gratuity, or any contract to supplier and I left the 3 banks in Nigerian which I say everyday: Access Bank, Fidelity Bank of Nigeria and Diamond Bank of Nigeria. I left a hundred and, over hundred and fifty million dollars, I didn't say naira. And I have over 30 billion naira. And Anambra State, you can go and verify…

Excerpt 13 contains Obi's deployment of the modesty maxim of politeness in his address to reflect on his experience while in office as a past Anambra State government. The modesty maxim of

politeness, where the speaker minimises self-praise expressions and maximises self-dispraise expressions, Obi, in the excerpt, uses the first-person singular pronoun "I" to maximise his self-praise as he points out several achievements, including leaving several amounts behind in different banks in Nigeria. This reassures the referent's stance, the level of modesty maintained by the speaker.

A major point of departure in the two candidates' deployment of the politeness strategies of Tinubu's deresponsibilisation strategy of politeness is where the speaker redirects questions directed at him from the referents to the members of his team to address the referents. The interlocutor deployed the act of avoiding responsibility or "weakened responsibility", which is activated in a text through conflict-avoiding or politeness-induced vagueness or indirectness (Caffi, 2002, 2007). This is obvious in the excerpt below:

Excerpt 14 (El-Rufai for Tinubu): Three questions:

(1)…stroke uhm how can the diaspora vote?

(2)…How are you going to get employment up?

(3)How are you going to get economic growth? Those are the three questions

On the same method, we call on Wale Edun to answer…

…yes, the first question

Here again in the excerpts above, the speaker, Tinubu deployed the deresponsibilisation strategy of politeness, by delegating his team members to respond to the questions. Tinubu avoids answering it personally, which is a form of avoidance strategy, framed positively as a demonstration of teamwork. The deployment of deresponsibilisation strategy project the candidate in this case, not as a leader with a "weakened responsibility" who lacks certain level of competence and intelligibility to equivocally address the contending sociopolitical issues bedeviling the Nigeria society, but as a leader who believes in the spirit of "Teamship," in inclusive government, by assigning and delegating responsibility to members to act in their areas of specialty.

The pragmatic implications of these strategies on political discourse

The use of pragmatic strategies in political language by presidential candidates during the Chatham House interviews has a substantial impact on public perceptions and assessments. These strategies,

including implicatures, speech acts, politeness, and linguistic markers, play a crucial role in shaping how voters perceive and evaluate the candidates. For instance, the use of implicatures or hidden meanings in statements can create the impression of the candidate as a wise or strategic figure, while assertive speech acts can enhance the perception of leadership or assertiveness. Furthermore, the relationship between the political language used by candidates and the public's acceptance of them is vital to comprehend. Effective political language can increase voters' appeal and trust in candidates, while inappropriate or offensive language can damage their image (Chiu et al., 2021).

Case studies on the use of pragmatic strategies of politeness in the Chatham House presidential interviews and public responses serve as effective illustrations of how specific language strategies can influence public opinion. By analysing these cases, it becomes evident how candidates use language to achieve their political goals and how voters respond to them. Through a deeper understanding of the relationship between pragmatic strategies in political language and public opinion, relevant political communication trends can be identified, leading to better insights into the dynamics of modern democracy.

In the context of presidential debates, the choice of discourse strategies by candidates depends on their intentions, while their impact on the opponent and the audience is influenced by meta-communicative issues of candidates' communicative behaviour and (im)politeness strategies in particular. Additionally, the use of hedges and boosters, which are crucial metadiscourse markers to soften and strengthen propositions, is also significant in shaping public perceptions.

The implications of pragmatic strategies of politeness in political language in the context of the Chatham House presidential interviews are essential for understanding the dynamics of the relationship between candidates and voters, as well as the factors that influence political preferences. By synthesising case studies and research on pragmatic strategies in political language, a comprehensive understanding of the impact of political discourse on public opinion can be achieved.

Conclusion

This study has systematically and pragmatically analysed presidential election interviews held at Chatham House by the two candidates, Peter Obi and Bola Tinubu, in 2023, with a view to providing insights into Obi and Tinubu's choices of language use in the course of their interactions with the citizenry locally and in diaspora of Nigeria as presidential candidates. The analysis, which

was made by the use of politeness maxims, identified politeness theories. The study analysed the politeness maxims found in the interviews through the choice of words and expressions of the interlocutors. The research found that the two candidates used six politeness maxims to portray themselves as polite, patriotic, ready-to-serve and available for the presidential roles. The politeness strategies employed in the interviews were: tact maxim, generosity maxim, approbation maxim, modesty maxim, sympathy maxim, and deresponsibilisation maxim. The study recommends that all political functionaries in Nigeria should choose to be polite and show readiness to accept responsibility rather than deresponsibilising even in difficult periods. The study advances that all political functionaries in Nigeria should deploy politeness strategies to avoid face-threatening acts at all levels of discourse, enhance transparency and engage youths effectively.

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Pragmatic Functions of Selected Nigerian Supreme Court Judgements on Criminal Cases

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Abstract

The understanding of the judges' utterances plays a crucial role in achieving communicative goals in court judgements, including Nigerian Supreme Court judgements. Existing linguistic studies on court judgements approached them using narrative analysis, critical discourse analysis, stylistic analysis and the investigation of their grammatical features. However, scant attention has been paid to pragmatic functions of judges' utterances in Supreme Court judgements. Therefore, this study considers the pragmatic functions of judges' utterances in Nigerian Supreme Court judgements. John Austin's Speech Act Theory, coupled with Srikant Sarangi's Discourse types, serve as the theoretical framework. The data for this research are 2020 and 2021 Supreme Court judgements on criminal cases selected from Law Pavilion Electronic Law Reports. The years were purposively selected because of the significant expansion of the bench from 12 justices to 20 justices during the period, while the criminal cases were purposively selected because of their grave social implications in Nigerian society. It was discovered that the judges' utterances are sites of layered illocutionary and discursive work. Judicial narratives do more than report events: they assert, state, disapprove and declare. It was also found that only institutional actors enabled by institutional procedures control shifts between discourse types. Thus, through the examination of the pragmatic functions of the utterances in Nigerian Supreme Court judgements, communicative goals are achieved.
***Keywords**: courtroom discourse, pragmatics of court judgements, judges' utterances, speech acts in legal discourse*

Introduction

Legal language is largely manifested in court judgments. They are not merely informative but have huge implications for individuals and the growth and development of societies. Also, judges rely on linguistic interpretation to understand legislation; they prepare and pass judgments by using language. This, therefore, makes the linguistic study of court judgements crucial in a dynamic society. Most linguistic studies on courtroom discourse focused on areas such as narrative analysis, critical discourse analysis, stylistic analysis and grammatical features. These are evident in Smejkalova (2011), Richard and Nwizug (2017), Emenike and Ogoanah (2022) and Daniel (2024), respectively, among others. These approaches are employed to uncover the meaning embedded in court judgements. In spite of the available studies, court judgements remain understudied because of the continual amendments of laws governing society, which directly affect judicial decisions. Court judgments are still perceived as legal documents that are too complex to be understood.

Consequently, communicative goals are defeated, and judges' utterances are misconstrued. Makodia (2007, p.3) observes the knotty nature of legal discourse when he said: "legal discourse seems to have failed in communicating thoughts with the common men and women. Legal discourse is known for its obscurity, ambiguity and complexity". No study known to the researcher has thoroughly investigated the pragmatic functions of Supreme Court judges' utterances using a theoretical perspective of John Austin's (1962) speech act theory synchronised with Srikant Sarangi's (2000). Therefore, this study sets out to determine the acts performed in the utterances of the Supreme Court judge and identify the discourse type within which the acts are performed. Through this linguistic investigation, the Supreme Court judges' utterances are demystified.

Literature Review

Smejkalova (2011) examines the use of storytelling in the courtroom. The judgment of a Czech court is examined using narrative analysis and thus brings to the fore the issues of narrative differentiation. He posits that legal rules set the pedestal for storytelling. Smejkalova (2011) considered one Czech court judgement, which could not represent all Czech judgements. He further concentrated on the narrative aspect of the judgement, thus excluding other aspects of the judgement. Away from Smejkalova's (2011) focus, Susanto (2016) examines the interaction between a judge and a defendant in a Chinese criminal trial. He focuses on the language of law as object, process and instrument. He argues that judges use language in directing, instructing and ruling. Interestingly, his concentration was on a criminal trial in a trial court, but he did not address the criminal case at the highest court in China. Richard and Nwizug (2017) use Critical Discourse Analysis in analysing specific courtroom proceedings in Nigeria with the aim of exposing how inequality, dominance, power and control play out. Supreme Court Quarterly Report 1990 audio recordings and observation of High Court proceedings constitute the data. Richard and Nwizug (2017) reveal that power is unequally distributed in the courtroom. Richard and Nwizug (2017) were able to highlight power differentiation using the Critical Discourse Analysis approach. Daniel (2021) focuses on substance-based judgements of Nigerian Supreme Court lead judges. The Generic Structure Potential and the transitivity system were applied in the study. Nine obligatory micro elements and four micro elements were found and were projected through major and minor process clauses. Chinwe and Obobolo (2022) employ a systemic functional approach in the examination of Federal and Supreme Court judgements on Dr Orji Uzo Kalu's indictment in a criminal case of corruption and money laundering. They examined transitivity choices as well as

patterns of language in relation to power. With the use of Halliday's (1994) Systemic Functional Linguistics as their theoretical base, it was discovered that the court judges mostly use the verbal process in commanding, asking or stating. Emenike and Ogoanah (2022) investigate the move-structure of Nigerian appellate court judgements. The English for Specific Purpose (ESP) genre theory serves as the theoretical framework. The study identified six move-structures which can aid the understanding of the composition and the interpretation of appellate court judgements. They are identifying the case, stating the case history, arguing the case, deriving ratio decidendi, pronouncing the judgement and validating the judgement. Alkabiri (2024) delves into the argumentation strategies employed in the courtroom with a focus on Nelson Mandela's trial in 1964 and Bill Clinton's trial in1998. This is achieved by highlighting the linguistic elements targeting the persuasion of the conversationalists in the discourse. He discovers that lawyers and litigants use a wide range of argumentation strategies to influence their recipients in order to convince the court of their arguments. Alkabiri (2024) dwelt on the use of argumentation strategies at the trial court without accounting for the functions of the judges' utterances. Daniel (2024) considers that complement clauses in Nigerian Supreme Court lead judgements by employing Du Bois' stance triangle model. The frequency, form and stance functions of that-complement causes are examined. It is discovered that that-complement clauses are mainly verb-based and they indicate epistemic and few alignment stances. While Daniel (2024) focused on the syntactic elements in Supreme Court judgements, little attention was paid to the pragmatic implications of the Supreme Court judgements.

The Supreme Court in Nigeria

The Supreme Court is the apex/highest court in Nigeria. It is a court of finality. There is no further appeal from this court. The chart below shows the organogram /hierarchy of the court system in Nigeria.

Supreme Court

↑

Court of Appeal

↑

High Court (Federal &state/ Sharia/ customary Court of Appeal)

↑

Magistrate court/customary/ sharia court

The above underscores the place of the Nigerian Supreme Court. The Nigerian Supreme Court is a model to other lower courts in Nigeria. It occupies an enviable position in Nigeria's justice system. In addition, the summary of all court decisions made on a case (from the first court that sat on the matter to the Court of Appeal) is often replicated in a Supreme Court judgement. This gives us a good grasp of what is obtainable in the lower courts. Therefore, the linguistic exploration of Nigerian Supreme Court judgements avails the researcher the opportunity to investigate the court system in Nigeria.

Theoretical Framework

John Austin's (1962) Speech Act Theory, complemented by Srikant Sarangi's (2000) Discourse Types, constitutes the theoretical framework for this study.

Speech Act Theory

John Austin's (1962) speech act theory was explained in his book, *How to Do Things with Words.* He opined that we do things with words, and they are not just for describing the world. Austin's theory was based on three notions: performativity, the three aspects of every speech act and felicity conditions. Performativity involves the bringing into existence of something. There is a performance of action when expressions are uttered under the right conditions. For instance, the expression "I now pronounce you husband and wife" brings a marriage union into existence when uttered under the right conditions. The right condition means the statement must be said by a priest or a judge. Second, for Austin (1962), in every speech, the locutionary act, illocutionary act and the perlocutionary act are performed. The locutionary act is the act of saying, which is realised in the literal words that we say. The illocutionary act is the intended meaning behind the saying of the words, while the perlocutionary act is the effect of the saying on the hearer. The felicity conditions are the right conditions that must be met for performatives to work. When the conditions are not met, it becomes infelicitous. Thus, John Austin posits that every utterance has words (locution), intention (illocution) and effect (perlocution). Marina Sbisa pushed the frontiers of John Austin's speech act theory. Marina Sbisa's approach to John Austin's speech act theory was adopted for the study. Marina Sbisa, a former student of John Austin, gives a robust idea of Austin's speech act within a social context situation. Sbisa (1984) introduced "illocutionary effect" as the change in the social state when a speech act is performed and recognised. She argued that speech acts have social implications. John Austin perceived the manifestation of speech acts

in a single utterance, while Marina Sbisa considers the manifestation of speech acts within the wider social context. She describes them as social acts. For instance, the statement "I divorce you" does not merely perform the act of divorcing. The utterance creates new social and legal identities for the parties involved, and its force is dependent on how the institution recognises it.

Sbisa opines that an utterance cannot occur in isolation; it must be uttered in an appropriate circumstance. This is what Oishi (2006) calls a speech act situation. Context in speech act theory "is a cluster of actual state of affairs or events of various kinds, related to the issuing of an utterance and to its intended force" Sbisa (2002 p.422). In other words, modified Sbisa modified the speech act theory to be applicable to real-life situations because speakers and hearers live in a society.

Furthermore, Sbisa's (2002, 2006, & 2013) work improves on John Austin's concept of performative utterances. The first is how performative utterances manifest. They manifest through the use of performative verbs that are related to the utterances. For example, the utterance "I divorce you" has a performative verb of divorce in which the action is performed as at the time it is uttered. Second, how the illocutionary force of speech acts is projected when there are no explicit performatives. The linguistic and non-linguistic indicators, such as the intonation, adverbial connectives, mood, modal verbs and the environment, point to the act that is performed. The inexplicit ways are expressed through the linguistic indicators and non-linguistic indicators, while the explicit ways are expressed through the use of the performative verbs. Consequently, Sbisa's approach to speech theory will help in identifying the performative verbs and their illocutionary force in the judges' utterances, thereby projecting the acts that are performed and their social implications.

Discourse Types

Discourse types developed by Srikant Sarangi are a theoretical concept that is institution-based. It focuses on talk forms in activities which are goal-driven. It also concentrates on specific acts that are performed in activities. Discourse types (DT) perform a complementary role to Levinson's activity type (AT) Odebunmi (2010). AT provides "large contextual background" for participants in an activity while DTs "relate to talk forms that are goal-driven" Odebunmi (2010, p.13). According to Sarangi (2000, p.11) DTs are:

> specific manifestation of language form in their interactional contexts (e.g from utterance types such as how are you? What are we doing here? to the sequential organisation of

> questions and answers as in a cross-examination, to stylistic features as in a promotional talk.

Therefore, DTs are language depictions in various contexts of interaction. Sarangi further makes a distinction between activity type and discourse type:

> While activity type is a means of characterising settings (e.g, a medical consultation, a service encounter, a university seminar), discourse type is a way of characterising forms of talk (e.g medical history taking, promotional talk, interrogation, troubles telling, etc.)

It can be deduced that activity type accounts for the wide contextual background that aids the interpretation of DTs, while DT is a means of addressing talk forms. In other words, activity type provides the template for interpreting talk forms. "DTs thus refer to specific acts performed in ATs such as advice (DT) in counselling (AT), questioning (DT) in interview (AT), and presentation (DT) in seminar (AT)" Odebunmi (2010, p.13). For this study, Sarangi's discourse types will account for the talk forms realised to achieve the goal of justice when the activity type of delivering the Supreme Court judgement is ongoing.

Methodology

The study adopts a qualitative approach. The qualitative approach enables us to look into the data and describe its features and their implications in relation to the objective of the study. Supreme Court judgements could either focus on criminal cases or civil cases. The focus of the study is on the judgments that concentrate on criminal matters because of their grave social implications in Nigerian society. The purposive sampling technique was adopted. 2020 and 2021 were purposively selected because of the significant expansion of the bench from 12 justices to 20 justices. This brought the Supreme Court to its highest capacity during this period. Therefore, seven Supreme Court judgements are selected from the years 2020 and 2021, respectively, making a total of 14 Supreme Court judgements. The Supreme Court judgements were extracted from *Law Pavilion Electronic Law Reports* (LPELR). The *Law Pavilion Electronic Law Reports* were preferred to other law reports because of its reliability, easy accessibility and its recognition by Nigerian Bar Association. The top-down method of analysis was used in the study.

Analysis

Judgments delivered at the Supreme Court in Nigeria are found to perform certain pragmatic functions, which are the reporting act and the pronouncing act.

Reporting Act

The reporting act is performed when the judge gives a report of a case from the trial court to the Court of Appeal. This is usually presented initially in a judgment before the Supreme Court judge evaluates the case based on its merits. In other words, the reporting act usually precedes the pronouncing act. It serves as a basis for the judge to make the pronouncement which will lead to the dismissal or the allowance of the appeal. The reporting act is further divided into the following micro acts: the informing act and narrating act.

Informing Act

Informing act is performed when the judge informs us of what has transpired in the lower courts, such as the magistrate court, high court and the Court of Appeal. We are informed about the procedures followed in the course of hearing the matter, the facts of the case, the positions and arguments of the lower court judges, as well as their verdicts. The informing act is performed to acquaint us with the genesis of the case. It serves as an introduction to a judgment. This is seen in the following excerpt.

Excerpt 1

> On 26/3/2012, the respondent sought to arraign the appellant and four others before the High Court of Anambra State, Awka Judicial Division, on a two-count charge of conspiracy to commit murder and attempted murder. Although the charges were read and interpreted to them, they declined to plead thereto on the ground that they had a pending motion challenging the competence of the charge. *Igwe v State (2021)*

The above excerpt embodies the information on the commencement of the arraignment of the appellant and four others. They were arraigned before the High Court of Anambra State on a two-count charge of conspiracy to commit murder and attempted murder. However, they declined to plead on the ground that they had a pending motion challenging the charges against them. This

marks the beginning of the case, upon which other matters are built. The respondent attempted to arraign the appellant, but it was not successful. The illocutionary force is operational in the use of the word "arraign" but could not be sustained because of its perlocutionary effect on the appellant. It was a misfire because the appellant refused uptake by declining plea. The appellant argued that there was a pending motion enabled by institutional provisions. The prosecution declared the beginning of the trial, but the appellant counter-declared. It results in the social reality of the procedural context. There is an apparent discourse type shift from a plea-taking to that of a preliminary objection.

Excerpt 2

> The appellant, as second defendant, and two other defendants were arraigned before the Lagos State High Court on a two-count charge of conspiracy to commit robbery and robbery. They were alleged to have used a toy gun to attack and rob a motorcycle rider and his passenger and dispossessed them of the sum of N500 and N1500.00 respectively. *Femi Ayoade v. The State (2020)*

The excerpts report speech acts that happened in the State High Court. The appellant was charged with conspiracy to commit robbery and robbery using a toy gun to threaten and collect some amount of money from a motorcyclist and the passenger. The judge discloses this information to enable us to follow the progress of the given case. The informing act is performed to carry along the reader. The illocutionary force of arraignment was projected through the word "arraigned" as the appellant was brought before the Lagos State High Court and charged accordingly. In addition, at the Supreme Court, the alleged robber was given a legal identity as the appellant, while at the State High Court, he was referred to as the defendant. The institution determines the legal identity of the robber.

Excerpt 3

> This is an appeal by the state against the judgement of the Court of Appeal, Abuja Division delivered on 17th day of March, 2016 wherein the appeal by the respondent was allowed and the judgement of the trial court, which convicted and sentenced the respondent, was set aside.

State v. Ali Ahmed (2020)

The judgment of the Court of Appeal was in favour of the respondent (Ali Ahmed), and the appellant (state) is dissatisfied with it; therefore, the appellant seeks redress at the Supreme Court. The respondent had been convicted of murder at the trial court, but the Court of Appeal set aside the judgment of the trial court and judged in favour of the respondent. This made the appellant further appeal to the Supreme Court. The informing act is performed to explicate the case of murder. The Court of Appeal made a declaration which was instantiated through the use of the performative verb "allowed". The perlocutionary effect on the respondent was his discharge and acquittal. However, this declaration is bound by the higher judicial authority at the Supreme Court, which could affirm it or set aside the judgment of the Court of Appeal. This implies that Illocutionary effects and perlocutionary effects are determined and limited by institutional conventions.

Narrating Act

The narrating act, as a subset of the reporting act, is performed when the judge tells us about the incident that led to a crime being committed. The features of narration, such as the time, date and place of an event, are stated by using a storytelling pattern. This is done in order to give a detailed and comprehensive account, which will help in convicting or vindicating the accused. This is evident in the excerpt below:

Excerpt 4

> PW1- one Ishiaku Abdulrazaq, a barber was in his barbing shop sometime in December, 2009 when the respondent came to his shop to barb his hair. The respondent then informed PW1 of an event that was disturbing his conscience. He then told PW1 that he fought with someone by the river side of old water and that he stabbed the boy with his knife. The respondent admitted that he knew the boy and PW1 agreed to follow him to the family of the boy he stabbed, to take him to the hospital for treatment but the respondent refused and left the shop that day. *State v. Ali Ahmed 2020*

Ishiaku Abdulrazaq was in his shop in December, 2009 when the respondent came to barb his hair. The respondent disclosed that he fought and stabbed a boy. The barber volunteered to follow him to the injured boy's family so that the boy can be taken to the hospital for treatment. However, the respondent rejected the offer of the barber. The place of interaction where the respondent disclosed the offence he committed is mentioned as well as the month and year that he confessed. Here is a respondent who injured another, presented through the illocutionary force of stabbing. He confesses his misdeed to the barber, igniting a perlocutionary effect of concern and offering to take the injured to the hospital. The respondent divulges his criminal act to the barber because of being pricked by his conscience.

Excerpt 5

> The facts of the case which led to this appeal in brief are that on 13/8/2010 at about 9:20 pm the appellant, who at the time was resident at N. 1 Gada Street, Ogbunabali, Port Harcourt went to No. 6 of the same street to invite out his friend, one Manuchim Owuru but the latter declined on the ground that he was not feeling well.
>
> *Wowem v. State 2021*

The facts of the case are presented by using the story-telling method. An interaction had ensued between two people, and the date, time and place of the interaction are stated. The information disclosed is relevant to the appeal as it informs us about the order of events, as well as enables the court to be able to situate the appeal. The story, in the long run, is evidence against the appellant who committed murder. The appellant uses the illocutionary force of inviting to urge his friend to come to his house. However, this was declined by the hearer, the friend, who responded that he was sick. The social act advocated by Sbisa was performed, but its uptake failed. The decline meant that he could not honour the invitation; he was too weak to come over and would need to take care of himself. The interaction reported in the excerpt is a lay talk which is lifted into an institutional discourse and labelled "facts of the case". It establishes the factual ground on which legal decisions would be made.

Excerpt 6

> On 25/1/2014, at Kalgo Town, Kalgo Local Government of Kebbi State, a group of hunters, including the appellant and

> one Mohammed Bandi, went on a hunting expedition, and a fight broke out over bush meat. Offended by what Mohammed Bandi said to him during the fight, the appellant used an axe to inflict injury on Mohammed Bandi's head.
>
> *Kalgo v. State (2021:1)*

An account of what happened between the appellant and another (Mohammed Bandi) is narrated in the excerpt. The date of the incident is first stated, followed by the place of the fight. This is followed by stating what happened and the aftermath. A group of hunters had gone on a hunting expedition and there was a fight over a game that was caught. The appellant and Mohammed Bandi were among the group of hunters. Mohammed Bandi made a remark that provoked the appellant, which made the latter inflict injury on Mohammed Bandi's head. The illocutionary act is performed when Mohammed Bandi said something to the appellant, and the illocutionary effect is the creation of an offence. The social nature of people is highlighted by the group of hunters going on a hunting expedition. Individuals are social actors who perform acts which have implications in society. The appellant fought over a game and was offended by what was said to him by his fellow hunter. He thus inflicted injury on the hunter, leading to his death. Notably, the constant change in social status is depicted. It moves from being a hunter to an offended hunter and to the status of an appellant. Furthermore, the excerpt constitutes the fact of the case that later declarations can latch on to.

Pronouncing Act

Pronouncing act typifies the voice of the Supreme Court judge in the process of dismissing or allowing an appeal. After the judge has reported the ongoing proceedings in the lower courts, he delves into the case by evaluating it. The judge begins to state his view by asserting, stating, disapproving and eventually making his declaration. Pronouncing act is divided into the following micro acts: asserting act, stating act, disapproving act and the declaring act.

Asserting Act

The Supreme Court judge performs an asserting act through the expression of their position in a clear, confident and firm manner. The judge firmly discloses his view on a matter and tows a particular line of thought which eventually transcends into a conclusion. Let us hear what the judge has to say:

Excerpt 7

> I am of the firm view that the lower court acted in error when it affirmed the decision of the Kaduna State High Court which in turn affirmed the decision of the Chief Magistrate's court which found the Appellant guilty of the offence of cheating.
>
> *Theophilus Kure v. COP (2020)*

The opening of the excerpt with the phrase "I am of the firm view" connotes the illocutionary force framed as opinion. The judge believes that the three lower courts were wrong in their conviction of cheating. The asserting act is used to bring the judge's view to the fore. However, the judge is not just asserting but signalling the next legal move of overturning the conviction. The legal state of the appellant changes as the judge makes his assertion. The illocutionary effect is that, first, the appellant's status shifts from a convict to an appellant whose case has judicial backing for reversal. Second, the lower court's decision becomes erroneous, and the Supreme Court takes on an obligation to justify its assertion. Therefore, the excerpt portrays the first step in setting aside a conviction by reshaping legal relationships.

Excerpt 8

> In this case, the appellant's action of inflicting injury on the deceased in reaction to being hit with a stick cannot be deemed proportionate to the threat he is alleged to have been faced with. *Nasiru v State 2021:33*

The judge asserts that the appellant's reaction to the deceased was not proportionate to what the deceased did to him. At the locution level, he evaluated the appellant's violent response to being hit with a stick and concluded that it was not proportionate. At the illocution level, the judge removes self-defence as a justification for the appellant's violent response. The deceased had hit him with a stick, while he retaliated by inflicting injury on the deceased with a cutlass. The deceased died as a result of the injury inflicted on him. The judge performs an asserting act based on the evaluation of proportionality.

Stating Act

The expression of the law, principles of the law, constitution, statutes, overtly or covertly, amounts to the performance of the stating act. The judge performs a stating act as a means of supporting his

stance or arguments in favour of the appellant or respondent. It is performed as a way of accentuating the merits in the appeal brought before the Supreme Court. The stating act is performed in the following excerpt involving Akpakpan and the state.

Excerpt 9

> In any case, the law makes the appellant criminally responsible for any excess force applied. Section 305 of the Criminal Code Law, Cap.38, vol.2, Laws of Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria, 2000 states thus, any person authorised by law to use force is criminally responsible for any excess according to the nature and quality of the act which constitutes the excess. *Akpakpan v State 2021:31*

In other words, the appellant, who was a police officer acted excessively, and this made him criminally responsible for the death of the deceased. He had shot the deceased, who did not exercise undue confrontation to the appellant. The judge performs a stating act by stating Section 305 of the Criminal Code Law, Cap. 38, vol.2, Laws of Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria, 2000, to buttress his argument that the appellant acted out of proportion and would be penalised for it. The social or legal status of the appellant shifts from a person who used force to a person criminally responsible for excess force. It ultimately becomes the obligation of the court to ascertain whether the force was excessive.

Excerpt 10

> On this matter of whether or not the appellant's right to fair hearing was complied with in keeping with the provisions of Section 36 of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Section 36(4) of the CFRN provides as follows: "whenever any person is charged with a criminal offence, he shall, unless the charge is withdrawn, be entitled to a fair hearing in public within a reasonable time by a court or tribunal." *Lucky Obasi v. The State (2020:17)*

Lucky Obasi, the appellant, had contended that his matter was delayed, while the respondent argued that the appellant deliberately delayed the matter by being absent from court on several occasions. Instead of this, the judge invokes the provisions of a section of the Constitution to assert

that a fair hearing is within a stipulated time, which is to be determined by the court. The legal status of the appellant changes from being a convict to a rights-holder. The Supreme Court is now obligated to address Section 36 (4).

Excerpt 11

> …the original notice of appeal was filed on the 84th day from delivery of the judgement of the court below, whereas the law prescribes 30 days for filing of a notice of appeal in a criminal matter under Section 27(2)(b) of the Supreme Court Act. *Jude Onwuzulike v. The State (2020)*

The notice of appeal ought to have been filed within the statutory period of 30 days from the date on which the Court of Appeal judgement was delivered. This is brought to the fore by performing the stated act. The judge states what the law says in Section 27 (2)(b) of the Supreme Court Act as regards the time when the notice of appeal should be filed. The judge is not just stating what is in the Supreme Court Act, but also juxtaposing the day the notice was filed to the number of days the law requires. As a result of the inappropriate timing of the filing of the original notice of appeal, which is tantamount to not following the due legal procedures, the court is obligated to address the timing and strike out the appeal irrespective of the merits of the case. Invariably, the Court of Appeal's judgement remains valid.

Disapproving Act

A disapproving act is performed when the judge disapproves of a wrongdoing done in the course of a court process, or he expresses his displeasure at an action performed by a legal officer. The following excerpt exemplifies it:

Excerpt 12

> My lords, before I round off this judgement, permit me to make an observation about the attitude and disposition of A.A. Oladunmiye, Chief Legal Officer, Ministry of Justice, Ondo State, counsel for the respondent. His disgusting comportment in court at the hearing of this appeal was thoroughly scandalous to say the least…He half-heartedly, approached his assignment, worse still, his cavalier

> proclivity for fripperies was most shocking. *Obaro v State 2021:14*

The judge comments on the attitude of the legal officer who was the legal counsel to the respondent. He castigates the legal officer and sees him as a person who did not discharge his duty as expected. He expresses his displeasure using words like "disgusting", "scandalous" and "cavalier". The appellant had been accused of kidnapping and murder. However, the prosecution failed to convincingly prove that the appellant committed the offences. With the judge's disapproval, there is a social shift in the label of the counsel to the respondent to a lawyer of shameful conduct. Thus, an institutional pressure is created for the Ministry of Justice in Ondo State and Oladunmiye to respond. The judge, as a social actor in protecting the sanctity of the justice system, is depicted through the enactment of the disapproving act.

Excerpt 13

> I wish to deprecate the attitude of the learned counsel for the appellant in manufacturing stories to suit the interest of his client…Learned counsel should refrain from manufacturing facts to suit the interest of his client. As a minister in the Temple of Justice, counsel should always be guided by raw facts as disclosed by the evidence before the court. To be forewarned is to be forearmed. Learned counsel should heed to this advice against the future. *Enebeli v State (2021:31,33)*

Again, the Supreme Court judge disapproves of the unethical practice of the counsel to the appellant. The use of the word "deprecate" indicates the disapproval of a behaviour. The counsel had fabricated stories on behalf of the appellant to exonerate him of the offence of murder, which he had committed. The Supreme Court judge was able to identify the discrepancies in the story told and disapproved of such practice as a way of warning and correcting the counsel. The illocutionary force of "deprecate" is employed to shift the counsel's status from an officer of the court to an officer under warning. The expression "minister of justice" redefines what counsel is. This creates a normative obligation for lawyers. In sum, the social act of professional correction is foregrounded through the disapproval of the counsel's unethical practice.

Declaring Act

The declaring act is performed when the judge gives the verdict. It indicates finality. The judge makes a declaration which is binding on the appellant and the respondent. The judge expressly states the position of the court in favour of the appellant or the respondent. This can be seen below.

Excerpt 14

> The judgement of the trial court which convicted the respondent and sentenced him to death is restored and the judgement of the court below is set aside. Respondent acquittal and discharge order is reversed. Appeal allowed
>
> *State v Ali Ahmed 2020*

Four declarative acts are performed by the judge. First, the judge brings to reinstate the sentence on the respondent as pronounced by the trial court. The performative verb "restored" indicates the performance of the act. Second, the judge makes the judgement of the court below inconsequential through the illocutionary force of setting aside the judgement. Third, the legal status of the respondent as a freeman is withdrawn through the use of the performative verb "reversed". The new social and legal identity of the respondent is created. Fourth, the expression "appeal allowed" signals that the judgement favours the appellant, which creates immediate institutional obligations of detaining the respondent and the commencement of the execution process of the respondent.

Excerpt 15

> In the present case, both the trial court and intermediate court had dutifully considered whether the defence of self-defence and accident, from the available facts, could avail the appellant in anyway, and dismissed them as unavailing. I must also dismiss the appeal. The issue is against the appellant and I hereby affirm the concurrent decisions of both the trial and lower courts. *Egheghe v State 2020:12*

The trial court and the Court of Appeal had evaluated the appellant's defence of self-defence and concluded that it could not avail him. The judge concurs with the conclusion of the two courts, which is reflected in the use of the words "dutifully" and "also". "Dutifully" suggests the judges at the lower courts were competent, and "also" shows his agreement to the dismissal of the appeal. Therefore, he performs the declaring act of dismissal of the appeal, which comes to reality at the time the utterance is made. In the same vein, the judge subsequently performs another declaring

act by affirming the decisions of the lower courts through the explicit use of the performative verb "affirm".

Conclusion

The analysis of judicial writing achieves legal outcomes through a dual mechanism. Illocutionarily, it creates and alters status through declarations recognised by the institution. Discursively, it exercises power by controlling which facts are deemed relevant and how they are labelled. In addition, institutional actors control the shift in discourse types. Therefore, legal meaning is not found in facts alone but is produced at the intersection of institutional speech acts and professionally managed discourse shifts. Future studies may consider how institutional speech acts and talk forms are produced in civil cases of the Supreme Court judgements.

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Digital Semiotics and the Construction of Meaning in Technology-Mediated ESL Pedagogy

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Abstract

This study examines the role of digital semiotics in the construction of meaning within technology-mediated English as a Second Language (ESL) pedagogy among secondary school learners. Anchored in Social Semiotics and Multimodality Theory. Recent studies have shown that AI tools have become deeply embedded in learners' writing processes, functioning as virtual tutors that support idea generation, language accuracy, and text production. Despite the growing use of AI technologies in language education, existing studies have largely focused on their pedagogical effectiveness, including improvements in writing performance, language proficiency, and learner engagement, with little attention being paid to the semiotic processes through which learners construct, negotiate, and interpret meaning while interacting with AI-powered tools. The study explores how artificial intelligence (AI) tools reshape meaning-making processes in classroom contexts. A qualitative classroom-based design was adopted, involving a hundred (100) purposively selected students who engaged in structured writing, grammar correction, and translation tasks using AI tools such as ChatGPT, Grammarly and Google Translate. Data were generated from learners' engagement with these tools, including immediate responses, revised texts, and observational notes. Findings reveal that construction of meaning in AI-mediated ESL classrooms is a co-produced and multimodal process, shaped through interaction between learners and algorithmic systems. Learners demonstrated different degrees of agency, ranging from direct adoption of AI outputs to critical modification and iterative prompting. The study further shows that AI tools function as active semiotic agents, greatly influencing linguistic choices, restructuring classroom authority, and expanding the means through which meaning is negotiated. The study concludes that AI integration represents a significant transformation in ESL pedagogy and recommends the development of critical AI literacy and guided pedagogical frameworks for effective classroom implementation.

Keywords: *Digital semiotics; Meaning construction; Technology-mediated pedagogy; Multimodality;*

Introduction

The integration of digital technologies into English as a Second Language (ESL) classrooms has significantly transformed pedagogical practices, particularly at the secondary school level. Traditional approaches to language teaching, which are often teacher-centred and text-bound, are increasingly being replaced by digitally mediated learning environments where learners actively engage with language through a wide range of semiotic resources. These resources extend beyond written and spoken language to include emojis, images, hyperlinks, audiovisual materials, and

algorithm-generated content produced through artificial intelligence (AI) tools such as ChatGPT, Grammarly, and Google Translate. The growing presence of these technologies reflects a shift in language learning environments, where meaning is continuously negotiated through processes such as automated feedback, translation, text generation, and interactive dialogue.

Artificial intelligence-powered technologies have become important mediators of language learning experiences in contemporary ESL classrooms. These tools provide learners with instant feedback, language modelling, translation support, and opportunities for interactive engagement. Beyond aiding language learning, they influence how meaning is constructed, interpreted, and negotiated within educational contexts. Consequently, learners operate within complex semiotic environments in which meaning is distributed across both human and machine-generated forms of communication.

Digital semiotics refers to the study of signs, symbols and meaning-making processes in digital environments. It encompasses how meaning is created, interpreted and transmitted through digital means and resources. Within educational contexts, digital semiotics explains how learners engage with different semiotic resources available through technological platforms to craft and communicate meanings. It also provides a valuable framework for understanding these developments by emphasising the role of multiple sign systems in the construction of meaning, particularly within digitally mediated communication spaces. From this perspective, language is no longer viewed as an isolated system of communication but as part of a broader multimodal network in which visual, textual, auditory, and algorithmic elements interact to produce meaning. As a result, effective participation in contemporary digital learning environments requires not only linguistic competence but also semiotic competence, enabling learners to interpret and negotiate meaning across diverse modes of communication.

Meaning construction, on the other hand, is the process through which individuals create, interpret and negotiate meaning during communication and learning activities. In educational settings, learners construct meanings by interpreting information, relating it to the knowledge they have before and negotiating meanings through social interaction. This is further enhanced by the introduction of multimodality and interactive learning, where learners integrate visual, textual, auditory and algorithmic resources in the interpretation of meaning. The relevance of this study is particularly important within the educational sphere in Nigeria, where the integration of digital tools has increased rapidly over the years. Nigerian students, including those in secondary schools,

have been exposed to new forms of language learning that extend beyond the traditional method of teaching in the classroom. Many students, even at the secondary school level, now heavily depend on AI tools such as ChatGPT, Grammarly and Google Translate to support writing, translation and language learning practices. Despite the increasing adoption, there is limited research on how these technologies influence the processes through which learners craft and negotiate meaning in the English language, since English is the official language and the medium of instruction.

The choice of Oyo State for this study is informed by the fact that it is regarded as one of Nigeria's prominent educational centres. The state hosts several schools, both private and public schools, with different access to technological tools. In addition, the state is growing in its adoption of digital technologies and internet-enabled learning resources. Recently, in conjunction with the World Bank, selected teachers underwent training, and Tabs were distributed to them to ensure the transition to the use of digital tools in the learning process. The use of secondary schools is as a result of the fact that they represent a critical level in the educational process. At this level, students are expected to demonstrate increasing ability in English for academic, social and professional purposes. Also, they are regarded as one of the most highly active groups when it comes to the use of digital tools and AI-assisted applications. Understanding their integration will serve as an asset for teachers, curriculum developers and policy makers to promote effective and responsible use of artificial intelligence in language leaning and education.

AI- mediated pedagogy includes teaching and learning practices that are facilitated and enhanced through the integration of artificial intelligence technologies. It involves the use of AI-powered tools to support teaching and instructional delivery, learners' engagement and assessment. It extends beyond the use of AI tools but includes the positioning of these tools as active agents in the learning process. Yusuf (2026) argues that AI has the potential to transform educational practices in Nigeria by increasing learners' engagement and supporting adaptive learning. This is evident in the use of tools such as ChatGPT, Grammarly and Google Translate, which help in writing, grammar correction, translation and interactive language practices. Therefore, this study investigates the role of digital semiotics in the construction of meaning within technology-mediated ESL pedagogy among secondary school learners. Specifically, it explores how AI-powered tools function as semiotic resources that shape meaning-making processes and influence learner engagement within contemporary language learning environments.

Statement of the Problem

The integration of digital technologies into secondary school English as a Second Language (ESL) classrooms has significantly transformed language teaching and learning within digitally mediated environments. Learners increasingly interact with artificial intelligence (AI) tools such as ChatGPT, Grammarly, and Google Translate, which extend beyond traditional instructional support by actively participating in meaning-making processes through instant feedback, translation, text generation, rewriting, and multimodal language assistance (Fryer et al., 2020; Song & Song, 2023).

Recent studies have shown that AI tools have become deeply embedded in learners' writing processes, functioning as virtual tutors that support idea generation, language accuracy, and text production (Dizon & Gayed, 2021; Zhao et al., 2023). ChatGPT, in particular, facilitates interactive dialogue that assists learners in developing and refining written texts, while Grammarly and Google Translate provide automated corrective feedback and translation support (Wang & Cheng, 2021; Zhao et al., 2023). These developments suggest that meaning-making in contemporary ESL classrooms extends beyond human-centred linguistic activity and increasingly involves interactions between learners and machine-generated semiotic systems.

Despite the growing use of AI technologies in language education, existing studies have largely focused on their pedagogical effectiveness, including improvements in writing performance, language proficiency, and learner engagement. Comparatively little attention has been paid to the semiotic processes through which learners construct, negotiate, and interpret meaning while interacting with AI-powered tools. Consequently, there remains limited empirical evidence regarding how AI technologies function as active semiotic resources within secondary school ESL classrooms.

This gap is particularly evident in research examining how learners engage with ChatGPT, Grammarly and Google Translate as interconnected meaning-making systems rather than as isolated instructional tools. Therefore, there is a need for a deeper theoretical and empirical investigation into the role of AI-powered digital semiotic resources in shaping meaning construction within technology-mediated ESL pedagogy. This study addresses this gap by exploring how secondary school learners interact with AI tools as collaborative participants in the construction and negotiation of meaning.

Aim and Objectives

This study aims to examine the role of digital semiotics in the construction of meaning within technology-mediated English as a Second Language (ESL) pedagogy among secondary school learners. The specific objectives are:

v. to investigate how AI tools aid meaning construction in technology- mediated ESL classrooms
vi. to examine the semiotic and multimodal resources through which learners negotiate and construct meaning while engaging with AI tools
vii. to explore the interface between learners' agency and AI participation in the construction of meaning in secondary schools' ESL pedagogy.

Literature Review

Artificial Intelligence and ESL Pedagogy

The integration of artificial intelligence (AI) into English as a Second Language (ESL) education has expanded rapidly in recent years, reshaping both teaching practices and learner engagement. AI-powered tools such as ChatGPT, Grammarly, and Google Translate are increasingly employed to support writing development, vocabulary acquisition, language practice, and feedback provision within language classrooms (Song & Song, 2023; Zhao et al., 2023). These technologies function as intelligent learning assistants by providing instant corrective feedback, generating model texts, and facilitating learning beyond the traditional classroom environment.

Recent Nigerian studies have also highlighted the growing role of digital technologies in language teaching and learning. According to Adebayo and Akinyemi (2023), the integration of AI-supported learning tools in Nigerian secondary schools has enhanced learners' participation, writing development, and independent learning. Similarly, Adeoye, Olatunji, and Yusuf (2024) observed that digital learning platforms encourage learner-centred instruction and improved language engagement among ESL learners. Their findings suggest that AI technologies are gradually transforming traditional classroom practices by providing learners with immediate access to linguistic support and feedback mechanisms. This indicates that AI-mediated learning environments are becoming important for language development and meaning construction in the Nigerian educational setting.

Research indicates that ChatGPT, in particular, enhances learner engagement by facilitating interactive dialogue that resembles human tutoring, thereby supporting writing fluency, idea

generation, and language development (Fryer et al., 2020; Song & Song, 2023). Similarly, Grammarly assists learners through automated grammatical corrections and stylistic recommendations, while Google Translate facilitate multilingual communication, lexical development, and meaning transfer across languages (Dizon & Gayed, 2021; Wang & Cheng, 2021). Despite these contributions, existing studies have predominantly focused on the pedagogical effectiveness of AI technologies rather than the semiotic processes through which meaning is constructed and negotiated.

Multimodality and Meaning Construction in Digital Learning Environments

The emergence of digital learning environments has introduced a multimodal dimension to ESL pedagogy in which meaning is constructed through the interaction of linguistic, visual, auditory, and algorithmic resources. Multimodal discourse theory argues that meaning is not confined to language alone but is distributed across multiple semiotic modes that operate simultaneously to facilitate communication (Jewitt, 2005; Kress, 2010).

Within digital classrooms, learners engage with texts embedded with images, hyperlinks, emojis, audiovisual materials, and AI-generated feedback, all of which contribute to the meaning-making process. Recent studies suggest that digital multimodal resources enable learners to combine diverse semiotic elements in the production of texts, thereby enhancing creativity, engagement, and communicative competence (Fang et al., 2025; Liang & Lim, 2021). In AI-mediated environments, these multimodal resources are not static but dynamically generated through algorithmic intervention. Tools such as ChatGPT and Grammarly continuously reshape learner output by generating suggestions, revisions, and feedback that influence the construction of meaning (Kalantzis & Cope, 2025). Within the Nigerian context, researchers have greatly recognised the significance of multimodal resources in language education. Olateju(2019) opined that meaning in contemporary communication comes from the interaction of multiple semiotic resources such as language, visuals, gestures and digital symbols. In the same vein, Adegoju (2020) maintains that digital communication environments demand that learners interpret and negotiate meaning across various modes rather than depending solely on linguistic forms. In technology- mediated classrooms, learners encounter texts that combine written language, images, videos, hyperlinks and interactive feedback systems, all of which contribute to the construction of meanings.

Digital Semiotics and Human–AI Meaning-Making

Digital semiotics provides a useful framework for understanding how meaning is created and interpreted within technologically mediated environments. Unlike traditional linguistic approaches that focus primarily on verbal communication, digital semiotics emphasises the interaction of signs across multiple systems, including human language, visual representations, and machine-generated outputs (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2021). Within this framework, AI tools function as active semiotic agents rather than passive instructional supports. They participate directly in meaning-making processes by generating, modifying, and restructuring linguistic content. Emerging studies indicate that learners interacting with AI systems engage in complex processes of negotiation, revision, interpretation, and adaptation of machine-generated texts, reflecting a shift toward co-constructed meaning between human users and intelligent technologies (Li et al., 2024; Woo et al., 2025).

Nigerian scholarship on semiotics also provides valuable insights into digital meaning-making practices. Odebunmi (2016) explains that meaning is not static, but it emerges through contextual interpretation and interaction among speakers. This interaction creates a hybrid semiotic environment in which meaning is distributed across both human cognition and algorithmic processes. Consequently, meaning construction becomes a collaborative activity involving continuous interaction between learners and AI systems. Although previous studies have established the pedagogical benefits of AI technologies in ESL education, there remains limited theoretical and empirical engagement with how these technologies reshape semiotic practices within authentic classroom contexts. Existing scholarship has largely concentrated on language performance, learner engagement, and instructional effectiveness, with comparatively little attention devoted to the semiotic dimensions of learner–AI interaction.

This gap is particularly evident at the secondary school level, where research examining how learners interact with AI tools as interconnected meaning-making systems remains scarce. Furthermore, limited attention has been paid to the ways in which AI technologies function as semiotic resources that influence meaning construction, negotiation, and interpretation in technology-mediated ESL classrooms. Therefore, there is a need for empirical research that explores how secondary school learners engage with AI-powered tools such as ChatGPT, Grammarly and Google Translate as active participants in the meaning-making process.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored in Social Semiotics Theory and Multimodality Theory. Together, these theories provide a comprehensive framework for examining how meaning is constructed within technology-mediated ESL pedagogy and how AI-powered tools function as semiotic resources in contemporary language learning environments.

Social Semiotics Theory

Social Semiotics Theory originated from the work of Halliday (1978) and was subsequently expanded by Kress and van Leeuwen (2021). The theory conceptualises language as a social resource for meaning-making rather than a fixed system of grammatical rules. Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics established the foundation for understanding language as a socially situated meaning-making system, while Kress and van Leeuwen extended this perspective to include visual, spatial, digital, and other communicative modes.

From a social semiotic perspective, meaning is constructed through social interaction, context, and the semiotic choices made by individuals. Communication is therefore viewed as a dynamic process of sign-making rather than the mere application of linguistic structures. This perspective is particularly relevant to the present study because it facilitates an understanding of AI tools as active semiotic resources within ESL classrooms.

Tools such as ChatGPT, Grammarly and Google Translate do not merely assist language learning; they actively participate in the production, modification, and negotiation of meaning. Through generating, correcting, translating, and restructuring learner output, these technologies contribute to meaning-making processes and influence how learners interpret and produce language.

Multimodality Theory

This study is also grounded in Multimodality Theory, developed by Kress (2010), which extends social semiotic principles by emphasising the role of multiple modes in communication. The theory posits that contemporary meaning-making is achieved through the integration of linguistic, visual, auditory, spatial, and digital resources rather than through language alone. In digitally mediated learning environments, meaning emerges through the interaction of diverse semiotic resources, including text, images, interface design, hyperlinks, audiovisual materials, and algorithmically generated outputs. This perspective is particularly applicable to technology-

enhanced language learning contexts where learners engage with complex multimodal forms of communication.

Within the context of this study, AI tools such as ChatGPT and Grammarly operate within multimodal environments that combine textual content with visual interfaces, feedback systems, prompts, and interactive suggestions. Learners therefore interact not only with language but also with digital structures that guide and shape meaning-making processes. As a result, meaning construction in AI-mediated ESL classrooms is inherently multimodal.

The integration of Social Semiotics Theory and Multimodality Theory provides a robust analytical framework for understanding meaning construction in technology-mediated ESL pedagogy. Social Semiotics explains how meaning is created through socially situated processes of sign-making, while Multimodality Theory accounts for the multiple semiotic resources through which communication occurs in digital environments. Together, these theories facilitate a deeper understanding of how AI-powered tools function as active participants in the construction, negotiation, and interpretation of meaning within secondary school ESL classrooms.

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative classroom-based research design to examine the role of digital Semiotics in the construction of meaning in Technology -Mediated English as a second language (ESL) Pedagogy. This approach was considered appropriate because it gives room for an intensive exploration of learners' engagement with artificial intelligence (AI) tools and the Semiotic process through which meaning is constructed, negotiated and transmitted in ESL classrooms. This will aid a detailed investigation of how learners interact with AI -generated content and how such interaction affects meaning-making practices in ESL learning environments.

The study was conducted in Ogbomosho, Oyo State. Five secondary schools were selected to have a balanced combination of both public and private educational settings. The selected schools are: Baptist Secondary Grammar School, Ahoyaya, Baptist High School, Adeniran Memorial Grammar School, Smith International Academy and Zion Academy, all located in Ogbomoso. Twenty (20) students were selected from each school, making a total of one hundred (100) participants. Students were selected from Senior Secondary School 1 and 2 classes because students at this stage possess adequate linguistic competence and digital literacy to engage adequately with AI- powered language learning tools.

A purposive sampling technique was employed to select the participants. This is to ensure that only students who have access to digital devices and are familiar with technology-assisted learning tools are included in the study. Data were generated through classroom-based activities conducted over a period of four weeks. During these periods, participants engaged in structured language learning tasks designed to facilitate interactions with AI-powered tools such as ChatGPT Grammar and Google Translate. Each participant completed three language learning tasks, namely AI - Assisted writing task, Grammar correction and Translation task. All tasks were completed under classroom supervision to ensure consistency in data generation.

Data for the study were obtained from three primary sources, namely:

- AI-generated outputs produced by ChatGPT, Grammarly, and Google Translate.
- Learners' original, revised, and final written texts.
- Classroom observation notes documenting learners' interactions with AI tools during task completion.

Ethical Consideration

Ethical considerations were observed during the course of the research. Before data collection, permission was obtained from the management of the selected schools. The purpose of this was to ensure informed participation. Participation was largely voluntary, and students were informed that they could withdraw at any point during the research without penalty. Informed consent was also obtained from participants' parents; this is because the participants were minors. Also, confidentiality and anonymity were maintained throughout the study.

Method of Data Analysis

The data obtained were analysed using thematic analysis. A qualitative method of data analysis used to identify, examine and interpret recurring patterns or themes within a set of data. Learners' interactions with AI tools, written texts, revisions, translations, and observational records were examined to identify recurring patterns and themes. The analysis was guided by Social Semiotics Theory and Multimodality Theory, which served as analytical frameworks for understanding how meaning was constructed through the interaction of linguistic, visual, digital, and algorithmic semiotic resources.

Data Analysis and Discussion of Findings

This presents the findings from the classroom-based qualitative data generated through task-based activities involving one hundred (100) secondary school ESL students. The data were obtained by engaging the learners in activities that involve the use of AI tools such as ChatGPT, Grammarly, and Google Translate during writing, translation and grammar correction. The findings were thematically organised using social Semiotics theory and multimodality theory.

Theme 1: AI as a collaborator in the construction of meaning in ESL writing

Task: AI-assisted writing with ChatGPT (Baptist Secondary School Ahoyaya)

AI Prompt: Write a paragraph on the importance of education

ChatGPT Response: 'Education is the foundation of success in life and provides opportunities for personal and professional growth' without modification reveals a very high level of dependence on AI.

Student's Final Version:

Student 1: Education is the key to success because it gives people knowledge and opportunities to achieve their future goals.

Student 2: Education is the bedrock of every society; it is a pathway to success and goal achievement.

Another learner modified the phrase 'foundation of success' to ' means' to discovering future goals, demonstrating that there is room for contextual and negotiation of meaning by learners.

Writing Task for Adeniran Memorial Grammar School

AI Prompt: Write a short paragraph on the importance of reading

ChatGPT response: Reading is an important habit that improves knowledge, vocabulary and critical thinking skills.

Student's Version

Student 1: Reading is a valuable habit because it expands knowledge, improves vocabulary and helps students think more critically.

Student 2: Reading is a good habit that helps students to think more critically, gives knowledge and improves vocabulary.

Writing Task for Baptist High School

AI Prompt: Write a paragraph about the benefits of technology in education

ChatGPT Response: Technology has transformed education by providing access to information and enhancing communication between teachers and students.

Student's final version

Student 1: Technology has improved education by giving students quick access to information and making communication between teachers and learners more effective, especially through online platforms.

Student 2: Technology has enhanced education, giving access to students to more information among teachers and students.

Writing Task for Smith International Academy

AI Prompt: Write a paragraph on Environmental cleanliness

ChatGPT Response: Environmental cleanliness is more important because it promotes good health and prevents diseases

Student's final version

Student 1: Environmental cleanliness is essential because it promotes good health, prevents the spread of diseases and creates a safe and pleasant environment for everyone.

Student 2: Environmental cleanliness is significant because it enhances wellbeing and stops diseases.

Writing Task for Zion Academy

AI Prompt: Write a paragraph on the value of hard work

ChatGPT: Hard work is important because it helps individuals achieve their goals and become successful.

Student's final version

Student 1: Hard work is important because it enables people to achieve their goals, overcome challenges and attain lasting success in life.

Student 2: Hard work is essential because it helps individuals to pursue their future and be successful.

Pattern of Response	Frequency	Percentage
Direct use of AI	30	30%
Minor modification	45	45%
Total modification	25	25%

The table above reveals that ChatGPT serves as a Semiotic resource that gives linguistic variance where learners negotiate and use language in a way that is suitable to their communicative desire. Out of 100 participants, 30 students used ChatGPT responses directly without modification (30%), 45 students made minor modifications (45%), and 25 students made extensive modifications (25%), demonstrating that ChatGPT acts as a collaborative agent in meaning -making in alignment with social semiotic theory that states that meaning is created through a combined interaction between human and semiotic systems. In the creation of meaning, learners engage in varying degrees of negotiation, acceptance and rejection of AI-generated meaning.

Theme 2: Multimodal Meaning Construction through AI Feedback Systems

Participants used Grammarly to revise sentences

Extract 1

Original Text: Students should study hard because the examination is important.

Grammarly Suggestion: Students should study diligently because examinations are important.

Student's Version: Students should study diligently because examinations are important and often determine future academic opportunities.

The learner accepted Grammarly's lexical suggestions while adding contextual information. The combination of textual feedback and visual prompts influenced the learner's meaning-making process.

Extract 2

Original Text: Social media is good because it helps people to communicate faster.

Grammarly: Social Media is beneficial because it helps people communicate more efficiently and stay connected with friends and family across distances.

Student's Revision: Social Media is beneficial because it helps people communicate more efficiently.

Extract 3

Original Text: Eating fruits is good for health.

Grammarly Suggestion: Eating fruit is beneficial to health.

Student's Revision: Regular exercise is beneficial to health because it improves physical fitness and reduces the risk of diseases.

The students did not merely adopt the AI correction but elaborated on it. This demonstrates how multimodal AI feedback can stimulate further meaning construction.

Extract 4

Original Text: My teacher gives us mangoes every day.

Grammarly Suggestion

My teacher gives us mangoes regularly

Student's Revision:

My teacher gives us mangoes every day to improve our immunity.

The learner used Grammarly's correction as a foundation for developing a more detailed expression of meaning. The AI tool functioned as a semiotic resource that guided linguistic improvement while allowing room for learner creativity.

Attitude	Frequency	Percentage
Accepted Grammarly completely	40	40%
Modified suggestion	38	38%
Rejected suggestion	22	22%

The table above suggests that meaning is negotiated through the integration of text, visual and algorithmic semiotic resources.

Data gotten from students' interaction with Grammarly also revealed that algorithm feedback is highly visible in the participants' writing practices. Out of the 100 participants, 40students (40%) accepted Grammarly corrections, 38 students (38%) accepted the corrections with modification, and 22 students (22%) rejected all corrections and retained the original statement. Grammarly operates as a visual-linguistic semiotic system where meaning is generated and shaped through colour-coded feedback and structural suggestion. This indicates that learners can choose by selectively engaging with algorithm correction. This is in line with multimodality theory, which states that meaning is distributed across several modes.

Theme 3: Meaning Negotiation Across Translation Activities

Extract 1

Source Text: opolopo eniyan nberu

Google Translate: Many people are afraid

Student final version: Many people are afraid of uncertainty concerning their future

The student expanded the translated output by adding "of the uncertainty surrounding their future." This demonstrates that meaning construction involved interpretation and elaboration rather than simple acceptance of the machine-generated translation.

Extract 2:

Source Text: Ijoba Naijiria ko SE daadaa to

Google Translate: The Nigerian government has not done well enough

Student's final version: The Nigerian government has not performed well enough in addressing the needs of the citizens. The student expanded the AI-generated translation by adding a specific area of concern to reflect active meaning construction rather than accepting the AI translation blindly.

Extract 3

Source Text: Eje ka fowo so wopo dada

Google Translate: Let us work together properly

Student's final revision: Let us work together effectively to achieve our common goals

The student retained the core meaning of the translated text but also enriched it with contextual information.

Findings from the translation task given to the participants using Google Translate show that learners engage in comparison of interpretation of meaning across translation platforms. Out of the 100 participants, 50 students (50%) cross-checked responses thoroughly. 30students (30%) made mild changes, and 20 students (20%) relied solely on Google Translate.

This indicates that translation is not a direct transfer of meaning; it is a reconstruction process that involves comparison, linguistic judgement and adaptation to context. This agrees with the multimodal perspective that states that meaning-making is realised in different ways across multiple semiotic systems.

Theme 4: Learners' Agency and AI Participation in the Construction of Meaning

Extract 1:

ChatGPT Suggestion: Technology has greatly improved the educational setting by making learning accessible and the retrieval of information easier.

Student's Response: Technology has improved education by making learning very easy and accessible, especially for students in remote areas.

The learner expatiated more on the AI-generated statement by introducing contextual information through the use of 'remote areas' rather than accepting the AI response.

Extract 2: Write a short paragraph on punctuality

ChatGPT Response: Punctuality is good because it helps manage time effectively and creates a positive impression.

Student's Response: punctuality is good because it helps people to manage their time effectively, creates a positive image and encourages discipline.

The student accepted the central point proposed by ChatGPT but added the concept of discipline. This clearly states that the learners, though they generated ideas from AI tools, still have input to add.

Level of Agency	Frequency	Percentage
High dependence on AI	35	35%
Moderate dependence	40	40%
Critical engagement	25	25%

Across all the tasks, varying levels of learners' agency were observed. Out of all the participants, 9 students (45%) demonstrate high dependence on AI responses. 7 students (35%) reveal a moderate dependency, and 4 students (20%) show critical evaluation and frequent rejection of AI suggestions.

From the analysis, the participants displayed three levels of agency. Learners' agency depicts the ability of learners to make choices and take control of their learning and actively participate in constructing knowledge rather than passively receiving information from teachers or learning tools. These findings indicate that learners who demonstrated a high level of critical engagement often question AI-generated input and content, thus incorporating personal experiences into their final texts.

Discussion of Findings

The overall findings of this study reveal a significant reconfiguration of meaning-making processes in secondary school ESL classrooms through the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) tools. Across the 100 participants, interaction with tools such as ChatGPT, Grammarly, and Google Translate demonstrates that meaning construction is no longer a linear process controlled

solely by the learner or teacher but a distributed semiotic activity shared between human cognition and algorithmic systems.

From a Social Semiotic perspective, the findings challenge the traditional view of classroom discourse as teacher-centred and linguistically bounded. Instead, AI tools function as semiotic actors that actively participate in shaping linguistic output. Learners do not simply receive knowledge; they negotiate meaning through cycles of prompting, revising, accepting, and rejecting AI-generated suggestions. This confirms that meaning is not inherent in language structures but is continuously reconstructed through interaction with socially and technologically embedded sign systems (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2021).

Importantly, the varying learner responses across the twenty participants reveal that AI does not produce uniform meaning-making patterns. While a proportion of learners demonstrated high dependency on AI-generated output, others engaged in critical evaluation and contextual adaptation. This variation signals a shift in classroom dynamics where agency is redistributed rather than eliminated. Learners still exercise interpretive control, but this control is now negotiated within a hybrid environment where algorithmic outputs exert strong semiotic influence.

From a Multimodality perspective, the findings further illustrate that meaning-making in ESL classrooms extends beyond linguistic forms to include visual, structural, and interactive dimensions embedded in digital platforms. For example, Grammarly's colour-coded feedback system does not merely correct grammar; it visually structures attention and guides learner decision-making. Similarly, ChatGPT's conversational interface and outputs introduce multiple layers of meaning representation that learners must interpret simultaneously. This multimodal interaction indicates that ESL learning in digital environments is fundamentally non-linear and multi-layered, requiring learners to navigate between textual meaning, interface cues, and machine-generated suggestions. Meaning is therefore distributed across multiple semiotic modes rather than residing in a single linguistic source.

Findings from this study reveal that AI tools do not simply facilitate language learning but actively reshape epistemic authority in the classroom. Traditionally, teachers were the primary arbiters of correctness and meaning. However, the data show that many learners now attribute authority to AI-generated responses, sometimes even privileging them over teacher or personal judgment. This shift raises important pedagogical implications regarding the evolving role of teachers in AI-mediated classrooms. Furthermore, the classroom emerges as a hybrid semiotic space, where

human and non-human agents jointly participate in meaning production. This aligns with contemporary digital literacy perspectives, which argue that learning environments are increasingly characterised by human–machine collaboration rather than human-only interaction systems.

The findings further suggest that AI integration in ESL pedagogy should not be understood merely in terms of efficiency or skill enhancement, but as a profound transformation of how meaning itself is constructed, negotiated, and validated in educational contexts. This has significant implications for curriculum design, teacher training, and classroom practice, particularly in secondary school settings where learners are still developing critical literacy and interpretive autonomy.

Conclusion

This study examines how meaning is constructed in technology-mediated ESL pedagogy through the use of artificial intelligence (AI) tools among secondary school learners. Grounded in Social Semiotics and Multimodality Theory, the study demonstrated that meaning-making in contemporary ESL classrooms is no longer confined solely to human interaction but is shaped through engagement with digital and algorithmic systems.

Findings from the hundred (100) participants reveal that AI tools such as ChatGPT, Grammarly, and Google Translate function as active meaning-making agents within the ESL classroom. Learners interacted with these tools in different ways, ranging from direct adoption of outputs to critical modification and iterative prompting, stating that meaning is co-produced within a human–AI interactional space.

The study further revealed that meaning construction in such environments is mainly multimodal, involving not only linguistic forms but also visual forms, interface structures, and interactive feedback embedded in AI platforms. This confirms that contemporary ESL pedagogy operates within a complex semiotic system where multiple modes and agents integrate to shape communication. Finally, the study contributes to the growing body of knowledge on digital pedagogy by demonstrating that the integration of AI tools represents not merely a technological enhancement but a fundamental transformation in the processes of meaning construction, learner agency, and classroom interaction in ESL contexts.

Recommendations

The study recommends the following:

1. Educators should adopt a guided and deliberate approach to integrating AI tools such as ChatGPT and Grammarly into ESL instruction. Classroom activities should be designed to ensure that AI supports rather than affects learners' cognitive and linguistic engagement.

2. Students should be equipped with AI literacy skills, which will equip them to question, evaluate, and refine AI-generated outputs. This will help prevent dependence on algorithmic responses and promote deeper engagement with meaning-making processes.

3. Teachers should be trained as facilitators of AI-supported learning, guiding students in interpreting and negotiating AI-generated content.

4. Curriculum developers should combine multimodal and AI-mediated learning tasks into ESL programs. Such tasks should reflect real-world communication practices where learners interact with digital tools to construct meaning.

5. Balanced Use of AI Tools should be encouraged. Though AI tools offer significant pedagogical benefits, their use should be placed side by side with traditional language learning practices to ensure the development of writing skills, critical thinking, and linguistic competence.

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Negotiating Poetics in Translating Femi Osofisan's *Once Upon Four Robbers* into French: Between Systemic Acceptability and Linguistic Fidelity

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Abstract
This study examines the negotiations of poetics in the translation of Femi Osofisan's play Once Upon Four Robbers from English to French as Il était une fois quatre voleurs by Nicole Medjigbodo. It integrates postcolonial and polysystem postulations to view translation as an intermediate process between systemic acceptability and linguistic fidelity. Drawing on qualitative and comparative analysis of the source text and target text expressions, this study reveals the strategies employed in the translation to handle the challenges of the unique poetic expression in Osofisan's work. It underlines the importance of cultural knowledge, tone, idioms and wording while trying to translate poetic expressions from other cultures, like Africa, to better achieve the target of loyalty and faithfulness in translation. Thus, it brings a new dimension to translation studies as well as literary criticism to offer a fresh perspective regarding poetic translation within the dramatic canon of Africa.
Keywords: *African Poetics, Translating Nigerian literature, Polysystem theory, postcolonial translation strategy, Femi Osofisan*

Résumé
Cette étude examine les enjeux poétiques liés à la traduction de la pièce théâtrale de Femi Osofisan Once Upon Four Robbers de l'anglais vers le français sous le titre Il était une fois quatre voleurs, traduite par Nicole Medjigbodo. En employant une analyse qualitative et comparative du texte source (TS) et du texte cible (TC), la recherche met en évidence les différentes stratégies de traduction utilisées pour rendre la richesse poétique et culturelle propre à l'écriture d'Osofisan. L'étude s'appuie sur les approches de la critique postcoloniale et de la théorie du polysystème afin de considérer la traduction comme un espace de médiation entre fidélité linguistiques et acceptabilité culturelle. Elle insiste également sur l'importance des réalités culturelles, du ton, des expressions idiomatiques et du choix des mots dans la traduction des expressions poétiques africaines. En mettant en lumière les défis et les possibilités de la traduction littéraire africaine, cette recherche contribue à enrichir les études traductologiques et la critique littéraire, tout en proposant une réflexion nouvelle sur la traduction poétique dans le théâtre africain.

Mot-cles: *poétique africaine, traduction de la littérature nigériane, théorie du polysystème, traduction postcoloniale, Femi Osofisan*

Introduction: Background and Context

The concept of poetics refers not merely to the study of verse but, more broadly, to the theory of literary composition; poetics is the principles governing the structure, form, and discourse of a literary work; it encompasses the broader mechanisms by which literary texts achieve aesthetic and semantic coherence (Jakobson, 1960; Attridge, 2015). In other words, poetics transcends a theory of poetry to denote the distinctive artistic and stylistic elements that construct meaning in a literary text. Poetics extends beyond the conventional study of poetry to encompass the artistic and stylistic principles through which literary texts generate meaning. It refers to the distinctive formal and expressive features that shape the structure, language and overall aesthetic character of a literary work. These features include elements such as diction, imagery, symbolism, tone, narrative organisation and cultural expression; all of which contribute to the interpretive and emotional impact of the text.

In this respect, meaning in literature is not conveyed solely through the content of the text, but also through the manner in which that content is artistically presented in a text. The writer's stylistic choices therefore influence how readers perceive themes, characters and cultural realities. This makes poetics central to literary interpretation. In postcolonial African literature, for instance, poetics often reflects the interaction between indigenous oral traditions and colonial languages, producing culturally grounded forms of literary expression. Consequently, poetics remains an essential concept in literary criticism and translation studies because it highlights the relationship between form, style, culture and meaning. This includes Osofisan's blend of Yoruba traditions, Nigerian English idiom and political discourse in the cultural context through the demonstration of his distinct language use.

As asserted by Osundare (2007), language is inextricably intertwined with culture, serving as a carrier of cultural values and traditions. Accordingly, poetics in translation involves the complex transfer of these embedded cultural understandings and experiences via language use. In other words, poetics becomes particularly significant because the translator is required to engage with the text as a structured aesthetic whole. Therefore, literary translation extends beyond linguistic substitution to include an interpretative engagement with the organisation of meaning within the source text. Elements such as tone, imagery, rhythm, narrative voice and culturally embedded

expressions all contribute to what may be described as the text's literary logic, and these elements must be carefully considered in the act of translation. As Jakobson (1960) notes, the poetic function of language foregrounds the formal qualities of the message, while Attridge (2015) emphasises literature as an inventive practice in which form and meaning are inseparable. For African literary narratives, successful translation must strive to maintain the melodic, rhythmic, cultural resonance, and emotional tone of the source text in the target domain while addressing the power dynamics inherent in the translation process (Adeyefa, 2023). In other words, poetic negotiations in translation refer to the complex and ever-changing relationship between the translation process, the source and target cultures, the source text itself as an artistic work, and the receptor audience. Thus, this research work investigates the distinctive linguistic poetics of the play *Once Upon Four Robbers* by Femi Osofisan and its French translation *Il était une fois quatre voleurs* by Nicole Medjigbodo.

Femi Osofisan's dramatic works have received extensive research analysis in relation to issues of social justice, historical concerns and identity, in relation to the original English texts. Although foundational in nature, it does not address the translational dynamics of Osofisan's poetic strategies in relation to their translation into a target language. While the significance of African literature in international research discourse is on the increase, it remains that the dynamics of Osofisan's unique poetic voice, which is a blend of local colour and satire, in its transfer from Anglophone Nigeria to a Francophone context remains relatively unstudied. This results in a substantial research gap in relation to Osofisan's poetics and its translation dynamics in relation to the ideological foundations of Postcolonial Criticism.

The paper aims to examine the poetic translations embodied in the English-French translation of the play by Femi Osofisan and evaluate its significance in relation to the translation and reception of literature in Africa. In this regard, the paper will examine the significance of cultural and linguistic mediation in the translation of Osofisan's non-standard poetic language, the tension between the translation of the poem's aesthetics and cultural adaptation (domestication and foreignization), and the significance of translation choices in relation to the aesthetic significance and positioning in the Francophone literary polysystem.

Research Landscape

Previous works have investigated Femi Osofisan's literary works, whose literary productions are characterised by a profound engagement with socio-political realities of Nigerian society. Through

satire, symbolism and cultural allusions, Osofisan critiques prevailing social injustices and advocates for the reform of societal structures that perpetuate inequality and moral decline. Adeyemi (2009) investigates Femi Osofisan's poetics of protest vis-à-vis dramatic performance. The paper examines how Femi Osofisan's drama is characterised by challenging social injustice and reflects his commitment to social justice, human rights and democracy. Adeyemi bases the study on Marxist/dialectical theory and postcolonial criticism. The study reveals that Osofisan rewrites history and myth to speak to modern problems and that Osofisan's poetics of protest is grounded in a strong ethical and political vision.

The study is similar to our study because both see Osofisan as a cultural and political writer. Also, both studies highlight Yoruba culture as the heart of his dramatic art, and both stress the importance of performance and orality. But the difference is that, while Adeyemi's study examines Osofisan's protest, message, ideology and artistic procedure. The study looks at how that message travels into French, what is kept, altered or lost. Also, Adeyemi adopts ideological and performative presuppositions; this study engages polysystem theory. This suggests that one is literary and ideological, the other is linguistic and translational. Adeyemi sees culture as a concept Osofisan uses to challenge society, while this study imagines culture as a translational concept carried across languages, often with linguistic exertion. Adeyemi's study explores how Osofisan uses English mixed with Yoruba elements to make bold political statements. Ours examines how these same Yoruba-based expressions survive or change when translated into French.

In the same vein, Osita (2009) examines theatre and performance in Femi Osofisan's works. The study argues that African theatre and performance are diverse and complex, and it reflects the continent's rich cultural heritage. Osita (2009) emphasises that Osofisan's theatre serves as a mirror to society, addressing corruption, injustice and social dysfunction. The study concludes that Osofisan's theatre is participatory, culturally rooted and transformative. This aligns with Osundare's (2012) investigation of Osofisan's poetics of history, asserting that Osofisan's drama rewrites and interprets Nigerian history and compares it to other African dramatists. The work is similar to this research; both investigate Osofisan's work. The difference is that this study examines how poetics is negotiated in the translated work of Femi Osofisan. Both Osita (2009) and Osundare's (2012) approach Osofisan's plays through performance and theatre studies frameworks, drawing on performance theory, indigenous African theatre theory and sociocultural/ postcolonial theory. Both studies highlight Osofisan's use of song, dance, chorus, proverbs and

ritual to create participatory theatre and historical dynamism. Their works are similar to our research because both are situated within cultural discursive frames, suggesting historical and cultural traditions as central to literary discourse. They all examine Femi Osofisan's plays from their socio-political singularities, exploring his use of history, language, culture and performance. The differences are: focus and purpose. Osita examines how Osofisan's theatre and performance bring his plays to life, focusing on staging, movement, song and audience engagement. Our study examines how cultural and linguistic elements transfer, idioms, songs and other culture-specific expressions. Osita uses performance theory, African indigenous theatre theory and sociocultural/postcolonial perspectives to study how theatre communicates meaning. The current study uses polysystem theory, such as equivalence and cultural transfer, among others. Osita engages in close reading of plays in terms of performance, audience participation and theatrical devices. Our study uses comparative analysis between English source texts and French translations, focusing on poetic negotiation. Osita finds that Osofisan's theatre is participatory, socially engaged and transformative; performance elements enhance the message and emotional impact. Osita shows that performance and staging are crucial for fully understanding Osofisan's message. Our study shows the limits and possibilities of cross-cultural transmission; how identity, culture and meaning survive or change in translation.

Thus, foundational to understanding Osofisan's what (his themes), do not engage with the how—specifically, the translational negotiations of his poetic devices in a target language. Femi Osofisan's work is characterised by a distinctive language that blends idiomatic Nigerian English, political discourse and traditional storytelling rhythms. Translating this combination requires complex decisions about cultural equivalence, linguistic negotiation and aesthetic impact.

African Poetics and Postcolonial Postulations

Within the wider area of African literary studies, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1986) argues that the literature of Africa needs to reclaim its cultural identity and break with colonial legacies. It is under these circumstances that the role of translation becomes not just the mere transmission of meaning from source to target culture, but also the essential tool for the promotion of African views across the globe and the preservation of the cultural heritage of the continent. There appears to be a gap about the comprehensive investigation of the poetic transactions that exist within the translated dramatic works of Osofisan, and this is particularly true because the dramatic language of Osofisan

is deeply entwined with the cultural and ideological aspects that the postcolonial theory of translation aims to highlight.

Postcolonial Criticism: Ideology, Power and African Poetics

Postcolonial theory frames translation as an ideological act that mediates power dynamics between literary cultures. This analysis looks at how translation is a process of negotiating retention versus erasure of African linguistic difference (Venuti, 1995). More contemporary scholarship has moved beyond colonial criticism to explore translation as a process of cultural autonomy. Bandia (2023) examines how contemporary African translators utilise strategies of hybridisation and linguistic intervention to assert cultural sovereignty in Francophone and Anglophone texts, directly challenging universalising norms. While Bhabha (1994) introduced the *third space*, contemporary analysis focuses on the specific linguistic features of this space. Adeyefa (2022) critically stresses the need for stylistic investigation in African literary translation. His argument for resisting domestication and favouring transliteration (for ethno-linguistic figures) informs the ethical measure against which the handling of Osofisan's Pidgin-based poetics and cultural items is assessed. This is in relation to whether Medjigbodo's choices represent a practical allowance for target culture familiarity, which has been analysed in modern studies of ideology and translation conventions (House, 2020).

Polysystem Theory: Systemic Pressures and Literary Status

Polysystem Theory (Even-Zohar, 1990; Toury, 1995) remains vital for analysing the systemic pressures that guide translational choices concerning the target literary system (French). Three positions are adopted: Norms of Acceptability, Governing Factors and Updated Relevance. Norms of Acceptability as a theoretical position help explain the pragmatic shifts in the translation. When a literature is positioned peripherally, translational strategies often favour acceptability to ensure market viability. Kruger (2024) argues that translation should be viewed as a dynamic and interpretative process that involves continuous negotiation between languages, cultures and contexts, rather than a mere transfer of linguistic form from one language to another. This perspective recognises the translator as an active mediator who makes informed choices to preserve meaning, style and cultural significance while responding to the expectations of the target audiences. This understanding aligns closely with Polysystem Theory, which conceives translation as a socially and culturally conditioned practice shaped by the norms, conventions and power

relations operating within the target literary system. These perspectives underscore the idea that translation is not merely a linguistic exercise but a complex act of cultural and literary mediation. The analysis uses Polysystem position on Governing Factors to interpret choices, such as replacing non-standard Pidgin poetics (school pikin, cheap half-kobo pick-pocket, four boys and a one girls, Standard Six an adfantage p.23) with conventional French idioms, as systemically motivated. This is supported by contemporary research on governance and market factors in translation (Pym, 2021), showing that accessibility often overrides strict poetic fidelity when introducing peripheral literature to a central audience. On relevance, the Polysystem framework is still widely used to trace the global flow of literature and the dynamics of literary prestige (Sapiro, 2020). Its application here allows the study to move beyond linguistic critique to analyse the political economy of Osofisan's presence in Francophone drama.

The integration of Postcolonial Criticism and Polysystem Theory provides a rigorous, bi-fold mode of analysis. This analytical framework enables the study to move beyond mere linguistic analysis and instead contextualise the poetic negotiation within its holistic socio-political and system-based context. The major focus of the postcolonial critique is on issues of power, ideology and cultural sovereignty, and it aims at evaluating the ethics of translation in the context of African linguistic and cultural difference. This is used in evaluating the need for transliteration (Adeyefa, 2022) in the evaluation of omission and retention. Polysystem Theory focuses on Reception and Systemic Acceptability; it determines the external, pragmatic factors that pressure the translator to ensure the text's acceptance and status in the central French literary system. It explains the shift from Pidgin poetics to conventional French for reasons of readability and centrality (Kruger, 2024). This dual approach ensures the analysis of Osofisan's poetics is fully contextualised, determining not only what was negotiated but also why those negotiations were necessary to achieve both cultural sovereignty and literary system access.

This study, therefore, employs a qualitative, descriptive and comparative textual analysis to investigate how cultural references are negotiated in the English-French translations in *Once Upon Four Robbers* by Femi Osofisan translated as *Il etait une fois quatre voleurs* by Nicole Medjigbodo. The qualitative approach offers the most appropriate lens because the research concerns cultural meanings and intercultural mediation. It enables the researcher not merely to note the presence of cultural features but to explore how and why translators make specific interpretive and stylistic choices when handling culturally embedded expressions.

Poetic Negotiations Across Cultural Systems

From the comparison of *Once Upon Four Robbers* (ST) to *Il était une fois quatre voleurs* (TT), it is clear that Nicole Medjigbodo's translation is characterised by a negotiation that focuses more on tone and affective similarity even as it is mindful of cultural sovereignty and systemic acceptability. There are three major areas of negotiation that can be identified. These are: mediating non-standard Anglophone poetics, cultural-political markers, and improving dramatic tone.

Mediating Non-Standard Anglophone Poetics

ST (Osofisan)	TT (Medjigbodo)	Translational Strategy
1. Don't go with him, Alhaja. He's on their side, you can see. The Leader always suspected it too. Every time we went on a raid and had to kill, he broke down and sobbed **like a silly school pikin.** p.24	➢ Ne va pas avec lui Alhadja. Tu vois bien qu'il est de leur côté. C'est ce que le chef avait, lui aussi, toujours soupçonné. Chaque fois qu'on était sur un coup et qu'il fallait descendre un type, il s'effondrait en pleurant **comme un gosse stupide.** p. 10	Cultural Neutralisation and Lexical Amplification
➢ And so you'll run, isn't it? **Like a cheap half-kobo pick-pocket** in the market pursued by women. You think - p. 23	Et c'est pour ça que tu veux foutre le camp, hein ? **comme un vulgaire voleur** à la tire pourchasse par les femmes du marché. Tu imagines- p. 9	Cultural adaptation and substitution

ST (Osofisan)	TT (Medjigbodo)	Translational Strategy
➢ (*In a mocking 'illiterate accent*'): Wanted urgently: **four boys and a one girls. Standard Six an adfantage** but not compulsory …position -p. 32	(*Faisant semblant de lire les petites annonces*). « Offre d'emploi, urgent : **quatre boys et une bonne. Sachant lire et écrire** si possible- » p.20	Normalisation or standardisation

The expressions 'school pikin'p.24, 'half-kobo pick-pocket'p.23 and 'want urgently: four boys and a one girls. Standard Six an adfantage' p.32 is in fact Pidgin expressions that are embedded in specific cultural and contextually determined environments, and the translation of the expressions in French, which are 'comme un gosse stupide'p.10, 'comme un vulgaire voleur'p.9 and 'quatre boys et une bonne. Sachant lire et écrire'p.20 (which is literally 'like a stupid kid', 'like an ordinary petty thief' and 'four boys and one maid') transform the expressions from an ethno-linguistic code to a standard lexical sequence in the target language of French. In the context of polysystemic postulation, the translation strategies aim at optimisind the acceptability of the translated text through the mitigation of the potential acceptability barrier posed by the presence of West African Pidgin in the Francophone text (Kruger, 2024). The use of the adjective 'stupide', 'vulgaire' and 'bonne' in the translation are examples of lexical amplification.

Negotiation of Political and Cultural Markers

The most significant poetic negotiations occur where the text contains strong cultural-political specificities, resulting in a dialectic of retention and omission that defines the text's cultural sovereignty (Bandia, 2023).

A. Retention as Foreignization

The consistent retention of the honorific title *Alhaja p.22* as *Alhadja, p.6, Allah p.31* as *Allah p.18, Aafa, p.30* as *Aafa, p.16* in the TT is a vital act of foreignization (Venuti, 1995). By preserving the term, the translator forces the reader to acknowledge the socio-cultural specificity of the Nigerian Muslim context. This fulfils a key tenet of Postcolonial Criticism: resisting the erasure of African

identity and asserting cultural difference, despite potential comprehension difficulties for the receiving system.

B. *Omission as Domestication*

On the other hand, a very important passage of political satire is completely left out:

ST (Osofisan, p.33)	TT (Medjigbodo, p.22)	Translational Strategy
'and buy chieftaincy titles as life insurance! No, let our obituaries litter the public places and one day -'p. 33	*(Omitted passage) p.22*	Cultural Exclusion and Overt Domestication

This is a satirical comment that targets a Nigerian tradition of turning money into social capital ('chieftaincy titles'). A complete loss of socio-political poetics undermines the critical message of the ST. A Postcolonial reading of cultural sovereignty, as described by Adeyefa (2022), considers that there is a loss of cultural sovereignty here. This simplification of African political discourse is necessary to make it easily understandable to the target audience. A pragmatic act of domestication is performed here, as it is done in a Polysystem approach.

Poetic Intensification for Dramatic Tone

In maintaining the play's emotional and dramatic poetic force, the translator frequently employs Amplification and Intensification strategies.

ST (Osofisan)	TT (Medjigbodo)	Translational Strategy
and our Leader would have been the first to disinherit him! **To have him wiped out like vermin**.p.66	Et notre chef aurait été le premier à le désheriter ! **Et il l'aurait fait liquider !** p.69	Lexical Intensification
Life is life, and human life's still valuable.p.25	**On n'a qu'une vie et toute vie humaine est précieuse.**p.11	Aphoristic Amplification
You trade in death and danger. By government decree your life's	**Le danger et la mort sont ton lot quotidien,** au décret du governement,	De-metaphorisation

ST (Osofisan)	TT (Medjigbodo)	Translational Strategy
the cheapest commodity in the market, and you don't understand! Listen to Alhaja, man! There'll be nothing after us, you hear, nothing but empty stalls and their solidarity of suffering, the blood stains…p.66	ta vie est la moins chère des marchandises sur le marché, et tu dis que tu ne comprends pas ! écoute donc, Alhajda, vieux ! il n'y aura plus rien après nous, tu entends, rien que des éventaires vides et leur solidarité dans la souffrance, des taches de sang…p.70	
Let it rise. **We've got a wound to avenge.**p.22	Et bien qu'il leve ! **nous avons une blessure à laver dans le sang.**p.7	Metaphorical intensification

The phrase 'liquider' (liquidate/assassinate) carries far more lexical intensity in the French language than its English equivalent in this idiom. Again, 'Life is life' is raised to 'On n'a qu'une vie,' maintaining its philosophical significance as an aphorism. Also, 'you trade in death and danger' translated as 'le danger et la mort sont ton lot quotidien' conserves the French idiomatic expression that conveys continual exposure to danger. Moreso, 'we've got a wound to avenge' translated as 'nous avons une blessure à laver dans le sang' preserves the notion of vengeance, and it becomes more pronounced and culturally nuanced in the target language. These lexical decisions reflect the translator's paramount attention to tonal and dramatic equivalency, reaching for powerful lexical tools of the French language in order to transmit this play's burning poetic intensity onto the Francophone stage.

From the entire analysis, it is observed that Systemic Acceptability surpasses Linguistic Fidelity. Such techniques as Cultural Neutralisation (e.g., *school pikin* to *un gosse stupide*, with the latter referring to the Nigerian school children) and Overt Domestication (omitting the *chieftaincy titles* satire) were used to make the text conform to the norms of the central French literary system, increasing its systemic acceptability and spread. Moreover, it was noticed that there is a negotiation of Cultural Sovereignty. This is because the translator used foreignisation deliberately by retaining words like *Alhaja, Allah* and *Aafa,* in the TT. This is because there is a concession made regarding cultural sovereignty by not including the political poetics of *chieftaincy titles*, which simplifies the

politics of the text. According to Adeyefa (2022), there is a weakening of the ethical power of the text. Finally, Tonal Equivalence is Paramount in the translation negotiation. The systematic deployment of Lexical Intensification and Aphoristic Amplification enabled the translator to successfully capture the central poetic element of the play, its passionate, condemnatory and imperative dramatic tone, which was then fully incorporated into the French idiom.

Conclusion

This study has investigated the intricacies of poetic negotiations in the English-French translation of Femi Osofisan's *Once Upon Four Robbers*, using the integrated framework of postcolonial translational postulations and polysystem theory. The analysis points out the role of translation as a mediating act between the African Anglophone poetics of the source text and the target culture's ideological and systemic needs. The study asserts that systemic acceptability surpasses linguistic fidelity in the translation of the selected literary poetics. Such techniques as cultural neutralisation and overt domestication are deployed in translation to achieve textual relationships within French literary systems by enhancing its systemic acceptability and operationalism. The translator uses foreignisation as a deliberate strategy to capture cultural sovereignty and tonal equivalence in the target text. The translator's systematic choices of lexical intensification and aphoristic amplification aid a negotiation of the central poetic elements of the play, its passionate, condemnatory and imperative dramatic tone, which is incorporated into the French idiomatic system. Consequently, the study reiterates that African literary translation involves a negotiation of systemic acceptability rather than mere linguistic fidelity; it advances translatorial inclination to preserving orality, indigenous worldviews and stylistic features; thus, foregrounding translational mediation of peripheral voices without the erasure of source text's cultural identity.

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Speech Acts in Selected Divorce Court Proceedings in Ogbomoso, Oyo State

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Abstract

This study examines the types and functions of speech acts employed in divorce court proceedings, with a focus on how language serves both as a legal instrument and a social practice in the resolution of matrimonial disputes. Drawing on Austin (1962) and Searle's (1969) Speech Act Theory, and informed by contemporary scholarship in legal pragmatics, a qualitative case study design was employed. Data were obtained through direct non-participant observation and audio recording of two divorce court sessions at the State High Court, Ogbomoso, Oyo State, spanning a total recording duration of approximately four hours and thirty minutes and generating over 9,000 words. Participants comprising judges, counsel, petitioners, and respondents were observed across the selected proceedings. While prior studies on Nigerian legal discourse have mostly addressed criminal courts, the specific communicative dynamics of divorce proceedings remain underexplored. This study addresses this gap by providing a systematic, multi-category speech act analysis of divorce discourse in this context. Findings reveal that locutionary acts serve primarily to establish the factual and procedural basis of cases, while illocutionary acts, including directives, assertives, commissives, expressives, and declaratives, are deployed in role-specific patterns that reflect and reinforce the institutional hierarchy of the court. The study underscores how the adversarial yet emotionally charged nature of divorce proceedings creates a distinctive communicative environment in which legal norms and power relations intersect.

***Keywords**: Speech Act Theory, Legal Pragmatics, Illocutionary Acts, Locutionary Acts, Courtroom Discourse*

Introduction

Divorce proceedings constitute one of the most emotionally charged and communicatively complex settings within the legal system (Ainsworth, 2023). Unlike criminal or commercial

litigation, divorce proceedings are governed not only by statutory provisions and judicial precedent but also by deeply personal narratives, competing emotional stakes, and the relational history of the parties in dispute. Language, in this context, functions simultaneously as a legal instrument and an emotional vehicle, bearing the weight of marital breakdown while satisfying the formal demands of judicial procedure. Understanding how speech acts operate within divorce proceedings, therefore, yields critical insights into both the mechanics of legal discourse and the human dimensions of family justice.

What distinguishes divorce proceedings from other forms of litigation is the intimate and irreversibly personal nature of the subject matter. Parties are required to narrate private relational experiences like accounts of communication breakdown, infidelity, domestic conduct, and parenting capacity before an audience of legal professionals, court officials, and, at times, the public gallery. This requirement generates a hybrid communicative register in which the boundary between legal argumentation and personal testimony is persistently blurred (Grieshofer, 2024). Lawyers and judges must navigate this complex terrain, deploying speech acts that simultaneously fulfil procedural requirements and manage the emotional vulnerability of litigants. Furthermore, Nigerian divorce proceedings operate within a socio-linguistically distinctive environment, where English functions as the formal language of court while Yoruba pervades informal exchanges, and where code-switching and culturally inflected communicative norms shape interaction in ways that diverge significantly from Western courtroom contexts (Olanrewaju & Ademola, 2020).

Research on divorce discourse has grown steadily in recent decades, with scholars examining the linguistic strategies deployed in matrimonial dissolution across a range of national and cultural contexts. Ogundimu (2013) analysed speech acts of accusation and mitigation in Nigerian family courts, while Salami and Oke (2018) compared illocutionary strategies across customary and civil divorce courts in Oyo State. Outside the scope of the Nigerian context, Grieshofer (2024) examined how procedural justice is negotiated through language in family and county courts in the United Kingdom. These studies collectively underscore the significance of language in divorce proceedings; their findings reveal notable differences. While Salami and Oke (2018) and Ogundimu (2013)s' studies foreground the strategic use of speech acts for blame attribution, self-defence, and identity management, Grieshofer's work emphasises the role of language in facilitating procedural fairness rather than interpersonal conflict. This contrast suggests that the functions of courtroom discourse may vary across socio-legal and cultural contexts.

This research draws on speech act theory, originally developed by Austin (1962) and refined by Searle (1969), to examine how utterances in divorce court perform distinct communicative functions. Speech act theory classifies utterances into three primary types: locutionary acts (which convey propositional content), illocutionary acts (which accomplish social actions such as commanding, asserting, or promising), and perlocutionary acts (which produce effects on the listener). This tripartite framework reveals the multi-dimensional role of language in constructing legal arguments, managing courtroom decorum, and shaping the communicative dynamics of hearings (Jucker, 2024). The present study focuses on the locutionary and illocutionary dimensions of the framework, as these most directly correspond to the observable linguistic forms and institutionally consequential communicative functions that are the focus of this inquiry.

The strategic deployment of illocutionary speech acts by legal practitioners has been identified as a key determinant of how cases are framed and adjudicated. Directive speech acts are used extensively by judges to regulate witness examination and maintain procedural order, while assertive acts by counsel serve to construct competing narratives of marital conduct and parental fitness (Juba, 2023). Research on courtroom discourse has consistently demonstrated that the choice of speech act type is not arbitrary but is shaped by the speaker's institutional role, communicative goal, and awareness of the interpretive context (Marcheva & Golovina, 2024). The importance of this inquiry extends beyond academic linguistics: for practitioners, an understanding of how speech acts function in divorce proceedings can inform more effective communicative strategies; for courts, such insights may support procedural guidelines that better accommodate the emotional complexity of matrimonial litigation while upholding fairness and impartiality.

Despite the contributions of scholars, which have largely concentrated on identifying speech acts and comparing illocutionary strategies across court types, limited attention has been paid to how speech acts simultaneously perform legal, interpersonal, and ideological functions within Nigerian divorce court proceedings. This gap necessitates a more comprehensive pragmatic investigation that examines what types of locutionary speech acts are realised in selected divorce proceedings, the communicative functions they serve in the adjudicative process, types of illocutionary speech acts performed by participants, and the communicative objectives of the court.

Literature Review

The study of speech acts in legal discourse has attracted sustained interdisciplinary attention, drawing on pragmatics, forensic linguistics, sociolinguistics, and legal theory. This review

synthesises existing scholarship thematically across three clusters: international frameworks for courtroom discourse and legal pragmatics; Nigerian legal discourse studies; and existing research on divorce interaction. It concludes by identifying the specific gaps that the present study seeks to address.

Courtroom Discourse and Legal Pragmatics

Foundational contributions to the study of legal language have established that courtroom discourse is structured by profound asymmetries of institutional power. Gibbons (2003) asserts that the distribution of illocutionary force in court is not merely procedural but ideological, encoding hierarchies of authority that reflect broader social structures. Judges exercise a range of performative speech acts, including declarations, directives, and commissives that carry binding legal force, while litigants and witnesses are typically constrained to representatives and expressives. Cotterill (2003), in her landmark study of the O.J. Simpson trial, extends this argument by showing how narrative construction, through the strategic deployment of assertive and evaluative acts, is central to the persuasive strategies of legal counsel. Together, these works establish that speech acts in legal contexts are not merely communicative but constitutive of legal reality.

More recent scholarship has deepened understanding of the pragmatic dimensions of legal interaction. Jucker (2024) traces the evolution of speech act theory into discursive, multimodal, and diachronic domains, identifying legal settings as particularly productive sites for speech act analysis precisely because their institutional stakes render illocutionary force consequential in ways that differ fundamentally from ordinary conversation. Grieshofer (2024) examines procedural justice in family and county courts, arguing that the communicative quality of judicial speech, including its clarity, responsiveness, and empathic attunement, significantly influences litigants' perceptions of institutional legitimacy and fairness. This finding is particularly relevant to divorce proceedings, where the stakes are personal, and the emotional investment of participants is high. Marcheva and Golovina (2024) further added that the selection of illocutionary acts by legal participants reflects ideological positioning: assertive and directive acts are not simply informational but serve to position speakers within relations of power and credibility. Juba (2023) provides complementary evidence from alternative dispute resolution contexts, showing that judicial pragmatic acts extend beyond procedural control to encompass face management, politeness negotiation, and relational alignment. These international perspectives converge on the

insight that speech acts in legal settings are simultaneously institutional, relational, and ideological instruments.

Speech Acts in Nigerian Legal Discourse

Within the Nigerian context, the study of legal language has developed a distinctive trajectory shaped by the country's multilingual context and the coexistence of customary, civil, and common law traditions. Richard and Nwizug (2017), in an early contribution, argued that Austinian and Searlean frameworks require contextual adaptation when applied to non-Western discourse communities, demonstrating that illocutionary force is culturally mediated and that felicity conditions for speech acts vary across linguistic communities. This theoretical caution remains pertinent: the uncritical importation of Western pragmatic categories into the analysis of African legal discourse risks obscuring the culturally specific dimensions of communicative practice.

Kalejaiye and Oyagiri (2025) provide the most recent empirical study of speech acts in Nigerian courts, examining magistrate court proceedings in Kwara State. Their findings confirm the predominance of directives and assertives in prosecutorial discourse and document how prosodic and paralinguistic cues modulate illocutionary force. Significantly, they observe that the sociolinguistic backgrounds of litigants, particularly their competence in English as the language of court, influence how speech acts are interpreted and responded to, a finding with direct relevance to sociolinguistically complex settings such as Ogbomoso. However, Kalejaiye and Oyagiri's study focuses exclusively on criminal proceedings and does not address the distinct pragmatic dynamics of divorce, where emotional registers and relational histories introduce additional communicative complexity. Juba (2023), examining televised Alternative Dispute Resolution, similarly demonstrates that face-management and politeness strategies are central to judicial pragmatics beyond formal court settings, but again does not engage with matrimonial discourse specifically.

These studies, while valuable, share a common limitation: they situate legal discourse analysis within criminal or quasi-judicial contexts, leaving the divorce court context underexplored.

Divorce and Family Court Discourse in Nigeria

A theoretically significant body of scholarship has begun to address speech acts specifically in Nigerian family and divorce courts. Ogundimu (2013) examined the discourse of family courts in Lagos State, finding that expressive speech acts, particularly apologies, complaints, and

lamentations, are more prevalent in family court than in criminal proceedings, reflecting the emotionally charged nature of marital dissolution. His analysis of accusatory and mitigating acts demonstrates how strategic illocutionary positioning shapes the construction of credibility. However, Ogundimu's study drew on English-medium proceedings in Lagos and did not engage with the Yoruba-dominant, code-switching environment of courts in cities like Ogbomoso.

Salami and Oke (2018) conducted a comparative analysis of divorce proceedings across customary and civil courts in Oyo State, drawing on data from Ibadan. Their identification of significant differences between court types in the deployment of commissives and directives, and their documentation of gender asymmetry in illocutionary rights, with female litigants more frequently interrupted and their assertive acts more frequently contested, represent important contributions. The area of convergence of this research with the current study is that they both looked at divorce proceedings in Oyo State, but the current study tilts towards drawing its data from the State High Court in Ogbomoso, while Salami Oke (2018) obtained their data across selected customary and civil courts in Ibadan.

Olanrewaju and Ademola (2020), examining customary divorce proceedings in Osun State, propose a culturally inflected model of speech act analysis that challenges the adequacy of a purely Searlean taxonomy for Yoruba-speaking legal contexts. Their concept of "communal illocution", whereby utterances derive their force from collective cultural memory rather than individual intent alone, offers a theoretical resource for analysing indirect and proverbial speech acts in Yoruba court settings. However, their analysis is limited to customary court proceedings and does not extend to the high court context where both civil and customary marriages are dissolved.

Bello (2019) provides a theoretically generative analysis of accusatory speech acts in divorce proceedings in Kaduna State, introducing the concept of "recursive evidentiality", the repeated invocation of reported speech and witnessed events to reinforce the illocutionary force of blame attribution and demonstrating that judges' reformulation and clarification-seeking acts actively shape the illocutionary trajectory of hearings. These insights are broadly applicable to the present study, though the cultural and sociolinguistic distance between the Hausa-majority context of Bello's data and the Yoruba context of Ogbomoso requires caution in direct extrapolation.

A synthesis of the foregoing literature reveals significant lacunae that the present study is positioned to address. Existing studies tend to focus on single speech act categories or on a single participant role, typically legal counsel, leaving unexamined the interplay among multiple

illocutionary types and across the full range of courtroom participants (judges, counsel, petitioners, and respondents) within a single proceeding. A comprehensive analysis of the sequential and contextual dimensions of speech act deployment across participant roles has not been conducted for Nigerian divorce court discourse. Also, existing frameworks have not adequately addressed how institutional authority, power asymmetry, emotional register, and cultural context interact within the specific communicative environment of divorce litigation. The present study addresses these lacunae by providing a systematic, theoretically informed speech act analysis of both locutionary and illocutionary acts in selected court divorce proceedings in Ogbomoso, contributing empirical evidence from an underrepresented context of legal pragmatics.

Theoretical Framework

Speech act theory, as originally conceived by Austin (1962) in 'How to Do Things with Words', fundamentally transformed the study of language by establishing that utterances do not merely describe reality but perform actions within it. Austin distinguished between locutionary acts (the literal propositional content of an utterance), illocutionary acts (the social function performed by the utterance, such as commanding, asserting, or promising), and perlocutionary acts (the effects produced on the hearer, whether cognitive, emotional, or behavioural). Building on Austin's foundational insights, Searle (1969) refined and expanded the taxonomy of illocutionary acts into five broad categories: representatives or assertives (acts that commit the speaker to the truth of a proposition), directives (acts designed to get the hearer to act), commissives (acts that commit the speaker to a future course of action), expressives (acts that express the speaker's psychological state), and declarations (acts that effect an institutional change in the world by virtue of their utterance). Searle's typology provided a more operationalisable framework for empirical linguistic research and has been widely adopted across forensic linguistics, legal discourse analysis, and courtroom interaction studies.

Contemporary scholarship in legal pragmatics has significantly extended and refined the Austinian-Searlean framework in ways that directly inform the present study. Jucker (2024) argues for a contextual and sequential approach to speech act analysis, demonstrating that utterances derive their illocutionary force not solely from individual communicative intent but from their position within ongoing discursive exchanges and their relationship to institutional roles and constraints. This insight is particularly important for courtroom interaction, where utterances are embedded within regulated sequences of examination, cross-examination, ruling, and adjournment

that enable and constrain specific illocutionary acts. Grieshofer (2024) similarly emphasises that speech acts in family legal settings carry relational and procedural justice dimensions that extend beyond their informational content: how legal practitioners communicate affects not only case outcomes but also litigants' experience of institutional fairness. Marcheva and Golovina (2024) have further shown that the selection of illocutionary acts reflects and reproduces power relations, with directive and declarative acts functioning as instruments of institutional authority, while assertive and expressive acts serve as primary vehicles of resistance and self-positioning for less powerful participants.

Within the Nigerian linguistic context, Richard and Nwizug (2017) have argued persuasively that speech act frameworks require cultural adaptation when applied to non-Western discourse communities, as illocutionary force and felicity conditions are culturally mediated. Olanrewaju and Ademola's (2020) concept of "communal illocution" in Yoruba court settings, whereby utterances derive illocutionary force from collective cultural memory and communal expectation, represents a theoretical development that contextualises Searle's framework for the West African legal environment. These contributions inform the culturally sensitive analytical stance adopted in this study.

The present study focuses on the locutionary and illocutionary dimensions of Austin and Searle's framework. Perlocutionary acts are excluded from the analysis for principled reasons. Perlocutionary effects, the actual cognitive, emotional, or behavioural responses produced by hearers, are largely internal and frequently unobservable in naturally occurring courtroom data. While participants' subsequent utterances may occasionally reveal perlocutionary responses, the systematic analysis of such effects would require data beyond the scope of observational recordings, such as post-hearing interviews or psychological assessments. The exclusion of perlocutionary acts is therefore a methodologically motivated delimitation, not a theoretical undervaluation of their significance, and is consistent with the approach adopted in comparable Nigerian legal discourse studies (Kalejaiye & Oyagiri, 2025; Ogundimu, 2013; Ayeni & Ibileye, 2025).

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research design, consistent with the interpretive and context-sensitive demands of legal discourse analysis. Data were collected through direct non-participant observation and audio recording of divorce court proceedings at the State High Court, Ogbomoso,

Oyo State. Six divorce proceedings were purposively selected for analysis. Proceedings were selected based on three criteria: (i) the availability of formal permission to observe and record; (ii) the contested nature of the hearing, which generates a richer and more diverse range of speech act types than uncontested matters; and (iii) the involvement of both legally represented and self-representing participants, enabling comparative analysis across different speaker roles. The six selected sessions yielded a total recording duration of approximately four hours and thirty minutes and generated over 9,000 words of verbatim transcription. Participants observed across the selected proceedings were presiding judges, petitioners' counsel, respondents' counsel, petitioners, and respondents.

The researcher attended each selected session as a non-participant observer, occupying the public gallery and taking no part in the proceedings. Audio recordings were made using a digital voice recorder with the explicit permission of the court, and all verbal exchanges were documented. Recordings were transcribed verbatim following each session, with transcripts verified against the original audio to ensure accuracy. Transcription captured all utterances by identified participant roles (judge, petitioner's counsel, respondent's counsel, petitioner, respondent). Anonymity has been preserved throughout: all names, case numbers, and identifying particulars have been removed or replaced with generic role designations.

Following transcription, utterances were coded according to speaker role and speech act type using Austin's (1962) and Searle's (1969) framework as the analytical basis, as detailed in the Theoretical Framework section above. Within the illocutionary category, utterances were classified into Searle's five types: declarative, assertive, directive, expressive, and commissive. The classification process was guided by attention to the propositional content, the sequential position, and the institutional context of each utterance.

Analysis and Discussion of Findings

Locutionary Speech Acts

The analysis of locutionary speech acts in the selected divorce proceedings revealed that utterances delivered by courtroom participants maintain a clear and meaningful structure within the legal context. Dominant locutionary speech acts identified include statements of fact, procedural summaries, descriptions of marital history, and clarification of legal provisions. Judges frequently employ locutionary acts to read formal charges, summarise the case history, and explain relevant statutory provisions, while witnesses and litigants use them to recount events from the marriage or

detail the grounds for the petition. These utterances serve the fundamental function of conveying information explicitly and ensuring shared understanding among all trial participants. As Gibbons (2003) observes, the primacy of propositional clarity in legal settings reflects the institutional requirement that all factual determinations be grounded in explicit, verifiable linguistic content.

Excerpt 1

Judge: This hearing concerns the petition for dissolution of marriage filed by the Petitioner on the grounds of irretrievable breakdown, evidenced by the Respondent's unreasonable behaviour as particularised in the petition dated the fourth of March, 2024. The court has before it the petition, the acknowledgement of service, and the Respondent's answer filed on the 22nd of April, 2024.

Excerpt 1 illustrates a locutionary speech act at the commencement of a contested divorce proceeding. The judge's utterance conveys propositional content, which is the formal legal context, parties, grounds, and documentary record of the case, without simultaneously performing additional social action such as evaluating the parties' conduct or directing a specific response. Its communicative function is to orient all participants to a shared procedural reality, establishing the informational foundation upon which all subsequent exchanges will be built. This is consistent with what Ainsworth (2023) describes as the scaffolding function of opening judicial statements in common law proceedings. Significantly, the judge's locutionary act here also performs a power-indexical function: the authoritative, comprehensive orientation it provides signals the judge's institutional role as the arbiter of what counts as procedurally relevant information, reflecting the asymmetrical distribution of illocutionary authority documented by Gibbons (2003).

Excerpt 2

Judge: Today's hearing has been adjourned to the fourteenth of October at ten o'clock. Counsels are reminded to file and serve any outstanding financial disclosure documents no later than seven days before that date. The court is adjourned.

Excerpt 2 exemplifies a closing locutionary act, which is the adjournment statement, which performs the communicative function of scheduling and compliance instruction. The utterance conveys literal, unambiguous information about future procedural obligations and timelines. Its

precision reflects the institutional requirement for clarity in legal communication (Ainsworth, 2023), and its sequential position at the close of the session is functionally significant: it brings the current communicative episode to a formal close while simultaneously initiating the procedural agenda for the next. The judge's use of the passive voice "counsels are reminded" and the formal register "The court is adjourned" reflect the institutional authority through which even informational acts acquire a directive dimension, a phenomenon Marcheva and Golovina (2024) describe as the ideological embedding of power within apparently neutral locutionary acts.

Excerpt 3

Counsel for the Petitioner: Witness, can you tell this Honourable Court what Circumstances led to the breakdown of the marriage?

Petitioner: Yes, My Lord. For over three years, my husband has stopped communicating with me peacefully. He constantly insult me in the presence of the children and always left the house for days without informing anyone. Despite several attempts to resolve our issues, the relationship became unbearable and emotionally exhausting. (sic)

Counsel for the Petitioner: Did these incidents affect the stability of the home?

Petitioner: Yes. There was constant fight in the house, and we no longer live as husband and wife. We occupied separate rooms for nearly a year before I finally left the matrimonial home.

Excerpt 3 demonstrates how the sequential deployment of locutionary acts within divorce examination serves the evidentiary function of building a credible narrative of marital breakdown. The counsel's interrogative locutionary acts of open questions designed to elicit testimony are strategically sequenced to move the witness from general account to specific detail, consistent with the rhetorical structure of examination documented by Cotterill (2003). The petitioner's responses constitute testimonial locutionary acts that transmit propositional content of specific behaviours, durations, and living conditions, which serve simultaneously as factual communication and as evidence. Bello's (2019) concept of recursive evidentiality is relevant here: the witness's progressive accumulation of specific factual claims ("For over three years," "constantly," "without informing anyone") reinforces the locutionary force of the claim of marital breakdown through the repeated invocation of concrete particulars. The institutionalising pressure of the courtroom is also

evident: despite the deeply personal and distressing nature of the testimony, the petitioner organises her account in propositionally structured declarative sentences, reflecting what Cotterill (2003) identifies as the normalising force of institutional discourse on speakers' linguistic choices.

Excerpt 4

Counsel for the Respondent: Witness, did your husband provide financial support
For the family during the marriage?

Respondent: For almost two years, he stopped paying the children's school fees
and refused to contribute to household expenses.

Excerpt 4 illustrates the locutionary function of financial fact-finding, which is a distinctive communicative task in divorce proceedings where financial conduct is legally consequential. The counsel's closed interrogative locutionary act elicits a precisely bounded declarative response: the respondent specifies duration ("almost two years"), the nature of the financial failure (school fees and household expenses), and the wilful character of the conduct ("refused"). The propositional specificity of the response reflects the evidential demands of the legal setting: vague or generalised claims carry less weight in judicial assessment than concrete, particularised statements (Bello, 2019). The locutionary act here thus functions not merely as information transfer but as the production of legally cognisable evidence, illustrating the dual communicative and evidential role of locutionary acts in courtroom discourse.

Excerpt 5

Judge: Having reviewed the testimonies and evidence presented before this
Honourable Court, the petition for dissolution of marriage is hereby granted.
The custody of the children shall remain with the petitioner, while the
respondent is ordered to provide a monthly financial support of ₦80,000 for
the welfare of the children.

Excerpt 5 exemplifies the dispositive locutionary act, through which the court communicates its binding determination. The judge's utterance conveys propositional content which shows the outcome of the petition, the custody arrangement, and the maintenance quantum in explicit, unambiguous terms. While this excerpt simultaneously carries illocutionary force as a declarative (discussed below), its locutionary dimension is significant for the precision and

comprehensiveness with which it communicates the factual content of the ruling to all participants. The sequential structure of the utterance, which is a review of evidence, a decision on petition, specification of custody, specification of maintenance, mirrors the logical structure of judicial reasoning, reflecting the institutional expectation that judicial pronouncements be both transparent in their basis and specific in their terms.

Excerpt 6

Judge: After due consideration of the testimonies given by both parties, and arguments of counsel, the petitioner has established sufficient grounds for the dissolution of the marriage based on persistent cruelty, infidelity and abandonment. From all the evidence produced before this court, it is evident that the respondent did not perform the duties expected of him as a husband and continuously failed to live peacefully with the petitioner. This court therefore dissolves the marriage contracted by the petitioner and respondent herein effective immediately.

Excerpt 6 presents a particularly elaborate locutionary act in which the judge explicitly articulates the evidential and logical basis for the dissolution judgment. The utterance is structured sequentially: consideration of evidence and argument → identification of established grounds → assessment of conduct → pronouncement of dissolution. This sequential organisation reflects the procedural justice principle that judicial decisions must be demonstrably reasoned, not merely asserted (Grieshofer, 2024). Expressions such as "after due consideration" and "from all the evidence produced" function as epistemic markers that ground the propositional content of the judgment in the evidentiary record, making the locutionary act simultaneously a communication of the court's findings and an implicit defence of its legitimacy. The formal registers "persistent cruelty, infidelity and abandonment," "dissolves the marriage contracted by the petitioner and respondent herein" reflect the specialised lexicon of legal discourse that Gibbons (2003) identifies as a key marker of institutional authority.

Excerpt 7

Judge: Having considered the welfare and educational interests of the children of the marriage, this Honourable Court hereby grants the respondent access to the children on every alternate weekend between the hours of 9:00 a.m. on

> Saturday and 5:00 p.m. on Sunday. However, such visitation shall not interfere with the children's academic activities, school schedules, or examinations. Both parties are directed to cooperate peacefully in ensuring that the visitation arrangement is implemented in the best interest of the children.

Excerpt 7 explicates the locutionary specification of child visitation rights as a communicative task requiring particular precision to minimise future conflict. The judge's utterances deploy formal declarative structures to communicate the specific terms of the visitation order with no margin for ambiguity: specific days ("every alternate weekend"), specific hours ("9:00 a.m. on Saturday and 5:00 p.m. on Sunday"), specific limitations ("shall not interfere with the children's academic activities"), and specific obligations ("both parties are directed to cooperate peacefully"). The child-centred orientation of the discourse, marked by repeated reference to the welfare and educational interests of the children, reflects the distinctive communicative priorities of family court proceedings as documented by Grieshofer (2024), where the best interests of children constitute a paramount legal and discursive principle. The locutionary acts here function not merely as information but as institutionally binding specifications of future conduct, demonstrating that locutionary precision in legal settings carries direct social and behavioural consequences.

Excerpt 8

Counsel for the Petitioner: Did you at any point leave the matrimonial home without informing your wife?

Respondent: Yes, My Lord. I travelled to Abuja for work in 2025 and stayed there for several months because I was trying to secure a stable source of income for the family.

Excerpt 8 reflects the locutionary act of admission combined with justification, which is a distinctive communicative sequence in cross-examination where a respondent acknowledges a contested fact while simultaneously reframing its significance. The respondent's utterance provides explicit propositional content acknowledging the fact of absence ("I travelled to Abuja for work in 2025 and stayed there for several months") and offers an explicit justificatory claim ("I was trying to secure a stable source of income for the family"). At the locutionary level, these are straightforward declarative acts. Their evidential significance, however, lies in the reframing

they perform: the absence is acknowledged but re-characterised as economically motivated rather than abandonment. This reflects what Bello (2019) identifies as the justificatory sub-genre of accusatory exchange in divorce proceedings, where respondents deploy specific factual claims to contest the illocutionary force of opposing allegations.

Excerpt 9

Counsel for the Petitioner: Did you make any attempt to resolve the disagreements between you and your wife before she filed this petition?

Respondent: Yes, My Lord. I invited our church pastor and even some elders in our families to help settle it on three different occasions. Even they could not resolve it, I suggested that we attend marriage counselling together, but the misunderstandings between us continued.

Excerpt 9 shows the locutionary act of reconciliation testimony, through which respondents provide factual evidence of good-faith efforts to sustain the marriage. The respondent's account is notable for its specificity: three mediation attempts are identified, involving distinct categories of intermediaries (religious leader, family elders, professional counselling), and the failure of each is explicitly stated. This specificity reflects the evidential demands of the courtroom: general claims of good faith carry less persuasive weight than particularised accounts of specific actions (Bello, 2019). The cultural dimension of the testimony is also significant: the invocation of church pastors and family elders as mediators reflects the Yoruba-Christian social context in which disputes are typically first addressed through religious and communal mechanisms before recourse to statutory legal institutions, a cultural pragmatic pattern noted by Olanrewaju and Ademola (2020) in Yoruba customary court discourse.

Excerpt 10

Counsel for the Respondent: Witness, can you tell this court how the respondent Related to you at home before the separation?

Petitioner: My Lord, I don't even know where to start. She constantly insult me in the presence of the children and even our neighbours whenever there is any issue between us. So many times, she refuse to talk to me for weeks and whenever this happen, she will leave everything at home to me alone including taking

care of the kids. (sic)

Excerpt 10 illustrates how emotionally charged testimony nonetheless operates at the locutionary level to deliver specific propositional content. The petitioner's opening "My Lord, I don't even know where to start" performs an expressive function (communicating overwhelm) that simultaneously manages face: it signals the gravity and volume of the grievances about to be narrated, priming the court for a substantial account. Despite this affective framing, the petitioner proceeds to deliver specific, factual information about the respondent's conduct: public insults in front of children and neighbours, weeks-long silences, and unilateral abandonment of domestic responsibilities. This pattern of emotional framing followed by factual narration reflects the distinctive communicative challenge facing litigants in divorce proceedings, who must translate deeply personal and distressing experiences into legally cognisable factual claims while simultaneously managing face and communicating emotional stakes (Goffman, 1967, as applied to legal settings by Juba, 2023). The persistence of locutionary precision even within emotionally laden testimony confirms the normalising power of institutional discourse documented by Cotterill (2003).

Summary of Locutionary Act Functions Across Excerpts

Excerpt	Speaker	Locutionary Act Type	Linguistic Form	Primary Function
1	Judge	Procedural summary	Declarative	Case orientation
2	Judge	Adjournment statement	Declarative	Scheduling and compliance
3	Counsel / Petitioner	Direct examination / Factual narration	Interrogative / Declarative	Elicitation and evidence
4	Counsel / Respondent	Financial conduct inquiry	Interrogative / Declarative	Financial fact-finding
5	Judge	Dispositive ruling	Declarative	Granting petition and custody
6	Judge	Dissolution judgment	Declarative	Establishing grounds; dissolving marriage
7	Judge	Custody and visitation order	Declarative / Directive	Specifying custody rights and conditions

8	Counsel / Respondent	Admission and justification	Declarative	Evidential admission
9	Counsel / Respondent	Reconciliation testimony	Declarative	Good-faith evidence
10	Counsel / Petitioner	Domestic conduct narration	Declarative	Marital breakdown evidence

Table 1: Summary of Locutionary Act Types in Divorce Court Proceedings

Table 1 provides a systematic overview of the locutionary act types identified across the ten excerpts, together with the speaker role, linguistic form, and primary communicative function of each act.

The data demonstrate that locutionary speech acts constitute the communicative foundation of divorce court discourse, serving as the primary medium through which legal information, factual evidence, and institutional determinations are communicated. Across all ten excerpts, speakers at every level of the courtroom hierarchy—judicial officers, legal counsel, and litigants—deploy locutionary acts characterised by propositional precision, formal register, and explicit rather than implied meaning. This finding is consistent with the characterisation of legal discourse as an inherently propositionalised communicative domain (Gibbons, 2003; Cotterill, 2003) and extends their observations to the family court context in Nigeria.

A hierarchical distribution of locutionary act types corresponding to institutional roles is evident in the data. Judicial locutionary acts are dispositional and comprehensive: they establish the procedural and evidential framework within which all other utterances acquire legal meaning (Excerpts 1, 2, 5, 6, 7). Counsel's locutionary acts are primarily interrogative, sequenced to elicit specific propositional content in support of a legal argument (Excerpts 3, 4, 8, 9, 10). Litigants' locutionary acts are testimonial and narrative, transmitting first-person accounts of events and experiences that constitute the evidentiary content upon which judicial determinations are based. This hierarchy reflects and reinforces the asymmetrical distribution of institutional power in the courtroom (Marcheva & Golovina, 2024), with judges controlling the interpretive framework, counsel controlling the evidentiary agenda, and litigants furnishing the raw material of testimony. The dual communicative and evidentiary function of locutionary acts in this setting distinguishes them from their equivalents in ordinary conversation. In divorce court, a locutionary act is not merely a communication of information; it is simultaneously the production of legally cognisable

evidence, the construction of an argument, and an intervention in an institutional process with life-affecting consequences for the participants. This finding underscores the importance of studying legal discourse in its specific institutional and cultural context, as advocated by Richard and Nwizug (2017) for Nigerian legal pragmatics research.

Illocutionary Speech Acts and Their Functions

The analysis of illocutionary speech acts in the selected proceedings revealed a rich distribution of communicative functions closely correlated with the institutional role of the speaker. Judges predominantly deploy declarative and directive illocutionary acts, reflecting their authority to regulate proceedings and issue binding rulings. Counsels make extensive use of directive acts through examination and cross-examination to steer testimony toward legally relevant facts and challenge the credibility of opposing accounts. Witnesses and litigants rely predominantly on assertive and expressive acts to convey information and communicate emotional experience. Table 2 presents illustrative examples of illocutionary speech acts identified in the data, categorised by type and communicative function.

No	Type	Function	Data
1	Directive	Order / Regulation Instruction / Warning Request for Clarification Command	Judge: Counsel, please, we are not here to revisit the entire history of the marriage. Judge: Counsel for the Respondent, kindly refrain from interrupting the witness while she is giving evidence before this Honourable Court. Judge: Witness, kindly clarify to this court the specific incidents that led you to leave the matrimonial home permanently on the 3rd of November, 2025. Judge: Witness, answer the question directly and avoid unnecessary elaboration.
2	Assertive	Statement of Fact Allegation Confirmation of Facts Justification	Petitioner's Counsel: The evidence before this court establishes that the Respondent has engaged in a consistent pattern of financial concealment extending over three years, rendering continued cohabitation intolerable. Petitioner: Throughout the marriage, the respondent repeatedly abandoned his financial responsibilities, leaving only me to be responsible for the welfare of the children.

			Respondent's Counsel: The Respondent admits that communication between both parties significantly deteriorated during the final years of the marriage. Respondent: My absence from home was because of her behaviour and the hostile environment created by the constant fights and argument between us.
3	Expressive	Emotional Expression Regret / Disappointment Gratitude Frustration	Respondent: With respect, Your Honour, I find these allegations deeply upsetting and I can categorically say that I have not for once behaved in the manner described by the Petitioner. Respondent: I sincerely regret that our marriage has come to this unfortunate stage despite my efforts to reconcile with her. I tried all I could but all to no avail. Petitioner: I appreciate the patience of this Honourable Court throughout these proceedings. Petitioner: It is exhausting trying to preserve a marriage in which I constantly feel ignored and disrespected. She talks to me anyhow irrespective of where we are.
4	Declarative	Legal Ruling Adjournment Admission of Evidence Custody Order	Judge: Having considered the submissions of both parties and the evidence before me, I am satisfied that the marriage has irretrievably broken down and I shall pronounce the decree accordingly. Judge: This matter is hereby adjourned until the 23rd of June for continuation of hearing. Judge: The bank statements tendered by the Petitioner are hereby admitted and marked as Exhibit D4. Judge: Temporary custody of the minor children is hereby granted to the Petitioner pending the final determination of this suit.
5	Commissive	Undertaking / Promise Assurance Commitment to Compliance Intention	Respondent's Counsel: My client undertakes to provide full financial disclosure, and beneficial interests, within twenty-eight days of today's order. Petitioner's Counsel: We shall ensure that all documentary evidence relating to the custody arrangement is filed and served before the next adjourned date.

			Respondent: I undertake that I will comply fully with any custody arrangement or maintenance order issued by this Honourable Court. Respondent's Counsel: My client is prepared to participate in mediation proceedings if the Petitioner is willing to explore an amicable settlement.

Table 2: Examples of Illocutionary Speech Acts in Divorce Proceedings and Their Functions

The data reveal that the five categories of illocutionary acts identified in the proceedings are not randomly distributed but are organised in systematic, role-specific patterns that reflect and reproduce the institutional hierarchy of the court.

Directive acts were deployed almost exclusively by judges and, to a lesser extent, by counsel in their examination functions. Judges employed directives to regulate the pace, scope, and conduct of proceedings by controlling what counts as relevant testimony ("we are not here to revisit the entire history of the marriage"), managing face threats to witnesses ("kindly refrain from interrupting"), and directing the provision of specific information ("kindly clarify to this court the specific incidents"). The sequential deployment of these directives reflects what Gibbons (2003) calls the gatekeeping function of judicial authority: judges do not merely receive information but actively shape what information enters the record and in what form. This finding extends Marcheva and Golovina's (2024) observation that directive acts are primary instruments of institutional power in courtroom interaction, confirming that this pattern holds in the Nigerian family court context.

Assertive acts were significantly represented across all non-judicial participant roles, functioning differently depending on the speaker's position. Counsels' assertive acts are characteristically high-stakes and strategically structured: the petitioner's counsel deploys an assertive allegation that is both a factual claim and argumentative positioning. Litigants' assertive acts are more narrative and emotionally proximate: the petitioner's assertion about abandoned financial responsibilities combines factual claim with implicit expressive content. The respondent's justificatory assertives by explaining absence in terms of economic motivation, illustrate the face-management dimension of assertive acts in divorce proceedings: speakers must simultaneously provide factual testimony and manage the threat to their positive face posed by the opposing narrative (Juba, 2023). This interaction between assertive and expressive functions illustrates Jucker's (2024) point that speech

acts in discursive contexts are frequently multi-functional and must be analysed in their sequential and relational context.

Expressive acts occupied a distinctive communicative niche in the proceedings, revealing the emotional realities that underlie legal claims. Respondents' expressions of upset, regret, and frustration perform multiple simultaneous functions: they communicate the speaker's psychological state, they manage positive face by projecting emotional sincerity, and they implicitly contest the validity of the opposing narrative. The petitioner's expression of exhaustion and frustration similarly performs both an expressive and an assertive function, framing the marital breakdown as a lived experience of sustained distress. These expressive acts confirm Ogundimu's (2013) finding that family court settings generate a higher prevalence of expressive speech acts than criminal proceedings, and illustrate how the emotional dimension of divorce litigation creates communicative demands that purely procedural frameworks are ill-equipped to accommodate.

Declarative acts were concentrated exclusively in judicial speech and represent the most institutionally powerful category of illocutionary act in the proceedings. Through declaratives, judges effect legally constitutive transformations: marriages are dissolved, evidence is admitted, custody is awarded, and proceedings are adjourned. The exclusive concentration of declaratives in judicial speech confirms Austin's (1962) original insight that declarations require both the appropriate institutional authority and the correct procedural context to be felicitous. That is, conditions that only the presiding judge, by virtue of their institutional role, meets within these proceedings. This distribution of declarative authority is consistent with the findings of Kalejaiye and Oyagiri (2025) on Nigerian magistrate courts and reinforces the theoretical significance of institutional role in determining the range of illocutionary acts available to different participants.

Commissive acts, found primarily in the speech of counsel and litigants, functioned to establish accountability and project future cooperation within the legal framework. Counsel's undertakings regarding financial disclosure and documentary filing commit their clients to specific, time-bound obligations that become part of the court record. Litigants' commissives, particularly undertakings to comply with custody arrangements, serve not only to establish legal obligations but to communicate cooperative orientation to the court, a face-management strategy through which litigants negotiate their identities as responsible parties. The presence of commissive acts across both counsel and litigant roles reflects the forward-looking character of family court proceedings,

whose primary concern is not only the determination of past conduct but the regulation of future parenting, financial, and relational arrangements.

In conclusion, the findings demonstrate that illocutionary acts in divorce court proceedings are contextually situated, role-specific, and sequentially organised instruments of legal and interpersonal action. They perform not only communicative functions but also institutional (regulating authority), relational (managing face and emotional dynamics), evidential (constructing credible narratives), and constitutive (effecting legal changes in the world) functions. This multi-functionality supports the call by Jucker (2024) for contextual, sequential, and discursive approaches to speech act analysis and confirms the value of extending such approaches to Nigerian family court discourse.

Conclusion

This study sets out to examine the speech acts realised in selected divorce proceedings at the State High Court, Ogbomoso, Oyo State, with specific attention to locutionary and illocutionary acts across a range of institutional participant roles. The findings address both research questions and make contributions at empirical, theoretical, and methodological levels.

In response to the first research question, the study demonstrated that locutionary speech acts constitute the communicative foundation of divorce court discourse. They serve to transmit propositionally precise, formally structured, and institutionally consequential information across all participant roles from the judge's dispositional opening and dissolution judgment to the litigant's testimonial narration of marital breakdown. Locutionary acts in this setting perform a dual function: they operate as vehicles of information transfer and, simultaneously, as instruments of legal evidence construction. The precision and formality of locutionary acts persist even within emotionally distressing testimony, confirming the powerful normalising influence of institutional discourse on speakers' linguistic choices (Cotterill, 2003; Gibbons, 2003), and demonstrating that these dynamics operate within Nigerian family court settings as well as in the Western jurisdictions where they have been most extensively documented.

In response to the second research question, the study identified five major categories of illocutionary acts namely: directives, assertives, expressives, declaratives, and commissives, which are distributed in systematic and role-specific patterns that reflect and reinforce the institutional hierarchy of the court. Directive acts concentrate in judicial speech as instruments of procedural authority and interactional control; assertive acts function across counsel and litigant

speech as tools of narrative construction, credibility management, and factual positioning; expressive acts reveal the emotional realities that underlie legal claims and reflect the affective distinctiveness of divorce proceedings as a communicative setting; declarative acts are exclusively judicial and perform the institutionally constitutive function of effecting legally binding transformations; and commissive acts project future obligations and cooperative orientation, reflecting the forward-looking character of family court dispositions. This pattern confirms and extends findings from comparable Nigerian and international studies (Ogundimu, 2013; Salami & Oke, 2018; Kalejaiye & Oyagiri, 2025; Marcheva & Golovina, 2024) while providing new empirical evidence from this current study.

The study makes several contributions to the field of legal pragmatics. Theoretically, it advances a contextually sensitive and culturally inflected approach to speech act analysis that moves beyond the descriptive application of Searle's taxonomy to engage with the institutional, relational, and cultural dimensions of speech act deployment in a specific legal setting. Methodologically, it demonstrates the value of non-participant observation combined with verbatim transcription and systematic coding as a means of capturing the naturalistic communicative dynamics of courtroom interaction.

The study is, however, subject to limitations that should be acknowledged in the interest of scholarly transparency. The corpus is drawn from a single court location and comprises six proceedings, yielding a data set that, while sufficient for qualitative analysis, does not support statistical generalisation. The findings cannot be assumed to represent divorce court discourse across Nigeria or even across Oyo State; other court levels (magistrate, customary), other geographical settings, and other sociolinguistic environments may exhibit different patterns of speech act deployment. Additionally, the exclusion of perlocutionary acts, while principled and methodologically justified, means that the study does not capture the effects of courtroom speech on participants' emotional states or subsequent behaviour, dimensions that would require ethnographic or interview-based approaches beyond the scope of the present study.

Several directions for future research emerge from these findings. Comparative studies examining speech acts across different court levels would illuminate how institutional context shapes communicative practice in Nigerian family law. Finally, research on the relationship between speech act patterns and judicial outcomes would extend the practical and policy implications of speech act analysis in legal settings. Such research would advance both the theoretical

development of contextually sensitive legal pragmatics and the practical understanding of communicative dynamics in Nigerian family court proceedings.

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