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**A SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS OF SELECT NIGERIAN CHILDREN'S ARTISTIC REPRESENTATIONS ON THE EFFECTS OF COVID-19 LOCKDOWN ORDER IN NIGERIA**

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**Abstract**

*This paper conducts a semiotic analysis of selected Nigerian children's artistic representations of their lived experiences during the COVID-19 lockdown order in Nigeria. Using De Saussure's (1983) theory of semiotics, Barthe's theory of meaning (1977) and Peirce's triadic schema of sign (1965) as theoretical framework, the specific objectives of the study were to identify the semiotic resources in the selected drawings and to explain their meanings in the context of the COVID-19 lockdown order. The paper explores how children encoded social, emotional and psychological realities into visual symbols during the pandemic. Five artworks drawn by children between the ages of eight and fourteen from both primary and secondary schools in Lagos State, Nigeria were, obtained from United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) website, were examined as signifying systems through which children communicated their perceptions of isolation, disruption, resilience, and hope. Saussure's distinction between the signifier and the signified provides the foundation for decoding the structural relationship between visual elements and their meaning. Barthe's notion of denotation and connotation, added to uncover the cultural and ideological dimensions embedded in the drawings, especially how the children interpreted the images of safety and fear in domestic spaces during the pandemic. Peirce's triadic model of icon, index, and symbol support a deeper interpretation by which visual cues, such as masks, closed schools, and family economy, functioned as signs of both trauma and adaptation. Results show that Nigerian children used art as a communicative tool to process and represent collective memory employing familiar cultural motifs and redefined domestic imagery to express altered social realities. In addition, children's visual narratives serve as critical sites for understanding societal response and emotional resilience during crises. The paper emphasises the pedagogical and socio-cultural significance of children's art as a mirror of national experience and identity reconstruction in post-pandemic Nigeria.*

**Keywords:** Semiotics, Artistic Representations, COVID-19 Lockdown, Signs and Symbols

**Introduction**

Communication is essential in our daily social interactions. It fulfils multiple functions within society, and it is inseparable from humanity, as food and water, because it underpins daily social interactions and remains inseparable from the very nature of humanity (Hassan, 2013). In social interactions, individuals connect through communication. Communication is the predominant activity by which individuals convey their opinions, ideas, emotions, thoughts, and facts, utilising either written texts or spoken language. Humans convey communication through diverse systems, one of which involves signs and symbols. The acceptance of a

system of symbols that communicate meaning constitutes the fundamental rule of any linguistic community. Abdullahi-Idiagbon (2009) asserts that meaning derives solely from language, and may not be universally applicable, as it is typically shaped by socio-cultural influences. The diversity of sentence and utterance meanings parallels the complexity of meanings derived from both verbal and non-verbal communication. Nonetheless, it is pertinent to note that deriving meaning from non-verbal cues enhances individuals' comprehension of the interrelationship between language and society, as humans significantly utilise their sensory perceptions, spatial awareness, and surrounding objects to communicate diverse messages (Abdullahi-Idiagbon, 2009)). In contemporary society, it is essential to recognise that many individuals communicate through images and illustrations.

This view clearly brings to mind a picture as a visual depiction of an individual, object, or situation, manifested as a painting or sketch. It is any observable image, cognitive representation, or specific depiction of reality as presented in a narrative, description, or interpretation. Images may incorporate both textual and graphic components; however, they can also be purely graphical or entirely textual. Images and illustrations are designed to be visually striking and educational. Consequently, information or messages are conveyed using several modalities, including pictorials, symbols, graphics, colours, and tables, in addition to lexical items (Abuya and Akinkurolere, 2013). In many instances, these images signify or mirror contemporary challenges at both national and international levels. To buttress the above, Benjamin Franklin (cited in Farokhi and Hoshemi, 2011) says humans make use of drawing tools as a means of putting their hands to action through drawing, painting and other entrepreneurial skills.

In 2019, the globe was introduced to a novel strain of virus associated with the same family as Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) and certain variants of the common cold. The novel virus referred to as Coronavirus was designated COVID-19. The initial COVID-19 case was documented in Wuhan, China, in December 2019 (Yuliana, 2020). The Coronavirus epidemic has spawned numerous conspiracy theories, akin to other significant worldwide issues. The notion that Human Papillomavirus (HPV) is a malady of the affluent stems from its transmission by air passengers, who are presumed to be wealthy due to their roles as government officials, business executives, athletes, media figures, and tourists, often identified as index cases in numerous nations. The initial group of infected individuals in Nigeria comprised government officials who had returned from countries with reported cases. The Coronavirus disease has emerged as a global pandemic that can infect and potentially fatal to anyone upon contact, irrespective of race, class, ethnicity, religion, age, gender, or any other societal divisions.

The virus disseminated rapidly, prompting the World Health Organization (WHO) to classify COVID-19 as a global pandemic. Following its designation as a global pandemic, many governments implemented diverse measures to address the escalating virus outbreak. To avert the transmission of the epidemic across individuals, communities, and nations, international governments and countries instituted a lockdown order under the slogan "Stay Home, Save Lives." The federal government and certain state governments in Nigeria issued lockdown orders to mitigate the spread of COVID-19. The COVID-19 pandemic lockdown order had both beneficial and harmful effects on the lives of numerous Nigerians, including children, due to the financial and economic crises it imposed on families, particularly vulnerable households and communities. Schools remained closed, leading to home schooling being the standard for many children, while public performances were curtailed. The COVID-19 pandemic lockdown elicited a multitude of emotions among many Nigerian children. A multitude of children articulated their emotions in diverse ways. Assisted by the Ayowole Academy of Arts in Lagos, Nigeria's commercial metropolis, some gifted kid painters

expressed their thoughts and emotions over COVID-19 through paintings, images, and sketches. These sketches, drawings, and images have garnered significant attention, resulting in the publication of several on the website of the United Nations International Emergency Fund (UNICEF). Lange-Kuttner (2020) asserts that drawing is a persistent form of human expression dating back to pre-historic times. He posits that it is an enjoyable, playful, and entertaining activity for children, serving as a significant mode of non-verbal communication.

Drawing is often regarded as a means to access a child's inner world, facilitating the expression of emotions and representations pertinent to specific areas of inquiry (Kilitsoğlu et al., 2022).

Thus, it is posited that through drawing, the child represents not merely a realistic depiction of the external world but also their feelings, thoughts, and understanding of the surrounding reality (Quaglia et al., 2015). Conversely, drawings can be viewed as instruments for analysing children's representations of social phenomena, activities, and the physical contexts in places they are situated. The COVID-19 pandemic's stay-at-home orders provided Nigerian children with an opportunity to express themselves, as their experiences were captured in the themes of their drawings. Drawing serves as a symbolic representation of the inner psyche, particularly the unconscious mind. The unconscious aspect of the psyche may manifest through symbols, such as drawings. Drawing serves as a direct form of communication from the unconscious, which is less susceptible to camouflage compared to verbal communication (Kitgahar and Matsuishi, 2007). The specific objectives of the study therefore are to identify the semiotic resources in the selected drawings and to explain their meanings in the context of the COVID-19 lockdown order.

### **Semiotics**

Semiotic studies can be considered the discipline that analyses the creation and meaning of message representation in any format. Thus, the significance of a sign can be analysed within the field of semiotics. According to Trisnayanti et al. (2021), a sign consists of an entity that conveys meaning. Signs are categorised into two types: verbal signs and non-verbal signs. A verbal sign constitutes communication expressed through spoken or written language. As stated by Chandler (2007), visual communication, a non-verbal sign, conveys a concept using images or illustrations that include symbols, art, colour, gestures, facial expressions, graphics, and posture. Consequently, the efficacy of verbal and non-verbal cues is a significant aspect of our existence. Both verbal and non-verbal signs serve several functions in daily life, acting as mediums to symbolise concepts or communicate messages to the intended audience. Indeed, a sign possesses an inherent meaning, and as humans, we require a deeper comprehension of that meaning. Semiotics is the examination of signs or symbols (Mayr, 2013) and the processes through which meaning is generated, encompassing various activities that include signs and the interpretation of meaning. Semiotics primarily studies how humans interpret their surroundings. Images, signs, symbols, and other forms of communication pervade our environment, regardless of whether they are verbal or non-verbal. Both verbal and non-verbal signs serve several functions in daily activities, acting as mediums to represent concepts or communicate messages to the intended audience.

### **Previous Studies**

Young children's drawings have attracted many scholars in different fields of education. The reason so many professionals, psychologists, researchers, and teachers, have carried out various researches to explicate the meaning and interpretation of children's drawings. For instance, scholars such as: Turkcan (2013) in a semiotic approach to the analysis of children's drawings, examined primary school pupils' drawings through a semiotic approach. The study was conducted in the primary school 3rd grade course of visual arts at two primary

schools, one of which had students with lower socio-economic status, and the other had students with higher socio-economic status. The study was carried out with a total of 26 students, and the participants were asked to draw a picture regarding a concept. Data were collected using the students' drawings through the clinical interviews with their drawings and results revealed that the semiotic analysis conducted regarding the students' drawings was not only a tool that helped make psychological descriptions but also an approach that helped their mental development processes. Degura and Nutbrown (2017) signs, symbols and schemas: understanding meaning in a child's drawings explored the schematic underpinnings in the drawings of a four-year-old girl, called Thea. The paper discusses ethical issues of drawings made at home and in school and Thea's recorded videos of her drawing session for a period of four months were used as data. Results revealed the importance of listening to children's talk as the draw in order to understand more fully, the meaning they are making. Villarroel et al (2018) in a study on the spontaneous representation of animals in young children's drawings of plant life examined the content of free drawings that a sample of 328 children aged four to seven years of age, undertook when explaining their understandings of plant life. Data regarding the type and frequency of the depictions of animals found in the children's graphic explanations on flora was collected and read in conjunction with participants' gender and academic level. The results show that a substantial proportion of the children in the sample spontaneously drew illustrations of animals in their graphic explanations concerning vegetable life and, more significantly, some pictures show plants and animals engaged in clear contract. Kaplan (2019) children's drawings speak a thousand words in their transition to school employed a draw-write-tell approach to capture children's understandings of transition to school. A Vygotskian view of drawing was adopted, as a mediating tool for children to make meaning of experiences and thoughts and express them to others. Children's drawings and explanatory narratives were thematically analysed in a social constructivist paradigm. The study looked at how children described their feelings and understanding of school and home, as well as their growing awareness of school life. Findings show drawings were supported as a useful tool for understanding children's view of transition to school and capturing changes in their feelings, knowledge and independence. Bulunuz et al (2022) a semiotic analysis of children's pictures: A school polluted by noise, investigated pictures drawn by primary school pupils about noise. Data were pictures drawn by the children. From the analysis, the reasons for the noise in the school were represented well in the pupil's pictures. The drawings showed that noise was seen as a harmful and disruptive factor that affects physical and mental health, as well as social interactions and learning in the school setting.

### **Artistic Representations by Children**

When children sketch, they meticulously select their supplies, including crayons, colours, patterns, as well as the dimensions and placement of their subjects. Children's drawings are distinctive and might provide specific insights on the young artist. Thomas and Silk (1990) assert that the examination of children's drawings originated in the late 19th century. Since that time, the study has primarily been utilised for aesthetic, educational, and clinical purposes. Children's drawings are typically analysed to investigate their perspectives on significant global issues both presently and in the future. Kellogg (1970) contends that a common developmental pattern exists in children's drawings and paintings. Global cultures utilise analogous forms to convey their intended messages. The forms may vary from one country to another, although fundamentally they stay similar. The artistic expressions of young children globally are uniform. Alland (1983) posits that children across many cultures may vary not just in the specifics of drawing style but also in the fundamental tactics employed to create their drawings.

Culture is essential in the formation of symbolic representations (Wales, 1990). Alland's theory posits that local cultural symbolism influences children's drawing practices (Alland, 1983). Although, the mental image of an individual may be fundamentally identical, the pictorial realisation of that representation might vary significantly based on its cultural context and iconographic standards (Wales, 1990). Since drawing serves as a form of personal expression, it can also function as a means of communication. Illustration often conveys significantly more to the observer than verbal discourse. Children lack enough capacities for abstract linguistic expression. Yet, they possess symbolic communication strategies, such as drawing. On that note, Children utilise photos to communicate with familiar individuals, cultivate life skills, and establish a sense of trust (Kitahar and Matsuishi, 2002). The progression of children's drawings correlates with the advancement of motor abilities, emotional growth, psychosocial development, and perceptual development. Children illustrate "what they comprehend" in their unique style. The sensory functions, sensibility/emotions, and motor functions interact, with the addition of social experience, culminating in the depiction on paper.

For the fact drawing belongs to the same realm of expression as play and verbal communication, children who engage in it exhibit happiness. They convey their concerns, joys, dreams, and pain through drawings, providing insights into their relationship with the world and other entities. Drawing serves as a medium for expression, and children's artwork reflects their personalities. It is rare for children not to draw; this can be a manifestation of trauma because drawing is in the same sphere of expression as play and conversation. Therefore, youngsters who sketch are happy youngsters. They communicate their anxieties, joys, dreams, pain and other feelings through drawings, and also provide leads about their relationship to the world and to other things. Drawing serves as a medium for expression, and children's artwork reflects their personalities. It is uncommon for children to refrain from drawing; this may indicate underlying trauma. When children sketch, they freely express themselves, conveying significant messages both positive and negative as well as trivial matters (Farokhi and Hashemi, 2011, p. 3)

### **Theoretical Framework**

This paper adopts Ferdinand de Saussure's Semiotic theory (1983) and Roland Barthes's theory of meanings (1977) to examine the data, elucidating the significance of semiotic codes and resources, while including Peirce's schema of signs (1965) for support. Ferdinand de Saussure employed the term "semiology" to denote the science of "signs." A sign represents a gesture, a communication, or an entity intentionally symbolising another. According to Saussure, the linguistic sign possesses a dyadic nature. It is a synthesis of "signifier" and "the signified," a dualistic psychological construct including "concept" and "sound," "image or word" (Yina, 2015). Saussure opines that language is a social phenomenon, as meaning is not inherent in individual words but exists within a multifaceted system of relational relationships that constitute a systemic network. Consequently, for the linguist, a "sign" constitutes the fundamental unit of meaning in communication, encompassing both "content" (signified) and "expression" (signifier).

Barthes (1977), contribution to semiotics is in using sign theory to decode hidden meanings in cultural phenomena of everyday life. According to Adedimeji (2002), he built upon the semiological system of De Saussure creating a way through non-verbal signs specifically for people to enrich their understanding of language, literature and society through the two orders of signification or signifier, and signified, syntagm and system as well as denotation and connotation to describe what literally appears in the drawings in order to interpret their

contextual, cultural and emotional meanings. Peirce (1965), believed the entire universe to be made up of signs. Every sign is connected with three things: “the ground”, its objects” and the “interpretant”. The sign is thus a “representamen” which is the perceptible object functioning in that capacity and corresponds to Saussure’s signifier (Yina, 2015). Peirce developed a schema of sign which recognises three kinds of signs which are icons, indexes and symbols. According to him, icons signify resemblance. He explains it clearly that an icon is a sign that is meant to resemble, simulate or reproduce its referent in some way. Photograph may be an icon because it can be said to reproduce its referent in a visual way. Index represents causal connection. It is a sign that refers to something or someone in terms of its existence and location in time or space, (or in relation to something or someone). Indexes show location and time. Symbols signify convention. They are signs that stand for their referents in an arbitrary and conventional way.

The signs, symbols, and icons of the weeping kid, the imprisoned birds, the two faces oriented in opposing directions, and the expressions of frustration and exclamation comprise elements of signifier and signified. For Saussure, each sign comprises a signifier and a signified, with the interaction between them constituting the process of signification. In semiotic theory, signifier possesses both dynamic and static characteristics, indicating the dual aspects of meaning formation and the resultant meaning (Yina, 2015).

### **Methodology**

This paper employed a qualitative descriptive and interpretative design to analyse the selected children’s drawings. Using purposive sampling, five children within the age bracket of eight, thirteen and fourteen years who are of both primary and secondary schools living in Lagos State, Nigeria assisted by the Ayowole Academy of Arts in Lagos, Nigeria's commercial metropolis. As gifted children, these kid painters expressed their thoughts and emotions over COVID-19 lockdown through paintings, images, and sketches. Tagged: “Nigerian Children Sketch it Out.” These sketches, drawings, and images garnered such significant attention, resulting in the publication of several of them on the website of the United Nations International Emergency Fund (UNICEF). The UNICEF Nigeria website is the hub for its work in Nigeria focusing on protecting children’s rights through programmes in different disciplines, offering updates, success stories, data and ways to support children’s initiative in various section of the society for partnership and career opportunities. UNICEF works in partnership with many stakeholders including government and civil society to achieve national and international goals to ensure the fulfilment of children’s rights. Thus, data were sourced from the United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund (UNICEF) website at

<https://www.unicef.org/stories/ni...> released on August 19, 2020. Five art works, numbered 1 to 5 were purposively selected out of many drawn during the COVID-19 lockdown situation for containing enough images and illustrations, that will be useful for analytical convenience. The data were categorised into verbal and non-verbal indicator cues present in the drawings and analysed through tri-theoretical semiotic framework, integrating Saussure’s semiotic theory (signifier and signified; Saussure, 1983), Barthes’s denotation and connotation as well as Peirce’s icon, indexes and symbols allowing for multi-layered interpretation of all visual, emotional and cultural meanings.

**DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION**

**THIS STUDY IS A SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS OF SELECT NIGERIAN CHILDREN'S ARTISTIC REPRESENTATIONS ON THE EFFECTS OF COVID-19 LOCKDOWN ORDER IN NIGERIA. IN THIS SECTION, DATA WERE CATEGORISED INTO VERBAL AND NON-VERBAL INDICATOR CUES PRESENT IN THE DRAWINGS AND ANALYSED THROUGH TRI-THEORETICAL SEMIOTIC FRAMEWORK, INTEGRATING SAUSSURE'S SEMIOTIC THEORY (SIGNIFIER AND SIGNIFIED; SAUSSURE, 1983), BARTHES'S DENOTATION AND CONNOTATION (1977) AS WELL AS PEIRCE'S ICON, INDEXES AND SYMBOLS (1965) ALLOWING FOR MULTI-LAYERED INTERPRETATION OF ALL VISUAL, EMOTIONAL AND CULTURAL MEANINGS.**



**Figure 1- by an eight-year-old Sulaiman Farouk.**

This drawing features iconic, indexical and symbolic signs (semiotic resources).

### **1. Verbal Signs**

The verbal signs in the text are the open book placed in front of Sulaiman though not legible.

### **2. Non-verbal Signs**

- i. A real picture of Sulaiman Farouk placed side by side with his own drawing. This is iconic and indexical.
- ii. A sketch Sulaiman Farouk made of himself with his head raised, revealing his open and bright eyes looking up, tears trickling down his eyes through his cheeks to his jaw area. This is also iconic and indexical.
- iii. A book in front of the art work. This is iconic and symbolic.
- iv. The rough brownish background. This is symbolic.

### **3. The Signified**

- i. The real picture of Sulaiman Farouk placed side by side with his art work signifies that Sulaiman is presenting an art work where he drew of himself crying while holding a book, looking up to God and at the same time praying in his heart that the whole Coronavirus pandemic would end soon.
- ii. Tears trickling down his eyes signify that Sulaiman feels pained staying at home with no hope of going back to school. It seems that whenever he sees his school bag, he would remember his friends and teachers.
- iii. With his head raised, revealing his open and bright eyes looking up, suggests that Sulaiman is asking a rhetorical question of when will the coronavirus pandemic end for him to start school again. He sees no hope in sight.
- iv. A book in front of the drawing signifies that Sulaiman is a primary school pupil who has been staying home because of the lockdown order and he could not study the way

he would have done if school had been going on normally. Also, Sulaiman's cry suggests that some children whose families could not afford online classes, which a lot of schools resorted to, were really going to be affected academically as no alternative arrangements were made for them.

- v. The rough brownish background shows that Sulaiman is being sincere and honest with his feelings which is in line with Barthesian theory, the rough brownish background functions as a connotative signifier that indexes emotional authenticity.

#### 4. Signification

The signifiers (semiotic resources) have both denotative and connotative signification as well as rhetoric signals filled with metaphor and irony. The rough brownish background depicts an honest and sincere picture of how the lockdown order has made life miserable as regards going to school.



**Figure 2 - by fourteen-year-old Michael Gajilo.**

This drawing features iconic, indexical and symbolic signs (semiotic resources).

##### 1. Verbal Signs

There are no visible verbal signs.

##### 2. Non-verbal Signs

- i. The image of a cage. This is iconic and symbolic.
- ii. The image of three birds (chickens) with red combs enclosed inside the cage are iconic and symbolic as well.
- iii. The image of grains of corn poured in front of the cage. This is symbolic.
- iv. The foreground colour of yellow and brown, is also symbolic.

##### 3. The Signified

- i. The image of the cage signifies the compulsory lockdown order which made people to stay at home to keep safe from contacting the deadly coronavirus disease as well as restricting people from going out to their various places of work or business to look for money to fend for themselves and their loved ones.
- ii. The image of the three birds represents families. The first bird represents the fathers, the second bird represents mothers and the third bird represents children in the families. The first bird which represents the fathers is not active, which means that fathers during the lockdown period could not work or worked from home while his energy which the 'red' comb signifies has been inactive. The second bird is very busy trying to get grains from outside the cage for the family. It also represented

opportunities like job opportunities which became few as many people were relieved of their jobs because of low level of productivity and maintenance costs in various establishments.

- iii. The grains of corn spread on the ground suggests the nature of Nigerian economy during the coronavirus lockdown order, meaning that families had to struggle to get food to survive or otherwise starve to death.
- iv. The foreground colour of yellow and brown depicts the bleak future of the economy occasioned by the lockdown order.

#### 4. Signification

The signifiers (semiotic resources) have both denotative in the sense that what we see “a drawing of three chickens with red combs enclosed inside a cage and being fed grains and connotative symbolic representations of how Nigerians were confined during the COVID-19 lockdown dependent on government provisions, experiencing loss of freedom, vulnerability, power imbalance and survival struggles. The image suggest that Nigerians were “cooped up like chickens,” metaphorically speaking.



**Figure 3 - by thirteen-year-old Pius Divine Tonna**

This drawing is iconic in nature.

##### 1. Verbal Signs

There are no visible verbal signs.

##### 2. Non-verbal Signs

- i. The drawing is an image of a man gnashing his face gnashing his teeth out of his wide-open mouth with his head resting on his hand. This drawing is also iconic in nature.

##### 3. The Signified

- i. The reaction on the man's face shows his frustration and pain as a result of hardship worsened by the COVID-19 lockdown order because the government did not give the citizens enough palliatives like food and money to ease hardships which many people experienced during the lockdown. His head resting on his hand further suggests that he has run out of ideas or strategies on how to cope with the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic with severe headache.

#### **4. Signification**

The signifier is both metaphoric and iconic in nature while having denotative and connotative features of pain and suffering.



**Figure 4 - by fourteen-year-old Okeshina Fawas.**

This drawing features iconic, indexical and symbolic signs.

##### **1 Verbal Signs**

The verbal signs are the money denomination of the Nigerian Naira currency.

- i The picture of Alvan Ikoku on the ten Naira note and the phrase “Central Bank of Nigeria,” are both iconic and symbolic.
- ii The number 50 on the fifty Naira note and the logo of the Central Bank of Nigeria are also iconic and symbolic in representation.

##### **2. Non-verbal Signs**

- i. The drawing of a boy looking at two Nigerian currencies with mouth wide open and with open hands, is symbolic.
- ii. The broken piggy bank with money inside, is also symbolic.

##### **3. The Signified**

- i. The verbal signs of the money denomination of the Nigerian currency reveals that money is a necessity in life and the much-needed item during the lockdown period to be able to purchase food items.
- ii. The non-verbal signs of the drawing of a boy holding a broken piggy bank with exclamation sort-of on his face reveals a little relief from the lack of money arising from the lockdown. It also reveals that before the coronavirus pandemic and the attendant lockdown order in Nigeria, fathers worked hard every day to fend for their families. Fathers saved money for the rainy days and also encouraged their children to save from the little pocket allowances they receive from their parents and relations. During the mandatory lockdown period, fathers used the money they had previously saved to feed their various families. As the lockdown continued longer than expected, some families became impoverished because the money the fathers had saved got exhausted. In this case, some reasonable children who had followed their fathers’ advice to save money in piggy banks resorted to breaking their piggy banks and

surrendered their little savings to their parents to ensure that their families did not starve.

#### 4 Signification

The signifiers have both denotative function in terms of the drawing and connotative signification compares how ordinary financial symbols “currency pictures, bank logos piggy banks,” encode deeper cultural anxieties about survival, economic hardship, government authority, and the fragility of savings during the COVID-10lockdown in Nigeria



**Figure 5 - by fourteen-year-old Taiwo Monday.**

This drawing features iconic, indexical and symbolic signs.

##### 1 . Verbal Signs

There are no visible verbal signs in the text.

##### 2 . Non-verbal Signs

- i. The pictures of boys backing each other. This is iconic.
- ii. The seriousness on the faces of the boys is both iconic and indexical.
- iii. Sweat trickling down the two faces, is also indexical and iconic.
- iv. Raised eye and folded mouth in the drawing at the right-hand side, is symbolic of hopelessness.
- v. The foreground colour is a mixture of cream and brown colour. A symbolic colour of earth.

##### 3. The Signified

The drawing represents the need to maintain and practice physical distancing as one of the protocols to be observed to prevent the coronavirus disease from spreading. The seriousness on the two faces depicts the severity of the coronavirus disease all over the world and the conscious efforts made to ensure that physical distancing is maintained. It suggests that physical distancing is really pertinent and should be maintained if one does not want to contract the deadly disease. The raised eye and the folded mouth in the drawing on the right-hand side depicts the unpleasantness in keeping physical distancing. It suggests that though physical distancing is necessary to reduce or stop the spread of coronavirus disease, people are not happy observing it.

#### **4 The Signification**

The signifiers (semiotic resources) have both denotative in that they are standing, with their back touching and connotative significations of cultural, emotional shaped experiences of fear hardship, solidarity and resilience in the context of COVID-19 lockdown in Nigeria.

#### **Summary of Findings**

The results revealed that the children used various semiotic codes: verbal and non-verbal to express the feelings of the effect of the COVID-19 lockdown order on them and the general public. Such expressions could only be interpreted individually depending on the perspectives readers are looking at. The expression is in line with Hodge and Kress's (1988) uses of semiotic systems in social practice which explained that the social power of text in society depends on interpretation. "Each producer of a message relies on its recipients for it to function as intended (Hodge and Kress, 1988, p .4).

The results also revealed that the signifiers (semiotic resources) have both denotative and connotative signification as well as rhetoric signals filled with metaphor, simile, euphemism and irony. For instance, in figure 1, metaphorically, "Sulaimon is an open book waiting to be read," meaning-his life experiences during the lockdown are visible and revealing. Similarly, "his eyes were as bright as candles searching for hope." In figure 2, the birds in the cage, "were restricted for safety" euphemistically. Also in figure 3, a "grin" indicates joy, yet the expression ironically shows pain. Furthermore, in figure 4, metaphorically, "the money was a mirror of the nation's hardship." Be that as it may in figure 5, the boys backing each other with serious faces and sweat are compared with soldiers as "they stood like soldiers fighting an invisible enemy," and so on. These suggest that apart from the plain meaning of the drawings, they were deliberately standing for something else as expressed by Saussure in his theory and reinforced by Barthes' theory of meaning.

Four out of the five drawings analysed featured all the three different types of signs icons, indexes and symbols as developed by Pierce in his schema of sign. Sketches 1,2,4, and 5 were all observed to be iconic, indexical and symbolic in nature, thereby confirming resemblance and simulation of the drawings to real life situations, causal connection to the time and location of the events. Only drawing 3 was observed to be iconic alone in nature.

From the data analysis, it has been acknowledged that children so much missed their normal school activities, their teachers and friends. In other words, physical confinement, economic collapse, emotional sufferings, educational disruption, deepening social inequality, the struggle for survival and resilient hope in adversity are the main thematic depictions of the selected artworks as regards the Nigerian experience of the COVID-19 lockdown in the year 2020. There was widespread anxiety globally as nobody, not even the health professionals could envisage the end of the pandemic. Life was generally unpleasant to everyone.

The five drawings analysed depicted the general situation during the lockdown, that is, restriction of movement, frustration, scarcity of food, physical distancing and unpleasantness, thereby emphasising the role of pictures in communication. It could therefore be said that the implicit and explicit meanings of the drawings were well communicated by the use of the semiotic resources deployed.

#### **Conclusion**

In line with Piaget and Inhelder (1956), children use signs and symbols in logical ways to communicate reality. On that note, artist and communication experts (linguists, psychologists,

and other educators and scholars) at various levels, have perceived children's artistic representation as very useful tools in pedagogy. On the other hand, while artist view children's arts as natural talents, linguists and semioticians read deep meanings out of these artistic representations. By implication, linguists have come to accept the fact that children's drawings/sketches usually comprise important clues which aid in describing the socio-cultural complexities of life as these children develop emotionally, mentally, physically and spiritually.

In view of the above, this paper has attempted a semiotic analysis of the Nigerian children artistic representations made during the COVID-19 lockdown order to express their feelings on the perceived effects of the coronavirus pandemic on the economy, educational sector, people's profession, religious activities and social lives.

Finally, this paper has strengthened the ideology that drawing of all types, are essential communication tools which contributes to the efficiency of other semiotic resources accompanying them linguistically.

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## TECHNOLOGY AND INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES PRESERVATION IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY NIGERIA

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### Abstract

*In the twenty-first century Nigeria, English is used as the official language while indigenous languages dominate daily communication. This is because Nigeria is a multilingual country with hundreds of indigenous languages. Undoubtedly, English has continued to connect Nigerians from diverse linguistic backgrounds. So with the rapid technological advancement of the digital age, most Nigerians engage with English daily. This poses a significant threat to the existence of indigenous languages, which many believe that communicating in them by their individual speakers is a defining feature of humanity, hence the need for their preservation. However, some scholars believe that technology can play a role in the preservation of indigenous languages. Thus, this paper explores the role of technology in the preservation of indigenous languages in contemporary Nigeria. A sociocultural theory by Lev Vygotsky (1978) was employed to examine how digital tools and platforms are transforming language documentation, transmission, and usage. Qualitative methodology was used to review literature, and analyse documented technological interventions in language preservation. Results revealed that technological interventions such as digital platforms, mobile applications, digital archives, social media content creation, and language documentation projects contribute positively to indigenous languages preservation. Furthermore, challenges such as the digital divide, limited funding, and cultural resistance impede widespread adoption of technology-driven preservation and effective implementation. The paper concludes that technology cannot be ignored, as it plays a pivotal role in the preservation of Nigeria's indigenous languages for future generations. It suggests that indigenous language preservation in the digital age requires investment in infrastructure, supportive policies, and active community engagement.*

**Keywords:** Technology, indigenous language, language preservation, Nigeria, digital platforms

### Introduction

Languages become endangered when they are dominated, lack proper documentation, and not passed on to younger generations. This is more than a linguistic problem; it is a sociocultural crisis that threatens identity, memory, and continuity. As Fishman (1991) explains, language is not just a means of communication but a repository of collective memory and indigenous knowledge. Language is both for communication and storage of shared memories, values, history, and wisdom. Describing the death of a language, Crystal (2000, p.1), for example, writes that, "To say that a language is dead is like saying that a person is dead", a process that evokes cultural grief and a deep sense of loss. For many Nigerians in the twenty-first century, it is not just the disappearance of words but identity, memory, and ancestral knowledge.

Unfortunately, many indigenous languages in Nigeria face the threat of extinction. Preserving these indigenous languages is vital for sustaining linguistic vitality in the twenty-first century.

With an estimated 400 to 500 indigenous languages, Nigeria is among the most linguistically diverse nations in the world (Blench, 2019). Blench notes many Nigerian indigenous languages are extinct or endangered. While they dominate daily use, English remains the official lingua franca for prestige, education, and global relevance. According to Aboh (2022), regional languages like Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba remain strong, while English spreads through institutions and digital media. Nigeria's diversity calls for inclusive cultural policies. The heterogeneity of Nigeria demands inclusive policies to safeguard its cultural heritage.

In the twenty-first century, people are not just using technology but living with it. Rapid digital growth has made English, both Standard and Pidgin a daily medium of interaction in Nigeria on a daily basis across different spaces (formal or informal). English provides a common ground for real communication for individuals from diverse linguistic backgrounds. As Such, Ugwuanyi & Aboh, (2025) explain that the influence of indigenous linguistic patterns has helped shape a localised and familiar variety of English language in Nigeria. However, Information and Communication Technologies still provide limited support for indigenous languages, restricting their online presence and visibility (Osborn, 2010; Aluko & Eze, 2023). For many native speakers in Nigeria, communicating in their indigenous language is a defining feature of humanity. Yet majority of the indigenous languages are endangered, or threatened by globalisation, urbanisation, and dominant languages like English and major regional languages. This paper focuses on the preservation of Nigerian indigenous languages. The aim is to explore the role of technology in their preservation in the twenty-first century Nigeria.

### **Literature Review**

In the twenty-first century Nigeria, the convergence of technological advancement and indigenous languages preservation are key academic and societal concerns. These concerns arise from the threat of language loss and the erosion of cultural heritage. Scholars argue that digital tools offer promising avenues for revitalising Nigeria's over 500 indigenous languages, many of which face extinction due to globalisation, urbanisation, and the dominance of English and other regional languages (Ekiye, 2023; Etim 2016; Bamgbose, 2011).

In Nigeria, indigenous languages are grouped into levels. The major languages are: Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba. Those in the middle are Urhobo, Fulfulde, Nupe, Tiv, Igala etc. The minority languages are Kaka, Jukun, Berom, Kuteb, etc. While some major Nigerian languages have well-established orthographic systems that facilitate their documentation and transmission, many minority languages rapidly decline without orthographic development or institutional support (Iwuala, 2020; Mgbemena, 2020; UNESCO, 2019). Of course, there is need for effective documentation and community engagement to reverse this trend.

**Indigenous languages** are the native languages spoken by the native people of a specific region or country. Indigenous languages in Nigeria refer to the various native languages spoken by communities across the country. These languages serve as primary means of communication and cultural expression among native speakers.

**Technology** refers to the application of knowledge, tools, and systems to solve real-world problems. Digital technology are things like, mobile apps, social media platforms, online archives, and other ICT tools that people use to communicate, learn, and preserve knowledge.

The advancement of digital technology brings both challenges and opportunities for preserving indigenous languages, as digital platforms can either accelerate linguistic erosion

or act as powerful tools for revitalisation and transmission (Bird, 2022). In the twenty-first century Nigeria, indigenous languages are important to the people and need to be preserved to maintain cultural heritage and identity. Technology is here to stay; focus should shift from its challenges to its opportunities.

For many years researchers have indicated the importance of promoting indigenous languages in the digital space. For example, Ekiye's (2023) examination of the critical role that library and information communication technologies (ICTs) play in preserving indigenous languages in Nigeria from endangerment showed that, when libraries are used, they serve as vital repositories (digital or physical) for the documentation, preservation, and dissemination of linguistic heritage. Repositories are digital containers or spaces where collections of data, files, or resources are organised and maintained for future access, use, or sharing. The author argues that indigenous languages in Nigeria have declined due to marginalisation in formal domains such as education and governance. Their preservation depends on intentional documentation and revitalisation strategies. Libraries serve as essential repositories for linguistic resources, while ICT tools enhance access and support language transmission across generations.

Nwafor (2024) explores the growing influence of social media in preserving and revitalising the Igbo language, emphasising its role as a dynamic space for cultural expression and linguistic engagement. The study highlights how platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube are being utilised by educators, content creators, and language enthusiasts to produce and circulate Igbo-language materials, including educational content, entertainment, and cultural narratives. These digital interactions not only foster a sense of community among Igbo speakers but also encourage younger generations to reconnect with their linguistic heritage. Despite these promising developments, Nwafor notes persistent challenges such as limited institutional backing, inconsistent content quality, and the overwhelming presence of English in digital spaces. The study concludes that while social media is not a standalone solution, it serves as a valuable tool in broader efforts to sustain and promote indigenous languages in the digital era.

More recently, a study by Michael (2025) investigates the role of digital technology in preserving indigenous languages and promoting linguistic diversity in Nigeria. Focusing on undergraduate students at Taraba State University, the study found that students have limited awareness of digital tools available for preserving indigenous languages. Michael points out that infrastructural challenges, limited digital literacy, and weak institutional backing hinder effective implementation. The author concludes that for technology to meaningfully contribute to indigenous language sustainability, stakeholders must prioritise strategic integration into educational curricula, raise awareness, and foster collaboration between academia, policymakers, and tech developers.

More often, there are challenges accessing technology, especially in communities with little or no financial backing. However, despite the financial and digital literacy challenges, digital media and artificial intelligence (AI) offer promising avenues for preserving indigenous languages in Niger State. Umar et al. (2025) correspondingly pinpoints that collaboration among communities, experts, and policymakers is essential to achieve this potential. For it is through concerted effort that accessible technology can be used to revitalize and preserve indigenous languages.

In South African context, an earlier study by Sundani (2023) looked at how digital technologies are utilised to improve access, promote visibility, and support the preservation of South African indigenous languages. His findings revealed that limited access to digital

technologies designed to support South African languages impedes their promotion and preservation. This lack of access hinders efforts to keep these languages visible and viable in the digital age. Similarly, Mlambo and Matfunjwa (2024) explore how digital technologies can be leveraged to preserve South Africa's indigenous languages, particularly those with fewer speakers such as Xitsonga, Tshivenda, Siswati, and Ndebele. The study found that these languages are underrepresented in digital spaces, restricting their visibility and integration into contemporary communication. The authors advocate for inclusive language policies and grassroots-led efforts to address this gap.

That mobile applications promote revitalisation, documentation, and intergenerational transmission of Nigerian indigenous languages is confirmed by Ajani et al. (2024). The study demonstrates that mobile applications are increasingly vital in the revitalisation and transmission of Nigerian indigenous languages. Their study shows how digital tools support documentation, promotes intergenerational learning, and enhance linguistic visibility, particularly when developed collaboratively with local communities. The authors further argue that ethical design and institutional backing are essential for long-term impact. Technology can serve as a catalyst for preserving and promoting Nigeria's endangered indigenous languages. The researchers reported that mobile apps when thoughtfully designed provide accessible, scalable tools for language learning, documentation, and intergenerational transmission.

Meighan (2021) investigates how indigenous communities are reclaiming digital spaces to support language revitalisation. The study challenges the dominance of Western epistemologies in technology design, in which is often limited in addressing the specific needs of local communities. He argues that technology is not neutral; it reflects the values of its creators, and calls for decolonised digital tools that align with indigenous worldviews. The study synthesises three decades of digital language activism and highlights the importance of intergenerational transmission and community-led initiatives. His findings revealed that digital technologies can empower indigenous language revitalisation when they are designed with cultural sensitivity and community participation.

In exploring the use of technology in preserving indigenous languages in Nigeria, it is essential to consider the role of indigenous-language journalism. Once a vital conduit for local expression, identity, and political engagement, these publications have faced and still facing mounting pressures in the digital age. In other words, indigenous newspapers exist in Nigeria (*Alaroye, Ogene, Aminiya, Albashir, Mwanger Adeyeye, & Salawu, 2024; Ifeduba, 2012*); however, their influence has declined in the twenty-first century due to the rise of social media platforms. According to Onyenankeya (2021), their survival depends on embracing digital transformation and adopting innovative business models that align future opportunities with practical strategies. He notes that indigenous language newspapers in Africa face poor funding, declining readership, and competition from mainstream and social media.

The preservation of language is embedded in sociocultural contexts. Sociocultural theory emphasises that language learning and use occur through social interaction and cultural mediation (Vygotsky, 1978). Using digital platforms facilitate new forms of social interaction for individuals from diverse indigenous groups. Technologies like mobile phones help indigenous language communities to create, share, and consume content that promote identity and cultural continuity (Thurlow & Mroczek, 2011; Nwafor, 2024). The sociocultural theory views language as a tool developed from social interaction for communication purposes. Language is shaped by social, cultural, and historical contexts especially in the digital age.

Digital communication, from texting to online learning, reflects users' identities, communities, and norms. The introduction and integration of technology in society have provided individuals with opportunities for social interaction. In this context, language assumes a central role as a medium for constructing meaning and cultivating relationships in the twenty-first century.

### **Conceptual Framework**

Sociocultural Theory (SCT) was created by Lev Vygotsky in (1978) and it belongs to the domain of sociolinguistics and cognitive linguistics, studying the role of language in cognitive development as shaped by social and cultural interactions. This theory claims that language is acquired and developed through meaningful social interactions and cultural contexts. It also highlights the importance of cultural tools and mediation in language learning and usage. The core components of sociocultural theory are:

**Social interaction:** Learning originates in social interactions, where children internalize skills and knowledge from others.

**More Knowledgeable Other (MKO):** Here, an individual with a higher understanding or skill level, such as a parent, teacher, or more skilled peer, guides the learner gradually.

**Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD):** The space between what a learner can do without help and what they can achieve with the guidance of a more knowledgeable other (MKO).

**Scaffolding:** This is a process where a teacher, parents or more skilled peer provides temporary support to help a learner complete a task within their ZPD, gradually withdrawing the support as the learner becomes more competent.

**Language:** A vital cultural tool that acts as a mediator of thought. Children use private speech to guide themselves, which later becomes inner speech (thought) through a process of internalization.

**Culture:** The social and cultural context shapes the cognitive tools and learning experiences available to a child.

Sociocultural Theory also acknowledges how digital tools function as cultural mediators in contemporary language documentation and learning. These digital tools act as innovations that enable interactive, culturally relevant, and collaborative language learning and preservation. They facilitate social interaction, access to diverse cultural content, and enable communities to document and share linguistic and cultural knowledge digitally. In language documentation, digital technologies such as AI, virtual and augmented reality, and digital platforms mediate cultural meaning and support the preservation and revitalization of languages by creating new electronic artifacts and spaces for cultural and linguistic exchange. Thus, these tools help shape language use, documentation, and learning within a culturally mediated social framework. Therefore, Sociocultural Theory provides a framework for understanding how language is socially and culturally constructed and how digital tools serve as agents of cultural mediation in language processes and documentation.

This paper is structured as a qualitative review of existing studies on the role of technology in the preservation of indigenous languages in Nigeria. As an alternative to conducting primary research, the paper synthesises insights from existing scholarly articles, language documentation project, that explore the intersection between language and technology. The thematic presentation is guided by a sociocultural perspective, which views language as a product of social interaction, cultural mediation, and historical context (Vygotsky, 1978).

This sociocultural perspective shows how digital tools act as both innovations and cultural mediators in shaping language documentation, transmission, and use.

### **Importance of Digital Platforms in Preserving Indigenous Languages**

Digital platforms are software based online infrastructures that enable interactions, transactions and exchanges between users, businesses and systems, often facilitating various digital markets and services. Common types of digital platforms include social media, e.g., Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, TikTok, Snapchat, WhatsApp etc. These platforms serve as foundational tools for digital interaction, enabling users to connect and engage across diverse digital world. Also, they simplify the recording, archiving, teaching and revitalization of languages, especially endangered or minority ones. By provide accessible digital environments where linguistic data including audio, video and text can be stored and shared among researchers, communities and educators, digital platforms are very important in preserving indigenous languages.

Apps which stand for Application, is a software program designed to perform specific functions directly for the user or sometimes for another software program. Originally popularized with smartphones, “App” now refers broadly to software programs on various devices such as mobile phones, tablets, desktops and laptops. Mobile apps designed for indigenous languages provide interactive lessons, vocabulary building, and oral history recordings. For example, the Igbo Calendar App preserves cultural knowledge and traditional timekeeping (Okafor & Uzochukwu, 2023). Digital archives like the Indigenous Languages Digital Archive (ILDA) enable storage and dissemination of linguistic data. In Nigeria, similar digital initiatives support preservation by making indigenous language resources more accessible and advancing their use among younger generations (Michael, 2025; Benson et al., 2017). Such archives are vital in counteracting language loss and ensuring that indigenous languages continue to thrive in contemporary society.

Social media platforms have emerged as vital spaces for the revitalisation, preservation, and promotion of indigenous languages, especially within postcolonial societies grappling with linguistic marginalisation. In the Nigerian context, platforms such as Facebook, Twitter (now rebranded as X), Instagram, TikTok, and WhatsApp have become instrumental in promoting digital environments where languages such as Igbo and Yoruba are not only used but celebrated (Nwafor, 2024; Salawu, 2024; Olagunju, 2023). These platforms facilitate a range of linguistic and cultural practices:

Firstly, they serve as informal yet highly effective tools for language learning. Through user-generated content such as short videos, memes, voice notes, and interactive posts where individuals gain exposure to indigenous vocabulary, idiomatic expressions, and grammatical structures in contextually rich formats. This is specifically significant for younger generations who may not have had formal education in their ancestral languages but are digitally literate and socially engaged. Secondly, social media enables cultural expression and identity affirmation. Users often incorporate indigenous languages into storytelling, music, fashion commentary, and political discourse, thereby asserting cultural pride and resisting linguistic homogenization. Hashtags in Igbo and Yoruba, for instance, have been used to mobilize communities around festivals, traditional rites, and even sociopolitical movements, demonstrating the languages’ relevance in contemporary civic life (Akinlami, 2024; Nwafor, 2024). Thirdly, these platforms encourage community building across diasporic and intergenerational lines. WhatsApp groups, Facebook communities, and TikTok trends allow speakers and learners of indigenous languages to connect, share resources, and engage in

dialogue. This digital connectivity helps to counteract the geographic and generational fragmentation that often threatens language transmission.

Moreover, the algorithmic visibility afforded by these platforms can amplify indigenous voices and narratives, challenging dominant linguistic hierarchies. When indigenous language content garners likes, shares, and comments, it signals demand and relevance, encouraging further production and dissemination.

### **Importance of Indigenous Languages Documentation**

Language documentation has emerged as a vital field within linguistics, especially in response to the alarming rate at which minority and endangered languages are disappearing. These language projects aim to systematically record and archive oral and written language data through multimedia resources to prevent language extinction and promote indigenous languages' development. For instance, government-funded initiatives and community-driven efforts emphasise documenting linguistic behaviours, traditional knowledge, and cultural expressions to enhance language preservation and revitalisation (Michael, 2025; Akpan, Urua, Ekpenyong, 2018). Language documentation projects help preserve indigenous languages and every indigenous language is important, as it allows people to build bridges across cultures, connect people from vastly different walks of life. Collaborative projects involving linguists and communities use digital recording and transcription tools to document endangered languages (Himmelmann, 1998; Mohammed and Haliri, 2024) For instance, Kunini grammar is documented to help preserve the language for future generations.

### **Challenges of technology in the preservation of indigenous languages**

Technology-driven language preservation has achieved meaningful progress in recent years, yet several challenges continue to impede its full potential. The digital divide remains a major barrier, as rural and marginalized communities often lack reliable access to the internet, digital devices, and the digital literacy needed to engage with preservation tools effectively. For instance, a study was conducted by Dosumu (2024) on "Overcoming Infrastructural Barriers to Digital Literacy in Rural Nigeria". The paper explores the significant impact of limited infrastructure on digital literacy in rural Nigeria, emphasizing key barriers such as inadequate power supply, poor internet connectivity, and insufficient ICT facilities. The study shows that infrastructural gaps deepen the digital divide, leaving rural communities illiterate and disadvantaged in the the twenty-first century. Dosumu recommends a more supportive rural broadband, solar-powered ICT centres, and digital tools in education. Nevertheless exclusion worsens linguistic inequities, while limited funding shortages hinder scaling, sustainability, and long-term impact (Nwankwo, 2023).

### **Conclusion and Recommendation**

Technology cannot be ignored in twenty-first century Nigeria. It is pivotal to the preservation of Nigeria's indigenous languages. In twenty-first century Nigeria, technology can preserve and revive indigenous languages. Digital tools such as apps, archives, and social media content creation support language preservation in twenty-first Nigeria. However, challenges like poor access, limited funding, and cultural resistance reduce their impact. To ensure meaningful progress, preservation strategies must be tailored to the specific needs and realities of marginalized communities. Collaboration among communities, scholars, and policymakers is essential for building resilient and effective language preservation

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**PRAGMATIC ACT ANALYSIS OF PRESIDENT BOLA TINUBU'S 2024  
DEMOCRACY AND WORKERS' DAYS' SPEECHES**

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**Abstract**

*The intersection of language and politics has long been a critical domain of inquiry in discourse studies, with a particular emphasis on how political actors utilise language to shape ideology, assert power and mobilise support. This study examined the pragmatic acts within President Bola Tinubu's 2024 Democracy Day and Workers' Day speeches, applying Pragmatic Act Theory (Mey, 2001) to explore the performative functions of political discourse. Political discourse, particularly in presidential speeches, plays a crucial role in shaping public opinion, legitimising governance, and reinforcing national unity. Through strategic language choices, political leaders convey ideologies, assert authority, and manage socio-political crises. This research identified and categorised pragmatic acts, such as assertives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declaratives, within the speeches, analysing how these acts function ideologically to address national issues like security challenges and economic reforms. Using a qualitative methodology, the study focused on how these speeches serve to construct national identity and manage public perception, reflecting broader political power dynamics. The findings revealed that pragmatic acts not only convey policy intentions but also strategically engage citizens, offering reassurance and legitimacy to the administration's leadership. In conclusion, the study highlighted the role of political discourse in performing governance through pragmatic acts, illustrating the significance of language as a tool for constructing political ideologies, managing crises, and fostering national unity.*

**Keywords:** Political Discourse, Pragmatic Act Theory, Performative Acts, Democracy Day, Workers' Day, Speech Acts, National Identity, Political Power, Ideological Functions, Public Opinion, and Governance.

**Introduction**

Political speeches, particularly those delivered by heads of state on significant national events, serve as critical tools for shaping public perception, legitimizing political power, and reinforcing national unity. Political discourse, particularly in Nigeria's democratic space, functions not just as a vehicle for communication but as a strategic tool for persuasion, legitimisation, and identity construction (Ayeomoni & Akinkuolere, 2012; Daramola, 2020). Studies by Taiwo (2013) and Adegaju (2015) have highlighted how political leaders in Nigeria use performative utterances to construct national identity, negotiate power dynamics, and manage political crises.

Given Nigeri's complex ethno-political landscape, presidential speeches on symbolic national occasions such as Democracy Day and Workers' Day are laden with rhetorical significance. These speeches often serve as avenues through which the presidency attempts to articulate governmental achievements, appeal to public sentiment, and construct a narrative of unity

and progress (Ajilore & Alabi, 2020). Bola Ahmed Tinubu's emergence as Nigeria's president in 2023 ushered in a new phase of political communication characterised by a need to stabilise the nation's socio-economic turbulence, project policy intent, and manage divergent public expectations. This is particularly important in light of the mounting criticisms surrounding Nigeria's economic challenges, labour unrest, and security concerns which have framed the socio-political discourse since 2015 (Eme & Onyishi, 2020; Nwagboso, 2022). The dual celebration of Democracy Day and Workers' Day, therefore, presents a unique opportunity to examine how Tinubu's administration seeks to balance rhetorical strategies of hope and realism, using pragmalinguistic tools to perform speech acts that resonate with diverse audiences.

By focusing on *pragmeme*—the generalised pragmatic acts — this study critically explored how President Tinubu constructs political ideologies through the consistent use of specific language patterns across workers and Democracy day speeches. The structural ideological perspective (Althusser, 2024) informs this analysis by providing a framework for understanding how pragmatic acts and *pragmeme* align with broader governance ideologies, reinforcing state narratives and political strategies. This study offers insights into the power of language as a tool for constructing political ideologies, managing crises, and fostering national unity.

### **Nature of Political Speeches**

Political speeches, especially those delivered by heads of state on commemorative national days, are not mere informational acts; they are performative in nature. Political leaders use these speeches to project authority, promote national unity, address public grievances, and reinforce the legitimacy of their governance. These speeches play a critical role in shaping public perception and constructing political ideologies. As Mey (2001) posits, pragmatic acts are shaped by context and perform specific functions within social and political spheres. The speeches of President Tinubu are a strategic use of language, intended to build solidarity, legitimise policies, and respond to ongoing national challenges such as economic instability, labour unrest, and democratic consolidation.

In Nigeria, political speeches hold immense significance due to the country's socio-political complexities, including ethnic plurality, historical challenges, and economic volatility. The Democracy Day and Workers' Day speeches are particularly important in this context. These events mark significant milestones in the country's political journey, where the president's rhetoric plays a pivotal role in reaffirming commitment to democracy and addressing socio-economic concerns. The language used in these speeches is designed to shape public opinion and create a shared vision for the country's future.

### **Methodology**

The theoretical framework for this study is Pragmatic act theory by (Mey 2001). Pragmatic act theory provides a context-sensitive, interactional, and socially embedded framework for analysing real-life communication. The objectives are to apply Pragmatic Act Theory (Mey, 2001) to analyse the speeches and explore how language is strategically used to perform political acts, address socio-economic issues, and construct national identity.

### **Data Sources**

The primary data for this research consisted of President Bola Tinubu's 2024 Democracy Day and Workers' Day speeches. These speeches were selected because they represented key moments in the Nigerian political calendar, where the president articulated his political agenda, addressed national issues, and positioned himself as the leader navigating the country's socio-economic challenges. The speeches are publicly available, and their analyses

provide valuable insights into how political discourses are used as performative acts in governance.

### **Data Analysis**

The analysis draws on Pragmatic Act Theory, which categorised speech acts into assertives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declaratives. These categories are used to understand how language is employed to perform specific political functions. The study focused on identifying and categorising these pragmatic acts in the two speeches and interpreting their ideological implications in terms of governance, national unity, and political legitimacy.

The research also employed **pragmeme analysis**, a concept introduced by Mey (2001), to examine the generalised pragmatic acts within the speeches. Pragmeme analysis helps to identify broader communicative strategies, such as those that construct national identity or legitimise political authority. Thematic analysis is also used to uncover overarching themes related to governance, democratic values, socio-economic reforms, and national unity, which are crucial in understanding the ideological functions of the speeches.

### **Findings and Discussion**

The analyses reveal that President Tinubu's speeches strategically employ a variety of pragmatic acts to achieve different communicative goals.

#### **Assertive Acts**

Assertive acts in the speeches serve to reaffirm the legitimacy of the president's leadership and the political direction of his administration. For example, statements like "Democracy is neither a foreign nor abstract concept devoid of real-life meaning for us" assert the president's commitment to democracy and governance, positioning the government as one that upholds democratic values. These assertive acts are not merely informative but serve to reinforce the political ideology of the administration, aligning it with democratic principles while distancing it from autocratic tendencies.

#### **Directive Acts**

Directive acts, such as "Join hands in shaping the destiny of our nation towards greatness", are used to mobilise the citizenry and encourage collective action. In political speeches, directives are crucial for fostering unity and motivating the population to actively participate in national development. By calling for collective efforts in the face of socio-economic challenges, these directive acts align the president's political agenda with public expectations of national progress. They also reflect the administration's role in guiding the nation through critical reforms.

#### **Commissive Acts**

Commissive acts in the speeches, such as promises to "cement democracy as our way of life", are pivotal in establishing the president's political authority. These acts involve the president committing to future actions, particularly in areas such as governance, national security, and socio-economic reform. By making such commitments, the president seeks to assure the public of his administration's dedication to addressing national issues, thereby strengthening his political legitimacy. Commissive acts also serve as tools for political mobilisation, as they signal the president's intention to fulfil his promises.

#### **Expressive Acts**

Expressive acts, such as acknowledging the sacrifices made by workers and citizens, convey solidarity and empathy. For instance, statements like "We honour the sacrifices made by our workers" express appreciation for the contributions of the workforce, especially in times of

economic hardship. These acts are significant in building trust and fostering a sense of collective responsibility among the people. They also serve to humanise the president, positioning him as a leader who is attuned to the concerns and struggles of ordinary citizens.

### **Declarative Acts**

Declarative acts, such as declaring the importance of national unity and progress, serve to establish the ideological framework of the speech. For example, the statement “We stand united in our pursuit of progress” is a declarative act that reinforces the theme of national unity, emphasising the need for all citizens to work together in addressing the country’s challenges. Declarative acts in the speeches also function to consolidate the president’s position as the leader who is guiding the nation towards a prosperous future

### **Pragmeme Analysis**

The use of **pragmeme** in these speeches reflects a broader ideological agenda of unity, progress, and governance. By consistently employing pragmatic acts related to solidarity, national identity, and political legitimacy, the speeches construct a narrative that positions President Tinubu as a unifying force capable of navigating the nation’s challenges. The pragmeme analysis shows how language is used to perform political ideologies, emphasizing themes of democracy, national cohesion, and socio-economic reform.(provide an instance of the use of pragmeme)

### **Thematic Analysis**

Thematic analysis of the speeches identifies several recurring themes related to governance, national identity, and socio-economic issues. The speeches emphasise the importance of democracy as the cornerstone of national progress, the need for economic reforms to address challenges such as inflation and unemployment, and the critical role of workers in nation-building. By framing these issues in terms of collective responsibility and shared national values, the speeches seek to foster a sense of national identity and unity among the Nigerian populace.

### **Conclusion**

The 2024 Democracy Day and Workers’ Day speeches by President Bola Tinubu exemplify the power of language in performing political acts and shaping public discourse. By using a range of pragmatic acts—assertives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declaratives—the president strategically constructs political ideologies, legitimises governance, and addresses the socio-economic challenges facing Nigeria. The speeches are not merely about conveying information; they are performative acts that seek to influence public opinion, foster national unity, and assert political authority. This study underscores the importance of Pragmatic Act Theory in political discourse analysis, offering valuable insights into the strategic use of language in shaping governance and national identity.

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**AN ANALYSIS OF DISCURSIVE STRATEGIES IN SELECTED SPEECHES OF  
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**Abstract**

*Politics, power and language are intertwined. Political figures often adopt language as a tool in their attempt to gain power and dominance. Language enables them to communicate their ideologies effectively to their audience. The objective of the study lies in the analysis of the discursive strategies used by President Tinubu to promote and project his ideologies on his audience. This research investigated how the Democracy Day Speech (2024) and Acceptance Speech (2023) of President Tinubu are characterized by strategic power play and subtle use of linguistic structure to twist the minds of his subjects. The study utilizes the qualitative research approach in conducting a Critical Discourse analysis of President Bola Ahmed Tinubu selected speeches. The data for this research include the (2024) democracy day speech and (2023) acceptance speeches of President Tinubu, and they are sourced from the internet. The study adopts purposive sampling technique as the sampling technique for the research. Sentences are selected from both speeches based on their relevance to the discursive strategies analyzed. The research also utilized Discourse Historical Approach as its framework to analyze how linguistic devices are used by President Tinubu to promote his ideologies through subtle persuasion. The study reveals that discursive strategies such as nomination, predication, argumentation, perspectivation and mitigation are used by President Tinubu in the Democracy Day speech and Acceptance speech to project his ideologies on his audience. The research further reveals how Linguistic structures such as Pronouns, Metaphors, intertextuality and historical allusions are used by President Tinubu to intensify his ideologies about democracy in the Democracy Day Speech (2024) and his ideologies of renewed hope for Nigeria in the Acceptance Speech (2023) while subtly mitigating The perspectives of the outgroup ( his audience ). The study provides proofs to conclude that politics is a game that can be played through subtle and creative usage of linguistic structures. The study contributes to the growing field of critical discourse analysis by examining the relationship between language and politics, as well as how discursive strategies are utilised in political speeches to promote ideologies. The study serves as a reference material for scholars who are interested in carrying out studies on critical discourse analysis of political speeches.*

**Keywords:** Critical Discourse Analysis, Political discourse, Political speeches, Ideologies, Discursive strategies, Discourse Historical Approach.

**Introduction**

This study is a critical discourse analysis of President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's Democracy Day Speech (2024) and Acceptance Speech ( 2023). Its main preoccupation is to explore the discursive strategies deployed in the speeches and how these discursive strategies are used to project some of his ideologies as well as how different ideological structures influence his perspectives in the speeches. The art of persuasion and creative maneuvering of language are

at the core of political discourse. Political actors utilize communicative devices of language to promote and impose their beliefs, values and ideologies on their audience.

This research critically investigates how some of these ideologies are subtly imposed on the audience through the use of various rhetorical and persuasive strategies and how they lead to a positive 'self' gratification and negative relegation of the masses. In other words, the study analyzes the discursive strategies used by President Tinubu in the speeches to project his ideologies which are meant to amplify his own interests. The connection between language and politics is very strong. It is through language that political leaders communicate their ideas and opinions to the masses, as language has proven to be a powerful tool in the hands of political leaders. Through the avenues created by language, political leaders are able to persuade, convince and sometimes cajole their listeners into believing and accepting their views.

Okoro (2017) asserts that politics is concerned with the power to make decisions, control resources and control people's behaviours and values. Language is therefore used as a tool to achieve control and power. Every political agenda is planned, prepared and executed through the instrument of language. Language enables politicians to form stable, sound and structural social relationships as language does not exist in a vacuum but functions within the context of situation or environment. This research investigates the triangular relationship between language, ideology and politics. Since language is a tool used by political actors to communicate their ideologies through tactful employment of discursive strategies, this study aims to identify and analyse the discursive strategies deployed by President Tinubu in His Democracy Day Speech (2024) and Acceptance Speech (2023) to demonstrate how the strategies aid in persuading his audience and manipulating them into believing his ideologies. Language is not only utilized by political actors for the sole purpose of communicating ideas and intentions, it is also used as a tool for self-glorification, domination, and projection of superiority of "self" against the "other". The objective of this research is to unwrap some of these hidden meanings in the selected speeches through careful analysis of the discursive strategies employed by President Tinubu in both speeches.

Studies have been carried out on political speeches and on how political actors use language as a tool to achieve political power in every human society. Earlier researches have paid attention to the phonological, syntactic, semantic and morphological aspects of political speeches. Although some researches have been conducted on critical discourse analysis of political speeches, ( see Okpanachi 2003, Eze and Amoniyani 2022, Masroor, et-al 2020) The present research intends to investigate critical aspects of political speeches such as ideology, power and political control in the speeches of President Tinubu which have not been fully tapped into. This is the gap the present study bridges through critical investigation of how political actors use language as a tool to project and promote ideologies, beliefs and certain values that are beneficial to them. This research critically investigates how political speeches of President Tinubu reflect the different perspectives and ideologies promoted by President Tinubu influence the attitude and state of mind of his audience.

### **Critical Discourse Analysis**

Critical discourse analysis began as an attitude to critical analysis at a symposium in Amsterdam in the early 1990s with scholars such as Teun Van Dijk, Norman Fairclough, Gunther Kress and Ruth Wodak. critical discourse analysis (CDA) is a critical perspective in the field of Discourse studies which views language in a different dimension. Critical Discourse Analysis introduces critical perspectives on language; it tries to create better ways

of analysing and researching the relations between discourse and other elements of social life such as ideologies, social institutions and organizations as well as social identities. CDA focuses on the practical use of language as a tool in the representation of identities, beliefs, social actions, social actors and various other aspects of the world.

Fairclough and Fairclough (2012) posit that manipulation and ideology are two main preoccupations of critical discourse analysis in the critique of discourse. This assertion aligns with one of the objectives of the study which is the critical examination of how President Bola Ahmed Tinubu employs certain communicative devices in an attempt to persuade his addressees to believe his ideologies which are meant to serve his own interests. CDA as a school of thought is characterized by a number of approaches which are invested in the deconstruction of ideologies and power through systematic investigation of text and talk.

### **Political Discourse**

The term political discourse refers to the language used by political leaders in text or talk. It may be used to refer to a type of discourse which is a political production such as a speech, debate, political interview, policy document etc. (Wilson 2015). The history of political discourse can be traced back to ancient times. It was referred to as “Rhetoric” because one of the authentic uses of the term was to describe particular forms of persuasion within political gatherings. In Wilson’s (2015) view, political discourse is the study of political language in which the focus is on aspects of language structure as it constitutes and displays specific political functions. According to Wilson, one major concern of political discourse is the question of how the world is presented to the public through particular forms of linguistic representation. Reality is not simply given to human kind through language; rather, it is mediated through different forms of how language is represented in a society. Through this perspective, analysts often explain politics as a relationship between language and power.

Political control is a form of language control because political leaders utilize language as a tool to cajole their subordinates into believing and accepting their ideologies. Wilson further drives home his point on the relationship between politics and language by discussing the works of George Orwell who argues that there is a link between language and the way humans perceive the world and that politicians manipulate this for their own selfish ends. Language most often becomes politicized because specific linguistic structures are used in particular contextualized discourses.

Chilton (2004) posits that politics and language are intertwined. He defines politics as a tussle for power between people who seek to project and maintain their power and those who seek to resist it. Hence, those who seek for power tend to use a variety of techniques which may include persuasion, rational arguments, irrational strategies, threats and manipulations to get their way. These political manoeuvres can be achieved through language use. Chilton refers to them as linguistic actions (discourses). Chilton further explains that language and politics are closely linked at a fundamental level by making reference to Aristotle’s analogy which states that humans are political animals. In Aristotle’s exegesis, only humans have the power of speech. It is through speech that humans distinguish between what is useful from what is harmful and also what is just from what is unjust. Humans possess the ability to choose between good and evil. To Aristotle, it is the shared perception of values that defines political associations. Chilton claims that political activity does not exist without the usage of language. All forms of social interactions carried out by humans are only achievable through language.

He also suggests that political leaders themselves use language at the level of wording and phrasing to sometimes dismiss criticism or to avoid making sensitive specifications. Words and phrases are one of many linguistic structures used by political leaders to persuade, coerce or manipulate their audience in political discourse. It is pertinent to note that Chilton's views in relation to political discourse remains that political actors recognize the role that language plays in politics and that language is important for political life. It is worthwhile to look at language from a political point of view because it is through language that political actors reach their goals in different political situations.

Fairclough (2012) is of the notion that political discourse is an argumentative discourse. Politics is seen as an affair built around practical and critical reasoning. To Fairclough, politics is based on the concept of deliberation and decision making in uncertain contexts, risks and constant disagreement. The idea of political discourse is a matter of argumentation which is only done through logical and critical thinking. Fairclough's idea gives primacy to analysis of practical reasoning in political discourse analysis. Political discourse is deliberative and argumentative in nature. It is a question of what politicians want to do for their society, how they intend to make decisions about common matters of public concerns by involving the public in the decision-making process on what to do on public disagreement and conflicts on the distribution of scarce social amenities, for instance. This can only be achieved through practical reasoning.

Van Dijk (1997) opines that political discourse is identified by its actors which are made up of not only politicians but also various recipients in political communicative events such as, citizens and the masses of a particular society. The bulk of studies on political discourse is about the text and talk of professional politicians or political institutions such as, presidents, Prime ministers and other members of government or political parties, both at the local, national and international level. Some of the studies on politicians are discourse analytic in nature. For instance, studies on presidential rhetoric are numerous in the USA.

Van Dijk's perspective about political discourse is multidimensional. To him, politicians are not the sole participants in political discourse. Political activities and the political process also involve people such as citizens and voters, people as members of press, demonstrators and so on. All these groups and individuals as well as their organizations and institutions can actively take part in a political process and many are also involved in political discourse. This implies that the scope of political discourse is extensive when all other participants are identified as part of the political process. Van Dijk further suggests that political members are participants of political discourse only when they are acting as political actors and hence are participating in political actions such as governing, ruling, legislating, protesting or voting.

These political actions and practices (text and talk) can further be categorized as discursive practices in the realm of political discourse analysis. The context in which a discourse takes place determines its categorization as political. Participants and their actions are the core of what can be labelled as political context. For instance, politicians talk politically if they and their talk are contextualized in communicative events such as cabinet meetings, rallies, interviews, parliamentary sessions, election campaigns, and protests and so on. Van Dijk also opines that text and context mutually define each other in the sense that a session of parliament for example, can only be done when elected politicians are debating, talking and arguing in parliament buildings and in official capacity and during the official session of parliament. Therefore, political discourse is defined by the context in which it occurs and this context is characterized by the time, place, setting, circumstance, occasion, function, goal and legal or political implications of political text and talk.

Van Dijk further argues that the notion of political discourse cannot be fully understood without the definition of the very idea of politics itself. He claims that since there is no single definition of what politics is, it may thus include all official or unofficial political actors, events, encounters, settings, actions (discourses) as well as political processes, political systems (like democracy and communism), political ideologies, political relations such as power, inequality and oppression. Hence, the polity does not only involve political actors, events, relations or properties, but also social, economic and cultural ones. Van Dijk's characterization of the domain of politics into various properties explains the multifaceted quiddity of politics and of political discourse and the fact that political text and talk cannot be analysed outside the context in which they are created.

### **Previous Studies**

There are wide ranges of researches that have been conducted on how discursive strategies are used in political speeches by political leaders to present ideologies and also influence the beliefs and opinions of their audience through subtle employment of linguistic techniques. Some of these are reviewed in this section.

Okpanachi (2003) evaluates the various linguistic strategies employed by President Obasanjo in his national address on the Nigerian Labour Congress that was held on the 8th of October, 2003. The research examines how the President uses the resources of language to portray himself and the NLC. Discursive strategies are used subtly by the President to present his perspectives to his addressees. The findings of the research show how linguistic strategies such as solidarity markers, appeal to patriotism are used by President Obasanjo to establish a sense of togetherness between himself and the masses while also using ego signifiers to show his audience that he is superior to them all. This depicts how power is enacted through linguistic craftsmanship. The results of the study also shows how discursive strategies like isotopes are used by the President to creatively frame the NLC and portray them as orchestrators of the problems of the masses. The President paints a positive picture of himself through self-praise while giving negative connotations of the NLC by using negative isotopes to describe the NLC and its leadership. The finding of the study clearly reflects how political actors flex linguistic muscles through eloquent and manipulative linguistic prowess that is always aimed at positive self-gratification and negative representation of the masses. One major shortcoming of the study is how it failed to identify all the discursive strategies that are imbedded in the speech. Only few linguistic strategies were identified by the researcher. This research however, intends to not only analyse how linguistic strategies are used in political speeches to achieve inclusiveness and solicitation of empathy by political leaders but will also critique how political leaders use language as a tool to subconsciously implant hidden ideologies and self-centred perspectives in the minds of their audience. This study makes implicit meanings and truths explicit.

Igwebuike (2018) explores the discursive strategies and ideologies in selected newspaper reports on the Nigerian- Cameroonian Bakassi Peninsula border conflict using socio-cognitive model of Critical Discourse Analysis as its framework. The finding of the research shows that seven discursive strategies were deployed by the Nigerian and Cameroonian newspaper reports on the Bakassi Peninsula border conflict. These discursive strategies include: slanted heading, negative labelling, evidentiality, number game, hyperbolism, victimization and depersonalization. The conclusions of the research suggests that these discursive strategies were used by both nations to present some prejudiced ideologies and exaggerated opinions that depicted gratification of a positive "self" against a negative "other." Although this present research is not aimed at examining newspaper reports, it

systematically examines the relationship between the discursive strategies employed in some selected speeches of President Tinubu and the ideologies he tries to impose on his audience. Logogye (2021) discusses the concept of ideology and politics in president Nana Akuffo Addo's 2018 state of the nation address. The research utilizes critical discourse analysis as a model to examine the ideological discourse structures used by the president to justify his government ideas and persuade his audience. The results of the study show that the president used macro strategies of positive 'self-representation' and 'negative other' representation to sell his ideologies in order to persuade and impress his audience and also gain their trust so as to maintain and control power. This further proves that political speeches are always filled with hidden agendas and meanings that are always aimed at serving the selfish interest of political actors. This present study explores how discursive strategies are used as tools to present ideologies in political speeches.

Addae, et-al (2022) examines the discursive strategies of ideological representations in the political speeches of Dr. Kwame Nkrumah. The study analyses the role of language in creating ideology and substance of power as well as ideological discursive structures in the selected political speeches. The findings of the research show how President Kwame Nkrumah uses pronouns as an ideological discursive strategy to project his ideologies. Pronouns are used by Nkrumah as communicative tool to show solidarity between the speaker and the audience. Evidentiality is also used by Nkrumah to create stories and bring back memories in order to persuade his audience into believing the message he is trying to communicate to them. According to the author, evidentiality is used to show truthfulness and validity of the source of the message the speaker is trying to pass to the audience. It shows the authority of the speaker over the audience as regards to the topic under discussion. The study further outlines the use of modal verbs by Nkrumah to show power and dominance over his audience. Intertextuality is also used as a discursive strategy. The study explains how Nkrumah draws from other texts by quoting from the speeches of other great men. Other discursive strategies explained in the study include a historical allusion which is used by the President to show his vast knowledge in the history of his country and continent. Rhetorical questions and metaphors are also used as ideological tools by President Nkrumah in the presentation of his speeches.

The conclusions of the research reflect how language plays an important role in politics. The study concludes that language and politics are intertwined and that politics is a game that can be successfully played through skilful deployment of language. The study falls short of critical evaluation of the speeches. It fails to examine some of the hidden meanings and gaps that can be found in the selected speeches. This present research however, not only investigates the discursive strategies in President Tinubu's speeches but also critiques how he masks his ideologies and projects "himself against the other" through skilful use of linguistic techniques.

Eze and Amoniyani (2022) investigate the discursive strategies in selected 2019 presidential campaign speeches of President Muhammadu Buhari and Atiku Abubakar. The study identifies the discursive strategies employed in the speeches of the contestants as well as how the linguistic techniques used in the speeches contain specific ideologies. Van Dijk's mental model theory is used as a model to portray how discursive strategies are utilised by political leaders to communicate certain ideologies that are aimed at promotion of selfish interests and agendas. The findings of the study suggest that discursive strategies such as parallelism rhetorical questions, deixis and metaphors are used as linguistic tools to create certain mental effects in the minds of the addressees. The research shows how these discursive strategies are used by the contestants to cognitively manipulate the audience into voting for them. The

research however relied heavily on the discursive strategies used in the speeches by both contestants. It fails to critically evaluate all of the underlying meanings that are enshrined in both speeches. This present research does not only identify the discursive strategies employed in the selected speeches of President Tinubu but also uncovers the hidden perspectives, power play, half-truths and obscure missions that are buried in political speeches.

Ige (2023) interrogates the expression of ideologies in Bola Ahmed Tinubu's political speech. The research investigates the underlying ideologies in the "Emi lokan" speech. The research explains the discursive moves used by the president in an attempt to persuade his audience into believing his point of view. The study argues that Supremacist ideology, which is viewed within the conceptualization of superiority and self-glorification, is used by president Tinubu to convince his audience that he was the right candidate to become the president in the speech. Ethnocentric ideology is used to project the Yoruba culture as superior to other cultures. The research further argues that Welfarist ideology is used in the speech by the president to suggest that he has provided political cover and has raised political protégés all in a bid to convince his audience. Collective ideology is also used in the "Emi lokan" speech to show unity between the speaker and the audience. President Tinubu uses collective ideology to reveal how he once placed the interest of the party above his personal ambition. The conclusions of the research show the relationship between language, politics and ideology. It establishes how ideologies are acquired, spread, produced and enacted through text and talk.

There are few similarities between the study and the present research. This is so because the present study examines some of the discursive strategies employed by President Tinubu in the selected speeches as well as how these discursive strategies influence the ideological prejudices that may be found in the speeches. In contrast to Ige (2023), the current research also deconstructs these ideologies in order to determine how linguistic techniques are used as a weapon by political actors to subtly magnify themselves and relegate their audience to the background.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study adopts Discourse Historical Approach as its framework for the analysis of the discursive strategies utilized in the selected speeches as well as the systematic critiquing of the notion of ideologies and power. The Discourse Historical Approach (DHA) is an offshoot of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) which main focus is the deconstruction of ideologies and power through systematic investigation of text and talk. Discourse Historical Approach was propounded by Ruth Wodak in 1986 with the aim of studying the emergence of anti-Semitic stereotypical images in public discourses in the 1986 Austrian Presidential campaign of former UN Secretary General Kurt Waldheim. (DHA) views language as a means in which political actors gain and maintain power by how they make use of it. It aims at deconstructing the hegemony of specific discourses by deciphering the ideologies that serve to establish, perpetuate or resist dominance. This theory focuses on the ways in which linguistic forms are used in various expressions and manipulation of power in political discourse.

There are three steps to linguistic analysis of text and talk in Discourse Historical Approach. They include the identification of the specific content or topics, investigation of discourse strategies, linguistic means and content dependent linguistic realizations are also examined. Discursive strategies according to Wodak include:

**Nomination:** This strategy focuses on categorization of social actors, objects, phenomena, events, processes and actions.

**Predication:** This refers to positive and negative description of social actors and the usage of metaphorical expressions to describe people.

**Argumentation:** This entails justification and questioning of claims of truth.

**Perspectivation:** This discursive strategy describes the attempt of a speaker to get his audience involved through the usage of linguistic techniques.

**Intensification and mitigation:** This strategy reveals the moment when the speaker intends to produce utterances implicitly or explicitly.

The researcher employs the Discourse Historical Approach in analysing the discursive strategies used by President Bola Ahmed Tinubu in communicating his ideologies in two of his speeches. These discursive strategies are identified and categorized. Wodak's nomination strategy is used to identify the ideologies projected by President Bola Ahmed Tinubu in the selected speeches. Perspectivation is used to investigate the linguistic techniques used by President Tinubu in promoting his perspectives. Predication strategy shows how the President describes his audience using metaphorical expressions. The study does a critical reading of the selected speeches in order to unravel the hidden meanings in the speeches by examining the argumentation strategy employed in the speeches. The sole purpose of this research is the deconstruction of the notion of ideology and power in relation to how political actors make use of linguistic techniques to gain the attention of their audience using President Tinubu's two speeches as a case study.

### **Research Methodology**

The study utilized the qualitative research approach in conducting a critical discourse analysis of President Bola Ahmed Tinubu selected speeches. The data for this research include the (2024) Democracy Day Speech and 2023 Acceptance speeches of President Tinubu, and they are sourced from the internet. The Democracy Day Speech (2024) and the Acceptance Speech (2023) made by President Tinubu are extracted from Google and excerpts from the speeches are selected using purposive sampling technique in order to identify the discursive strategies employed by the President in both speeches as well as how these linguistic strategies influence the perceptions of his audience.

The data for this research are the transcripts of President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's Acceptance Speech (2023) and Democracy Day Speech (2024). Sentences from both speeches are selected in accordance with their relevance to the discursive strategies analyzed.

### **Analysis and Discussion**

This section examines the discursive strategies employed by President Tinubu in June 12th 2024 Democracy Day Speech.

**Nomination Strategy in President Tinubu Democracy Day Speech:** Nomination strategy is used by President Tinubu to name his audience. Pronouns such as I, we and us are used to create a sense of unity between him and the audience in an attempt to impose his agenda and ideals on the audience. Terms such as my fellow Nigerians and Nigerians as also used to appeal to the emotions of the audience.

### **Solidarity as a discursive strategy**

President Bola Ahmed Tinubu utilizes personal pronouns such as **we, us and our** to establish a sense of togetherness between him and his audience. This can be seen in the first excerpts of relevant data presented in the table below:

**Table 1: Usage of Pronouns as Solidarity Markers (Democracy Day Speech)**

1.	My fellow Nigerians, let me begin by congratulating all of <b>us</b> for witnessing the celebration of another Democracy Day today.
2.	On this day 31years ago <b>we</b> entered <b>our</b> rites of passage to becoming a true and enduring democratic society.
3.	<b>We</b> lost great heroes and heroines along the way.

The table above depicts how the President uses pronouns as a discursive strategy to create rapport between him and his audience. This strategy is also used as a weapon for emotional blackmail, in an attempt to gain the sympathy, love, confidence and trust of the audience. By using this linguistic structure, he is able to persuade the audience into believing his opinions and points of view about democracy.

### Appeal to Patriotism

The President uses patriotic appeal as a discursive tool to convince his addressees to support his ideas on how pivotal democracy is to Nigeria and the need for continuous practice of the democratic system of government. The repetition of the common identity of the citizenship of the nation fellow Nigerians and Nigerians portrays this patriotic appeal to the audience. The President uses this as a discursive strategy to project the ideology of democracy. This is depicted in the following excerpt:

**Table 2: Excerpts of Patriotic Appeal (Democracy Day Speech)**

1.	<b>Fellow Nigerians</b> , true democracy shines its light into the daily lives of the people who live under its nurturing wings.
2.	<b>As Nigerians</b> , we must remind ourselves that no matter how complicated democracy may be, it is the best form of governance in the long run.
3.	<b>Fellow Nigerians</b> , our Democracy is more than a historic fact. It is a living, breathing reality.

It can be seen in the table above that the repetition of the conventional symbol of identity fellow **Nigerians** is used by the President to appeal to the patriotic minds of the audience with the aim of gaining personal support and sympathy. His uses this to build in their minds the idea that Democracy is the best form of governance for Nigeria. This patriotic appeal can be characterized as manipulative and deceptive. It is a method used by the president to impose his ideologies on the people.

### Perspectivation Strategy in President Tinubu's Democracy Day Speech

President Tinubu subtly employs linguistic techniques such as intertextuality and historical allusions in an attempt to get his audience cognitively involved in the discourse. The usage of linguistic techniques in political discourse by political actors is a creative move used by politicians to lure their audience into accepting their perspectives and opinions.

### Historical Allusion as a Discursive Strategy

Historical Allusion is used as an ideological tool in the Democracy Day speech by the president to establish his knowledge of the past history of the country. He reminiscences on the struggles and woes that the country has suffered in time past in the fight against military rule. This is evident in the excerpt below:

**Table 3: Excerpts of Historical Allusion. (Democracy Day Speech)**

1.	We have lost great heroes and heroines along the way in this struggle, The winner of the June 12, 1993 Presidential election, Chief MKO Abiola, the most significant symbol of our democratic struggle, his wife Kudirat, General Shehu Musa Yar'Adua and Pa Alfred Rewane among others sacrificed their very lives.
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President Tinubu reflects on the political past history of the country in an attempt to remind the audience of the battles that have been fought by past political figures in the quest for a democratic Nigeria. Persuasive skill is employed by the President as a means to appeal to the subconscious state of mind of the audience with the goal of establishing his ideologies on why they should undoubtedly accept the democratic system of government.

#### **Intertextuality as a Discursive Strategy**

President Tinubu applies intertextuality in the speech by drawing on other texts, through quotation. The president resorts to the use of intertextuality as a means of persuading his audience on why Nigeria must continue to embrace democracy as a system of government. This is expressed in the following excerpt:

**Table 4: Excerpt of Intertextuality (Democracy Day Speech)**

	The words of the American President Franklin Roosevelt certainly rings true: "There are many ways of going forward. But only one way of standing still".
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In the table above, President Tinubu quotes the words of a known personality (an ex American President) in trying to convince his audience that democracy is the only way forward for Nigeria. Through the usage of intertextuality, the President builds his ideologies in the cognition of his audience. These linguistic techniques are used by the President to show his audience his complete involvement in the fight for a true democratic Nigeria.

**Predication Strategy in President Tinubu's Democracy Day Speech:** Metaphorical expressions are used by the President to describe the military regime and the democratic government.

#### **Metaphor as a Linguistic Device**

President Tinubu uses metaphors to represent the war between the military regime and the Democratic government. Metaphors are used ideologically to raise the consciousness of the audience on the kind of struggle the country was plunged into in the military era and to also remind them of how chaotic the military era was. This is reflected in the table below:

**Table 5: Metaphoric Representations (Democracy Day Speech)**

1.	Despite the <b>lethal might</b> of the military government, what appeared to be high and unyielding walls of dictatorship came tumbling down.
2.	The nation exited the <b>yoke</b> of military rule in 1999 to become the most populous democracy on African soil.

The President uses words like **lethal might** and **yoke** to evocate the concept of war and turmoil in the cognition of his audience thereby cementing his point of view in their minds. He further mentions the victory against military rule in 1999 in order to convince them of the success of democracy. Metaphors are used to make negative representation of the military regime.

**Argumentation Strategy in President Tinubu's Democracy Day Speech:** This strategy is used by the President to justify his claims about the detriments of military rule. In the opening paragraphs of the speech the President mentions the struggles and woes that came with the military regime in an attempt to legitimize democratic rule and delegitimize military rule. Expressions such as struggle and military dictatorship are used to paint a derogatory picture of the military regime. President Tinubu is able to persuade his audience by appealing to their emotions and reminds them of their history. The President pejorizes the military regime all through the speech while ameliorating democratic rule.

The usage of the ego signifier "I" in these expressions "**I was among those who took the risk to midwife the birth of our democracy.**" And "**I am now a direct and obvious beneficiary of the fruits of those historic efforts.**" Portray the notion of self-gratification and relegation of the other. He projects himself as superior by letting them know that he played a part in championing the idea of Democratic rule in the 1990s. This claim made by the President implies that he is well aware of the dysfunctional system of governance of his predecessors and is expected to forge a different path. It is however logical to say that the President is currently walking on the same road his predecessors walked on if not worse. Nigeria as a country is still in the same pit of political, economic, religious and social conflicts. This further buttresses the idea that political actors use language a tool for promotion of their deceptive and selfish narratives.

**Mitigation and intensification Strategy in President Tinubu's Democracy Day Speech:** President Tinubu uses mitigation strategy to make certain implicit and explicit utterances. The Democracy Day speech is coloured with implicit meanings and a number of fallacies. Words are used to intensify Democracy as the best system of government when in reality, the administration of the President has only birthed economic hardship and sociopolitical upheavals. For someone who witnessed the troubles that came with the military rule, as claimed by the president in his speech, He has done little to make the populace of the country believe in democracy. In the excerpt below the President mentions that he played a part in the war against military rule in Nigeria and the birth of democracy. These are all strategic moves that are aimed at persuasion and promotion of the President's selfish ideologies. The military regime is mitigated as bad while democracy is intensified as good.

### **Discursive Strategies Utilized by President Tinubu in His Acceptance Speech**

#### **Predication Strategy**

Predication in DHA details how social actors are positively and negatively represented in political discourse. President Tinubu uses the ego signifiers "I" and "we" to achieve a positive representation of himself and fellow political actors there by relegating his audience to the background. The usages of these ego signifiers establish the notion of how political leaders make positive representation of in-groups and negative representation of the out-group.

#### **Projection of "self" against the "other" as a discursive strategy**

The President's Acceptance Speech is aimed at celebrating his victory haven won the 2023 presidential election. The ego signifier "I" is used to project his personal achievement and also cajole the audience into accepting the idea that he won the elections by appealing to their emotions with the intention to seek for their support. We are also used to refer to himself and his fellow political actors in a subtle endeavour to magnify 'self'. The following excerpts of the relevant data are presented below:

**Table 6: Ego Signifiers (Acceptance Speech)**

1.	I am profoundly humbled that you have elected me to serve as the 16th president of our beloved republic.
2.	<b>We</b> commend INEC for running a free and fair election
3.	I am grateful to Almighty God. By His mercy, I was born a son of Nigeria and through His sublime purpose I find myself the victor of this election.
	I also ask my supporters to let peace reign and tensions fade

In line 1 of the table, the President portrays himself as a humble and patriotic Nigerian who believes in democracy. In line 2, **we** is used to refer to the President and his fellow political contestants this suggests a projection of superiority of "self" against the "other". The President distances himself from the audience in an attempt to legitimize authority and power. in line 3, The president mentions that he was born a son of Nigeria. This statement suggests that he perceives himself worthy to rule. Line 4 simply shows that the elections were not at all free and fair as claimed by the President. Hence, he urged his supporters to let peace reign. This shows the contradictions and gaps that are enclosed in political speeches.

### **Nomination Strategy**

The Pronouns **we**, **our** and Modal auxiliary verbs **will** and **shall** are used by the President to promote his ideologies. Terms such as **Batified**, **Atikulated**, **obidient** and **Kwankwasiyya** are used to refer to himself and his political opponents with the intention of suggesting that regardless of their differences they should be unified.

### **Usage of pronouns, verbs and neologism as Linguistic devices**

President Tinubu employs pronouns, verbs and neologism to implant the notion of unity in the minds of his audience and also to show willingness and intention to serve the nation as an ideological strategy in his quest to convince his audience that they have made the right decision by voting for him. Examples can be seen in the table below:

**Table 7: Usage of pronouns, modal auxiliary verbs and neologism (Acceptance Speech)**

1.	Together, we shall build a brighter and more productive society for today, tomorrow and for years to come.
2.	Whether you are Batified, Atikulated, Obidient, Kwankwasiyya, or have any other political affiliation, you voted for a better, more hopeful nation and I thank you for your participation and dedication to our democracy.
3.	I will give you my utmost as your next President and commander- in - chief.

In the table above it can be seen that the President uses pronouns, neologism and modal auxiliary verbs such as will and shall to paint a picture of inclusiveness by stating that together he and his audience will build a better Nigeria. In line 3 the president exerts power and dominance by stating that as the commander in chief, he alone knows what is to be done in order to achieve success. The power gap between president Tinubu and his audience is best revealed in line 3 of the excerpt above. Through the usage of modal verbs, he is able to commit his audience to a certain kind of sense of duty.

### Perspectivation Strategy

Emotional appeal is used as a discursive strategy by the President to win the hearts of his audience and to persuade them into believing and accepting his ideologies. Pronouns such as **we** **our** and **us** are used to show the President's involvement and complete participation in the election processes.

### Emotional Appeal as a Discursive Strategy

President Tinubu in his Acceptance Speech utilizes emotional appeal as a discursive tool in trying to gain the sympathy and support of the youths. He claims to understand their pain and suffering and declares himself as the all-knowing Messiah they have all been longing for. This is reflected in the following excerpt:

**Table 8: Excerpts of Emotional Appeal (Acceptance Speech)**

1.	Now, to you, the young people of this country, I hear you loud and clear. I understand your pains, your yearnings for good governance, a functional economy and a safe nation that protects you and your future.
2.	I am aware that for many of you, Nigeria has become a place of abiding challenges limiting your ability to see a bright future for yourselves.

The President's assertion about understanding the pains of the Nigerian youth is a tactical move aimed towards generating personal support and acceptance. The President appeals to the emotions of the youth in order to persuade them into believing his so-called objectives and plans for their future. Words such as **pains**, **yearning** and **challenges** are used by the President to foster this emotional appeal.

### Argumentation Strategy

Argumentation strategy is used by President Tinubu in his Acceptance Speech of President Tinubu to emphasize his ideologies and personal agendas to his audience. Emotional appeal is reoccurring topoi in his acceptance speech. He constantly assured his audience of his intentions to rule excellently and solve all of their socio-economic issues. Expressions such as "**my fellow Nigerians**" and personal pronouns such as **we**, **our** ,**us** are used to foster emotional appeal which leads to smooth persuasion and promotion of his ideologies.

### Mitigation and intensification strategy

Illocutionary acts of praise and thanksgiving is used by the President to intensify his perspectives. Expressions such as "I thank you for your participation and dedication to our democracy" and "I thank all who supported my campaign" suggest the President's creative manoeuvring of language in revealing his ideologies and beliefs to his audience. The ego signifier "I" is used to mitigate the out -group.

The President did not fail to establish superiority over his political opponents and his audience in his Acceptance Speech. The expression "Political competition must now give way to political conciliation and inclusive governance." suggests that his opponent must now back down and submit to his authority. This uncovers the "us" verses "them" conflict that exists in political discourse.

### **Findings**

The findings of the study reveal that President Tinubu employed linguistic devices such as Pronouns, intertextuality, historical allusion and appeal to patriotism as discursive strategies in the Democracy Day Speech (2024) to promote his ideologies and marginalize the opinions of his audience.

The findings of analysis done on the Acceptance (2023) reveal how President Tinubu used emotinal appeal as a strategy to create a sense of unity between him and his audience. The ego signifier "I" is used by the President to magnify his ideologies. Linguistic structures such as neologism, verbs and pronouns are also used to amplify the President's perspective on "renewed hope for Nigeria".

Consequently, the analysis of the discursive strategies employed by President Tinubu in both the Democracy Day Speech (2024) and Acceptance Speech (2023) uncovers his Ideological inclinations about democracy and subjective perspectives of renewed hope which he enforces on the audience through creative application of linguistic structures. Nomination and predication strategies are used to achieve persuasion in both speeches while argumentation, intensification and mitigation strategies are used by the President to project his ideologies and perspectives on his audience.

### **Conclusion**

The research has revealed the roles of language in real human situations. Language is used as a means to communicate ideologies and impose values and beliefs in political speeches. In line with the tenets of Critical Discourse Analysis and Discourse Historical Approach, this study has proven that political discourses have ideological implications and that the relationship between language and politics cannot be separated. It is through skilful and subtle use of language that political actors impose their ideologies on others. In this study, power has been enacted and legitimized through the use of language. The study has provided evidences to show how language is used as a tool by power hungry politicians to brainwash and manipulate their subjects into buying their selfish ideologies which are only meant to serve their personal interest. The findings of the study have also shown how language functions as a tool for positive projection of "self" as superior against the "other". The analysed data have depicted how President Tinubu uses language to make positive references to themselves while portraying their audiences as mere brainless subjects who have no ability to think for themselves. Political speeches are always enclosed in hidden meanings and agendas. This is achieved through skilful deployment of language. Politicians conceal their ideologies through language because they often times do not correspond with the present social realities. It is pertinent to state that politicians take advantage of the less educated members of their society by manipulatively imposing their wishes on them.

It is important to note that this study has reemphasized the fact that Critical Discourse Analysis is a crucial approach to the study of how language is used to enforce ideologies in discourse, particularly in terms of how it is used to unravel hidden meanings and ideologies in political discourse.

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**CHINUA ACHEBE: THE NOVELIST AS CRITIC AND EDITOR****Halima Shehu****F.C. Chike-Okoli**

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**Abstract**

*Chinua Achebe is widely acknowledged as a foundational figure in the development of modern African literature, particularly for his novels that explore the complexities of both pre-colonial and post-colonial African experiences. However, in addition to his fiction, Achebe's contributions as a critic and editor have profoundly influenced literary criticism and shaped global understanding of African literature. His efforts to amplify African voices through his critical essays, his role as the founding editor of the Heinemann African Writers Series, and his editorship of the literary journal Okike have been pivotal in asserting the significance of African perspectives thereby highlighting his multifaceted impact on the literary world. While scholarly studies focus predominantly on his fiction, Achebe's critical essays and editorial work merit further scholarly attention due to their lasting influence on world literature. Employing **postcolonial theory as theoretical framework and methodology**, this paper integrates textual analysis, critical discourse analysis, and paratextual examination to investigate Achebe's essays in *Morning Yet on Creation Day* and *Hopes and Impediments*, as well as his editorial interventions. Through this methodological approach, the study explores how Achebe's work addresses the challenges encountered by African writers, interrogates the role of literature in postcolonial societies, and elucidates the potential of literature to foster cultural reclamation and social transformation.*

**Key words:** Chinua Achebe, Postcolonial theory, African literary criticism, Editorial practice, Critical essays

**Introduction**

Chinua Achebe established the groundwork for modern African literature with his novels *Things Fall Apart*, *No Longer at Ease*, *Arrow of God*, *A Man of the People*, and *Anthills of the Savannah*. Together with other works written later in his career, these initial four novels explore the intricate dynamics of both pre-colonial and post-colonial experiences (Njoku, 1984). They vividly depict an African way of life and interrogate the challenges of modernity in independent Nigeria. Often regarded as the "father of the African novel in English" (Innes, 1990; Gikandi, 2012; Abrams, 2013; Krishnan, 2017), Achebe's influence extends far beyond his works of fiction. His critical essays and editorial endeavours speak of a strong commitment to carving out a space for African voices, significantly influencing global literary discourse. Alongside his widely studied novels, his critical and editorial contributions on the issues of identity, power, language, and resistance have profoundly impacted literary criticism and established African writing as an essential part of world literature.

Achebe's views as articulated in numerous essays are significant in multiple ways, most notably in his redefinition of African narratives which challenge Western portrayals of Africa. In his novels, he gives voice to African characters, histories, and cultures by presenting them from an unprecedented depth and complexity. However, in his essays, the rich, vibrant life of the Igbo people prior to European colonization is emphasized, offering readers an indigenous perspective on Africa. His works interrogate colonial violence, the

erosion of indigenous values and governance, and the shifting contours of African identity and resistance in the post-colonial era. Furthermore, his exploration of the tension between the use indigenous African and European languages is also crucial for comprehending the broader discourse surrounding language, culture and power. Therefore, as Achebe's influence on world literature continues to endure, it is necessary to examine more closely his interrelated roles as novelist, critic, and editor, since these facets of his career collectively shape his impact on literary and cultural discourse. Accordingly, this study adopts a postcolonial analytical approach to explore how Achebe's novel, essays and editorial interventions challenge colonial representations of Africa to articulate new frameworks of cultural authority.

Although available scholarship offer valuable insights into Achebe's fiction and critical arguments, the interconnections between his literary and editorial practices remain underexplored. This article addresses that gap by examining how his aesthetic choices, theoretical assertions, and editorial interventions collectively constitute a postcolonial strategy aimed at both dismantling entrenched colonial narratives and establishing new frameworks through which African stories may be told and understood. By situating his multi-faceted work within postcolonial theory, the study underscores his central role in reshaping the cultural, ideological, and institutional landscapes of African literature. Through a combined analysis of selected novels, major essay collections *Morning Yet on Creation Day* (1975) and *Hopes and Impediments* (1988), and paratexts from the *African Writers Series*, the article demonstrates that Achebe's authority as a novelist is inseparable from his critical and editorial commitments. Together, these roles articulate his vision of literature as a site of cultural negotiation and political intervention. In doing so, the article positions Achebe as an architect of a postcolonial literary consciousness.

### **Theoretical Framework and Methodology**

Postcolonial theory, with its emphasis on the enduring impact of colonialism and the strategies through which formerly colonized peoples resist, reinterpret and reclaim their histories, is employed here as the overarching analytical framework. It anchors this examination of Achebe's work within critical debates on representation, cultural authority, and the politics of literary production. This approach is particularly suited to Achebe's corpus because his creative, critical, and editorial interventions collectively respond to the historical and epistemic legacies of colonialism. His fiction interrogates imperial constructions of Africa; his essays, especially in *Morning Yet on Creation Day* (1975) and *Hopes and Impediments* (1988), challenge the cultural, political, and linguistic assumptions embedded within Western literary traditions, while his editorial leadership of the African Writers Series sought to establish African narrative autonomy. A postcolonial framework illuminates the continuities between these roles, revealing how Achebe's ethical realism, linguistic innovation and historical consciousness operate in tandem with his essays and editorial commitments.

Central to this framework are the theoretical insights of **Edward Said (1979)**, **Homi Bhabha (1994)**, and **Gayatri Spivak (1988)** whose works illuminate the mechanisms through which colonial discourse constructs and sustains regimes of knowledge and power. Said's critique of Orientalist representation is instrumental in understanding Achebe's insistence on narrative self-determination and his repudiation of Eurocentric portrayals of Africa. Bhabha's concepts of hybridity, ambivalence and cultural negotiation provide useful tools for analysing how Achebe's novels dramatize the complex intersections of indigenous epistemologies and colonial structures. Spivak's interrogation of subaltern silencing further sharpens the analysis

of Achebe's editorial agenda, particularly his efforts to amplify African voices within global literary circuits. In addition to these global theorists, the study draws on key interventions by **African scholars**, including Abiola Irele (2001), Ato Quayson (2014), and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (2012) to situate Achebe's intellectual contributions within African epistemological traditions. Irele's reflections on the African imagination help to contextualise Achebe's narrative strategies, while Quayson's discussions of postcolonial aesthetics inform interpretations of Achebe's ethical and cultural commitments. Ngũgĩ's critiques of linguistic imperialism similarly offer a foundation for analysing the language politics embedded in Achebe's fiction and editorial decisions.

Methodologically, the study integrates **textual, critical discourse** and **paratextual analyses**. Through a close reading, it examines how Achebe's novels articulate postcolonial concerns such as cultural memory, moral responsibility, and the reclamation of historical narrative. Critical discourse analysis is employed to interpret Achebe's essays as rhetorical interventions that challenge colonial epistemologies and redefine African literary identity. Drawing on Genette's (1997) theorisation of paratexts, the analysis attends to editorial statements, series introductions, and other framing materials that structure the African Writers Series and shape its reception. These materials are treated as deliberate postcolonial acts aimed at shaping how African literature is accessed, circulated, and understood. Combining theoretical and methodological tools provides a cohesive analytical premise for this examination of Achebe's work. It positions his roles as novelist, critic and editor as interconnected practices through which he advances a postcolonial rearticulation of African cultural and literary agency.

### **Achebe as Novelist**

Before delving into Achebe's essays and editorial contributions, a brief overview of his major novels provides essential context for understanding the thematic concerns, narrative strategies and socio-political influences that in turn inform both his critical perspectives and his editorial vision. His first novel, *Things Fall Apart* (1957), brought him worldwide recognition, sold over 20 million copies, and has been translated into 57 languages (Krishnan, 2017). Considered one of the most powerful depictions of colonization (Garner, 2013), it offers valuable insight into African cultures and the historical forces that shaped them thus aligning with Said's concept of *Orientalism* which illuminates the ways Western discourse have historically misrepresented Africa as primitive, static, or exotic. Achebe directly counters this pattern in his novel by rendering Igbo society with complexity, nuance, and cultural depth. Bhabha's theory of hybridity, ambivalence, and mimicry further clarifies the novel's portrayal of cultural negotiation and resistance as the Igbo community confronts the destabilizing pressures of colonial intrusion. While Achebe's commitment to foregrounding marginalised African perspectives and countering the erasure exemplified by the District Commissioner's impulse to reduce Okonkwo's life to a mere "reasonable paragraph" in a colonial chronicle finds resonance in Spivak's notion of the subaltern.

Within the narrative, Okonkwo witnesses the arrival of British missionaries and the gradual disintegration of Igbo traditions, a process intensified by his own rigid pride and inflexibility. His eventual suicide is both a personal tragedy and a symbolic commentary on the destructive entanglements of colonial domination. The novel's concluding scene which features the colonial official speculating on how to incorporate Okonkwo into his historical account, underscores the epistemic authority Said critiques and the silencing of subaltern subjects central to Spivak's analysis. By re-centering the African viewpoint, Achebe transforms

*Things Fall Apart* into a literary reclamation of history, identity and moral agency thereby asserting a vision that is both aesthetically compelling and politically consequential.

Obi Okonkwo, the protagonist in Achebe's subsequent novel, *No Longer at Ease* (1960), is like his grandfather Okonkwo, in *Things Fall Apart*, depicted as a victim of cultural conflict, although in a different context. His struggles within colonial and postcolonial structures foreground the tensions experienced by individuals navigating overlapping moral, social, and political pressures. Set on the cusp of Nigeria's independence, the novel captures the transitional moment of a society emerging from colonial rule and grappling with the challenges of modernization. Obi's personal and moral downfall reflects the erosion of traditional values in the wake of colonial disruption. The Igbo people are disoriented and their society "no longer at ease" in the modern era. Through Obi's trajectory, Achebe explores the socio-political climate of pre-independence Nigeria, highlighting the tensions between inherited cultural norms and the pressures of a Westernized bureaucratic system. Seen through the lens of Spivak's subaltern theory, Obi's predicament underscores the difficulty of articulating autonomous moral agency in a society still constrained by colonial legacies and elite structures.

In his third novel, *Arrow of God* (1964), Achebe returns to the 1920s. The narrative focuses on Ezeulu, the proud Chief Priest of Ulu, whose authority is tested by the rapid transformation of Igbo society under the pressures of personal ambition and colonial incursion. Ezeulu attempts to assert power over both his community and the spiritual calendar "It was true he named the day for the feast of the pumpkin leaves and for the New Yam feast; but he did not choose it. He was merely a watchman... No! The chief priest of Ulu was more than that, must be more than that..." (Achebe, 1964, p. 72). This reveals the tension between human authority and spiritual law as the novel explores the collapse of Igbo spirituality and religious life when confronted with the Christian religion backed by colonial military and political power. Ezeulu embodies the subaltern caught between colonial authority and indigenous hierarchies, his personal and communal dilemmas reveal the complexities that Western accounts frequently omit. His decision to negotiate colonial domination by sending his son Oduche to learn the ways of the colonizers ultimately backfires, demonstrating the unpredictable consequences of cultural hybridity, a notion resonant with Bhabha's theory of ambivalence which frames colonial encounters as sites of negotiation, adaptation and unintended transformation.

Through vivid and engaging storytelling, in *A Man of the People* (1966), Achebe portrays the complexities and contradictions of African politics, shedding light on the challenges of nation-building, the abuse of power and the struggle for social justice. As noted by Orock (2022), this novel remains a relevant and powerful critique of political corruption and elite complicity in postcolonial Nigerian society. A satirical exploration of post-independence politics, it follows Odili, a young teacher who becomes entangled in a corrupt political system. Achebe's narrative exposes the contradictions and abuses of power that characterize the early years of independent Nigeria, culminating in a military coup reminiscent of historical events. Through Odili's experiences, the novel interrogates the persistence of authoritarian tendencies and the moral failings of elites and in so doing highlights the continuity between colonial structures of power and postcolonial governance. From a postcolonial standpoint, Achebe exposes both the enduring legacies of colonial domination and the internalization of its hierarchical and exclusionary norms, exemplifying what Said describes as the cultural arrogance of Orientalist discourse.

Decades later, in *Anthills of the Savannah* (1987), Achebe examines the challenges faced by newly independent African nations, particularly the difficulty of forging a cohesive national identity amidst the lingering influence of colonial structures. Focusing on three central characters, Chris Oriko, Commissioner for Information; Beatrice Okoh, a government official; and Ikem Osodi, a critical newspaper editor, the novel explores the dynamics of political power, corruption, and civic responsibility. The titular anthills serve as a metaphor for the interconnectedness of society emphasizing the coexistence of multiple truths and perspectives as captured in the Igbo proverb that Achebe invokes: “Where something stands, there also something else will stand” (p. 122). Through this narrative, Achebe foregrounds the role of cultural memory, moral reflection, and intellectual engagement in shaping postcolonial governance.

Taken together, Achebe’s literary works consistently interrogate the disruptive impact of colonialism, the tensions between indigenous traditions and Western influences as well as the moral and political dilemmas individuals face in negotiating authority and identity (Kumar & Chand, 2024). Viewed through a postcolonial lens, his novels illustrate the fluidity and hybridity of identity under colonial and postcolonial conditions (Bhabha, 1994), critique the epistemic dominance of Western norms and the marginalization of African perspectives (Said, 1979; 1993) to give voice to subaltern experiences often excluded from official histories (Spivak, 1988; 1999). Achebe’s narratives, therefore, are not merely literary explorations but deliberate interventions in the production of knowledge and history. They reclaim African agency and affirm the moral and cultural resilience of his societies.

Furthermore, in his novels, Achebe’s engagement with language exemplifies the complex dynamics of postcolonial cultural negotiation. His narrative style demonstrates a fluid interplay between indigenous oral traditions and Western literary forms reflecting his deep seated commitment to reclaiming African voices and experiences from the margins imposed by colonial discourse. By incorporating culturally specific expressions, he captures the emotional depth of his characters and the lived realities of his community, producing what Yousaf (2003) describes as the “textualization of Igbo cultural identity” (p.37).

In the novels such as *Things Fall Apart* (1958), he incorporates Igbo proverbs, idioms and folktales into English narration, for example, “*Proverbs are the palm oil with which words are eaten*” (p. 17). Similarly, in *Arrow of God* (1964) he writes, “*When the moon is shining the cripple becomes hungry for a walk*” (p. 34). These moments of linguistic hybridity create a narrative space that is neither entirely Western nor fully indigenous. Instead, they reflect Bhabha’s concept of cultural ambivalence wherein identity and meaning emerge through ongoing negotiation between the colonizer and the colonized. Such hybridity destabilizes the authority of colonial discourse and produce forms of expression that articulate the lived complexities of the colonial encounter rather than adhering to imposed norms. Spivak’s notion of the subaltern also illuminates Achebe’s literary work. By embedding specific Igbo terms such as *chi* (personal god), *egwugwu* (ancestral masquerade spirits), and *Ogbanje* (a spirit child) in his narratives, Achebe gives voice to those historically marginalized or silenced by colonial discourse. Together, these linguistic and narrative strategies illustrate his postcolonial project, that is, a careful negotiation of language, culture, and power that resists the reductionist tendencies of colonial epistemologies, amplifies historically silenced voices, and articulates the ambivalences inherent in cultural encounters. His novels thus operate as both literary and political interventions that redefine the possibilities of African representation in global literature.

### Achebe as a Critic

While Achebe's fiction has long been acclaimed for its narrative complexity and cultural depth, his critical essays also deserve scholarly attention for the significant contributions they continue to make to contemporary postcolonial discourse. His views on the transformative power of narrative articulated in essay collections titled *Morning Yet on Creation Day* (1975) and *Hopes and Impediments* (1988) explicitly query the reductive assumptions embedded in Western representations of Africa. These essays articulate Achebe's views on the political, cultural, and ethical dimensions of postcolonial African life. Whether retrospective or newly compiled, they examine the responsibilities of writers, the ideological underpinnings of colonial discourse, and the potential of literature as a site of social and moral transformation.

The essays advance the thematic preoccupations of his fiction, most notably cultural dislocation and the psychological imprint of colonial domination while constructing a postcolonial critical framework through which literature can be analysed as a medium that interrogates, disrupts, and reconfigures hegemonic narratives. As observed by Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin (2002), Achebe's non-fiction writings shed critical light on the construction of identity, the politics of cultural representation and the role of language in perpetuating or dismantling colonial power structures. In them, Eurocentric epistemologies that deny the complexity and legitimacy of African worldviews are contested. In their place, he advocates for a literary canon that recognizes multiple centers of knowledge and expression: "The world is big. Some people are unable to comprehend that simple fact....Diversity is not an abnormality but the very reality of our planet" (Achebe, 1975, p. 103). Thus, Singh (2022) asserts that by reclaiming African voices from the peripheries of global discourse, Achebe's critical essays are foundational to African postcolonial literary theory as a whole. In challenging Eurocentric epistemologies that portray Africa as static, primitive or morally deficient, Achebe confronts the mechanisms through which Western narratives have historically marginalized African perspectives.

Irele (2001) argues that Achebe's essays in *Morning Yet on Creation Day* articulate "the first coherent statement of African literary aesthetics" (p. 23), contending that Achebe's demand for culturally and historically grounded readings of African literature provides a seminal framework that anticipates and informs subsequent postcolonial theory. Similarly, Quayson (2014) sees Achebe's essays as theorising the conditions of representing the African experience in English. He asserts that Achebe's reflections on language prefigure contemporary discussions of hybridity, narrative ethics and world literature. Indeed, four essays are particularly central to Achebe's critical intervention: "The African Writer and the English Language" and "The Novelist as Teacher" in *Morning Yet on Creation Day*, alongside "The Role of the Writer in a New Nation" and "An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*" in *Hopes and Impediments*, each articulating his evolving conception of literary responsibility and cultural representation. They offer critical reflections that align closely with the central concerns of postcolonial theory which at its core interrogates the economic, political and cultural structures of the domination imposed upon colonized societies by European powers (Garuba, 2014). These structures not only disrupted indigenous systems of governance and cosmology but profoundly transformed the cultural identities and linguistic practices of colonized peoples.

The role of language in the construction of postcolonial identities and cultural narratives interrogated in "The African Writer and the English Language" highlights how colonial languages were imposed as instruments of control over knowledge, education, cultural production and indigenous forms of expression. As the implications of employing the

colonizer's language is examined, attention is drawn to issues of power, representation and resistance. However, while underscoring the complex relationship between language, power and identity in postcolonial Africa, Achebe competently provides a nuanced critique of the linguistic legacies of colonialism. He recognizes English as both an instrument of colonial domination and a medium through which African writers can assert and express their cultural identities but significantly, he also advocates for the strategic appropriation of English by African authors as a means of establishing their presence within global literary discourse.

Thus, in contrast to Ngũgĩ's criticism of African writers use of colonial languages, Achebe sees English not as a tool of oppression but as a medium for empowerment, envisioning it as a vehicle by which African writers can assert narrative authority and shape a distinctive literary voice. This potential skillfully illustrated in his novels transforms the language from a mere instrument of colonial mimicry into a dynamic medium capable of conveying African worldviews and storytelling traditions. Consequently, he encourages other writers to transcend the rigid conventions of Standard English and embrace linguistic innovation by infusing the language with indigenous expressions, oral traditions and cultural idioms. For Achebe, when English is appropriated and adapted in this way, it is no longer "a neutral language" but becomes an Africanized language. He writes: "I feel that the English language will be able to carry the weight of my African experience. But it will have to be a new English, still in full communion with its ancestral home but altered to suit its new African surroundings" (Achebe, 1975, p. 84). Through this lens, Achebe positions English as a reclaimed space, or one that allows African identity and culture to be not only represented but to be re-imagined. Even in disagreement, Ngũgĩ underscores the significance of Achebe's indigenization of English, demonstrating that even a colonial language can be appropriated to preserve African thought, memory, and narrative agency (Ngũgĩ, 1986). Hence, even while Ngũgĩ advocates African-language writing, he nonetheless positions Achebe as a theorist whose reflections on language forced African literature to confront the politics of linguistic inheritance.

In two thematically interrelated essays, "*The Novelist as Teacher*" and "*The Role of the Writer in a New Nation*", Achebe not only critiques the cultural arrogance of colonial discourse but also redefines the role of the African writer. In the aftermath of colonialism, he believes that the African novelist cannot afford the luxury of being a mere entertainer but must assume an active role in shaping national consciousness as a teacher, historian and active participant in the reconstruction of national consciousness. This perspective, first articulated in "*The Novelist as Teacher*" and reiterated in essays such as "*The Writer and His Community*" and "*Colonialist Criticism*," frames the writer as an active agent in society, responsible not only for shaping national consciousness but also for challenging colonial epistemologies. At the same time, it emphasizes African storytelling traditions as a vital mechanism for transmitting knowledge, preserving cultural memory, and asserting indigenous narrative authority.

Achebe insists that writers can introduce complex ideas and moral lessons to a broad audience in accessible and engaging ways through storytelling because for him the writer is not merely a creator of stories but an intellectual and a moral guide whose duty it is to instruct and challenge society. Consequently, novels are not just reflections of life but can serve as tools for teaching society about itself, its values, and for portraying potential for progress. As he explains in "*The Role of the Writer in a New Nation*," writers could open up debates about important issues and inspire the kind of critical reflection that leads to social and political change. Although this position has been challenged by some critics such as Sule

(2025) who caution against assigning a purely “didactic function” to African literature, Achebe’s a vision of the writer as an active, engaged participant in society is embraced by other African writers such as Ousmane Sembène who sees the artist as a “modern-day griot”, that is, a chronicler and critic of society; and Tsitsi Dangarembga who argues that her writing, and by extension fiction, serves as a form of activism that seeks to give voice to marginalized and silenced people. Similarly, Adichie (2009) believes that writers have a duty to engage with the world around them. In various interviews, including her famous TED Talk “*The Danger of a Single Story*”, she emphasizes the power of storytelling to shape perceptions, challenge dominant narratives and amplify marginalized voices: “Stories matter. Many stories matter. Stories have been used to dispossess and to malign, but stories can also be used to empower and to humanize.”

“*An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad’s Heart of Darkness*” is a seminal postcolonial critique of Western literature, interrogating how Africa is depicted in canonical European texts. Achebe argues that Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* is fundamentally racist, portraying Africans as subhuman and reinforcing colonial stereotypes. While often praised in the West for exploring the psychological effects of imperialism on Europeans, the novella marginalizes African characters, reducing them to faceless, almost animalistic figures, and stripping them of individuality and complexity. Africa is constructed not as a space with its own histories and cultures but as a void against which European superiority is highlighted. Africans merely function as symbols of darkness and chaos, while European characters, particularly Marlow, represent civilization and progress. Achebe contends that this binary opposition participates in colonialist discourse that frames African peoples as inferior and in need of European intervention.

Quayson (2014) supports Achebe’s critique, noting that it offers a methodological model for analyzing the epistemological structures of colonial discourse. By exposing the racial and ideological assumptions embedded in canonical texts, Achebe demonstrates how literature can perpetuate harmful cultural narratives. The Western canon’s celebration of *Heart of Darkness* as a modernist masterpiece often overlooks Conrad’s prejudices, emphasizing his supposed critique of imperialism while ignoring the dehumanization of Africans. Therefore, Achebe calls for reading the novella through a postcolonial lens, recognizing its role in shaping perceptions of Africa and reinforcing colonial ideologies. His critique expressed in this essay has been instrumental in foregrounding racial issues in literature and influencing subsequent scholarship (Said, 1993; Rajoria, 2022; Geeti, 2022).

Both *Morning Yet on Creation Day* and *Hopes and Impediments* serve as counter-narratives to colonial discourse (Lynn, 2017), providing important insights into Achebe’s thoughts and philosophy, his perspective on African literature, culture and politics. In particular, the title *Morning Yet on Creation Day* taken from a line in the Bible and in the context of Achebe’s writing, suggests an image of renewal, a new day of creation that follows a period of darkness, symbolizing the era of colonialism and its aftermath. On the other hand, the title *Hopes and Impediments* encapsulates his central preoccupations as a writer and critic engaged with the postcolonial condition. It reflects the duality of his outlook, a deep sense of optimism regarding Africa’s potential for cultural and political renewal and a sober recognition of the enduring challenges that obstruct such progress. The title underscores Achebe’s commitment to both critique and reconstruction, framing his essays as part of a broader effort to navigate the complexities of postcolonial reality. In the two texts, Achebe foregrounds African moral, historical, and cultural agency, demonstrating as Said (1979, 1993) notes, that the power to define reality is always contested and that hegemonic

representation can be resisted through counter-narratives. Thus, both essay collections do more than reinforce the thematic preoccupations of his fiction; they provide a roadmap for understanding the complexities of African identity, the legacy of colonialism, and the role of literature in societal transformation.

### **Achebe as Editor**

While Achebe was instrumental in establishing a body of literary criticism that analyzed African literature on its own terms, he also worked to elevate the status of African writers globally through his editorial and institutional interventions. As advisory editor of the Heinemann African Writers Series (AWS) and founder of *Okike: Journal of New African Writing*, Achebe created platforms that not only amplified African voices but also shaped the development of African literature and fostered a postcolonial literary discourse. Beyond his essays, he played a pivotal role as an editor, canon-builder, and paratextual strategist, guiding the selection, framing, and presentation of texts in ways that increased their visibility, emphasized their cultural and historical significance, and ensured that African literature could be read, interpreted, and valued on its own terms.

Achebe's editorial influence on the AWS, particularly between 1962 and 1972, has received limited scholarly attention despite the series' foundational impact on African literature (Sole, 2009). Under his stewardship, the AWS published works by writers such as Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, Dennis Brutus, Tayeb Salih, Léopold Sédar Senghor, Ousmane Sembène, Wole Soyinka, Nadine Gordimer, Steve Biko, Ama Ata Aidoo, Flora Nwapa, Buchi Emecheta, and Okot p'Bitek. The series' inaugural title, Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, was followed by over 210 titles, including Elechi Amadi's *The Slave* offering a pan-African literary space for novels, poetry, plays, and autobiographies. While initially focused on Anglophone Africa, the series later incorporated works translated from French, Portuguese, Zulu, Swahili, Acholi, Afrikaans, and Arabic, reflecting Achebe's commitment to **linguistic and cultural diversity**.

Currey (2008), who served as AWS editorial director from 1967 to 1984, emphasizes that Achebe's vision was instrumental in maintaining the Series as a vital platform for authentic African voices. Irele (2001) describes Achebe's editorial leadership as a "revolutionary intervention" that institutionalized African literary modernity, while Quayson (2014, 2019) stresses that Achebe's role was not merely administrative but interpretive, curating African literature with an ethical commitment to regional breadth, historical complexity, and linguistic diversity. Ngũgĩ (2012) further acknowledges the AWS as "the first truly pan-African literary space," which enabled generations of African writers, including himself, to gain continental and global recognition.

There is need to also see Achebe as a **paratextual strategist**, whose editorial interventions including forewords, introductions, cover designs, series numbering, and accessibility principles actively shaped how African literature was read, interpreted and valued. Gérard Genette's (1997) concept of paratextuality is particularly useful here as it highlights the ways in which texts are framed and mediated before they reach readers. Paratexts, as Genette argues, function as thresholds: they guide interpretation, signal meaning and establish the relationship between the author, text and audience. In the AWS, Achebe's forewords and introductions, for example, to Cyprian Ekwensi's *Burning Grass* (1962) and Amos Tutuola's *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* (1962) situated works within African cultural, historical, and ethical frameworks. These paratexts guided readers to engage with the texts on their own terms, emphasizing the richness of African storytelling traditions, historical context and thematic depth. By framing the works in this way, Achebe's editorial commentary performed

a **critical and pedagogical function** thus extending his intellectual influence beyond his essays and fiction and shaping the broader reception of African literature (Quayson, 2014).

Achebe's paratextual strategies also included **visual and material interventions**. Even the original orange AWS covers which were numbered sequentially from 1 to 210, created a sense of an **organized African literary corpus** and visually linked diverse authors and genres while signaling their collective importance. His insistence on **affordable editions for African readers** reflected a commitment to democratizing literature and reclaiming interpretive agency thereby ensuring that African literature could circulate within the societies it depicted (Achebe, 1975; Currey, 2008). Through these measures, Achebe shaped not only which voices were amplified but also how they were received, interpreted and canonized, making the AWS a site of **postcolonial literary pedagogy**.

However, while the AWS has received some scholarly attention, Achebe's role in founding *Okike* in 1971 at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, remains underexplored. Established as a platform for emerging African literary voices, *Okike* showcased both creative works and critical essays that aligned with Achebe's vision of a vibrant postcolonial literary community. The September 1972 edition featured early works by writers such as Osmond Enekwe, Maxwell Nwagboso, and Odia Ofeimun who later became a celebrated poet *The Poet Lied*, (1980), essayist (*A House of Many Mansions*, 2012) and political commentator who has been celebrated for his incisive works that blend literary artistry with social and political critique, contributions that have earned him recognition both locally and internationally. *Okike* thus exemplifies Achebe's commitment to nurturing talent and promoting African literary discourse at both national and continental levels.

### Conclusion

Chinua Achebe's work as a novelist, critic, and editor was central to the emergence of a distinctly African literary tradition. Through novels such as *Things Fall Apart*, he crafted narratives that explored African histories, cultures, and experiences from indigenous perspectives, laying the groundwork for his critical interventions. His essays dismantled Eurocentric representations of Africa and advocated for culturally and historically grounded interpretations of African texts. As an editor, particularly through the African Writers Series and *Okike*, he cultivated platforms that amplified African voices, nurtured emerging writers, and shaped the global reception of African literature. By championing works that reflect African realities, he redefined postcolonial literature and asserted the necessity of African agency in literary production. Ultimately, his enduring influence across fiction, criticism, and editorial practice ensures that he remains a foundational architect of African letters and a guiding figure whose vision continues to resonate in world literature.

Perhaps future studies might explore in more depth the paratextual strategies that Achebe employed in the African Writers Series and *Okike*, including his forewords, introductions, and editorial framing to better understand how these interventions have shaped the reception and interpretation of African literature. Scholars could also investigate the interplay between his fiction and critical writings, examining how his narrative techniques, ethical commitments and thematic concerns in novels such as *Things Fall Apart* resonate with his essays and editorial philosophy. Additionally, research might consider the global impact of Achebe's editorial interventions on the canonization of African literature, exploring how his curatorial decisions influenced the visibility, valuation, and interpretation of African texts in postcolonial and world literary discourse. Such studies would not only deepen appreciation of

Achebe's multifaceted contributions but also illuminate the mechanisms through which African literary authority has been established and sustained.

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**ORALITY, NEO-EPIC FORM, AND INDIGENOUS MEMORY STRUCTURES IN OKPANACHI'S POETIC NARRATIVES**

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**Abstract**

*This study examined how Musa Idris Okpanachi's poetry reconfigures African orature, epic traditions, and indigenous memory structured into a poetics of resistance and remembrance. While his works are often situated within the paradigm of protest literature, this study argues that their deeper significance lies in the formal and ideological reactivation of oral aesthetics and epic frameworks to confront historical amnesia and postcolonial disintegration. Adopting a qualitative approach grounded in literary textual analysis, the study engages three interrelated frameworks: African orature theory, comparative epic studies, and indigenous memory scholarship. Close readings of Okpanachi's three major collections: The Eaters of the Living (2010), From the Margins (2012), and The Music of the Dead (2016), demonstrated how repetition, invocation, chant, and cyclical temporality function as mnemonic devices that preserve communal memory while indicting authoritarian violence and social decay. The analysis showed that Okpanachi enacts what may be termed a neo-epic poetics: a transformation of epic form that privileges collective trauma over heroic triumph, elevated the silenced masses rather than individual heroes, and reframes history as cyclical return rather than linear conquest. In this way, his poetry emerged as both archive and testimony, sustaining indigenous epistemologies while performing political criticism. By placing Okpanachi within the continuum of oral-informed, epic-scaled African poetics, this study contributed to scholarship on memory, form, and cultural survival in contemporary African literature.*

**Keywords:** orature, neo-epic, indigenous memory, African poetry

**Introduction**

The poetry of Musa Idris Okpanachi stands at the crossroads of political testimony and cultural memory. His work is acclaimed for its uncompromising criticism of authoritarianism, violence, and moral decay in contemporary Nigeria, and critics such as Sule Egya have located his writing within the broader tradition of protest poetry (Egya 19). Still, beyond its political charge, Okpanachi's verse rests on a deeper formal architecture rooted in African orature, indigenous epistemologies, and epic memory. As Gavin Hendricks notes, orality operates as an imaginative and resistant mode that dialogues with histories of marginalisation (Hendricks 2). Okpanachi's poetry embodies this dialogic quality, transforming oral procedures into textual strategies for resisting historical amnesia and postcolonial fragmentation.

The purpose of this study is to examine how Okpanachi mobilises orality, neo-epic form, and indigenous memory structures not only as aesthetic strategies but also as ideological tools of cultural preservation and resistance. Specifically, the study seeks to (1) analyse how oral techniques such as repetition, chant, and invocation are reconfigured in his written texts, (2) investigate how neo-epic frameworks reshape traditional epic form to privilege collective

trauma over heroic triumph, and (3) explore how indigenous memory systems underpin his poetic critique of authoritarian violence and historical erasure.

Across his three collections: *The Eaters of the Living* (2010), *From the Margins* (2012), and *The Music of the Dead* (2016), voice, repetition, invocation, and naming emerge as defining techniques. These features are central to African oral traditions, where memory is preserved not in archives but through performance, ritual, and communal testimony. Scholars of oral literature stress that formulaic repetition and rhythmic structuring function as mnemonic devices that guarantee continuity across generations (Rao 21; Oranye 9). In this sense, Okpanachi's deployment of chant-like rhythms and refrains places him within a "neo-oral poetics," what Ademola Dasylva describes as a modern reanimation of oral aesthetics within written texts (Dasylva 89). By embodying the role of griot or seer, Okpanachi constructs a poetic voice that remembers the forgotten and testifies for the silenced.

This study contends that Okpanachi enacts a neo-epic poetics: a reconfiguration of epic narrative structures that identifies collective trauma rather than heroic triumph. Isidore Okpewho has argued that African epics are defined by their communal and historical orientation rather than by singular heroes (Okpewho 124). More recent scholarship extends this point by framing the African epic as a collective form that privileges multiplicity, cyclical temporality, and communal protagonism (Bazimaziki 65; Tucker). Okpanachi aligns with this trajectory, but he reshapes the epic mode into a space of mourning and resistance. In his hands, the neo-epic becomes ironic and subversive. Thus, elevating unnamed victims, reframing history from the margins, and rejecting linear conquest in favour of ancestral return and cyclical temporality.

The significance of this approach lies in showing that Okpanachi's poetry is more than political criticism; it is also a cultural archive that sustains indigenous epistemologies and reasserts ancestral authority in contemporary contexts. While previous studies have largely situated him within the paradigm of protest poetry, little attention has been paid to the formal architectures through which oral traditions, epic temporality, and indigenous memory converge in his verse. This study fills that gap by identifying these elements as central to his poetics and by positioning him within the broader continuum of oral-informed, epic-scaled African poetry

### Literature Review

Contemporary work on African verbal art stresses that orality is not a residual cultural feature but an active epistemic and aesthetic system that contemporary poets deliberately reconfigure in print to keep memory and social criticism operational. Several studies insist that orality functions as an organising logic for communal knowledge, ritual practice, and political testimony rather than as an aesthetic residue to be mimicked (Ogundokun 4). This framing opens the way to read Musa Idris Okpanachi's poems not as nostalgic reproductions of oral performance but as strategic appropriations of oral procedures; mnemonic structures, call-and-response patterns, and chant rhythms, that rework communal memory for present criticism.

Scholars from multiple contexts emphasise that oral modes operate simultaneously as method and medium: they encode knowledge in social performance and make collective memory retrievable in crisis. Gavin Hendricks, for instance, shows how oral forms become archival practices of the subaltern, enabling marginalised communities to preserve counter-histories and political testimonies through song, ritual, and testimony (Hendricks 7). Similarly, studies

by Paul Oranye and S. Jayasrinivasa Rao argue that orality functions as a discipline of transmission, using formula, repetition, and sonic patterning to secure information across generations (Oranye 12; Rao 21). Okpanachi's poems employ these same mechanisms. Rhetorical refrains and aural recurrence operate as mnemonic scaffolds that both recall shared pasts and provoke contemporary accountability.

Recent scholarship also rejects a narrow, Homeric model of the epic and instead proposes a broadened, cross-cultural sense of "epic behaviour" that can be instantiated across media and registers (Hardie 29; Jensen 97). From this vantage point, an African "neo-epic" becomes legible as a sequence or assemblage that privileges communal stakes, cyclical temporality, and collective protagonism rather than a single heroic subject. Comparative case studies confirm that African heroic epics function pedagogically and ethically, transmitting social values through narrative expansiveness (Bazimaziki 65). Okpanachi's longer sequences and recurring mythic figures are best read within this theoretical widening: his poems collectively enact an epic project of social memory and moral adjudication, not just narrative length.

Memory studies and institutional approaches further detail how oral memory is preserved and mobilised. Work on cultural-memory institutions and indigenous knowledge highlights both local mnemonic technologies (ritual, archive, oral repertory) and larger infrastructures (museums, libraries, community repositories) that mediate preservation and access (Chisita, Rusero, and Shoko 274). Field studies on mnemonic technique, such as research that translates Australian Aboriginal memorisation methods into contemporary pedagogy, demonstrate the practical efficacy of indigenous systems for curricular and activist work (Reser et al. 3). These institutional and technique-based perspectives help explain why Okpanachi's poems often read like living repositories: their devices are both performative and archival, designed to circulate within community networks as well as to inhabit the printed page.

Important theoretical entry points also problematise linear historicity and illuminate the temporality in which memory and epic meet. Scholars such as Herbert Tucker, M. S. Jensen, and Ortega-Villaseñor emphasise cyclical or layered conceptions of time that capture indigenous cosmologies, enabling literature to function simultaneously as history, prophecy, and ritual (Tucker 41; Jensen 98). Okpanachi's tendency to collapse chronological boundaries, mixing ancestral speech, mythic scenes, and immediate political address, follows this pattern. Cyclical temporality becomes a structural method for binding past trauma to present ethics and for imagining future repair.

Studies on African orature also show how writers incorporate performance conventions into written texts to ensure circulation beyond print. Wumi Raji underscores that poetry, when infused with oral aesthetics, becomes a performative act of cultural preservation as well as political resistance (Raji 53). Similarly, Ademola Dasylva highlights the reanimation of oral aesthetics in modern poetics as a strategy to sustain communal participation (Dasylva 89). Okpanachi's poems, designed to be heard as much as read, extend this continuum between the spoken and the written, grounding their critical force in the interplay of voice, rhythm, and memory.

Taken together, this body of scholarship maps a conceptual field in which orality, neo-epic strategies, and indigenous memory technologies mutually enable one another. Read against this background, Okpanachi's poetry manifests a deliberate poetics of memory. It borrows performance techniques to encode communal knowledge, extends epic logic to hold civic

discourse at scale, and deploys institutional-aware memory work to reframe postcolonial exigencies as ethical tasks. Yet, while studies have elaborated on orality, epic, and memory in African literature broadly, little attention has been directed toward how these three strands converge uniquely in Okpanachi's oeuvre. By addressing this gap, the present study identifies his poetry as both an archive of indigenous epistemologies and a neo-epic testimony to contemporary African realities.

### **Theoretical and Methodological Framework**

This study is grounded in an interlocking framework that brings together African orature theory, epic and neo-epic studies, and indigenous memory scholarship. Each provides tools for understanding the aesthetic and ideological dynamics of Musa Idris Okpanachi's poetry.

African orature theory, articulated by scholars such as Ruth Finnegan, Isidore Okpewho, Gavin Hendricks, and Ademola Dasylva, underscores the centrality of performance, chant, repetition, and invocation in sustaining African aesthetics. This framework is vital for positioning Okpanachi's stylistic strategies within the continuum between oral performance and written text.

Epic and neo-epic theory further illuminate the structuring of Okpanachi's narratives. Comparative scholarship on epic traditions (Hardie; Jensen; Bazimaziki; Tucker) demonstrates that African epics privilege collective memory, cyclical temporality, and communal protagonism. Okpanachi reshapes this legacy by crafting what may be described as a "neo-epic poetics," where collective trauma replaces heroic triumph, and cyclical temporality replaces linear conquest.

Indigenous memory studies provide a third critical perspective. Scholars highlight how memory is sustained through local mnemonic practices, oral repertoires, ritualised performances, and community repositories, as well as institutional infrastructures (Chisita et al.; Reser et al.). This framework clarifies how Okpanachi's poetry functions as both performance and archive, keeping cultural memory alive while resisting state-sanctioned erasures.

Methodologically, the study employs **close textual analysis** as its primary approach. Poems are read closely for their use of repetition, chant, call-and-response, and narrative sequencing, with attention to how these devices reanimate oral traditions and encode indigenous memory. This method allows the analysis to move beyond thematic commentary, foregrounding instead how Okpanachi's formal strategies embody cultural preservation and political resistance.

### **Textual Analysis and Discussion**

#### **1. Okpanachi and the Legacy of Orature in African Poetry**

The enduring presence of orature in African literature reflects a deep-rooted tradition where memory, wisdom, and communal history are transmitted through spoken word, chant, and performance. In African poetics, orality is not simply a medium, it is an epistemology, a way of knowing, feeling, and remembering. Musa Idris Okpanachi's poetry emerges as a modern extension of this tradition. While his work is written and published in English, its architecture is unmistakably oral. His poetic voice draws on ancestral rhythms, mnemonic devices, and performative modes of speech, aligning him with a lineage of African poets, such as Okot

p'Bitek, Niyi Osundare, and Mazisi Kunene, who inscribe orality into the fabric of the written word.

In the African context, orature encompasses genres such as praise poetry, ritual chants, dirges, incantations, epics, and folktales. As theorised by Ruth Finnegan and Isidore Okpewho, orature is not static; it evolves, hybridises, and adapts to new sociopolitical realities while preserving its communal and mnemonic functions. This adaptability is evident in Okpanachi's work, which infuses modern political criticism with the aesthetics of ancestral speech. His poems are not meant only to be read silently but to be **heard, chanted, and echoed**, recreating the experience of oral transmission even in the written medium.

### ***Invocation and the Dialogic Voice***

Okpanachi's dialogic voice emerges through persistent invocation, calling upon forces, presences, and interlocutors beyond the self to generate a layered, responsive poetic world. When the poet addresses twilight as a sacred being in *From the Margins of Paradise's In Praise of the Night*:

**"Al-Lail', the maiden name / Of dark-sweet twilight,"** (From the Margins of Paradise p.7)

The poem adopts the ritual mode of invocation familiar in oral cultures, speaking to cosmological entities as animate presences. This establishes a dialogic relationship in which the poet is not isolated but in conversation with the symbolic forces shaping existence. Similarly, in *"I Speak to the Wall"*, the poet opens with a refrain:

**"I speak to the wall / It will not echo my voice / But it will keep my shadow"** (*The Music of the Dead* p.72)

This is not a passive monologue. It is a dialogic gesture, resonant of **call-and-response** structures in traditional orature. The poet invokes a silent listener, a wall, a grave, the ancestors, suggesting that memory resides not in documents or institutions, but in **embodied, spatial, and ancestral presences**.

In *Tonight*, the line:

**"Let me light you the candle / To find your path,"** (*The Eaters of the Living* p.88)

This illustrates the speaker's ritualistic engagement with another consciousness, guiding and responding simultaneously. The act of lighting a candle becomes a dialogic gesture, echoing oral practices in which speech is performative, interactive, and often ceremonial. Similarly, in *I Speak to the Wall*, the speaker repeatedly addresses a seemingly inanimate audience:

**"I speak to the wall / Because no one else will listen / Without cutting off my tongue"** and **"I speak to the wall / Because walls outlast those / Who write their names / In testament of power."** (*The Music of the Dead* p.72)

Here, the wall becomes both a witness and a surrogate listener, reflecting the oral tradition's capacity to animate the non-human as an audience for ethical, historical, or spiritual truths.

### ***Proverbial Density and Ritual Cadence***

Another key feature of Okpanachi's oral style is his use of proverbial logic and rhythmic density. African oral traditions are rich in proverbs, which serve as compressed repositories of communal wisdom. While Okpanachi rarely uses proverbs verbatim, he often mimics their **philosophical condensation** and **moral tone**. The statement, in *Love and Leave Me*,

**“The heart is foolish: / Love, madness and death / Perfume, poetry and paradise,”** (From the Margins of Paradise p.27)

It reads as a compact philosophical assertion whose cadence mirrors the structure of a proverb, balancing opposites and paradoxes in a ritualised listing that distills emotional truths into memorable form. This syntactic parallelism embodies the mnemonic economy of proverbs.

In *The Constitution*, the iterative phrasing:

**“We shall write the codes / Of pain on your wounds / We shall punish with / Laws written by swords”** and **“We shall engrave new decrees / On faces marked with red-hot iron”** (*The Music of the Dead* p.68)

Here, it adopts an incantatory rhythm that recalls the ritualised delivery of proverbs or ancestral wisdom in oral performance. The repetition of “we shall” functions as a performative and mnemonic device, embedding ethical injunctions within the cadence of the verse. This stylistic strategy, rich in proverbial density and ritualised sound patterns, not only enhances the musicality of the poetry but also aligns it with oral traditions that use rhythm, repetition, and ritual speech to encode communal knowledge and social critique.

### ***Poet as Griot, Witness, and Medium***

Okpanachi's poetry positions the poet as a griot-like figure, one who witnesses societal contradictions and mediates the tensions between lived experience and communal truth. This becomes unmistakable in *Census*, the line:

**“He ignored the sores / And counted the scars”** (From the Margins of Paradise p.24)

In it, the poet exposes the failure of official structures to perceive suffering, functioning instead as the voice that reveals what institutions conceal. The poet becomes a chronicler of historical and social wounds, much like the griots who documented communal struggles and triumphs. Similarly, *Marriage by Internet* illustrates the poet's witness role on a social plane:

**“He had only a piece / of slippery worm and cold dough / In my oven, his kitchen knife / Was blunt and he had no tranquillizer / To cool my boiling blood.”** (*The Eaters of the Living* p.89)

Here, the poet mediates between the chaotic reality of expectations and the cultural scripts surrounding marriage, presenting a vivid record of human behaviour and societal absurdity. In *King of Cemetery*, the speaker observes:

**“The living find they have no rights to die / The guards listen to the anthem of the dead / Eavesdrop on ravishing harps / Witness the vanishing children”** and **“They set cemeteries aflame / To arrange weddings in Hell.”** (*The Music of the Dead* p.96)

These passages reveal the poet's function as both chronicler and moral witness, conveying the tragedies inflicted upon society while ensuring that the memory of the victims persists.

Together, these examples show Okpanachi performing as a griot-like figure, chronicling the private and public spheres with ethical and aesthetic authority, translating lived experience into enduring poetic witness.

## 2. The Neo-Epic Mode: Subverting the Heroic in the Age of Ruin

While Musa Idris Okpanachi's poetry is rooted in oral aesthetics, it simultaneously draws on, and radically reconfigures, the structures of the **epic form**. In traditional African epics, such as *Sundiata* or *Ozidi*, the narrative centres around a heroic figure whose journey embodies communal values, ancestral continuity, and cosmic order. These epics are often oral performances anchored in praise, ritual, and the invocation of gods or ancestors. However, in Okpanachi's work, the **epic tradition is reactivated in the shadow of national betrayal, postcolonial collapse, and mass dispossession**. The outcome is a distinctly **neo-epic form**: a broken, haunted version of the epic, where the heroic journey becomes a lament, and the collective voice replaces the singular hero.

### *Epic Tropes and Their Subversion*

Okpanachi's poetry engages with traditional epic motifs, heroic acts, rulers, and valor, only to subvert them by revealing the destructive and morally ambiguous nature of these figures. In *The Hawkers of Blood*, he writes:

**"We have eaten the apple / Bolted out of Paradise / Invented sins and committed suicide."** (*The Music of the Dead* p.76).

Here, the reference to the biblical fall recasts humans not as heroic pioneers but as flawed agents of destruction. The line in *Love and Leave Me*:

**"I am in exile seeking asylum / From myself,"** (From the Margins of Paradise p.27)

This immediately destabilises the idea of the epic hero as a stable, self-assured figure embarking on purposeful quests. Instead, the speaker's journey is inward, disoriented, and dislocated, presenting a hero who flees rather than conquers.

Equally, in *Marriage by Internet*, the longstanding trope of the hero's long journey, in epics often undertaken for glory or union, is parodied through the protagonist's travel to London for marriage. The journey is not triumphant but humiliating, marked by detention, strip-searching, and the shattering of illusions. Instead of receiving a radiant partner befitting epic destiny, she encounters

*"Mr. Stephen / ... an awkward toothless / Infirm hunchback who could / Hardly walk."* This grotesque anti-climax subverts the epic ideal of union as the culmination of heroic adventure. (*The Eaters of the Living* p.89)

Even the mobilisation of ritual grandeur, "Drums were rolled out... seven white mystic veils", becomes ironic. The epic spectacle masks a profound disillusionment, making the poem a critique of how contemporary fantasies mimic epic structures only to collapse under

modern realities. Thus, both poems deploy epic motifs, quests, grandeur, divine imagery, only to expose their inadequacy in the age of ruin.

### ***Time, History, and the Epic Voice***

Okpanachi's reworking of the epic voice foregrounds the instability of historical continuity and the fragmentation of temporal experience. The lament in *The Nation of Statues*,

**“History has bypassed us / With the new statues,”** (From the Margins of Paradise p.25)

This presents a community abandoned by its own historical narrative, excluded from monumental recognition and denied the heroic commemoration associated with classical epic. Instead of being celebrated, they are forgotten, displaced by manufactured symbols that erase lived experience.

Okpanachi's poetry situates the epic voice in dialogue with both memory and historical consciousness. In *A Tale*, Okpanachi traces the evolution of narrative forms:

**“It was a story / It became a tale / Transform to folktale / Translated to a legend / The legend became a myth / And the myth changed / To human mysteries / The riddles of the hearth / Passed from mouth to ear / Scattered to the lands / Of night and dreams.”** (*The Music of the Dead* p.88).

The poem *Tonight* reformulates temporal depth as vulnerability within an uncertain modern world. The voice assumes a prophetic, quasi-epic tone when declaring:

*“The storms, rains, lightning / And thunder shall be over / When the night passes.”* (*The Eaters of the Living* p.88)

This echoes the epic prophetic register, yet here it foregrounds precarity rather than triumph. The ferryman who will arrive “At the dawn of the day” conjures mythic transition figures (such as Charon), but the “light” is described as “brief,” signaling an erosion of epic certainty about destiny.

### ***The Communal Subject and the Death of the Hero***

Okpanachi's neo-epic foregrounds the community over the individual hero, often exposing the vulnerability and shared suffering of ordinary people. *The Nation of Statues'* haunting declaration:

**“We are the Terra Cotta / Army guarding the dead,”** (From the Margins of Paradise p.25)

In that, there is construction of a vision of communal endurance where the living serve as silent sentinels rather than triumphant heroes. Their purpose is custodial rather than conquering, emphasising a collective identity formed in suffering and memorial duty. In *The Gog and Magog*, the focus is on the devastation inflicted upon communities:

**“Their paunches are the mass graves of the people / Their mouths are where things go in without coming out / Their shit is sold in the open markets / They piss on our heads.”** (*The Music of the Dead* p.80)

The “hero” figure disappears entirely, replaced by systemic oppression that engulfs ordinary lives. The neo-epic thus privileges the communal subject, documenting collective experience and trauma while undermining classical heroism, signaling a profound interrogation of power, violence, and memory in contemporary African society.

In *Thank You*, the speaker positions themselves not as a hero but as a node within a web of relational histories:

*“Our paths have crisscrossed / These many years... like rivers beneath the bridge of time.”*  
(The Eaters of the Living p.92)

The communal metaphor dissolves the heroic ego; identity becomes relational. The gratitude expressed, “Thanks for the gifts of poetry... the pain of the scorpion sting”, suggests that the self is constituted through others, including antagonistic or painful relationships. The heroic self is replaced by a communal, dialogic subject defined through shared temporal exchanges rather than solitary triumph.

The ultimate renunciation, “Let’s go our ways / Farewell unspoken”, is a quiet anti-epic ending. Instead of heroic closure (victory, death, apotheosis), the poem opts for dissolving connection, emphasising the ordinariness of departure over monumental heroism

### 3. Indigenous Memory Structures: Time, Ancestry, and Naming

In African indigenous epistemologies, memory is not merely a psychological faculty or personal archive, it is a **collective, sacred structure** that links the living with the dead, the visible with the unseen, and the past with the present. Time is often conceived as **cyclical** and ancestral, where the present continuously spirals back to meet the unfinished business of the past. Memory is not fixed in written records but carried through ritual, naming, performance, and geography. In Musa Idris Okpanachi’s poetry, this indigenous logic of memory is deeply embedded in both form and content, shaping how trauma, silence, and resistance are narrated.

While Okpanachi’s poetry is overtly political, its undercurrent of **indigenous memory-making** resists linear temporality and Euro-modernist understandings of history. His verses repeatedly summon **ancestral voices**, mark places as sites of memory, and treat language as a ritual medium. In doing so, he reclaims poetic space as a vessel of African remembrance, mourning, and witness.

#### *Cyclical Temporality*

Time in Okpanachi’s poetry is **non-linear, ancestral, and cyclical**, echoing African conceptions of history. In *Remembered*, cyclical temporality is expressed through the **interweaving of past and present in intimate memory**. The speaker reflects:

“I never know I would / One day lie so close / To you like a baby / In your arms / Because you were once / A star far away / In your own sky.” (*The Music of the Dead* p.74).

Here, time collapses; the past (“once a star far away”) is continuously present in the lived moment of memory. The poem evokes **the recursive nature of personal and emotional memory**, where formative experiences are revisited and reshaped, demonstrating how cycles of remembrance shape identity and relational consciousness.

In *Remember*, the poet presents memory as a **recurrent, shaping force** that connects past experiences to the present. Lines such as,

“Where memory is pain / I am a sadist / Where it is a harvest / I reap,” (The Eaters of the Living p.93)

It illustrates the cyclical nature of personal and emotional history: memory is both a source of suffering and of renewal. The act of recollection is not linear; it loops across time, intertwining lived experience with the ethical and emotional weight of remembering. The speaker urges the addressee to “Wear my memory / In your heart / Like a birthmark,” suggesting that memory functions as a **permanent, cyclical imprint** upon identity, continuously resurfacing and influencing relational and social consciousness.

Similarly, *Taste of the World* explores human experience as a cycle of gain, loss, and learning:

“I have tasted tomorrow / A glass window on the world / The foretaste of indelible / Traces of dream.” (From the Margin of Paradise p.19).

This anticipatory vision of “tomorrow” underscores how memory and experience loop across temporal boundaries. The poem positions lived experience as a continuum, where the past informs present actions and the present prefigures future possibilities. The cyclical temporality in these poems captures the interplay between cosmic and human rhythms, linking lived life to larger temporal cycles of nature and consciousness.

### ***Naming as Ritual and Accountability***

In *You Write the Calendars*, naming is intertwined with **recording historical and social realities**. The line, “You write the calendars / Of death on the doorsteps of your lovers,” (The Music of the Dead p. 91).

This underscores the ethical responsibility inherent in naming: it is both documentation and moral testimony. By inscribing acts of death in a personal and relational context, the poem demonstrates that naming is **not neutral but a moral and social act**, holding both perpetrators and witnesses accountable. The “doorsteps of your lovers” situates this naming in intimate and familiar spaces, showing that acts of accountability traverse private and public domains.

In *Rabi*, naming becomes **intimate and ethical**, tied to memory, longing, and relational responsibility. The poet writes:

“My tears / Is the ink with which / I write you now / On the peel of my edited heart.” (The Eaters of the Living p.98)

Here, naming is not administrative but affective: it carries the weight of **emotional and ethical responsibility**, encoding the presence, absence, and moral significance of the beloved. The repeated references to the addressee, “You, who intoxicate me / You, who possess me / You, whose beauty / Perfumes my thoughts”, show how naming anchors memory, identity, and relational ethics. Through this poetic naming, memory and accountability are inscribed in the **heart and soul**, rather than in official records.

Also, *Taste of the World* explores human experience as a cycle of gain, loss, and learning:

“I have tasted tomorrow / A glass window on the world / The foretaste of indelible / Traces of dream.” (*From the Margin of Paradise p.19*).

This anticipatory vision of “tomorrow” underscores how memory and experience loop across temporal boundaries. The poem positions lived experience as a continuum, where the past informs present actions and the present prefigures future possibilities. The cyclical temporality in these poems captures the interplay between cosmic and human rhythms, linking lived life to larger temporal cycles of nature and consciousness.

In *Census*, the act of counting and naming is ritualised:

“He counted the dust, the skies / Over our heads, rats, / The ants, bedbugs and lice, / He counted the seven names of the beasts.” (*From the Margin of Paradise p.24*).

The enumerator does not merely quantify; he ritualistically assigns names to both human and non-human entities, reflecting a cosmology in which everything is accountable within a shared ethical and spiritual framework. Naming here becomes a mode of preserving memory, acknowledging presence, and assigning significance to otherwise invisible forces.

### ***Ancestral Presence and Ethical Witness***

In *My Father’s House*, ancestral presence is central to the poem’s ethical critique. The speaker invokes the figure of the father and other authority figures, describing them as complicit in systemic violence:

“My father in Heaven / Who abandons us in abattoirs / In the hands of new butchers... / The judge who miscarries justice / The hangman who unfurls the noose / The tailor who sews the shroud.” (*The Music of the Dead p.92*).

Here, the ancestral figure is both **a witness to suffering and a symbol of moral failure**. The poem situates memory within the framework of ethical accountability: the dead and the forebears are not absent but **actively observing the consequences of injustice**, thereby serving as a standard against which contemporary actions are measured.

Whereas, *Marriage by Internet* similarly foregrounds **ancestral presence** through familial and ritual interventions:

“Mother preached the virtue / Of obedience to parents / Father whispered into my ears / Endless streams of prayers / And blessings of the ancestors / Mascot, amulets and holy / Water of luck.” (*The Eaters of the Living p.89*)

Here, ancestors are **active moral agents**, their blessings and protective rituals mediating human experience and guiding ethical conduct. Memory, ritual, and moral responsibility converge: the poet’s experiences of marriage, travel, and identity are continuously witnessed and ethically regulated by ancestral presence.

. In *Message from Mother*, the ancestral voice is both guiding and commanding:

“She said when / Next I give birth to you / You must do my wish / I said I would choose / Another mother.” (*From the Margin of Paradise* p.22).

This poem situates memory as an ethical obligation; the mother’s words are ancestral directives that carry moral and spiritual weight. The speaker negotiates between personal desire and ancestral expectation, highlighting the tension between individual agency and inherited responsibility.

### **Memory, Place, and Poetic Space**

In *I Speak to the Wall*, memory is **embedded in physical and symbolic space**, turning walls into repositories of collective experience. The speaker declares:

“I speak to the wall / Because walls have / Secret ears of shadows,” (*The Music of the Dead* p.72).

This portrays walls as **silent witnesses to oppression and injustice**. Memory becomes spatially situated: the walls “wear / Graffiti as the constitution / Of the oppressed,” suggesting that poetic space, here, the urban or constructed environment, functions as a canvas for remembering and resisting power. The repeated refrain, “I speak to the wall / Because no one else will listen,” emphasises that memory and testimony must sometimes inhabit unconventional spaces, where the act of poetic inscription becomes a form of ethical and historical intervention.

In *Dossiers of Flowers*, the poet constructs memory and emotion through **cultivated, symbolic spaces**:

“You led me through / The labyrinths of flowers / Writing my names / On the perfumed petals.” (*The Eaters of the Living* p.84)

Here, gardens and flowers become **poetic spaces of memory, intimacy, and ritual**, where the act of inscription, writing one’s name on petals, links memory to relational experience. The poet also portrays time and memory as entwined with space:

“You are the stretch of future / Cut in two by the savage / Claws of Time / A serpent treacherously / Coiled on the string / Of my heart.” (*The Eaters of the Living* p.84)

Space, time, and memory converge, emphasising that **poetic space is an ethical and emotional arena**, mediating experience and sustaining memory within tangible and symbolic locations.

*Flower in the Rain* also foregrounds spatialised memory:

“Keep me in your eyes / Carry me on your brow / Implant me in your pupils / Hide me in your heart from yourself.” (*From the Margin of Paradise* p.42).

Here, memory occupies both bodily and relational spaces. The poet embeds personal memory within intimate human gestures, creating a space where presence, absence, and longing intersect. Poetic space becomes a container for remembering, preserving, and interacting with experiences, emotions, and ancestral traces.

#### 4. Sound, Voice, and Poetic Performance

In African oral traditions, **sound is meaning**, a carrier of memory, a call to witness, and a vehicle of communal affirmation. Poetry, in this context, is never a silent artifact; it is **a performed experience**, alive with rhythm, cadence, and breath. Musa Idris Okpanachi's poetry harnesses this dimension of performance even within the written word. His use of sound patterns, repetition, chant, alliteration, antiphony, and strategic silence, reveals a deep commitment to the **acoustic aesthetics** of African orature. This section examines how Okpanachi's poetic voice enacts not only resistance but also **re-echo**, a sonic mourning that insists on being heard.

##### *The Performed Voice: Echoes of the Griot and the Priest*

*Africa in My Soul* is the clearest example of a performed voice resembling the griot, the praise-singer, and the cultural historian. The poem assumes an authoritative, declarative tone, speaking not merely as an individual but as a custodian of memory:

*"Africa of my birth and death... the cradle of civilisation, the home of the gods."* (The Eaters of the Living p.102)

This sweeping invocation parallels the griot's epic recitation of origins, genealogies, and cultural identity. Yet the speaker also adopts the ritual authority of the priest, sanctifying the landscape through solemn affirmations: *"I love the sermons of her rivers, the enigma of her space."* The word "sermons" explicitly frames nature as a sacred text, positioning the speaker as interpreter of divine messages.

In *The Constitution*, Okpanachi constructs a voice that speaks with priestly authority and punitive ritual force. The speaker declares:

**"We shall write the codes / Of pain on your wounds / We shall punish with / Laws written by swords."** (*The Music of the Dead* p.68).

Here, the repeated **"We shall..."** functions as a ritualised chorus of power, a collective voice that performs domination through its very cadence. The incantatory structure reinforces collective witness, while the fusion of legal language with instruments of violence, "codes... on your wounds," "laws written by swords", dramatises the brutality of state authority. The performed voice becomes both juridical and punitive, echoing the roles of griot and priest even as it exposes the violence underlying institutional decrees.

Similarly, *Children of the Night* asserts a collective, performative presence:

*"We are the super citizens / We besieged the land / We conquered the clan"* (*From the Margin of Paradise* p.55).

The text performs communal testimony, its sound patterns echoing oral performance.

##### *Repetition, Alliteration, and Ritual Form*

Okpanachi consistently employs repetition, alliteration, and parallelism to structure meaning and reinforce mnemonic effect. In *Music of the Dead*, *"The Perfume and the Fire"* illustrates this technique through its ritualised anaphora:

**“I am a lone flower... / I am the fresh crisp shoots of dates... / I am a lone leaf...”**  
(*Music of the Dead* p.71)

The recurring “**I am...**” creates a rhythmic pattern that anchors the speaker’s shifting identities in a steady, incantatory cadence. Rather than violence, the repetition performs a lyric self-assertion, allowing the persona to redefine the self through a sequence of metaphoric transformations. This patterned unfolding of identity mirrors Okpanachi’s broader poetic strategy, where reiteration becomes both a mnemonic device and a ritualised performance of voice.

In *From the Margin of Paradise, The Legion of Cain* employs repetition to dramatise power:

“They write the laws / With golden edges of the sword / In the blood of the innocent / Across the throne.” (*From the Margins of Paradise* p.62)

The repeated syntax mirrors ritual incantation, reinforcing communal memory and sonic intensity.

*Love Puppet* uses repetition structurally to mimic the strings of the puppet metaphor. The poem repeats syntactical patterns:

“The puppet master of love / The robber of my heart / The high priest / Of my feelings / The governor / Of my emotions” (*The Eaters of the Living* p.97)

It creates rhythmic parallelism. The anaphoric “The...” heightens the ceremonial tone, as though listing titles in a ritual hierarchy. The command “*Pull the strings / Of my heart / And let me / Dance to the tune / Of your Mind*” enacts ritual submission; the short, clipped lines mimic breath, creating an oral quality reminiscent of performance poetry.

### ***Antiphony and the Implied Response***

Antiphonal call-and-response structures, foundational to African oral performance, are subtly inscribed in Okpanachi’s verse. Though often written in a single voice, his poems imply a respondent, a listener, a communal presence. Consider “The Constitution”:

“We shall write the constitution/ On ruins of falling walls/ With embers from the mouths/ Of dragons and tongues of fire.” (*Music of the Dead* p.68)

Each line begins with the repeated ritual formulation and functions like a public declamation, a kind of chant that invites the audience to affirm, question, or condemn. The cadence implies a congregation or witness beyond the page. In a live setting, such lines would almost certainly elicit echo or response, suggesting that the poem contains within it the possibility of performance.

In *She Came*, antiphony appears not as human dialogue but as echoing description that suggests the environment is answering the speaker. The repeated structure, “She came...”

“She came out of a river... She came out of snow... She came rising” *Love Puppet* uses repetition structurally to mimic the strings of the puppet metaphor. The poem repeats syntactical patterns:

“The puppet master of love / The robber of my heart / The high priest / Of my feelings / The governor / Of my emotions” (The Eaters of the Living p.87)

In *Soul mate*, the antiphonal dynamic is further explored through metaphoric inversion, where the speaker’s voice and the beloved’s presence exist in mutual reflection and refracted response:

“You are the road; I am the journey / You are the path; I am the traveller / You are the earth; I am the life / You are the river; I am the boat” (*From the Margins of Paradise p.39*)

Here, the structure of paired metaphors enacts a responsive dialogue between self and other, suggesting that identity, experience, and emotion are relationally co-constituted. The speaker’s utterances call for recognition, and the implied response is embedded in the continuous relational mapping of self onto the other. This formal strategy mirrors traditional oral antiphony, wherein the response is not only performed aloud but is conceptually enacted through metaphorical and symbolic resonance.

It creates rhythmic parallelism. The anaphoric “The...” heightens the ceremonial tone, as though listing titles in a ritual hierarchy. The command “*Pull the strings / Of my heart / And let me / Dance to the tune / Of your Mind*” enacts ritual submission; the short, clipped lines mimic breath, creating an oral quality reminiscent of performance poetry.

### ***Strategic Silence and Poetic Breathing***

From *From the Margins of Paradise*, *The Night of Laughter* exemplifies how silence punctuates narrative:

“Maybe I was the only one who heard the universal wails that filled the world that night.” (*From the Margins of Paradise p.7*).

The ellipses and fragmented lines compel readers to inhabit the breath of the poem, making the acoustic experience ethical as well as aesthetic.

*Tonight* uses silence as ritual suspension. The repeated insistence:

“I shall not sleep tonight” anchors the poem in a vigil, a state defined by waiting, quietude, and nightlong contemplation. Silence surrounds imagery such as:

“*Her breath the first breath of life / Perfumes my nostrils,*” (The Eaters of the Living p.88)

Here soft imagery suggests hushed stillness rather than dramatic sound. The speaker’s repeated searches, “Where is she... Where is Midas”, are not answered, and the absence of response becomes a form of strategic silence, heightening the poem’s yearning. Silence culminates in the closing resolve:

“*I shall not sleep tonight until I search / within myself the image of my life,*” (The Eaters of the Living p.88) where introspection is framed as a silent ritual journey.

Similarly, in *My Dear*, strategic silence punctuates expressions of devotion and vulnerability:

“I shed tears / Sacrificing / My heart to yours / I strip wishing your charm / Would cover me / Still I am only a speck at the small / Ends of your binoculars” (*Music of the Dead* p.90)

The fragmented lines, with their deliberate spacing, create a cadence that mirrors hesitation, longing, and the limitations of human expression. The silences between phrases function as emotional punctuation, allowing the reader to “breathe” within the text and contemplate the gap between desire and fulfillment. Both poems showcase how silence and lineation operate together to modulate intensity, offering a subtle but powerful performative dimension to the poetic voice.

Together, these poems illustrate how silence and breath shape poetic meaning, embody emotional vulnerability, and intensify performance beyond vocal sound.

Across all three collections, Okpanachi’s poetics dramatises the intersection of oral performance, memory, and resistance. The speaker functions as witness, prophet, and griot. Repetition, alliteration, antiphony, and strategic silence coalesce to transform the poem into a living archive, where historical memory, political critique, and ancestral presence converge

### Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that Musa Idris Okpanachi’s poetry is more than political testimony; it is a deliberate reactivation of orality, neo-epic structuring, and indigenous memory systems as tools of cultural preservation and resistance. By mobilising repetition, chant, invocation, and communal voice, his verse transforms oral procedures into textual strategies that resist historical amnesia and sustain collective remembrance.

In reconfiguring the epic mode, Okpanachi displaces the singular hero with the collective, reframes triumph as mourning, and privileges cyclical temporality over linear conquest. This “neo-epic poetics” situates his work within a broader African literary tradition that fuses performance, memory, and ethics, while also extending the possibilities of protest poetry. His poems function simultaneously as art and archive, ensuring that ancestral voices and silenced histories remain active within the postcolonial present.

The significance of this analysis lies in how it highlights Okpanachi’s contribution to African poetics: his work exemplifies how contemporary poets adapt oral forms and epic logic to articulate resistance and reimagine memory for new generations. In doing so, this study also addresses a critical gap in scholarship by foregrounding the methodological role of indigenous memory technologies in African poetry. Future research might extend this framework to other poets of the third generation, or explore how digital platforms further reshape the continuum between oral performance and written text.

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**AN ANALYSIS OF EVALUATIVE CATEGORIES OF REPORTING VERBS IN UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH PROJECTS OF STUDENTS OF ENGLISH AND LINGUISTICS AT FEDERAL UNIVERSITY DUTSE**

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**Abstract**

Reporting verbs (RVS) are crucial aspects of citation in academic writing that allows the writer to engage critically with existing researches, conveying their thoughts, attitudes, stance and evaluation towards the cited materials. Using Hyland's (2002) framework, the study examines the deployment of reporting verbs in signalling critical stance in the literature review sections of selected long essays of undergraduate students at the Department of English and Linguistics Federal University Dutse. A total of 15 literature reviews between 2022 and 2024 sessions were collected and analysed both qualitatively and quantitatively following Hyland's model classification. The reporting verbs used by the students were classified according to their categories and the predominant evaluative categories were identified. The findings show that the students were unable to use all the three categories of reporting verbs outlined in Hyland (2002). The discourse acts had the highest frequency (130), followed by research acts (52) while cognition acts recorded zero frequency (0%). It also reveals that factive verbs under discourse acts were the predominant evaluative categories of reporting verbs in the data. The analysis reveals that the students possessed limited knowledge of the functional features of reporting verbs and they are not aware of the critical stance of reporting verbs to establish academic voice.

**Key Words:** Reporting Verbs, Critical Stance, Research Project, Literature Review

**Introduction**

Academic writing is a complex discourse that requires authors and writers to navigate various linguistic and rhetorical strategies to convey their ideas, attitudes stances and evaluations. One of the most important requirements for graduating from tertiary institutions is the completion of a research project which is an aspect of academic writing like term papers and journal articles. Academic writing serves as a crucial assessment tool for evaluating a student's understanding of discipline's discourse conventions, ultimately influencing their degree outcomes. As an academic writing, it requires students to engage critically with existing researches, by familiarizing themselves with the author's viewpoint and the viewpoint of other authors, questioning and challenging explanations. As literature review chapters is crucial in academic writing, so also is the effective and efficient critical stance signalling. It enables students to demonstrate their understanding, evaluation, and synthesis of existing knowledge. It also enables them to establish their academic voice, credibility, and authority associated with a particular source or research findings.

One crucial aspect of academic writing is the use of reporting verbs which enable authors and writers to represent and engage with the work of others. While citing authors, writers often use reporting verbs to present, argue or critique other writers' opinions or claims and express it in their own word (Hyland, 1999). A reporting verb is simply a verb belonging to a class of verbs that convey action. It is use to respond to others' research and report their result in the

academic genre. Reporting verbs are grammatical devices that writers use to express their stance in their studies and connecting or aligning themselves with the readers. It helps to convey the writer's attitude, stance and evaluation whether positive, negative, or neutral towards the cited authors' ideas and to clarify the nature of the relationship between the writer and the original source (Afful, 2007; Hyland, 2002; Swales, 1990; Thompson & Ye, 1991). Reporting verbs vary in their strength; for instance, the verb *suggesting* is different from the verb *discussing*. The two verbs are distinctive pictures of how an author perceives and studies their results. The reporting verbs allow the authors to demonstrate their responsibility for making the statement (Charles, 2006). Due to this, Bloch (2010) points out that it is usually hard for a non-native English speakers to select appropriate reporting verbs.

Students often struggle with the appropriate reporting verbs to employ to make their work coherent and persuasive. Moreover, as has been observed, majority of undergraduate students are not aware of the stance signalling functions of reporting verbs in engaging in critical evaluation of existing studies. Even though, studies have highlighted the significance of reporting verbs in academic writing, (Hyland, 2000; Thompson & Ye, 1991), few studies have focused especially on their role in signalling critical stance in students' literature reviews (Loan & Pramoolsook 2015; Manan & Noor, (2014). Furthermore, most existing research has concentrated on expert academic writing, writings of postgraduate students, neglecting the challenges faced by beginners' writers such as undergraduate students. Even among Nigerian scholars, it appears there is a scarcity of research on reporting verbs despite its significance in projecting researcher's critical stance on positions of works they are reviewing.

The study therefore examines the extent to which undergraduate students of English and Linguistics particularly those in Federal University Dutse, use reporting verbs to signal their stance regarding the positions that authors they are reviewing their works have taken on a particular line of argument. To undertake this task, the study adopts Hyland's (2002) categories and subcategories of reporting verbs to serve as the theoretical framework. The study examines the extent to which undergraduate students of English and Linguistics in Federal University Dutse use reporting verbs to signal critical stance in the literature review of their research projects, To achieve this aim, the researcher classifies the reporting verbs according to their categories and evaluative functions, and also identifies the predominant evaluative categories of the reporting verbs in the literature review of the selected projects.

Due to the importance of academic writing for students, this study serves as insight into the use and classification of reporting verbs according to the functions they perform in the review of literature.

## **Literature Review**

The verbs employed to introduce citations in academic writing have been extensively studied in the context of reporting, with a significant body of research examining their role in citation practices. These verbs are essential for indicating the source of information, attributing idea, convey stance, synthesize information and develop arguments to specific authors, and maintaining academic integrity in writing. Besides the obvious benefit of giving credit to earlier studies, it conveys the writer's attitude towards the source materials, allowing writers to analyse and interpret others' works and build upon existing research. According to Hyland (2005), reporting verbs are one of the linguistic strategies used by writers to convey their opinions and build rapport with readers. That is to say, it shows writers' evaluation on the cited information either to agree, disagree, criticize or remain neutral.

Swales and Feak (2004) go further, showing a distinction between the word 'say' and 'claim'. They argue that some reporting verbs have a tendency to be more evaluative than others. That

is to say, substituting 'claim' for 'say' when citing a source can diminish or downplay the significance of the cited information, giving it less emphasis than intended. This shows that the choice of reporting verbs in academic writing show something more than its lexical meaning.

Reporting verbs are typically classified into several categories based on their semantic meaning, strength, and nuance. These classifications can overlap, and the nuances of reporting verbs can vary depending on context and discipline.

Thompson and Ye (1991) categorize reporting verbs based on their semantic differences, which they believed serve two primary functions: denotation and evaluation. Within the denotation category, they distinguished between 'author acts' and 'writer acts', depending on who is credited with the responsibility for the process. 'Author acts' refer to the original author's perspective, whereas 'writer acts' are intentionally created by the writer for rhetorical purposes, offering a distinct point of view that may not necessarily reflect the original author's perspective.

Building on Thompson and Ye's earlier work, Hyland developed an influential categorization framework for reporting verbs, grouping them into three primary functional categories. The first category, "Research Acts", encompasses verbs that describe real world experimental activities, typically found in statement of findings. The second category "Cognitive Acts", comprises verbs related to the researcher's mental processes. The third category, "Discourse Acts", focuses on linguistic activities, highlighting the verbal expression of cognitive and research activities.

Hyland (2002) further refines his categorization of reporting verbs by dividing each types into subcategories based on their evaluative functions in the discourse. He also explored the writer's stance in citation, which can be supportive, tentative, critical or neutral towards the reported claims. By choosing reporting verbs strategically, writers can convey their commitment and perspective, potentially attributing a position to the original authors.

Writers or students, who are English as a second language users, often encounter challenges with verb choice in terms of accuracy and appropriacy with reporting verb usage particularly with its tense and syntactic form. This leads to overusing of familiar verbs, struggling to learn new words or using verbs without considering their impact. Hyland (1994) found that English as a second language students often struggle with limited repertoire, leading to register confusion or inappropriate tone in their essays. They emphasize that the choice of words affects the degree of certainty and attitude towards the information cited (Hyland and Milton, 1997). This suggest that students who are learning English as a second language often have limited range of vocabulary to choose from because of the cognitive and experiential factors that affect how they learn and use words. This also means that the specific words a writer chooses can show how confident they are about the information and what attitude they have toward it. That is to say, when choosing a lexical item, writers need to consider how their tone will have impact on the reader and how sure they are about the information.

Wette (2010) notes that despite instruction, English second language students found it challenging to grasp subtle differences in reporting verbs meaning, instead they use comfortable one. This means English second language students found it difficult to understand the differences between the meanings of reporting verbs, instead they use familiar one. Therefore, instruction or teaching alone may not be sufficient for mastering advanced reporting verbs aspects but students need extensive reading, unlimited repertoire, practice and feedback from instructor.

Ramoroka (2014) investigates the use of reporting verbs in essays written by non-native undergraduate students from the department of media studies and education in Botswana. The study focuses on the range of reporting verbs used and how they were used in citing the writer's information. The study consists of 40 essays written by students from the aforementioned department. The study reveals that participants used reporting verbs and citations sparingly, taking a neutral stance toward cited sources and avoiding strong opinions.

Taiwo (2016) investigates participants stance-taking in Nigerian job and career online discussion groups focusing on the use of cognitive verbs *think*. The study explored the frequency of the use of the verb *think*, its common position, its clusters and some typical functions it performs. The findings show that while the expression of cognition through the use of the verb *think* in the corpus may be similar to what obtains in English as a mother tongue speech context in terms of frequency of occurrence, its syntactic positioning and clusters mirror the patterns typical of some major Nigerian languages. The study also found that the peculiarities of the Computers Mediated Communication (CMC) mode influence the clusters the verb takes in the discussions. The study therefore concludes that the use of *think* for cognition in online communication is shaped by the peculiarities of the Nigerian sociolinguistics context as well as the CMC context.

Swear and Kalajahi (2019) highlight significant challenges faced by postgraduate students at Technology University. The study analysing a Small corpus of three master's theses from engineering students. The study found that students tend to used factive verb rather than non-factive verbs struggle to employ contrasting verbs. The study shows that students have limited critical engagement with the subject matter.

Wen and Pramoolsook (2021) compare the use of reporting verbs between bachelor's essay and master's thesis literature review chapters of Chinese English major, the study consist of 30 bachelor's essay and 30 master's thesis. Based on Hyland's (2002) classification of reporting verbs framework, the study revealed that the undergraduate writers used fewer and narrower range of reporting verbs when compared to the master student writers. Additionally, both groups preferred the use of Research and Discourse Acts reporting verbs than Cognition Acts reporting verbs. In terms of evaluation functions, undergraduate student writers showed their preference towards non – factive reporting verbs and master students writers used more factive reporting verbs.

Farinde and Omolaiye (2023) explore a contrastive analysis of reporting verbs usage in English and Okpameri. The study generated Okpameri data from text instrument administered to SS3 students in Okpameri linguistic environment and the participants observation also adopted for data collection. English data were gotten from the English grammar texts. The findings show that the two languages are grammatically marked for reporting verbs, but the usage of these reporting verbs differs. While reporting verbs in English have unlimited vocabulary choices, reporting verbs in Okpameri have limited vocabulary choices. Also, English reporting verbs are morphologically realized for tense and number, but this is not so in Okpameri as Okpameri reporting verbs are not morphologically inflected. Moreover, the use of English reporting verbs is context-based, but this is not so in Okpameri because the reporting verbs 'ai' in Okpameri for instance, is used to suggest that the speaker has given information, whereas in the real sense of it, the speaker intends to give an order or issues query. The study therefore, suggests that English language experts should adopt systematic approach to the teaching of reporting verbs as this will broaden the knowledge of Okpameri ESL learners. The present study is dealing with reporting verbs in research projects of students of English and Linguistics Department in Federal University Dutse. The revelation of the various studies have confirmed that both undergraduate and

postgraduate students possessed low awareness to use reporting verbs during the process of composing their project and thesis and this shows that they have limited critical engagement. Therefore, proper investigation and recommendation be given so that writers can become familiar with the lexical features and rhetorical functions of reporting verbs and then raise the awareness of using reporting verbs appropriately and effectively throughout the whole process of academic writing.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Several frameworks for analysing reporting verbs have been widely discussed in the literature. Notable models include Swales and Feak's (2004) reporting verbs typology, Hyland's (2002) classification of reporting verbs and models developed by Thamos and Hawes (1994), Thompson and Ye (1991) and Coffin (2009). These frameworks have been applied to investigate reporting verbs within single disciplines, across disciplines and across cultures, providing valuable insights into their usage and functions. The theoretical framework for the study is anchored on Hyland's (2002) categories of reporting verbs. The framework is adopted due to its advantages in terms of convenience, comprehensive, applicability and effectiveness in categorizing reporting verbs which includes both the author's and writer's evaluative judgments, containing the key factors in reporting process of academic writing.

Hyland (2002) categorizes reporting verbs into three primary types based on their functions:

1. Research Acts verbs represent experimental activities or actions carried out in the real world. The verbs express acceptance, judgment or commentary on research findings. This category is further divided into two subcategories.

- a. Findings Acts: verbs convey acceptance such as (show, confirm, demonstrate) rejection (ignore, fail, overlook) or neutrality (acquire, find, observe).
- b. Procedures Acts: verbs describe research methods without evaluative connotation (examine, analyse, explore). (Hyland, 1999, 2002).

2. The cognitive Acts verbs reflect the researcher's mental processes. These processes can be expressed in the form of positive and mental attitudes, tentative view and critical stance. This category is classified into four subcategories.

- a. Positive attitude: Accepting information such as (agree, understand, concur).
- b. Tentative attitude: Expressing uncertainty such as (believe, suppose, doubt).
- c. Critical stance: challenging or disagreeing such as (disagree, dispute, not think).
- d. Neutral attitude: reflecting or considering such as (reflect, anticipate, and conceive).

3. Discourse Acts verbs convey an evaluation of cited materials. It enables the writers to either take responsibility for their interpretation, conveying their uncertainty or attributing a qualification to the author. This category is sub-divided into three types:

- a. Doubt: expressed through tentative verbs (suggest, indicate) and critical verbs: signalling uncertainty or critique such as (fail to account, exaggerate).
- b. Assurance: convey using non-factive verbs: indicating confidence and citation such as (state, describe, define, surprise, report) and factive verbs such as (explain, affirm, argue).
- c. Counters: utilizing doubt verbs to objects a citation such as (critique, challenge, deny, question) (Pramoolsook, 2015, Hyland, 2002)

### **Research design**

The research design employed for this study are quantitative and qualitative approaches. The data were manually analysed qualitatively by classifying the reporting verbs according to their categories and evaluative functions. Additionally, a quantitative analysis was conducted to identify the predominant evaluative categories of reporting verbs in the literature review of the selected projects.

### **Method of data collection**

To generate data for the study, 15 undergraduate projects were collected from the Department of English and Linguistics Federal University Dutse. The projects selected covered the last three academic sessions; that is, from 2022 to 2024 to ensure currency. This sample size falls within the optimal range for inference, as suggested by Thompson (2011). The study focused on the literature review of these projects because it provides a comprehensive evaluation of existing research, highlighting gaps and areas for further investigation (Hartley, 2008). Moreover, literature review extensively employ reporting verbs, making it a rich source of data.

### **Analytical framework**

To analyse the reporting verbs in the students' literature review, Hyland's (2002) three main categories of reporting verbs were adopted. They are Research Acts, Cognition Acts and Discourse Acts. These verbs are identified and analysed following the theoretical framework for the study.

### **Data analysis procedure**

The research projects were collected and read each samples twice after which the reporting verb were identified and classified according to their categories and evaluative functions in a tabula form. Afterwards, the predominant evaluative categories of the reporting verbs were identified.

### **Data Presentation and Analysis**

To analyse the critical stance signalling of reporting verbs in the literature review of the selected projects, the first step was to identify, calculate instances of reporting verbs in the data and classified them according to their categories.

### **Examples 1 to 3 illustrate the predominant evaluative of reporting verbs in Discourse Acts.**

#### **Example. 1**

Arthur (1996) *defined* stylistics as a branch of linguistics that studies styles, especially in works of literature. (PRJ, 4).

#### **Example. 2**

Kaufman (1999, p14-15) *states* "the central job of comparative historical Linguistics is the identification of group of genetically related languages - - - [and] the reconstruction of their ancestors. (PRJ, 1).

#### **Example.3**

Van Dijk (1988 p, 2) *asserted* that discourse is not simply an isolated textual or dialogue structure, rather it is a complex communication event that also embodies a social context, featuring participants (and their properties) as well as production and reception process. (PRJ, 11).

### Examples 1 to 3 illustrate the least predominant evaluative of reporting verbs in Research Acts.

#### Example.1

Ruth (1976) *says* that the emotional tones, pitch change, dramatic gesture, facial expressions, vocal expressiveness, rhythm of delivery, melody, pause-effects which the reciter can bring into play in the course of his performance are often lost completely in the written version which has no life phonological thetic possibilities (PRJ, 13).

#### Example.2

Halliday (1985, p25) *sees* systemic functional linguistic as "a framework for describing language in use in a way that takes account of its dual nature as both social interaction and symbolic meaning" (PRJ, 8).

#### Example.3

Ayeomoni (2004, p199) *concluded* that "it is obvious from the analysis of the political speeches \_ \_ \_ that the language of the political elites in Nigerian is more often than not exhibiting some unique features which renders it a variety of languages" (PRJ, 3).

**Table 1: Classification of reporting verbs Identified in the Studied Projects**

Acts	Sub-Categories %	Sub-Division %
<b>Research 52 (24.41%)</b>	Findings 47 (22.07%) Procedures 5 (2.35%)	Factive 5 (2.35%) Counter – Factive (0.94%) Non-Factive 42 (19.72%)
<b>Cognition 0 (0%)</b>	Positive 0 (0%) Critical 0 (0%) Tentative 0 (0%) Neutral 0 (0%)	
<b>Discourse 130 (61.03%)</b>	Doubt 10 (4.69%) Assurance 120 (56.34%) Counters 0 (0%)	Tentative 10 (4.69%) Critical 0 (0%) Factive 73 (34.27%) Non-Factive 47 (22.07%)

At the end, a total of 213 reporting verbs were recorded and 31 did not show any features of reporting verbs i.e. "according to". However, based on Hyland's (2002) classification of reporting verbs, the Discourse Acts had the highest frequency of 130, representing more than half (61.03%) of the total reporting verbs identified in the data, followed by Research Acts with a quarter occurrence 52, representing (24.41%) of the data. The least was Cognition Acts with zero occurrence, representing (0%). This shows that Discourse Acts were more employed than Research Acts and the students tended to use Discourse Acts to report verbal expression of research activities and attributing a qualification to the author.

Regarding the evaluative functions of reporting verbs, Assurance had the highest frequency of 120 with a (56.34%) while doubt had 10 with a (4.69%). As for the counters, (0%) was recorded. In addition as sub- division in assurance, the factive (34.27%) were higher than non-factive (22.07%) while doubt recorded (4.69%) and counters (0%). As for Research Acts, findings which covered a quarter (22.07%) of the total data was higher than procedures (2.35%). Likewise, sub-division in findings that is, non- factive had the highest of (19.72%)

and factive (2.35%) while counter-factive was (0%). Finally, Cognition Acts was the least in the rank with (0%). The findings reveal that the students were more inclined to verbally report the claims of other researchers to establish the credibility of their arguments and situated their work within a specific knowledge in the field. This can be seen under assurance, the students preferred to use factive (34.27%) to non-factive (22.07%) which revealed that they tend to report and accept the previous researcher's information. While in findings, the students preferred to use non-factive to factive to report the previous information neutrally, giving no clear signal to the previous researcher's information. It can be concluded that the students preference for non-factive in Research Acts enabled them comment on cited sources in a neutral manner, conveying their stance on the reported information while acknowledging prior research without imposing their personal judgment. On the other hand, the analysis also showed that these students often took a clear position on the cited sources favoring factive reporting verbs. This suggests that they presented research findings and backed their claims by demonstrating strong agreement with the original authors' idea. Finally, Cognition Acts which accounted for (0%) was not employed by the students. This suggests that the students were not aware of the Cognition Acts or avoid direct disagreement with previous researchers by refraining from it. Instead, they employed Research Acts and Discourse Acts to interact with existing research, acknowledging prior studies and contributing to ongoing academic discussion.

To answer research question 2, the predominant evaluative categories of reporting verbs were tabulated in table 2 below.

**Table 2: Predominant evaluative categories of reporting verbs in the literature review of the selected projects.**

Research Acts	Frequency	%	Discourse Acts	Frequency	%
Non-Factive	42	19.72	Factive	73	34.27 %

Table 2 reveals the predominant categories of reporting verbs in the data. The table shows that factive verb in Discourse Acts were more employed than non-factive verb in Research Acts. While factive verbs had a frequency of 73, non-factive had 42, resulting in (34.27%) and (19.72%) respectively. This means, the students were more inclined to reporting verb discourse in assurance to express a factive stance.

**Table 3: Frequency Distribution of the Identified Factive Verbs in the Projects**

<b>Factive Verb</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Define</b>	26	36
<b>State</b>	22	30
<b>Asserted</b>	10	14
<b>Describe</b>	5	7
<b>Emphasize</b>	4	6
<b>Added</b>	2	3
<b>Highlight</b>	2	3
<b>Support</b>	1	1
<b>Stress</b>	1	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>100</b>

**Table 4: Frequency Distribution of the Identified Factive Verbs in the Projects**

<b>Non-Factive</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Say</b>	11	26
<b>See</b>	6	14
<b>Means</b>	6	14
<b>Concludes</b>	5	12
<b>Observes</b>	4	10
<b>Views</b>	3	7
<b>Write</b>	2	5
<b>Infer</b>	1	2
<b>Attempt</b>	1	2
<b>Notes</b>	1	2
<b>Enunciated</b>	1	2
<b>Remarks</b>	1	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>100</b>

In table 4, the highest non- factive verbs used by the students were *say* (26.2%), *see* (14.3%). Other non- factive verbs used were *means*, *concludes*, *view* and *writes*. The factive verbs which had the lowest frequency were *infer*, *observed*, *noted*, *enunciated* and *remarks* with a frequency of (2.4%) respectively.

Finally, cognition Acts reporting verbs were not employed by the students. That is, the students did not use the reporting verbs to synthesize and criticize the work of previous researchers. Although cognition Acts reporting verbs significantly influence personal interpretation in knowledge negotiation. These verbs are used to represent previous literature in terms of the cited author's thoughts and mental process, highlighting the role of human agency in shaping claims and acknowledging potential limitations.

### **Findings**

The study analysed the critical stance signalling of reporting verbs in the literature review chapters of undergraduate students of English and Linguistics Department of Federal University Dutse. Using Hyland's (2002) classification of reporting verbs, the study classified the reporting verbs according to their categories, identified the predominant evaluative ones and determined to what extent students used reporting verbs to signalling critical stance and establish academic voice. The analysis revealed that the students were unable to use all the three categories of reporting verbs. The students were more inclined to Discourse acts and research Acts but failed to use the cognitive aspects of reporting verbs. On the evaluative role of reporting verbs, the analysis had shown the predominant evaluative ones which signifies the students' position on the cited sources, backing their claims and demonstrating strong agreement with the original authors' idea. Furthermore, the analysis also revealed that the students were comfortable or familiar with those verbs in their studies and not yet aware of the cognitive aspects of reporting verbs. As reporting verbs play a vital role in projecting researcher's critical stance, it is possible for students to demonstrate proficiency in using reporting verbs if the ideas of incorporating source is introduced early in English for Academic Purposes (EAP) course.

### **Conclusion**

Based on the above results, the study found that the students were unable to use all the three categories of reporting verbs. In terms of denotative functions of reporting verbs, Discourse Acts were the most frequently used reporting verbs followed by Research Acts and Cognition Acts. The results showed that the students were more inclined to Discourse Acts and Research Acts but seems they are not aware of the Cognitive aspect of reporting verbs. The study concur with the findings of Hyland (2002), Agbaglo (2017) and Loan and promoolsook (2015) on the most frequently used reporting verbs in citations. In contrast, Un-dom and Un-udom (2020) and Manan and Noor (2014) found the Discourse Acts to be the least occurring category of reporting verbs in masters' thesis. This suggests that there is a distinctive difference between the use of reporting verbs in undergraduates' project and masters' thesis. Furthermore, regarding sub- categories in Discourse Acts, the students used more of assurance to findings verbs. The results showed that the students were familiar and exposed to these verbs in their studies. In addition, in terms of evaluative functions of reporting verbs, factive verbs under Discourse Acts were predominantly used by the students followed by non-factive verbs in Research Acts while the students avoid employing Cognition Acts perhaps, they are not familiar or are not aware of how to use the reporting verbs to signal their own views on the reported claims. In addition to the cognitive and experiential factors that affect how English second language students learn and use words, it can be inferred that the students possessed limited knowledge about the functional features of reporting verbs and also lack critical thinking which are more demanding cognitively in shaping claims and acknowledging potential limitations. This could also suggest that students are not ready to take the lead of an authorship.

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## CULTURE, IDENTITY AND SOCIAL CHANGE IN DENJA ABDULLAHI'S DEATH AND THE KING'S GREY HAIR

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### Abstract

*African drama emanated from religious rituals and festivals. Being predominantly traditionalists, Africans worship gods and other supernatural beings and objects. They engage in charms, hence their religious activities are highly ritualistic. A ritual has a purpose for its enactment, sometimes signifying a blessing upon society. Denja Abdullahi's play depicted the activities of a king whose reign should be short and brief in line with tradition, but the king chose to remain in power and rule his people against their wishes.. The play buttressed the belief and culture of the people whose king is aware that the presence of grey hair terminates the rules of kingship and tradition mandated Otolofon to examine the king's head season by season. Rather than King Esutu's hair growing grey, it gets blacker than it was the season before. This confused the palace chiefs who confronted their king. King Esutu's secrets made it impossible for grey hair to grow on his head; he defied himself against the will of the people. In this study, Formalism theory was adopted as a tool for the research. In the end, it was obvious that the short-lived kingship needed redress for social development.*

**Keywords:** Death, Greed, Power, Belief, Liberty

### Introduction

Every piece of literature is a cultural production that adumbrates a people's identity and way of life. It highlights the people's pains and happiness, their relationship with hegemonic institutions, and their dealings with centrifugal forces around them.. More often than not, it foregrounds the ideals and aspirations of the people. The earliest work of modern African playwrights are those whose thematic thrust rest in the affirmation of the African identity , Ikeh (2016). The purpose is to reconstruct and redirect the African personality which has been bastardized by colonialism. Denja Abdullahi through his literary work, has cause to question certain traditional oppressive and suffocating tendencies within and outside their environment as well as affirm their history and cultural autonomy in the face of politics that threaten their existence. The entire history of mankind rests on the consistent search for cultural identity, roots and projections of personal aspirations. Man, basically, has more often grappled with the reality of interpreting his environment as well as his relationship with peoples of other cultures. This primeval goal results in most cases, personal or institutional conflict. This is because man by instinct, tends to assert himself and define his place among other elements of society - always ready to defend his cultural identity as a human being.

To begin with, man is a political animal, and no one should be surprised that drama which is the one genre of literature manifestly originated and promoted by the bourgeois class would naturally gravitate into the realm of politics which normally deals with the day-to-day

management of public affairs. The formalist may talk of "the poem per se", of beauty being its own excuse for being, of a poem or a novel for that matter, not existing to reach or even to please but to exist and be beautiful, but the discerning readers know that art is propaganda where the writer is the persuasive purveyor of truth even if, in higher art, the end-result is an aesthetic experience. In the main, though most literary periods are influenced by political events which some assert, have become the major determinant of norms in the periodization of literary history. Political events seem to be the sole determinant of literary history periods such as "Commonwealth", "Restoration" are used for English Literature; "Colonial" and "Revolutionary" in American Literature; and "pre-independence" and "post-independence" periods in African Literature. But beyond lending mere appellations to literary periods, politics enters literature through the latter's affective powers, through what we normally term, the pragmatic theory of arts for, directed always towards the audience, the pragmatic theory looks at arts as an ends, since very playwright wants to change the perceptives of his audience, to give that audience a new way of looking at an experience. In the effective or pragmatic theory of art, we use the adage: Some wish to change men's minds; Others wish to change the world men live in.

The political play in West Africa seems to adhere to Frantz Fanon's "fighting phase", third phase of colonial and post colonial literature, when "the native ... turns himself into an awakener of the people; hence, comes a fighting literature, and a national literature." The West African drama is, from its inception, an exercise in politically creative commitment in play. Nnolim (2009) in the broadest terms as political, any work in which the author's concerns with public themes and public welfare are pre-dominant; especially any themes that extend beyond the concerns of the individual self and embrace the collective destiny of nations or the masses. Politics enters the play at those times when the fate or destiny of peoples or classes are locked in the death throes of survival, when continuity in a people's way of life is threatened; when alien forces by way of military forces or colonial invasion, endanger a people's future or make that future uncertain, and in our body politics, when the vultures of corruption descend to devour a people's cherished ethical, religious or moral values.

In the light of the above, the West African play was born in response to colonial invasion and its abuses which threatened our collective security as a people, it has since then been sustained by reaction to our collective disenchantment with political independence, and it will further thrive by protests to abuses inherent in the inequities engendered by the kind of society we have chosen to operate- inequities that have often erupted into open class or ethnic warfare. In the end, this study posits that what unites our playwrights of the political drama is utopia - their single - minded quest for a just and egalitarian society free from oppression and exploitation by both external and internal masters.

In this study, the literary conventions and habits of expression used by the African playwrights in the practice of their arts, plus the observable narrative technique employed by the African playwrights to highlight the African world-view in literature and by the African tradition in the drama, tradition which takes its roots from our oral followways. Since by tradition, we normally mean a body of belief, customs, sayings, literary conventions and devices and habits of expressions handed down to a playwright from the past-by the African tradition in the play, the tradition that respects, copies from, makes use of, and owes allegiance to our norms.

As for Denja Abdullahi, we go to him for exciting playwright. More than this, we go to him for plots with adequately motivated conflicts, with strong interplays of one force against another. He is the strongest in depicting two strongly realized characters in sharp conflicts, in

rivalry, in fights. The plot of well-defined conflict is the legacy of Denja Abdullahi's conflicts that involve larger communities in inter-village or inter-town conflicts and wars.

Formalism according to Ifejirika (2014) as a critical approach that pays much attention to the purely literary aspect of playwrights that primarily concern themselves with social, political, cultural and historical aspects of their environment. Also, Abrams (2012) gave a lucid explanation of the literary concerns of formalism thus, "Russian Formalism is a type of literary analysis which originated in Moscow and Petrograd in the second decade of this century in connection with Avant-Garde experiments in literature and in reaction against the prevailing emphasis in Russian criticism on the content and social significance of literature" (165). The import of the above quotation is that for the formalist critics, the social, political, economic, cultural and moral contents of literature are of little or no interest and relevance. In other words, the definition implies that formalism is a critical principle aimed at understanding literature primarily through its techniques rather than as a mere vehicle for personal expression or for a moral and political doctrines.

In the critical analysis of the play *Death and the King's Grey Hair*, effort is made to prove that the playwright employed AI in his language through carefully selected diction to convey his feelings and attitude towards the trend of socio/political events in the immediate post independence state of Africa. Furthermore, effort is on to prove the power of language as a unique instrument in literary work. As one reads through the analysis, one would appreciate the ability of Abdullah to deploy technology in human existence. Formalism views literature primarily as a specialized use of language and proposes a fundamental opposition between the literary (or poetical) use of language and ordinary practical use of language. It proposes that the central function of ordinary language is to communicate to auditors a message or information by reference to the world existing outside language. In contrast, it conceives literary language to be self-focused, in that its function is not to convey information by making extrinsic references, but to offer the reader a special mode of experience by drawing attention to its own formal features, that is, to the qualities and internal relations of the linguistic signs themselves. The linguistic of literature differs from the linguistics of practical discourse, because its laws are oriented towards producing the distinctive features that formalists call literariness. Abram (189). Eustace Palmer is quoted to serve as a foundation for our discussion on formalism.

### **Critical Analysis of *Death and the King's Grey Hair***

In the critical analysis of the play, effort is geared towards the Language used by the playwright to convey his feelings and attitude towards the trend of socio/political events in the immediate Shakaga. Here, language is portrayed as a strong tool in a unique manner as buttressed, "We have learnt from Europe that a playwright or an artist lives on the fringe of society - wearing a beard and a peculiar dress and generally behaving in a strange, unpredictable way. He is in revolt against society, which looks on him with suspicion if not hostility. The last thing the society would dream is to put him in charge of anything" (42). Through this, one would appreciate the ability of Abdullah to deploy scatological image through words to celebrate the greed, selfishness and vulgarism that form the nucleus of the Shakaga society shortly after King Esutu's emergence as the leader and the ruler as manifested in poor leadership, bribery and corruption exacerbated by undue pressures and promptings from the palace chiefs, insincerity and uncritical/gullible followership. For practical and demonstrative aspect of this study, a deep appreciation of Denja Abdullahi's *Death and the King's Grey Hair* from formalists' critical perspective would be employed. A playwright is a very sensitive, conscious, concerned and committed person in the society. He sees what ordinary persons cannot see and condemns in direct or indirect, symbolic or

satirical way, man's imperfection in a society full of greed, insincerity, injustice, deceit, bribery and corruption, nonchalance, hatred, falsehood, impatience and abomination. The playwright exhibits his disapproval, disgust, disappointment and sometimes disillusionment over man's false nature, tendency to exploit, to lie, to deceive and to oppress his fellow. *Death and the King's Grey Hair* sought to expose political and social corruption not only in Shakaga but also in Africa as a whole Eustace Palmer.. Abdullah clearly demonstrated social awareness and sensitivity by symbolically expressing his disgust and disappointment over the level of social and political decay in Shakaga.

In the play, Abdullah treats the issue of King's effort to twist the known norms of his people and the condemnation and scorn he gets from his Chiefs. From the first page of the play, Abdullahi does not leave anybody in doubt of the kind of play he is about to present. For instance, he tells us that the gathering of the wisemen is not for fun as the Gabisi opens up:

Gabisi : Hail you seven wise men! I fear for the land when I see you gathered in this grove. Great and fearful things must be on their way to our land for wise men like you never gather to tell jokes about women's behinds. That is for the lustful young men whose loins are yet to fertile forge generations have been born (11).

This is the kind of picture Abdullah starts with. The king represents social and environmental indiscipline in the society as he puts;

King Esutu : Where are the Chiefs, the wise men? You are fond of attributing their shortcomings to wisdom. What wisdom is there in a King coming to a place of meeting before his Chiefs? (11).

Abdullah's comments on the image of bribery and corruption with special reference to King Esutu's anger as one of the Chiefs greeted in their manner as he approached the palace;

Otolofon: Oh King, may you not live long, may your race to join the ancestors be swift.

King Esutu: Enough of your curses or greetings. I do not know what to call them.

Otolofon: They are greetings and blessings according to tradition, King. And King, will this be the first time you have heard these kingly greetings? (18).

From the quotation above, one could see that Abdullahi has great inclination and tendency to create nauseating, devastating and frightening image to show the rottenness of men in Shakaga in particular and African independent nations in general. His powerful choice of negative diction is a living testimony to his dissatisfaction with the level of immorality, bribery and corruption in the society. The King's greed and ambition to remain in power against his people's wish became glaring that each member of the palace Chiefs is worried. This is portrayed through Otolofon as they could no longer hide their feelings at the moment;

Otolofon: No one dares disrespect our King, yet no community dares disrespect the gods and the tradition: not even its King or wise men.

Royal Bard: Today's sun seems to have risen from the west, King. Be wary, for I can smell the pungent odour of ancient words.

King Esutu: Let the sun blaze forth its fury but the earth will never run away. Otolofon, stand on your head if you wish. As for the heavy words you claim to have, let me tell you that the horns can never be too heavy for the cow that bears them.

Otolofon: Oh! King, the wise men sent me to ask, the land sent me to ask, the people sent me to ask; If you or anyone is blocking the march of tradition. I was also asked to remind you of

the pledge you made before climbing the throne. Our land is a land of short reigns and young Kings. The land feels you have ruled for too long. And a king who rules for too long counts disasters into our land (19).

According to the tradition of Shakaga, the glory of their Kings lies in their being reborn as a lion after their reigns. The land is a land of short reigns and young Kings. The King must be young to rule the land with the blood of the young. The blood of the young shouts the blessings of the gods. They believe that long life on the throne makes a king a tyrant. At this point, the voice reminds the King of their tradition thus;

Voice : Esutu, at the sprout of the first white hair on your head, seen by the ruffler of royal heads, you must drink poison, die and be taken to the forest where you will join your ancestors as a lion, Esutu, pledge your acceptance of the laws (20).

Rather than respect the law of the land, King Esutu who uses modern means to prevent grey hair reacts;

King Esutu : I now see what you foolish lot are up to. You have spent the days away from the palace to plot my downfall. Go and remind one another that I am the King and they are my subjects (22).

A careful study of Abdullahi's choice of words in the quoted lines shows that he is out to portray a very ugly environment peopled by dirty nauseating persons in the guise of king and so. King Esutu as it is, drinks too much from the many wells of power. These words are words from a head that does not think deep as he opens up during the ritual of head massage through Otolofon thus;

Otolofon : I have not finished. The king refused to let me do what my ancestors did in seasons gone by and what. I have been doing for so many seasons. He said my hands have been afflicted with temporary leprosy. And that it was not yet time for me to put my filthy fingers on his head. That is what I brought back from the palace (24).

Meanwhile, the king has a prince friend who is the secret behind his long stay. He visits the king secretly with dye which the king refers to as ageless gift. In his own words, the king informed his friend the prince that the palace chiefs and the wise men in their community have vowed not to step into the palace until he shows them that he has not been obstructing the march of tradition. The king is aware that their land is a land of young Kings and short reigns. Abdullah portrays the diverse nature of societies. In other places for instance, the long reign of a good king is a blessing to any land. One prays for the king to live long until his mouth is bereft of teeth. Even if you want the king dead, you dare not say it or your head would grace the shrine of the iron-god. In the land of Shakaga, the sign of ageing detected by the ruffler of the royal heads, one of the wise men carries the verdict of death on the reigning king. But to the surprise of them all, King Is not in a hurry to age as buttressed in his conversation with his Prince friend;

King Esutu: Before we get lost in the joys of all-things good, tell me, friend, do you come with my ageless gift?

Prince: I never forget whatever can bring joy to my good old king.

Through Gabisi, who is the guardian of the word in Shakaga, the King heard enough of his threatening words, asked his Bard to take Gabisi to the darkest of holes and hide him there. The dog that will perish in the bush will surely cease to hear the call of the hunter. Those whom the gods want to destroy, they will first make mad. The King's visitor after too much

wine, boasted to the tapper that he has with him the ageless gift which he gives the King whenever he visits their land. King Esutu became furious over the revelation of his long reign secret. He killed both Gabisi who had been prisoned long before the revelation and also killed the Royal Bard and fled the town before dawn after forcing the poison-bearer to take the poison he was sent to give the King. These deaths and the King's flee mark new beginning in Shakaga. They agreed never to welcome any king in their land again. This horrible disregard for tradition by the accused King might be the god's way of telling Shakaga people to have a rethink over what they uphold as belief.

### Conclusion

In summary, nature is presented in the play as it is said that when the fire dies, it covers itself with ashes and when the banana tree dies, it replaces itself with an offshoot. Gabisi died honourably and the eldest son took over his position as the banner of truth. A land in the hands of the wise shall never go astray. Those entrusted with power should not get drunk from its fumes. Those who are not with it, should watch with wide-opened eyes. The people will always outlive all evils. King Esutu's reign ended abruptly as he fled the town which marks a new wave in Shakaga. This gave birth to a new system of operation in the entire community having seen that what they hold as a long time tradition can be obstructed through artificial intelligence hence, the need for sustainable development. King Esutu dared his cultural values. He lost his identity as a king. This led to a social change in Shakaga.

Finally, this tradition appeared quaint but in-depth reflection helps one discover the sense in it. One would come to the reality that most ancient traditions which modernity taught us to regard as queer, really had a stabilizing role to play in the traditional society. This ancient tradition is used to play to portray power tussle. The play dwells on power, its uses as well as its attendant problems in the human environment. The point buttressed is that the attitude of human society is yet to change with respect to power. Power from the point of view of the primitive cave man, to the man of today's computer age, is the same. One may argue that the human being in terms of natural disposition, has never developed beyond his primitive essence. Most often, what is called development is just a variation or fine-tuning of the timeless past.

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## ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE IN ESL CLASSROOMS: TRANSFORMING PEDAGOGY AND STUDENTS' ENGAGEMENT IN NIGERIAN TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS

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### Abstract

*This study explored how Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools are reshaping English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction in Nigerian tertiary institutions, with a focus on tools like chatbots, adaptive learning systems, generative AI, machine translation, and speech recognition. Using Thematic Analysis based on Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework, data were collected through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews with five lecturers, and focus group discussions with 78 NCE students. Findings reveal that AI tools enhance student engagement, support personalized learning, and encourage greater learner autonomy. Lecturers reported a shift from traditional instruction to more facilitative roles, leveraging AI for routine drills, instant feedback, and language practice. Students expressed increased motivation and confidence, especially when interacting with AI tools to develop speaking and writing skills. However, challenges emerged, including inconsistent access to digital tools, technical limitations, and growing concerns about students' over-reliance on AI applications like ChatGPT for assignments. The study highlights the transformative potential of AI in enriching ESL teaching and learning but emphasizes the need for adequate infrastructure, digital access, and staff training to ensure responsible and effective use. These insights contribute to understanding the evolving role of AI in Nigerian ESL classrooms and offer valuable guidance for educators and policymakers seeking to integrate AI meaningfully in language education.*

**Keywords:** Artificial Intelligence in ESL Classrooms, Nigerian Tertiary Institutions, Pedagogy, Students' Engagement

### 1. Introduction

The rise of artificial intelligence (AI) in education has opened new avenues for enhancing language teaching and learning. In the context of English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction, Ahmed (2024) asserts that AI-driven tools are increasingly used to provide personalized learning experiences and interactive content. These tools range from conversational chatbots and adaptive learning platforms to generative AI applications like ChatGPT and AI-powered translation or speech recognition systems. Across the globe, research has begun to document how such technologies support language learners by providing instant feedback, adaptive practice exercises, and immersive language experiences (Belda-Medina & Calvo-Ferrer, 2022; Cisłowska & Peña-Acuña, 2024). AI can also help teachers by analyzing learners' performance in real time and identifying each student's strengths and weaknesses, allowing for timely adjustments in teaching strategies (Cisłowska & Peña-Acuña, 2024; Deng & Yu, 2022). Moreover, AI-based language applications can dynamically tailor activities to individual needs, potentially increasing student engagement and autonomy (Deng & Yu, 2022; Joshi & Pondel, 2019).

Despite growing global interest, the adoption of AI in higher education classrooms remains uneven, particularly in developing country contexts. In Nigeria, where English is the medium of instruction at the tertiary level and a crucial skill for academic and professional success, integrating AI into ESL pedagogy presents both significant opportunities and challenges. Ahmed (2024) affirms that recent discussions suggest that Nigerian universities have yet to fully harness AI's potential in education, partly due to limited awareness, infrastructure constraints, and the need for faculty training. At the same time, there is recognition that AI tools could help address some local educational challenges – for instance, large class sizes and diverse proficiency levels – by providing supplementary support and personalized practice for students (Baidoo-Anu & Owusu, 2023; Ahmed, 2024).

Furthermore, Artificial Intelligence (AI) has become a transformative tool in education settings worldwide, particularly in English as a Second Language (ESL) classroom. This study specifically examines the impact of AI integration on teaching ESL and students' engagement at the Federal College of Education (Technical), Akoka, Lagos State, Nigeria. By leveraging AI-driven language learning tools and interactive platforms, educators at this institution can enhance the pedagogical process, making English language learning more interactive, personalised, and effective. The study critically analyses the ways in which AI reshapes traditional teaching practices, addresses challenges in AI integration in ESL teaching and fosters a more engaging learning environment.

The research focuses on a Federal College of Education in Nigeria to explore how AI technologies may be transforming ESL pedagogy and students' engagement at the tertiary level. The study is guided by the following broad questions: How are various AI tools (including chatbots, adaptive learning platforms, generative AI, machine translation, and speech recognition tools) being utilized in ESL classrooms? In what ways do these tools influence teaching methods and students' engagement in language learning activities? Through classroom observations and stakeholder interviews, this research provides an in-depth account of lecturers' and students' experiences with AI integration in language learning.

Hence, this study responds to a gap in the literature by examining how AI is actually being implemented in an ESL classroom at Federal College of Education (Technical), Akoka, Lagos State, Nigeria, and what impact it has on teaching practices and student engagement.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **Research Problem and Gap**

Despite the global rise of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in education, there is limited research on how AI is specifically transforming pedagogy and students' engagement in English as a Second Language (ESL) context within Nigerian tertiary institutions. While some studies (Vieriu & Petrea, 2025; Walter, 2024; Treve, 2024; Abubakar, Onasanya & Ibrahim, 2024) have explored AI in general educational settings, a few like Anana, Alugbin & Chinaguh (2023) have delved into its direct impact on ESL teaching methods and how it influences student interaction and motivation in Nigeria's unique educational landscape. Furthermore, the integration of AI in ESL teaching within Nigerian tertiary institutions remains underexplored, leading to a lack of understanding of its effectiveness in enhancing pedagogy and boosting students' engagement. This gap results in missed opportunities to leverage AI tools for more dynamic and interactive language learning experiences. Therefore, it is crucial to investigate the specific ways AI is reshaping ESL teaching practices students' involvement in Nigerian tertiary institutions.

**Artificial Intelligence in Language Education: Tools, Applications and Challenges**

AI-driven tools have become increasingly prominent in language education over the past few years, offering new ways to personalize learning and engage students. Recent studies emphasize that AI applications can tailor instruction and feedback to individual learners' needs, which can enhance learning efficiency and motivation (Ahmed, 2024; Cislowska & Peña-Acuña, 2024). Adaptive learning platforms, for instance, adjust the difficulty of language exercises in real time based on a student's performance, providing more practice where needed and advancing when the learner demonstrates readiness. According to Deng and Yu (2022), this level of personalization was rarely achievable in traditional classrooms and is associated with improved learner satisfaction and outcomes in ESL settings. Furthermore, Ali et al. (2023) outline the interactive nature of many AI tools — from gamified vocabulary apps to intelligent tutoring systems — tends to increase student engagement by making practice more immersive and immediate. Learners often report that using AI-based tools is enjoyable and less intimidating than conventional exercises, which can lead to greater time-on-task and willingness to practice (Joshi & Pondel, 2019).

One widely studied category of AI tools in ESL is conversational agents or chatbots. AI chatbots enable students to practice writing and speaking through simulated conversations. Research has shown that chatbots can encourage more frequent language use and lower students' anxiety about errors (Eun & Maeng, 2023; Belda-Medina & Calvo-Ferrer, 2022). With the advent of more advanced generative AI like ChatGPT, the potential for richer interaction has grown. These tools can produce nuanced responses to student input, effectively acting as virtual language partners or writing assistants. Baidoo-Anu & Owusu, (2023) highlight that early work on generative AI in education suggests it can be a double-edged sword: on one hand, it helps learners generate ideas and receive instant feedback; on the other hand, educators worry about over-reliance and the originality of student work. The debate on AI and academic integrity is ongoing (Jarrah et al., 2023), but consensus is emerging that when used under guidance, tools like ChatGPT can support learning without replacing the learner's own effort.

AI has also made inroads in areas like machine translation and speech recognition, which are highly relevant for ESL learners. Modern neural machine translation tools (e.g., Google Translate) are increasingly accurate and have become common aids for students writing or reading in a second language. Studies indicate that when students use machine translation judiciously — for drafting and then refining their work — it can help improve vocabulary and grammatical accuracy in their writing (Deng & Yu, 2022). However, researchers caution that students need to be trained in post-editing and critical use of such outputs to avoid blind dependence on the AI. Similarly, Anggraini, (2022) opines that speech recognition technology, implemented in pronunciation training apps or voice-interactive systems, allows learners to get immediate feedback on their spoken English. These tools have been reported to improve pronunciation and listening skills by enabling repetitive, focused practice. Some limitations have been noted, such as recognition errors for non-native accents and the lack of nuanced feedback compared to a human teacher, but overall the technology is seen as a valuable supplement for oral skills development.

While AI tools offer clear advantages, the literature also discusses challenges in implementing them effectively. One major consideration is the preparedness of teachers and students to use AI in pedagogically sound ways. Many instructors are still gaining awareness of AI capabilities and how to integrate them into lesson plans (Mabuan, 2024; Olubola & Ramnarain, 2024). Without proper training, teachers may underutilize the technology or use it in ways that do not optimally support learning. Additionally, infrastructure issues, such as

limited internet access or insufficient devices, especially in developing regions, can hinder consistent use of AI in classrooms (Ahmed, 2024). There are also concerns regarding ethical use: ensuring that students use AI as a learning aid rather than a shortcut to bypass learning (Lesia et al., 2022). Despite these challenges, the prevailing view in recent literature is cautiously optimistic. When supported by institutional training and guidelines, AI tools can complement traditional teaching methods and potentially lead to improved outcomes in ESL education (Sevnarayan, 2024). The past few years have seen a growing consensus that the question is not whether AI will be used in language classrooms, but how to use it most effectively and responsibly.

### **Digital Colonialism**

Digital colonialism refers to the way power, knowledge, and culture are shaped and dominated by external actors (often from the Global North) through technology systems that impose norms, values, and infrastructure on less powerful communities. In the Nigerian higher-education context, digital colonialism becomes visible in how AI and generative technologies are increasingly imported rather than locally developed, often reflecting Western pedagogical standards, datasets, and linguistic norms. Peters and Olojede (2025) point out that despite AI's potential for learner support and scalability, one of its demerits is digital colonialism, which includes overreliance on foreign models, potential erosion of local cultural, linguistic, and epistemic practices, and power asymmetries in who designs AI curricula and whose knowledge gets privileged. Likewise, Mgbomo and Nkaanee (2025) critically examines whether AI systems act as instruments of cultural imperialism, questioning whether knowledge production via AI perpetuates Western epistemologies at the expense of local or indigenous knowledge.

### **Surveillance Capitalism**

Surveillance capitalism is a term popularised by Shoshana Zuboff (2019), capturing how platforms collect, analyse, and monetise behaviour, often invisibly shaping user behaviour and decisions. In educational AI contexts, this raises concerns about data privacy, power, and control. While direct empirical studies in Nigerian universities are fewer, many of the studies on GenAI engagement highlight worries among students and lecturers about data governance and trust. For instance, Mgbomo and Nkaanee (2025) note concerns about institutional AI policy, overreliance, and the need for robust data governance structure to safeguard data. Furthermore, Essien, Salami and Ajala (2024) mention institutional distrust, lack of clarity about who owns data, and fears about misuse of student interactions.

### **Sociocultural Impacts of Technology**

Sociocultural effects include how technology shifts identity, norms, participation, and educational expectations. In their study, Essien, Salami and Ajala, (2024) highlight that socio-cultural variables such as peer encouragement, alignment of tools with educational goals, and communal norms are strong predictors of student engagement with AI tools. Students from contexts where technology is already integrated socially tend to adapt faster. The same study observed that inadequate technical support and infrastructural deficits (electricity, Internet bandwidth) are sociocultural in that they reflect broader inequalities, shaping who can meaningfully use AI tools. Moreover, Olafare and Ogunrinbokun (2024) assert that AI tools could not understand local accents or wrong idiomatic usage, cultural resistance (traditional expectations of teacher-led instruction), and the way local languages are marginalized in AI mediated communication.

### **Intersections and Implications**

When these perspectives are combined, some clear implications emerge for ESL/AI in Nigerian tertiary institutions. AI tools designed without local knowledge risk reinforcing colonial linguistic hierarchy (digital colonialism), where Western English norms dominate and local dialects or idiomatic speech are devalued. Furthermore, Surveillance capitalism raises ethical issues: student data, analytics, feedback loops all potentially owned/used by external for-profit AI providers, with little local oversight. Also, Sociocultural impacts show that technology may not be neutral: identity, confidence, and equity are deeply implicated. Students from backgrounds with less exposure to technology or English are more likely to be marginalized unless technology use is intentionally scaffolded and culturally tuned.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical Framework adopted for the data analysis of this study is Thematic Analysis (TA). It was developed by Braun and Clarke (2006). Thematic Analysis is a theoretical framework that is used to identify, analyse, and interpret themes within qualitative data. It involves generating themes within the selected data. According to Dawadi (2020), TA allows researchers to identify, analyse, and report patterns within data, making it suitable for exploring complex phenomena. One of the strengths of TA is its adaptability to various theoretical frameworks, which allows for flexibility and helps to make sense of complex data. Kiger (2020) asserts that Thematic Analysis can be employed within essentialist paradigms to report participants' experiences or within constructionist paradigms to examine how experiences are shaped by broader social contexts. This versatility is beneficial when investigating the multifaceted impacts of AI on pedagogy and student engagement. Moreover, TA's systematic approach facilitates the organization of large volumes of qualitative data, enabling the identification of recurring themes that reflect participants' perspectives. This is crucial in understanding how AI tools influence teaching methods and student interactions in ESL classrooms.

### **Reflexive Thematic Analysis**

Reflexive Thematic Analysis, as articulated by Braun and Clarke (2006), emphasizes the researcher's active role in the analytical process. It involves a six-phase process: familiarization with data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. This approach acknowledges that researchers bring their own perspectives to the analysis, which can influence theme development. By engaging in reflexivity, researchers critically examine how their assumptions and experiences shape the interpretation of data. This is particularly pertinent in this study, where understanding the nuanced effects of AI in educational settings requires a deep engagement with participants' narratives. Furthermore, Reflexive TA does not necessitate a pre-existing coding framework, allowing themes to emerge organically from the data (Braun and Clarke, 2006). This inductive approach is advantageous when exploring new or under-researched areas, such as the integration of AI in Nigerian ESL classrooms.

### **Methodology**

This study adopted a qualitative case study approach to investigate how Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools are integrated into English as a Second Language (ESL) classrooms at the Federal College of Education (Technical), Akoka, Lagos. The case study design was appropriate because it allowed for an in-depth exploration of teaching and learning processes in a real institutional context, capturing both lecturers' and students' lived experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The research setting was a public tertiary institution in Nigeria where English serves as the primary medium of instruction. At the time of the study, lecturers in the English department had begun experimenting with AI tools in their courses.

Participants included five ESL lecturers (designated Lecturer 1 through Lecturer 5) and 78 National Certificate in Education (NCE) students. The lecturers were purposively selected based on two criteria: (a) at least five years of teaching experience, and (b) their current use of AI in ESL courses. They represented approximately one-third of the department's teaching staff, making them an important sample for capturing institutional practices.

For students, a stratified random sampling strategy was applied to ensure representation across second- and third-year cohorts. Out of the larger student population, 78 students were chosen as a manageable yet statistically meaningful group. The selection balanced diversity with feasibility, ensuring adequate data generation without overextending resources. Students were anonymized as *Student A*, *Student B*, etc., to preserve confidentiality. All participants provided informed consent before participation.

Three qualitative methods were employed to generate rich, triangulated data:

1. Classroom Observations:

Ten class sessions (two per lecturer) were observed over one semester. Detailed field notes captured the types of AI tools used (e.g., chatbots for conversation practice, generative AI writing assistants, adaptive grammar platforms, and speech recognition software) and students' interactional patterns. Observations focused on real-time dynamics of engagement, participation, and teacher mediation. *Example note:* In Lecturer 2's class, when the chatbot prompted students to simulate a shopping dialogue, Student C hesitated but later joined after peers modelled responses, showing increased confidence.

2. Semi-Structured Interviews with Lecturers:

Each lecturer participated in a 15–30 minute interview to explore their perceptions of AI integration, including benefits, challenges, and effects on pedagogy. Interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and later coded. *Lecturer 3 remarked:* "AI gives immediate feedback on grammar, which saves me time, but sometimes the suggestions are too rigid and ignore Nigerian English expressions."

3. Student Focus Groups:

Four focus groups (5–6 students each) were conducted, lasting about one hour each. Students discussed their engagement with AI, challenges, and perceived impacts on learning. Focus groups encouraged peer reflection and collective meaning-making. *Student F noted:* "I like that I can practice pronunciation privately with the speech app before speaking in class—it makes me less shy."

## Data analysis

Data were analysed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019). The process unfolded in several stages:

1. Familiarization: Transcripts and observation notes were read repeatedly to gain an overview.
2. Initial Coding: Segments of text were coded inductively.
3. Theme Development: Codes were clustered into themes.
4. Review and Refinement: Themes were refined through iterative comparison across data sources to ensure they reflected the dataset as a whole.

Multiple strategies ensured the trustworthiness of findings:

- Triangulation: Insights from classroom observations, lecturer interviews, and student focus groups were compared to strengthen interpretations.
- Peer Debriefing: Two colleagues in applied linguistics reviewed emerging themes to minimize researcher bias.
- Member Checking: A subset of participants (two lecturers and five students) reviewed preliminary findings to confirm accuracy.

These steps enhanced credibility, dependability, and confirmability of the research outcomes.

### Findings

The following questions were posed to evaluate the impact of AI in English as a Second Language (ESL) teaching within Nigerian tertiary institutions:

#### **Question One: How has the introduction of AI tools impacted student participation and enthusiasm in the observed classes?**

##### **Students' Engagement and Motivation**

In all the observed classes, the introduction of AI tools corresponded with increased student participation and enthusiasm. Lecturers noted that even typically reserved students became more actively involved when learning activities included AI. For example, lecturer 3, a 46 – year - old woman observed that using a chatbot for dialogue practice encouraged full-class participation: *“The shy students who usually stay quiet were suddenly typing away and sharing their chatbot’s responses. I’ve never seen them so involved.”* Students also described the AI-based exercises as enjoyable and engaging. As some of the students explained, practicing English with a conversational chatbot or an interactive app *“felt like a game, so you want to keep going. It doesn’t feel like a boring drill – it’s fun and you learn at the same time.”* Many students were motivated to continue using the AI tools outside class for extra practice. Several mentioned gaining confidence as they used these tools, practicing without fear of embarrassment. Some lecturers believed this heightened engagement translated into better skill development, pointing out instances of students speaking more fluently or writing more accurately after consistent AI-supported practice.

#### **Question Two: In what ways do AI tools support personalized learning in ESL classrooms?**

##### **Personalized Learning and Autonomy**

The AI tools enabled a more personalized learning experience, allowing students to work at their own pace and according to their proficiency level. In classes using an adaptive learning app or AI-driven exercises, stronger students could advance to more challenging tasks while those needing reinforcement received additional practice on easier items. Lecturer 2, a 56-year-old man, remarked that the adaptive platform helped cater to individual needs in a large class: previously, *“some students were bored because it was too easy, and others were lost because it was too hard. But with the app, everyone was working at their own level.”* Students appreciated this customization. A few students observed that the software adjusted to their performance: *“It gave us easier questions when we were struggling and harder ones when we did well, so we could improve step by step.”* Learners took more initiative as they realized the AI would support their individual learning needs. For instance, a few students used machine translation tools or online dictionaries on their own to aid comprehension of difficult texts, and others repeatedly practiced pronunciation with a speech recognition app

until they achieved higher scores. Such behaviours indicate that AI tools promoted greater learner autonomy—students felt empowered to engage in self-directed learning using these digital resources as supplements to classroom instruction.

### **Question Three: What impact does the integration of AI tools have on pedagogical practices?**

#### **Changes in Pedagogical Practices**

The use of AI in the classroom prompted instructors to modify their teaching strategies and roles. Teachers often shifted from a traditional lecture-centered approach to more of a facilitator role. Lecturer 1, a 59-year-old woman explained that after incorporating an AI writing assistant (ChatGPT) into her writing class, she spent less time lecturing and more time guiding students in how to refine and critique AI-generated content. *“I’m no longer the only source of knowledge for generating ideas,” she said. “Instead, I walk around and help students evaluate what the AI suggested, asking questions like, ‘Does this make sense? How can we improve it?’ I’ve become more of a guide on the side.”* Similarly, when lecturer 3 used a chatbot to handle repetitive conversational practice, he freed up class time to monitor students’ progress and provide individualized feedback, rather than having to model every dialogue himself. In general, lecturers redesigned some lesson activities to integrate AI tools effectively, for example, using AI-driven grammar drills as homework and dedicating class time to discussion and clarification. While there was an initial learning curve, the lecturers adapted by planning lessons where AI took on routine tasks (like providing instant feedback or additional examples) and the teacher focused on higher-level instruction or personalized support. This shift in pedagogy was noted by students as well; some students observed that their teachers were circulating more and spending more time on one-on-one help during AI-based activities, rather than lecturing from the front.

### **Question Four: What are the challenges associated with integrating AI in education?**

#### **Challenges in AI Integration**

Alongside the benefits, the integration of AI tools came with several challenges. A practical concern was the inconsistency of technology access. Both lecturers and students reported occasional technical difficulties, such as unreliable internet connectivity and limited access to devices. According to Lecturer 4, a 56-year-old man, recounted a class session where a planned online chatbot activity had to be abandoned due to a network outage, which caused frustration. Students from less resourced backgrounds sometimes struggled if they did not have data plans or devices to use the AI tools at home. For example, a particular student shared that she loved practicing with the English app on campus using a free Wi-Fi from her friends but could not continue at home: *“I don’t have Wi-Fi at home, so I can’t use it unless I spend my mobile data, which is expensive.”* Another set of concerns revolved around the appropriate use of AI. Lecturers were cautious about students becoming too dependent on AI for answers or risking academic honesty. *“I had to remind them that ChatGPT is just a starting point, they still need to write in their own words,”* noted a 47-year-old woman lecturer 5, reflecting a common worry that students might use generative AI to produce assignments. Clear guidelines were put in place by some teachers (such as requiring students to show their work process or edits made to AI outputs) to ensure that learning, not cheating, was taking place. Finally, a learning curve in mastering the new tools was evident. A few students felt initially intimidated by the technology or uncertain about how to interpret the AI’s feedback. Over time, with guidance and practice, most became comfortable, but these observations underline that sufficient training and support are necessary. Despite these challenges, both teachers and students generally viewed the AI integration positively, emphasizing that the benefits to engagement and learning outweighed the difficulties.

## **Discussion**

The experiences documented in this study largely align with emerging research on AI in language education and can be further understood through established pedagogical theories. Our finding of heightened students' engagement corresponds with Vygotsky's (1978) Social Constructivist Theory, which posits that learners build knowledge through interaction and social engagement. Thus, the study revealed increase in motivation and participation when AI tools are incorporated into language learning. For example, Ali et al. (2023) observed that both teachers and students felt more motivated using ChatGPT as a learning aid, and Eun and Maeng (2023) similarly found that high school students perceived chatbots as a fun and helpful way to practice English. In our study, the low-pressure practice environment provided by AI (where students could make mistakes privately with an app or chatbot) likely contributed to this engagement. This supports long-standing notions that reducing learners' anxiety can improve their willingness to communicate and participate. By offering immediate feedback and a game-like experience, AI tools seem to tap into students' intrinsic motivation, a result that is consistent with the positive attitudinal outcomes noted in the literature (Joshi & Pondel, 2019; Belda-Medina & Calvo-Ferrer, 2022).

The results also reinforce the role of AI in enabling personalized learning and greater learner autonomy which corresponds with Self-Determination Theory by Deci and Ryan (1985) that highlights the importance of autonomy, competence, and relatedness as fundamental to intrinsic motivation. This autonomy in learning choices nurtures intrinsic motivation, fostering a deeper engagement in the classroom. Prior research has highlighted that AI-driven platforms can tailor instruction to individual needs, leading to improved student satisfaction and outcomes (Cisłowska & Peña-Acuña, 2024; Ahmed, 2024). Our classroom observations and student testimonies provide concrete examples of this personalization at work: each student could focus on their specific gaps (whether in grammar, pronunciation, or vocabulary) with the help of AI, without feeling held back or rushed by peers. This individualized pacing is a luxury in traditional large ESL classes, but AI made it feasible, echoing Deng and Yu's (2022) review which noted improved writing accuracy when students used machine translation with iterative self-correction. Moreover, the study shows technology's potential to foster learner autonomy, which reduces the pressure on learners; according to Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis (1982), lowering learners' anxiety enhances language acquisition, when lecturers leverage AI for routine instructional tasks, it reduces the pressure on learners. Students in our focus groups described taking charge of their learning (practicing extra, seeking resources) – behaviour change that indicates higher agency. This finding dovetails with Joshi and Pondel (2019), whose findings show that integrating technology in language classes can promote independent learning habits. In essence, our local evidence supports the idea that AI can serve as a personal tutor or practice partner for students, empowering them to extend learning beyond the classroom.

Importantly, this study illustrates a shift in pedagogical practice that complements the voices of teachers in other contexts. Mabuan (2024) and Olubola and Ramnarain (2024) report that English instructors who experimented with tools like ChatGPT began to adopt more facilitative teaching roles. This study observes the same phenomenon: the instructors/lecturers became orchestrators of learning activities, leveraging AI to handle certain instructional tasks while they provided more individualized guidance. This transformation is significant because it suggests that effective AI integration is not about replacing teachers, but rather about repositioning them. In line with Baidoo-Anu and Owusu (2023), who discuss AI as an assistive tool in teaching, the findings show that when routine exercises (e.g., grammar drills or idea generation) are offloaded to an AI system, teachers can focus on higher-order skills, critical thinking discussions, and mentorship. However, it is also clear

that teachers need time and support to adapt to these new roles. In this study, lecturers initially faced a learning curve and had to redesign their lesson plans. This points to the need for professional development and sharing of best practices, as also recommended by Sevnarayan (2024) in a South African university context. With proper training, teachers can more confidently integrate AI and use it to enhance, rather than disrupt, their pedagogy.

The challenges identified in this study underscore points raised in existing literature and offer insight into the context-specific hurdles of implementing AI in education. On a broad level, the issues of infrastructure and access are well-documented barriers in technology adoption in African higher education (Ahmed, 2024). Our participants' frustrations with internet outages or device limitations echo Ahmed's (2024) call for better digital infrastructure if AI initiatives are to succeed in Nigeria. Without reliable connectivity and sufficient devices, the digital divide can widen even within a single classroom. Additionally, concerns about over-reliance on AI and academic integrity mirror those discussed by Lesia et al. (2022) and Jarrah et al. (2023). The lecturers in this study managed this by clarifying how students should and shouldn't use AI for assignments, reflecting the kind of guidelines scholars suggest in maintaining academic honesty. This indicates a practical need for institutional policies on AI usage in coursework, a point increasingly being debated in higher education worldwide. Despite these challenges, it is noteworthy that the participants in this study remained optimistic about AI's role, echoing the cautious optimism found in other research (Mabuan, 2024). They recognized that with proper safeguards and support, the advantages – more engagement, personalized practice, and innovative teaching methods – outweighed the downsides.

This study extends existing scholarship on AI in education by demonstrating its impact within a resource-constrained Nigerian higher education context. While prior research, often situated global North, highlights AI's capacity to foster engagement, personalize learning, and promote learner-centred pedagogy, the present findings confirm these benefits in a setting where infrastructural and financial limitations typically hinder innovation. In doing so, this study builds on existing studies but diverges by showing that AI tools can support equity by personalizing learning, improving accessibility, offering support, bridging resource gaps, and helping teachers identify and assist struggling students, thereby giving all learners a fair chance regardless of background or context. Similarly, this study interrogates how AI reshapes classroom dynamics shifting teacher-student roles toward more collaborative interactions; influences learner identity by positioning students as more active, independent participants; and reconfigures equity by broadening access to tailored support.

Overall, this study contributes to the growing understanding of AI in ESL education by providing evidence from a Nigerian tertiary institution. The consistency of this finding with those from other regions suggests that many benefits and challenges of AI integration are universal. At the same time, this research highlights the importance of local context: issues like inconsistent power supply or large class sizes can influence how AI tools are adopted and used. These insights can inform both practitioners and policymakers. Educators looking to integrate AI in similar contexts can learn from the successes and missteps observed in our case, and institutions can better plan for the necessary infrastructure and training.

### Conclusion and Recommendations

This study demonstrated that AI tools can significantly enhance the experience of teaching and learning ESL at the tertiary level, even in a resource-constrained context. By examining an ESL classroom at a Nigerian tertiary institution where AI was integrated, it was found out that these technologies can increase students' engagement, personalize learning support, and encourage more learner-centered pedagogy. The benefits observed in this case (greater participation, autonomy, and adaptive teaching) align with global reports, suggesting that AI's positive impact on language education is broadly applicable.

At the same time, the findings underscore the need to address practical and pedagogical challenges to fully realize AI's potential. Institutions planning to implement AI in classrooms should invest in reliable infrastructure and provide training for educators. Clear guidelines on the ethical use of AI (for example, how students should and shouldn't use tools like ChatGPT) are necessary to maintain academic integrity and maximize learning. With thoughtful integration, AI can serve as a valuable assistant in large ESL classes by handling routine practice and feedback, while teachers focus on higher-order instruction and individualized guidance. Policymakers and university administrators in contexts similar to Nigeria should consider pilot programs that pair technological upgrades with teacher training, to ensure that introducing AI in education leads to meaningful improvements in student learning outcomes.

This study had limitations that suggest avenues for future research. It was conducted at a single institution with a limited sample and relied on qualitative data without measuring long-term learning gains; this was done because the study basically provided the understanding of the benefits of integrating AI in ESL classrooms which provided in-depth insights that generated rich, context-specific knowledge. Future studies could use longitudinal designs or controlled experiments to quantify the impact of AI-assisted instruction on language proficiency. Investigating student performance and retention of knowledge with and without AI support would shed more light on the technology's effectiveness. Comparative research across different educational contexts would also be valuable to examine how local conditions influence AI integration in language teaching. Despite these limitations, the study contributes a needed perspective from a developing country's higher education context. The evidence suggests that, with appropriate support, AI can be a transformative tool in language classrooms, making learning more engaging and tailored to student needs. As AI technology continues to evolve, ongoing research and sharing of best practices will be crucial in harnessing its strengths while mitigating its risks in education.

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## THE SYNTACTIC STRUCTURE OF NEGATION IN MUPUN AND IMPLICATIONS FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING AMONG MUPUN NATIVES

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### Abstract

*This study examined the syntactic structure of negation in Mupun and explores its implications for English language learning among native Mupun speakers. Mupun, a West Chadic language spoken in Plateau State, employs a negation system that differs significantly from the Standard English pattern, particularly in the placement of negative markers, the use of auxiliary elements, and the interaction between negation and tense–aspect constructions. The research analyzes the distribution and functions of primary Mupun negators, their position within the clause, and how they affect verb phrases and subject–predicate relations. Findings show that Mupun often marks negation through clause-final particles, whereas English relies primarily on preverbal negation using auxiliaries such as do, be, and have. These structural contrasts create predictable difficulties for Mupun learners of English, including omission of auxiliaries, misplacement of not, and incorrect formation of negative questions. The study argues that explicit contrastive teaching, focused on auxiliary-supported negation and the syntactic rigidity of English negative constructions, can significantly improve learners’ accuracy. Ultimately, understanding Mupun negation patterns offers valuable insights for developing pedagogical strategies tailored to the linguistic background of Mupun-speaking learners.*

### 1. Introduction

Negation is a fundamental universal property of human language, allowing speakers to deny propositions, reject assumptions, express non-existence, or indicate the absence of events. Although the concept of negation is universal, the syntactic strategies languages employ to encode it vary widely. These variations often create difficulties for second language learners, especially when the target language uses structural patterns that differ significantly from those of the first language.

Mupun land or chiefdom is located in Pankshin Local Government Area of Plateau State of Nigeria in an area laying some 120 kilometers East of Jos. The entire Mupun land or chiefdom is just one district called Lankan district. The name ‘Lankan’ was given by the Ngas people, meaning groundnuts. This was because some Ngas people used to travel to Lankan to buy food. The land is relatively favourable for the production of maize, melons, cocoyam, groundnut, sorghum, acha, millet, etc. (Danfulani & Fwatshak, 2012, p. 70) The Mupun land has the following villages: Abwor/Dyis, Kagu, Sihin, Ghitong, Nenlet, Jiblik, Jing, Lankan, Asaa, Akong, and Dung (Frajzyngier, 1993).

The Mupun people are bordered by Mwaghavul people on the west and by Ngas on the east. It is bordered by Chip, where the Miship language is spoken, on the Southeast. Danfulani and Fwatshak (2012) report that the Mupun are found on the eastern edge of the Jos Plateau, in central Nigeria. The people are called Mupun and the language is also called Mupun. The term Mupun consists of two phrases; ‘Mu’ which means ‘we’, and ‘Pun’ which means “chased out from hiding” (Danfulani & Fwatshak 2012, p.71).

The Mupun people have two traditions of origin:

1, Borno, and

2. Places within the Jos Plateau. These places are Tambes, Dai, Zong, Muduut, Gung, and Ron (Danfulani & Fwatshak, 2012). The second tradition of origin from within the Jos Plateau is further seen in the table of migration of the six major clans of Mupun land – Tambes, Nendai, Jelbang, Mutkop, Diffir and Jepkul.

Below is the map of Pankshin Local Government showing Mupun land.

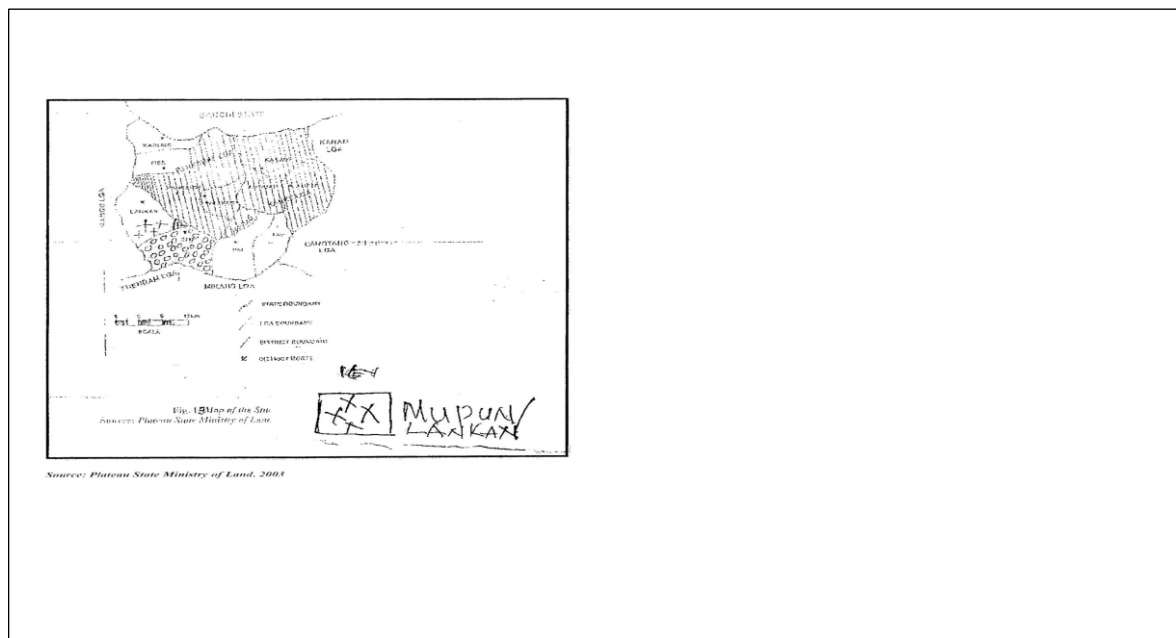


Fig 1: Map of Pankshin Local Government Area showing Mupun land

Source: Plateau State Ministry of Lands, 2003.

Mupun is a member of the Chadic family in the Afroasiatic phylum, which includes languages that are spoken in Africa and Asia. Newman (1977) regards the Chadic language family as a constituent member of the Afroasiatic phylum. According to Heine and Nurse (2000, p.80), the Chadic phylum has an estimated number of 140 languages spread out in three directions from the Lake Chad on which the family name is based and spoken in parts of Nigeria, Chad, Cameroon, Central African Republic and Niger. The widely spoken and the best-known Chadic language is Hausa. The Chadic sub-group is divided into four thus: West Chadic, Central Chadic (Bui Mandara), East Chadic and Masa (Heine & Nurse 2000). The Mupun language belongs to the West Chadic family, which is further divided into 'A' and 'B'. Mupun still falls under group 'A' of the West Chadic, alongside Ngas, Mwaghavul, Bole etc.

This study investigates the syntactic structure of negation in Mupun, a West Chadic language spoken predominantly in Pankshin and Mupun districts of Plateau State, Nigeria. While previous research on the Mupun language has addressed phonology, morphology, and lexical documentation, syntactic studies remain sparse, particularly with regard to negation. This leaves a gap in understanding how Mupun speakers process negation and how their linguistic background influences their acquisition of English, especially in formal educational contexts.

English uses a well-defined system of negation that relies heavily on auxiliaries, rigid word order, and the clausal placement of not. Mupun, in contrast, uses negative particles that appear either clause-finally distribution depending on the tense–aspect environment. These differences create predictable learning challenges that may manifest as negative transfer,

omission of auxiliaries, misplacement of negative markers, or incorrect formation of negative questions.

### Objectives

The study therefore pursues three major objectives:

1. To analyze the syntactic form and distribution of negation markers in Mupun.
2. To compare these patterns with English negative constructions.
3. To determine their implications for English language learning among Mupun speakers and propose pedagogical interventions.

### Significance

The significance of this research lies in its contribution to contrastive analysis, language pedagogy, and the broader understanding of Chadic syntax. The findings can support curriculum designers, English teachers, and Mupun language educators in developing instruction that acknowledges learners' linguistic realities.

## 2. The Concept of Negation

### 2.1 Definition of Negation

Negation is a linguistic operation that reverses the truth value of a proposition. According to Horn (2010), negation typically signals non-occurrence, denial, contradiction, or rejection. It may appear at the clausal, phrasal, or morphological level, depending on the language.

### 2.2 Functions of Negation

Negation serves several communicative functions:

Descriptive negation: expressing that something did not occur.

Rejection: refusing an assumption or request.

Metalinguistic negation: challenging form or presupposition rather than content.

Existential negation: indicating absence of entities.

These functions are universal, but their syntactic realization differs across languages.

### 2.3 Types of Negation

#### Operator and Do Periphrasis

This is a straightforward phrase that has been negated by placing the word not before the operator and the prediction.

Example:

Positive

We may win the match.

\*Mu mak se kohorong khi tan disi

We may eat winner of match this

Abbreviated Negation

English

Mupun

Direct translation

Two colloquial forms of negation are feasible in situations when the operator can be shortened by using a contracted form that is enclitic to the subject. Keep in mind that you cannot shorten or contract the operator in Mupun or most other African languages.

. Examples:

1. Someone's not coming

\* Me gurum khi ji kas

someone is not coming

Me gurum khi ji kas

- |                    |                  |
|--------------------|------------------|
| 2. We aren't ready | We are not ready |
| * Mu dak sun kas   | Mu dak sun kas.  |

### Non-assertive Forms and Negative Forms

The negative particle not or n't is frequently followed (not necessarily directly) by one or more of the non-assertive items.

Examples:

- | Positive                 | Negative                             |
|--------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 1. We've had some lunch  | 1. We've had no lunch                |
| * Mu kə mu ten sise puus | *Mu kə mu ten sise puus kas          |
| 2. I've bought something | 2. I haven't bought anything for you |
| * Wen kən seet me mbi ha | *Wen kən seet me mbi ha kas          |

### Negative Intensification

According to Quirk et al., there are several methods for adding emotional intensity to a denial.

Examples:

- I'll never, go there again.  
\* .Wen ciyam ba dəm npemənə zak kas
- I don't care a damn whether we win or lose.  
\*wen kak ni kas ka mu se koghorong ah mu pal

### Initial Negative Element

There is no substituting construction for the simple negative form when it appears in a subject or initial adjunct since the non-assertive form connected with negation cannot advance in the sentence.

Examples:

- | Negative Subject         |                           |
|--------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1. No one listens to me  | * Me gurum le kom wen kas |
| 2. Nothing came of it    | *Me mbii put dəən nə kas  |
| 3. None of us were ready | *Me me fun dak shin kas   |

### Negative Adjunct

- Not until yesterday did he change his mind  
\*Ka ba a do don kas dang wu she putuhup wu

It further confirms that the negative marker should be placed at the final position in Mupun statements in the majority of situations, as seen in the examples under the negative topic.

### More than one non-assertive form

When a clause has a negative element, it is typically negative all the way through—that is, until the final adjunct begins, or at least until the negative element appears. This means that following a negative, all assertive forms that would have appeared in the matching positive sentence must generally be replaced with non-assertive forms.

Examples:

- I've never traveled anywhere by air yet.  
\*Wen kən ciyam yo mwan dəən jirghi deng kas.
- No one has ever said anything to either of us.  
\*Men gwe kə ciyam saat membi meme fun kas.

Even in positive subordinate clauses that come after a negative in the main clause, the non-assertive forms can be found.

Examples:

- Nobody has promised that any of you will be released yet.  
\* Me gurum kə le po ne memefu put aku kas.
- That wouldn't deter anyone who had any courage.  
\* Mənə nci me nguputuhup kas.

Nonetheless, forceful forms are equally likely to arise in these situations, and more generally, assertive forms do follow a negative as long as they don't overlap with it.

The link between negative words and the nonassertive words they govern illustrates the scope of negation. Only when a non-assertive form is within the purview of the negative, that is, the linguistic range that the negative meaning functions over, can it be claimed that the negative forum governs (or determines the occurrence of) the non-assertive form. Typically, the scope of the negation starts with the negative word and goes all the way to the end of the phrase or the start of the last adjunct. Typically, the predication is outside of the subject and any adjuncts that appear before it. The operator is something that falls both inside and outside of the purview. Examples:

1. I definitely didn't speak to him ('It's not definite that I did not).
2. I didn't definitely speak to him ('It's not definite that I did').

### Focus of Negation

It is crucial to determine the information focus in addition to the scope of the negation. A specific area of the clause where contrastive nuclear stress falls shows not only that the rest of the clause can be interpreted positively, but also that the contrast in meaning has an impact.

Example:

It was not the labor government that John attacked. (For example, John wasn't the attacker, but someone did). Negation is emphasized. It should also be considered that the Mupun child would encounter difficulties since he does not grasp the shift in stress in English because it is not there in his native tongue.

### Tag Questions

A statement has an additional kind of negation attached to it, as shown in the tag question. Examples:

1. The lady has left, hasn't she?
2. He knows you, doesn't he?
3. He doesn't like his job, does he?

Statements

The main purpose of statements is to communicate information. Usually presented in declarative form, it can also be given in negative and interrogative forms. In this case, the subject usually comes before the verb and is always present.

Examples:

Declarative

Audu will not speak to the boss today

\*Audu wu nlu pò ngu kikyen nə cicin si kas

It is evident from the numerous examples provided in the literature study that students struggle to accurately convert declarative sentences to negative forms due to habits established in their mother tongue. Consequently, children must study English as a second language and be taught to employ a variety of declarative, interrogative, and negative sentence patterns. The comparative analysis of negation in Mupun and English is the sole focus of this work.

## 2.4 Negation in English

English uses *not* as its primary negative marker, typically requiring an auxiliary (do, be, have). For example:

1. He did not come.
2. She is not happy.

The do-support rule is central to English negation and is a major source of difficulty for learners whose first languages do not require auxiliaries.

### **2.5 Negation in African and Chadic Languages**

Most Chadic languages use negative particles placed either clause-initially or clause-finally. Mupun aligns with the clause-final negation pattern, a feature shared with other languages in the Ngas-subgroup. There is a dearth of information in the literature regarding the negation aspects of the Mupun language in particular and the Chadic family languages in general. It does not claim to be a generative/transformational description of the language as it currently exists. A few examples are the work of researchers such as Newman (1971), who analyzed the Hausa negative markers by providing a systematic account of the markers found in modern Hausa in terms of their historical study presented and its implications for synchronic studies of negation in Hausa. Frajzyngier (*Mupun Grammar*), 1993.

Additionally, in 2009, Norbert Cyffer, Erwin Ebermann, and Georg Ziegelmeyer published a book titled "Negation Patterns in West African Languages and Beyond," which Elly van Gelderen reviewed. The book identifies several negation patterns in West Africa, including the incompatibility of negation and focus, the use of the prohibitive and various negation patterns dependent on specific Tense-Aspect-Moods, the absence of negative indefinites, and "double negation," as they pointed out. In a workshop on post-verbal negation, Wolff (2012) concentrated on the Chadic family; this study is more closely related to his focus on the Hausa language belonging to the West Chadic group. Similar to the Standard Hausa post-verbal negation marker *bá*, which typically occurs in clause-final position (with some exceptions permitted), the Mupun language negation marker *kas/ka*, which is also a member of the Chadic family, typically appears at the end of a sentence; however, this is not always the case in "northern" dialects. As can be seen in the review below, the markers *ba* and *kas* appear in the medial and terminal locations, respectively, in the Mupun negative intensification example. Negation

According to Horn (2001), having the ability to negate means having the ability to reject, contradict, lie, speak ironically, and be able to tell fact from falsehood—that is, having the ability to be human. According to Blanco and Moldovan (2011), affirmative statements are always the default position and negation is a feature of all languages. UsingEnglish.com (@copyright 2002-2013) states that a negative structure can show the absence of a noun or any other substantive, the non-performance of the action described as a verb. Huddleston and Pullum (2002), cited by the same authors, stated that, unlike affirmative statements, negation is marked by words (e.g., not, no, never) or affixes (e.g., -n't, un-). Negation in language functions in a contradictory way: it involves a connection, action, modification, etc. Adverbs and adjectives can both be negated to express the absence of the quality or characteristic described by a verb, or non-existence in the case of a stative verb. Adverbs and adjectives can also be negated to express the absence of the quality characteristic described to break the linking function of a preposition so that the items governed by it are shown to be separate. Even if something may not be green, a negative almost always conjures up a spectral image of the precise thing it is claiming is lacking. This is because when we discover that something is absent, it colors our perception of it. One of the essential components of meaning and

creativity is this clever system shared by all languages. It gives us access to one of the most basic and basic tools available for generating various shades of meaning.

### **3. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

The study adopts a Contrastive Analysis Framework (CAF) combined with insights from generative syntax.

#### **3.1 Contrastive Analysis Theory**

Contrastive Analysis (Lado 1957) posits that the differences between a learner's first and second language determine potential areas of difficulty. If Mupun marks negation differently from English, these differences may predict specific errors.

#### **3.2 Generative Syntax Approach**

Within the generative grammar model, negation is treated as a functional category (NegP) with specific syntactic behavior. Languages vary in:

The position of the negative head.

Its interaction with tense and aspect.

Movement or non-movement of verbs to Neg.

This approach provides a theoretical basis for analyzing Mupun negation structures.

#### **3.3 Application to the Study**

Combining both frameworks allows the research to:

1. Describe Mupun negation patterns using syntactic theory.
2. Contrast them with English structures.
3. Explain learner errors as predictable outcomes of structural differences.

### **4. METHODOLOGY**

#### **4.1 Research Design**

The study employs a descriptive qualitative approach supported by contrastive linguistic analysis.

#### **4.2 Data Sources**

Data were drawn from:

1. Native speaker consultations (10 Mupun speakers aged 25–60).
2. Recorded natural speech samples.
3. Elicited constructions using translated sentences.
4. Existing descriptive works on Mupun grammar.

#### **4.3 Data Collection Tools**

Audio recordings of speech of the native speakers of Mupun. Their speeches were analyzed to identify negation markers.

#### **4.4 Data Analysis Procedure**

1. Identification of negation markers and their distribution.
2. Classification of negative constructions.
3. Contrastive analysis with English structures.
4. Interpretation of implications for English learning.

#### 4.5 Ethical Considerations

Participants were informed of the purpose of the research, and verbal consent was obtained. Pseudonyms were used for anonymity.

### 5. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

#### 5.1 Negation Marker in Mupun

Mupun uses the primary negative particle “ka/kas”, which frequently occurs clause-finally. Examples include:

1. laa ne seet ka – “The child did not go.”
2. ba naa ka – “I did not see.”

#### 5.2 Distribution of Negative Markers

Negation appears:

1. Clause-finally in standard negation.
2. As a preverbal marker in negative imperatives.

#### 5.3 Negation and Tense–Aspect Interaction

In Mupun:

1. Negation does not require auxiliary support.
2. Tense markers remain in their normal positions.
3. Verbs do not move to negation.

This contrasts sharply with English, where:

1. Auxiliaries are mandatory.
2. Subject–auxiliary inversion occurs in negative questions.
3. Do-support is required for lexical verbs.

#### 5.4 Negative Questions in Mupun

Mupun forms negative questions by adding the particle *ka* or *kas* using intonation alone: Laa ne seet ka yee? – “Didn’t the child go?”

English forms:

- “Did the child not go?”  
 “Didn’t the child go?”

The presence of auxiliary movement in English is a problem for Mupun learners.

#### 5.5 Implications for English Language Learning

1. Auxiliary omission Learners often produce:  
He not come instead of He did not come.
2. Negator misplacement due to clause-final Mupun negation:  
She is happy not instead of She is not happy.
3. Difficulty forming negative questions, learners may avoid inversion or place *not* incorrectly.
4. Overgeneralization of negative particles. Some learners mistakenly introduce a clause-final not pattern.
5. Negative concord errors Mupun allows reinforcing negation patterns; learners may overuse negatives in English (e.g., I didn’t see nothing).

#### 5.6 Pedagogical Implications

1. Teaching should emphasize auxiliary-supported negation.
2. Contrastive drills highlighting positional differences.
3. Explicit practice in negative wh-questions and tag questions.

4. Error analysis to address predictable transfer issues.

## 6. FINDINGS

1. Mupun relies primarily on a clause-final negative particle ka/kas, unlike English which places not after auxiliaries.
2. Mupun negation does not require auxiliary verbs; English does.
3. The difference in syntactic configuration leads to transfer errors among Mupun learners of English.
4. Negative questions in English create significant challenges because Mupun does not involve subject–auxiliary inversion.
5. Learners sometimes apply Mupun-like clause-final negation patterns to English sentences.
6. Contrastive analysis proves effective in predicting error patterns for English teachers in Mupun-speaking communities.

## 7. CONCLUSION

The study reveals that the syntactic structure of negation in Mupun is distinct from that of English in several fundamental areas, including the position of the negative marker, the role of auxiliaries, and the formation of negative questions. These structural differences create predictable challenges for Mupun learners of English, resulting in errors that can be traced to their L1 negation patterns.

The study concludes that addressing these challenges requires explicit teaching techniques that contrast Mupun and English structures. Incorporating L1 knowledge into English pedagogy enhances learners' comprehension and reduces fossilized errors. This research contributes both to Chadic syntax studies and to applied linguistics in multilingual contexts.

## 8. CONTRIBUTION TO KNOWLEDGE

1. The study provides one of the few detailed syntactic analyses of negation in Mupun, enriching documentation of West Chadic languages.
2. It demonstrates specific structural contrasts between Mupun and English that had not been systematically analyzed before.
3. It shows how these contrasts generate predictable learning difficulties among Mupun speakers.
4. It proposes pedagogical strategies informed by linguistic theory to improve English instruction in Mupun-speaking communities.
5. It contributes to the broader field of contrastive linguistics and minority-language issue.

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## THE HERO ARCHETYPES IN MWAGHAVUL LEGENDS AND THEIR RELEVANCE TO CONTEMPORARY YOUTH IDENTITY

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### **Abstract**

*This paper explores heroic archetypes in Mwaghavul legends and their relevance to contemporary youth identity. Rooted in African oral traditions, the study responds to the cultural threat posed by globalization and declining indigenous storytelling. Drawing on archetypal theory, particularly the works of Carl Jung and Northrop Frye, the paper employs literary analysis of a Mwaghavul legend known as Jepnwaan. Through this framework, the hero is examined as an archetypal figure with Jepnwaan as the epic warrior-redeemer who embodies supernatural resistance, sacrifice, and cultural sovereignty. The findings reveal that this legend not only preserves communal memory but also offers an enduring model of courage, integrity, and service that contrasts with the fragmented role models of modern youth culture. By situating Mwaghavul heroism within a universal archetypal continuum, the paper demonstrates how indigenous narratives can provide symbolic resources for addressing youth challenges such as unemployment, leadership crises, and identity dislocation. It concludes that integrating this heroic tradition into education, cultural programming, and policy can inspire morally grounded, resilient, and culturally conscious youth.*

**Keywords:** *Hero, Archetypes, Mwaghavul, Oral narrative, Legends, Youth identity*

### **Introduction**

The African oral narratives are true expressions of the folk-beliefs, custom, worldviews, values and essence of the African people. They are largely oral but real and imaginatively transmitted from generation to generation. Undisputedly, no society has ever existed without a culture. This lived culture is transmitted to the youths by the elders and custodians of the culture. Thus, the culture of a pre-literate society is transmitted basically in the oral form which is represented as the folklore of the people. Okpewho avers that the folklore of a people generally is made up of two activities, which include what the people traditionally say in their songs, proverbs, tales, etc, and what they traditionally do like weaving, dancing, rituals and the likes (5). These cultural activities constitute part of the life of a people and survive when they are transmitted.

It may be argued whether folklore still has benefit especially in our contemporary society. Akporobaro defends this when he states that all oral forms are means for the validation and preservation of culture and tradition (38). This means that culture ceases to exist when its cultural resources are no more. Besides, African folklore is seen to possess depths of wisdom and value.

Who then are the Mwaghavul? Barnabas reveals that they are Chadic speakers who by oral tradition, have migrated from the Lake Chad to settle in their present abode in Mangu local government, Central Plateau. They occupy the old nine districts of Ampang, Chakfem, Jipal Kerang, Kombun, Mangu, Mangun, Panyam and Pushit. They have a first class paramount ruler called the Mishkagham Mwaghavul, in Plateau State, Central Nigeria (28). They are

among the largest ethnic groups within the state. Today, beside these domesticated districts, a sizeable population of the Mwaghavul is also found in the Southern part of Plateau State and in Lafia, Gwantu, Saminaka, Pambeguwa, Zaria and many other places where they constitute a community. Barnabas further points out that the identity of the Mwaghavul surfaced when the people had taken possession of their present abode (29).

Today, post-modern culture has plunged many African societies and cultures into the risk of losing indigenous storytelling and identity among youths. The Mwaghavul culture is not exempt from this danger. This paper is therefore to identify and analyse hero archetypes in Mwaghavul legends and to evaluate how these archetypes can inspire youth identity formation in contemporary society.

### **Theoretical Framework: Archetypal Theory**

Archetype in literary criticism, according to Abrams and Harpham, means “narrative design, pattern of actions, character types, themes, and images which recur in a wide variety of works of literature, as well as in myths, dreams, and even social rituals” (16). The key forerunner of archetype theory is Carl Gustav Jung. His theory of archetypes forms a central element of his concept of the collective unconscious. He defines archetypes as universal forms or images that occur in all cultures and epochs. Archetypes are inherited tendencies or patterns of psychic functioning that shape human perception and behavior, manifesting particularly in myths, dreams, and art (7). Jung emphasizes that archetypes are not fixed images, but are structural predispositions of the psyche that give rise to symbolic representations across different traditions. Thus, myths and religious symbols are the unconscious expressions of these primordial images.

In Jung’s explanation, key archetypes include the Persona which represents the social mask one wears; the Shadow, representing repressed instincts and darker aspects of the self; the Anima or Animus which is the contra-sexual aspect of the psyche; and the Self, symbolizing psychic wholeness and integration. These archetypes serve as organizing principles for experience and are revealed most vividly in mythological narratives.

Carl Jung further argues that in myth, archetypes appear as universal motifs and recurring figures like heroes, tricksters, wise old men, great mothers that express fundamental human concerns. For Jung, the study of myths is crucial, since they are the primordial language through which the unconscious speaks. Ultimately, Jung’s archetypal theory shows how myths bridge the personal and collective levels of experience. Myths provide symbolic frameworks through which individuals can connect with deeper layers of the psyche, offering pathways toward self-understanding and individuation.

Other prominent scholars who further developed archetypal criticism in different modes include Maud Bodkin, G. Wilson Knight, Robert Graves, Philip Wheelwright, Richard Chase, Leslie Fiedler, and Joseph Campbell. Their emphasis tended to be on use of mythical patterns in literature, with the belief that myths are related to the elemental archetype than the art of skillful writers.

Northrop Frye, in his book *Anatomy of Criticism*, also developed the archetypal approach by combining the typological interpretation of the Bible with the conception of imagination in the writings of William Blake. Frye defines archetypes as recurring narrative patterns and symbols that link all literature into a unified imaginative structure. He explains that the mythical phase which is “symbol as archetype” reveals how symbols “connect one poem with

another and thereby help to unify and integrate our literary experience” (99). In an essay, “Archetypal Criticism: Theory of Myths,” Frye develops a framework of four mythoi, modeled on the cycles of nature which include comedy (spring), associated with “rebirth and renewal” (163); romance (summer) which is the high point of adventure, triumph, and idealism; tragedy (autumn) which is linked with decline and catastrophe; and irony and satire (winter) embodying disintegration, sterility, and chaos. He further distinguishes three levels of archetypal imagery to include apocalyptic imagery which deals with images of harmony and fulfillment, e.g., gardens and light; demonic imagery dealing with forces of disorder, darkness, and sterility; and analogical imagery dealing with the human order between apocalyptic and demonic. For Frye, archetypal criticism shifts away from author-centered approaches; hence, literature should be seen as an order of words where myths and symbols create coherence across works and cultures.

The justification for adopting this theory is that archetype theory provides a systematic lens for interpreting the recurrent character patterns, motifs, and symbolic structures that permeate myths and oral narratives across cultures. Jung’s notion of archetypes as manifestations of the collective unconscious underscores their universality, allowing the heroes of Mwaghavul legends to be situated within a broader continuum of human symbolic expression while still retaining their cultural specificity. Similarly, Frye’s emphasis on mythic structures and archetypal roles establishes a “grammar” of storytelling through which these heroic figures can be critically examined not merely as localized cultural artifacts but as integral components of the universal imaginative heritage of humanity. In the context of this paper, the application of archetype theory is particularly significant because it enables an interpretive bridge between traditional Mwaghavul narratives and the lived realities of contemporary youth. By analyzing the heroic archetypes in legends, the study highlights symbolic models that resonate with the identity struggles of modern youths, including challenges of unemployment, leadership deficit, and existential uncertainty. Thus, archetype theory not only enriches the literary analysis of Mwaghavul legends but also facilitates a socially relevant dialogue between cultural heritage and youth identity formation, affirming the enduring relevance of mythic heroism in shaping contemporary values and aspirations.

### **Legends and Significance in Oral Narratives**

“Legend” is taken from the medieval English *Legenda* which means things to be read, and also from Latin’s *Legere* which means read. James explains that “the word legend conjures up everything from legendary heroes – real people who performed heroic deeds ... that fall between actual history and total fantasy” (v).

Sauchuk et al in their attempt to define legend foreground events as the phenomena that help to project a legend. The legend must exhibit some supernatural traits that begin to constitute a tale of the deeds. They define legend as,

a story about an event that allegedly took place in reality. In almost all cases, legend arose on the basis of the stories of witnesses, eyewitnesses, ‘chosen people’ who could witness a certain miracle or sacrament associated with the names and faces of the saints. It is important that the legends were passed from mouth to mouth, overgrown with new details and assessments from those who told them (523).

Isidore Okpewho on his part defines legend as “accounts of personalities and events that are considered so memorable that deserve to be talked about or recounted again and again” (183). He further reveals that the legend might have emerged from a closely recent event, or from far away past which have become even vague to memory, as a result, producing different forms of manipulative or distorting details of narration. Okpewho talks

about two kinds of legends which are the historic legend, and the romantic (or mythic) legend. While the historic legend can be events of the present or of the recent past found in the memory, in which the narrator adhere to the details of the real life because the personality and the event in question is known and can be recalled, the romantic, or mythic legend is conversely not under any restrictions. The reason is the events are a distant past, and so the narrator improvises with imaginations in most incredible manner, and takes cover in the guise that “things are no longer what they used to be” even when questioned (183).

For the purpose of this study, this research will adopt the explanation of the concept of legend given by Bascom who defines legends as “prose narratives which, like myths, are regarded as true by the narrator and his audience, but they are set in a period considered less remote, when the world was much as it is today” (4). To Bascom, legends, rather than being sacred, are characteristically secular, with humans as the major characters. Their stories may revolve around migration, warfare, deeds of heroes of antiquity and the likes. They are usually verbal traditions of ancient treasures, ghosts, fairies and local tales. It can be added that legends give tales of natural events with origin from mysteries or Gothic, and supernatural world. It is also a story transmitted from generation to generation about fame of personalities.

Bascom reveals that the contents that constitute legends are migration, wars and victories; stories of deeds of past heroes, chiefs and kings, and succession in ruling dynasties. Legends are often the counterparts in the verbal tradition to written history, but they also include local tales of buried treasures, ghosts, fairies, and saints (4). The features of legends are tales that are believed to be factual or to contain possible details of real life. They are historical stories, but also occur in the world of today. They are either secular or sacred, and the characters are humans with extraordinary gifts. These tales are not privately own and are not totally magical in their effects.

Legends possess some values which include teaching of morals about the consequence of right and wrong behaviour. They also explain the unknown by trying to make sense of natural phenomena. They express cultural identity and serve pedagogical functions. In addition, they encourage values like bravery, selflessness and heroism.

### **Hero Archetypes in Mwaghavul Legends**

Jepnwaan is the legend selected for this study. Jepnwaan was a hero that existed before the advent of the Europeans in Mwaghavul land and battled the colonial invasion around 1905 (Katu 175). The legend of Jepnwaan occupies an important place within Mwaghavul oral tradition, presenting a distinct heroic model that fuses history, myth, and spirituality in constructing communal memory and identity. The narrative of this hero is transcribed and translated as follows:

**Ngu Jagham: Rev. Sunday Ayuba**

**Koghorong Jepwaan**

Ba mu mmak sat puun kí nìghin kí Jenwaan kas. Mo le sum Jepnwaan nwuri a pee dí mo so kat ri a tileng. A jep mo so kat ri a tileng, 6e mo nwaan ri jíí ní ntulu. Ani 6e mo le sum nwuri nne Jepnwaan. Wuri jíí tong dí ri jíí wurang 6e rií cìn mbii lukshik mo. Gyet wuri a koghorong hakyeng dang wurií cìn mbii aapoo mo. Kyet a kwat aa, koo a me ye 6e ri ncìn shi koghorong. Gyet kat guruh tu lushim njii kí lushim 6e ngo mìnì a koghorong. A lwàa kwàt dí gyet wurií twa mo mmìnì. Kat wuri twa lwàa kwàt mìnì mo 6e móó cìn pwaghál mu mbii dí ri cìn ní dang 6e wuri nswap pak lwaa ní nguruh ní mo.

Gyet wuri a koghorong lek hakyeng. Dikaam fina sat nne gyet kat dun kiling mee fiip si be dun nyaghal nKombun can del nKerang nne Jepnwaan ki pet dun. Pet pee mini den a mu lek. Kat mee beer ji, be Jepnwaan mpirep gurum firi mo mpee cin lek ni. Wuri mak naa ji ki shaar lek di moó ji mpee bwot beer a yil ni akudang moó ji wul. Kat ri naa kisi be ri ncin kum aku ri dak nyem lek firi mo di. Wuri ncin lek ni dang ri nse koghorong. Wuri mak naa mee mbii diibish di moó ji a yil ni kaa mee muut diibish kaa beló, koo ngorzol, koo tuzuk mo di nyem diibish moó cin mpee ji ki ni a yil ni. Kat ri naa be ri nlek ki mo nriin aku ri daam baa muut ni mo mpee kaji ni ji twa koo tung mee gurum di a yil ni. Wuri nlek ki nyem diibish ki riin diibish mini mo ku ri se koghorong nkaa mo.

Gyet ni ndi Muutdughum di wuri a mishkagham kum nKerang muut, be Jepnwaan lap mishkagham ki mishkagham kum ni. Wuri cin kum aku ri man mbii mo dang ri taa a kyeen nlek mo.

Ba gyet Jepnwaan cin mee dik kas. Jir ki di ri a koghorong mu di moó cin pwaghal nri mpee lwaá yil di ri twa mo ki koghorong di ri se mo nlek mo, jiraap mo ribet di mo ndee nri mmat, ki zak, di wuri mmak yaa mee reep dyel mmat be ba wuri cin kisi kas. Wuri tong didi ndi mmat. A mbii di ri naa ni ret nri mmini. Mbut ntong firi, wuri ribet fwang a yil firi ki gurum firi mo. Wuri kam mbii mo dang ri le nyem firi mo nkaa ar. Gyet gurum moó fes kiir ri zam dang ba ri kiir mee múut kas.

Gyet wuri mwàan a nkaa biring dang ri cin lek nkaa biring zak. Koo di ba daas lek firi ni mo des kas be ri nse koghorong nkaa shaar lek firi mo. Wuri mak wang but ki dushuu di nKerang aku ri zok mat mo ki jep mo ki nyem di ba mo nso nlek kas. Parmeece koo shaar lek mo ji del di nyil ni be ba mo nnaa mee gurum kas mpee di ri zok gurum ni mo mbut ki dushuu ni. Kat ri zok gurum ni mo be ri ntaa nkaa shaar lek firi ni mo kaa nfyem nkaa jep kwee mo si. Gyet shaar lek moó mak den a nRon mo. Kat ri tu koghorong ki shaar lek mo be ri ncan kaa ni so le nlu kum. Pak be ri nshwaa a mos ki dyes kaa ni.

Gyet muluu mo shee ji sham ki poo Naan a Piyana akudang moó mwàan ki ni nkaghar yil Mwaghavul mo. Jepnwaan man nne muluu moó sham di a yil dang moó ribet mang sel ki yil ni. Mee muluu mo feer mo ji sham pe Jepnwaan di be ri kaat mo aku ri le mo nbit. Wuri put yit mo aku ri shaghat mo di ba mo mak waa pwat kas. Wuri dum mo ki dyeel nzhitaa diideet. Mo sigham di ndighin bit ni di mo ji murap. Wuri naa mo ji a mee mbii diipoo a yil ni dang moó ribet la yil ni nkaa nyem kum mo. Wuri sham yaghal mpee lek mpee di ri naa mbii diinaat ki ji di a yil ni. Pak muluu ni mo waa baa ji di be ri yaghal mpee lek ki mo. Wuri ki daas lek firi mo taa nkaa muluu di mo tong kaa pwat nkogho nGindiri ji nyil ni. Wuri ki daas firi ni mo kaa nkaa biring furu mo mpee lek ni. Muluu ni mo pwas mo ki kòpwus mu di ni twa pak daas lek firi mo. Jepnwaan cin lek mu di ri mak yaa mee muluu ni ki kòpwus firi. Wuri la lee lek ni dangbe ba ri manshi ki lee pus pee mini kas. Wuri wang gurum di ri zok mo mbut ki dushuu aku ri baa shaghat dushuu ni di ki mee sat di ba mee gurum mak waa del di kas. Lek ni ji naat mu di muluu ni mo cin-cin mpee yaa ri. Kat muluu ni mo cin mpee yaa be ri ncighir lushim. Pak be ri ncighir lushim nji. Wuri yaghal cin shin mpee ku mo yaa ri di mpee di ba ri ribet ku muluu ni mo waa twa gurum mo di a yil ni mpee wuri kas. Mpee yil ni ki gurum ni mo be ri cin shin ku ri yit mo yaa ri di. Muluu ni mo cin-cin mpee ku ri wòo àr dak aapoo firi ni be ba ri sat mmo kas. Mo del so ki

ri 6e mo sham wul mBwoonraas mManggu 6e ri 6wot lek a muluu ni mo. Muluu ni mo pus ri ɗi tòghòm beer nri. Pak gurum moó sa nne a tòghòm firi ni le lutuk mManggu yon. Moó waa sat nne muluu ni mo naa nne moò pus ri 6e riì muut tanbe wuriì put ndaas ɗel sham ɗiɗi nkogho ndeer.

**Translation: Narrator: Rev. Sunday Ayuba**

**Hero: Jepnwaan**

No one could tell who Jepnwaan's parents were. He was named Jepnwaan because he was found in the forest. It was children who discovered him there and lured him home. That was why he was given the name Jepnwaan. He grew up and performed amazing deeds. He was a great hero who accomplished marvelous things. He excelled in hunting and in every adventure. At that time, anyone who killed a cheetah or a leopard was considered a hero. These were the common animals he killed. Whenever he killed such beasts, victory dances were performed in his honor, and he would share part of the meat with the people.

Jepnwaan was also a great war hero. My grandfather told me that whenever they heard certain kind of whistle, they would leave Kombun and cross over to Kerang in response to Jepnwaan's call. Such calls were for war. Whenever war threatened, Jepnwaan would summon his men to fight. He could foresee enemies approaching to wage war on the land before they even appeared. Once he saw this, he would perform traditional religious rites and prepare his warriors. He always fought bravely and emerged victorious.

He could also perceive impending calamities such as sicknesses—chickenpox, smallpox, or measles—that evil people tried to unleash upon the land. When he foresaw such threats, he would combat them spiritually, neutralizing their power so they could not harm anyone. He fought against evil people and evil spirits and always overcame them.

When Mutdughun, the chief priest of Kerang, died, Jepnwaan became both king and chief priest. He performed traditional rites, possessed deep knowledge of secrets, and continued to lead in war.

Jepnwaan never married. Despite being a hero celebrated with victory songs, admired by maidens who desired to be his wives, and fully capable of choosing or even capturing a bride, he chose to remain unmarried. His only passion was to protect his land and his people. He guided his people on the right path. He was greatly feared, yet he himself feared nothing.

He rode horses and fought wars on horseback. Even with only a few warriors, he defeated his enemies. He opened the volcanic mountain in Kerang to hide women, children, and those unable to go to war. Sometimes enemies invaded the land but found no one because Jepnwaan had hidden his people inside the belly of the volcanic mountain. Once he secured his people, he would launch attacks on his foes like a raptor swooping on chicks. His chief enemies were the Rons. When he killed the champion of an enemy camp, he cut off the head and placed it in the shrine. He also drank local brew from their skulls.

The missionaries first brought the gospel to Panyam before it spread to other Mwachavul lands. Jepnwaan realized that colonialists had intruded and wanted to take over. Four white men came to Jepnwaan. He welcomed them, locked them inside his hut, and suffocated them with pungent smoke from peppers. They coughed until they died. He had seen that they brought strange

ways and sought to overthrow the traditional rulers and priests, so he rose to defend the land.

Later, more Europeans returned. Jepnwaan and his warriors descended upon those who came through Gindiri. They fought on horseback, but the Europeans used guns, killing some of the warriors. Jepnwaan wrested a gun from one of them, but he did not know how to use it. He then released the people he had hidden inside the volcanic mountain and sealed it again with a flat stone that no one could open.

The war was fierce. The Europeans tried to capture Jepnwaan, but whenever they approached, he transformed into a leopard or sometimes into a cheetah. Eventually, he surrendered himself, not out of fear, but because he did not want more of his people to be killed. For the sake of the land and its people, he allowed himself to be taken.

The Europeans tried to make him reveal the secret of his powers, but he never did. As they led him away, at Bwoonraas, near Mangu, Jepnwaan attacked them. They shot him, and his blood was spilled. It is said that his blood brought prosperity to the Mangu market. Some say that though the Europeans believed they had killed him, he actually revived and moved down into the lowlands.

### **Synopsis**

From this oral narrative, Jenwaan belongs more firmly to the mythic tradition, where the protagonist transcends ordinary human limitations to embody superhuman heroism. Jepnwaan, “the son of no one,” abandoned in the forest yet divinely gifted with extraordinary strength, rises to prominence as hunter, warrior, and priest-king. His feats include slaying leopards, and cheetahs, as well as confronting monstrous spirits who afflict humanity with diseases such as smallpox and measles. By defeating these embodiments of evil, Jepnwaan becomes not only a saviour but also a spiritual mediator who communes directly with deities through traditional religious rites. His heroism extends into political and military realms. Jepnwaan leads armies with unmatched skill, harnesses mystical powers to protect his people, and resists European colonial intrusion. His confrontation with the white men around 1905 (Katu 175), dramatizes the clash between indigenous heroism and colonial modernity. Jepnwaan’s heroism stresses resistance, defiance, and ultimate transcendence, culminating in his mysterious withdrawal into mythic immortality. Archetypally, Jepnwaan is a culture hero, divine warrior, and sacrificial redeemer, embodying values of courage, purity, devotion to the gods, and selfless service to his people.

### **The Hero Archetypes in the Legend of Jepnwaan**

Jepnwaan is an Archetype of the warrior/redeemer. He embodies the mythic-epic hero, larger-than-life, who operates in the cosmic and supernatural realm. His archetypal significance is evident in the following:

#### **The Abandoned Child / Chosen One**

Jepnwaan’s mysterious birth reveals as “the son of no one, found in the forest” aligns him with the mythic orphan archetype, common to global legends like Moses, Sundiata, and Hercules. His extraordinary strength as a child marks him as divinely chosen, a hero set apart from ordinary humanity.

**The Warrior Hero**

His feats against wild beasts (leopards, cheetahs) and his leadership in war portray him as the archetypal warrior, a defender of his people whose valour and physical prowess surpass all others. In Frye's terms, he is the hero of romance, superior to men and environment, operating in a mythic dimension (Frye 188).

**The Saviour / Redeemer**

Jepnwaan's battle against monstrous spirits who embody disease like smallpox, measles, and chickenpox situates him in the redeemer archetype: one who saves his people from cosmic affliction. By defeating these evil spirits, he becomes the community's health liberator and spiritual savior.

**The Priest-King Archetype**

Jepnwaan not only fights wars but also becomes chief priest, interceding between deities and humans. This dual office echoes African archetypes of sacral kingship, where the ruler mediates divine will for the community. His celibacy reinforces his purity as a sacred servant of the gods.

**The Anti-Colonial Resistor**

His confrontation with Europeans reconfigures the epic hero into a resistance figure. Jepnwaan confronts colonial intrusion directly, using mystic powers, firstly, by shutting four white men in a hut and killing them using smoke, and then by turning into cheetah and leopard to resist gunfire, and his spilled blood is asserted to be the reason behind Mangu market becoming prosperous. These expose the deception of Western "civilization." This makes him an archetype of the hero as defender of cultural sovereignty.

**The Transcendent Hero**

Jepnwaan's withdrawal into immortality, his transformation into animals, and his mystical sealing of the volcanic cave marks him as a mythic immortal hero whose essence cannot be destroyed. Like Gilgamesh, or Sundiata, he transcends mortality, entering legend as a timeless protector.

Thus, Jepnwaan's archetype belongs to the mythic imagination and cosmic struggle. He symbolizes supernatural salvation and resistance beyond history. He reflects Mwaghavul society's negotiation of identity, spirituality, and power across colonial and postcolonial experiences.

**Relevance to Contemporary Youth Identity****1. Heroic Traits versus Modern Youth Role Models**

In examining the Mwaghavul legend of Jepnwaan, a striking contrast emerges between the archetypal hero model of tradition and the fragmented role models of modern youth culture. Jepnwaan epitomizes resilience, courage, spiritual devotion, and self-sacrifice. These traits reflect what Northrop Frye would call the archetype of the "culture hero", whose primary function is to sustain communal order and identity (200). By contrast, many contemporary youths draw their role models from globalised media culture, celebrity life, or political populism to foreground individual success, material wealth, or visibility rather than communal responsibility. This is not to say all contemporary figures lack integrity, but the archetypal resonance of a Mwaghavul hero challenges the superficiality of modern icons by re-centering role models around service, sacrifice, and moral responsibility. Thus, the legend

functions as counter-narratives that resist the commodification of identity and reassert cultural ideals of leadership and heroism.

## **2. Youth Challenges in Contemporary Context**

The crisis of contemporary youth identity in Nigeria, marked by unemployment, leadership vacuum, disillusionment with governance, erosion of cultural values, and globalized identity pressures, underscores the continuing relevance of heroic archetypes. Jepnwaan's defiance against colonial intrusion and his resistance to external domination resonate with the need for youths to cultivate courageous, independent, and morally grounded leadership models in today's socio-political climate. Furthermore, the identity crisis engendered by globalization and modernity finds resolution in this myth. Heroes such as Jepnwaan remind Mwaghavul youth that their identity is not merely borrowed from external cultural flows but rooted in a spiritual and historical heritage of resilience and resistance.

## **3. Shaping Youth Values and Aspirations**

Hero narratives function not simply as entertainment but as didactic instruments of cultural pedagogy. According to Joseph Campbell's concept of the monomyth, heroic journeys provide symbolic maps for self-discovery and personal transformation. For a contemporary youth, engaging with Mwaghavul hero narratives offer pathways to reframe personal struggles within larger archetypal structures of resilience, service, and transformation. For example, Jepnwaan's narrative provides a template for courage, resistance, and creative innovation. His mastery of both physical and mystical domains mirrors the need for modern youths to combine cultural rootedness with new skills particularly in facing global challenges such as technological change, cultural erosion, and socio-political instability.

The Mwaghavul society can redefine youth identity by positioning young people as active carriers of heroic responsibility, rather than passive victims of globalization and economic hardship, through the integration of heroic archetypes into the educational curricula, youth mentorship programmes, and cultural reorientation initiatives. The legend thus becomes a tool for cultivating moral vision, resilience, and purpose, enabling youths to aspire toward authentic heroism rather than superficial celebrity. It can therefore be said that the Mwaghavul legend of Jepnwaan is not relics of the past but living narratives with the potential to address contemporary youth challenges. This oral narrative, when properly harnessed, can inspire youths to move beyond disillusionment, shaping aspirations that align personal growth with communal survival.

## **Conclusion**

This study has shown that the Mwaghavul legend of Jepnwaan embody heroic archetypes that remain relevant to contemporary youth identity. Jepnwaan represents the epic warrior-redeemer, offering alternative model of courage, justice, sacrifice, and communal service in contrast to the fragmented role models of today. Reviving such indigenous narratives is crucial for restoring cultural pride and guiding youths toward values of integrity and resilience in the face of leadership crises, and identity challenges. Therefore, educators should integrate this legend into the curricula, cultural institutions should preserve and promote it through performances and archives, and policymakers should support its inclusion in cultural and youth development programmes. In this way, Mwaghavul heroic traditions can inspire a morally grounded and culturally conscious generation.

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**INTERPERSONAL FUNCTIONS OF APPRAISAL MARKERS IN PRESIDENT TINUBU'S STATE-OF-THE-NATION ADDRESS OF AUGUST 1, 2023**

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**Abstract**

*This study investigated the interpersonal metafunctions in President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's national address delivered on 1st August 2023, employing Martin and White's (2005) Appraisal Theory within the Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) framework. A qualitative research design was adopted, with the transcript of the speech purposively selected from the official website of the Nigerian Presidency due to its national significance and rhetorical weight. The transcript was segmented into clauses, and Attitude, Engagement, and Graduation markers were systematically identified and analysed to reveal how evaluative language negotiates interpersonal meaning, constructs authority, and shapes audience alignment. Findings indicate that Attitude markers were strategically deployed to project empathy, patriotism, and commitment, while simultaneously condemning elite greed and inefficiency. Engagement resources reflected a balance between decisiveness and inclusivity, legitimising subsidy removal as unavoidable while framing reforms as a collective responsibility. Graduation resources intensified urgency, highlighted historical significance, and lent precision and credibility to government commitments. The study contributes to political discourse analysis by showing how appraisal resources function as tools of persuasion, solidarity-building, and leadership legitimisation in Nigerian presidential rhetoric.*

**Keywords:** Appraisal Theory, interpersonal meaning, political discourse; evaluative language

**Introduction**

Political discourse has long been recognized as a fertile site for the exploration of linguistic strategies that shape public opinion, project authority, and negotiate ideological positions. Within systemic functional linguistics, Halliday and Matthiessen (2014) highlight the interpersonal metafunction as a crucial resource through which speakers establish social relations, express attitudes, and position themselves toward their audience. Among the various linguistic resources that realize this metafunction, appraisal markers play a central role in encoding evaluation, judgment, and affect, thereby enabling political actors to construct solidarity and legitimacy. Martin and White (2005) argue that appraisal theory offers an effective framework for analysing evaluative language, as it accounts for how speakers align with or distance themselves from particular value positions in discourse. Thus, the theory is adopted in this study to examine the interpersonal functions of appraisal markers in President Tinubu's State-of-the-Nation's speech in August 1, 2023.

The study of appraisal markers in political communication has gained significant scholarly attention because such markers do not merely express opinion but strategically influence audience perception. Thompson (2014) asserts that evaluative language is instrumental in constructing persuasive discourse since it allows political leaders to project credibility and invoke shared values. Similarly, Homolar (2011) emphasizes that appraisal markers serve to

shape ideological frames by categorizing political events and actors in ways that legitimize certain policy directions. In the Nigerian context, Adegaju (2005) demonstrates that evaluative resources in political speeches are central to the performance of authority and the negotiation of national identity, while Opeibi (2009) underscores their persuasive potential in democratic discourse.

President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's State-of-the-Nation Address of August 1, 2023, delivered in response to pressing socio-economic challenges, offers a rich site for the analysis of appraisal markers. In this address, Tinubu employs evaluative language to justify policy decisions, particularly regarding fuel subsidy removal and economic reforms, while simultaneously appealing to citizens' sense of resilience and national unity. Appraisal markers in this context not only construct a narrative of responsibility and sacrifice but also function to mitigate dissent by framing hardship as a collective struggle for long-term national benefit. As Fairclough (1992) notes, the strategic use of evaluative language in political texts is often tied to broader ideological projects, linking discourse to power and hegemony. Again, it is observed that studies that have systematically examined the interpersonal functions of appraisal markers in President Tinubu's political discourse, particularly his 2023 State-of-the-Nation address are lacking.

Against this backdrop, the present study is designed to identify the appraisal markers employed in the President's address and to analyse their interpersonal functions within the framework of Appraisal Theory. A focus on these objectives is considered significant, as it extends scholarship on political discourse in Nigeria by examining how interpersonal meanings are negotiated through evaluative language in a moment of national economic transition. By investigating the evaluative strategies at play in Tinubu's address, it is hoped that the study will contribute to a deeper understanding of how language operates as a tool of governance, persuasion, and identity construction. This inquiry will not only reinforce the centrality of discourse in shaping political realities but will also provide insights into the dynamics of leadership communication in contemporary Nigeria.

### **Language and Discourse**

Language is universally recognised as one of the most fundamental tools of human communication and social interaction. At its core, it serves as a symbolic system through which meanings are created, shared, and negotiated within particular socio-cultural contexts. Linguists have long studied language not only as a formal system of signs and structures but also as a medium for human expression, cognition, and social organisation. Ferdinand de Saussure's structuralist approach laid the early foundation by conceptualising language as a system of signs consisting of the *signifier* and the *signified*. Later developments, especially within functionalist and pragmatic traditions, shifted attention to how language operates in real communicative contexts to achieve particular ends.

Discourse, in contrast, refers to language-in-use beyond the level of individual sentences. It is not merely a stretch of language but a socially situated practice through which speakers construct meaning, assert identities, and reproduce or challenge power relations. Discourse encompasses a variety of spoken, written, and multimodal texts that are contextually bound. As Fairclough (1992) contends, discourse represents both a form of language use and a form of social practice, thereby merging linguistic features with broader ideological and institutional processes. This view is echoed by van Dijk (1997), who maintains that discourse is not just shaped by society but also actively shapes social cognition and structures through the mediation of mental models and ideological positioning.

Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) provides a particularly robust framework for understanding the relationship between language and discourse. Within this framework, language is viewed as a resource for making meaning in three interrelated metafunctions: ideational (representing experience), interpersonal (enacting social roles and relationships), and textual (organising messages coherently). These metafunctions are not abstract categories but are realised through specific grammatical and lexical choices that serve communicative purposes within discourse. Thus, in political or institutional discourse, linguistic forms such as nominalisation, passivisation, and modality are often used strategically to obscure agency, assert authority, or structure ideological meanings.

Discourse scholars have also highlighted the embeddedness of discourse within particular genres, settings, and power structures. Bhatia (1993) and Swales (1990), for instance, point out that discourse is shaped by genre conventions and communicative purposes associated with institutional contexts. In political discourse, this shaping is particularly evident, as language is deployed strategically to influence public opinion, legitimise actions, construct identities, and advance ideological agendas. Political actors often manipulate language not only to communicate but also to persuade, conceal, and dominate, practices that underscore the inherently strategic nature of discourse in such settings.

Furthermore, discourse cannot be separated from context. According to Wodak and Meyer (2016), context is multifaceted, encompassing the immediate linguistic co-text, the situational setting, the intertextual relations among texts, and the broader socio-political background. This complexity means that meaning in discourse is rarely fixed; it is always subject to interpretation based on the interplay between textual features and contextual factors. Consequently, a thorough analysis of discourse necessitates both textual and contextual sensitivity.

In synthesising these scholarly positions, it becomes clear that language is not only a system of signs but a dynamic resource for constructing discourse. Discourse, in turn, is the medium through which language becomes socially meaningful. Together, language and discourse function as complementary dimensions of human communication: language provides the structural and semantic tools, while discourse supplies the interactive and contextual mechanisms through which meanings are negotiated, identities performed, and ideologies transmitted. This conceptual interplay forms the foundation for discourse analysis, especially in studies of political communication where the strategic deployment of language has significant implications for public perception, power relations, and social action.

### **Previous Studies on Appraisal Features in Political Discourse**

Appraisal features have become a central focus in studies of political discourse due to their role in constructing interpersonal meaning, managing audience alignment, and projecting ideological positions. Grounded in Martin and White's (2005) Appraisal Theory, recent scholarship demonstrates how political leaders strategically employ evaluative resources, including affect, judgment, appreciation, engagement, and graduation, to persuade, legitimize policies, and build solidarity. A review of both global and Nigerian studies provides valuable insight into how appraisal features function in diverse political contexts and situates the present study within broader scholarly debates.

Globally, Sun (2019) adopts a holistic appraisal approach to examine evaluation in Donald Trump's First State of the Union Address, combining macro-semantic analysis with micro-level appraisal coding. The study finds that affect and appreciation humanize policy claims, judgment delegitimizes opponents, and graduation intensifies key evaluations, illustrating

how appraisal operates both locally and within broader argumentative structures. Similarly, Xu (2023) investigates interpreter-mediated Chinese premier press conferences and finds that interpreters routinely adjust appraisal resources to align with audiences, demonstrating the ideological impact of appraisal mediation. Comparative analyses, such as Aljuraywi (2022), reveal contrasting appraisal profiles between Joe Biden and Donald Trump, while Alhuthali (2024) highlights the phase-sensitivity of appraisal in Ban Ki-moon's speeches. Gao and Munday (2023) and Zhang et al. (2024) further demonstrate how engagement and mediation shape evaluative outcomes in international political discourse. Collectively, these global studies converge on three key insights: appraisal choices are sensitive to the phase of a speech, engagement resources manage dialogic space, and mediation influences evaluative interpretations. These findings provide an important analytical framework for examining high-stakes addresses, such as Tinubu's State-of-the-Nation speech.

### **Nigerian-Based Studies on Tinubu's Political Speeches**

Building on this global framework, Nigerian scholarship highlights similar patterns in the political discourse of Bola Ahmed Tinubu. Ayeni (2025) conducts a speech act analysis of Tinubu's 2023 presidential campaign speech in Anambra, employing Harrison et al.'s (2017) model. The study categorizes various speech acts and demonstrates how Tinubu utilized performative and persuasive strategies, emphasizing evaluative and directive language to mobilize and influence his audience. Amoussou et al. (2024) perform a pragma-stylistic analysis of Tinubu's inaugural speech, examining speech acts, verb tenses, deictic expressions, and rhetorical tropes. The study shows that these linguistic elements collectively enhanced persuasive impact and aligned the speech with broader political ideologies, highlighting the significance of syntactic and stylistic choices in framing political messages during high-stakes national addresses. Dada (2025) analyses Tinubu's early post-election speeches, including his inaugural, Democracy Day, and Independence Day addresses, through a speech act lens, underscoring how performative language reinforced policy objectives, asserted authority, and shaped public expectations. Sobola and Ogundipe (2025) examine metaphors in Tinubu's inaugural speech using the interaction theory of metaphor, showing how figurative language conveys policy messages, shapes public perception, and creates persuasive resonance. Taken together, these Nigerian studies demonstrate that Tinubu's speeches integrate evaluative language, rhetorical devices, and syntactic strategies to construct political authority, align audiences, and project reformist ideology. However, despite these insights, there remains a notable gap: no existing study, particularly on the internet, has systematically examined the interpersonal functions of appraisal markers in Tinubu's state of the nation's address of October 1, 2023. Specifically, while prior research highlights speech acts, stylistic choices, ideologies, and metaphorical constructions, the ways in which Tinubu's evaluative language negotiates social relationships, manages alignment with the audience, and constructs interpersonal meaning in the State-of-the-Nation Address of August 1, 2023 remain unexplored. The present study therefore aims to fill this gap by applying Appraisal Theory to analyse the interpersonal functions of affect, judgment, appreciation, engagement, and graduation markers in this pivotal speech.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study is anchored on Appraisal Theory, a framework within the Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) paradigm developed by Martin and White (2005). The theory extends Halliday's (1994) interpersonal metafunction by providing a systematic model for analysing how speakers and writers use evaluative language to negotiate social relationships, construct identities, and align or disalign with audiences. Appraisal theory is therefore concerned with

the linguistic resources through which attitudes, judgments, and emotions are expressed, and how these resources function interpersonally in discourse.

The central tenets of appraisal theory are organized into three major domains: Attitude, Engagement, and Graduation. Attitude covers the expression of emotions (affect), judgments of human behaviour (judgment), and evaluation of things, phenomena, or processes (appreciation). Engagement relates to the speaker's positioning with respect to alternative voices or viewpoints, showing how speakers align with or challenge other perspectives. Graduation concerns the scaling or intensification of meaning, whereby speakers amplify or downplay their evaluations (Martin & White, 2005; Hood, 2010). These subsystems allow scholars to capture how discourse is used not only to describe reality but also to evaluate it in socially meaningful ways. These subsystems will be mapped on data in this study to identify the attitudinal, engagement, and graduation resources and their interpersonal functions in President Tinubu's State-of-the-Nation Address of August 1, 2023.

### **Methodology**

This study employs a qualitative research design. The qualitative approach is particularly suited for the study's interpretive and context-sensitive objectives, as it enables effective exploration of how language choices negotiate interpersonal relations. The primary data for the study consists of the official transcript of President Tinubu's national address delivered on 1st August 2023. This transcript was obtained from the official website of the Nigerian Presidency. The speech was purposively selected due to its national relevance, political significance, and rhetorical weight, making it a rich resource for interrogating the linguistic strategies through which political authority and interpersonal meaning are enacted. Thus, engaging with other speeches will somewhat betray the objectives of the study that is why the focus is strictly on this single speech. In terms of data collection procedures, the transcript was segmented into clauses, after which relevant linguistic features across the metafunctions were identified. Particular attention was given to Appraisal Theory as an interpersonal extension of SFL, focusing on the three subsystems of attitude (affect, judgement, and appreciation), engagement, and graduation. These markers were carefully identified and examined to reveal their role in enacting interpersonal meanings, positioning the speaker, and shaping audience alignment.

### **Analysis and Discussion**

The appraisal subsystem (attitude, engagement, and graduation) markers as identified in the speech are presented in tables, and discussions offered after each of the tables.

#### **1. Attitude Markers**

In Martin and White's (2005) Appraisal Theory, Attitude constitutes one of the three major subsystems, alongside Engagement and Graduation. The Attitude system accounts for how speakers and writers express feelings, evaluations, and values in discourse. It is further categorised into three subtypes: Affect, which reflects emotions and personal feelings; Judgement, which conveys moral or ethical evaluations of people's character and behaviour; and *Appreciation*, which involves assessments of objects, processes, policies, and phenomena. In the selected speech, all three subcategories are employed strategically to build solidarity with citizens, delegitimise corrupt elites, and positively appraise government policies and future prospects. The table below presents specific markers of Attitude across these three subcategories, with illustrative extracts and their interpersonal functions.

**i. Affect Makers****Table 1: Affect Markers and their Interpersonal Functions**

Marker	Extract from the Speech	Interpersonal Function
hopes and aspirations	“The whims of the few should never hold dominant sway over the hopes and aspirations of the many.” (para 5)	Appeals to collective desires, evoking shared emotional investment in democracy.
anxious and uncertain	“Households and businesses struggle. Things seem anxious and uncertain.” (para 11)	Acknowledges public feelings of insecurity and worry, aligning leader with people’s lived experiences.
empathy expressed	“I understand the hardship you face.” (para 11)	Expresses empathy and emotional recognition, strengthening solidarity with citizens.
regret and concern	“I wish there were other ways. But there is not.” (para 11)	Expresses regret and concern, showing emotional involvement in tough policy choices.
affection and patriotism	“...as I came here to help not hurt the people and nation that I love.” (para 11)	Expresses affection and personal attachment, reinforcing sincerity and patriotism.
solemn commitment	“Fellow Nigerians, I made a solemn pledge to work for you.” (para 24)	Expresses deep commitment and seriousness of intent, appealing to trust.
emotional dedication	“...it’s the only thing that keeps me up day and night.” (para 24)	Signals personal emotional dedication and anxiety over citizens’ welfare.
admiration and goodwill	“I want to use this opportunity to salute many private employers...” (para 31)	Expresses admiration and positive emotion, reinforcing encouragement and goodwill.
acknowledgement of hardship	“Fellow Nigerians, this period may be hard on us and there is no doubt about it that it is tough on us.” (para 32)	Acknowledges hardship and suffering, validating people’s emotional state.
appeal for trust	“I plead with you to please have faith in our ability to deliver...” (para 33)	Expresses earnest appeal and desire for trust, reinforcing relational closeness.
optimism and hope	“I assure you... we are exiting the darkness to enter a new and glorious dawn.” (para 39)	Expresses hope and optimism, inspiring confidence in a brighter future.

Table 1 highlights the affect markers in President Tinubu’s speech and their interpersonal functions, showing how he employs emotional and evaluative language to build solidarity, trust, and a sense of shared identity. By contrasting “the whims of the few” with the “hopes and aspirations of the many,” he appeals to collective desires and aligns citizens’ expectations with his administration’s vision. Expressions such as “households and businesses struggle” and “I understand the hardship you face” acknowledge public suffering and project empathy, presenting him as a leader connected to the people’s realities. Similarly, statements of regret

like “I wish there were other ways” reveal the emotional weight of policy choices, while patriotic affirmations such as “the people and nation that I love” reinforce sincerity and service-oriented leadership. His pledge to “work for you” and appeals for trust signal personal commitment, while metaphoric optimism in “we are exiting the darkness to enter a new and glorious dawn” motivates citizens with hope and resilience.

## ii. Judgement Makers

**Table 2: Judgement Markers and their Interpersonal Functions**

Marker	Extract from the Speech	Interpersonal Function
outlived its usefulness	“This once beneficial measure had outlived its usefulness.” (para 3)	Judges the fuel subsidy as outdated and ineffective, legitimising its removal.
deep pockets and lavish bank accounts	“...being funnelled into the deep pockets and lavish bank accounts of a select group of individuals.” (para 3)	Condemns corruption and elite greed, portraying beneficiaries as undeserving.
serious threat	“...they became a serious threat to the fairness of our economy and the integrity of our democratic governance.” (para 4)	Judges elite influence as dangerous and unethical, framing reform as moral necessity.
whims of the few	“The whims of the few should never hold dominant sway over the hopes and aspirations of the many.” (para 5)	Evaluates elite dominance as selfish and illegitimate, contrasting it with collective will.
millstone around the country’s neck	“...this once helpful device that had transformed into a millstone around the country’s neck had become inevitable [to remove].” (para 6)	Judges the subsidy as burdensome and harmful, reinforcing justification for reform.
highway of currency speculation	“...the multiple exchange rate system... became nothing but a highway of currency speculation.” (para 7)	Condemns the system as exploitative and illegitimate, delegitimising its defenders.
extremely unfair	“This too was extremely unfair.” (para 7)	Passes moral judgement on economic inequality caused by privileged access to wealth.
illicit and mass accumulation	“...the threat that the illicit and mass accumulation of money posed to the future of our democratic system...” (para 8)	Frames elite wealth acquisition as illegal, unethical, and dangerous to democracy.
flaws in the economy	“...as we moved to fight the flaws in the economy, the people who grow rich from them... will fight back.” (para 10)	Evaluates structural economic issues as systemic flaws, requiring correction.
unfriendly fiscal policies	“...to address unfriendly fiscal policies and multiple taxes that are stifling the business environment.” (para 14)	Judges previous policies as hostile and restrictive, legitimising reform.

Marker	Extract from the Speech	Interpersonal Function
decaying healthcare and educational infrastructure	"...revamp our decaying healthcare and educational Infrastructure." (para 25)	Evaluates public services as deteriorated and failing, justifying intervention.
unproductive fuel subsidy	"...saved over a trillion Naira that would have been squandered on the unproductive fuel subsidy..." (para 35)	Condemns subsidy as wasteful and unproductive, contrasting it with responsible spending.
smugglers and fraudsters	"...which only benefitted smugglers and fraudsters." (para 35)	Passes harsh moral judgement on subsidy beneficiaries, delegitimising opposition.
greatest good for the greatest number	"Our commitment is to promote the greatest good for the greatest number of our people." (para 37)	Establishes an ethical principle, legitimising government action through moral appeal.

The judgement markers in Table 2 function primarily to legitimise the speaker's economic reforms by framing previous policies, elite practices, and systemic structures in negative moral terms. Phrases such as "outlived its usefulness," "millstone around the country's neck," and "unproductive fuel subsidy" depict the subsidy as outdated and wasteful, justifying its removal as necessary. Similarly, references to "deep pockets," "serious threat," and "smugglers and fraudsters" condemn elites as corrupt actors undermining democratic governance and public welfare. Such delegitimation positions reform as a morally just response to exploitation. Conversely, positive markers like "the greatest good for the greatest number" foreground utilitarian principles, presenting government policy as ethically grounded in collective welfare. In all, these judgement resources serve as strategic tools that draw a sharp moral boundary between corrupt elites and a reformist government committed to fairness and justice.

### iii. Appreciation Makers

**Table 3: Appreciation Markers and their Interpersonal Functions**

Marker	Extract from the Speech	Interpersonal Function
plain, clear language	"I will speak in plain, clear language so that you know where I stand." (para 2)	Values transparency and accessibility, enhancing trust with the audience.
better, more productive economy	"...share my vision regarding the journey to a better, more productive economy for our beloved country." (para 2)	Positively evaluates the future economy, instilling optimism.
long-term good	"I had promised to reform the economy for the long-term good..." (para 9)	Appreciates reforms as purposeful and sustainable, legitimising policy direction.
sustainable economic growth	"...kick-start a sustainable economic growth, accelerate structural transformation and improve productivity." (para 15)	Positively evaluates government investment as enduring and progressive.

Marker	Extract from the Speech	Interpersonal Function
very important sector	“We are going to energise this very important sector with N125 billion.” (para 16)	Assigns high value to MSMEs and the informal sector, emphasising their role in growth.
further drive financial inclusion	“Ultimately, this programme will further drive financial inclusion...” (para 18)	Appreciates government initiative as advancing inclusivity and fairness.
food security agenda	“...farmers who are committed to our food security agenda.” (para 20)	Positively values agriculture as vital to national stability and welfare.
viable and appropriate transaction structure	“...develop a viable and an appropriate transaction structure for all stakeholders.” (para 23)	Evaluates policy planning as sound and well-structured, building credibility.
solemn pledge	“Fellow Nigerians, I made a solemn pledge to work for you.” (para 24)	Appreciates leadership commitment, reinforcing trust and sincerity.
stronger financial footing	“...our states will become more competitive and on a stronger financial footing...” (para 26)	Values infrastructural investment as enhancing state capacity and resilience.
affordable rate	“...buses across the states and local governments for mass transit at a much more affordable rate.” (para 27)	Positively evaluates policy outcome as beneficial to citizens’ welfare.
good and helpful plans	“All of our good and helpful plans are in the works.” (para 32)	Positively appraises policies as beneficial and reassuring.
glorious dawn	“...we are exiting the darkness to enter a new and glorious dawn.” (para 39)	Symbolically values reforms as transformative and hopeful for the nation’s future.

Table 3 highlights the role of appreciation markers in President Tinubu’s address, showing how evaluative language was employed to establish credibility, inspire optimism, and foster rapport with citizens. Markers such as “plain, clear language” emphasise transparency and trust, while future-oriented expressions like “better, more productive economy” and “long-term good” legitimise reforms as sustainable and purposeful. Phrases like “very important sector,” “further drive financial inclusion,” and “food security agenda” foreground inclusivity, recognising MSMEs, the informal sector, and agriculture as national priorities tied to welfare and stability. Technical appreciation markers such as “viable and appropriate transaction structure” project competence, while interpersonal markers like “solemn pledge” reinforce sincerity and servant leadership. Metaphorical expressions like “glorious dawn” elevate reforms symbolically, framing them as transformative and hopeful.

## 2. Engagement Markers

In Martin and White’s (2005) Appraisal Theory, Engagement is the second subsystem, complementing Attitude and Graduation in shaping interpersonal meaning. It concerns how speakers negotiate alternative voices and perspectives, distinguishing between monoglossic statements (presented as facts) and heteroglossic ones (which acknowledge or contest other views). Heteroglossic strategies include disclaiming, proclaiming, entertaining, and

attributing. In President Tinubu's address, these strategies assert authority, recognize opposition, and legitimize government policies within wider debates. The table below highlights Engagement markers and their interpersonal functions.

**Table 4: Engagement Markers and their Interpersonal Functions**

Marker Strategy	Extract from the Speech	Interpersonal Function
Disclaim – Denial	“I am not going to talk in difficult terms by dwelling on economic jargon and concepts.” (para 2)	Rejects technical discourse, positioning himself as accessible and aligned with citizens' needs.
Disclaim – Counter-expectation	“I understand the hardship you face. I wish there were other ways. But there is not.” (para 11)	Concedes difficulty but closes space for alternatives, legitimising his policy choice as unavoidable.
Proclaim – Endorsement	“The preceding administration saw this looming danger as well. Indeed, it made no provision in the 2023 Appropriations for subsidy after June this year.” (para 6)	Strengthens legitimacy of his stance by aligning it with that of the previous government.
Proclaim – Pronouncement	“To be blunt, Nigeria could never become the society it was intended to be as long as such small, powerful yet unelected groups hold enormous influence...” (para 4)	Uses authoritative assertion to close debate and emphasise urgency of reform.
Proclaim – Affirmation	“This fight is to define the fate and future of our nation. Much is in the balance.” (para 9)	Elevates reforms to matters of national destiny, rallying support through certainty and emphasis.
Entertain – Modality	“If there were, I would have taken that route...” (para 11)	Acknowledges hypothetical alternatives, but closes them off to reinforce inevitability of current actions.
Entertain – Hedging	“Things seem anxious and uncertain.” (para 11)	Opens dialogic space by acknowledging public perception of hardship, fostering empathy and solidarity.
Attribute – Acknowledgment	“We have had a multi-stakeholder engagement with various farmers' associations and operators within the agricultural value chain.” (para 19)	Credits other voices, showing inclusiveness and shared responsibility in policy decisions.
Attribute – Reporting	“Earlier this month, I signed four (4) Executive Orders in keeping with my electoral promise...” (para 14)	Positions policy action within institutional continuity and accountability, reinforcing credibility.
Proclaim – Reaffirmation	“I made a solemn pledge to work for you... it's the only thing that keeps me up day and night.” (para 24)	Reasserts personal commitment, closing space for doubt and enhancing trust.

Marker Strategy	Extract from the Speech	Interpersonal Function
Proclaim – Optimism	“We will get out of this turbulence. And, due to the measures we have taken, Nigeria will be better equipped...” (para 34)	Projects confidence and certainty, motivating collective resilience.

Table 4 highlights how President Tinubu deploys engagement markers in his August 1st, 2023, national address to manage audience alignment and reinforce legitimacy. Disclaim strategies, such as denial and counter-expectation, enable him to reject overly technical discourse and frame subsidy removal as unavoidable, thereby closing off alternative perspectives. Proclaim strategies, including endorsement, pronouncement, and reaffirmation, project certainty and authority, aligning his reforms with historical continuity and national destiny while reaffirming personal commitment and optimism. At the same time, entertain markers (through modality and hedging) acknowledge public anxieties and create space for empathy, tempering the force of proclamation and helping him appear responsive rather than rigid. Attribute markers further distribute responsibility by referencing engagements with farmers and executive orders, situating his policies in participatory and institutional contexts. Collectively, these strategies balance authority with responsiveness, allowing Tinubu to project himself as decisive yet empathetic, authoritative yet consultative, thereby consolidating trust and legitimacy in a time of economic difficulty.

### 3. Graduation Markers

In Martin and White’s (2005) Appraisal Theory, Graduation is the third subsystem alongside Attitude and Engagement, concerned with how speakers scale or soften their evaluations. It operates through Force, which intensifies or downplays meanings via quantifiers, repetition, or intensifiers, and Focus, which sharpens or blurs category boundaries (e.g., *exactly*, *kind of*). Through Graduation, speakers may strengthen solidarity and urgency or moderate claims for broader acceptance. In the selected speech, these markers emphasize economic challenges, reinforce government commitments, and occasionally temper assertions to maintain inclusivity. The tables below illustrate markers of Graduation across Force and Focus and their interpersonal roles in the discourse.

**Table 5: Force – Intensification Markers and Their Interpersonal Functions**

Extract from the Speech	Interpersonal Function
“serious economic challenges this nation has long faced” (para 1)	Heightens the urgency and gravity of the economic situation.
“plain, clear language” (para 2)	Amplifies commitment to transparency and accessibility.
“deep pockets and lavish bank accounts” (para 3)	Magnifies elite corruption, intensifying condemnation.
“a serious threat to the fairness of our economy and the integrity of our democratic governance” (para 4)	Stresses the severity of elite influence, legitimising reform.
“small, powerful yet unelected groups hold enormous influence” (para 4)	Accentuates elite dominance, closing debate on its illegitimacy.
“the whims of the few... the hopes and aspirations of the many” (para 5)	Sharpens contrast between selfish elites and collective will.

<b>Extract from the Speech</b>	<b>Interpersonal Function</b>
“a millstone around the country’s neck” (para 6)	Intensifies burden imagery, reinforcing inevitability of reform.
“highway of currency speculation” (para 7)	Uses metaphor to amplify illegitimacy of exchange rate abuse.
“extremely unfair” (para 7)	Scales up moral evaluation of inequality.
“This fight is to define the fate and future of our nation. Much is in the balance.” (para 9)	Intensifies stakes, elevating reforms to existential significance.
“through every means necessary” (para 10)	Amplifies resistance expected from elites, underscoring struggle.
“things seem anxious and uncertain” (para 11)	Amplifies hardship and public anxiety.
“solemn pledge... only thing that keeps me up day and night” (para 24)	Scales up personal commitment, reinforcing sincerity.
“decaying healthcare and educational infrastructure” (para 25)	Amplifies deterioration to justify urgent intervention.
“tough on us... no doubt about it... temporary pains” (para 32)	Intensifies acknowledgment of hardship, but mitigates with temporariness.
“swiftly closing the time gap” (para 33)	Highlights urgency of government response.
“the greatest good for the greatest number” (para 37)	Maximises ethical commitment through superlative phrasing.
“exiting the darkness to enter a new and glorious dawn” (para 39)	Symbolically intensifies optimism and transformation.

As shown in Table 5, intensification markers serve as key rhetorical devices in President Tinubu’s speech, heightening urgency, magnifying challenges, and legitimising reforms. Expressions like “serious economic challenges this nation has long faced” underscore gravity, while phrases such as “plain, clear language” frame the speaker as transparent. Condemnations of corruption (“deep pockets and lavish bank accounts”) dramatize elite misconduct, legitimising intervention. Contrasts like “the whims of the few... the hopes and aspirations of the many” and metaphors such as “a millstone around the country’s neck” evoke injustice and burden. Intensifiers also elevate reform as historic (“This fight is to define the fate and future of our nation”), while personal pledges that “keep me up day and night” reinforce sincerity. Even hardship is intensified (“tough on us... temporary pains”) but softened by temporariness, with hope scaled up through imagery of “a new and glorious dawn.” In all, intensification dramatizes problems, validates reforms, and projects a resolute leadership persona.

**Table 6: Force – Quantification Markers and Their Interpersonal Functions**

<b>Extract from the Speech</b>	<b>Interpersonal Function</b>
“trillions of Naira yearly” (para 3)	Uses large-scale quantification to dramatize subsidy costs and justify removal.
“illicit and mass accumulation of money” (para 8)	Expands the perceived scale of corruption, presenting it as systemic and widespread.

Extract from the Speech	Interpersonal Function
“1 million nano businesses” / “1,300 per local government” (para 17)	Highlights inclusivity and reach of government intervention by emphasising numerical spread.
“200,000 Metric Tonnes of grains” / “225,000 metric tonnes of fertilizer” (para 20)	Uses precise figures to underline the magnitude and credibility of relief efforts.
“500,000 hectares of farmland” / “N200 billion... N50 billion each” (para 21)	Reinforces seriousness of agricultural investment through quantified allocation.
“saved over a trillion Naira” (para 35)	Stresses the fiscal benefits of subsidy removal by appealing to large-scale savings.

The use of force–quantification markers in the President’s speech strengthens its persuasive and legitimising effect. As seen in Table 6, expressions like “trillions of Naira yearly” (para. 3) dramatize the burden of fuel subsidy, framing its removal as inevitable and rational, while “illicit and mass accumulation of money” (para. 8) amplifies corruption as systemic rather than isolated, justifying the government’s moral stance. Quantitative markers also signal inclusivity and reach, as in “1 million nano businesses” and “1,300 per local government” (para. 17), highlighting wide-scale accessibility of intervention programmes. Similarly, specific figures such as “200,000 metric tonnes of grains,” “225,000 metric tonnes of fertilizer” (para. 20), and “500,000 hectares of farmland” (para. 21) enhance credibility by presenting relief and investment measures as concrete and practical rather than abstract. The claim of having “saved over a trillion Naira” (para. 35) further quantifies the gains of subsidy removal, appealing to fiscal prudence and progress. Collectively, these markers legitimise government decisions, project the President as a credible authority, and construct a discourse of accountability, inclusivity, and transparency aligned with citizens’ expectations.

**Table 7: Focus – Sharpening Markers and Their Interpersonal Functions**

Extract from the Speech	Interpersonal Function
“to be blunt, Nigeria could never become the society it was intended to be...” (para 4)	Sharpens categorical claim, closing debate and asserting authority.
“to be specific, N200 billion out of the N500 billion...” (para 21)	Narrows precision, enhancing credibility of policy planning.
“your salary review is coming” (para 29)	Sharpens certainty, providing reassurance and building trust with workers.
“we are exiting the darkness to enter a new and glorious dawn” (para 39)	Draws a sharp boundary between present hardship and future hope, reinforcing optimism.

The extracts in Table 7 demonstrate the use of focus–sharpening markers as an interpersonal resource to establish categorical certainty and precision. Unlike quantification or intensification, sharpening narrows meaning and forecloses alternative interpretations. For instance, “to be blunt, Nigeria could never become the society it was intended to be...” (para. 4) projects finality, while “to be specific, N200 billion out of the N500 billion...” (para. 21) reinforces credibility through precision. Similarly, “your salary review is coming” (para. 29) conveys inevitability, strengthening trust with workers, and “we are exiting the darkness to enter a new and glorious dawn” (para. 39) contrasts hardship with future prosperity. Overall,

sharpening markers collapse ambiguity, enhance credibility, and reframe economic challenges as steps toward a purposeful national trajectory.

### **Findings**

The analysis of President Tinubu's August 1st, 2023, national address, using Martin and White's (2005) Appraisal Theory as the framework, reveals a strategic use of Attitude, Engagement, and Graduation markers to legitimise reforms, strengthen solidarity, and build credibility. Attitude markers (affect, judgement, appreciation) were used to express empathy, patriotism, and commitment, while condemning elite greed and inefficiency. These markers positioned the President as empathetic and service-oriented, delegitimised corrupt beneficiaries of past policies, and positively appraised government reforms as sustainable, inclusive, and transformative. Engagement markers demonstrated a careful balance between authority and responsiveness. Through disclaiming and proclaiming, Tinubu closed off debate and legitimised subsidy removal as unavoidable, while entertaining and attributing strategies allowed space for empathy, inclusiveness, and shared responsibility. This interplay projected him as decisive yet consultative. Graduation markers intensified urgency, dramatized challenges, and elevated reforms as historic struggles, while quantification lent credibility to government commitments through precise figures. Focus-sharpening markers further collapsed ambiguity, emphasising certainty, precision, and optimism. In all, the findings show that Tinubu's address systematically mobilised evaluative language to construct a moral dichotomy between corrupt elites and reformist governance, frame hardship as temporary and purposeful, and present his leadership as empathetic, authoritative, and historically committed to national transformation.

### **Conclusion**

This study has examined President Tinubu's August 1st, 2023, address on the state of the nation through the framework of Martin and White's (2005) Appraisal Theory, focusing on the subsystems of Attitude, Engagement, and Graduation. The analysis demonstrates that evaluative language was not merely ornamental but functioned as a core rhetorical resource for legitimising reforms, managing public perception, and positioning the speaker within the socio-political landscape. Through Attitude, Tinubu constructed an empathetic and patriotic self-image, condemned past economic mismanagement, and positively appraised his administration's policy choices. Engagement resources enabled him to balance authority with inclusiveness, simultaneously foreclosing debate on subsidy removal while opening dialogic space to accommodate citizens' concerns. Graduation allowed him to scale meanings, heightening urgency, emphasising certainty, and foregrounding optimism about recovery and transformation. Taken together, these strategies reveal a deliberate orchestration of interpersonal meaning to strengthen solidarity, project credibility, and legitimise hardship as a temporary sacrifice for long-term national renewal. The findings highlight how political discourse in Nigeria relies heavily on evaluative language to construct ideological positions and negotiate legitimacy. Future studies could extend this analysis by comparing Tinubu's discourse with that of previous or contemporary Nigerian leaders, thereby providing a broader understanding of continuities and shifts in the linguistic construction of political authority and national identity.

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**STYLISTIC PROJECTION OF IDEOLOGICAL MENTAL MODELS IN AHMED YERIMA'S PARI****Gaye Harry Hanson****Takim Ajom Okongor, Ph.D.**Department of English and Linguistics  
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**ABSTRACT**

*This study examined how stylistic devices are utilised by Ahmed Yerima to project ideological mental models of his characters (particularly those of Ama and Tada, who represent divergent worldviews of individual members of the society) in PARI. To achieve this aim, the study eclectically employed Leech and Short's (2007) stylistic taxonomy and van Dijk's socio-cognitive model as its theoretical framework. Through a qualitative analysis of scene one to three, purposively sampled for their thematic and stylistic richness, the research identified how linguistic form encodes cognitive and ideological stances. The findings revealed that religious, cultural, and colloquial lexis, alongside code-switching, metaphors, proverbs, repetition, and parallelism, functioned as key vehicles for projecting individuals' worldviews. Ama's adaptive, results-oriented religiosity contrasts sharply with Tada's doctrinal conservatism and concern for communal perception, producing tensions across three axes: instrumental versus doctrinal faith, urgent action versus spiritual waiting, and personal salvation versus social reputation. The analysis demonstrates that stylistic features in PARI are not merely ornamental but operate as cognitive and ideological signifiers, transforming dialogue into a site of cultural negotiation and ideological contest. This integrated stylistic-cognitive approach underscores the role of language as both a mirror and shaper of belief systems in dramatic discourse.*

**Keywords:** ideological mental models, socio-cognitive approach, code-switching, repetition, religious discourse

**Introduction**

Ahmed Yerima's *Pari* is a socially charged play that interrogates the psychological, religious, and cultural complexities surrounding insurgency in Northern Nigeria. Set against the backdrop of Boko Haram's violent abductions, the drama centres on Ama and Tada, a Christian couple whose daughter, Hyelapari, is kidnapped by terrorists. Ama's desperate search for her child drives her to religious conversion, from Christianity to Islam, in an attempt to secure divine intervention. Her husband, Tada, struggles between religious loyalty, marital solidarity, and personal despair, revealing cracks in their moral and emotional worlds. Through the interplay of belief systems, prophecies, and interpersonal conflict, Yerima projects a multi-layered narrative in which characters' mental states are shaped by trauma, faith, doubt, and survival instincts.

Thematically, *Pari* traverses issues of identity, resilience, betrayal, and reconciliation, while stylistically, it employs a rich array of devices (dialogic tension, metaphor, symbolism, biblical and Qur'anic allusions, irony, and repetition) to represent the inner worlds of its characters. These stylistic choices do more than embellish the narrative; they become vehicles through which readers and audiences access the mental models of Ama, Tada and

other central figures. In cognitive terms, a mental model refers to the internal representation of reality constructed by individuals based on their experiences, beliefs, and goals (van Dijk, 2014). In the play, these mental models are encoded in speech patterns, evaluative expressions, and narrative framing, allowing audiences to perceive the thoughts, motivations, and emotional states of each character.

This study, positioned at the intersection of stylistics and cognitive discourse analysis, pursues two interrelated objectives. It seeks to locate Ama and Tada's **ideological mental models**, uncovering the belief systems, value orientations, and sociocultural assumptions that underpin their actions and interactions, and then examines how these mental models are represented through the stylistic devices in the play, thereby demonstrating how literary style functions as a conduit for the projection of cognitive and ideological worlds.

### **Stylistics**

Stylistics, as a branch of applied linguistics, examines how language functions in both literary and non-literary texts, with emphasis on the relationship between linguistic choices and their communicative effects. It operates at the intersection of linguistics and literary criticism, showing how features such as lexis, syntax, phonology, and discourse structure shape meaning. In this sense, style is viewed as a matter of choice, where writers and speakers deliberately select from available linguistic resources to achieve specific artistic, rhetorical, or persuasive goals (Leech & Short, 2007; Verdonk, 2002). Contemporary developments have extended stylistics beyond formal description into interdisciplinary domains, incorporating cognitive, pragmatic, and sociolinguistic perspectives (Simpson, 2014). Cognitive stylistics draws on theories of mental representation to explain how texts activate conceptual frameworks (Stockwell, 2020), while pragmatic stylistics focuses on how intentions, expectations, and context influence interpretation (Chapman & Clark, 2014). In literary studies, stylistics demonstrates how dialogue, figurative devices, and narrative cues encode characterisation, ideology, and theme. As Carter and Stockwell (2008) argue, it reveals the interplay between form and content, and Widdowson (1975) reminds us that stylistics explains not only what a text means but how it means, offering a disciplined approach to linking linguistic artistry with cognition and social practice.

### **Cognitive Discourse Analysis**

Cognitive Discourse Analysis (CODA) investigates how language use reflects and shapes underlying cognitive processes. It presumes that discourse mirrors the mental representations speakers employ in communication (ten Have, 2004, 2007). It extends discourse analysis beyond the textual or social to include the mental operations underpinning meaning-making. Closely linked to cognitive linguistics, CODA identifies how metaphors, framing devices, schema activation, and narrative structures reveal speakers' cognitive models, aligning with van Dijk's (2014) theory of mental models. Its strength lies in uncovering implicit meanings and ideological positions, showing how actors construct perspectives, legitimise actions, or reproduce power relations (Hart, 2011).

### **Mental Models and Ideological Mental Models**

Mental models are internal cognitive structures used to simulate reality, enabling interpretation, prediction, and coherence (Johnson-Laird, 1983; van Dijk, 2014). In discourse, they mediate between language and cognition, integrating new information with existing knowledge. In literature, mental models help readers construct images of settings, characters, and events, shaped by cultural background and interpretive frameworks (Stockwell, 2020). A significant subset, ideological mental models, are socially shared representations embodying

group beliefs and norms (van Dijk, 1998). These guide topic selection, lexical choice, and argumentation in ways that reinforce group identity. Political speeches and literary texts often reveal such models through metaphors, framing, symbolism, or irony, which naturalise perspectives while marginalising others (Hart, 2011). This study examines how these models are projected through stylistic devices in *Pari*.

### Previous Studies on Ahmed Yerima's Plays

Though studies specifically on stylistic analysis of *Pari* remain limited as observed from available and accessible literature, a range of scholarly works engages with Yerima's dramatic oeuvre through lenses such as adaptation, cultural pragmatics, narrative technique, archetypal symbolism, psychoanalytic reading, and aesthetic experience. Some of these works are reviewed in this section.

Adeoti (2011) investigates how Yerima adapts pre-existing source texts, including *An Inspector Calls* and *Otaelo*, for the Nigerian theatre context. She explores the interplay of intertextuality and cultural inflection, arguing that the playwright retains essential narrative elements while infusing them with indigenous cultural meaning. This work highlights how adaptation can serve as both a stylistic strategy and ideological intervention, offering a model for analysing how Yerima's dramatic forms convey cognitive-ideological content through textual transformation.

Adeniji (2014) employs Mey's theory of pragmeme to examine pragmatic acts across six of Yerima's culture-based plays. He identifies eighteen speech-act types (including persuading, lamenting, invoking, and advising) embedded within communal, traditional, and emotive contexts. The study demonstrates how idiomatic language, proverbs, and metaphor index cultural values and shared knowledge, thereby constituting characters' ideological voices. Its culturally grounded approach offers robust tools for analysing how *Pari*'s speech events might similarly encode cognitive and ideological stances

Liman (2019) examines how Yerima re-imagines the historical figure of Sultan Attahiru, challenging colonial narratives through narrative and dramatic technique. She argues that Yerima's depiction positions Attahiru as a revolutionary leader rather than a destabilizing threat. Liman's exploration of narrative framing, resistance discourse, and the credibility of fictionalised historical identity underscores the importance of stylistic choices in constructing ideological character models, an insightful analogue for analysing how characters' mental models in *Pari* are framed through style.

Ajidahun (2019) applies psychoanalytic theory to explore gender dynamics, religious hypocrisy, and familial conflict in *Tuti*. The analysis considers how subconscious drives and repressed tensions inform character behaviour and thematic structure. By highlighting internal conflict through symbolic family interactions, this study illustrates how stylistic and dialogical choices can externalize characters' hidden psychological frameworks, an analytical angle that complements mental model investigation in dramatic texts like *Pari*.

Jacob (2018) explores Yerima's contribution to Nigerian theatre through the lens of Deweyan aesthetic theory, emphasizing the experiential nature of drama. He argues that Yerima's plays foreground the process of experience over mere textual form, making theatre a transformative medium for collective engagement. This perspective encourages stylistic analysis that goes beyond language to consider the affective and immersive dimensions of dramatic

representation, which may be particularly relevant when examining *Pari*'s emotional and cognitive resonance with audiences.

Using archetypal criticism, Adenike (2024) examines how Yerima treats death in *Haze*, *Akudaaya*, and *Ajidewe*, notably through personification and cultural myth. She reveals how the playwright destabilises entrenched cultural assumptions about death by attributing human qualities to the concept, thus opening interpretative space for readers to conceptualise mortality differently. This symbolic and stylistic re-figuring of existential themes provides a useful parallel for examining how *Pari*'s characters mentally model crisis, faith, and redemption.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study eclectically employs the work of Leech and Short (2007), and van Dijk's Socio-cognitive Model as its theoretical framework to explore the stylistic representation of Ama and Tada's mental models in Ahmed Yerima's *Pari*. The integration of these approaches allows for a robust analytical lens that accounts for both the textual stylistic features and the cognitive-ideological underpinnings of the characters' discourse and actions. Leech and Short's (2007) model of style in fiction is particularly relevant for identifying and describing the key stylistic devices employed in *Pari*. Their framework offers a systematic categorisation of stylistic analysis into levels such as lexical choice, syntax, semantics, and discourse structure. Notably, their discussion of speech and thought presentation (including direct speech, indirect speech, free indirect discourse, and stream of consciousness) provides a foundation for tracing how characters' mental states are linguistically encoded. Similarly, their treatment of foregrounding, parallelism, deviation, and lexical patterning are useful for identifying recurring stylistic strategies that convey characters' attitudes, emotions, and perspectives. The analysis draws on these categories to identify how Yerima's stylistic choices foreground certain ideological positions and psychological realities.

Van Dijk's Socio-cognitive Model (2009) provides the bridge between stylistic realisation and cognitive-ideological interpretation. At the heart of this model is the concept of mental models, cognitive representations that individuals construct to make sense of events, situations, and interactions. In the context of *Pari*, these mental models may include perceptions of social hierarchy, gender roles, cultural traditions, justice, and moral responsibility. Van Dijk also emphasises ideological mental models, which are shaped by group membership, social values, and political or cultural alignments. The model allows for the identification of how these mental models are textually represented through stylistic cues, and how they influence characters' choices, conflicts, and resolutions. Combining Leech and Short's detailed linguistic taxonomy and van Dijk's cognitive-ideological perspective, no doubt will enable an integrated analysis that captures both the micro-stylistic and macro-cognitive dimensions of *Pari*. The integrated framework ensures that stylistic analysis does not stop at textual description but extends to uncover the deeper mental and ideological structures which shape the play's characters and thematic concerns.

### **Methodology**

This study adopts a qualitative research design, as it aims to explore the interplay between stylistic devices and ideological mental models in Ahmed Yerima's play, *Pari*. The qualitative approach is appropriate because it enables an in-depth textual analysis of the linguistic and literary features of the play, while also examining the underlying cognitive and sociocultural frameworks that shape characterisation and thematic development. The choice of methodology is informed by the need to interpret meaning beyond surface-level textual features, integrating stylistic, literary, and cognitive approaches to drama analysis. The data

for this study are purposively sampled from the text of *Pari*; specifically, from Scene one to three. Purposive sampling is adopted because it allows for the deliberate selection of linguistic and literary instances that are most relevant to the research objectives. The focus is placed on passages that reflect ideological positioning, and foreground the mental models of characters. The method of data analysis is guided by the interrelated objectives. The analysis locates through the lens of van Dijk's socio-cognitive theory (which connects discourse structures with underlying cognitive schemata and societal contexts) the characters' ideological mental models, uncovering the belief systems, value orientations, and sociocultural assumptions that underpin their actions and interactions, and then examines how these mental models are represented through the stylistic devices in the play, thereby revealing the intricate relationship between linguistic form and ideological content.

### **Analysis**

In this section, the data for the study are analysed. The ideological mental models of Ama and Tada (the main characters) are located and how the stylistic devices facilitate the projection of these models are examined. This is with a view to demonstrate the nexus between cognitive discourse analysis and stylistics. The various ideological mental models and the stylistic devices utilised to project them are analysed below.

#### **A. Religious Code-switching and Sacred Diction**

Ama's opening prayer in Arabic ("*La illaillalla... wahuwa Allah kulli shaiin kadir*") immediately signals her ideological shift toward Islamic identity as a pragmatic strategy to align with the faith of her daughter's abductors. The rhythmic, formulaic nature of the prayer, combined with her later references to *limam*, *Alhamdulillah*, and *Insha Allah*, projects a mental model that is syncretic and goal-driven: she is willing to reposition her faith to increase the perceived efficacy of her appeals to a divine authority. Tada's responses ("*Jesus! Agnes, what is this?*", "*We are Christians, remember?*", "*Only Jesus can...*") draw on Christian discourse markers and biblical diction, representing his Christian exclusivist mental model. This shows the clash between Ama's instrumental, adaptive religiosity and Tada's denominational loyalty.

#### **B. Metaphors and Proverbs as Cultural Cognitive Anchors**

Ama's language is saturated with metaphors drawn from Nigerian oral tradition, which frame her loss and justify her choices. For instance, "The dreaded village masquerade of Mbalala dances only to the sound of the drums his followers play" serves as a metaphor for aligning oneself with the methods of those in power, while "A dead child is better than one that is missing" expresses proverbial fatalism, reflecting a communal worldview that equates absence with an existential void. Similarly, "My faith melted like the morning dew" conveys the erosion of belief, revealing her disillusionment. These proverbs and metaphors project Ama's ideological mental model as one rooted in communal wisdom, yet reinterpreted for personal survival. In contrast, Tada's metaphors, such as "A bush shoulder has become a fish bone I cannot swallow," reflect his sense of entrapment in a marital and moral dilemma, with a cognitive framing that is domestic, pragmatic, and self-defensive, rather than transformative like Ama's.

#### **C. Dream Narratives as Ideological Foreshadowing**

Ama's dream of nakedness, shame, and a rescuing velvet drape functions as a symbolic map of her mental state: humiliation (loss of child, loss of faith), alienation (absence of Tada in the dream), and hope (mysterious saviour's covering). The *drape* motif reappears when Shaagu speaks of "a godly hand" that saves her, which Ama aligns with her previous dream,

indicating her openness to multiple spiritual interpretive frameworks. The dream narrative is a stylistic device that blends surreal imagery with psychological realism, mirroring her ideological oscillation between Christianity, Islam, and indigenous spiritualities.

#### **D. Parallelism and Repetition to Emphasize Ideological Conflict**

The dialogue contains repeated binaries that sharpen the ideological divergence between the characters. For instance, “Almighty who? We are Christians...” is countered by “By Allah... this is what I want to do,” reflecting a clash of religious and cultural allegiances. The repeated questioning of “Faith?” serves as a sceptical interrogation of divine reliability, while the lament “I have nothing. I have lost everything... nothing” uses repetition to convey both grief and ideological renunciation. These patterns of repetition reinforce Ama’s mental model as one of spiritual urgency and adaptive hybridity, while Tada’s retorts reveal moral caution and a deep concern for social perception.

#### **E. Code-mixing of Indigenous Religious References**

References to *Scramou-uvu* (goddess of womanhood) and Shaagu (wise man of the Mirror world) bring in African Traditional Religion as a tertiary framework. For Ama, these are not mere superstitions; they are potential allies in her pragmatic quest for her daughter. For Tada, however, these represent dangerous deviations. This stylistic blending of Islamic, Christian, and indigenous religious registers embodies religious pluralism as a survivalist mental model.

#### **F. Irony and Cynicism as Markers of Disillusionment**

Ama’s chuckles when questioning God’s justice (“*Faith my...*”, “*I doubt your God now*”) function as stylistic irony, revealing a mental model grounded in experiential doubt rather than doctrinal loyalty. Her sarcasm toward Tada’s religiosity (“my randy deacon... talks about faith?”) exposes her perception of moral hypocrisy in religious institutions.

#### **G. Songs and Oral Performance**

Tada’s “*Wayo wayo wayo Allah / Wayo wayo wayo God*” song bridges Islamic and Christian appellations to God, suggesting an unconscious syncretism in his own model, despite his verbal resistance to Ama’s religious shift. The switch between Hausa, vernacular prayer, and English reinforces the intercultural religious space both characters inhabit.

#### **Findings and Discussion**

The ideological mental models of Ama and Tada are revealed through stylistic devices that dramatize identity conflict in a multi-faith Nigerian setting. Religious, cultural, and colloquial lexis (“*La illaillalla*,” “*Jesus!*,” “*Scramou-uvu*,” “*Wayo Allah!*”) anchor them within Christian, Islamic, and indigenous cosmologies, fostering realism and audience identification. A semantic field of violence (“*spears*,” “*slaughtered*”) intensifies pathos, while interrogatives, imperatives, and exclamations convey emotional volatility. Repetition, elliptical utterances, and parallelism highlight desperation and persistence. Figures of speech (metaphors, similes, personifications, and proverbs) act as cognitive anchors, turning abstract emotions into culturally resonant imagery.

Contextual features such as code-switching across Arabic, English, Hausa idioms, and Biblical diction reflect shifting identities. Cohesive devices (anaphoric repetition, discourse markers, and interruptions) structure quarrelling and dissonance. Ama’s worldview emerges as pragmatic, adaptive, and results-driven: her conversion to Islam is strategic, embodying “militant empathy.” Tada, in contrast, embodies Christian orthodoxy, patriarchal authority, and passive endurance, prioritising denominational loyalty and social reputation. Their

tensions unfold in three domains: utilitarian vs. doctrinal faith, urgent action vs. spiritual waiting, and personal salvation vs. communal image. Stylistic devices (religious code-switching, metaphors, dream sequences, proverbs, and irony) foreground these ideological contrasts while embedding both characters in a contested religious-linguistic space.

### Conclusion

The findings of this study demonstrate that the play's linguistic and stylistic architecture is deeply intertwined with its thematic and ideological core. Through the interplay of religious, cultural, and colloquial lexis, the text situates its characters within a multi-faith Nigerian landscape marked by tension, negotiation, and identity conflict. The integration of Christian, Islamic, and indigenous references is not ornamental; rather, it functions as a symbolic battlefield on which the characters' ideological positions are asserted and contested. Grammatical structures, figures of speech, and cohesive devices operate as tools of ideological projection. The frequent use of interrogatives, imperatives, and exclamations reveals heightened emotional states, while repetition, parallelism, and code-switching reinforce thematic contrasts and cultural hybridity. Metaphors, proverbs, and culturally embedded imagery serve as cognitive shortcuts, translating complex belief systems into emotionally charged, memorable expressions. The cognitive discourse analysis further reveals that Ama and Tada's worldviews are not merely personal preferences but structured ideological mental models shaped by their socio-cultural and religious environments. Ama's survivalist pragmatism and adaptive religiosity stand in stark opposition to Tada's doctrinal conservatism and social conformity. Ultimately, the study concludes that the stylistic choices in the play are integral to meaning-making, serving as both mirrors and amplifiers of ideological difference. The deliberate manipulation of language, through code-switching, metaphor, repetition, and culturally specific references, not only builds realism and cultural authenticity but also transforms dialogue into a dynamic site of ideological struggle. Thus, this study has highlighted the intricate relationship between style, ideology, and character psychology, and offered insights into how characters' lived experiences can be interpreted through the prism of language.

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**PERCEPTUAL IDENTIFICATION OF PURE ENGLISH VOWEL QUALITIES IN  
THE SPOKEN ENGLISH OF SELECTED PRE-NCE STUDENTS AT AMINU KANO  
COLLEGE OF ISLAMIC AND LEGAL STUDIES KANO**

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**ABSTRACT**

*This study perceptually investigated the pure English vowel qualities in oral performances of pre-NCE students at Aminu Kano College of Islamic and Legal Studies, Kano. Adopting a mixed-method design, the study integrated phonetic analysis with statistical representation of vowel realisation patterns among the forty participants. Data were elicited through oral tasks consisting of twenty-four words that captured the twelve pure English vowels, and oral tests were administered to assess vowel identification and realisations. Audio recordings were transcribed using Broad phonetic transcription IPA and taxonomic analysis revealed systematic deviations from Received Pronunciation (RP), shaped by the influence of Hausa phonology. Central vowels absent from Hausa, such as /ɜ:/, /ə/, and /ʌ/, were consistently substituted with closer L1 categories, while tense-lax distinctions in high vowels collapsed into neutralised forms (/i:/-/ɪ/ → [i]; /u:/-/ʊ/ → [u]). Mid vowels displayed partial variability. These outcomes indicate that learners are not merely deviating randomly from RP but reorganising its vowel system into a reduced and internally consistent inventory. The findings highlight how substitution and neutralisation underpin the nativisation of English in Nigeria, reflecting both L1 phonological constraints and the consolidation of Nigerian English as a distinct variety.*

**Key Words:** Perceptual Identification, Taxonomic Phonology, Vowel quality, substitution,

**1. Introduction**

Accurate pronunciation is a cornerstone of effective communication in English, and vowels play a central role in this process. Vowel sounds carry essential phonetic information that contributes to intelligibility, word distinction and overall speech comprehension. Despite the importance of vowel production, many learners of English particularly in Nigerian tertiary institutions encounter persistent challenges in accurately perceiving and producing vowel qualities. These challenges are particularly evident among pre-NCE students, who often have limited exposure to systematic phonetic instruction and may rely heavily on spelling-based rather than the actual sound pattern.

Previous studies on English vowel production and perception in Nigeria have primarily focused on general pronunciation patterns or orthography-based approaches, emphasizing spelling and written forms rather than the actual phonetic qualities of vowel sounds. While these studies provide useful insight into English language learning, they fail to address a critical question how accurately do learners perceive pure vowel qualities in spoken English? This awareness of vowel sounds is essential for developing proper pronunciation, improving listening comprehension and reduces communication barriers in academic and social contexts.

The purpose of this study is to address this gap by investigating how the qualities of pure English vowels in the spoken English of selected pre-NCE students at Aminu Kano College of Islamic and Legal Studies Kano can be perceptually identified. By focusing on phonetic perception rather than orthographic patterns, this study provides a more accurate and practical understanding of students' phonetic awareness and pronunciation proficiency. The findings are expected to contribute to the development of more effective English pronunciation teaching strategies in Nigerian tertiary institutions.

Given that language is dynamic and constantly evolving, the realisation of English vowels by educated Hausa speakers may reflect new trends that need to be documented. Recent calls for the codification of Nigerian English Phonology have highlighted the need for more empirical data on how Nigerian learners, especially those in educational settings realise English vowel sounds. This study, therefore, investigates vowel quality realisations in the spoken English of selected pre-NCE students of Aminu Kano College of Islamic and Legal Studies, Kano. By focusing on how these learners perceive and produce English vowels, the study aims to provide insight into the specific vowel sounds that are problematic, the influence of the Hausa vowel system, and how such realisations compared to standard English Received Pronunciation.

## **2.0 Literature Review**

### **2.1 The concept of vowel Quality**

Vowel Quality refers to the distinct features that differentiate one vowel sound from another. These features are primarily shaped by the position of the tongue, the shape of the lips, and openness of the mouth during articulation. In phonetics, vowel quality helps us distinguish between vowels like /i:/ in seat and /æ/ in sat, even though they may be spoken with similar loudness or pitch. According to Roach (2009), vowel quality is determined by the configuration of the vocal tract, especially the position of the tongue and shape of the lips during articulation.

### **2.2 Hausa English as a Variety of Nigerian English**

Hausa English is indeed a prominent variety of Nigerian English, spoken primarily by Hausa speakers in the northern region of Nigeria. Hausa English is widely recognised as one of the regional sub-varieties of Nigerian English. It reflects a blend of standard British English features and phonological, lexical, and syntactic influences from the Hausa language. As Olorunfoba (2019) observes, Nigerian English is not a monolithic entity but comprises several regionally influenced varieties, including Hausa English, Yoruba English, and Igbo English, each shaped by the first language (L1) of its speakers. Similarly, Akinjobi and Oladipupo (2010) affirm that Hausa English often transfer features of the Hausa phonological system into their English speech, resulting in distinct pronunciation patterns and vowel realisations. This hybridisation gives Hausa English a unique linguistic identity, especially in terms of pronunciation, intonation, and lexical choices, aligning with the broader categorisation of Nigerian English varieties as described by Jowitt (1991) and further classified by Uzoezie (2002). Therefore, Hausa English represents a fascinating interplay between Standard English and Hausa linguistic framework, especially in the spoken forms of English among Northern Nigerian learners. Hausa-English is spoken primarily by the Hausa people, one of the largest ethnic groups in Nigeria. Bernard (1991, cited in Muhammed, 2011) argues that the influence of one language over the other is extremely important in a situation of prolonged and systematic language contact. Hausa English forms of English has developed features which mark it one as a legitimate variety within the varieties of Nigerian English.

Hausa, a Chadic language of the Afro-Asiatic family, possesses a relatively simple vowel system compared to English. It consists of five short vowels: /a/, /e/, /i/, /o/, /u/, and their corresponding long forms :/ a:/, /e:/, /i:/, /o:/, /u:/, making vowel length a primary distinctive feature rather than vowel quality (Newman, 2000). These vowels are distinguished by duration rather than articulatory complexity, in contrast to English, which has a broader and more intricate vowel inventory. English includes not only a greater number of monophthongs but also diphthongs and centralised vowel sounds such as the mid-central /ə/ (schwa). Which do not exist in Hausa (Gimson, 1989; Roach, 2009). This phonological gap contributes to difficulties experienced by Hausa-speaking learners of English, especially in accurately identifying and producing certain English vowel qualities.

### **2.3 The Concept of Pronunciation**

The use of organs of speech to produce sounds is called pronunciation. Adult Migrant English Program Research Centre [AMEP] (2002) explains that pronunciation consists of certain sounds that have meaning, speech aspect outside the individual sound level, and quality of voice. In addition, Ricard and Schmidt (2006) added that the way English sounds are produced is called pronunciation. Niati and Nurhasanah (2018) also suggest that pronunciation is important, especially in speaking skills. A key to communication in which the listener will catch what is said is pronunciation. It is a technique of how to put language into sounds. According to Eripuddin and Kasyulita (2019), pronunciation is undeniably important in communication. A learner with good pronunciation in English is more likely to be understood, even if they make errors in other areas (Gilakjani, 2012). Therefore, practicing and studying pronunciation systematically will help students to be successful in communication.

### **2.4 English Pure Vowels**

Pure vowels, also known as monophthongs, are speech sounds produced with a single, unchanging vocal tract configuration during their articulation. They maintain a steady quality throughout their duration. These vowels are categorised based on tongue height, backness, lip rounding, and length (Roach, 2009). For example, the 'beat' /i:/ and 'bit' /ɪ/ are pure vowels because the tongue and mouth position remain constant during their production (Ladefoged & Johnson, 2015). Vowels play a very crucial role in language, influencing pronunciation, meaning and rhythm. They also have a direct impact on how consonants are used. Vowels are the sounds produced by the human voice without obstructing the airflow through the vocal tract. They are the building block of language, forming the core of syllables and words. Phonetically vowels are defined as sounds produced with open vocal tract, resulting in no obstruction of airflow. According to Ladefoged (2010), phonetically, "vowels are sounds produced with an open vocal tract, with no significant obstruction of the airflow. The tongue is not in contact with the roof of the mouth or the teeth." In addition, Ambelegin and Arianto (2018) explain that by passing the discussion through the mouth's diverse forms with the tongue and lips different positions, the discussion stream is moderately stopped by the short subjects at the glottis, and vowel sounds are delivered.

Phonetically, a vowel is a speech sound produced without any significant constriction or closure in vocal tract, allowing the air to flow freely. The quality of a vowel depends on the position of the tongue (height and backness), lip rounding, and length (Roach, 2009). For example, vowels such as /i:/, /ʊ, and /æ/ differ based on how high or low the tongue is in the mouth, and whether the lips are rounded or unrounded.

Phonologically, vowels are defined by their roles in syllable structure, specifically as a nucleus or peak syllable. It looks at how sounds are used to create meaning. Phonologically,

Vowels are syllabic segments that typically function as the nucleus of a syllable and contrast with consonants in terms of distribution and function within a language system (Crystal, 2008). In addition, Hayes (2009) phonologically defines vowel as a sound that forms the nucleus of a syllable. The nucleus typically occupied by a vowel, is the prominent part of the syllable due to its sonority. The primary function of vowels is to be the nucleus or peak of a syllable, because they provide the necessary sonority and act as the core around which consonants can be built. In phonology, vowels are abstract units called phonemes that represent categories of sound, such as /i/, /e/, or /u/, which speakers mentally store and use to differentiate words.

### **i. Long Vowel Sounds**

Long vowels are sounds articulated with a noticeably greater duration than short vowels, while maintaining a stable tongue and lip posture throughout their production. Their length is a phonemic feature in certain languages, meaning that the duration of vowel can create distinctions in meaning. Long vowels are not defined by orthography or by the combination of letters in spelling, but strictly by their temporal duration and consistent articulatory quality during pronunciation. The symbols consisting of one vowel symbol plus a length mark made of two dots [:] show that these vowels are long. These are: /i:/, /ɑ:/, /ɔ:/, /u:/, /ɜ:/ as explained in Jones (2020). In English a vowel used alone in an open syllable can be long vowel or part of diphthongs.

According to Roach (2009), long vowels in English differ from short vowels not only in length but also in quality due to the greater muscular tension involved in their articulation.

### **ii. Short Vowel Sounds**

Short vowels are pronounced with a shorter duration than long vowels. They are often found in unstressed syllables or in certain phonetic environment. According to Mc.Cully (2009), a simple vocalic segment occurring within a syllable's nucleus is called short vowel sound. It is a single vowel that forms the nucleus of a syllable, and has relatively brief duration compared to long vowels, these are :/ɪ/, /e/, /æ/, /ʌ/, /ɒ/, /ʊ/, /ə/. In English vowels used alone in a closed syllable tend to make short vowel sounds. Crystal (2008) notes that short vowels in English are central to distinguishing meaning in minimal pairs such as bit /bɪt/ and beat /bi:t/, where duration and quality are key differentiators.

## **2.3 Previous studies on vowel Quality and Realisations of English Sounds in L2 Englishes**

Recent empirical studies on vowel quality in second language (L2) English continue to highlight its complexity and role of native language influence.

Adebayo (2023) conducted an acoustic study titled 'Analysis of Formant Frequencies and Vowel Articulation in the spoken Standard Nigerian English of Under graduate students.' The research used formant frequency measurements (F1 and F2) to examine vowel height and backness among Nigerian undergraduates. It found that, despite formal education, Nigerian speakers consistently deviated from Received Pronunciation (RP) norms, particularly in vowels like /æ/, /ɜ:/, and /əʊ/. These findings are relevant to the present study as they affirm the influence of Nigerian indigenous languages on English Vowel production. While Adebayo's study employed acoustic analysis, the present study uses phonetic transcription and perceptual comparison, focusing on pre NCE students, thus exploring earlier stages of language acquisition.

Similarly, Valezuela and French (2023) explored the production of English vowel contrasts by Spanish L1 speakers over a longitudinal period. Their findings showed gradual improvement in producing contrasts such as /i:/-/ɪ / and /u:/-/ʊ /, highlighting the impact of exposure and practice. Though their learners differ linguistically from Hausa-speaking Nigerian students, both studies focus on vowel production, reinforcing the cross-linguistic challenges in ESL contexts.

Adejumo and Ogungbe (2024) explored pronunciation difficulties among Nigerian high school students. Their findings showed that both segmental and suprasegmental features posed significant challenges, especially English vowels due to L1 interference. While their study broadly covered phonological errors, the present research narrows its focus to the realisation of English vowels, using the Taxonomic phonology framework to classify and describe the learners' output systematically.

Kucerova & Simackova (2025) conducted longitudinal study focused on how young Czech learners acquire L2 English vowels over 16 weeks of exposure. Participants were provided structured input from native speakers, and their production was analysed using acoustic phonetics. The study concluded that consistent exposure to accurate models significantly improved learners' vowel production. This study, while not longitudinal, similarly records participants' realisations of pure English vowels and identifies areas of difficulty, especially those absent in the Hausa vowel system. Unlike Kucerova and Simackovas' work, which emphasizes input quality, this research highlights L1 interference and categorises phonological processes responsible for the deviations, using a surface-based Taxonomic Framework.

Munro *et al.* (2022) explored variability in L2 vowel production by examining multiple speakers from different linguistic backgrounds learning English. The researchers employed both perceptual judgement and acoustic analysis to evaluate vowel accuracy and variability across speakers. Their findings suggest that L2 vowel production is not only influenced by the learner's native phonology but also by individual learning histories and exposure. This approach resonates with the objective of the current study, to document and analyse how pure English vowels are realised among Hausa-speaking pre-NCE students. However, while Munro *et al.* used a more diverse participant pool, this study narrows the scope to a specific group, allowing for deeper insights into L1-specific phonological influence and systematic vowel realisation patterns.

### 3. Theoretical Framework

In the light of the aim of the study, which is to account for vowel realisation in the spoken English of selected pre-NCE students at Aminu Kano college of Islamic and legal studies, Kano Nigeria. The current study employed Taxonomic Phonology as a theoretical framework upon which the study is based. Taxonomic Phonology is a traditional approach to studying the sound system of language. It was developed under the structuralist school of thought in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, focuses on describing and classifying the observable sound units. It is most commonly associated with Leonard Bloomfield (1933). Taxonomic Phonology does not seek to explain the psychological or generative processes behind sound production. Rather it emphasizes the systematic analysis of the surface forms of speech, how sounds are actually realised and function within a linguistic system.

In this study, the theory provides a suitable tool for classifying and comparing the vowel realisations of selected pre-NCE students at Aminu Kano College of Islamic and Legal Studies, Kano, Nigeria, with the standard forms obtainable in Received Pronunciation

English (RP). Through broad phonetic transcription, the theory facilitates the identification of deviations, substitutions, and patterns in vowel articulation. These patterns are further interpreted against the background of the students' native phonological systems, particularly that of Hausa. Taxonomic Phonology thus enables a structured, observable and data-driven approach to analysing the perceptual identification of pure English vowel quality in the spoken English of second language learners.

#### 4. Methodology

This study adopted a mixed-methods design, combining qualitative phonetic analysis with quantitative frequency measures to capture both the nature and prevalence of vowel deviations. Forty pre-NCE students from Aminu Kano College of Islamic and Legal Studies participated, with ten students from each of four departments, selected purposively. Data were collected through a word-list teaching task of 24 words represents the 12 targeted pure English vowels, audio-recorded and transcribed using the Broad international phonetic Alphabet (IPA). Qualitative analysis identified substitutions and neutralisations and Hausa influenced patterns, while quantitative frequency counts and percentage distributions measured the extent of each vowel realisation, justifying the mixed methods approach. Ethical approval was obtained, verbal consent given and participant anonymity maintained. This approach provide rigorous and comprehensive account of vowel production among participants.

#### 5. Data Presentation and Analysis

In this section, the different realisations of the Received Pronunciation (RP) vowels as perceived in the participants' oral performances are represented in tables.

##### 5.1 Realisation of RP Monophthongs in Participants' Oral Performance

Participants' realisations of monophthongs as perceptually identified are represented in Table 1 below to illustrate the vowel qualities they assign to such vowels, qualities that are referred to as variants of RP's vowels.

**Table 1: Frequency Distribution of Participants Realisations of Pure English Vowels (Monophthongs)**

RP Vowel	Target Word	Variant 1	No. of Participants (%)	Variant 2	No. of Participants (%)	Total No. of Participants
/ɜ:/	Bird	[a]	34 (85%)	-	-	40
	Earth	[a]	34 (85%)	[e]	6 (15%)	40
/ə/	Above	[a]	35 (87%)	-	-	40
	Across	[a]	35 (87%)	-	-	40
/ʌ/	But	[ɔ]	36 (90%)	-	-	40
	Cup	[ɔ]	36 (90%)	-	-	40
/æ/	Fat	[a]	34 (85%)	-	-	40
	Bag	[a]	34 (85%)	-	-	40
/u:/	Blue	[u]	40 (100%)	-	-	40
	True	[u]	40 (100%)	-	-	40
/ʊ/	Cook	[u]	40 (100%)	-	-	40
	Full	[u]	40 (100%)	-	-	40
/e/	Bed	[ɛ]	26 (65%)	[e]	14 (35%)	40
	Said	[ɛ]	26 (65%)	[e]	14 (35%)	40
/i:/	See	[i]	40 (100%)	-	-	40

	Green	[i]	40 (100%)	-	-	40
/ɪ/	Pit	[i]	40 (100%)	-	-	40
	Bit	[i]	40 (100%)	-	-	40
/ɒ/	Odd	[ɔ]	40 (100%)	-	-	40
	Pot	[ɔ]	40 (100%)	-	-	40
/ɔ:/	Door	[ɔ]	32(80%)	[o]	8 (20%)	40
	More	[ɔ]	32(80%)	[o]	8 (20%)	40
/ɑ:/	Car	[a]	40 (100%)	-	-	40
	Farm	[a]	40 (100%)	-	-	40

Table 1 presents the frequency distribution of selected pre-NCE students at Aminu Kano College of Islamic and Legal Studies, Kano, Nigeria, in their realisations of English monophthongs when compared with Received Pronunciation (RP) targets. The findings reveal a consistent pattern of systematic substitutions that reflect the influence of mother tongue interference, particularly from Hausa, as well as tendencies toward simplification of the English vowel system.

A major finding is the widespread substitution of central vowels with open or back variants. For instance, the RP mid-central vowel /ɜ:/, expected in words like *bird* and *earth*, is overwhelmingly realised as [a] by 85% of the respondents, with only 15% approximating the variant [e]. Similarly, the schwa /ə/ in *above* and *across* is consistently replaced by [a] (87%), indicating a preference for a more stable open vowel in place of the reduced vowel that is less prominent in Hausa phonology. Likewise, the open-mid back vowel /ʌ/, as in *but* and *cup*, is predominantly realised as [ɔ] (90%), again pointing to the learners' reliance on the closest available vowel in their L1 system.

The front vowel /æ/, which is distinctively marked in RP as in *fat* and *bag*, is similarly rendered as [a] (85%). This substitution underscores the absence of the low front /æ/ in Hausa and aligns with previous descriptions of Nigerian English vowel realisations (e.g., Jowitt, 2008; Gut & Fuchs, 2013), where [a] is often employed in its stead.

The high vowels show relatively higher stability. The long /u:/ and short /ʊ/ are uniformly realised as [u] across all tokens, with 100% of respondents producing this substitution in words such as *blue*, *true*, *cook*, and *full*. This indicates a lack of contrast between /u:/ and /ʊ/ in the learners' phonological inventory, resulting in vowel merger. Similarly, the long /i:/ and short /ɪ/ are consistently realised as [i] by all participants, suggesting that learners do not maintain the tense-lax distinction present in RP. Such mergers simplify the vowel system, reflecting a restructuring of English phonology to align with the learners' native categories.

In the case of the mid-front vowel /e/, variation is observed: 65% of participants realise it as [ɛ], while 35% approximate it as [e], particularly in words like *bed* and *said*. This distribution suggests an emerging, though not fully stable, contrast influenced by exposure to English orthography and schooling. Similarly, the back mid-long vowel /ɔ:/ in words such as *door* and *more* is variably realised, with [ɔ] (80%) as the dominant form and [o] (20%) as a secondary variant, reflecting partial approximation to RP but also evidence of fluctuation between open-mid and close-mid realisations.

The low back /ɑ:/ in *car* and *farm* is uniformly realised as [a], further highlighting the absence of the RP back vowel distinction in Hausa and the learners' reliance on the front open [a] as a default. Finally, the RP /ɒ/, as in *odd* and *pot*, is consistently realised as [ɔ] by

all respondents, again demonstrating the systematic replacement of RP low back vowels with their closest L1 counterpart.

In all, the data indicate that the learners' vowel realisations are characterised by simplification, vowel coalescence, and systematic substitutions. High vowel contrasts (/i:/ vs. /ɪ/ and /u:/ vs. /ʊ/) collapse into single categories, while central vowels (/ə/, /ɜ:/, /ʌ/) are restructured toward [a] or [ɔ]. These results align with broader descriptions of Nigerian English phonology, where vowel distinctions are reduced and adapted to reflect the phonemic inventory of major indigenous languages. The patterns thus reflect both the learners' interlanguage phonology and the emerging norms of Nigerian English, demonstrating how RP categories are nativized in the local linguistic ecology.

## **6. Findings**

The analysis of English vowel realisations by selected pre-NCE students at Aminu Kano College of Islamic and Legal Studies, Kano, reveals systematic deviations from Received Pronunciation (RP) that can be accounted for by the phonological processes of substitution, and neutralisation. These processes reflect the influence of Hausa phonology as well as the broader nativisation of English within the Nigerian context. With respect to monophthongs, the findings indicate that central vowels absent from Hausa undergo extensive substitution. The mid-central vowel /ɜ:/ and the schwa /ə/ are consistently realised as [a] or [e], while /ʌ/ is replaced by [ɔ]. Likewise, the low front vowel /æ/ is uniformly rendered as [a]. In contrast, high vowels display complete neutralisation of tense–lax distinctions: /u:/ and /ʊ/ are merged as [u], while /i:/ and /ɪ/ are uniformly produced as [i]. Mid vowels exhibit partial variability: /e/ alternates between [ɛ] and [e], while /ɔ:/ is variably realised as [ɔ] or [o]. By contrast, the back low vowel /ɑ:/ and the short back /ɒ/ show categorical realisations as [a] and [ɔ], respectively. These outcomes point to a systematic restructuring of the RP monophthong system, aligning it with the more restricted vowel inventory of Hausa.

## **7. Conclusion**

This study has shown that the vowel realisations of pre-NCE students at Aminu Kano College of Islamic and Legal Studies, Kano, Nigeria are characterised by systematic deviations from Received Pronunciation, shaped predominantly by substitution, and neutralisation. These processes, driven by the phonological constraints of Hausa, result in the restructuring of the RP vowel system into a reduced but internally consistent system. While central vowels are substituted with more familiar L1 categories and tense–lax contrasts are neutralised. The findings underscore the patterned and rule-governed nature of these adaptations, affirming their role in the nativisation of English and the consolidation of Nigerian English as a distinct variety.

## **8. Recommendations**

From the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed:

- 1) English language teachers should develop and implement specific instructional materials and activities focusing on the misrealised vowels, particularly central vowels and tense-lax distinctions identified in the study.
- 2) English language teachers should utilise contrastive analysis and exposure to standard English speech models to address Hausa phonological influence and improve vowel perception and production.

- 3) English language teachers should conduct regular pronunciation assessments, coupled with individualised feedback to help students recognise and correct errors.
- 4) Since the study found systematic substitution and neutralisation of vowel sounds absent in Hausa( e.g mid central vowel, schwa and front low vowels), pronunciation focused modules should be incorporated into the curriculum of Aminu Kano College of Islamic and Legal Studies, Kano to target these problematic vowels.
- 5) The teaching of pronunciation should take a learner centred approach by developing skills in communicating with learners about speech and pronunciation rather than just giving the learners phonetically accurate descriptions.
- 6) Teachers should encourage students to reflect on their own pronunciation challenges and identify effective learning strategies.
- 7) The college should also provide teachers with professional development opportunities focused on L2 pronunciation pedagogy.

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**WOMEN IN SELECTED NOVELS OF CHINUA ACHEBE****Zainab Muhammad Kazaure (Ph.D)****Shehu Nasiru**

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**Abstract**

*Several feminist studies have often criticised Chinua Achebe's fiction as a repository of women denigration and marginalisation. Such readings have always stemmed from Achebe's colonial novels which have clearly defined focus on colonialism and counter reaction against imperial perspective of Africa. In Achebe's trio novels Things Fall Apart, Arrow of God, No Longer at Ease, and A Man of the People, he portrays his characters, issues, and events in their banal reality to present to the world the organised African setting prior to the colonial invasion of the continent. This study examines the portrayal of women in these colonial novels, situating their representation within the historical context of precolonial and colonial Africa. Through a critical analysis of Achebe's works, this research reveals the complexities of women's roles and agency in the face of colonialism, highlighting both the limitations and intimations of his depiction. Achebe's focus was to create his own reality in which women are presented in the manner that they lived in the precolonial and colonial time. The changing circumstances that greeted the colonial presence also marked the change in the status of women, in which Achebe's novels metamorphose with the same circumstances creating women that fit into the new system. By exploring the intersections of culture, power, and identity, this paper offers a nuanced understanding of Achebe's female characters and their significance in the broader narrative of African literature.*

**Keywords:** Chinua Achebe, Women, Postcolonial Feminism, African Literature, Patriarchy, Gender Roles

**Introduction**

Chinua Achebe, a writer who needs no introduction in African literature, pioneered themes that resonate with the people and address global readers' concerns about his own culture, worldview, and philosophies. Using a language that attempts to reflect reality, his writings create a balance between art and society. With *Things Fall Apart* (1958), Achebe's name is boldly written in gold in the annals of African literature. The novel targets a foreign audience, countering erroneous conclusions about his Africa. Divided into three parts, the novel presents Africa before, during, and after colonialism, highlighting the contentment Africans enjoyed before the colonial era. The novel has a postcolonial tone of complicity, critiquing the colonial masters who threw the continent into chaos with their imposed cultures.

Following *Things Fall Apart* was *No Longer at Ease* (1960), which together with *Arrow of God* forms the trilogy in Achebe's colonial novels. *No Longer at Ease* tells the story of Obi Okonkwo, a young Nigerian man struggling to navigate the conflicting expectations of tradition and modernity. It explores themes of corruption, cultural identity, and the impact of colonialism. The story is set in the 1960s, a time when Nigeria has just gained independence. The reader witnesses Obi's struggles as he tries to reconcile his traditional African values with the Western ones he acquired during his stay in England. Obi secures a job in the civil service, a position that comes with a comfortable salary. However, he quickly finds himself

caught up in a web of corruption and bribery, which is the norm in Nigerian society. His initial intentions to live an honest life are challenged as he faces financial pressures, societal expectations, and his own desires for a modern lifestyle.

In *Arrow of God* (1964), Achebe centers his narrative on Ezeulu's struggles with colonialism and Christian influences as the chief priest of Ulu in a Nigerian village. The novel explores the complex relationships between British administrators and the Igbo people, delving into themes of power, tradition, and identity. Ezeulu's internal conflict between duty to his people and loyalty to traditional ways is a powerful portrayal of the impact of colonialism.

In *A Man of the People* (1966), Achebe chronicles the narrator's encounters with Mr. Nanga. The narrator, who is also a teacher, recounts the rise of Nanga from a primary school teacher to a member of parliament and Minister of Culture. He describes what led to his dislike of the Minister, his confrontation with him, and what befell the Minister. He also details how he 'stole' Chief Nanga's mistress from his hold, married her, the assassination of the leader of C.P.C., the view of the Western world on his country, the state of affairs in his country, and how his girlfriend betrayed him by sleeping with the Minister.

*Anthills of the Savannah* (1987) is set in the fictional West African country Kangan. The novel explores the aftermath of a military coup and the complexities of power, politics, and friendship. The narrative focuses on the relationships between Sam, the military dictator, and his friends Chris and Ikem, offering a nuanced portrayal of power dynamics and commentary. From the foregoing, it is pertinent to note that Achebe's art is an attempt to represent his culture as best as he can, and his use of language has also demonstrated this commitment. In his oeuvre, Achebe explores African socio-political existence, including the complex roles of women. Writing in a patriarchal African setting, the writer's portrayal of women warrants scrutiny through a postcolonial feminist lens. Rather than viewing his representation as misogynistic or patriarchal, this analysis argues that Achebe's novels provide a thoughtful and contextualised depiction of women's experiences in Africa.

### **Postcolonial Feminism**

Postcolonial feminism aims to highlight and address oppression and marginalisation. This theory recognises the complexity of these disparities, considering factors like race, class, and gender identity (Spivak 271). However, postcolonial feminists argue that to achieve this, it is important to promote a wider viewpoint of the complexity of oppression in society. For example, accounting for how race, religion, class, and gender identity can impact an individual's experience (Spivak 274). Postcolonial feminism also acknowledges that feminist perspectives differ across cultures and regions, particularly between Global North and South. This approach holds that the ideas and goals of feminism that originated from the Global North cannot simply be adopted by the rest of the world. It seeks to understand the specific experiences of women in different cultural and historical contexts. Instead, it tries to incorporate into the global feminist discourse the views and experiences of indigenous communities and feminist perspectives from across the Global South.

According to Audre Lorde, to engage with postcolonial feminism as an ally, feminists from the Global North should consider these differences rather than impose their version of feminist goals (Lorde 110). It is often referred to as "imperial feminism," which can perpetuate patriarchal and racist structures that feminism aims to challenge.

In comparison to other feminist waves, postcolonial feminism takes some stances in direct opposition to previous perspectives. Unlike second-wave feminism, postcolonial feminism rejects the idea of universal sisterhood. This perspective postulates that women are not a homogeneous group. At the core of postcolonial feminism is the concept of intersectionality, the commitment to considering every aspect of an individual's gender identity to define who they are and what they are fighting for. Postcolonial feminism wants to bring to the surface the unconscious bias, especially racism, present in women from the Global North. It focuses particularly on eliminating the “white saviour complex” that may linger among Global-North feminists.

Broadly, postcolonial literature encompasses works by authors from formerly colonised nations, especially those rooted in South Asia, Africa, the Caribbean, and other regions where independence movements emerged over the past century (Murfin 4513). Chinua Achebe exemplifies this tradition.

Achebe’s novels are, first and foremost, a chronicle of African community, culture, and custom. Through richly layered English sprinkled with proverbs, metaphors, legends, myths, and taboos, he recreates traditional festivals, ceremonies, and everyday rituals, demonstrating that the African past was, in Ashcroft’s words, “orderly, dignified and complex and altogether a worthy heritage” (Ashcroft 89).

His mission aligns with Ketu Katrak’s assertion that social responsibility must underpin both postcolonial theory and creative works of writers (Ashcroft 112). Achebe makes it explicit that colonial rule devastated African societies culturally, socially, and politically, and his fiction is a deliberate act of restitution. Yet this ‘restitutive’ impulse sometimes clashes with feminist reform, revealing a tension between preserving cultural authenticity and confronting internal patriarchy. Thus, after colonialism, the role of women becomes crucial. Most African societies remain patriarchal, men are given more privilege and women relegated to a lower position. As Katrak notes, women in formerly colonised societies were “doubly colonised” by both imperial and patriarchal ideologies (Ashcroft 103).

This condition leads to the more complex struggle and movement of women. In many cases, imperial colonization comes first to be fought against, and unfortunately ignores the other. Under such a condition, some Black African women writers fight against this double colonization. However, most male African writers, especially Achebe, ignored the issue of women in the course of fighting colonialism and cultural imperialism. This is because every aspect of life, including the role of women, was focused on dignifying the past and restoring African self-confidence.

Kirsten Holst Petersen argues that Achebe’s objectivity in portraying African society often leads to an unintentional reinforcement of patriarchal values. She asserts that his focus on communal harmony and cultural preservation may suppress gender issues, making women’s oppression invisible (Petersen 64). In contrast, feminist scholars like Florence Stratton emphasise that Achebe’s novels reflect the social condition of African women, highlighting their resistance and agency despite patriarchal constraints (Stratton 23).

### **Women in Achebe’s Novels**

The concerns and debates about the condition of women in Africa are premised on the influence of Western feminist thought, in which women have continuously craved to assert their humanity in the “men’s world.” However, it is imperative to note that African women

have consistently played a crucial role toward the development of their communities (Ogundipe-Leslie 7). While most women in other climes lack the energy and agility to perform their tasks courageously as the African woman, the call for feminism must have arisen to protect women's interests and rights. In Chinua Achebe's novels, all classes of women are created to show the courage, strength, and valorising spirit of the African women in the evolving African world.

In *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe's women are caught in their traditional roles as wives and mothers who understand not just their responsibilities, but also their positions in their matrimonial homes, creating a conducive environment. The fact that Okonkwo is domineering and short-tempered, yet the wives have continuously remained submissive without protest, perhaps explains one of the reasons Okonkwo succeeds as a man among his peers.

While many scholars assess Achebe's women in *Things Fall Apart* as a marginalised group (Stratton 45; Oyewumi 58; Nwoke 122; Bryce 33), this school of thought ignores the contributions of these women toward the success of Okonkwo's family, of which they are a part. Florence Stratton, for example, in *Contemporary African Literature and the Politics of Gender*, contends that Achebe's fiction reinforces gender hierarchies, placing women as background figures to uphold male heroism. Similarly, Oyeronke Oyewumi criticises Achebe for applying Western gender binaries to African realities, thus erasing indigenous social systems in which women historically held power (*The Invention of Women* 72). Jane Bryce also observes that Achebe's women often embody "male anxieties rather than independent voices," functioning as moral symbols rather than social actors (Bryce 34).

Nwosu and Ifeoma view the portrayal of Achebe's women in *Things Fall Apart* as inferior, passive, submissive, and weak, merely to be seen, not heard, an attitude against which postcolonial feminism argues when it refuses to consider women as a homogeneous group (Nwosu 34; Ifeoma 16). Chinweizu, however, goes further, accusing Achebe of perpetuating colonial stereotypes of African women, portraying them as "passive appendages of men" and thus complicit in the continuation of patriarchal mythmaking (*The Decolonization of African Literature* 214).

Other scholars, Muthui and Muhoro, argue that in *Things Fall Apart*, men control every aspect of society, while the female gender lacks power to lead the family or any structural institution, as portrayed in the novel. They claim that Igbo culture dictates that the female gender should not participate in social, economic, and political matters (Muthui and Muhoro 4515). However, they ignore the fact that Okonkwo's success is largely dependent on his wives who work on the farms for him. It is through the hard work of these women that bumper harvests and food security are enjoyed in Okonkwo's household.

Consequently, to produce an abundant harvest, the traditional farmer needs a good workforce. Women constitute, and still form, the core of the rural workforce: farming, tending animals, and nurturing children. Likewise, in organising festivals, women are very busy preparing abundant food for the entire village and their relatives from outside the village. In any kind of ceremony, women work hard, engaging in many activities.

In the novel, therefore, women were expected to work, meaning that they were not "appendages" after all, since they contributed to the general well-being of the home by growing crops meant to be grown by women only. Though the women could not plant or

harvest the yam crop, seen as a man's crop, they were allowed to plant, harvest, and even trade in crops such as cassava, beans, and coco-yams. Achebe indicates that the more women a man married, the higher his social status became (*Things Fall Apart* 47).

Moreover, men are portrayed as significant in the chauvinistic Igbo society, where power and its structure are centred and bestowed on males who construct gender identities. It is pertinent to note that in an African patriarchal society, decision-making at home and in public affairs is vested in men, and women do not contest this ideology. In essence, *Things Fall Apart* is a colonial novel that sought to represent a traditional African society from Achebe's point of view.

In *No Longer at Ease* (1960), where Achebe's narrative focus clearly shifts from a counter-reaction against European representation of Africa, the writer is concerned with the struggle to navigate the conflicting expectations of tradition and modernity. In this novel, the notions that come with colonialism are highlighted, and the women the reader encounters are different from the core traditional women of *Things Fall Apart*.

*No Longer at Ease* reveals the story of Clara, which is interlaced with Obi Okonkwo's experience, and one can identify positive traits in her character. She represents a new mode of female characterisation in Achebe's fiction. In fact, she is the first of her kind in Nigerian literature. It is believed that in Achebe's fictional world, women should be seen and not heard, as in *Things Fall Apart*. This cannot be said about Clara.

She is educated abroad, has a career as a nurse, and believes that her individuality should be acknowledged and respected. She is different from the women in *Things Fall Apart* (published two years before *No Longer at Ease*) and from those in *Arrow of God* (published in 1964).

In those other two novels, patriarchy intrudes oppressively into every sphere of existence. In the androcentric world of those works, the man was everything and the woman nothing. They were just happy and satisfied serving their mostly promiscuous and oppressive husbands. But Clara is an epitome of the modern African woman, emancipated and enlightened through the Western education she acquires. She lives a modern lifestyle and is also presented as stubborn and self-assertive.

This is obvious in her relationship with Obi. She loves movies while Obi loves poetry. She does not submerge herself and her desires into Obi's likes and dislikes like the traditional African woman would. For Clara, if she tolerates Obi, he also has a duty to tolerate her. The ability to resist her man and express anger while the man has to plead is not seen in *Things Fall Apart*. In other words, Clara's character does not just fall into the category of a pioneer feminist figure within Achebe's literary landscape, but she also represents Achebe's deliberate construction of the increasing empowerment and discovery of the marginalised voices of African women in the mid-twentieth century (Onyerionwu and Egbuta 5).

In *Arrow of God*, Achebe celebrates the traditional African woman who is hardworking, loyal, and submissive, from giving birth to maintaining and preserving her sexuality and virginity until marriage. The novel shows that the Igbo society had a strict custom about the sanctity of women before marriage. It portrays an African woman who neither disobeys her husband's decisions nor stands for herself in opposition to men. This sort of submission and loyalty, which the Igbo custom imposes on the women, many critics claim, is for their own benefit (Srinidya and Thirunavukkarasu 64).

In addition, the individuality of men minimises the potential of women, and these traits are constructed by society. *Arrow of God* also highlights the importance of virginity for women in Igbo society. One instance mentioned by Achebe is when Obika's wife, Okuata's virginity and dignity, is questioned to the point that she becomes insecure and stressed because, in the past, she engaged in physical intimacy with Obiora, making her unsure of her sexual status. Molestations and rape are also shown as major concerns in the colonial African Igbo community. Achebe illustrates that the Umuaro society plans to increase the number of male children to protect the females against molestation and harassment.

Ezeulu, in his prayers, always asks for growth of male numbers in the clan because he thinks, "But if we are many nobody will dare molest us, and our daughters will hold their heads up in their husbands' houses" (*Arrow of God* 27). This illustrates that the safety and virginity of Igbo women are always at risk in the clan. This idea also suggests that women are permanently found under the male-oriented society in which the community must develop cultural ethos to protect the girl child.

Critics such as Ama Ata Aidoo and Biodun Jeyifo have pointed out that Achebe's early works, despite their realism, lack depth in their female portrayals. Aidoo contends that Achebe's women often serve as narrative tools for male development, while Jeyifo notes an "ambivalence toward the female principle" in Achebe's fiction, arguing that his women are frequently symbolic rather than active agents ("Fate of the Female Principle" 42).

While many critics see Achebe as a writer who marginalised women in his writings, particularly in his earlier novels, such critics abandon the sense of realism in which Achebe tries to represent society as a writer. Reading the trilogy, one can see that he writes to reflect the reality of his society, and his realism is evident in both language and subject matter. This is why his colonial women conspicuously reflect the status of women at the time. However, as their status began to change in Africa with the advent of colonialism, a new breed of women began to appear in his stories, actively participating even in political affairs of the society (Green 4; Obiechina 71).

These are the women a reader meets in *A Man of the People*, where Achebe shows a shift of perception of women, especially on matters concerning politics. In Chapter One, Achebe introduces Mrs. Eleanor John, which signals new dynamics in the perception of women. Odili introduces Mrs. John as "an influential party woman from the coast who had come in the Minister's party" (*A Man of the People* 14). This description clearly shows a shift in the representation of women in terms of gender roles in society. Women are now introduced as ministers rather than housekeepers, as in *Things Fall Apart*. Achebe has exhibited a paradigm shift in the portrayal of female characters and their role in modern society.

Mrs. John symbolises the modern woman who is courageous, determined, and thriving through all odds. She owns a clothing empire like her male counterparts, embodying the ideals of African feminism. The qualities of Mrs. John as an influential businesswoman signal that Achebe's new role for the modern female gender in society has proven women worthy and equal to men in all spheres of life. Women like Mrs. John have successfully taken their rightful place in society, making important contributions to the economic growth of their countries.

Moreover, Mrs. John's presence and her role in the statutory boards within the Minister's portfolio can be seen as a social change for the female gender; her presence signifies the voice of the voiceless female gender. It further implies that women are politically conscious and capable of participating in decision-making bodies where their views and concerns are considered. Through the representation of Mrs. John, it can be argued that female characters are depicted as brave, resistant, and successful (Ouarodima 17; Davies 41).

Similarly, the character of Eunice in the novel portrays Achebe's new African woman. Throughout the novel, he questions postcolonial Nigerian politics of exclusion that collapsed public and gender space, preventing good governance. Achebe presents the female gender as pivotal to definite change in the novel. Eunice is depicted as politically sound. She is one of the co-founders of the newly formed political party, CPC, an opposition party that intends to fight and replace the corrupt regime of Chief Nanga and his ilk. Eunice stands man-to-man with the male gender in a male-dominated society. Hence, Achebe has given a new role to his female characters in *A Man of the People* (Sundar and Surya 32).

It is in *Anthills of the Savannah* that Achebe's women achieve their full potential. Published in 1987, *Anthills of the Savannah* has a thirty-year gap since *Things Fall Apart* was published in 1958. Thus, changing times, circumstances, and contexts have certainly shaped Achebe's mind, leading to a transformation in how he depicts women positively. In his own admission, Achebe states that as Nigeria and Africa continued to develop, he recognised the increased roles that women needed to play in order to get the country out of the mess it was in (*The Paris Review* 14).

Consequently, Achebe further reveals that he identifies with Beatrice, the feminine character in *Anthills of the Savannah*. He states that she shares the same hopes, aspirations, and beliefs that he had toward life and development in Nigeria and Africa at large. Beatrice is the first female character whom Achebe gives a prominent role in his fiction. By his own admission, Achebe acknowledges that he had used feminine characters in his past works, but none had assumed a role as central as Beatrice's.

Achebe admits that his earlier works did not highlight women as strong, prominent contributors to societal welfare. He, however, refutes critics' suggestions that Beatrice was created solely due to feminist criticism. In his defence, he cites the presence of a character named Beatrice in two of his prior books: *No Longer at Ease* and *A Man of the People*. Despite the emancipation and empowerment women achieve in *Anthills of the Savannah*, there remains dissatisfaction in feminist critical circles. In a review of *Anthills of the Savannah* in the journal *OKIKE* (No. 30, 1990), for instance, Ifi Amadiume blames Achebe for failing or refusing to give "women power," insisting that the female characters still exist to "service" men (Ejinkeonye).

Ultimately, Achebe's portrayal of female characters reflects both the constraints of traditional Igbo society and the subtle resilience of women who traverse and redefine their roles within the society. In other words, women emerge not merely as passive figures within patriarchy but as vital forces that sustain culture, family, and moral order.

## Conclusion

This study has been an attempt to contribute to the feminist discourse on Achebe's novels, particularly the assumption that Chinua Achebe's novels marginalise or undermine women. The paper offers an analysis of some of his novels "Things Fall Apart", "No Longer at

*Ease*”, “*Arrow of God*,” “*A Man of the People*”, and “*Anthills of the Savannah*” focusing on the portrayal of female characters.

In his novels, the evolution of his female characterisation mirrors the broader shifts in postcolonial Nigerian society and in Achebe’s own narrative consciousness. The point this study makes is that Achebe’s fictional world is characterised by a critical endeavour to portray issues as realistically as possible, which can be seen even in his use of language, where he adopts vivid descriptions of events, episodes, and characters.

Women in Achebe thus occupy the critical space in narration according to their setting at a given time and place. From his colonial novels to the later *Anthills of the Savannah* (1987), Achebe acknowledges changing times that include the condition of women in Africa, where they evolve to take their space in society.

Thus, while the Western feminist front advocates equal rights for and improvement in the condition of African women, it is significant to state that societal ethos is never homogenous. The ones Western feminists promote are alien to the African society, in which African women live with valour and must not be overgeneralised as a universal standard for all women.

Several African feminists believe in the emancipation of the African woman, yet some echo the idea that African women have consistently played a crucial role toward community development (Ogundipe-Leslie 15). Achebe’s novels therefore chart a progression from women as cultural signifiers to agents of political critique, reflecting the writer’s growing awareness of gender as a crucial dimension of decolonisation.

While his early works risked marginalisation, later texts consciously foreground women, allowing readers to view the narratives through a more inclusive lens (Green 9).

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## A STUDY OF THEMATIC PROGRESSION IN POETRY: AN EXAMPLE OF OKPANACHI'S *DOGS AND ANGELS I, II, AND III*

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### **Abstract**

*Although thematic progression has been examined in literary and non-literary writings recently, the study of the phenomenon is lacking in respect of poetry with only a few works done on the genre. In light of the foregoing, this research scrutinizes thematic progression in Musa Idris Okpanachi's troika poems, *Dogs and Angels*, which appear in the poet's most recent anthology, *Music of the Dead*, with the objectives of finding out the patterns used in the poems, the patterns used more often, and how the poet uses the patterns differently to achieve meaning. The poems are selected judgmentally for their centrality to the whole text, portraying the themes of death, the dead and killing which are at the centre of the anthology. The theme-rheme demarcations of the poems are presented in tables, followed by the discussions. Consequently, the study discovers through the scope of the three poems that the derived, constant and linear theme patterns are used by the poet. The derived theme pattern is identified seven times, the constant theme pattern six times, and the linear theme pattern only once across the three poems. It is shown that the poet alternates between patterns within the same stanza. It is concluded that the poet's use of such devices as metaphor, metonymy, repetition, synecdoche, ellipses and enjambment helps him attain the discovered patterns. Further thematic progression studies are recommended in the area of poetry.*

**Keywords:** Thematic Progression, derived theme, constant theme, parallel theme, marked and unmarked themes

### **1.0 Introduction**

This research article is a study of thematic progression in poetry, particularly Musa Idris Okpanachi's *Dogs and Angels I, II, and III* which are featured in the poet's anthology, *Music of the Dead*. Poetry is a genre of literature in which language is uniquely used, with poets writing in styles not used in prose, drama and other forms of literary and non-literary writings. Therefore, this is carried out to find out the types of thematic progression patterns used in poetry, the most productive of the patterns, and how interaction between thematic progression patterns helps the poet achieve meaning in a style typical of poetry's.

One of the major interests of discourse analysts is understanding how information is organized using some of the paradigms such as thematic structure which deals with how information is arranged in a clause. However, the discourse analysts' quest for structure of texts goes beyond the clause level which leads to the development of thematic progression. Thematic progression helps discourse analysts to study how themes in multiple clauses relate and how the whole text gives meaning (Taiwo, 2010).

Taiwo (2010) states that thematic progression is the manner through which a theme progresses into another from one clause to the next. Pradjana and Putri (2024) add that thematic progression shows how information flows in a text and enables understanding of a text. Furthermore, Ariantarini et al. (2021) explain that thematic progression targets showing the relationship between sentences. It comprises both theme and rheme. According to Halliday (1985), the theme is the part of a clause which serves as the opening of the message while Eggins (1994) sees the rheme as the part of the clause where the theme is advanced.

Recently, the study of thematic progression has caught the interest of several discourse analysts. Sulastri (2022), for instance, studies the phenomenon in some students' works on short story. The major aim is to understand how students develop paragraphs. Again, Dewi and Sapitri (2023) conduct a thematic progression research on the short story *The Tale of Mouse Deer Stealing Cucumber*. Furthermore, Pradjana and Putri (2024) examine thematic progression in Holly Black's novel, *The Wicked King*, intending to reveal how theme patterns are developed in a novel.

Despite the recent interest in the study of thematic progression in literary texts and beyond as seen above, there seems to be still an existing gap in the study of the said phenomenon in the field of poetry, with only a few researches conducted in the area. Therefore, this research is an attempt to fill that gap and reveal the peculiarities of thematic progression patterns in poetry.

### 1.1 Thematic Progression Patterns

Different thematic progression patterns have been identified by different linguists (Qingwei & Zongxieng, 2019). The duo linguists opine that the patterns can be summarized into five patterns: radioactive pattern, convergent pattern, staircase pattern, overlapping pattern, and parallel pattern. Earlier, Danes (1974) identifies four thematic progression patterns, namely: the constant theme pattern, the linear theme pattern, the split rheme pattern, and the derived theme pattern. Also, Thompson (2014) identifies three types of thematic progression which include: constant progression, linear progression, and derived progression. Again, Yunita (2018) identifies three types of thematic progression patterns, namely: continuous topic pattern, zig-zag or simple linear theme pattern, and multiple or derived theme pattern. Having examined the above identified patterns, this research uses the following thematic progression patterns in the analyses of the selected poems.

#### The Constant Theme Pattern/Radioactive Pattern/Continuous Topic Pattern

Danes (1974) and Thompson (2014) identify this type of pattern as the first kind. It is realized when clauses that follow one another in a text share fully or partially a common theme. Qingwei and Zongxieng (2019) identify the same pattern as "radioactive" whereas Yunita (2018) calls the same pattern as "continuous topic" pattern. According to these researchers, this pattern is commonly found in biographical writing and other forms of narrative. Below is an example of the constant theme pattern:

**George** is our friend. **He** attended the prestigious Bayero University, Kano. After **his graduation**, **he** got a scholarship abroad. **He** now studies in Sweden.

It is shown above that all the themes in the five clauses relate to George informed by the use of personal pronouns. Notwithstanding, the phrase **his graduation** refers to George as well.

#### The Linear Theme Pattern/Staircase Pattern

Danes (1974), Thompson (2014), and Qingwei and Zongxieng (2019) identify this pattern as linear theme pattern and staircase pattern, respectively. Linear theme pattern entails a rheme

of a preceding clause fully or partially becomes the theme of a succeeding clause. This can be seen in the following example:

**Bala** is a brother to Chinedu and Yemi. **Both Chinedu and Yemi** are students of Kuntau Science College. **Kuntau Science College** is one of the best private secondary schools in Kano state. **The private secondary schools** in Kano state offer the best education in the whole northern Nigeria.

The foregoing text shows the rhemes (or their parts) of the three preceding clauses become the themes of the four succeeding clauses. Chinedu and Yemi that form a part of the rheme in the first clause form the theme in the second clause. Likewise, the other rhemes in second and third clauses.

### **The Split Rheme Pattern**

The third theme pattern identified by Danes (1974) is the split rheme pattern. According to him, this part entails a situation whereby a rheme of a clause has two constituents and each of the constituents becomes a theme in a subsequent clause in the text. Below is an example of the pattern:

**My father** was married to four beautiful women. **Hajiya Mama** was his first wife and the mother to his three eldest daughters. **Hajiya Asma’u** was his second wife and his only wife to have given birth to one daughter and died before him. **Hajiya Fulani** was his third wife and a mother to five daughters. **Hajiya Fatima** was his fourth and last wife and a mother to three daughters and his only sons.

The example above shows how the rheme of the first clause is split and developed into the themes of the subsequent clauses. The rheme has four constituents and each is taken to form a clause.

### **The Derived Theme Pattern**

In the case of derived theme pattern, the writer selects any of the topics mentioned earlier and gives it a status of a theme in a subsequent clause. In other words, the writer may decide to select a feature of an earlier topic or theme to develop a consequent theme in the text (Danes, 1974 & Yunita, 2018). In addition, Thompson (2014) states that all other themes in a text connects back to the “hyper-theme”, a theme which sets the theme for the whole text. Let us consider the following example:

**Toyota cars** are some of the most loved cars by motorists in Nigeria. **The cars’ beautiful exterior looks** justify Nigerians’ attraction towards them. **Their interiors** may not be the best in the world but certainly some of the best seen in the country. **The engines of the cars** are very strong and economical.

The above example shows how the derived theme pattern works, with all the subsequent themes derived from the theme of the first clause.

### **Parallel Pattern/Zigzag Pattern**

Qingwei and Zongxiang (2019) identify the pattern as parallel pattern while Yunita (2018) identifies the same pattern as zigzag pattern. This is a situation where two themes alternate in different clauses while the rheme keeps on changing. It is seen as thus:

**Politicians** behave like beggars before elections; **voters** do the begging after elections. **Politicians** understand voters and exploit them; **voters** do not understand politicians to return the favour.

The foregoing shows how the two themes, politicians and voters, alternate in different clauses while the rheme keeps changing in the four clauses.

### Convergent Pattern

This is another pattern identified by Qingwei and Zongxieng (2019). In the case of convergent pattern, multiple clauses share the same rheme with different themes. This pattern's example is seen below:

**Musa** borrows the book, **Ibrahim** borrows the book, and **the rest of the class** borrow the book.

The aforementioned shows how convergent pattern works with Musa, Ibrahim and the rest of the class –all three themes share the same rheme.

### Overlapping Pattern

Overlapping pattern is realized when the theme and rheme of a clause crisscross partly or entirely with the theme and rheme of a previous clause (Qingwei and Zongxieng, 2019). Let us examine the following example:

**My sister** builds a house. **The house** looks unique already. **She** loves things that look different.

The above example shows how the rheme (builds a house) becomes a theme in the second clause while the theme (my sister) in the first clause becomes a theme (she) again in the final clause.

## 2.0 Literature Review

This segment of the article reviews previous works done in the area of thematic progression. Arientarimi et al (2021) submit that several researches from different areas of study have been conducted in the area of Thematic Progression. Qingwei and Zongxiang (2019) analyze Samuel Ullman's prose poem, *Youth*. The paper studies the relationship between thematic progression and characteristics of the passage. It is established that the prose poem is logical, influenced by the staircase pattern. Also, the article explains the relationship between genre and thematic progression. It is shown that preference for thematic progression differs from one genre to another. Notwithstanding, the duo researchers fail to take into account how poetic features help inform thematic progression in the poem. Thus, this current study takes into account poetic features where they inform thematic progression in the selected poems.

However, the other studies conducted on poetry in the area, at the disposal of the researcher, are only limited to the study of thematic structure of the poems under scrutiny. Qiao (2019), for example, offers a thematic interpretation of Emily Dickinson's poem, *Because I Could Not Stop for Death*. The aim is to explore Dickinson's attitude towards death through the study of thematic structure. Finally, the research reveals that the study of thematic structure can play a vital role in the study of discourse analysis and literary texts. As every poet writes differently, the differences may also manifest in how each poet develops themes. More importantly, this current research takes the study to the level of thematic progression in poetry while Qiao (2019) fails to show how themes are progressed.

Similarly, Sayuthi (2019) investigates theme in Robert Frost's poems. The research analyses 10 selected poems from *Complete Poems of Robert Frost*. It is revealed by the study that unmarked multiple themes are intensely featured in the poems. On the contrary, the marked simple themes are the least featured in the poems. Essentially, this research fails to examine thematic progression in the selected poems. Therefore, this presented is interested in

examining both theme-rheme structure and progression in the selected poems. Again, Khalfa et al (2021) explore the thematic structure of Edgar Allan Poe's Dream-Themed Poems. The study examines how textual meaning is realized through the structures of theme-rheme in the four selected poems analyzed. The research reveals that the poems display simple, multiple, topical, interpersonal, textual, marked and unmarked themes. However, the study is restricted to only the investigation of theme-rheme structures rather than thematic progression which this current study does.

Therefore, this research sets out to differ from the past researches conducted in the area of thematic structure and progression by examining areas such as thematic progression and taking into account poetic features which the reviewed previous studies fail to do.

### **Methodology**

This aspect of the paper explains the method of the selection of the poem under study, method data presentation and method of data analysis.

Okpanachi's *Music of the Dead* and the poems *Dogs and Angels I, II and III* in the collection are selected using judgmental sampling technique. The text, on one hand, is selected out of the poet's three collections for its recency and that it has not been given enough attention as the other two. The poems, on the other hand, are selected for their shared themes of death, the dead and killings which are central to the whole text. As analyses of the selected poems may not account for the whole text's thematic progression characteristics, hence further researches are encouraged to explore other poems in the collection.

The data is presented with the stanzas first presented, followed by the analyses in tabular form. The tables have two sections: one showing the themes while the other showing the rhemes. The tables are then discussed, explaining the thematic progression patterns used in the stanzas. Moreover, the tables are used to show the dichotomy between themes and rhemes, followed by a discussion on the data presented in the table. It is pertinent to note that poetic features are explained where they inform thematic progression.

### **3.0 Data Presentation, Analysis and Discussions**

According to Martin and Rose (2007), in theme analysis, a segment of a discourse is taken and dissected into clauses. In addition, Thompson (2014), argues that a single structure can have more than one possible analyses. Therefore, in the analyses below, the aforementioned submissions are as well used.

#### **4.1 *Dogs and Angels I***

*Bathe your brows  
Spatter the wall with my blood  
As mural court painting  
You repaint people  
With acid to cleanse them  
Playing the game of butchers  
To give them new complexion  
(Okpanachi, lines 1-7)*

Themes	Rhemes
1. Bathe	1. your brows
2. Spatter	2. the wall with my blood as mural court painting
3. You	3. repaint people with acid to cleanse them
4. (You)	4. (are) playing the game of butchers, to give them new complexion

The table above shows that there are two marked processes and two unmarked participant serving as themes in the stanza. There is an evidence of constant theme with the first theme “bathe” maintained in the second clause through the word, “spatter”. That the two words share a similar sense which is a case of metonymy proves that the themes are similar. Furthermore, the successive unmarked theme appears to have been derived from the first rheme “your blood”. However, the final clause which is elliptical contains an unmarked theme (shown in the brackets). The theme appears to have been carried over from the preceding clause. Therefore, the structure of the stanza combines both constant and derived themes. The poem continues:

*The peace mongers  
Play lutes with toys of war  
Making music of the dead  
To frighten even the undertakers  
(Okpanachi, lines 8-11)*

Themes	Rhemes
1. The peace mongers	1. play lutes with toys of war, making music of the dead to frighten even the undertakers

The above table shows that the stanza comprises only one clause separated into several lines informed by enjambment. The stanza picks up from the previous one with the unmarked theme “the peace mongers” referring to the same “you” and the rheme in synchrony with the final rheme in previous stanza. Alternatively, the ellipsed participants and verbal elements of two lines treated as part of the rheme can be filled as submitted by Martin and Rose (2007). However, the option chosen here is triggered by the obvious enjambment used by the poet in the lineation of the stanza. Therefore, the stanza’s structure is derived pattern with an unmarked theme and a single rheme. The poem continues:

*The silent nemesis  
Has delivered swords  
To the blind executioner  
Of Pilate’s mob  
(Okpanachi, lines 12-15)*

Themes	Rhemes
1. The silent nemesis	1. has delivered swords to the blind of Pilate's mob

Similarly, this stanza's three lines are treated as a single rheme as a result of a clear enjambment which informs the lines' separation. The unmarked theme "the silent nemesis" is derived from the previous stanzas' "you" and "the peace mongers" through metaphor. The poet metaphorical compares "the peace mongers" to "the silent nemesis" thus the pattern is the derived theme pattern. However, the rheme is new. The poem continues:

*A male child must perish  
Rivers must run blood  
Vermin must take over the land  
So Pharaoh must be born*  
(Okpanachi, lines 16-19)

Themes	Rhemes
1. A male child 2. Rivers 3. Vermin 4. So Pharaoh	1. must perish 2. must run blood 3. must take over the land 4. must be born

The above stanza encompasses four clauses, with each clause having a unique unmarked theme and a unique rheme. The themes of the first two clauses appear to be different to those in earlier stanzas. Notwithstanding, the themes may be derived from previous rhemes. "A male child" appears to be a synecdoche of "repaint *people* with acid...", a male child being a part of people. The unmarked theme, "rivers" is a hyperbole of "blood" from the first stanza, justified by the rheme, "must run blood". Again, the unmarked themes "vermin" and "Pharaoh" are metaphorically referring to the same "the peace mongers" and "the silent nemesis" mentioned in the second and third stanzas respectively. Hence, the thematic progression pattern in derived theme. The final stanza reads:

*Pharaoh must be born again  
To extinguish rights and minds  
To beatify people with blood  
On gallows of love*  
(Okpanachi, lines 20-23)

Themes	Rhemes
1. Pharaoh	1. Must be born again to extinguish rights and minds to beatify people with blood on gallows of love.

Finally, the above stanza encompasses only one unmarked theme and one rheme. The poet is able to maintain the unmarked theme, "so pharaoh" and rheme, "must be born" from the

previous stanza through repetition. The rheme in this stanza is additionally encompassing more information to show what the pharaoh does. Therefore, the thematic progression pattern is constant theme.

#### 4.2 *Dogs and Angels II*

*Wounds sprout everywhere  
Sores and gashes springing  
From the bowel of the earth  
Spread wildly like fire  
(Okpanachi, lines 1-4)*

Themes	Rhemes
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Wounds</li> <li>2. Sores and gashes springing from the bowel of the earth</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Sprout everywhere</li> <li>2. Spread wildly like fire</li> </ol>

This three-stanza-poem opens with two clauses in this stanza. The clauses comprises two similar unmarked themes and rhemes. It is noticed that “wounds” in the first clause is what is metaphorically referred to as “sores and gashes...” in the second clause - likewise what is in the first rheme is what is metaphorically referred to in the second. Therefore, the thematic progression pattern is constant theme pattern. The poem continues:

*The killing libido of the dogs  
Has reached orgasm  
Of cleansing the people  
With orgiastic phalluses  
(Okpanachi, lines 5-8)*

Themes	Rhemes
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The killing libido of the dogs</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Has reached orgasm of cleansing the people with orgiastic phalluses</li> </ol>

This stanza contains only one clause. The poet is able to talk about “dogs” in the title of the poem in the unmarked theme, “the killing libido of the dogs”. Arguably, this is achieved using synecdoche, the killing libido being a part of the dogs. The rheme is new. Thus, the pattern is derived theme pattern. The poem concludes:

*Deliver me to a wild pack  
Feed me in pieces to the dogs  
Reinvent me in depth of pain  
Rework the doors and locks  
That open and close by your reflex  
After you have thrown away the keys  
With the precision of death  
(Okpanachi, lines 9-15)*

Themes	Rhemes
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Deliver</li> <li>2. Feed</li> <li>3. Reinvent</li> <li>4. Rework</li> <li>5. After you</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. me to a wild pack</li> <li>2. me in pieces to the dogs</li> <li>3. me in depth of pain</li> <li>4. the doors and locks that open and close by your reflex</li> <li>5. have thrown away the keys with the precision of death</li> </ol>

The final stanza encompasses five clauses. It is noticeable that the unmarked themes: “deliver”, “feed”, and “reinvent” are metaphorically similar themes while “rework” differs. These similarity and dissimilarity is engineered by both metaphor and their rhemes. Nonetheless, the rhemes follow the same pattern with the first three being similar while the last differs. The final theme appears different starting with a conjunction and being a participant unmarked theme. The conjunction is not given the status of a theme because conjunctions do not fill theme position alone as submitted by Thompson (2014). The final rheme is derived from the preceding rheme. The first three clauses exhibit the constant theme pattern with the themes and rhemes being similar while the last two clauses exhibit the linear pattern with “...your reflex...” in the first rheme becoming the final theme, after ‘you’.

#### 4.3 *Dogs and Angels III*

*Now that you have erected walls*  
*Everywhere thinking*  
*You have taken refuge*  
*Beyond the reach of death*  
*The fetters are taller than us*  
*The invisible mobile nooses*  
*Have clasped on our necks*

(Okpanachi, lines 1-7)

Themes	Rhemes
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Now that you</li> <li>2. Thinking you</li> <li>3. The fetters</li> <li>4. The invisible mobile nooses</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Have erected walls everywhere</li> <li>2. Have taken refuge beyond the reach of death</li> <li>3. Are taller than us</li> <li>4. Have clasped on our necks</li> </ol>

The stanza comprises four clauses with the first two sharing similar marked themes but different rhemes while the other two clauses share similar unmarked theme but different rhemes. The similarity of the first pair of theme is triggered by repetition while the similarity of the second pair of themes is informed by metonymy, the word “nooses” being another word for “fetters”. However, the four rhemes appear different to one another. The thematic structure of the stanza is both constant with the poet maintaining his first and third themes in the second and last clauses respectively. Additionally, the poet’s alternation from the first two

similar themes to the second two similar themes deems the pattern of the stanza as parallel pattern. The poem continues:

*Why do you fence the clan  
With my body chained to the people  
Why are graves becoming hedges  
On the fence of the Rock*  
(Okpanachi, lines 8-11)

Themes	Rhemes
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Why</li> <li>2. Why</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. do you fence the clan with my body chained to the people</li> <li>2. are graves becoming hedges on the fence of the Rock</li> </ol>

Thompson (2014) explains that in wh-questions, the wh-word serves as the unmarked theme. This is as a result of the wh-word carrying the missing information which is the sole purpose of the clause. Therefore, this stanza's wh-words are treated as unmarked themes. Apparently, the two themes are the same, informed by repetition, whereas the two rhemes are similar. Hence, the structure of the stanza is constant theme pattern. The poem continues:

*Your bull terriers set houses ablaze  
With people inside to light  
Your birthday candles*  
(Okpanachi, lines 12-14)

Themes	Rhemes
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Your bull terriers</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Set houses ablaze with people inside to light your birthday candles</li> </ol>

The unmarked theme, "your bull terriers", in the above stanza is derived from one of the previous themes "you" in the first stanza. The poet accomplishes this through repetition, by using the pronoun "your" whose personal form is used in the first stanza. Therefore, the pattern is derived theme pattern. The poem continues:

*You spill rose blood as souvenir  
To this land of cemetery –  
Your treasured garden*  
(Okpanachi, lines 15-17)

Themes	Rhemes
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. You</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Spill rose blood as souvenir to this land of cemetery – your treasured garden</li> </ol>

Finally, this stanza encompasses one clause. The poet maintains a similar unmarked theme, deriving the theme, “you”, from the previous stanza’s theme. He attains this through repetition. The rheme is similar to the previous themes’ rhemes. Consequently, the pattern is derived theme pattern.

#### 4.0 Findings

The analyses of the three selected poems demonstrate that in poetry, derived, constant, and linear theme patterns are used with each of the three patterns discovered, forming the structures of the poems. The research discovers that the derived theme pattern is used more often than the constant and linear theme patterns. The derived theme pattern appears across the three poems seven times, the constant the pattern appears six times, and the linear theme pattern appears only once. To attain these structures and meaning, the poet uses poetic devices such as metonymy, metaphor, repetition, synecdoche, hyperbole, and enjambment. The study exposes how the poet alternates from one pattern to another as seen in especially *Dogs and Angels II* where he switches from the constant theme pattern to the derived theme pattern, from the derived theme pattern to the constant theme pattern, and from the constant theme pattern to the linear theme pattern. It is further revealed that the poet uses ellipsed clauses where multiple lines share the same theme informed by especially enjambment.

#### 5.0 Conclusion

The study concludes that poets, like writers of other forms of literary and non-literary writings, use thematic progression patterns in writing poems. Qingwei and Zongxieng (2019) and Yunita (2018) point out that the constant theme pattern is commonly used in biographical writings. However, in the selected poems and as seen in the analyses, this study concludes that the derived theme pattern is the most commonly used in addition to the constant theme pattern. The use of these patterns helps the poet maintain the poetry style of writing which does not require straightforwardness. This is because, especially, the derived theme pattern allows writers to pick from any topics mentioned previously. Lastly, it is concluded that the poet’s use of poetic devices such as metaphor, metonymy, repetition, synecdoche, ellipses, and enjambment informs the manifestation of the patterns discovered in the poems.

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**GRAPHOPHONEMIC STATUS OF ENGLISH CONTEXT-INDUCED SILENT <T>  
IN SPOKEN ENGLISH OF NCE II STUDENTS OF COLLEGE OF EDUCATION,  
GUMEL, JIGAWA STATE, NIGERIA.**

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**Abstract**

*This study investigates, in the spoken English of selected Hausa-speaking NCE II students of the College of Education, Gumel, the phonetic status of grapheme <t> that is contextually silent in Standard British English. Anchored in Generative Phonology, the research examines and represents in form of phonological rules how the speakers represent the grapheme as the underlying representation (UR) in their phonetic output, which is their surface representation (SR). The data for the study were collected through a wordlist reading task comprising twenty English words with silent grapheme <t> (e.g., chasten, apostle), which were administered to forty purposively selected students who are Hausa natives. Their renditions were recorded in a quiet library using an Android phone recorder. The recordings were listened to; and how the students realised the grapheme <t> were identified and represented in a square bracket in line with the International phonetic alphabet (IPA). The analysis was conducted qualitatively and quantitatively guided by formal rule notation to identify the transformation of the grapheme into audible sounds. Findings reveal that all participants consistently pronounced the silent grapheme <t> as [t] across all lexical contexts, demonstrating strong orthographic interference and the absence of deletion rules typical of Standard English. This pattern suggests a grapheme-faithful pronunciation strategy, where speakers' speech mirrors English spelling conventions and Hausa phonological transparency. The study concludes that these pronunciations represent systematic graphophonemic adaptations rather than random errors.*

**Keywords:** Hausa English, silent graphemes, graphophonemic approach, phonological rules, English pronunciation.

**1. Background**

English, as the official language of Nigeria and a global lingua franca, occupies a central role in education, administration, and interethnic communication (Adegbija, 2004). Consequently, a variety of English otherwise known as Nigerian English (NE) has evolved as a distinct linguistic system shaped by the sociolinguistic realities of a multilingual environment where indigenous languages, such as Hausa, significantly influence its phonological and orthographic patterns (Banjo, 2000; Oloruntoba-Oju, 2013). Among the notable phonological characteristics of NE is the phenomenon of spelling pronunciation, where speakers assign phonetic values to letters that are silent in Standard British or American English (Jones, 2006; Odebunmi, 2007). This tendency often manifests in the pronunciation of context-induced silent graphemes—letters that are rendered silent in native English varieties because of specific phonological environments. For instance, in Standard English, the grapheme <t> is silent when positioned between <s> and <le> as in *apostle*, or between <s> and <en> as in *hasten* and *chasten*.

In native English phonology, such silent letters are the outcome of historical sound changes and morphophonemic simplifications that prevent the articulation of redundant consonants (Chomsky & Halle, 1968; Jones, 2006). However, observations from classroom interactions and phonetic recordings reveal that Nigerian learners of English, especially Hausa-speaking students in College of Education, Gumel, tend to pronounce these silent graphemes, thereby producing forms such as [hastɛn] or [chastɛn]. This practice suggests a systematic graphophonemic pattern in which orthography exerts a stronger influence on pronunciation than native phonological rules. Such patterns provide insights into how L2 learners mentally process English spelling and phonology within the sociolinguistic realities of Nigeria (Adamu, 2018; Umar, 2016).

The Hausa variety of Nigerian English provides a critical linguistic context for exploring this phenomenon. Hausa orthography, unlike English, maintains a nearly transparent grapheme-phoneme correspondence, where every written letter typically represents a sound (Mamman, 2015; Yahaya, 2017). Consequently, Hausa speakers learning English often transfer this orthographic transparency into their spoken English, assigning phonetic values to graphemes that would otherwise be silent in Standard English. This leads to contextually induced phonetic realization, a process whereby silent graphemes such as <t> in *castle*, *bustle*, or *whistle* are pronounced because learners rely on visual cues from spelling rather than on contextual phonological constraints.

Although several studies have examined segmental and suprasegmental features of Nigerian English (Bamgbose, 1995; Jowitt, 1991; Banjo, 2000), limited empirical research has focused on the pronunciation of context-induced silent graphemes, particularly the grapheme <t> in the spoken English of Hausa learners. This gap is significant because NCE II students at the College of Education, Gumel, represent a pedagogically important group, future teachers whose pronunciation habits influence successive generations of learners. Understanding how these students treat silent <t> grapheme will therefore shed light on the pedagogical transmission of pronunciation norms within Hausa-speaking contexts.

Furthermore, from a psycholinguistic perspective, second-language (L2) learners often rely on orthographic forms as pronunciation guides, particularly in contexts where English phonology is taught through spelling-based literacy (Treiman, 2000; Akinlabi & Awobuluyi, 2014). Given that Hausa literacy emphasizes phonemic transparency, learners may consciously or subconsciously vocalize all graphemes, including those silent in English. This interplay between English orthography, Hausa phonology, and L2 cognitive processing underscores the importance of graphophonemic analysis as a means of understanding the linguistic mechanisms behind the spoken realizations of silent graphemes.

Accordingly, this study investigates the graphophonemic status of the English context-induced silent grapheme <t> in the spoken English of NCE II students of the College of Education, Gumel, Jigawa State. It aims to determine the extent to which these students pronounce or omit silent <t> in specific phonological contexts and to identify the orthographic, phonological, and cognitive factors influencing such realizations. The findings are expected to contribute to the theoretical understanding of graphophonemic interactions in L2 phonology and to inform pronunciation pedagogy for English language instruction in Hausa-speaking educational settings.

## 2. Silent Graphemes and Context-Induced Silence

Silent graphemes are written characters that lack phonetic realisation in particular contexts. Their silence is often context-induced, depending on phonological, morphological, or etymological environments rather than inherent muteness. Many silent graphemes result from historical sound changes and orthographic conservatism in English (Carney, 1994; Crystal, 2003). For instance, in *doubt* /daʊt/ and *debt* /det/, the <b> is silent due to its Latin roots (*dubitare*, *debitum*), where the sound was lost but later reintroduced into spelling for etymological reasons (Venezky, 1970). Likewise, *subtle* /'sʌtl̩/ retains a silent <b> from *subtilis*, reflecting orthographic rather than phonological motivation (Scragg, 1974).

Many silent graphemes emerge from phonotactic constraints and articulatory simplification. In *wrestle* /'resəl/ and *fasten* /'fɑ:sən/, the <t> is omitted between consonants to ease pronunciation (Lass, 1999). Similarly, *raspberry* /'rɑ:zbəri/ and *receipt* /rɪ'si:t/ contain silent <p>s resulting from coarticulation and historical borrowings from French and Latin (Crystal, 2003). Even in *tongue* /tʌŋ/, the final <ue> is silent, preserved only for orthographic distinction (Cook, 2004). Thus, contextually induced silence in English arises when certain phonological environments (especially consonant clusters) render articulation of specific graphemes redundant. These silent letters, often perpetuated by historical and etymological spellings, reflect the complex interaction between pronunciation, phonotactics, and orthographic tradition. Understanding such silences is crucial for mastering English pronunciation and decoding its graphophonemic irregularities.

## 3. Graphophonemic Approach to Phonological Description

The graphophonemic approach examines the systematic relationship between graphemes (written symbols) and phonemes (speech sounds), highlighting how orthography interacts with phonology to shape pronunciation and reading (Fowler, 1991; Venezky, 1999). It bridges the gap between phonology and orthography, showing that phonological analysis must account for written representation, especially in English, where irregular spelling affects sound patterns (Carney, 1994; Frost, 2012). Venezky's (1967) foundational work established English orthography as morphophonemic, reflecting both sound and morphological structures. Fowler (1991) further noted that exposure to written forms influences phonological perception, reinforcing the role of graphophonemic relationships in cognitive processing. In applied linguistics, this approach informs literacy and pronunciation teaching by linking phoneme awareness to grapheme recognition (Ehri, 2005). For L2 learners, orthographic transparency affects pronunciation and phonological development; languages with shallow orthographies aid learning, while English's deep orthography demands greater graphophonemic awareness (Seymour, Aro, & Erskine, 2003). Computational models such as text-to-speech systems also rely on this interface for accurate grapheme-to-phoneme conversion (Seidenberg, 2017).

## 4. Previous Studies on Features of Hausa Spoken English

Banjo (1973) offers a sociolinguistic overview of Nigerian English varieties, including Hausa English, but without addressing the orthography–phonology interface. Jibril (1982) provides a seminal analysis of Nigerian English phonology, including Hausa English segmental phonology, highlighting, among other things, the substitution of English dental fricatives /θ/ and /ð/ with alveolar plosives /t/ and /d/ due to Hausa phonological constraints. While insightful, his study overlooks orthographic influences such as the treatment of silent letters. The present study builds on this by linking orthography directly to phonological realization. Similarly, Garba (2004) examines vowel mergers in Hausa English, while Adebayo (2008) investigates stress and intonation transfer, yet both focus on phonetic or prosodic features

rather than the role of spelling in pronunciation. Aliyu (2010) and Ahmad & Bello (2015) describe phonotactic processes like consonant cluster simplification and vowel epenthesis, revealing how Hausa phonology shapes English pronunciation. However, neither of these works considers how English orthographic patterns (particularly silent graphemes) affect articulation. Likewise, studies by Ibrahim (2016) and Sani (2017) focus on tonal interference and plosive devoicing, providing valuable phonetic data but excluding orthographic dimensions. Garba and Abdullahi (2018) discuss morphophonemic adaptations, and Abdullahi and Usman (2020) present acoustic analyses of Hausa English, both contributing to phonological documentation without examining silent grapheme realization.

In sum, the extant literature on Hausa Spoken English has extensively documented phonological features including consonantal substitutions, vowel mergers, tonal interference, consonant cluster simplification, and morphophonemic processes. However, none of these studies directly investigate the realization of contextually silent graphemes in Standard Native English by Hausa natives who are using English, especially within formal educational settings. This gap is significant because contextually silent graphemes pose unique orthographic and phonological challenges that influence pronunciation, intelligibility, and literacy development among English as a second language (L2) users, to which the students belong. The current study addresses this gap by exploring how the selected NCE II students of College of Education, Gumel, realize grapheme <t> that is contextually silent in English, thereby contributing insights to the phonology-orthography interface and offering pedagogical implications for English language teaching in Hausa-speaking contexts.

## 5. Theoretical Framework

This study adopts Generative Phonology as its theoretical framework, particularly its concern with the mapping between underlying representations (URs) and surface representations (SRs) via formal phonological rules. Originally proposed by Chomsky and Halle (1968) in *The Sound Pattern of English*, Generative Phonology posits that speakers have internalized rules which systematically transform abstract, underlying forms into the spoken outputs appropriate for their linguistic community. While traditionally applied to model native speaker competence, this framework is adaptable for analysing the internal logic of varieties of English, including Hausa English. In the context of this study, Generative Phonology is used not to identify deviations from native norms, but to describe and explain the patterned realisations of silent grapheme <t> as context-dependent phonological phenomena. These realisations are viewed as idiosyncratic yet systematic features of Hausa English, shaped by the influence of English orthography and mediated through the students' first language (Hausa). Consequently, the focus is not on error correction but on uncovering underlying rule systems that govern how the <t> contextually silent in English is reinterpreted or reactivated in this variety.

## 6. Methodology

This study adopts qualitative and quantitative research design, and it is anchored in Generative Phonology to examine how NCE II students of the College of Education, Gumel, realise the English grapheme <t> that is contextually silent in Standard English. It seeks to describe these pronunciations as systematic phonological patterns influenced by orthographic and L1 factors rather than as mere errors. The population comprises NCE II English students who have received formal instruction in English phonology. Using purposive sampling, forty native Hausa speakers were selected for the study due to their shared exposure to English orthographic and phonological instruction. Data collection involved a wordlist reading task consisting of twenty English words with silent grapheme <t> (e.g. *chasten*, *apostle*).

Participants' oral renditions were recorded in a quiet library using a digital audio recorder. The data analysis was conducted within the framework of Generative Phonology, focusing on the transformation of underlying representations (URs) to surface forms (SRs) through phonological rules. The transcriptions of the phonetic realisations of the grapheme <t> in the recordings were done phonetically using the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA), and recurrent realisation patterns followed by the participants were represented through rule notation. Approval was obtained from the school authority prior to data collection, and participants were granted confidentiality, voluntary participation, and the right to withdraw at any point, with all audio data anonymised and securely stored for research purposes only.

## 7. Data Presentation and Analysis

### 7.1 Realisations of Grapheme <t> in Lexical Items

In this section, how the participants realised the contextually silent grapheme <t> in English are presented as perceived.

#### 7.1.1 Grapheme <t> in <s>\_\_<en># Context

The participants' realisations of grapheme <t> in the environment <s>\_\_<en># as perceived are presented in Table 1 below

**Table 1: Participants' Phonetic Realisations of Grapheme <t> in <s>\_\_<en># Context**

S/N	Lexical Item	Grapheme in focus	Phonetically Realised as	No. of Participants	Percentage %
1	chasten	<t>	[t]	40	100%
2	christen	<t>	[t]	40	100%
3	fasten	<t>	[t]	40	100%
4	glisten	<t>	[t]	40	100%
5	hasten	<t>	[t]	40	100%
6	listen	<t>	[t]	40	100%
7	moisten	<t>	[t]	40	100%
8	often	<t>	[t]	40	100%

The data in Table 1 show a consistent phonetic pattern in the realization of the grapheme <t> in the <s>\_\_<en># phonological environment. In all eight lexical items (*chasten*, *christen*, *fasten*, *glisten*, *hasten*, *listen*, *moisten*, and *often*), the participants uniformly articulate <t> as the voiceless alveolar plosive [t], with 100% of the forty speakers exhibiting this feature. In Received Pronunciation (RP), however, the grapheme <t> in these lexical items is typically silent, such that *listen*, *often*, and *fasten* are pronounced as /'lɪsn/, /'ɒfn/, and /'fɑ:sn/ respectively. The participants' articulation of [t] therefore reflects a clear instance of orthographically induced pronunciation, where spelling exerts a dominant influence on phonetic realization.

#### 7.1.2 Grapheme <t> in <s>\_\_<le># Context

The participants' realisations of grapheme <t> in the environment <s>\_\_<le># as perceived are presented in Table 2 below

**Table 2: Participants' Phonetic Realisations of Grapheme <t> in <s>\_\_<le># Context**

S/N	Lexical Item	Grapheme in focus	Phonetically Realised as	No. of Participants	Percentage %
1	apostle	<t>	[t]	40	100%
2	bristle	<t>	[t]	40	100%
3	castle	<t>	[t]	40	100%
4	rustle	<t>	[t]	40	100%
5	trestle	<t>	[t]	40	100%
6	whistle	<t>	[t]	40	100%
7	hustle	<t>	[t]	40	100%
8	epistle	<t>	[t]	40	100%
9	gristle	<t>	[t]	40	100%
10	wrestle	<t>	[t]	40	100%
11	jostle	<t>	[t]	40	100%
12	rustle	<t>	[t]	40	100%

The data presented in Table 2 demonstrate a consistent phonetic pattern in the realisation of the grapheme <t> among the NCE II students of the College of Education, Gumel, in the <s>\_\_<le># phonological context. Across all twelve lexical items (*apostle*, *bristle*, *castle*, *rustle*, *trestle*, *whistle*, *hustle*, *epistle*, *gristle*, *wrestle*, *jostle*, and *rustle*), the participants uniformly pronounced <t> as the voiceless alveolar plosive [t], with 100% occurrence among the forty speakers. In RP, however, the grapheme <t> in this environment is typically silent, such that the words *castle* /'kɑ:səl/, *whistle* /'wɪsl/, and *apostle* /ə'pɒsl/ omit the /t/ segment entirely. The participants' uniform articulation of [t] in all items therefore indicates a strong orthographic influence on pronunciation, an instance where written forms directly shape phonetic output. This orthography-driven pronunciation pattern reveals that the students have not fully internalised the RP convention of t-deletion in post-sibilant <s>\_\_<le># contexts. In addition, their realisations reflect the entrenched patterns within their speech community.

## 7.2 Formal Rule Notations of the Realisations

In this section, the adopted pronunciation rules by the participants are represented following Generative Phonology formal rule notations in comparison with the Standard English rules.

### 7.2.1 Rule Notation for <t> in <s>\_\_<en># Context

1. Standard English Formal Rule: <t> ----->/Ø/ / <s>\_\_<en>#

2. Participants' Formal Rule: <t> -----> [t] / <s>\_\_<en># [as can be seen in Table 1]

The Standard English formal rule — <t> → Ø / <s>\_\_<en># — indicates that in Standard English varieties, the grapheme <t> is deleted (i.e., not phonetically realised) when it appears between <s> and <en> at the end of a word. This means that in words like *listen* and *fasten*, the <t> is silent, and the words are pronounced as [lɪsən] and [fɑ:sən] respectively, rather than [lɪstən] or [fɑ:stən]. The deletion of /t/ in this environment follows a phonotactic simplification rule, which prevents the occurrence of a complex consonant cluster /stn/ that is not permissible in English phonology. Hence, the silent <t> in such words is a regular feature of English morphophonemic structure.

In contrast, the participants' formal rule — <t> → [t] / <s>\_\_<en># — reveals that the NCE II Hausa-speaking participants retained and pronounced the <t> in all instances where it should be silent. Thus, words like *listen* and *fasten* were realised as [listen] and [fasten], as shown in Table 1 of the study. This rule indicates that the participants did not apply the deletion

process characteristic of Standard English; instead, they maintained the orthographically represented consonant in speech. This deviation from Standard English can be attributed to orthographic interference and L1 phonological influence. In Hausa phonology, there is no equivalent of silent graphemes; every written consonant is typically pronounced. Therefore, Hausa learners of English tend to adopt a grapheme-faithful pronunciation strategy, in which each grapheme corresponds directly to a spoken sound. Furthermore, since the [t] sound is common and permissible in Hausa syllable structures, there is no native phonological constraint that would motivate its deletion.

### 7.2.2 Rule Notation for <t> in <s>\_\_<le># Context

1. Standard English Formal Rule: <t> ----->/Ø/ / <s>\_\_<le>#

2. Participants' Formal Rule: <t> -----> [t] / <s>\_\_<le># [as can be seen in Table 2]

The Standard English formal rule — <t> → Ø / <s>\_\_<le># — shows that, in Standard English, the grapheme <t> is not pronounced when it appears between <s> and <le> at the end of a word. In other words, the <t> undergoes deletion (represented by Ø), resulting in pronunciations such as [kɑ:səl] for *castle*, [wɪsəl] for *whistle*, and [rɛsəl] for *wrestle*. This elision is a conventional morphophonemic feature of English orthography, where certain consonants, though retained in spelling for etymological reasons, are silent in speech. The omission of /t/ in this phonetic environment serves a phonotactic purpose, simplifying potentially difficult consonant clusters like /stl/, which are disallowed in English phonology.

Conversely, the participants' formal rule — <t> → [t] / <s>\_\_<le># — reveals that the Hausa-speaking participants in this study retained and articulated the <t> sound in contexts where Standard English prescribes silence. As indicated in Table 2, words such as *castle*, *whistle*, and *wrestle* were realised as [kastul], [wɪstul], and [restul] instead of [kɑ:səl], [wɪsəl], and [rɛsəl]. This means that the participants consistently produced the grapheme <t> as [t], ignoring the standard deletion rule. This finding reflects a strong grapheme-to-phoneme transfer, where participants' pronunciation patterns are heavily influenced by the orthographic form of English words. In Hausa phonology, there is no concept of silent consonants; all written letters correspond to audible sounds. Consequently, Hausa learners tend to pronounce every grapheme they see, as this aligns with the phonological norms of their first language. The consistent realisation of <t> in this context thus indicates orthographic interference and negative transfer from Hausa to English. Additionally, the retention of /t/ could be seen as a strategy of hypercorrection, reflecting an attempt by learners to demonstrate precision and completeness in articulation. However, in doing so, they inadvertently deviate from the native norms of English pronunciation.

## 8. Findings and Discussion

The analysis of the participants' phonetic realisations of the grapheme <t> in the environments <s>\_\_<en># and <s>\_\_<le># reveals a highly consistent pattern of orthographically induced pronunciation among Hausa-speaking users of English. Across all twenty lexical items examined, the participants uniformly articulated <t> as the voiceless alveolar plosive [t], a sound that should be silent in Standard or Received Pronunciation (RP) in the studied lexical contexts. This uniformity, evidenced by a 100% occurrence rate in both contexts, underscores the pervasive influence of English orthography on the participants' spoken English and reflects the phonological transparency characteristic of Hausa English.

In the <s>\_\_<en># environment (as in *listen*, *fasten*, *glisten*, *often*), Standard English exhibits a /t/-deletion rule, represented formally as <t> → Ø / <s>\_\_<en>#, which prevents the occurrence of the complex consonant cluster /stn/. However, the participants' realisations followed the reverse pattern — <t> → [t] / <s>\_\_<en># — indicating that they consistently

pronounced [t], as in [listen] or [fasten]. This deviation signifies that the students have not internalised the morphophonemic simplification rules of Standard English, where silent letters are integral to native-like pronunciation. Instead, they adopt a grapheme-faithful pronunciation strategy, in which every written consonant is phonetically realised. This behaviour aligns with the orthographic conventions of Hausa, where each grapheme corresponds to a distinct phoneme, and silent letters are virtually non-existent.

Similarly, in the <s>\_\_<le># environment (as in *castle*, *whistle*, *wrestle*), RP applies a comparable deletion rule — <t> → Ø / <s>\_\_<le># — to simplify clusters such as /stl/. The participants, however, applied the rule <t> → [t] / <s>\_\_<le>#, thereby producing [kastul], [wistul], and [restul] instead of the RP forms [kɑ:səl], [wɪsəl], and [rɛsəl]. This consistent realisation across all participants reaffirms the strong orthographic dependence guiding their speech production. It also demonstrates negative transfer from Hausa phonology, where all consonants are pronounced, regardless of their position in a word. The articulation of [t] in these contexts thus reflects the learners' reliance on visual rather than auditory cues, suggesting that their phonological representations are mediated by spelling rather than by the internalisation of native phonotactic constraints.

From a pedagogical perspective, these findings reveal that the Hausa-speaking students' pronunciation is strongly shaped by the orthography-phonology interface, an area often overlooked in English phonology instruction. Their consistent production of the silent <t> highlights a pedagogical gap in the teaching of English morphophonemic rules and orthographic irregularities. The results also illustrate the broader phenomenon of phonological transfer in second language acquisition, where learners project the structural norms of their first language onto the target language. In linguistic terms, the findings provide empirical evidence that Hausa English exhibits grapheme transparency and phonetic explicitness, two defining traits of emerging Nigerian English varieties. This suggests that Hausa users of English interpret the written form of English as a direct phonological script, producing speech that prioritises orthographic faithfulness over native phonotactic simplification. Such patterns reinforce the notion that the Hausa variety of Nigerian English is not merely a deviation from RP, but a systematic variety governed by its own internal phonological logic shaped by orthography, literacy habits, and L1 transfer mechanisms.

## 9. Conclusion

This study investigated how Hausa-speaking NCE II students of the College of Education, Gumel, realise contextually silent graphemes in English, focusing on the grapheme <t> within specific phonological environments. Using a descriptive qualitative design based on Generative Phonology, the research analysed participants' spoken renditions of selected English words to identify systematic pronunciation patterns influenced by orthography. The findings reveal a clear divergence from Standard English conventions, indicating that learners tend to pronounce graphemes according to their visual representation rather than established phonological rules. This suggests that orthographic awareness exerts a strong influence on the learners' phonological output, reflecting a close interaction between literacy practices and spoken language.

In all, the study concludes that the pronunciation of silent graphemes by Hausa learners of English is not arbitrary but reflects underlying graphophonemic tendencies shaped by first language influence and orthographic perception. These insights contribute to a deeper understanding of the phonology-orthography interface in Nigerian English and highlight the need for pedagogical approaches that explicitly address the phonological implications of English spelling conventions.

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**A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF INTERACTIONAL METADISOURSE IN THE INTRODUCTION AND CONCLUSION SECTIONS OF CHEMISTRY AND ENGLISH STUDIES RESEARCH ARTICLES**

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**Abstract**

*This research investigates interactional metadiscourse markers in the Introduction and Conclusion sections of Chemistry and English studies research articles in Nigerian academic discourse with the view to discover how these interpersonal items are deployed to situate research problems and motivations; foreground research findings and situate them within wider context before exiting studies. A combination of three non-probability sampling strategies of (quota, availability and purposive) were used to source the journal editions and research papers' introductions and conclusions. The research uses Hyland's (2005) interpersonal model for the manual analysis of the data after which it was converted to plain text and run into AntConc concordance software version 3.4.3 corpus analysis toolkit to ensure reliability in ascertaining the feature's frequency. Findings reveal considerable similarities and variations as scholars in these areas deployed almost similar number of booster materials across the two rhetorical sections. However, the variation was more obvious in the deployments of other interactional features such as hedges, attitude markers, engagement markers and self mentions with English studies scholars surpassing their counterparts in Chemistry in both introduction and conclusion sections. Generally, the results imply English studies scholars' preference to crafting convincing research article introductions and reporting research findings firmly and cautiously before finally exiting their studies.*

**Keywords:** Interactional Metadiscourse, Research Articles, Academic Discourse, Disciplinary Variation, Metadiscourse Markers

**1. Introduction**

This paper analyses interactional metadiscourse markers in the Introduction and Conclusion sections of Chemistry and English studies research articles in Nigerian academic discourse. The importance of introduction and conclusion sections in academic texts has been receiving significant and increasing attention. The popularity of their investigations across disciplines and cultures reveals their significant status as the established genres in negotiating knowledge. In research articles, Introductions mostly state research problem, provide previous studies and explain the reason behind investigating the current problem (Swales, 2004). However, conclusion sections summarise all the article components, state the results and implications before exiting the entire study (Estaji & Vafaeimehr, 2015). In its part, the concept of interactional metadiscourse which refers to the non-topical discourse materials such as: *I suggest, however* and *as you may recall* that express writer's personal thoughts, act

as signposts for textual organisation and direct readers through the textual development thereby taking the central part to understanding discourse as a whole has been given wider attention over the past few decades (Lautamatti, 1978; Vonde Kopple, 1985; Cremore et al, 1993; Hyland, 2005; Adel, 2006;) and review of its use shows a plethora of studies on different cultures and genres in both professional and academic discourses such as Hyland (1998), Bunton (1999), Le (2003), Martin (2003), Dahl (2003,2004), Hyland and Tse (2004), Swales and Van Bonn (2007) to mention a few. These studies mainly focused on the variation in metadiscourse use between English and other languages such as Arabic, Spanish and French and professional and academic genres such as newspaper editorials, business letters and emails, undergraduate composition, master and doctoral theses abstracts and research articles.

On the use of metadiscourse in academic discourse, research article genre has taken the lead in investigating the disciplinary effects on metadiscourse markers as evidenced in studies such as Abdi (2002), Alfros and Schryer (2009), Abdi et al (2010), del saz-Rubio (2011), Kedri et al (2013), Estaji and Vafaimehr (2015). The focus in these studies was mainly on some metadiscourse markers in the entire research articles mostly from Western and Asian journals or metadiscourse features in some of the rhetorical sections in research articles such as abstracts, discussions or introductions. However, such effort was not well extended to research articles particularly in Nigeria. Although research are being reported, new knowledge being discovered and disseminated, there seems to be wider assumption here that research article is a single and uniform entity with a 'common core' across disciplines (Bhatia, 2002) and that propositional or ideational meaning is what disciplinary community members mainly need to interact with their potential readers freely and present their knowledge convincingly (Hyland, 2005).

In Western and Asian countries where the rate of research on different aspects seems very high and drives virtually any public policy enactment, the mode of presenting propositional meaning in communicating new knowledge has taken a rhetorical dimension through the choice of appropriate linguistic markers (Idris, 2023). Such interpersonal markers take the potential reader/listener throughout the text and respect their opposing views. As such, these linguistic elements known as Metadiscourse have become important features in academic discourse particularly research articles (Hyland, 2005).

However, such is not the case in most African countries especially Nigeria where one may hardly think of any link between researches or their rates with national policy enactment. Although English is spoken as second language in Nigeria and most official transaction is conducted in English, its learning, proficiency and even usage seem stagnated at the levels of grammar and content knowledge even among the educated ones that write the seemingly scanty research articles amidst uncertainty of acceptance and usage by the appropriate authority. This over reliance on the content knowledge or propositional meaning may risk over rejection of such articles by other disciplinary community members and the international journals to curtail the assumption that persuasion in academic discourse is achieved mainly through propositional content ignoring largely the appropriate construction of authorial self and establishing accepted participants' relationship which the metadiscourse markers are out to achieve (Hyland, 1998). Thus, this research seeks to fill the gap in the literature on the use of interactional metadiscourse features in research articles from the chosen natural and social sciences classified as 'hard and soft' disciplines in Nigerian context.

According to Beinstein (1992), hard disciplines are value-free, empirically grounded, constitutive of theories which are verified through consensual criteria, while soft areas are

value-laden, contextually grounded, reiterative, and rely much on argumentation for verification. These areas are parallel, according to Beinstein (1992), thus, may vary in their interactional metadiscourse deployment. The essence of conducting this research along this dimension is to ratify Hyland's (2005:30) view that "metadiscourse has now become an important feature of any successful academic writing that strives for credence and acceptability". As such, this paper investigates how these interactional markers are used to withhold claims, foreground discoveries and engage readers interactively in research introductions to properly situate motivations, and the conclusion sections where findings are discussed and summaries mentioned before exiting the entire study.

## 2. Theoretical Underpinning

Metadiscourse concept embodies the notion that communication should go beyond propositional content for effective message delivery. It is an essentially heterogeneous category that can be realised through a range of linguistic devices from punctuation and typographic marks to whole clauses and sentences such as *see the table below*, *this research examines* and *according to Idris (2023)*. Adel (2006) categorised metadiscourse features into broad and narrow based on approach to their conceptualisation. The broad approach explains metadiscourse as comprising resources for textual functions and that of interpersonal functions, while the narrow approach delimits the features to textual functions. This paper adopts the broad approach as instantiated by Hyland (2005). The model is considered interpersonal as it takes into account the potential reader's knowledge, textual experiences and processing needs (Hyland & Tse, 2004). The model draws distinction between interactive and interactional metadiscourse corresponding respectively to textual and interpersonal categorisations in Kopple (1985) and Cresmore et al (1993). Interactive features according to Hyland (2005) organise a text cohesively in anticipation of readers' needs and facilitate their comprehension by guiding them throughout the text. Interactional markers signal a writer's epistemic stance on propositional content and his attitudes towards readers (Hyland, 2005). Interactional features which are the focus of this research explicate the writer's efforts to control the level of personality in a text and establish a suitable relationship with their data, arguments and audience (Hyland, 2004). They entail the following items:

**Boosters:** these lexical elements which express certainty and highlight the force of propositions (Hyland, 2004).

**Hedges:** these are devices through which the writer withholds full commitment to a proposition; the elements are employed as index to recognise alternative voices, viewpoints and possibilities (Hyland, 2005).

**Attitude markers:** these are elements that represent the writer's attitude and judgment of the propositional content (Hyland, 2005).

**Engagement markers:** these refer to lexical items which address the potential readers explicitly either to focus their attention or include them as participants through second person pronouns, imperatives, question forms and asides (Hyland, 2005).

**Self mentions:** these items indicate the degree of explicit author presence and attendance in the text represented through the first person pronouns and possessive adjectives (Hyland, 2004; 2005).

## 3. Review of Related Studies

Different studies have examined the types and functions of metadiscourse features in different professional and academic genres. For instance, a research by Abdi (2002) explored the use of interpersonal (interactional) metadiscourse markers in two broad areas of Natural Sciences and Social Sciences henceforth, (NS) and (SS) respectively to identify the authors'

identity and choices. The study concentrated on three interactional features: attitude markers, emphatics (boosters) and hedges. The study found that SS writers employed more of these markers than their colleagues in the NS. Although there was a wide gap in the use attitude markers and hedges, the two disciplines showed little differences in their use of emphatics (boosters).

In a similar research, Falahati (2006) examined the use of hedging elements in the research articles' introduction and conclusion sections. Results discovered that hedging distribution is not similar in these sections because the discussion section contains more hedging elements when compared with the introduction. Reasons for this as Falahati observed, is strongly connected to the relative functions of the individual parts of the research article and their particular aim.

Alfros and Shryer (2009) conducted a study to examine any difference on the use of Hyland's (2005) interactional features in achieving disciplinary-specific arguments, appealing to readers for writer's credibility and community values and practices between English Language and literature research articles. In essence, the researchers investigated how the Aristotelian notions of logos, ethos and pathos are reflected on the features like self-mention, boosters, hedges and engagement markers. The findings of this study uncovered that two rhetorical strategies seem common to researchers in these areas. Firstly, these scholars prefer positive presentation and evaluation of their works and other studies upon which their works were grounded. The second strategy reported is the negative presentation and evaluation of opposing perspectives by these writers. Alfros and Shryer (2009) concluded that with the combination of these strategies, writers seemed to widen the gaps between their contributions and the alternative views.

Abdullahzadeh (2011) focused on the use of interpersonal features (hedges, emphatics and attitude markers) in the conclusion section of Applied Linguistic research articles written by Iranian applied linguists and their Anglo-American peers. The objective was to determine the features's frequency distribution and ascertain how they guide readers to follow steadily discourse flow that leads to effective textual comprehension. Abdullahzadeh (2011) employed Vande-kopple's (1985) framework and parsed manually, a corpus of 60 article conclusions - 30 from each linguistic group. Findings reported revealed both similarities and variations in the persuasive efforts of these scholars. For instance, hedges were the most frequently deployed markers in both linguistic groups with almost similar frequency. As for the emphatics and attitude markers, there exists a sort of variation with Anglo-American applied linguists showing more concern in their choices than their Persian peers. Abdullahzadeh (2011) concluded that the dominant use of hedges signifies the scholars interactive approach to readers and humility to get their papers accepted. Also, frequent use of emphatics and attitude markers by English applied linguists portrays scholars' interests to share and emphasise their findings than their Iranian peers who seem to report to these devices for emphasis on knowledge that support their results.

Estaji and Vafaeimehr (2015) investigated interactional metadiscourse used in the introduction and conclusion sections of Mechanical and Electrical Engineering research articles. The study was conducted with an idea of noting the most preferred elements between hedges, boosters and attitude markers and to this end, 42 articles (21 from each) were drawn from two international journals. Generally, results showed no significant variation regarding features' frequency which as Estaji and Vafaeimehr (2015) noted, may relate to closeness in the disciplines knowledge. However, boosters were the most used features followed by

hedges then attitude markers. Interestingly, Mechanical Engineering deployed these markers more in their introductions suggesting their emphasis and certainty on their research motivations, while Electrical Engineering gave more preference to the items in their conclusions implying their concern to stand firm with their discoveries.

In another study, Salahshoor and Afsari (2018) examined the use of interactional metadiscourse in the discussion and conclusion sections of natural and social science master theses. The researchers' aim was to find out any variation in the application of these markers across the chosen disciplines. For this purpose, thirty master theses were randomly selected from six disciplines across five university libraries within the time frame of 2010-2016. Salahshoor and Afsari (2018) investigated only discussion and conclusion sections of the selected theses using Hyland's (2005) interactional lane. Agreeing with Abdi (2002), results of Salahshoor and Afsari's (2018) reveal that the proportion of interactional features in the social science master theses discussion and conclusion sections was more than their counterpart theses' discussion and conclusion. On the individual markers, hedges, engagement markers and boosters were found to be more prevalent in descending pattern across the sampled data. Salahshoor and Afsari's (2018) study differs with the current research on the data sample, number of the disciplines and the interactional lane. Thus, this paper concentrates on the interactional metadiscourse in research articles from two disciplines categorised as natural and social sciences.

#### **4. Methodology**

This research examined the type, frequency differences and the communicative implications of the interactional metadiscourse features used in the introduction and conclusion sections of Chemistry and English Studies research articles. The paper analysed six (6) research articles from the journals of each discipline using quota and purposive samplings making the total of twelve (12) research articles. These articles were selected from the following Chemistry journals: Bayero Journal of Pure and Applied Sciences, Vol.8, No.1- 2015, Nigerian Journal of Pure and Applied Sciences, Vol.8, 2016 and CHEMSEARCH Journal, Vol.7, No.2 – 2016 and also the following journals for English studies articles: Journal of Arts, Anambra State University, Vol.1, No.1 -2013, Ganga Journal of Language and Literary Studies, Vol.5, No.3 – 2015 and Journal of the Nigeria English Studies Association, Vol.14, No.2 – 2014. Based on this, two (2) research articles' introductions and conclusions were selected from each of the mentioned journals to represent their disciplines. Thereafter, a manual corpus analysis was carried out in order to examine interactional metadiscourse distribution in the introductions and conclusions of the selected articles. This is to provide a qualitative and quantitative picture of their usage as listed by Hyland (2005). Thus, metadiscourse frequency of occurrence in all the selected texts was manually investigated and their communicative values inferred based on their frequency of usage. However, the selected articles were converted into plain texts and run into AntConc software version 3.4.3 corpus analysis toolkit created in 2019 by Lawrence Anthony for two reasons: to ascertain the word count and determine the mean for each article; to ensure that each manually tagged element was coded appropriately. To this end, Table 1 below shows the descriptive statistics for the corpus by the two disciplines investigated in the study.

**Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of the Corpus**

	<b>Research Articles</b>	<b>Number of Words</b>	<b>Mean of Words</b>
<b>Chemstry</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>23 984</b>	<b>1998.7</b>
<b>English Studies</b>	12	21, 698	1808.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>24</b>	45, 682	<b>3806.7</b>

Therefore, this research seeks to answer the following questions:

1. How do the use of interactional metadiscourse markers in Chemistry and English studies research article introductions differ?
2. How do the use of interactional metadiscourse features in Chemistry and English studies research articles conclusions differ?
3. To what extent is the use of interactional metadiscourse different or similar in the introduction and conclusion sections of Chemistry and English studies research articles?

These questions were formed to properly guide the data collection process, data analysis procedure and the subsequent discussion of findings.

## 5 Results and Discussions

In order to answer the first research question as to how different is the use of interactional metadiscourse (hedges, boosters, attitude markers, engagement markers and self mentions) in the introduction sections of Chemistry and English studies research articles, the researcher did a frequency count of the coded elements to determine their distribution. The table below reveals the types, frequencies and percentage distribution of the used metadiscourse.

**Table 2: Frequency of Metadiscourse in English Studies and Chemistry Research Articles' Introductions**

<b>Types of Interactional Metadiscourse</b>	<b>Chemistry Frequency of Metadiscourse</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>English Frequency of Metadiscourse</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Boosters</b>	90	60.8%	91	46.3%
<b>Hedges</b>	35	23.6%	61	30.9%
<b>Attitude Markers</b>	13	8.8%	17	8.6%
<b>Engagements Markers</b>	9	6%	25	12.7%
<b>Self-Mentions</b>	1	0.7%	3	1.5%
<b>Total</b>	148	42.9%	197	57.1%

As can be seen, Table 2 above determined the frequency of interactional metadiscourse features in the introduction section of these articles. It is interesting to note that the deployment of these markers was more frequent generally in the English studies research articles' introductions with boosters (43.3%) having the dominant use in particular. This pattern was also observed in Chemistry articles' introductions with boosters (60.8%) having

the most frequent deployment. This strongly implies that researchers in these areas tend to emphasize on their discoveries with certainty and aimed to convince their readers about their accomplishments. Also, the use of hedges with 61 instances in English studies' introductions was more frequent when compared with 35 samples discovered in the Chemistry introductions. According to Hyland (2005), the use of boosters together with hedges, strengthens arguments and gives a sort of solidarity to the audience by chosen from different views a single and confident perspective. The deployment pattern of these interactional markers continued in that dimension with English studies introductions having frequent use of engagement markers and attitude markers with 25 and 17 instances respectively as against 9 and 13 samples in the Chemistry research articles' introductions. Based on the information on the table above, self mentions were the least frequent items in the two areas with 3 (1.5%) and 1 (0.7) for English studies and Chemistry introductions respectively. These results are compatible to the findings discovered in Hyland (1998), Abdi (2002), Loi and Lim (2013), and Kedri (2014) that reported more engagements and attitude markers in humanities. Generally, the deployment pattern of these items suggests the writers' desire to recounting their facts with strong tone than intimating their potential readership and navigating their perceptions to the most preferred views indirectly by using excessive engagements and attitude markers.

The table below attempts to answer the second research question that tend to focus on how these interactional metadiscourse markers are employed in the conclusion section of Chemistry and English studies research articles.

**TABLE 3: Frequency of Metadiscourse in English Studies and Chemistry Research Articles' Conclusions**

Types of Interactional Metadiscourse	Chemistry Frequency of Metadiscourse	Percentage	English Frequency of Metadiscourse	Percentage
<b>Boosters</b>	27	62.8%	21	50%
<b>Hedges</b>	13	30.2%	9	21.4%
<b>Attitude Markers</b>	3	7%	4	9.5%
<b>Engagements Markers</b>	0	6%	7	16.7%
<b>Self Mentions</b>	0	0%	1	2.4%
<b>Total</b>	43	50.6%	42	49.4%

Surprisingly, the results in the Table 3 above contradicted the discoveries made in the introduction section of these articles as shown in Table 2. Here, the deployment of these interactional items was more frequent in the Chemistry articles' conclusions. As revealed above, boosters with 27 instances (62.8%) were equally the most repeated markers in the Chemistry articles' conclusions indicating twelve point eight percent (12.8%) increase compared to the English studies research articles' conclusions. This reflects the writers' interest to deploying a more emphatic tone to assert their claims and report their results before finally exiting their studies. Also, hedges were the second most frequent interactional markers noted in the Chemistry articles' conclusions with nine percent more use when compared to English studies' conclusions. This further suggests the authors' interest to stating their facts with certainty and caution thereby strengthening their findings and similarly opening other doors for further research and discoveries as Hyland (2005) suggested. However, English studies articles' conclusions used two point five percent more attitude

markers than Chemistry conclusions. Interestingly, Chemistry articles did not record a single engagement markers and self mentions throughout their sampled conclusions which suggest a strong deviation from the discoveries made in their introduction sections. These results tallied with the findings discovered in Idris (2023), Loi and Lim (2013) and Kedri (2014) which implied that Chemistry and generally, natural science writers might have strong partialities in downplaying potential readership as discourse participants and standing strongly by their results through sufficient boosters.

The table below focuses on the third question which seeks to know the extent of the similarities and differences in the use of interactional metadiscourse features within the sampled introduction and conclusion sections of Chemistry and English studies research articles.

**TABLE 4:**  
**Frequency of Interactional Metadiscourse in the Introductions and Conclusions of English Studies and Chemistry Research Articles**

Interactional Metadiscourse	Chemistry Research Articles				English Studies Research Articles			
	Introductions		Conclusions		Introductions		Conclusions	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Boosters</b>	90	60.8%	27	62.8%	91	46.3%	21	50%
<b>Hedges</b>	35	23.6%	13	30.2%	61	30.9%	9	21.4%
<b>Attitude Markers</b>	13	8.8%	3	7%	17	8.6%	4	9.5%
<b>Engagements Markers</b>	9	6%	0	0%	25	12.7%	7	16.7%
<b>Self-Mentions</b>	1	0.7%	0	0%	3	1.5%	1	2.4%
<b>Total</b>	148	34.4%	43	10%	197	45.8%	42	9.8%

The data in Table 4 above can account for the extent to which the deployments of these interactional items are similar or different in the introduction and conclusion sections of Chemistry and English studies research articles. As can be observed, there is a significant similarity and minor difference regarding the use of these interactional markers in the sampled research articles. Generally, results revealed that all the sampled introductions and conclusions used these interactional markers except Chemistry conclusions that have no instances of engagement markers and self mentions. Also, it was found that sampled research articles sections maintained the same hierarchical patterns for boosters, hedges, attitude markers and engagements deployment except for engagement markers that appeared more than the discovered attitude markers in the introduction and conclusion sections of English studies research articles. This suggests a great deal of similarity in the deployment of these interactional markers. However, there is a significant difference in the overall deployment of all the items generally across the disciplines and the use of engagement markers and self mentions in particular across the disciplines and the rhetorical sections as the obtained results have shown.

These results support Estaji and Vafaeimehr (2015) who investigated the similarities and differences in the use of emphatics, hedges and attitude markers in the introduction and conclusion sections of Mechanical and Electrical Engineering research articles. Their discoveries showed no statistically significant differences regarding the frequency of the individual items across the selected rhetorical areas and disciplines. However, the overall discovered results concur with the findings of Abdi (2002) which examined the use of emphatics, hedges and attitude markers in the introduction and conclusion sections of natural science and social science research articles where his obtained results showed a statistically significant difference between the two areas especially regarding frequency.

## **6. Findings and Conclusions**

This research was carried out primarily to examine the deployment of interactional metadiscourse markers in the Introduction and Conclusion sections of Chemistry and English studies research articles in Nigerian context in order to infer on their communicative values. Research in this area has proved that research articles' introductions lead motivations for studies unveiling whether they were formed on previous studies, investigating overlooked items or improving certain studies that deliver vague findings. However, conclusion/discussion is being taken as one of the important components of both theoretical and empirical research papers because it foregrounds study results, situates research findings within wider disciplinary literature by way of comparison to previous studies and provides a gateway of exiting studies through recommending areas of further research. These functions require effective tenor with the potential readership and can be achieved through standing firmly behind arguments and claims, adequate politeness, appropriate writer attitudes, engaging readers and taking them as participants and lastly standing overtly or covertly behind their arguments. These items, as Hyland (2005) recognised, are important features of every academic discourse. To this extend, results of the analysis discovered striking similarities and variations across the disciplines and rhetorical sections in terms of types and frequency of deployments. Analysis revealed that almost all the interactional metadiscourse markers were found in these sections except engagement markers and self mentions in the Chemistry research article conclusion. However, further analysis showed varying deployment as boosters then hedges were discovered to be the most frequent items in both Chemistry and English studies research articles' introductions and conclusions. Engagement markers were found to be the most interactional features when compared with the attitude markers across all the sections then lastly, self mention items. Generally, Chemistry writers deployed more boosters which suggested their desire to firmly stand on their research motivations and findings while English studies generally used more hedges which inclined their concern on taking the potential readership along in stating their research motivations while cautiously reporting their findings. In another dimension, English studies scholars used more interactional markers in their introductions and hence, it can be concluded that they were more concerned to processing and addressing their readership potential needs and objections through providing from the onset persuasive introductions which guide readers to the subsequent sections. However, Chemistry scholars deployed more of these items in their conclusions which showed their resolve to presenting findings with full commitments and standing by them confidently.

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**LEXICAL-SEMANTIC ANALYSIS OF NIGERIAN ENGLISH IN SELECTED NIGERIAN HIGHLIFE MUSIC.**

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**Abstract**

*This study examines the lexical-semantic features of Nigerian English in selected highlife musical lyrics, demonstrating how highlife music functions as a linguistic medium for conveying Nigerian sociocultural experiences. The research identifies distinctive lexical items and semantic patterns used by highlife musicians, analyzes their meanings within cultural contexts, and determines how these features diverge from or expand upon Standard English norms. The objectives are to classify lexical choices in the lyrics, interpret their semantic implications, and evaluate how these linguistic forms contribute to the stylistic richness and communicative purpose of highlife music. A qualitative research design employing textual analysis is used as the primary methodological approach. Four highlife songs are purposively selected based on thematic relevance, linguistic density, and cultural representativeness. The lyrics are transcribed and systematically examined to identify features such as neologisms, loanwords, idiomatic expressions, semantic shifts, metaphors, and context-dependent meanings. This method enables a detailed interpretation of how Nigerian English is creatively deployed to reflect social realities and cultural identity. Systemic Functional Linguistics serves as the theoretical framework, providing a functional explanation for how linguistic choices are shaped by social context and communicative purpose. By integrating SFL with lexical-semantic analysis, the study reveals that highlife musicians use Nigerian English not merely as a linguistic code but as a dynamic resource for identity expression, cultural affirmation, and social commentary.*

**Introduction**

Language is a central medium through which people construct identity, negotiate meaning, and express cultural experiences. In multilingual societies such as Nigeria, English has undergone substantial indigenization, resulting in a localized variety known as Nigerian English (Bamgbose, 1995; Adegbija, 2004). This variety reflects the social norms, cultural realities, and communicative patterns of Nigerians. One productive domain where these linguistic features are vividly expressed is in highlife music, a genre noted for its narrative depth, cultural grounding, and social commentary (Echeruo, 2011). Highlife musicians often draw on Nigerian English to articulate everyday experiences, employing lexical items, idioms, and metaphors that index Nigerian identity and worldview. Despite the cultural importance of highlife music, scholarly research on Nigerian English has traditionally concentrated on formal domains such as academic writing, newspaper discourse, broadcasting, education, and political communication (Jowitt, 2007; Gut & Fuchs, 2013). Very few studies have examined Nigerian English usage in creative texts, particularly musical lyrics, even though music serves as a significant linguistic and cultural archive. The neglect of musical discourse omits an important dimension of how Nigerians use language to express emotions, negotiate social relationships, and comment on societal issues.

**Statement of the Problem**

While previous research has described phonological, lexical, and syntactic features of Nigerian English (Bamgbose, 1995; Jowitt, 2007), little attention has been given to how Nigerian English operates within highlife musical texts, especially at the level of meaning. Existing research rarely does not investigate the functional motivations behind lexical choices, nor does it explore how musicians use language to construct interpersonal meanings, encode cultural realities, and structure messages. Moreover, few studies have integrated a Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) perspective in analyzing Nigerian English in music, leaving a gap in understanding how linguistic choices serve ideational, interpersonal, and textual functions (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014).

Despite extensive research on Nigerian English in formal contexts such as education, media, and political discourse (Bamgbose, 1995; Jowitt, 2007), its use in popular music genres, particularly highlife, remains significantly underexplored. From a sociolinguistic perspective, little is known about how Nigerian English functions as a marker of identity, social values, or cultural affiliation within musical discourse, or how musicians manipulate the language to reflect local norms and engage audiences. Similarly, from a functional linguistic perspective, especially within the framework of Systemic Functional Linguistics (Halliday, 1978; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014), research has scarcely addressed how lexical and semantic choices in lyrics serve ideational, interpersonal, and textual purposes representing lived experiences, expressing emotions, or structuring messages for effect. Furthermore, from a pragmatic and semantic standpoint, the creative use of idioms, metaphors, and context-specific expressions in Nigerian English has received minimal attention, despite its role in conveying humor, social critique, and moral lessons. Consequently, there is a critical gap in understanding the cultural, social, and communicative significance of Nigerian English in popular music, leaving unexplored how linguistic choices contribute to meaning-making, identity construction, and audience engagement in highlife lyrics. This study, therefore, seeks to address these gaps by conducting a comprehensive lexico-semantic analysis of selected highlife songs, employing Systemic Functional Linguistics to examine how Nigerian English is used to construct meaning, engage listeners, and reflect cultural realities.

**Literature Review and Theoretical Framework**

Lexico-semantics focuses on the study of the meaning of words and lexical items and the relationships between them (Cruse, 2004; Lyons, 1995). It investigates phenomena such as polysemy, semantic shifts, idioms, collocations, and culture-specific meanings, which are central to understanding language in context. Studies in lexico-semantics have been applied to diverse English varieties to examine how local innovations in vocabulary and meaning emerge (Crystal, 2003). However, research applying lexico-semantic analysis to Nigerian English in creative domains, such as music, remains limited. Most studies focus on formal or written English, leaving music lyrics as an underexplored site for understanding lexical creativity and semantic innovation (Adegbija, 2004; Jowitt, 2007).

Nigerian English (NE) is a localized variety of English that has evolved to reflect the cultural, social, and communicative realities of Nigeria (Bamgbose, 1995; Jowitt, 2007). Scholars have documented its phonological, syntactic, lexical, and semantic features, noting its distinctive vocabulary, idiomatic expressions, and semantic extensions (Adegbija, 2004; Elugbe, 1999). For example, terms like *wahala* (“trouble”), *shakara* (“show off”), or *Mama* (“mother”) illustrate the cultural encoding of meaning. While studies have examined Nigerian English in formal texts, advertisements, political discourse, and education, very few have focused on popular music as a linguistic site (Jowitt, 2007; Echeruo, 2011).

Highlife music originated in Ghana and became popular in Nigeria in the mid-20th century, blending African rhythms with Western instruments (Collins, 1989). Nigerian highlife songs often narrate social issues, moral lessons, personal experiences, and communal values (Echeruo, 2011). The lyrics are rich in culture-specific expressions, proverbs, and idiomatic usages, making them ideal for lexico-semantic analysis. Despite this richness, most studies of Nigerian highlife focus on musicology, history, or performance, rather than the linguistic and semantic features of the lyrics (Collins, 1989; Echeruo, 2011).

Language is a crucial tool for expressing identity, culture, and social meaning. In multilingual societies like Nigeria, English has developed into a localized form known as Nigerian English. Scholars such as Bamgbose (1995) and Adegbija (2004) have thoroughly documented its phonological, lexical, syntactic, and semantic features, showing how it differs from Standard British English. Although their studies are essential, I notice that much of this research focuses on formal settings like education, media, and political discussions, leaving creative and performative areas such as popular music largely unexplored. This opens up a clear opportunity to expand the study of Nigerian English into contexts where it serves not just as a communication tool but also as a cultural and expressive medium.

Highlife music, which flourished in Nigeria in the mid-twentieth century, is particularly rich in culturally grounded linguistic expressions. Collins (1989) and Echeruo (2011) describe highlife as a genre that blends African rhythms with Western instrumentation, narrating social realities, moral lessons, and personal experiences. While I acknowledge the contribution of these studies in mapping the history and social impact of highlife, I contend that they neglect the linguistic dimension, particularly how Nigerian English is deployed within lyrics to encode meaning, construct social relationships, or organize discourse. From my perspective, ignoring this dimension leaves an incomplete understanding of how language and culture interact in music.

The field of lexico-semantics offers tools for examining these interactions (Cruse, 2004; Lyons, 1995), focusing on meaning, semantic shifts, idioms, and context-dependent expressions. However, few studies have applied lexico-semantic analysis to Nigerian English in music, and those that do often fail to account for how lexical choices function socially, culturally, and performatively. Similarly, functional linguistic perspectives, particularly Systemic Functional Linguistics (Halliday, 1978; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014), remains underutilized in this domain. From my analysis, this is a missed opportunity: SFL's metafunctions ideational, interpersonal, and textual provide a robust framework for understanding not only what words mean but why they are used in specific ways to achieve social and cultural goals.

Additionally, pragmatic and metaphorical uses of Nigerian English in highlife lyrics have received minimal scholarly attention. Expressions embedded in songs often convey humor, social critique, or moral guidance in ways that are deeply context-dependent. This is a critical gap that this work seeks to address, as understanding these nuances is essential to appreciating both the linguistic creativity and cultural richness of highlife music.

While previous studies have laid the groundwork for understanding Nigerian English and highlife music separately, they leave significant gaps in exploring how Nigerian English operates within highlife lyrics at the lexical, semantic, and functional levels. Addressing these gaps through a lexico-semantic analysis informed by SFL will provide new insights into the intersection of language, music, and culture, demonstrating how Nigerian English is both expressive and socially meaningful. This study therefore positions itself as a necessary

contribution to both linguistics and music discourse analysis. In addressing this gap, the study aims to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the distinctive lexical and semantic features of Nigerian English in selected highlife songs?
2. How do these lexical-semantic features function to convey cultural meanings, social commentary, and interpersonal relations in the lyrics?
3. In what ways do the lyrics employ pragmatic, idiomatic, and metaphorical expressions to achieve stylistic and communicative purposes?

By addressing these questions, the study not only contributes to the linguistic analysis of Nigerian English but also expands understanding of popular music as a site of cultural expression, linguistic innovation, and social meaning.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study is anchored in Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), as developed by Halliday (1978) and further elaborated with Matthiessen (2014). SFL views language as a social semiotic system, where meaning is realized through choices within a system of options, and every linguistic choice reflects social purpose and cultural context. Unlike traditional linguistic approaches that analyze language in isolation, SFL emphasizes the functional roles of language, showing how words and structures are used to achieve social, cultural, and communicative objectives.

In the context of this study, SFL provides a conceptual and analytical framework for examining how Nigerian English is deployed in highlife music lyrics. It allows the researcher to move beyond identifying lexical items and their semantic meanings to understanding how these words and expressions function in communication, encode cultural values, and shape listener interpretation. By integrating SFL with lexico-semantic analysis, the study investigates both what the words mean and how they operate socially and culturally in highlife lyrics.

SFL is built around three meta-functions of language ideational, interpersonal, and textual which serve as analytical lenses for this study. Each meta-function aligns with a dimension of the data analysis: Ideational meta-function, focusing on how language represents experience, actions, events, and social reality. Interpersonal meta-function focusing on how language mediates social relationships, expresses attitudes, and engages listeners. Textual meta-function focusing on how language organizes meaning into coherent and structured messages.

In summary Systemic Functional Linguistics provides both a lens and a tool for analyzing Nigerian English in highlife music. Its meta-functions map neatly onto the study's dimensions of data analysis ideational (semantic content), interpersonal (social interaction), and textual (structural organization) allowing for a comprehensive understanding of meaning, function, and cultural significance.

### **Methodology**

This study adopts a qualitative research design employing a descriptive and analytical approach to investigate Nigerian English in selected highlife and popular music lyrics. The research integrates lexico-semantic analysis with Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), which allows for a multidimensional examination of the lyrics across ideational, interpersonal, and textual meta-functions (Halliday, 1978; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). Qualitative methodology is appropriate because the study seeks to interpret meanings, social functions, and cultural expressions in the songs rather than quantify linguistic features.

The corpus comprises four purposively selected songs known for their popularity, cultural significance, and richness in Nigerian English expressions: “Joromi” by Victor Uwaifo, “Sweet Mother” by Prince Nico Mbarga, “Go below” by Lagbaja, and “Oruka” by Sunny Neji. Lyrics were transcribed from official recordings, and Nigerian English features were identified based on cultural specificity, local usage, and divergence from Standard English (Jowitt, 2007; Adegbija, 2004). Each lyric was annotated to highlight lexical, semantic, pragmatic, and functional features, facilitating systematic analysis.

Data analysis was guided by the three SFL meta-functions, integrated with lexico-semantic principles. The ideational meta-function examined how Nigerian English encodes cultural experiences, social realities, and moral themes through lexical items, semantic fields, and metaphors. The interpersonal meta-function explored how artists engage listeners, express attitudes, and construct social relationships through pronouns, evaluative words, and pragmatic expressions. The textual meta-function investigated how lyrics are organized for cohesion, emphasis, and stylistic effect, including repetition, thematic sequencing, and the placement of idiomatic expressions. This approach allows the study to interpret both what words mean and how they function socially and culturally, while also adhering to ethical standards, such as proper attribution of lyrics and APA-compliant referencing.

### Data Presentation and Analysis

The lyrics of the four selected songs were analyzed using lexico-semantic and SFL approaches, focusing on lexical items, idiomatic expressions, and their cultural meanings. The findings are presented descriptively, with examples from the lyrics to illustrate how Nigerian English conveys ideational, interpersonal, and textual functions.

### Analysis of Sweet Mother by Prince Nico Mbarga

*“Sweet mother, I no go forget you / For the suffer wey you suffer for me.”*

*“When I dey cry, my mother go carry me.”*

*“You fit get another wife, but you fit get another mother? No!”*

#### Table of Lexico-Semantic Features

Excerpt	Feature	Meaning	Cultural Significance
“I no go forget you”	Negation + future promise		Expresses enduring gratitude; Nigerian English identity
“for the suffer wey you suffer for me”	Culture-specific conjunction + noun		Highlights maternal sacrifice and hardship
“When I dey cry”	Progressive auxiliary “dey”		Reflects colloquial Nigerian English, immediacy, and intimacy
“my mother go carry me”	Future auxiliary “go” + lexical verb		Maternal care and protection
“You fit get another mother? No!”	Modal “fit”; rhetorical question		Emphasizes uniqueness of mother; social/cultural value

Repetition of “Sweet mother” Repetition Reinforces theme, emotion, and cohesion

### Discussion

The lyrics showcase Nigerian English features such as “no go,” “dey,” and “wey,” grounding the song in local identity. Lexical choices like “suffer,” “carry,” and rhetorical structures convey cultural values of motherhood, filial gratitude, and social respect. Repetition of “Sweet mother” functions textually to organize the song and emphasize its emotional core.

Interpersonally, the lyrics engage listeners, inviting empathy and reflection. Ideationally, they represent lived experiences and maternal sacrifice, demonstrating how Nigerian English in music is both expressive and culturally meaningful.

### Analysis of Sweet Mother by Prince Nico Mbarga

*“Sweet mother, I no go forget you.”*

*For the suffer wey you suffer for me yeye*

*“When I dey cry, my mother go carry me.”*

*“You fit get another mother? No!”*

#### Lexico-Semantic Features

Excerpt	Feature	Significance
“I no go forget you”	Nigerian English negation/future	Expresses lasting gratitude
“When I dey cry”	Progressive “dey”	Colloquial intimacy
“my mother go carry me”	Future auxiliary “go”	Maternal care
“You fit get another mother? No!”	Modal “fit”; rhetorical	Emphasizes uniqueness of mother
“Sweet mother”	Repetition	Emotional emphasis and cohesion

### Discussion

The lyrics use Nigerian English features to convey maternal love, gratitude, and care. Repetition and rhetorical structures strengthen emotional impact and engage listeners, while lexical choices reflect cultural values and lived experiences, showing how Nigerian English functions expressively and culturally in music.

### Analysis of Osondi Owendi by Chief Stephen Osita Osadebe

*“Osondi owendi, the one good is the one bad”*

*“Some dey suffer for no reason, some dey chop life easy”*

*“Na him own e be, na him own e be”*

#### Lexico-Semantic Features

Excerpt	Feature	Significance
“Osondi owendi”	Idiomatic expression / code-mixing	Literally “one good, one bad”; conveys social comparison; Igbo-English hybrid
“Some dey suffer for no reason”	Progressive “dey”	Reflects Nigerian English structure; immediate, colloquial tone
“Some dey chop life easy”	Verb “chop” (eat/enjoy)	Semantic shift in Nigerian English; conveys enjoyment/privilege
“Na him own e be”	Pidgin-English / repetition	Emphasizes fate or social outcome; textual cohesion and oral rhythm

Repetition of “Osondi owendi” Refrain Organizes message, emphasizes moral theme, memorable and culturally resonant

### Discussion

The lyrics use Nigerian English features such as “dey,” “chop,” and Pidgin constructions like “Na him own e be” to convey social realities and everyday experiences. The ideational function captures the disparity between fortune and misfortune, reflecting societal observation. The interpersonal function engages listeners through familiar, colloquial language and idiomatic expressions. Textually, repetition and refrains reinforce the song’s moral lesson, ensuring cohesion and memorability. Overall, Osondi Owendi demonstrates how Nigerian English in highlife music encodes culture, conveys meaning, and engages audiences.

### Analysis of Go Slow by Lagbaja

*“Go slow, oh, Lagos traffic too much”*

*“Somebody dey chop for the road”*

*“We go still waka, no wahala”*

### Lexico-Semantic Features

Excerpt	Feature	Significance
“Go slow”	Imperative phrase	Nigerian English/Pidgin instruction; literal traffic warning and metaphor for patience in life
“Somebody dey chop for the road”	Progressive “dey” + semantic shift “chop”	Reflects Nigerian English; “chop” = taking advantage / misbehavior; colloquial social commentary
“We go still waka”	Future auxiliary “go” + “waka”	Expresses continuation / persistence; “waka” = walk/move on in Nigerian English
“No wahala”	Nigerian English / Pidgin idiom	Means “no problem”; interpersonal reassurance; culturally rooted expression

Repetition of “Go slow” Refrain Emphasizes theme; textual cohesion; memorable hook

### Discussion

The song uses Nigerian English/Pidgin features such as “dey,” “chop,” “waka,” and “no wahala” to depict everyday Lagos life, particularly traffic and social behavior. Ideationally, the lyrics represent urban realities and frustrations, while interpersonal features engage listeners with humor, advice, and solidarity. Textually, repetition of “Go slow” reinforces both the musical and moral message. Lagbaja’s Nigerian English demonstrates how language conveys social observation, cultural values, and communal engagement in highlife and Afrobeat music.

### Analysis of Oruka by Sunny Neji

*“Oruka, you go remember me one day”*

*“No be lie, I dey tell you the truth”*

*“Everybody dey talk, but I go still dey shine”*

**Lexico-Semantic Features**

<b>Excerpt</b>	<b>Feature</b>	<b>Significance</b>
<b>Oruka, you go remember me one day</b>	Future auxiliary “go”	Expresses prediction / certainty; Nigerian English structure; interpersonal emphasis
<b>“No be lie”</b>	Negation idiom	Colloquial Nigerian English; emphasizes honesty and sincerity
<b>“I dey tell you the truth”</b>	Progressive “dey”	Marks ongoing action; adds immediacy and conversational tone
<b>“I go still dey shine”</b>	Future “go” + progressive “dey” + metaphor “shine”	Combines Nigerian English grammar with metaphor for success/achievement; conveys resilience and self-assurance

Repetition of “Oruka” Refrain Textual cohesion; highlights personal address and emotional focus

**Discussion**

In “Oruka”, Nigerian English features such as “go,” “dey,” and idioms like “No be lie” communicate sincerity, confidence, and social interaction. Ideationally, the lyrics portray personal resolve, resilience, and ambition, reflecting lived experiences. Interpersonally, they engage listeners directly through conversational tone and rhetorical emphasis. Textually, the repetition of the name “Oruka” reinforces focus and cohesion, making the song both memorable and emotionally resonant. The analysis shows how Sunny Neji’s Nigerian English expresses cultural identity, personal experience, and social values in highlife music.

**Findings**

The findings highlight highlife music as a repository of linguistic creativity and a valuable medium for understanding the expressive potential and evolving nature of Nigerian English. Through this framework, the study demonstrates how meaning is constructed, negotiated, and culturally encoded in Nigerian English expressions by highlife artists. The study concludes that musical texts function as repositories of linguistic creativity and serve as valuable resources for understanding the evolution, diversity, and expressive potential of Nigerian English.

**Conclusion**

The lexico-semantic analysis of Nigerian English in the selected highlife songs, Sweet Mother (Prince Nico Mbarga), Osondi Owendi (Chief Stephen Osita Osadebe), Go Slow (Lagbaja), and Oruka (Sunny Neji) demonstrates how language functions as both a cultural and communicative resource in Nigerian popular music. Across the songs, features such as the progressive auxiliary “dey,” future auxiliary “go,” Pidgin-English idioms, code-mixing, and culturally loaded lexical items reveal ideational, interpersonal, and textual metafunctions (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). These linguistic choices encode lived experiences, social realities, moral lessons, and interpersonal relationships, while simultaneously engaging

audiences emotionally and organizing meaning textually. The study confirms that Nigerian English in highlife music is not merely a stylistic variation of Standard English but a dynamic medium for cultural expression, identity construction, and social commentary (Jowitt, 2007; Adegbija, 2004). Consequently, this analysis highlights the significance of functional and lexico-semantic approaches for understanding language in music and underscores the interplay between language, culture, and society in Nigerian popular music.

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## CRITICAL LANGUAGE AWARENESS: A SINE QUA NON IN EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH AND ASSESSMENT

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### Abstract

*This position article argues for; by bringing to a fore, the importance of critical language awareness in educational research and assessment. It posits that despite the importance of language in shaping research practices, not much attention is given to studies on language awareness in Educational Research and Assessment. Researchers tend to overlook the subtle ways in which linguistic items influence the interpretation, findings, and conclusions of their studies. Critical Language Awareness (CLA), is the reflective understanding of how language perpetuates ideology and power; enriching educational inquiry and promotes equitable assessment practices. The methodology employed involves a qualitative approach through thorough examination of existing literature; leveraging on Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), the article highlighted how linguistic items such as lexical choices, grammatical structures, metaphorical expressions, discourse markers and pragmatic implicatures can perpetuate bias, reinforce dominant ideologies, and affect research validity. The article also posited that appropriate and effective use of language enhances the functional interpretation and communicative clarity of research findings and explicated on unmasking bias through CDA and the implication for researchers. The article concluded by asserting that it is crucial to prioritize critical language in order to ensure that research practices employ language effectively and ethically; thus, demonstrating the efficacy of language in research and assessment. To that end, the paper recommended the development of online courses and resources aimed at cultivating language awareness among researchers. Furthermore, it proposed mentorship programmes that pair experienced scholars with emerging researchers to foster linguistic sensitivity and critical reflection. Implementing these strategies will advance critical language awareness in educational research and assessment which will ultimately lead to more rigorous, ethical, and socially responsible research practices.*

**Keywords:** Critical Language Awareness, Educational Research, Assessment, Research Ethics and Linguistic Bias

### Introduction

Language is not merely a neutral conduit for information; it is a powerful socio-cultural and ideological tool that shapes thought, reinforces hierarchies, and structures inclusion and exclusion within educational spaces (Fairclough, 1992, Pennycook, 2021). Language plays a vital role in understanding humanity and the world. In educational settings, language is employed to convey knowledge, skills, evaluate students' learning, and initiate power dynamics. Nevertheless, it can equally be a source of bias and inequality, highlighting the need for critical language awareness. It is through language that power circulates thereby legitimizing some forms of knowledge while marginalizing others. In educational research and assessment, Critical Language Awareness (CLA) emerges as a foundational framework for interrogating how language both reflects and reproduces broader social inequities (Apple, 2020; García & Solorza, 2021). Shohamy, (2021), Flores & Rosa (2021) posit that Critical Language Awareness (CLA), drawing from Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and sociolinguistics of power, foregrounds the political nature of language use in schools,

research, and assessment contexts. It challenges educators and researchers to ask difficult but necessary questions: *Whose language is centred? Whose discourses dominate curricula? And which voices are systemically erased or pathologised?* (Flores, 2021; Janks, 2010).

This article asserts that CLA, is not an optional enhancement but a *sine qua non*; an essential precondition for equitable, ethical, and critically engaged educational research and assessment. According to Shohamy (2021) and Flores & Rosa (2021), the absence of CLA in research may unwittingly reinforce colonial legacies, and assessments may replicate deficit discourses and systemic injustices. The above is premised on the assertion that CLA help to promote more equitable educational practices by recognising and addressing language biases. It enhances educational research by enabling researchers to recognize and address the power dynamics and biases embedded in language as well as improve educational assessment by ensuring that assessments are valid, fair and unbiased. Bourdieu (2021), postulates that in a multilingual and multicultural educational contexts, awareness of language's ideological dimensions is essential. Thus, CLA encourages students, educators and researchers to interrogate how language constructs social hierarchies and maintains privileges. In educational research and assessment, failure to account for language ideologies risks reinforcement in inequities. Therefore, integrating CLA in both educational research and assessment is not a luxury but a *sine qua non*; an essential condition. Thus, the discussion in this article focused on conceptual notion of CLA, the role it plays in educational research, CLA and linguistic equity in assessment as well as the implication for systemic transformation, pedagogy and policy.

### **Conceptual Notion of Critical Language Awareness (CLA)**

Critical Language Awareness (CLA) was postulated by Norman Fairclough in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Fairclough, a renowned scholar in Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) argued that language is not a neutral medium but a social practice embedded with ideological functions. He introduced CLA as a pedagogical extension of CDA to empower students to understand and critique these functions. According to this scholar, CLA bridges critical theory and language education, highlighting the central role of language in maintaining or challenging power structures. It not only make learners linguistically competent but also socially, and politically conscious. Dwomoh (2023), views CLA as a careful judicious understanding of the role of language in shaping knowledge, power dynamics, and social relationships in educational settings. It involves recognizing the ways in which language use can influence teaching, learning and assessment practices, and being aware of likely biases and inequalities that can arise from language use. Flore and Rosa (2021) state that CLA is the reflective understanding of how language perpetuates ideology and power, enriching educational inquiry and promotes equitable assessment practices. Concurring with Fairclough, Janks (2010) posits that CLA is grounded in CDA which views language as a form of social practice inherently linked to ideology and identity. In educational research, this perspective promotes scholars to interrogate how linguistic features influence meaning construction, research interpretation and societal impact.

### **The Role of Critical Language Awareness in Educational Research: Power and Ideology in Academic Languages**

Educational research often privileges standardized academic English as the sole legitimate mode of scholarly communication. This silences diverse epistemologies and reinscribes colonial hierarchies (Canagarajah, 2020; Makoni & Pennycook, 2021). Peer-reviewed publications, research funding bodies, and international academic norms often marginalize scholars who write from alternative linguistic and cultural positions (Kubota, 2020). CLA exposes this monolingual bias and promotes epistemic justice. According to Maldonado-

Torres (2020) and Makalela, (2020), the inclusion of knowledge systems grounded in different worldviews, vernaculars, and semiotic practice.

Agbo (2023) explicates that CLA foster critical engagement with language, promoting inclusion and pushing for reforms in language use in Nigerian schools; thereby preparing students for to be analytical, socially aware, powered language users in a multilingual and multicultural society. According to Agbo, ‘understanding critical language awareness plays a transformative role in educational research and assessment in Nigeria, particularly in addressing issues of equity, representation, and linguistic diversity. For example, a researcher might investigate how the exclusive use of English in standardized tests like WAEC, NECO or UTME (popularly known as JAMB) limits access to higher education for students whose first language is Idoma, Igbo, Yoruba, or Hausa. Again, the knowledge and understanding of CLA can help researchers and assessors to design tools that account for Nigeria’s multilingual reality. This leads to fairer evaluations that test not just grammar, but students’ ability to use and interpret language critically. For instance, setting tasks that assess students’ ability to analyse biased language in politics or media texts, in both English and indigenous languages, helps promote critical literacy.

Kubota (2020) asserts that CLA enhances interpretation of texts and data. According to this assertion, researchers who understand CLA are better equipped to analyse qualitative data such as interviews, examination scripts, or classroom interactions through a critical lens that considers power, identity, and ideology. For example, in a study of classroom discourse, CLA helps identify whether teachers unconsciously reinforce stereotypes through their language, such as ethnic marginalisation or gender bias. Agbo, above credits the role of CLA in educational research and assessment by explaining further that, CLA strengthens culturally relevant pedagogy. She expatiated that, by incorporating CLA, research and assessment will better reflect Nigeria’s diverse linguistic and cultural realities thereby ensuring that education is not only academically rigorous, but socially responsive. This, the scholar illustrated by citing an instance where a researcher examines how literature syllabi include or exclude authors from minority ethnic groups, using CLA to argue for more balanced representation.

Discourse analysis reveals how policy and research often frame educational problems through deficit lenses. For example: the phrase “achievement gap” subtly blames marginalized students for systemic under-resourcing (Flores & Rosa, 2021). Another example is terms like “language deficiency” or “limited English proficiency” devalue multilingual capabilities (Cummins, 2020).

García (2022) and Janks (2010) assert that CLA advocates for reframing discourses to highlight structural inequities, such as linguistic imperialism, institutional racism, and resource disparity. They claim that research methodologies must account for participants' full linguistic repertoires and suggested strategies that aligned with CLA to include:

Translanguaging methodologies, which allow participants to draw from all their languages to express knowledge (García & Wei, 2020, Mazak, 2021).

Researcher reflexivity, where scholars critically examine how their linguistic assumptions influence data interpretation (Kubota, 2020, Flores, 2021).

Ethical multilingual research practices, ensuring informed consent and participation across languages (Heugh, 2021).

## **How Linguistic Items Perpetuate Bias, Reinforce Dominant Ideologies, and Affect Research Validity.**

Linguistic items in educational research and assessment refer to the language elements used in research instruments, assessments, and educational materials. Flores (2021) describes linguistic items as instruments that can influence the way data is collected, potentially analyzed, and interpreted potentially leading to flawed or flawless conclusions. These items impact on how people understand, respond to or interpret and perform tasks. These items or elements affect both instructions, interpretation of data, findings and drawing conclusion and assessment. Some key examples commonly considered include: lexical choices, grammatical structures, discourse markers, metaphorical expressions, pragmatic implicatures, e.t.c.

### **Lexical Choices**

Lexical choices in research and assessment are specific words and phrases that are used in research and assessment. These specific words and phrases that are employed in research and assessment are used in subtle, but powerful ways to perpetuate bias, reinforce dominant ideologies, and undermine research validity. Lexical choices can reflect and reproduce societal biases, whether it relates to class, gender religion, ethnicity, or region. For example, referring to certain regions as “underdeveloped” or “backward” or people as “illiterate” instead of saying “marginalized” or “underserved,” or “excluded from formal education” or “non-literate” demonstrates deficiency rather than structural disadvantage. The above unacceptable lexical choices dehumanize participants, misrepresent communities, and skew public policy perceptions based on the research. It is imperative to note that certain words carry loaded connotations or stereotypes, which can reflect the researcher’s own biases or societal prejudices. Such lexical choice or language stigmatizes groups and may influence how the findings of the research are interpreted or how interventions are designed. It is important to observe that lexical choices are not just about semantics. They shape power, perception, and truth. In research, particularly in sensitive or diverse contexts like heterogeneous society like Nigeria, language must be used ethically and critically to ensure valid, inclusive, and responsive scholarship.

Language usually holds the worldview of the dominant social or political class, masking inequality as “normal” or “natural.” For example, referring to standard English as “correct” or “proper” implies that pidgin or Nigerian pidgin or indigenous languages are inferior or uneducated. If not examined, they may unintentionally promote the status quo. Referring to English as the “official” or “proper” language and delegitimizes indigenous language in Nigeria. Another example is, using terms like “tribal conflicts” instead of “resource based or politically instigated conflicts” simplifies complex socio- political realities and blames culture rather than policy. The implication of using such negative lexical items is that, it construe language that marginalizes alternative perspectives, particularly in multicultural, post-colonial societies like Nigeria.

Lexical bias can lead to misinterpretation of data, invalid conclusion and ethical issues. If a survey or interview questions use terms that are culturally inappropriate, ambiguous, or carry unintended meanings, respondents may misunderstand or feel alienated. For instance, in a qualitative analysis, interpreting responses using biased vocabulary can distort what participants actually mean. This compromises the reliability and credibility of research findings, leading to flawed or unethical scholarship. Therefore, in order to avoid lexical bias, there is need to reflect critically on choice of words or phrases to be used and mind whose voice is to be centred or silenced; use inclusive and neutral language that is devoid of moral and cultural judgments; understand how terms are used in cultural context and pilot test questions in multilingual or divers settings to check for bias or misunderstanding.

### **How Grammatical Structures and Metaphorical Expressions Perpetuate Bias, Reinforce Dominant Ideologies, and Affect Research Validity.**

Grammatical structures and metaphorical expressions are powerful tools in language. Although they help convey meaning, they can also embed biases, reinforce dominant ideologies, and affect validity of research in subtle but significant ways as shall be explicated subsequently. Grammatical choices such as tense, subject-object positioning, passive voice, and many others often reflect and reproduce implicit biases. It helps to hide agency. For example, “Mistakes were made” instead of “The government made mistakes.” The first obscures responsibility. The passive voice which is common in political or scientific discourse to avoid blame. Nominalization, turning verbs into nouns (Agbo 2023), is another way of perpetuating bias in research. For example, “The failure of communication.” This helps avoid mentioning who failed. Gender pronouns and role nouns using “he” as a default or linguistic terms like “chairman, “man,” reinforces gender norms. According to Poehner and Lantolf (2023), these grammatical patterns can reinforce stereotypes by erasing marginalized voices by portraying certain actions or groups as natural, objective or passive and framing authority figure as neutral or objective. It is salient to note that, in research, these biases can appear in how findings are presented such as: “subject responded aggressively” instead of “we observed signs interpreted as aggression,” where the former implies objectivity and agency while concealing the researcher’s interpretive role.

Metaphors shape thought by framing one’s understanding of concepts. Cognitive linguist, George Lakoff famously argued that metaphors are not just literary but cognitive tools. He explains that metaphors structure how people think. For example, “war metaphor” in health. Some examples like “battling cancer” or fighting disease” valorize individual effort but can stigmatize those who “lose.” “Market metaphors” in education such as “student as costumers,” “education as product” shapes policy and reduce learning to economic terms. Agbo (2025), explains that metaphors that are termed “machine metaphors” in science, describe the human brain as a computer therefore reinforcing a mechanistic view, thereby ignoring emotional, social and cultural factors. According to her explanation, these metaphors normalize certain worldview (e.g., scientism, neoliberalism), conceal alternative perspectives or systemic issues and suggest inevitability or naturalness to existing power structures.

It is worth noting that language affects not just how findings are reported, but how data is collected, interpreted, and valued. Therefore, the choice of grammatical structures and metaphoric expressions in research and assessment have impact on research validity. Biased languages skews interpretation. If a researcher describes a community as “underdeveloped” rather than “historically marginalized,” it implies internal deficit rather than external oppression. It also enhances framing of questions in survey and interview questions. The way a question is asked (e.g., “Do you support stricter punishment for examination mal-practice?” or “Do you support restorative justice”) shapes the responses. If the language of research is inaccessible, academic, or reflects only dominant ideologies, it marginalizes other ways of knowing or being (e.g., indigenous epistemologies). To this end, exclusion of non-dominant voices is impactful in research validity. In sum, language choice influences what counts as evidence, whose voices are legitimate, and what conclusions are drawn from the findings.

### **Discourse Markers and Pragmatic Implicatures in Perpetuating Bias, Reinforcing Dominant Ideologies and Affecting Research Validity**

As earlier mentioned in this article, language is never neutral. It carries with it sets of assumptions, values, and worldviews that shape how people interpret, and convey meaning. To this end, discourse markers and pragmatic implicatures are linguistic features that play vital role in shaping discourse. While they are often overlooked in academic and empirical

research, these linguistic items can perpetuate bias, reinforce dominant ideologies and compromise the validity of research findings.

Schiffrin (1987), describes discourse markers as words or phrases like, 'so,' 'yet,' 'you know' 'however' and 'basically' that are used to organize and manage the flow of conversations. They signal transitions, emphasize points, or indicate relationships between ideas. Although they seem neutral, they use can convey stance, alignment, or evaluative judgment. Discourse markers are cohesion devices that are used to connect words or structures (phrases, clauses & paragraphs). Pragmatic implicatures, which is rooted in Gricean theory, on the other hand, refers to meanings inferred from context rather than directly stated. For example, saying "She managed to finish the task" implies that the task was challenging or difficult (Grice, 1975). These implicatures rely on shared cultural or contextual knowledge and can subtly convey ideological stances.

### **Perpetuating Bias through Discourse Markers in Research and Assessment**

Discourse markers can can subtly encode evaluative judgment or frame perspective that skew interpretations, For instance, a researcher writing, "interestingly," the men in the study reported..." Position the data as unexpected or atypical. Flairclough (1995), states that this use of "interestingly" implies a bias about gender norms are expectations. The above scholar explicated that, similarly, markers like "but," "although" can diminish the perceived weight of preceding statements. He illustrated this claim by citing an instance as follows: "The indigenous participants expressed concern, but the data suggest overall satisfaction." He explained that, in this illustration, the discourse marker "but" functions to privilege the quantitative data over indigenous voices, marginalizing dissent,

Levison (2000) posits that pragmatic implicatures function under the surface of explicit language relying on shared social assumptions, he expatiated further stating that when researchers or speakers say "She even got promoted," the implicature is that the promotion was surprising or undeserved, potentially reflecting gender, class or racial bias. These implicatures often echo dominant ideologies especially in institutional or academic discourse. For example, describing a community as "resilient" in the face of structural neglect may subtly endorse the status quo by implying that hardship is natural or acceptable. The underlying message aligns with neoliberal values of individualism and self resilience, absolving institutions from responsibility. Again, Pragmatic implicatures also shape the reception of counter hegemonic discourse. In media, or political texts, phrases like "They claim to be oppressed" carry implicatures of skepticism or delegitimization, reinforcing dominant narratives that dismiss systemic inequality. (Lakoff, 2004).

Discourse markers and pragmatic implicatures can introduce bias that affect external, internal, and construct validity in research, According to Gee (2014), when researchers interpret through discourse that subtly favour a group or perspective, then findings may reflect personal or cultural bias rather than empirical neutrality. Gee explicated citing an instance where an interview transcriptions that preserve hedging markers such as "sort of," "you know" only for certain participants may unintentionally cast them as less confident or credible. Gee further explained that pragmatic implicatures can distort the operational definitions of construct. He cited another example describing participants' behaviour with terms like "even," "just," or "barely" can imply marginalization or anomaly without supporting the data skewing how construct such as resilience or competency are interpreted. Thomas (1995), asserts that the use of culture-specific implicatures assumes shared understanding, which can limit the generalizability of findings across contexts. He further explains that a phrase like "of course she succeeded" presupposes cultural knowledge of success norms that may not translate cross culturally.

Furthermore, reader interpretations can vary based on how these markers guide inference. Researchers may inadvertently prime audiences through discourse that evokes dominant ideologies which affect how data are received, understood (interpreted), and applied in practice.

### **Unmasking Bias through Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)**

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) provides framework for interrogating how discourse markers and implicatures perpetuate social power structures. CDA scholars like Fairclough (1995) and Van Dijk (2008) postulate that everyday language reproduces ideology through patterns so normalized they become invisible. Hence, by examining how transitional phrases such as “nevertheless,” “still;” emphasis such as “naturally,” “clearly;” or modal expressions like “might;” “must” shape reader alignment, CDA reveals how dominant perspectives are legitimized. In the same vein, uncovering implicature such as assumptions of ‘whiteness,’ maleness, or heteronormativity as default show how language naturalizes social hierarchies.

### **Implications for Researchers**

To mitigate the perpetuation of bias and preserve validity, researchers must do the following:

- i. Researchers must be aware of how discourse markers may convey unintentional stance or emphasis. In other words, they must reflect on critical language use. This practice would help avoid markers or normativity unless, explicitly warranted by data.
- ii. Researchers must recognize the assumptions embedded in indirect language. They must question whether an implicature might reflect personal, cultural or ideological bias rather than empirical evidence. Therefore, researchers must be conscious of implicatures.
- iii. Researchers must include participants’ voices as fully and authentically as possible and must minimize editorial or evaluative commentary. This means that researchers must adopt flexibility; especially in qualitative researches, and document properly how interpretations may be shaped by discourse framing,
- iv. It is imperative for researchers to use CDA tools to help identify potential sources of bias and ideological reinforcement. The use of CDA or Conversation Analysis to review language patterns, especially in interview transcriptions, report writing, or field notes enhances interpretation for valid results and fair and objective assessment.

### **Critical Language Awareness in Assessment Practices**

In the words of Shohamy (2021) and Agbo (2025), assessment practices, whether formal tests or classroom evaluations, or research, are never neutral. They are embedded with values about what counts as knowledge and whose language is valid. They assert that Standardized assessments often reflect Western-centric, monolingual norms that disadvantage multilingual and racially marginalized students. Thus, CLA calls for decolonial approaches that recognize translanguaging and cultural knowledge as valid demonstration of learning and emphasize formative, dynamic assessments that value process, context, and growth as postulated by Garcia and Otheguy in 2020 and Poehner & Lantoff in 2023. They further explain that this entails shifting from deficit models to asset-based assessments that foreground students’ linguistic and cultural strengths.

### **Identifying and Mitigating Linguistic Bias by Building Literacy Agency**

According to Baker-Bell (2020), Kubota (2020) and Adegbite (2021), assessment instruments often penalize students who use non-standard varieties like African American Vernacular English or Nigerian Pidgin and students whose communicative norms (e.g., storytelling, indirectness, presentation of data or interpretation) differ from Western academic conventions. Kubota explicates further by opining that CLA necessitates linguistic audits of tests, rubrics, and grading practices to ensure they do not perpetuate implicit bias.

Beyond assessment design, CLA supports critical literacy pedagogies that empower students to analyse how language conveys power and ideology (Janks, 2010). It also resists linguistic assimilation and reclaim their linguistic identities (Paris & Alim, 2017, Heugh, 2021). But it encourages student-centered practices like peer assessment, portfolio work, and participatory rubric design align with CLA by decentering monologic evaluation (Hélot & Ó Laoire, 2021). Agbo (2025) explains that CLA-trained teachers are better equipped to design equitable assessments and foster inclusive classrooms.

### **Impact of CLA on Research Assessment and Benefits**

Research assessment can be influenced by language bias, whether certain linguistic items or style are privileged over others. This can lead to unfair evaluations of research quality, particularly for researchers who do not conform to dominant language norms. CLA recognizes that language use is embedded in power dynamics, which can influence research assessment outcomes. For instance, research that queries or challenges dominant ideologies or power structures may be assessed more harshly than research that reinforces existing power dynamics. Agbo (2023) posits that in line with fairclough's description of CLA as being sensitive to cultural backgrounds and language varieties of researchers, this background knowledge can impact research assessment outcomes. For example, research that uses non – standard language varieties or cultural references (as cited earlier), may be evaluated as less rigorous or less valid than research that conforms to standard language norms.

Wodak and Meyer (2009), postulated that if the following qualities of CLA are adopted, research assessments would be more valid and credible, devoid of bias and any element of subjectivity. These scholars assert that CLA can promote more equitable evaluations of research quality by recognizing and addressing language bias and power dynamics. This, the argued is rooted in conduct of more equitable evaluation. They also state that CLA can enhance research quality by promoting more nuanced and contextualized understandings of research findings and methodologies. This the claim would foster research quality. Wodak and Meyer concluded by positing that in addition to the above, CLA can improve the validity of research assessments by taking into cognizance or account, the complex relationship between language, power, and knowledge. In order to achieve the above, the following strategies can be employed:

Research assessment should be devoid of language bias by using clear, concise and appropriate language, free from jargon and technical terms that may be unfamiliar to certain researchers. Therefore, it is imperative to avoid language bias.

Research assessments should promote critical reflection on language use and power dynamics by recognizing the complex relationships between language, power, knowledge and context. This strategy enhances critical reflection.

Research assessment should use inclusive language that recognizes and values diverse language varieties and cultural background so as to promote sense of belonging.

By applying CLA principles in research assessments, evaluators can promote more equitable and inclusive evaluations of research quality, ultimately enhancing the quality and validity of research findings.

### **Conclusion**

Critical Language Awareness (CLA) is a crucial aspect of educational research and assessment, as it recognizes the complex relationship between language, power, and knowledge. This language awareness is foundational for dismantling systemic injustices in educational research and assessment. It also equips scholars to interrogate the linguistic

dimensions of inequality and enables educators to design inclusive, socially just research and assessment. Hence, it is salient for researchers to note that discourse markers, pragmatic implicatures as well as other linguistic items as components of language in researches are more than mere linguistic tools; these elements are potent instruments that shape meaning, influence perceptions, and reproduce power relations. In the realm of research, their unethical use can introduce bias, uphold dominant ideologies and compromise validity. Therefore, adopting critical language lens and mindful language practices, advance researches towards more equitable, reflexive and valued scholarly inquiry and assessment. It also supports more equitable educational outcomes in a linguistically diverse nation such as Nigeria. Without CLA, education risks becoming a tool of domination rather than liberation. Future research must deepen its commitment to linguistic equity by embracing CLA as both a theoretical lens and a practical framework.

### **Recommendations**

The author finds it important to make the following recommendations:

Courses that focus on CLA principles and their application in educational research and assessment should be developed. These courses should be designed to accommodate diverse learning needs and provide opportunities for interaction and feedback;

Accessible resources, such as guides, tutorials, webinars, that provide practical guidance on CLA principles and their application in educational research and assessment should be created and well supervised for productivity;

Support and professional development opportunities for researchers and educators should be provided. This would boost deeper understanding of CLA principles and their application. These opportunities when provided, should be ongoing;

Establishment of mentorship programmes that pair experienced researchers or scholars, educators with novice researchers and educators is key. These would provide opportunities for mentorship which include: guidance, support, and feedback on CLA principles and their application;

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**WOMEN'S RESISTANCE TO SEXISM AND POWER DOMINANCE IN  
CONTEMPORARY NOVELS: A STUDY OF SAFIYA ISMA'IL YERO'S NAJA****Nafisa Aliyu Suleiman****Kayit Racheal Philip**Department of English and Drama,  
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**Abstract**

*This paper analyses Safiya Ismail Yero's Naja. Women face untold hardship because not only do they live in a social order that constrains them from realising their vision, they are also confronted with stiff opposition as they try to resist being subjected to some of the established norms in the society. Some of these deprivations are borne out of tradition, religion and male dominance. This paper explores how the novel Naja by Safiya Ismail Yero presents women's resistance to sexism and power dominance. The research adopts feminist theory to analyse the novel, the methodology used is qualitative where the primary text is the source, although other sources are consulted, such as journal articles which form the secondary sources. The research examines the ways the female characters respond to oppressive gender expectations and how they fight for their identity within a male-controlled society. The study shows that the women in the text resist discrimination through self-expression, emotional strength, and refusal to accept limiting roles. It also discusses how male dominated societies try to silence women and maintain control, and how the characters challenge these pressures by standing up for themselves and redefining their place in society. By analysing these forms of resistance in Naja, the study shows the importance of women's voice in confronting inequality and contributing to social change.*

**KEY WORDS:** Sexism, Women Resistance, Power Dominance, Contemporary Novels**1.0 Introduction**

The paper delves into the necessity of understanding how women navigate patriarchal systems through identity reclamation and resistance and investigating their responsibilities in such contexts. The majority of contemporary works by women authors address contemporary issues such as the status of women, marriage, family ties, motherhood, and masculine perspectives. Being female in Nigeria usually means being constantly overlooked, undervalued, and underestimated. It means being harassed and judged for doing the same things men do. Strangely, it also means being held accountable for the things men do, for being assaulted or raped; it means not being afforded the basic human rights of education and freedom of expression. As some Nigerian women discovered after being inspired by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's "We Should All Be Feminists" talk, being a woman is hard, being female in Nigeria is much harder.

In *Naja* by Safiya Ismail Yero, a compelling narrative that centers around a young Fulani girl who due to her knowledge on western education has refused to be subjected to her cultural and religious norms. Naja's action illustrates her struggle for equal rights, freedom of expression and personal choice. Despite the increasing complexity of gender and sexual issues, women across the globe continue to face constraints imposed by entrenched patriarchal norms and attitudes. Traditional local society continues to uphold the notion that women, be they as spouses, daughters or mothers are the responsibility of men. The rigorous and inflexible perception of gender roles that has been fostered by adherence to this patriarchal ideology has deprived women of their freedom and autonomy.

In the social domain, African women have borne the brunt of cultural traditions, many of which have been described as oppressive and have also limited the advancement of women. Friedl (1975) defines male dominance as a situation in which men have highly preferential access, although not always exclusive rights to those activities to which the society accords the greatest values and the exercise of which permits a measure of control over others.

Sanday (1981) in page 64 of his journal on female power and male dominance, defined male dominance (patriarchy) from two angles. First is the exclusion of women from political and economic decision making. Secondly, the male aggression towards women. He went further to measure this aggression using five traits:

1. Expectation that males should be tough, brave and aggressive.
2. The presence of men's houses or specific places where only men may congregate.
3. Frequent quarreling, fighting or wife beating.
4. Institutionalization or regular occurrence of and
5. Raiding other groups for wives

Sanday suggests that the presence of these five traits in a society indicates a high degree of male aggression and power dominance.

In Safiya Ismail Yero's novel, these five traits were portrayed, where men exert their powers on the women in the novel. This study highlights the objectification of women, women are being treated as mere commodities rather than individuals with autonomy, killing the women's voice and taking away their rights as women. This study also shows this women resistance to male dominance and fight to be heard and seen.

## **2.0 Literature Review**

### **2.1 Sexism**

Sexism is a form of discrimination based on a person's sex or gender, typically directed against women. It reflects and sustains the belief that one sex most often male is inherently superior to the other, and it manifests in attitudes, behaviors, and institutional structures that marginalize and oppress women. In both private and public spheres, sexism is expressed through stereotypes, exclusion, objectification, unequal opportunities, and violence. Its effects are both subtle and overt, ranging from social expectations about gender roles to systemic denial of access to power, education, and economic resources. The concept of sexism has been defined by different feminist scholars and from different theoretical perspectives. For example, Deborah Rhode defines sexism as conveying a discrimination based on sex and it seems to require some conscious effort.

In literature and media, sexism is often reflected in the portrayal of women as weak, emotional, dependent, or secondary to male characters. Female characters may be denied complex identities, reduced to domestic roles, or punished for defying traditional norms.

In Northern Nigeria, sexism takes on unique dimensions shaped by religion, tradition, and socio-economic inequality. Women may face early marriage, restricted mobility, and limited access to education under the justification of religious or cultural values. However, they are also forms of power dominance, designed to control women's bodies, voices, and choices. Even laws and policies may fail to protect women due to male-centered interpretations of justice and morality. Literature like *Naja* by Safiya Ismail Yero illustrates how female characters confront and challenge the sexist structures that attempt to silence or suppress them.

Above all, sexism is a deeply rooted social problem that continues to shape the lives of women in Nigeria and beyond.

## 2.2 Patriarchy

The word “patriarchy” has been recreated in the past two decades to analyze the origins and conditions of men’s oppression of women (Kamarae,1992). Originally used to describe the power of the father as head of household, the term ‘patriarchy’ has been used within post 1960s feminism to refer to the systematic organization of male supremacy and female subordination (Kamarae, 1992; Stacey, 1993; Aina, 1998; etc.).

They characterise patriarchy as an unjust social system that is oppressive to women. As feminist and political theorist Carole Pateman writes, "The patriarchal construction of the difference between masculinity and femininity is the political difference between freedom and subjection." (Carole 1988). In feminist theory the concept of patriarchy often includes all the social mechanisms that reproduce and exert male dominance over women. Feminist theory typically characterizes patriarchy as a social construction, which can be overcome by revealing and critically analyzing its manifestations (Ann, 2001).

## 2.3 Power Dominance

Power dominance refers to the unequal control and distribution of authority, resources, and influence within a society. It is a structural dynamic in which one group maintains superiority over another through coercion, tradition, or institutional support. In gender relations, power dominance is typically exercised by men over women, sustaining systems of patriarchy and sexism. This dominance is not only physical or economic but also psychological and ideological, shaping how individuals perceive themselves and their roles in society.

In the Nigerian context, power dominance is deeply rooted in history and tradition. From precolonial to postcolonial periods, leadership, property ownership, and decision-making were primarily reserved for men. Colonialism further entrenched male dominance by restructuring indigenous political systems and sidelining the roles of women in governance and the economy. Today, power dominance is reflected in the persistent underrepresentation of women in politics, unequal access to education and employment, and the gendered control of bodies, particularly in Northern Nigeria.

Power dominance operates on multiple levels personal, cultural, institutional, and structural. At the personal level, men may dominate through physical control, financial dependency, or emotional manipulation. Culturally, dominance is maintained through gender roles that portray men as natural leaders and women as followers or caregivers. Institutionally, laws and policies may fail to protect women’s rights or reinforce their subordination. For example, unequal divorce laws, the lack of legal support for marital rape victims, or the tolerance of child marriage all illustrate how the legal system can perpetuate male dominance.

In literature, power dominance is often portrayed through characters and settings that reflect patriarchal realities. In *Naja* by Safiya Ismail Yero, power dominance is evident in the way male figures, fathers, husbands, and religious leaders seek to control the decisions, freedom, and future of the protagonist. Naja’s journey is marked by constant negotiation with these power structures, whether through silent endurance or bold resistance.

## 2.4 Women’s Resistance in literature

Resistance, in the context of gender studies, refers to the various ways women confront, challenge, and subvert systems of oppression such as patriarchy, sexism, and power dominance. It is a deliberate or instinctive act of defiance against societal structures that seek to suppress female autonomy, agency, and voice. Resistance can take many forms visible or hidden, loud or silent, individual or collective but it is always a statement of refusal to accept imposed inferiority.

Literature has long served as a vehicle for marginalized voices, offering a space where writers, particularly women, can expose, challenge, and reimagine oppressive social structures. In feminist literary criticism, women's resistance in literature refers to the ways female characters defy societal norms, confront patriarchal power, and assert their agency. These acts of resistance whether overt or subtle play a critical role in shaping narratives that empower women and inspire social consciousness.

In African literature, and specifically Nigerian literature, female resistance has become a central theme in the works of authors such as Buchi Emecheta, Flora Nwapa, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Zaynab Alkali, and more recently, Safiya Ismail Yero. These writers use fiction to mirror real-life struggles of women in male-dominated societies. Through their characters, they address issues such as child marriage, domestic abuse, limited access to education, and cultural silencing. Their works reveal how women resist not only through physical rebellion but also through self-awareness, intellectual empowerment, and emotional strength.

One of the early examples of resistance in Nigerian literature is seen in Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood*, where the protagonist, Nnu Ego, initially conforms to traditional expectations of womanhood but ultimately suffers as a result. Her gradual disillusionment becomes a form of resistance against the societal pressure to equate a woman's worth with her ability to bear children. Similarly, Flora Nwapa's *Efuru* presents a female character who defies marital expectations and lives on her own terms, rejecting societal definitions of female success.

In contemporary works, resistance often takes more complex and dynamic forms. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's characters, like Ifemelu in *Americanah* or Kambili in *Purple Hibiscus*, resist societal and familial pressures through education, voice, and independence. These characters reflect the changing roles of women in modern Nigeria and show that resistance can evolve with time and context.

In *Naja* by Safiya Ismail Yero, the protagonist offers a deeply relevant and localized form of resistance. Set in Northern Nigeria, where patriarchal structures are reinforced by cultural and religious norms, Naja's decision to question authority, pursue education, and resist the expectations imposed on her reflects the reality of many women in conservative societies.

Women's resistance in literature is also reflected in narrative techniques. Female authors often employ internal monologue, symbolism, and nonlinear storytelling to give voice to characters who would otherwise remain silent in society. Even the act of writing from a female perspective can be a form of resistance against the male-dominated literary tradition. Through these tools, literature becomes not only a reflection of resistance but also an active force within it.

## 2.5 Empirical Review

Empirical studies on women's resistance to sexism and patriarchal dominance in Nigeria have increased significantly in recent years, reflecting both academic interest and real-world gender advocacy. These studies, conducted across disciplines such as gender studies, sociology, literature, and political science, provide insight into the lived experiences of Nigerian women and the various forms of resistance they adopt.

A study by Okoh (2020) explored women's resistance in Northern Nigeria through education and economic empowerment. The research, conducted using interviews and surveys in Kano and Kaduna states, found that access to education significantly enhances women's capacity to question traditional gender roles and assert independence. Many of the women interviewed reported using their education not only to improve their lives but also to support other women, challenge family expectations, and negotiate for autonomy in marriage. This finding aligns closely with the character Naja in Safiya Ismail Yero's novel, who resists societal expectations by seeking education and intellectual freedom.

Similarly, Ibrahim and Salihu (2018) conducted a qualitative study on female agency in Hausa literature. Their analysis revealed that contemporary Hausa novels written by women increasingly portray female characters who resist male control, assert their voices, and challenge traditional roles. The study emphasises that resistance is often portrayed through subtle acts such as questioning a marriage decision or seeking a career rather than overt rebellion. This nuanced form of resistance is also seen in *Naja*, where the protagonist does not immediately revolt, but gradually develops the confidence to assert her choices.

Another empirical study by Akin & Aina (2012) analysed the intersection of culture and patriarchy in Yoruba communities, highlighting how women use cultural norms to negotiate power. The study found that many women resist patriarchal dominance by using culturally accepted practices such as storytelling, rituals, and women-only gatherings to create solidarity and push for change within acceptable boundaries. This supports the theory of "nego-feminism" proposed by Obioma Nnaemeka, where African women engage in resistance through negotiation rather than confrontation. These forms of cultural resistance mirror how female characters in literature, including Naja resist from within rather than through radical rupture.

In the political sphere, the work of Ogunyemi (2019) examined Nigerian women's participation in activism and social justice movements. Using data from the #BringBackOurGirls and #ArewaMeToo campaigns, the study shows that Nigerian women increasingly use digital platforms to resist gender violence and mobilize public opinion. These empirical findings show that resistance has expanded beyond private acts to include public, visible movements. The themes in *Naja* reflect this broader societal shift, illustrating how literature mirrors real-life resistance.

Above all, empirical studies consistently show that Nigerian women resist sexism and power dominance in diverse, context-specific ways through education, literature, economic activity, cultural negotiation, and activism. These studies not only validate the fictional portrayals of resistance seen in *Naja*, but also emphasize literature's role as both a mirror and a tool of transformation. By grounding your literary analysis in these real-world findings, the study gains both depth and relevance, bridging the gap between art and reality.

### **3.0 Theoretical framework**

The theoretical framework for this study is grounded in feminist literary theory and draws from African feminism to critically examine women's resistance to sexism and power dominance in contemporary Nigeria, with particular reference to *Naja* by Safiya Ismail Yero.

#### **3.1 Feminist Literary Theory**

Feminist literary theory is a critical framework that analyzes literature through the lens of gender inequality, patriarchy, and women's experiences. It emerged as a response to the historical marginalization of women in literary canon and criticism, with the goal of uncovering how literature reflects, reinforces, or resists patriarchal structures.

One of the earliest interventions in this theory came from writers like Virginia Woolf, in *A Room of One's Own* (1929), argued that women's creative expression had been historically limited by economic and social constraints. Later theorists such as Elaine Showalter, Sandra Gilbert, and Susan Gubar further developed feminist criticism by exploring how women writers create alternative literary traditions that reflect their own experiences, not just male-defined ideals.

In the African context, feminist literary theory is adapted to address issues unique to postcolonial societies. African feminist critics argue that Western feminist approaches, while insightful, often do not fully account for the intersections of gender with race, class, tradition, and colonial history. African feminist literary theory thus emphasizes culturally rooted forms of resistance and female agency. Scholars like Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie, Chikwenye Ogunyemi, and Obioma Nnaemeka have advanced theories that consider both the oppression and strength of African women within familial and communal contexts.

In Nigerian literature, feminist literary theory is a valuable tool for analyzing how women resist sexism and power dominance. Texts by authors such as Buchi Emecheta, Flora Nwapa, Zaynab Alkali, and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie use female-centered narratives to challenge dominant patriarchal ideologies. Through characters who fight for education, independence, and self-expression, these writers use literature as a form of resistance.

In *Naja* by Safiya Ismail Yero, feminist literary theory helps us examine how the protagonist challenges the gender norms of her conservative Northern Nigerian society. *Naja* resists through education, personal reflection, and emotional resilience. Her journey embodies the feminist principle of reclaiming voice and agency within oppressive systems. The novel also highlights the various subtle forms of resistance such as silence, delayed compliance, and emotional withholding that align with feminist interpretations of how women resist without outright rebellion.

Moreover, the narrative structure of *Naja* centered on a woman's internal world and her responses to societal expectations aligns with the goals of feminist literary theory: to make visible what has historically been invisible. Yero's writing gives voice to the psychological and emotional toll of patriarchy, an area often ignored in male-authored literature.

Feminist literary theory also critiques how female characters are shaped by language and narrative control. Who tells the story, and how it is told, matters. In *Naja* the author crafts a narrative that resists the traditional male gaze and instead invites readers into the lived reality of a woman negotiating survival, identity, and autonomy in a patriarchal setting.

In conclusion, feminist literary theory is an essential framework for studying gender dynamics in literature. It allows readers and scholars to deconstruct traditional narratives and uplift stories that reflect women's resistance, resilience, and empowerment. In the case of *Naja*, this theory illuminates how literature can challenge societal norms and inspire broader conversations about women's rights and agency in Nigeria and beyond.

#### **4.0 A portrayal of Sexism, Power Dominance and women's resistance in *Naja* by Safiya Ismail Yero**

##### **4.1 Portrayal of sexism and power dominance in *Naja***

Safiya Ismail Yero's *Naja* offers a vivid and honest look at how sexism and power dominance shape *Naja*'s entire life. Set in a patriarchal Northern Nigerian society, the story shows how cultural norms, family expectations, and religious beliefs combine to limit women's freedom. At every stage of *Naja*'s journey, a new form of control emerges,

silencing women's voices and stripping away their ability to make their own choices. This was first projected in Naja's life, Naja's marriage was arranged and decided by her father. Her husband showed interest in her, told her father and without consideration and consultation her father accepted the offer, Naja was only told that in a fortnight she was going to be married. This act by Naja's father shows power dominance and how she doesn't have the freedom to make choice about her own body. Naja's marriage to Mallam Ilu, her husband, isn't just a cultural norm, it was also a way of paying off her father's debts to Mallam Ilu, treating Naja as a commodity. This was depicted when Mallam Ilu casually said "How about marrying her to me and I waive the cattle for you" (pg 8). Marriage here is shown not as a relationship built on love or mutual respect, but as a kind of transaction between men. When her father agrees to marry her off to an older man, Naja's consent and feelings are never considered. What matters to him is the social and economic benefit the marriage will bring, not his daughter's happiness. This shows how women are commodified under patriarchy. Naja and other women in the society are not seen as individuals with the right to decide their own future, but as one whose life can be arranged to serve men's needs. This silencing of women's emotions in marriage is one of the clearest ways patriarchal power is maintained. Another instance of power dominance occurs when Naja's father organises a meeting concerning her, although she is present, she is not allowed to speak, decision was made and imposed on Naja and this made Naja very bitter as she said to herself "what kind of judgement is this"?... "so this was it they were not going to ask her what had happened. They would not hear her own side of the story"(Pg 27). This meeting was dominated entirely by men, not even Naja's mother was invited to the meeting, this exclusion reflects Simone de Beauvoir's idea in *The Second Sex* that women are constructed as "the Other," treated not as full individuals but as those whose lives are defined by male authority (Beauvoir, 2011). African feminist scholar Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie describes this as one of the "six mountains" African women carry: the burden of being silenced in decisions that most affect them (Ogundipe-Leslie, 1994).

Another instance of sexism was when Naja's father was saying to mallam Ilu how he had regretted allowing Naja go to school "I don't even know how I let her mother and that idiot NYSC boy convince me to send her to that boko. Naja's father mocked her for reading "books without pictures" and compares her to someone "demented," he reduces her intellectual curiosity to something abnormal or even laughable. This shows that women who devote themselves to learning are somehow stepping out of their "natural" role. He sees her pursuit of education as a threat to the order in which things are done in their tradition. In his view, sending a girl to school, especially for Western-style education, is unnecessary and even dangerous, as it might "corrupt" her or distract her from the roles society expects of her marriage, childbearing, and domestic duties. Instead of seeing education as empowering, he interprets it as destructive because it challenges the boundaries patriarchy has placed around women. Mallam Jarmai's words and that of his brother Inlaw shows how sexism works in a society with cultural norms. It ridicules women's ambitions, denying them the chance to grow intellectually, and insisting that men must control their future. Yero uses this moment to highlight how women's pursuit of education is often resisted, not because they lack ability, but because patriarchal systems fear the independence and self-definition that education makes possible. The betrothed assumes the right to decide what his future wife should or should not be exposed to, even before marriage. This reflects the sexist belief that women's lives are not theirs to shape, but rather extensions of men's authority. His statement also shows how marriage, which could be a partnership of equals, is instead imagined as a system of ownership where the husband dictates boundaries for the wife.

Women become silenced by men that even in situations where they are obligated to speak up they tend to be silent. A perfect example is Naja's mother, from the beginning of the novel, we see how she is against every decision her husband takes but too scared to stand up to him even when it affects her children. Another is Hauwa's mother, when Hauwa's grandmother accused Hauwa of having something to do with a boy in the society, her father without seeking the truth physically assaults her, Hauwa narrates to Naja saying "He took my silence for a yes, and pounced on me, kicking, slapping, and hitting." (Pg 103) this is a significant example of men's dominance. Equally significant is her mother's silence and inaction during the beating, she says "You see, my mother was not supposed to interfere, and she didn't." (Pg 104) Although her mother feels her pain, the rules of patriarchy force her to stay quiet and stop her from standing up to the father. For the daughter, this silence feels like a deep loss because her mother who used to be her comfort and support now seems distant, especially after she gets married, she recounted to Naja; "But that day when she came to see me in my husband's house, she had looked everywhere but into my eyes." (Pg 103). This shows how patriarchy not only hurts women individually but also separates them from each other, making it harder for them to support one another or fight back together. Towards the end of the text, Safiya Ismail Yero introduces other characters that suffered men's dominance and oppression, one of which is Aunt Zahra. Another example of domestic Abuse is in the case of Aunt Zahra's friend, Mariya whose body was found in a well, Mariya's sudden death and mysterious death raises many unanswered question, including rumours of an accident, suicide or even murder. The only story of how she died came from her husband who claims she mistakenly stepped on the wooden board which served as a lid to the well and died. Everyone believed as there was no counter story, until 3days after when Mariya's gateman reveals to aunt Zahra that Mariya's husband has a history of abuse, "He told Aunt Zahra how he had always feared for Mariya, how her husband used to yell and beat her senseless... he knew because he was always the one that took her children to school and back whenever she acquired bruises after being beaten." This confession exposes the violence that Mariya endured privately, a violence that she never openly shared even with close women around her like Zahra and Chinelo, their friend. This shows how women can endure oppression and violence in their marriage and not speak just to protect their marriage. While Zahra was listening to the gateman speak she immediately realised how she also has been going through the same thing and not voicing out "She could not understand why Mariya never mentioned that her husband had turned her into a punching bag. It dawned on her that she was going through the same thing, yet she never told anyone about it."

Mariya's death is an example of how women's lives and voices are erased under patriarchy. Her suffering is dismissed, her death explained away as an accident, and only through the gateman's testimony does her truth come to light.

#### **4.3 Women's resistance to sexism and dominance in *Naja***

Resistance is the act or power of resisting, opposing, or withstanding. Although Safiya Ismail Yero's *Naja* depicts patriarchal oppression, the novel also shows that women are not entirely powerless. They find ways to resist, negotiate, and reshape their roles within the restrictions placed on them. This resistance is not always loud or dramatic; often, it appears in quiet but meaningful actions that allow women to hold on to their dignity and humanity in a world that tries to silence them. This idea reflects African feminist thought, which values women's strength, resilience, and the practical ways they survive and push back against inequality in their cultural settings. The women in *Naja* fought against sexism and power dominance with their voices and actions. The major person that resisted all through the novel is Naja, she resisted in her parent's home, her matrimonial home and the society in general. In her matrimonial home, she refused to be the silent wife who gives in to everything her husband

says. Every other bride submits their body to their husbands immediately after marriage but Naja refused to submit herself to her husband, Mallam Ilu, and even after he reported her to her parents and she was advised to do back and do the needful she was still defiant and stood by her word, Iyatu her friend tried to convince her but she replied her "...but, honestly, I was not joking when I told you that night I was brought here that I will not let this shameless old man defile me"( pg 33). Aladio, one of Naja's student also rebelled and resisted power dominance when she stood up to her husband who never provided for them, doesn't let them eat from the farm produce they have in the house and beats her when she tries to speak up, but this time Aladio wasn't scared, she did all that she had been scared to do and when she was trying to talk to him about it and he wasn't responding she challenged him saying he was the one she was talking to, he was shocked because Aladio never spoke back at him. He tried to hit her as usual but when he noticed that she didn't flinch and was ready to stand and face him, he backed off. She narrated the incident to Naja the next day saying "she had asked him if beating a woman was all that he was good at. She had said he did that because he was weak, and it clearly depicted his weakness" (pg 75) and just as she anticipated he swallowed the bait and lowered his face in shame. Another example of a woman who resisted sexism is Auntzy Zahra, who after tolerating her husband's nonchalant attitude towards her and her children and the domestic abuse she had to face every time he was around finally gave up and decided she wouldn't take it again. She filed for a divorce and was now a free woman who is not subjected to any man's authority. She thanked Naja for helping her see reasons why leaving her marriage was a good idea, she says "I want to thank you for removing the curtain off my eyes, for making me see that what I was in was not marriage. Thank you, Naja! Who knows what would have happened if not for your brave intervention? Perhaps I would have ended up like Mariya. Auntzy Zahra and Naja finally started a foundation to help women find their voice and leave places that cost them their peace. Naja's life all through the novel was one of rebellion, breaking rules and making decisions that seemed right to her and not the society. Naja left her husband's house without the permission of her husband to live with Auntzy Zahra because she believed she had a better future there. Not even her father could stop her. Her stubbornness and defiant attitude towards the patriarchal society helped her achieve her goal. She became a good example and a motivation to so many women scared to take the bold step. Despite being confined to the domestic and religious sphere and also the denial of movement and public engagement by her husband she still found a way out.

In the end, the strength of the women in *Naja* is revealed not only through their struggle against patriarchy, but also through their lives. Through education, the courage to speak, and support for one another, Safiya Ismail Yero uses these female characters to show the strength of women and refusal to remain on the margins and instead create spaces where their voices and choices matter. Their struggles and victories reflect the novel's feminist message: that even within a deeply patriarchal society, women have the creativity and determination to challenge the systems that try to hold them down.

*Naja* by Safiya Ismail Yero, a story that strongly brings out the experiences of women living under patriarchy, sexism, and male dominance. The study looked at how Yero uses her characters and story to show what women go through in a society that gives more power and freedom to men. It also explored how women resist these unfair systems and find their strength. From the beginning of the novel, Yero uses Naja's life to show how deeply rooted patriarchy is. Women are treated as if they exist only to serve men, and their voices are not valued. Naja's silence in the early part of the story represents the silence of many African women who suffer in the name of culture and tradition. But as the story goes on, Naja begins to realise her worth and learns that she has the right to speak up, to make choices, and to take control of her life. Her growth shows the power of self-awareness and courage

This research, pays attention to the theme of women's resistance to sexism and power dominance in a patriarchal society, it explores the struggle of women in societies where religion and societal norms have limited them to domestic roles, obedience and silence while also showing their strength, courage and fighting for freedom. The novel presents women not as weak or silent, but as strong and active individuals who challenge traditions and question male control. Using the character Naja, Yero shows women's desire to create better roles for themselves in society and how they used their voices in doing so.

## 5.0 Concluson

Naja is a work that contributes significantly to the discourse on sexism and power dominance, offering a searing critique of patriarchal societies and underscoring the imerative for gender equality and social justice. It is a strong tool against sexism and patriarchy, Yero uses Naja's story to remind us that real freedom and equality come when everyone, especially women, are allowed to dream, speak, and live freely.

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## ORALITY IN NIGERIAN POETRY AS A STATEMENT ON LEADERSHIP IN NIYI OSUNDARE'S *VILLAGE VOICES*

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### Abstract

*Literature is shaped by the socio-economic and political realities of its society. Consequently, the tone and content of any given literature be it poetry, prose or drama reflects the realities of that society. To this end, this paper tries to examine some of Niyi Osundare's poems in Village Voices as a statement on the austere experiences of the Nigerian leadership. Osundare infuses traditional oral lore and aesthetics to make his commentary for easy access to his target audience. These traditional lore and aesthetics include indigenous expressions, localized language, culture and proverbs so as to succinctly convey his thoughts as a commentary on Nigerian leadership and put forth a way forward.*

**Keywords:** oral literature; orality; poetry; leadership

### Introduction

Reading through Osundare's first work, *Songs of the Market Place*, through *Village Voices*, *A Nib in the Pond* to *Waiting Laughters*, *Moonsongs* and *The Word is an Egg* reveals that Osundare has always overwhelmingly deployed and "poached" consistently from the native Yoruba metaphysical beliefs, traditional religious systems as well as oral traditions to protest the prevailing circumstances of the socio-economic and political predicament of Nigeria. The flashes of experimentation with Yoruba traditional oral forms that began in *Songs of the Marketplace* became a dominant style in *Village Voices* as well as in Osundare's other collection of poems. In *Village Voices* (1984), Osundare places the sociopolitical values of traditional life above the urbane society which is based upon a system of exploiting the resources of the poverty stricken masses, the down trodden and the peasants. In this regard, Ngara (1990:177) posits that, "Osundare has published several volumes of poetry including *Village Voices*, in which he devotes his poetic energies to the service of the exploited African rural peasantry." For this reason, Aiyejina (1988:123), observes that there is no gainsaying in declaring Osundare as a poet of the people who captures "the banter of the market place, the garrulous and living voices of street fighters, the spontaneous wit of touts, ... tunes of farmers... all (are) encapsulated in Osundare's poetry." To this end, Osundare's poetry can be viewed as enabling the peasantry and the masses to appreciate and know the fact that someone is fighting their cause and they can take solace that part of his instrument of war is their own rhetorical heritage. In effect, this is the reason why Osundare makes the deliberate use of familiar, commonplace, everyday ideational and physical elements, metaphors, proverbs, images and verses that are patently performative with a very strong audience consciousness.

For Osundare, utilizing these elements makes it easy for him to comment on the appalling political and leadership system in Nigeria, endangered stability; the ever-widening gap between those who wallow in poverty and those who are in affluence. For this reason, one can detect the agitation for revolution in Osundare's *Village Voices*. The messages and impressions Osundare tries to convey and describe in *Village Voices* is his concern for the oppressed and the distressed state of the Nigerian society in their various conditions of wants,

deprivation, repression and exploitation. Apart from narrating and describing the sordid experiences of the distressed, Osundare calls upon the peasants and the downtrodden to collectively revolt against the forces that dominate them.

### **Orality in Nigerian Poetry as a Statement on Leadership in Niyi Osundare's *Village Voices***

*Village Voices* (1984) is segmented into three sections comprising thirty-eight poems, "rising voice" – "voices in dialogue and banter", "voices about coming and going", "voices of anger and indictment" and – "closing". In this collection of poems, Osundare's major concern is the socio-economic predicament of the rural dwellers and the toiling farmers. The poet addresses and analyzes the unpleasant realities that directly or indirectly affect the oppressed and the distressed in the Nigerian society. Osundare is able to address and analyze this injustice by translating, mediating and transmuting the traditional oral aesthetics of his people, the Yoruba people. For anyone who has an acquaintance with Osundare's poetry, the reader will notice the awesome deployment of nature and traditional Yoruba orature to construct social vision. To this end, *Village Voices* demonstrates the poet returning to his roots and the deployment of nature so as to champion social equality and to canvass the masses for revolutionary change. Abdu (2003:145) posits that it is worthy to note that:

The persona of all the poems assumes the voice and world-view of the villager, that eternal butt of city jokes. The villager's simplicity and modesty, which endow him with an exceptional ability to live a celebratory life as well as withstand so many years of exploitation and neglect from the powers that govern him, are the things from which Osundare draws inspiration and which he celebrates in the poems.

Abdu (2003:146) further observes that it is from the villager's perception that Osundare critically assesses the current trends in Africa's modern experiences. The Villager is over and over again taken for granted for the fact that he is unlettered and depends solely on natural resources to fend for himself. The Villager is constantly relegated to the past despite the substantiation provided by years of scholarly studies that the oral culture is more multifaceted than, and is even seminal to, the culture of the script. The poet's deployment of African oral traditions to enhance his poems is meant to mobilize the peasants, the masses and the have-nots to desire for and work for social transformation. At this point, it is pertinent to mention that these African oral traditions which are undermined and considered irrelevant by some sentimental critics are really important. Bodunde (2003:274) buttresses the functionality and importance of African oral traditions by stating:

Needless to say, oral forms have their own existence and they serve various functions within the culture. They are used in written literature to perform similar social purposes. The act of correlating the artistic and social functions of oral genres with creative possibilities in written poetry for instance makes sense because these forms have succeeded through ages in conditioning valuable means of cognizing and humanizing society.

Fraser (1986:314) added an insightful remark on the important use of oral traditions by the 'new African poets' by stating that the positive result of these developments is that they (the

poets) thrust the oral transmission of verse, hitherto regarded chiefly as a standby, into the limelight, and, hence, provided a much needed rethinking of the way in which highbrow art could learn from oral tradition. This is the reason for the use of diction derived from African oral traditions and oral performances by Osundare and his cohorts.

Futhermore, *Village Voices* notes Osundare's repugnance to the persistent atmosphere of state of terror and suppression around him. The collection is also dedicated to his father who was a farmer, a singer and a drummer. Osundare's father is an epitome of the African peasant who struggles to sustain himself amidst the bitter realities of life. In addition, the collection reflects the poet's background in rural Ikere-Ekiti, where he grew up, and this is what accounts for his exploration of the rich store of rural life as his material for art and poetic modus operandi. Jeyifo (1988:319) remarks that, "the poet celebrates the rural communities as sturdy producers, witty raconteurs, singers, jesters, satirist, which are all latent kernels of the performing.

"Voices in Dialogue and Banter" is the first episode of performance of the three sections of *Village Voices* and contains fourteen poems. In all these poems, Osundare expresses his anger against corruption, tyranny, exploitation and marginalization. In constructing purposeful coherent mode to express his poetic vision and ideas, Osundare explores poetry as a form of dialogue, conversation and as an interactive discourse which involves communicative exchange and social interaction between imaginative characters for the purpose of sharing information. In effect, the use of dialogue technique by Osundare (with his imaginary opponents) could be said to embody and project certain patterns and strategies of interaction. This is observable in that the language format is structured in the form of conversation which is a replica of African oral poetic performance. Examples of poetic performances that entail dialogue are the dialogue among *Ijala* poets in the forest and the interpretation of ritual dance among traditional festival audience during an audience- performer dialogue in *Dadakuada*. Witticism, humor and satire are three elements Osundare exploits in "Voices in Dialogue and Banter" as a means of social and communicative exchange in which he implicitly expressed the status and rights of the peasants and also the obligation of the leaders, politicians and elites.

Reading through Osundare's poems, one notices his use of wide range of available patterns of orality which have rejuvenated the contemporary Nigerian poetry. In this regard,, Ohaeto (2003:39) states:

It is his creative capability and the innovative presentation of his works that accounts for the success of his poetry. He is clearly a writer whose works exhibit not only his achievements but also the collective poetic highpoints of his generation poets. The interesting use of language, the employment of appropriate devices, the harnessing of traditional and cosmopolitan ideas and features and relevant thematic preoccupations combine to make his poetry the encapsulation of a succinct statement by a generation of Nigerian poets.

Moreover, in "Dialogue of the Drums" Osundare applies dexterity in adopting images and symbols to symbolize his ideas. The poem is a about the dialogue between two drummer-singers; one is aligned to the community, hence an ordinary and independent performer, while the other drummer is aligned to and sings for the royalty in the palace. The ordinary

and independent drummer-singer represents the citizens in the community, while the royal drummer-singer represents the high and mighty and those who enrich themselves at the expense of the peasants. This symbolism is buttressed by the images of drums projected by the poet, *Bata*, *Omele*, *Gangan*, *Reso* which are used during child birth, *Ogele* used for the dead and the *Adan* a satirical drum which represents drums that stand for the poor, the masses and ordinary citizenry. The *Gbedu*, *Egiri* and *Ibembe* represent royal drums which represent the government, the rich and the elite. To this end, Osundare deploys the images of these drums, which are used during Yoruba traditional performances, in projecting his mission statement. The poet is not a lone ranger who fights injustice alone but takes along with him other members of the community in spreading his proletarian ideas. Vividly, the reader's eye captures a performance ambiance with voices of poet-singers, audience and the sound of drums. Osundare explores the traditional poet-in-dialogue form to delineate the nature of his aesthetics. He also distances himself from the palace singer whose drum is *dumb in the marketplace* (line 53) and whose royal song *extol those whose words/behead the world* lines (55-56).

Another prominent African oral poetic genre which features in "A Dialogue of the Drums" is the panegyric and abuse poetry which is confrontational in nature. Finnegan (1970:111) writes:

In its specialized form panegyric is the type of court poetry and one of the most developed and elaborate poetic genres in Africa. It seems to go with a particular ethos, a stress on royal or aristocratic power, and an admiration for military achievement. It is true that praises (including self-praises) also occur among non-centralized peoples, particularly those who lay stress on the significant of personal achievement in war or hunting, ... and also that the use of 'praise names' is nearly universal.

In line with the above quotation, the protagonist of "A Dialogue of the Drums" praises his achievements and boasts his ability to sing to the world and takes pride in being the people's poet. Of the two drummers, the protagonist feels superior because he does not support the oppressing forces of the society. Osundare writes:

When I raise my voice  
the world will be my chorus  
I, owner of the throat for pleasing songs,  
and hands sculptured  
for the talkative face of the drum  
but there are some people I know  
people whose name I will not mention  
whose hippo hands slap the drum  
like a slap of flabby flesh  
flogging mere noise from  
its tuneful belly (p.5)

The protagonist is so confident in his profession that he accuses his opponent of misplaced priorities by *flogging mere noise* from the drum. With respect to the abuse poetry, Osundare is able to transpose the Yoruba traditional 'Song of Abuse' in his poetry. In the traditional

Nigerian society, it is understood that power could construct or destroy. This is in appreciation of the fact that in a state of exercising power and authority rulers may want to abuse their power. Satirists in the society check and balance power that is in the hands of the ruling class or anyone in a position of authority. In this case, the people's poet, who is an independent one, satirizes and accuses the palace poet of only praising and glorifying the high and mighty without singing the gory tales of those they are governing. Osundare writes:

You, singer of royal songs  
your drum, dumb in the marketplace,  
only talks in the palace of gold  
your song extols those whose words  
behead the world (p.7)

The protagonist further cautions the palace poet to be on his guard because he has outworn relevance in the community. Symbolized in appalling metaphors as 'woman's opoo', 'eunuch' and 'vultures, the palace poet is satirized as a predator who lives and encourages rulers to become dictators.

Africans are known for celebration of life, for this reason, the poet defines his origin in the tradition of music and dance, the song and drum. This is what is reflected in the following:

I hail from a line of drummers  
And understand perfectly  
The language of the leather (p.6)

The oral poet is also known for his bluntness. As a result, it makes sense only when the poets are employed to tell the truth; *the fangs of fact* (line 62) must be told whenever a leader contravenes his boundary.

When the target of a proverb  
Feigns the ignorance of an alien  
Tell him to chide the cowardice  
Of his hands (p.5)

The above proverb is the answer given to the people's poet by the palace poet, even though the independent poet did not mention names, the palace poet knew he is the target of abuse. The provocations are enough to spur the palace poet to respond in a way that he is no stranger in the art of using words without physical violence. Other proverbs that abound in this poem include: '*Excessive feasting on the jungle hunt*', '*Let runners of accusing songs/ Put legs in their words*', '*You have reached the neck of the palm/ You may soon find the earth cradling your broken head*' and '*Let him die of thirst /Who thinks my fish should not find a river/ Broad enough to suit its fins*. The proverbs explored by Osundare are to give impact to the subject matter at hand. Reading through the poem one is bound to come across simile, personification and metaphors which conjure images in the mind's eye. Examples are: '*Whose hippo hand slap the drum/ Like a slab of flabby flesh*', '*Omele which carries a high-pitched face/ Round like a moon caught/ In the wakeful ambush of the second cock*', '*I will sing my song the way that pleases/The ear of my heart*', '*And my hands on the face of drum*' and '*Your drum, dumb in the market place,/only talks in the palace of gold.*'

The postcolonial issues in 'A Dialogue of the Drums' foregrounded by the characters in the poem captures the different types of personalities and nuances in attitude that can be found in

the societal system. One of the characters is seen expressing his desire to be committed to the masses and is against the moral stance and decorum of the people at the helm of affairs and those who support them (the palace poet). The people's poet accuses the palace poet of not being in tune with the plight and predicament of the larger society but is involved in *frequenting miserable ceremonies/ like Vultures bald as/the drums we beat* (lines 84-86) The people's poet further says *I will not only give legs to my coiling words/I will also give them the fangs of fact* (lines 61-62). In other words, the beating of his drums only makes references to facts. The ordinary drummer, who represents the citizenry, goes ahead to ask the palace drummer:

When last did your hands touch the *reso*  
which celebrates the coming of a newborn,  
*Ogbele* which warns the grave of the dead one  
where were you *adan* filled the night  
with the shame of Akpeloko  
who proved too sharp with the neighbor's yam? (p.7)

The people's poet properly responded to the questions he was asked for he knows where the palace poet belongs to. The royal poet is at the palace running errands that are worthless to the community:

You were at the palace, running endless errands  
like a shuttle in the loom  
your eunuch drum a dumb stool  
for harem buttocks (p.7)

The royal poet on the other hand brags that *reso* is not wide enough for his hands and his *fish fin* is too broad for the river (*reso* drum). He further adds that he who thinks he won't find a river wide enough for his fins, *let him die of thirst* (line 88). The people's poet replied sarcastically by saying:

Listen palace singer, listen royally  
Your fish will come belly up someday  
Its underside beamed at the laughing sun  
Those whose relatives thrive on leftovers  
Should not mourn when crushed (p.8)

Though the ordinary drummer may belong to the lower class, he will not be crushed when another government takes over for he is for the people. The ordinary drummer tells the royal drummer that a day will come when his song will have no chorus and his drum will be mute, and this will happen when corruption, mismanagement and rot of the government are eventually conquered. Another royal singer takes his position while *the people always outlast the place* (line 106). The last line of the poem implies that governments come and go, but people remain, consequently, when there is a change of government, the royal drummers are replaced. The independent drummer is constant and remains just as the people remain. From a wider perspective, this poem is an advocacy that artists should be socially committed to the yearnings and aspirations of the common man and not to blow trumpets or fraternize with tyrants and dictators in the society. In line with Osundare's vision of social commitment and the task of redressing the retrogressive situation in Nigeria,

The song of abuse which features in "A Dialogue of the Drums" extends to 'Not in my Season of Songs'. In fact this time around, the language is more abusive and vehement..The

abuse in the character's monologue is detected in his use of proverbs. Thus, in this poem, meaning depends strongly on the creative deployment of images and icons borrowed from the oral arts. The poem begins with a proverb:

*Sigid* thirsty for a dance of shame  
 craves a festival in the rain  
 bees hum peacefully in a fallowing farm  
 a restless boy punctures their hive  
 with a crooked stick (p.9)

The character alleges to have been goaded into a fight in which the opponent cannot win. The opponent is just being stupid and ignorant just like *Sigidi*, whose last safe place is the rain. *Sigidi* is a statue in Yoruba built of mud. The character further likens the foolishness of the opponent to a boy who punctures the hive of peaceful bees with a crooked stick which means inviting trouble. Metaphorically, the character's mouth is described as the beehive of abusive songs. In the second stanza of the poem, the persona in the poem assures his opponent more painful stings of abuses in his song and his song will never be out of season. This implies that whenever the government goes wrong, committed writers with a socialist vision are always around to criticize and call for a social change.

The third stanza presents the abusive and distorted images of the opponent and his parents as described by the angry persona; this is done through the use of simile and metaphor.

Yes, I would have told you  
 about your swollen testicles  
 which crook your legs  
 like miserable bows  
 and your lips thick like hippo skin;  
 about the elephant legs of your mother  
 and your father whose head  
 rivals a buffalo's own (p.9)

The last three stanzas are prosaic; this is one of the characteristics of Yoruba traditional oral performance. The poet persona, more or less, heaps abuses on the opponent's father and kinsmen who work for the colonial administration or government for their selfish interest which goads the masses into gruesome hardships:

Your father, the D.O's shit carrier  
 who hounded kinsmen as tax debtors  
 and drafted people into force labor  
 for the crumbs of the white man's bread (p.9)

Other despicable acts the opponent and his family are accused of collecting bribe and exhortation of money from peasant farmers. The poem ends with the proverbs:

He whose forehead is  
 twins with a hanging cliff  
 let him not peer into other people's faults  
 the squirrel has lived its fame for excess  
 it has put the penis below the scrotum.(p.10)

The meaning of the Yoruba proverbs above is that one should always let sleeping dogs lie, for when you wake them up, you might not know what the outcome could be. In other words, the opponent in the poem started a fight he could not finish which leads to the spreading of his dirty linen in the public.

‘Not in my Season of Songs’ is a biting satirical song which exposes the atrocities committed by corrupt colonialists, politicians, the rich who exploit the peasants and the elite. Through the use of emphatic idiomatic expressions, proverbs and metaphors, Osundare raises the social consciousness of the peasants to revolt against those who commit atrocities at the expense of the larger community. The voice of the villager, as deployed by Osundare, decries the atrocities committed by the colonialists which also continued after colonialism. The theme of exploitation can be vividly seen in the D.O’s image, the Produce Buyer (who is fattened by the ugly money he forces out of the oppressed) and the sanitary inspector *who can extract bribe from a corpse* (line 33) Osundare in this poem succeeded in criticizing the socio-political realities of the Nigerian society.

“Sleeping, at Five and Twenty” reflects a typical village dialogue and banter. In essence, the sarcastic voice of the persona is that of a hypothetical and scornful brother who reprimands his good for nothing younger brother. Osundare alludes the above scenario with the retrogressive and stagnant nature of Nigeria as a nation at Twenty Five. At the date of the publication of the poetry collection by Osundare, Nigeria as a nation had just clocked twenty five years of independence and had nothing to show for it. The bone of contention for Osundare is, any nation at twenty five should have been focused and independent not only in name but by conscience and substance. The poet persona says:

At five and twenty  
there you are  
still sleeping and snoring  
snoring and sleeping  
while the sun burns your youth away  
at five and twenty  
there you are no farms no barns  
no wives no children  
visiting relatives only  
when the pestle is fighting the mortar (p.11)

*There you are no farms no barns/no wives no children* signifies how impoverished Nigeria is. This is because in the African tradition, the number of farms, barns, wives and children one has in the traditional community signifies how wealthy one is. The last two lines of the above stanza reflect a nation which always borrows and keeps *visiting relatives only/ when the pestle is fighting the mortar*. In the third stanza, Osundare’s criticism on the state of the Nigerian nation seems to be biting because its peers are very successful and progressive as they do not exhibit the parasitic, lethargic and decayed conscience characterized by Nigeria:

At five at twenty  
there you are  
living each day  
till the sun goes down  
behind the trees

you will never hit the whizzzzzz  
when the world races past your sleeping ears (p.11-12)

In relation to the above stanza, Nigeria's daily habit as the giant of Africa, is *sleeping and snoring/ snoring and sleeping*, and when not sleeping *living eachday/ till the sun goes down/ behind the trees*. At twenty five, the country is still retarded in its growth and development and is not even ready to match up with the fast changing world. Hence, *you will never hit the whizzzzzz/ when the world races past your sleeping ears*.

The images of wretchedness and impotence also abound in the poem. For instance, the *heavy gourdlets* has become a *limp stump* which is a subject of laughter for the girls in the village:

Heavy gourdlets swing between your legs  
maidens tease your limp stump  
taking a dip in the village stream (p.11)

Other images and symbols include 'Wooden body', which signifies being dormant without having the principle of productive philosophy and progressive liberated mind. To this end, this poem serves as a reminder and a clarion call against indolence and the embezzlement of the national treasury by the people in the government. The poem emphasizes that the focus of the government should be on nation building. To comment on the setting of the poem, it indicates that Nigeria is an agrarian society. This we clearly see in his use of 'wives', 'children', 'relatives' 'farms', barns', village square' and 'village stream.' Significantly too, it indicates the socio-economic values of the poet –persona's society, its close knit community and the ensuing commonality there from. The above indicates Nigeria's abundant human resources and vast land on which the country can engage in an agrarian economy. The abundant land and human resources are just a waste as they are not properly exploited to their full capacity. The last stanza says:

We say a child is foolish  
his mother says 'As long as he doesn't die'  
what death kills a child faster  
than arrant folly? (12)

The above stanza indicates that when a child's discipline is questionable, the parents and elders reprimand and guide the child to grow and be a responsible adult. The child in question is metaphorically the Nigerian nation, and the parents refer to the elders of the country. The elders of the nation in question seem to be contented with the situation and resolve to do nothing, as long as the nation can slowly drag itself. But Osundare's belief is that the retrogressive nation will only keep on weakening and finally deteriorate to a condition whereby the nation cannot be salvaged. At this point, it is disheartening to know that after three decades of publishing *Village Voices*, Nigeria is still a far cry from what it is supposed to be. Balogun (2017:15) portrays the nature of Nigeria's development in the following way:

Since Nigeria got her independence from Britain, it seems Nigeria has not got it right. Even the first republic, which appeared better, was not without problem, the military struck. We had the military interregnum that affected the development of our democracy, there are myriad of problems militating against the economic development of this beleaguered

nation. It is disheartening that Nigeria is 57 years old and we are still in the woods. The aphorism ‘A fool at forty is a fool forever’, can be applied to us as a sovereign nation.

In other words, Nigeria as a nation is blessed with enormous human and material resources, but it has nothing to show for it. Nigeria is battling with selfish leaders who fight and cling to power for personal aggrandizement. Corruption, religious and ethnic divide are other militating factors. Agriculture is abandoned and Nigeria fails to develop other sectors like mining.

As always, Osundare reveals his socialist ideas through drawing on the oral tradition of his agrarian roots. Hence, using songs, stories and rituals of his tradition, as well as the cultural forms, tones and mood, he devises a model that makes his verse accessible to the distressed people in the Nigerian society, who are victims of self-serving economic and political leadership. In this regard, “Killing without a Sword” is a caricature of the undertone of independence without self-reliance. The title of the poem is being repeated at the last stanza to reiterate the significance of the message. The title of the poem is a proverb which provides for Osundare the basic crux of his poem. Osundare warns the nation against adopting colonialist economic policies which only dwindle and stampede economic growth rather than aiding the nation’s economic environment. The poem is rendered in three anecdotal fables as an illustration of the message. The poem is a dialogue of two friends in which one of the friends ask the other for favor and for every favor the friend gets extra, thus:

My friend asked for pounded yam  
I gave him pounded yam  
with *egusi* soup whose taste  
stuck the tongue to the palate

My friend asked for cloths  
I fleeced the loom of bales  
he spreads out in *sanyan*  
*alabangada* adorns his head (p.13)

Osundare satirizes the ‘righteous’ connotation of giving which impoverishes the mindset of the receiver. Many African countries got their independence without knowing how to nurture and sustain Africa in line with its socio-economic, political and cultural realities. The image presented by Osundare is that of ‘enslavement’ in the connection between the colonized and the colonizer. The colonized always depend on their colonizers and model their socio-economic and political plans after the colonizers without putting into cognizance their cultural differences. The poet’s sarcasm and source of concern is on how it is difficult to achieve any significant development without giving priority to the African socio-economic, political and cultural situation. The third and fourth stanzas describe how the protagonist is stretched to do what is not to his favor:

Now my friend ask me  
to give him the moon  
I perch on my toe  
and stretched my rubber body  
but my hands never reach the sky (p.13)

In the fourth stanza, the protagonist intones that applying heartbreaking Western policies of socio-economic and political measures is not to Africa's favor and is counterproductive. This is what is made vivid below:

Our worst enemy is he  
who sends us to pluck  
a fruit deliciously beyond our reach (p.13)

As always, Osundare's poems are full of images and figurative language drawn from the repertoire of Yoruba rhetorical resources.

Folktales, fables and allegory in traditional societies are used to comment on human affairs, either for corrections, reprimanding or to praise commonly accepted experiences of life. To this end, Osundare uses oral sources in a captivating way to reflect his socialist vision. A case in point is the "Chicken Story", the story smacks of deception from a seemingly true psychological make-up, in the projection of the alibi to suggest the incapability of performing a certain task that appears to be obvious. Thus, the chicken cannot eat pebbles and swallow sand with its toothless mouth. The chicken story of incapacitation may elicit empathy. The proverbial tale warns the chicken for its pretentiousness; one wonders how the metaphoric character could do what is beyond its capability. In this regard, the message of the poem is for the Nigerian community and humanity at large. The twentieth century experienced a great boast in industrialization. Consequently, the third world countries felt marginalized and disadvantaged. Accordingly, Abdu (2003:167) postulates that the countries, therefore, demanded compensation, equitable trade terms and humanitarian aids from the industrialized world. Yet the chicken, even with all the compensation and equitable terms of trade, cannot match the prowess of the industrialized countries. Osundare posits in the form of a proverb:

Let the ear sift  
what the mouth says  
the mill inside all men  
do not grind with equal force (p.14)

As a word of caution, Osundare warns the third world countries on the need of applying wisdom in taking decisions because each and every individual (country) has his own level of capacity and ability.

For Osundare, proverbs are vital and he uses them to effectively articulate his vision. Thus, the villager, in "A villager's Protest", oozes torrents of proverbs to register his anger and anguish against corrupt politicians.

*Esuru* grows swollen-headed  
and outgrows the prestigious belly  
of the mortar  
the wasp power-stung  
enters a race of waists (p.48)

Osundare describes the politicians as bigots. Thus, he appropriates them with the *Esuru* and the wasp in Yoruba folklore. The *Esuru* yam, even though soft, loose, tasty and impossible to pound in the mortar, just like the cunning politician, has no other place to go but be in the

community. Accordingly, the yam ends up pounded and eaten despite it being slippery. Also, the wasp with its tiny waist and its decision to involve itself in a *race of waists*, the poet attests to the politicians' defeat during the re-election process.

Men of deep unwisdom  
 knowing not that  
 power is the bird of the forest  
 which nests on one tree today  
 and tomorrow pitches its tent  
 on another (p.48)

The poet, using the above proverb, indicates that no condition is permanent; power is compared to the bird's nest, which is built constantly, often from one tree to another.

Another rain will fall  
 (its clouds already gathering)  
 and the distant wayfarer  
 will come seeking shelter  
 in huts long neglected (p.48)

Lastly, the politicians' destiny is seen in the hands of the electorate who will reject them for being deceitful. In the poem, just as in the tradition of folktales which ends with moral ethos, there is the notion of instability in power and the notion of keeping to promises as moral lessons. Metaphoric statements include: *they come more times/ than the eye bats its lid* (lines 1-2). This refers to the incessant visits of the politicians to villages with the purpose of soliciting votes. The expression *power is the bird of the forest* (line 53) implies that power can be yours today, and tomorrow it can be in possession of another person.

Even democracy/politics has to be saved from Nigerian politicians. The Nigerian politician, though full of resourcefulness, is deficient in the basic requirement of good character. He pays lip service to democracy and at the slightest opportunity jumps into bed illicitly with the enemies of democracy as long as he will enjoy the national cake. The Nigerian political class is aberrant and totally opportunistic. The only thing consistent about the Nigerian politician is his inconsistency and deceit. This is the painted image of the Nigerian politician in Osundare's "The Politician's Two Mouths". The overriding theme of the poem is deceit; the deceit and double talk. This is what is illustrated below:

The politician's mouth has two edges  
 like *Esimuda*'s sword  
 it is murder both ways  
 .....  
 when the man of power  
 tells you his tale  
 ask him to wait till  
 you bring a sieve (57)

This indicates that most of Nigerian politicians are fraudsters. One sees the image of a dishonest politician who lures the unsuspecting peasants and masses to vote him into power with never-to-be fulfilled campaign promises. Accordingly, the persona portrays the political realities in Nigeria. Other themes include that of oppression, economic exploitation, and

breach of trust, self-aggrandizement, and political apathy. The persona, in direct reference to the power mongers, paints the permeating mood of deceit and ingratitude:

Whoever believes what the politician says  
His ear is blocked by the carcass of truth

A politician tells you to wait  
And you heed his words  
Ah! Friend,  
Your soul will tell you  
The biting pains of folly (p.57)

Therefore, the persona describes the deceitful politicians as ‘snakes’, ‘hungry dogs’ and ‘lying wolves’ because you will have to wait for their promises till *your soul will tell you/ the biting pains of folly* (lines 20-21). Osundare makes no bones about his stance as a social advocate who is doubtful of the Nigerian politicians. He consolidates his written words with remarks in public appearances, justifying the writer’s task as a commentator on socio-economic and political issues. In an interview with Poetry International Web, November, 2002, Osundare was quoted saying:

You cannot keep quiet about the situation in the kind of countries we find ourselves in Africa. When you wake up and there is no running water, when you have a massive power outage for days and nights, no food on the table, no hospital for the sick, no peace of mind; when the image of the ruler you see everywhere is that of a dictator with gun in his hand...then there is no other way than write about this, in an attempt to change the situation for the better.

Osundare uninterruptedly depicts the peasants as serial victims of avaricious self-serving politicians, whose nature is virtually and simultaneously revealed in every line of the poem.

As usual, recourse to oral tradition and its proverbial lore by Osundare is always envisioned in his poems. One views the politician’s mouth as double edged as the sword of the legendary Ikere warrior so as to describe how deceitful politicians can be and to implicate political fraud. The proverb, *alas! a thin membrane covers the belly/we cannot see the inside of a lying wolf* (lines 10-11) is suggestive of the different attitudes concealed in the politicians mind, thus, it becomes difficult to unveil what lies inside them by mere looking and this should invite the peasant’s watchfulness and scrutiny to detect deception. Imagery is a dominant device in traditional oral poetry. Osundare is able to generate mental pictures which augment the aesthetic quality of the poem and minimize complexities. These include: *Esimuda’s sword*, a hungry dog, a lying wolf, snake, a sieve and white man’s razor. Figures of speech used by Osundare include simile: *The politician’s mouth has two edges/ like Esimuda’s sword* (lines 1-2), *the mind squats like a hungry dog* (line 8) metaphor, *we cannot see the inside of a lying wolf* (line 10) sarcasm; *he prostrates for votes*(line 7), rhetorical question *who sees a snake and hails an earthworm?* (lines 1-6) Personification *your soul will tell you /the biting pains of folly* (lines 20-21). Other devices include alliteration, repetition, rhyme and rhythm to yoke oral poetic effects with musicality in the poem.

## Conclusion

Osundare's *Village Voices* effectively depicts the ineptitude of Nigerian leaders, plight of the poor and how class inequality deprives them of the essentialities of life. Osundare is able to achieve this through his mastery of Yoruba culture and oral tradition. To this end, Sesan posits (2017:7-8):

Osundare has been able to blend traditionalism with modernism in his poetry. Osundare's poetic language not only includes a large vocabulary related to rural-agrarian culture and natural phenomenon, but also a number of proverbs and metaphors taken from African .... traditions.

In effect, Osundare's poems makes a commentary on the Nigerian leadership and reflects his anger against social injustice made visible by the images of poverty and deprivation. This is why the need for social, political and economic reconstruction of the society is emphasized by the poet. All these he achieves through Yoruba poetic tradition and verbal wit.

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**AN ANALYSIS OF STRUCTURAL METAPHORS IN KABIRU MUSA JAMMAJE'S  
*THERE IS A WAY***

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**Abstract**

*This paper analyses the structural metaphors in the film *There is a Way*, directed by Kabiru Musa Jammaje. Rooted in Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) as propounded by Lakoff and Johnson (1980), the research investigates how abstract domains of human experiences are structured through concrete source domains. Using a qualitative research design and purposive sampling, the study extracted and analyzed 8 metaphorical expressions from the film's dialogue. The focus is specifically on structural metaphors, which provide a framework for understanding complex abstract concepts like education and life events. The study reveals that these metaphors are central to constructing narrative meaning. Specifically, the analysis demonstrates how the film uses the EDUCATION IS A JOURNEY mapping to contrast moral integrity with corruption. The study concludes that cinematic language in Northern Nigerian cinema serves as a powerful medium for reflecting social realities, proving that metaphors are not just figures of speech, but "figures of thought"*

**Keywords:** Structural Metaphors, Conceptual Metaphor Theory, Cognitive Semantics, Source Domain, Target Domain

**1. Background to the Study**

The study of how humans understand and communicate about the world is key to fields like philosophy, rhetoric, linguistics, and cognitive science. A key element in this process is metaphor, which allows the mind to structure abstract ideas based on concrete experience. Metaphors were traditionally committed to the realm of aesthetics; classical rhetoric viewed them primarily as rhetorical devices, embellishments to language used to persuade, ornament speech, or evoke emotion. For instance, Blair (1783, as cited in Hatch, 1998) define metaphor as a Figure of Speech, by which the name of one object is transferred to another, for the sake of ornament, or to give new force to the expression. This view, heavily influenced by traditional linguistic approaches like structuralism (Saussure, 1959) and logical positivism (Ayer, 1936), while acknowledging the power of metaphor as a fancy way of speaking, fails to recognize its deeper cognitive significance. Metaphors were seen as deviations from the norm; interesting, but ultimately secondary to the true meaning conveyed by literal language.

The seminal work of Lakoff and Johnson revolutionized the field of linguistics and had a profound impact on related disciplines like psychology, philosophy, and cognitive science. It provided a framework for understanding how metaphors shape our thought processes, influence our behavior, and even structure our cultural understanding of the world. Indeed, Lakoff and Johnson (1980) argue that, 'Metaphor is pervasive in everyday life, not just in language but in thought and action. Our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature. Instead of being seen as merely decorative, metaphors are now recognized as essential tools for conceptualizing and communicating complex ideas. They are not just figures of speech; they are figures of thought.'

This research is inspired by the growing recognition that this cognitive model of meaning-making applies not only to language but also to multimodal narratives, particularly film. Film, as a powerful visual and narrative medium, provides a fertile ground for the expression, elaboration, and manipulation of conceptual metaphors through dialogue, imagery, characters' actions, and narrative structure. As Bordwell and Thompson (1990) suggest, film constitutes a way of seeing, shaping, and understanding the world, often by activating and reinforcing culturally shared conceptual metaphors.

This study therefore undertakes an analysis of structural metaphors in the film, "There is a way", directed by Kabiru Musa Jammaje. By applying the theoretical tools of Cognitive Semantics, this research aims to find out the specific conceptual mappings operating within the film. Furthermore, the study seeks to demonstrate the value of cognitive semantic analysis as a tool for interpreting film and understanding its complex relationship with human cognition.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.0 Conceptual Metaphor**

Metaphor is part of our lives and language more than we would like to think of it superficially. According to Baduleteanu (2019), it is the very essence of the way people come to know the world and interact with it in their daily lives, as it is at the heart of the processes through which we build our conceptual representations and transfer them into language. An individual creates a conceptual mapping between the properties of the source and the target, thereby gaining a new understanding about the target (Forišek and Steinová, 2012). The human conceptual system, which is largely metaphoric, plays a central role in defining everyday realities, and what humans do every day is very much a matter of metaphor (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980).

A conceptual metaphor consists of two domains: the source domain and the target domain. The source domain is a concrete, familiar concept (e.g., JOURNEY, WAR, BUILDING), while the target domain is an abstract, less-structured concept (e.g., LIFE, ARGUMENT, THEORIES). The conceptual metaphor is the mapping from the source domain to the target domain, allowing us to structure our understanding of the abstract target in terms of the concrete source. For instance, the conceptual metaphor ARGUMENT IS WAR maps concepts from the source domain of WAR (e.g., winning, losing, attacking, defending) onto the target domain of ARGUMENT. This mapping gives rise to linguistic expressions like "Your claims are indefensible," "He shot down my argument," and "I won the debate" (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980).

### **2.1 Structural Metaphors**

Structural metaphors allow a highly structured and concrete source domain to provide a rich framework for an abstract target domain. The ARGUMENT IS WAR metaphor is a prime example. The conceptual structure of war (two opponents, attack/defense strategies, winning/losing) provides a framework for understanding arguments. Without this structure, an argument would be a disorganized set of verbal exchanges with no clear goal (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980).

### **2.2 Review of Empirical Studies**

Babura (2024) conducts a cognitive semantic study of Aliyu Kamal's novels, using Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) to analyze over 100 metaphorical expressions. The study categorizes these into structural, ontological, and orientational types, demonstrating how abstract concepts like love and social status are mapped onto concrete domains. Babura finds that Kamal's metaphors are cognitive tools that bridge English linguistic structures with

Hausa conceptual systems. This research is foundational to the current study as it provides a methodological template for analyzing metaphors in "Nigerian English" texts and demonstrates how a writer's cultural background influences metaphorical choice in prose.

Abubakar(2024) explores ontological metaphors in the Hausa film series *Labarina*, focusing on how abstract entities such as emotions and social secrets are treated as physical objects. By analyzing dialogue, the study demonstrates how "container" and "entity" metaphors allow characters to negotiate complex social relationships and personal traumas. This work is highly significant as it offers a specific model for analyzing filmic dialogue in Northern Nigerian cinema. Specifically, Abubakar's focus on the "container" schema provides a useful lens for the current study's analysis of how Isham and Fadila conceptualize their social boundaries in *There is a Way*.

Sobola (2019) investigates conceptual metaphors in the Nollywood film *Elú kú Tràwò*, utilizing Lakoff and Johnson's CMT to show how one conceptual domain is understood in terms of another. The findings reveal that these metaphors are rooted in Yoruba cultural beliefs, proving that film is an effective tool for communicating culture through language. While both Sobola's study and the current work utilize CMT, they differ in linguistic setting: whereas Sobola focuses on a Yoruba-language film, the current study analyzes *There is a Way*, which is performed in English.

### **3. Theoretical Framework**

This study adopts Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), as primarily propounded by Lakoff and Johnson (1980) as a foundational framework for understanding the prevalent role of metaphor in everyday language, thought, and action. According to this theory, our daily experiences are fundamentally structured and understood through metaphorical processes (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980). The production and comprehension of metaphorical language are mediated by metaphorical correspondences that structure our mental representations of complex concepts (Ajidahun, 2018). At its core, a conceptual metaphor involves understanding one conceptual domain in terms of another conceptual domain (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980). Cognitive Metaphor Theory identifies two central conceptual domains:

- i. The source domain, which is a conceptual area from which metaphorical expressions are drawn and is typically more concrete or experientially grounded, and;
- ii. The target domain, which is the conceptual area that is intended to be understood or structured by the metaphor and is often more abstract.

The relationship between these two domains is established through conceptual mapping (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980; Kövecses, 2005). Typically, conceptual metaphors employ a more abstract concept as the target domain and a more concrete concept as the source domain, reflecting a general cognitive process of understanding the abstract in terms of the concrete (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980; Kövecses, 2005). However, it is also possible for both conceptual domains to involve concrete concepts, as may be observed in certain contexts (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980).

Cognitive Metaphor Theory asserts that metaphor is not merely a linguistic phenomenon; it is a fundamental mode of thought and representation (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980). In the cognitive linguistic view, a conceptual metaphor is such a set of correspondences that obtains between a source domain and a target domain, where metaphorical linguistic expressions (that is., linguistic metaphors) commonly make the conceptual metaphors (that is, metaphors in the mind) manifest (though there may be conceptual metaphors that have no linguistic metaphors to express them) (Kövecses,2005)

#### 4. Methodology

For the purpose of this study, a qualitative research design centered on textual analysis through a cognitive semantic lens is employed. This approach is necessitated by the research goal of interpreting the abstract conceptual mappings within the film's narrative rather than providing a quantitative frequency (Creswell, 2013). Data collection involved a multi-step procedure: an initial holistic viewing of the film to annotate thematic developments, followed by the systematic extraction of dialogue from key scenes. The paper focuses on a purposive sample of 9 structural metaphors (datum) that illustrate the cognitive mapping between source and target domains.

#### 5. Data Presentation and analyses

This section presents the analyses of the data collected from the film "There is a way", produced by Kabiru Musa Jammaje

##### 5.1 Structural Metaphors

###### Datum 1

"This is a shortcut to university."

(Source: Aminu speaking to Isham about 'Miracle Center')

Context: The character Aminu is attempting to persuade the protagonist, Isham, to register at a "Miracle Center" which is a corrupt examination venue where success is guaranteed through malpractice. Aminu describes this corrupt route as a "shortcut."

**Table 1: Conceptual Mapping of EDUCATION IS A JOURNEY**

S/N	Source Domain: JOURNEY	Target Domain: EDUCATION
i.	A physical path or road	The academic curriculum/process
ii.	A shortcut (a route that saves time)	Exam malpractice/Miracle Centers
iii.	A destination	University admission/Graduation
iv.	Movement/Walking	Studying/Effort
v.	Obstacles on the road	Exams/Academic challenges

###### Analysis:

The metaphorical expression in Datum 1 is a classic realization of the LIFE IS A JOURNEY schema, specifically narrowing down to EDUCATION IS A JOURNEY. In this instance, the abstract and complex process of gaining admission into the university is conceptualized as a physical journey. By employing the word "shortcut," Aminu maps the physical property of "shortened distance" onto the abstract domain of "academic effort." In the physical world, a shortcut is often viewed positively as a sign of efficiency and cleverness. However, in the moral landscape of the film, this structural metaphor reveals a significant cognitive shift in Aminu's worldview: he views education not as a transformative developmental process but merely as a destination to be reached by the path of least resistance. This metaphor sets up the central thematic conflict of the film between the "legitimate road" (hard work) and the "illegitimate path" (corruption), suggesting that the characters perceive moral integrity as a physical distance that must be traveled.

**Datum 2**

“We’ve already closed that chapter.”

(Source: *Isham speaking to Aminu*)

Context: When Aminu presses Isham to join the exam malpractice ring, Isham refuses vehemently and states that he has “closed that chapter,” indicating his refusal to discuss the topic any further.

**Table 2: Conceptual Mapping of LIFE EVENTS ARE A BOOK**

S/N	Source Domain: BOOK	Target Domain: LIFE EVENT
i.	A chapter	A specific period of time or topic
ii.	Closing the book	Ending the discussion/event
iii.	Reading/Writing	Experiencing/Discussing
iv.	Turning the page	Moving on to a new topic

**Analysis:**

In this datum, the abstract concept of a conversation or a period of decision-making is structured in terms of a BOOK. By stating he has “closed the chapter,” Isham utilizes the source domain of literature to conceptualize his life. Physically, when a chapter is closed, the narrative within it is paused or concluded, and the reader moves on. Isham maps this physical finality onto the abstract social interaction. This mapping allows the character to exert agency and control over the conversation; just as one has the physical power to stop reading a book, Isham asserts he has the cognitive power to stop engaging with a corrupt idea. The metaphor implies a total cessation of influence, suggesting that the topic is not just paused, but finished and shelved.

**Datum 3**

“When life throws you a lemon, make a lemonade.”

(Source: *Fadila comforting Isham*)

Context: Fadila tries to console Isham after he is unfairly expelled from the university due to the machinations of Dr. Bello. She uses this idiomatic metaphor to encourage resilience and adaptability.

**Table 3: Conceptual Mapping of LIFE IS A PROVIDER / EXPERIENCE IS FOOD**

S/N	Source Domain: FOOD/FRUIT	Target Domain: MISFORTUNE
i.	A Lemon (Sour fruit)	A negative event (Expulsion)
ii.	Throwing (Action)	Destiny/Fate happening to someone
iii.	Making Lemonade (Sweet drink)	Creating a positive outcome
iv.	Tasting/Consuming	Experiencing life

**Analysis:**

This is a complex structural metaphor that combines LIFE IS A PROVIDER with MISFORTUNE IS SOUR FRUIT. The “lemon,” universally known for its sour, acidic, and unpleasant taste, is mapped onto the “unpleasant experience” of expulsion and failure. The act of “making lemonade” maps onto the cognitive process of “transforming a negative situation into a positive outcome through effort and ingenuity.” This metaphor serves a crucial thematic function in the film, reinforcing the motif of resilience. It suggests that the character does not have control over what life “throws” (destiny), but has absolute control over what they “make” (reaction) from it. It structures Isham’s subsequent actions not as a passive acceptance of defeat, but as an active process of “cooking” or “preparing” a new destiny.

**Datum 4**

"You have met your match."

(Source: Aisha confronting Dr. Bello)

Context: Aisha confronts the corrupt lecturer, Dr. Bello, threatening to expose his dirty secrets if he does not pay her. She declares boldly that he has met his "match."

**Table 4: Conceptual Mapping of CONFLICT IS A SPORT/GAME**

S/N	Source Domain: SPORT	Target Domain: SOCIAL CONFLICT
i	A Match/Competition	A confrontation or argument
ii	An Opponent	An adversary (Dr. Bello)
iii	Equal Skill/Weight Class	Equal Leverage/Power
iv.	Winning/Losing	Dominating/Being exposed

**Analysis:**

This expression structures the social conflict between Aisha and Dr. Bello as a competitive SPORT or GAME. In physical sports like wrestling or boxing, opponents are often paired based on weight class or skill level to ensure a "fair match." By stating Dr. Bello has "met his match," Aisha metaphorically elevates her own status from "student" (subordinate) to "opponent" (equal). She implies that she possesses the "skills" (in this case, secrets and evidence) necessary to compete with him on a level playing field. This metaphor is cognitively significant because it challenges the rigid hierarchy of the university environment, signaling a shift in power dynamics where the student is no longer a victim but a player in the game.

**Datum 5**

"Don't beat around the bush."

(Source: Aminu to Isham)

Context: Aminu asks Isham to be direct about why he won't pay for the miracle center, suspecting Isham is evasive because of poverty rather than morality.

Table 5: Conceptual Mapping of COMMUNICATION IS HUNTING

S/N	Source Domain: HUNTING	Target Domain: COMMUNICATION
i.	The Bush	The superficial/irrelevant topic
ii.	Beating the bush (indirect action)	Speaking evasively
iii.	The Animal/Prey (hidden inside)	The Truth/Main Point
iv.	Capturing the prey	Getting to the point

**Analysis:**

This metaphor is derived from the domain of HUNTING. In the source domain, hunters would hire beaters to hit the bushes to flush out birds or animals without going directly into the thicket. In the target domain of communication, this maps onto "avoiding the main point." Aminu uses this metaphor to demand directness. It structures the conversation as a "hunt" for the truth, implying that Isham is hiding the "prey" (the real reason for his refusal) behind a thicket of moral excuses. The metaphor entails that the truth is something elusive that must be forced out into the open.

**Datum 6**

"A leopard cannot change its spots."

(Source: *El-Mahadi regarding Dr. Bello*)

Context: El-Mahadi meets his old friend Dr. Bello, who plays a prank on him with a fake snake. El-Mahadi comments on his friend's mischievous nature using this metaphor.

Table 6: Conceptual Mapping of CHARACTER IS BIOLOGY

S/N	Source Domain: ANIMAL BIOLOGY	Target Domain: HUMAN CHARACTER
i.	A Leopard	A person (Dr. Bello)
ii.	Spots (Permanent markings)	Inherent habits/nature
iii.	Biological inability to change	Psychological inability to change

**Analysis:**

This structural metaphor maps HUMAN CHARACTER onto ANIMAL BIOLOGY. The "spots" of a leopard are a permanent biological feature that cannot be altered or washed away. This is mapped onto Dr. Bello's "nature" or "habits." The metaphor suggests a deterministic view of human personality: that corrupt or tricky individuals (like Dr. Bello) have an inherent nature that education, time, or status cannot erase. It cognitively frames Dr. Bello not as a man who chooses to be mischievous, but as a man who is mischievous by nature, foreshadowing his inability to reform later in the film.

## Datum 7

"I'll teach this boy the lesson of his life."

(Source: Dr. Bello threatening Isham)

Context: After Isham leads a student protest against the sale of handouts, Dr. Bello vows revenge in his office.

Table 7: Conceptual Mapping of PUNISHMENT IS EDUCATION

Source Domain: EDUCATION   Target Domain: REVENGE/PUNISHMENT
Teacher   The Punisher (Dr. Bello)
Student   The Victim (Isham)
Lesson/Subject   Suffering/Regret
Learning   Experiencing Pain

### Analysis:

Here, PUNISHMENT is structured as EDUCATION. Dr. Bello, a teacher by profession, ironically uses the terminology of his job ("teach a lesson") to describe an act of vengeance. The "lesson" he intends to impart is not academic knowledge but suffering and regret. This mapping highlights the corruption of the educational system in the film, where teachers use their authority not to enlighten minds but to oppress dissenters. The cognitive implication is that the power dynamic of the classroom (teacher over student) is being weaponized for personal vendettas.

## 6. Findings of the Study

**i. Pervasiveness of CMT:** The research confirms that metaphors in the film are not merely decorative but are fundamental cognitive tools that map concrete experiences onto abstract social and moral concepts.

**ii. Structural Mappings:** Key abstract processes like education and life events are structured through concrete domains. For example, EDUCATION IS A JOURNEY allows the film to contrast a "legitimate road" (hard work) with a "shortcut" (malpractice).

**iii. Ontological Entity Treatment:** Abstract states are treated as physical substances to convey social value. Specifically, POVERTY IS A STAIN/DIRT ontologizes social status as a matter of hygiene, reflecting deep-seated class prejudices within the narrative.

**iv. Orientational Hierarchy:** The film utilizes spatial orientation to establish power dynamics. The STATUS IS UP and CONTROL IS UP metaphors physically place characters like Fadila and legal authorities "above" the protagonist, creating a spatial image of social stratification and suppression.

**V. Thematic Resilience:** The metaphor MISFORTUNE IS SOUR FRUIT (e.g., "making lemonade") illustrates the protagonist's cognitive shift from passive victimhood to active agency and resilience.

## 6. Conclusion

This study provided an analysis of structural metaphors in Kabiru Musa Jammaje's *There is a Way*, demonstrating that the film's dialogue is embedded in the Conceptual Metaphor Theory framework. By identifying and analyzing structural metaphors, the research shows that these linguistic expressions are "figures of thought" that shape the audience's understanding of morality, class, and education.

The findings highlight that metaphors serve as a bridge between cultural values and human cognition, allowing the film to communicate complex ideological messages through everyday

concepts. The analysis proves that cinematic language in Northern Nigerian cinema is a powerful medium for reflecting social realities, where moral integrity is conceptualized as a physical path and social status is a matter of vertical orientation.

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