

Socio-stylistic Variation in the Construction of Political Identity in Nigerian Newspaper Columns

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Abstract

This study investigates the stylistic and sociolinguistic variations in the construction of political identity in selected Nigerian newspaper opinion columns. It explores how columnists use language to project, negotiate, and contest political identities within the broader context of Nigeria's complex sociopolitical landscape. Drawing insights from the frameworks of Critical Stylistics and Sociolinguistic Variation Theory, the study examines linguistic choices, including lexical selection, modality, transitivity, code-switching, and register variation, as tools for identity construction and ideological positioning. Data are drawn from purposively selected opinion columns published between 2024 and 2025 across three major Nigerian newspapers: *The Punch*, *Vanguard*, and *The Guardian*. Through qualitative stylistic analysis complemented by sociolinguistic interpretation, the paper uncovers how political identities are linguistically crafted to appeal to ethnic, regional, and class affiliations. The findings reveal that stylistic variation serves not only as a marker of individual authorial style but also as a reflection of sociolinguistic realities embedded in Nigeria's pluralistic society. Moreover, the study demonstrates that stylistic features are strategically employed to sustain political persuasion, legitimise authority, and reinforce ideological alignments. The research contributes to the growing body of scholarship that bridges stylistics and sociolinguistics, offering deeper insights into how language use in the media shapes political consciousness and public opinion in Nigeria's democratic discourse.

Keywords: Socio-stylistics, Political Identity, Newspaper Discourse, Nigeria

Introduction

Language plays a central role in shaping political discourse and constructing identities within any given society. As a vehicle of social interaction, it does more than communicate ideas—it positions speakers and writers within ideological frameworks and social hierarchies (Fairclough, 1995; van Dijk, 2006). In

political communication, linguistic choices are rarely neutral; they reflect and reinforce the power dynamics that define the relationship between politicians, the media, and the public. This interconnection between language, power, and identity forms the basis for the exploration of stylistic and sociolinguistic variations in political

discourse. In contemporary Nigeria, newspaper opinion columns have emerged as vibrant platforms for political commentary and ideological expression. Through these columns, writers and journalists do not merely report political events—they frame them, offering interpretations that often reflect broader social and political identities (Odebunmi, 2015; Taiwo, 2007). The newspaper column thus serves as a site where language is strategically used to construct, contest, and project political identities, often along ethnic, regional, or class lines. Understanding the stylistic and sociolinguistic patterns in these texts provides insight into how language operates within Nigeria's polarised political environment.

Stylistics and sociolinguistics, though traditionally distinct disciplines, converge in their concern with meaning-making and the social functions of language. While stylistics focuses on how linguistic form contributes to interpretation and effect (Leech & Short, 2007), sociolinguistics examines how language varies according to social context, identity, and power (Holmes, 2013). The intersection of these two perspectives—often termed *socio-stylistics*—enables a more holistic understanding of how linguistic style serves as both an aesthetic and social resource in political communication (Jeffries, 2010; Simpson, 2014). Political identity in Nigeria is a multifaceted

construct, shaped by ethnic diversity, religious affiliation, and historical patterns of governance. These dimensions frequently find linguistic expression in media discourse, where writers use stylistic and sociolinguistic resources to align themselves with or against certain ideological positions (Alo & Igwebuike, 2019). For instance, the strategic use of pronouns, metaphors, and evaluative lexis often serves to distinguish political “us” from “them,” reinforcing social boundaries and partisan loyalties.

Previous studies on Nigerian media discourse have largely emphasised issues of ideology, representation, and framing (Adegoju, 2009; Oyeleye & Osisanwo, 2013). However, few have combined stylistic and sociolinguistic approaches to explore how identity is linguistically constructed through individual authorial choices and broader sociocultural variations. This study bridges that gap by examining how stylistic features interact with sociolinguistic variables—such as register, code choice, and audience orientation—to construct political identities in newspaper columns. The Nigerian press operates in a linguistically diverse society where English coexists with indigenous languages and multiple varieties of Nigerian English. This linguistic pluralism often manifests in newspaper discourse through code-switching, colloquial expressions, and stylistic blending (Bamgbose, 2018).

Such practices are not random; they signal identity, solidarity, and ideological stance. Analysing these stylistic and sociolinguistic variations offers a deeper understanding of how writers engage with readers' shared sociocultural experiences to enhance persuasion and credibility.

Stylistic devices such as transitivity patterns, modality, and evaluative language play crucial roles in shaping the reader's perception of political actors and events. For example, the use of active or passive constructions may either attribute responsibility or obscure agency, subtly influencing how political behaviour is interpreted (Simpson, 1993). Similarly, modality and metaphor often encode ideological positions, allowing writers to project authority, express certainty, or create distance (Jeffries, 2010). These stylistic choices are not merely grammatical; they are ideological tools that contribute to identity construction. From a sociolinguistic perspective, variation in language use reflects social positioning and group membership. Columnists adopt linguistic styles that resonate with the identities and expectations of their target readership (Labov, 2001; Bell, 2011). In a heterogeneous society like Nigeria, where regional and ethnic affiliations influence political orientation, linguistic variation in media discourse becomes a reflection of underlying sociopolitical realities. The

newspaper column thus serves as a microcosm of Nigeria's linguistic and ideological diversity.

The present study, therefore, investigates how stylistic and sociolinguistic variations interact in the construction of political identity in Nigerian newspaper columns. It examines how columnists linguistically construct authority, solidarity, opposition, and ideological alignment through stylistic manipulation of linguistic forms. By doing so, the research highlights how language mediates the negotiation of power, identity, and ideology in Nigeria's democratic space. Ultimately, this study contributes to the ongoing dialogue between stylistics and sociolinguistics by demonstrating their complementary roles in analysing political discourse. It underscores the importance of viewing stylistic variation as socially motivated and ideologically meaningful. Beyond its theoretical contribution, the research offers practical insights into how media language shapes political consciousness, influences public opinion, and sustains ideological divides in contemporary Nigeria.

Literature Review

The relationship between language, politics, and identity has been widely examined across linguistic disciplines, emphasising how language functions as a semiotic resource for constructing and projecting political identities

(Fairclough, 1995; van Dijk, 2006). The media serve as a central arena for such identity construction, where ideological meanings are negotiated and reproduced. While Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) highlights how linguistic choices reflect power and dominance (Wodak & Meyer, 2016), stylistic and sociolinguistic approaches extend this understanding by revealing how linguistic patterns and stylistic variations encode ideology and identity in more nuanced ways. Stylistics, traditionally rooted in literary studies, now encompasses political and media discourse (Leech & Short, 2007; Jeffries & McIntyre, 2010). It focuses on how linguistic forms—such as word choice, syntax, and rhetorical devices—creates meaning and ideological effect (Simpson, 2014). In political discourse, stylistic features like metaphor, modality, and transitivity reveal how writers persuade and position their audiences. Sociolinguistics, by contrast, explores language as a social phenomenon, showing how variation reflects class, gender, ethnicity, and power (Holmes, 2013; Labov, 2001; Wardhaugh & Fuller, 2015). Bell's (1984, 2011) Audience Design Model underscores how language use is audience-sensitive, meaning that writers adjust style to resonate with their readership—an especially relevant factor for newspaper columnists who target ideologically distinct audiences.

Recent scholarship bridges both traditions through socio-stylistics (Crystal & Davy, 1969; Jeffries, 2010), linking linguistic form to social meaning. This approach illuminates how stylistic features in political texts serve rhetorical, ideological, and identity-related purposes (Toolan, 2016). Through lexical selection, metaphor, and pronoun use, writers construct in-groups and out-groups, projecting solidarity or opposition (Chilton, 2004; Wodak, 2009; van Dijk, 2006). Thus, political identity is realised through linguistic representation, evaluation, and categorisation that position both writers and readers within ideological boundaries. In Nigeria, several studies have examined political discourse from stylistic and sociolinguistic perspectives. Taiwo (2007), Adegoju (2009), and Odebunmi (2015) identified linguistic strategies such as metaphor, repetition, and evaluative lexis in political texts, showing how they convey leadership ethos and ideological stance. However, few have combined stylistic and sociolinguistic approaches to analyse newspaper opinion columns—a hybrid genre that blends journalistic and literary styles. Columnists often deploy humour, satire, and local idioms to engage readers and express political critique (Alo & Igwebuike, 2019). Such texts thus offer rich data for exploring how stylistic creativity and linguistic variation function as tools for constructing

political identity. The multilingual nature of Nigerian English adds another dimension to political communication. Nigerian English, shaped by indigenous languages and cultural experiences, reflects sociocultural identity (Bamgbose, 2018; Jowitt, 2019; Gut & Igboanusi, 2019). Features like code-switching and local idioms serve as solidarity markers, enhancing authenticity and appeal. Moreover, stylistic tools such as transitivity, modality, and appraisal (Simpson, 1993; Jeffries, 2010; Martin & White, 2005) reveal how writers attribute agency, express stance, and construct evaluative meanings. Despite extensive scholarship, there remains a gap in integrating stylistic and sociolinguistic perspectives in analysing Nigerian political commentary. This study, therefore, fills that gap by examining how stylistic variation functions as a sociolinguistic marker of political identity and ideology within Nigeria's dynamic, multilingual media landscape.

Theoretical Framework

The present study is grounded in two complementary theoretical perspectives, Critical Stylistics (Jeffries, 2010) and Sociolinguistic Variation Theory (Labov, 2001; Bell, 2011), which together provide a multi dual framework for examining how language form and social context interact in the construction of political identity. While Critical

Stylistics explains the linguistic and ideological dimensions of discourse, Sociolinguistic Variation Theory focuses on the social and audience-oriented nature of linguistic choices. Integrating both frameworks allows for a holistic understanding of how newspaper columnists in Nigeria use language both aesthetically and politically. Critical Stylistics, advanced by Jeffries (2010), extends traditional stylistic analysis by foregrounding the ideological and power-related functions of language. It argues that texts are systematically constructed to reflect and reproduce particular worldviews, often serving political or ideological ends. Through linguistic tools such as naming, transitivity, presupposition, and modality, analysts can uncover how texts frame agency, authority, and responsibility (Jeffries & McIntyre, 2010). In political commentary, such features are instrumental in constructing political actors as credible or culpable, thereby influencing public perception. This framework, rooted in Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough, 1995; van Dijk, 2006), differs by focusing more closely on the textual and grammatical level of ideological expression. It thus offers a precise method for identifying how stylistic patterns in media discourse encode political stance. For instance, passive construction may obscure agency in reports of governance failures, while

modal verbs express varying degrees of certainty or authority (Simpson, 2014). Hence, Critical Stylistics provides the linguistic tools for uncovering how columnists naturalise political ideologies through stylistic manipulation.

Complementing this is Sociolinguistic Variation Theory, which investigates how linguistic variation correlates with social variables such as class, ethnicity, gender, and audience (Labov, 2001). Language is viewed as a dynamic resource that speakers and writers adapt according to social context, reflecting and constructing identity. In written discourse, these variations manifest in register shifts, code-switching, and lexical choices, signalling social belonging or ideological stance. Bell's (1984, 2011) Audience Design Model further explains that language style is influenced by perceived audience expectations, meaning that columnists may adjust their linguistic style to align with readers' political or cultural orientations. In Nigerian newspaper opinion columns, such stylistic and sociolinguistic variations reflect audience awareness and ideological positioning. Writers employ local idioms, Nigerian English expressions, and evaluative tones to signal solidarity or dissent (Bamgbose, 2018; Jowitt, 2019). While Critical Stylistics reveals *how* ideological meanings are encoded, Sociolinguistic Variation Theory explains *why* certain linguistic choices

are made—linking textual form to social identity. The combination of both frameworks, therefore, bridges micro-level textual analysis and macro-level social interpretation. Overall, the integration of Critical Stylistics and Sociolinguistic Variation Theory aligns with the constructivist view of identity (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005), which posits that identity is discursively constructed through language. Together, they illuminate how political columnists use language to perform, negotiate, and contest political identities within Nigeria's complex sociolinguistic landscape (Odebunmi, 2015; Alo & Igwebuike, 2019). This theoretical synergy allows the study to account for both the linguistic mechanisms and the social motivations underlying the stylistic and sociolinguistic construction of political identity in Nigerian newspaper discourse.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative, descriptive, and interpretive research design, appropriate for examining how stylistic and sociolinguistic choices contribute to the construction of political identity in Nigerian newspaper discourse (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The qualitative design aligns with the interpretive orientations of Critical Stylistics (Jeffries, 2010) and Sociolinguistic Variation Theory (Labov, 2001; Bell, 2011), both of which emphasise how linguistic forms interact with social and

ideological contexts to produce meaning. The data consist of forty-five opinion columns published between 2024 and 2025 in *The Punch*, *The Guardian*, and *Vanguard*. These newspapers were purposively selected for their national circulation, editorial diversity, and engagement with political commentary. Opinion columns were chosen because they blend personal style, ideological expression, and public persuasion (Taiwo, 2007). The sampling followed three main criteria: (i) each column must focus on political or governance issues, (ii) it must exhibit identifiable linguistic or stylistic variation, and (iii) it must hold national relevance (Odebunmi, 2015). This approach ensured a balanced representation of political discourse across ideological perspectives. The analysis integrates two frameworks. From Critical Stylistics, the study examines linguistic features such as transitivity, modality, naming, and presupposition to uncover how columnists represent political actors, encode agency, and express evaluative or ideological stances. From Sociolinguistic Variation Theory, the analysis focuses on register shifts, code-switching, and the use of Nigerian English, which index social positioning, audience design, and ideological orientation (Fairclough, 1995; Simpson, 2014). The research adhered strictly to ethical standards of academic inquiry (Wodak & Meyer, 2016). Since data were drawn from

publicly available newspaper publications, no personal or confidential information was involved. All authors and newspapers were duly acknowledged, and interpretations were grounded in textual evidence to maintain intellectual honesty and analytical rigour.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

The analysis in this section explores how political identity is linguistically constructed through stylistic and sociolinguistic variations in selected newspaper columns from *The Punch*, *The Guardian*, and *Vanguard*. The texts are analysed comparatively to highlight distinct authorial styles and ideological orientations. Each newspaper represents a unique editorial voice: *The Punch* tends toward populist critique, *The Guardian* projects intellectual elitism, while *Vanguard* often reflects pragmatic political reporting. These editorial orientations influence the linguistic and stylistic features employed by their columnists in constructing political identity.

Excerpt 1: “Our leaders have perfected the art of making promises that dissolve

faster than salt in rainwater.” (*The Punch*, 12 February 2024).

Excerpt 2: “Insecurity has turned the once-vibrant North into a landscape of fear

where silence is safer than speech.” (*The Punch*, 27 March 2024).

Excerpt 3: “Election campaigns have become carnivals of deceit where slogans

dance louder than ideas.” (*The Punch*, 9 April 2024).

Excerpt 4: “Power in Nigeria is like a relay race where the baton is passed among

the same tired runners.” (*The Punch*, 2 May 2024).

Excerpt 5: “Corruption wears new clothes every election season, but the face

beneath remains the same.” (*The Punch*, 15 June 2024).

The nominal group “our leaders” in excerpt one establishes collective inclusion and shared national ownership, but its evaluative framing evokes irony, presenting politicians as habitual deceivers. The metaphor “promises that dissolve faster than salt in rainwater” encodes transitivity through a material process (“dissolve”) that foregrounds the ephemeral nature of political pledges. This aligns with Jeffries’ (2010) observation that metaphor and transitivity together shape ideological

perception by naturalising certain worldviews. The presupposition that promises always exist but inevitably fail reinforces cynicism toward authority. The modality implied by “have perfected” conveys certainty and continuity, suggesting that deceit is an institutionalised practice. Thus, through naming and process structure, the columnist constructs politicians as masters of manipulation. Lexically, the metaphorical comparison draws from a familiar Nigerian cultural image — salt dissolving in rainwater — an everyday experience that indexes social proximity between columnist and reader. This domesticated imagery marks a shift from formal to colloquial register, fostering solidarity while condemning elites. Following Bell’s (2011) audience design theory, such lexical selection aligns discourse with readers’ lived realities, enhancing credibility. The pronoun “our” performs an inclusionary stance, signalling collective victimhood and uniting readers linguistically against the ruling class. This use of accessible metaphor and communal pronouns situates the columnist within the sociolinguistic repertoire of Nigerian populist critique, foregrounding shared disillusionment.

In excerpt two, transitivity plays a crucial role in attributing agency: insecurity, an abstract concept, is personified as the actor acting “has turned.” This metaphorical

personification imbues insecurity with destructive agency while positioning citizens as passive recipients. The naming of the region as “the once-vibrant North” presupposes a lost golden age, constructing nostalgia and decline simultaneously. Through negation, the contrast between “silence” and “speech” underscores suppressed agency. Modality is implied in “safer,” revealing degrees of danger and social judgment. According to Jeffries (2010), these features collectively encode a worldview in which societal decay is rendered linguistically inevitable, exposing the ideological framing of fear as normalised. The phrase “once-vibrant North” evokes geographical and ethnic identity, aligning with Labov’s (2001) view that linguistic choices index social belonging. The choice of the definite article “the” before “North” reinforces regional specificity within Nigeria’s sociopolitical geography. The idiomatic pairing of “silence” and “speech” mirrors local proverbial discourse, reflecting the Nigerian oral tradition where silence often signifies wisdom or fear. The register oscillates between journalistic reportage and poetic lament, a stylistic hybrid typical of political commentary addressing sensitive topics. Such variation encodes solidarity with Northern victims while subtly criticising governmental negligence, situating the columnist within a moral voice of national empathy.

The metaphoric naming of campaigns as “carnivals of deceit” in excerpt three invokes festivity and deception, blending incongruent semantic fields to expose political spectacle. The transitivity positions campaigns as agents that “have become,” signalling transformation into theatrical deception. Through presupposition, it assumes campaigns once embodied sincerity, now replaced by manipulation. The phrase “slogans dance louder than ideas” inverts sensory logic — making words dance and sound — to critique superficiality in political communication. Modality is implicit in the hyperbolic “louder,” constructing certainty in moral judgment. Following Jeffries (2010), the text uses stylistic foregrounding to naturalise the view of politics as entertainment rather than governance. This excerpt demonstrates register shifts from political terminology (“campaigns,” “ideas”) to performative lexis (“carnivals,” “dance”), bridging elite and popular discourse. The blending of formal and colloquial vocabulary aligns with Bell’s (2011) argument that speakers tailor linguistic performance to audience expectations. The columnist’s metaphorical imagery draws from Nigeria’s rich festival culture, situating the critique in familiar sociocultural terms. The playful yet critical tone functions as verbal irony, a socially marked variation that indexes both education and social awareness. It constructs the columnist’s identity as

intellectually sophisticated yet culturally grounded — a dual register appealing to middle-class readers.

The simile in excerpt four deploys transitivity to dramatise political stagnation: the process “is passed” highlights repetition and continuity of elite control. The naming of politicians as “tired runners” metaphorically erases individuality, emphasising exhaustion and redundancy. The presupposition that the same people continually circulate in leadership positions reinforces a narrative of exclusion. The modality is factual (“is like”), asserting inevitability rather than speculation. As Jeffries (2010) notes, such analogical constructions linguistically solidify ideology through repetition and familiarity, transforming critique into shared truth. The stylistic economy mirrors Nigeria’s political recycling, where metaphors enact sociopolitical criticism. The use of a sports metaphor taps into a common Nigerian idiom, creating a conversational register that bridges elite and popular readership. The lexical choice “tired runners” functions as a sociolinguistic label — derogatory yet humorous — indexing collective disdain. The metaphor’s accessibility aligns with Labov’s (2001) principle that social meaning is embedded in style shifts: here, the journalist’s informal tone enacts solidarity with citizens frustrated by unchanging leadership. Register mixing between formal “Power in

Nigeria” and informal “tired runners” demonstrates linguistic code-tuning (Bell, 2011), enhancing engagement while signalling ideological opposition to political elites.

The clause in excerpt five foregrounds naming and transitivity in the personification of “corruption” as an active participant in the political arena. Through the material process “wears,” the columnist attributes agency and intentional disguise to corruption, transforming an abstract concept into a living entity. The presupposition that corruption always exists, merely changing form, constructs an ideology of moral permanence. The contrastive conjunction “but” functions as a stylistic pivot, reinforcing disillusionment through negation of genuine reform. As Jeffries (2010) notes, the use of personification and presupposition creates interpretative worlds where corruption becomes a normalised, almost human adversary. The result is an implicit critique of political continuity masked as change. Lexically, the phrase “new clothes” evokes local imagery of fashion and appearance, resonating with Nigerian sociocultural values surrounding status and display. By deploying accessible lexis, the columnist bridges elite critique with popular speech, exemplifying Bell’s (2011) notion of *audience design*. The idiomatic tone mirrors oral proverbial patterns common in Nigerian discourse,

emphasising collective wisdom. Through this register shift, the writer constructs solidarity with the readership, positioning himself as a socially aware critic of elite hypocrisy. The metaphor thus performs dual functions — intellectual satire and sociolinguistic inclusivity — fostering an interpretive community grounded in shared discontent.

Excerpt 6: “When politicians promise change, they often mean exchanging seats, not systems.” (*The Punch*, 30 July 2024).

Excerpt 7: “Every new government arrives with drums of hope and departs with drums of excuses.” (*The Punch*, 8 August 2024).

Excerpt 8: “Inflation is not just rising; it is running wild, chasing the poor into despair.” (*The Punch*, 24 September 2024).

Excerpt 9: “The government’s silence after the flood is louder than any press statement.” (*The Punch*, 11 October 2024).

Excerpt 10: “Our democracy walks on crutches made of promises and propaganda.”

(*The Punch*, 19 November 2024)

The lexical opposition between “change” and “exchanging” in excerpt six embodies Jeffries’ (2010) principle of *oppositional meaning construction*, exposing political doublespeak. The transitivity pattern shifts agency to “politicians,” holding them responsible for semantic manipulation. Through presupposition, it implies that political change is superficial, restricted to individuals rather than institutions. The negation “not systems” underscores structural inertia, while modality (“often”) indicates habitual deception rather than isolated failure. The concise syntax and antithetical phrasing yield a rhetorical punch, linguistically encoding cynicism toward political reform narratives. The sentence juxtaposes formal political vocabulary (“systems”) with colloquial imagery (“seats”), signalling a deliberate register shift that bridges elite policy discourse and everyday expression. According to Labov (2001), such stylistic variation indexes speaker intent and social alignment. The columnist adopts a middle-class critical voice, neither populist nor technocratic, thereby constructing an accessible yet authoritative persona. The use of humour

through semantic play enhances resonance among readers familiar with recycled leadership tropes. This sociolinguistic blending of registers reinforces shared scepticism and co-constructs a linguistic community of critical citizens.

The repetition of “drums” within parallel syntactic structures in excerpt seven foregrounds rhythm and irony, creating semantic symmetry that mirrors cyclical political disappointment. The transitivity assigns movement verbs (“arrives,” “departs”) to governments, anthropomorphising institutions into travellers burdened by sound imagery. Through presupposition, the columnist asserts that each administration follows the same predictable pattern. The metaphoric naming of “drums of hope” and “drums of excuses” exploits sound symbolism to mark the transformation from optimism to rationalisation, aligning with Jeffries’ (2010) observation that repetition and contrast function as ideological framing devices. The cultural metaphor of “drums” draws deeply from African expressive traditions, where drumming signifies celebration and communication. By embedding this indigenous image within political commentary, the columnist localises critique in a familiar sociocultural idiom. Bell’s (2011) framework of audience design elucidates how this shared symbolic repertoire enhances rapport between writer and

reader. The rhythmic parallelism mimics oral narrative cadence, signalling a blend of journalistic register and folk rhetoric. The result is a linguistic style that resonates across class lines, aligning elite critique with grassroots interpretive codes.

Excerpt eight exemplifies transitivity through the anthropomorphisation of inflation as an agent performing violent motion (“running,” “chasing”). The negation “not just rising” introduces a contrastive intensification that amplifies the severity of economic hardship. The naming of “the poor” as victims foregrounds social inequality, while the metaphor of pursuit dramatises structural oppression. As Jeffries (2010) argues, lexical choices that construct moral polarity between aggressor and victim embed ideological critique in textual form. The modality implied in the certainty of description transforms journalism into moral commentary, indicting governance failures through linguistic vividness. Lexically, the excerpt blends economic terminology (“inflation”) with kinetic, everyday imagery (“running wild”), evidencing a register hybrid that makes abstract economics socially intelligible. The action verbs simulate urgency, mirroring public anxiety. Labov’s (2001) notion of style as attention to speech variation applies here: the columnist adjusts style for emotional salience, fostering empathy among economically burdened

readers. The choice of “the poor” as a collective noun indexes solidarity with marginalised Nigerians. Thus, sociolinguistic variation functions to democratize discourse, translating technical realities into socially grounded narrative.

The sentence in excerpt nine inverts normative sound metaphors to contrast silence and loudness, creating a paradoxical emphasis through presupposition that inaction itself communicates meaning. The transitivity identifies “government” as the agent whose inaction becomes discourse. Through negation, the absence of speech is framed as presence, a rhetorical inversion aligning with Jeffries’ (2010) framework of *negated presupposition*. The modality is factual rather than speculative, granting authority to the critique. The naming of “the flood” without temporal markers universalises the disaster, foregrounding moral responsibility rather than specific events. The expression “silence is louder than any press statement” blends journalistic register with proverbial resonance, reflecting a Nigerian rhetorical pattern where silence carries moral weight. The ironic juxtaposition of auditory imagery exemplifies register mixing, enhancing readability and emotional force. Bell’s (2011) concept of *audience accommodation* is evident as the columnist adjusts tone to align with public frustration. The stylistic

condensation — few words carrying multiple meanings — indexes intellectual sophistication while maintaining accessibility. This linguistic hybridity constructs the columnist as both moral observer and voice of civic conscience.

In excerpt ten, the transitivity pattern metaphorically assigns agency to democracy, depicting it as a disabled body, thereby dramatising fragility. The naming of “promises” and “propaganda” as structural supports enacts ideological inversion: what should sustain democracy instead weakens it. Through presupposition, the writer implies systemic dysfunction, while modality in the declarative structure asserts moral certainty. Following Jeffries (2010), the vivid metaphor fuses abstract critique with embodied imagery, transforming political commentary into affective discourse that visually encodes institutional dependency. The medical metaphor “walks on crutches” draws from everyday physical experience, rendering political analysis tangible to a broad readership. The collocation of “promises” and “propaganda” reflects register fusion — blending policy language with moral discourse. Labov (2001) emphasises that such variation constructs identity by signalling shared interpretive norms. The columnist employs an inclusive pronoun “our,” performing alignment with the citizenry rather than elite observers. Through

accessible metaphor and communal reference, the discourse achieves social intimacy while maintaining intellectual critique.

Excerpt 11: “Citizens are no longer spectators; they are now umpires of their own

destiny.” (*The Punch*, 7 December 2024).

Excerpt 12: “In Nigeria, truth travels by foot while lies fly in private jets.” (*The Punch*, 15 January 2025).

Excerpt 13: “The poor pay for policies they didn’t design, just as they queue for fuel

they didn’t hoard.” (*The Punch*, 23 February 2025).

Excerpt 14: “Nigeria’s problem is not a shortage of talent but a surplus of tolerance for mediocrity.” (*The Punch*, March 2025).

Excerpt 15: “When justice sleeps, corruption wakes and begins to dance in daylight.”

(*The Punch*, 10 April 2025).

Transitivity and naming collaborate in eleven to redefine agency. Citizens, once passive (“spectators”), are repositioned as evaluators (“umpires”), signifying empowerment. The contrastive construction “no longer... now” establishes ideological transformation,

signalling moral awakening. Through presupposition, the text assumes previous passivity, recontextualising political participation as renewed agency. The modality of certainty affirms this shift as reality rather than aspiration, conforming to Jeffries’ (2010) notion of constructing ideological coherence through grammatical opposition. Lexical borrowing from sports (“spectators,” “umpires”) indexes familiarity, reflecting a shared cultural repertoire of football discourse prevalent in Nigerian society. Such register adaptation aligns elite commentary with popular linguistic forms, reinforcing Labov’s (2001) principle of social meaning in stylistic choice. The transition from observational to participatory metaphor constructs solidarity, redefining the citizen’s linguistic identity from passive to authoritative. Through this metaphorical democratisation, the columnist linguistically constructs collective empowerment and ideological renewal.

The parallel structure and transitivity in excerpt twelve encode contrasting velocities: “truth travels” (slow movement) versus “lies fly” (rapid motion). This semantic opposition dramatises moral asymmetry. The naming of “truth” and “lies” as anthropomorphised entities transforms moral abstraction into narrative characters. Through presupposition, deceit is shown as socially privileged.

The lexical contrast between “foot” and “private jets” invokes class disparity, embedding a critique of elite corruption. As Jeffries (2010) observes, such textual contrast constructs ideological binaries that naturalise moral commentary. The juxtaposition of colloquial (“by foot”) and elite (“private jets”) imagery encapsulates Nigeria’s socioeconomic duality. The register shift between grounded and luxurious expressions reflects stratified realities, producing humour and critique simultaneously. Bell’s (2011) theory of audience design clarifies how these contrasts engage both ordinary readers and elites through irony. The proverb-like rhythm evokes oral discourse patterns, situating the columnist in a culturally resonant communicative tradition. Thus, sociolinguistic variation transforms moral satire into a shared social experience.

Excerpt thirteen employs parallelism and presupposition to expose distributive injustice. Through transitivity, “the poor” are agents only in suffering, not decision-making. The repetition of “they didn’t” constitutes negation that accentuates exclusion. The naming of “policies” and “fuel” juxtaposes governance with daily survival, collapsing macroeconomic and microeconomic spheres. The modality of factual assertion (“pay,” “queue”) creates narrative inevitability. Jeffries (2010) identifies such structures as ideological

indicators of systemic exploitation framed through linguistic symmetry. The everyday imagery of “queue for fuel” references a recurrent Nigerian crisis, grounding critique in lived experience. The register here is distinctly populist, employing simple syntax and vivid realism to align with common speech. Labov’s (2001) view of stylistic adaptation explains how this shift democratizes critique, transforming elite policy discourse into an accessible moral narrative. The pronoun “they” marks empathetic distance yet shared concern, allowing the columnist to voice collective frustration while maintaining authorial neutrality.

This antithetical construction in excerpt fourteen utilises negation and naming to redefine causality. “Shortage of talent” versus “surplus of tolerance” constructs a paradox of abundance and deficiency. The presupposition that talent exists yet remains unutilized repositions failure as moral rather than structural. The modality of assertion (“is not... but...”) conveys analytical certainty, framing judgment as objective truth. Following Jeffries (2010), such binary constructions articulate an ideological stance through grammatical symmetry and evaluative lexis, rendering the critique epistemically unassailable. Lexically, the academic term “mediocrity” elevates the register, aligning the columnist with educated elites while the familiar rhythm of “not... but...” maintains accessibility. This

stylistic balance typifies Nigerian opinion journalism, where intellectual critique meets conversational resonance. Bell's (2011) theory of audience design elucidates how such hybridisation targets both intellectuals and lay readers. The phrase performs social differentiation — distinguishing excellence from complacency — while uniting readers in moral reflection about societal standards.

Excerpt fifteen exemplifies metaphor, transitivity, and personification within Critical Stylistics. “Justice sleeps” and “corruption wakes” anthropomorphise institutions as actors, dramatising moral inversion. Modality suggests inevitability, while presupposition implies a causal relationship between institutional failure and moral chaos. The stylistic orchestration transforms abstract concepts into visible actions, creating a vivid moral allegory. The interplay of activity (“dance in daylight”) conveys normalisation of corruption, subverting justice's symbolic authority. Sociolinguistically, the figurative use of “dance” situates corruption within cultural performativity. The imagery of daylight connotes openness, reflecting social acceptance of wrongdoing. The columnist deploys shared cultural symbolism to critique moral desensitisation. This variation illustrates Labov's (2001) notion of style-shifting—where moral indignation is encoded in culturally resonant metaphor. The linguistic form thus constructs

ideological solidarity around moral renewal, blending critique with communal moral appeal.

Excerpt 16: “Power in Nigeria is not seized; it is recycled among familiar faces.”

(*The Guardian*, 3 May 2024)

Excerpt 17: “Nigeria's leadership problem is not a puzzle; it is an open secret whispered at election time.” (*The Guardian*, 12 June 2024)

Excerpt 18: “Our leaders build bridges where there are no rivers, just to cut the ribbons.” (*The Guardian*, 2 July 2024).

Excerpt 19: “Each regime promises a new dawn but leaves us in an older darkness.” (*The Guardian*, 20 July 2024)

Excerpt 20: “Accountability dies when loyalty becomes the only political currency.” (*The Guardian*, 14 August 2024)

Excerpt sixteen employs negation (“not seized”) and presupposition to challenge the myth of democratic competition. The phrase “recycled among familiar faces” utilises metaphoric naming that deconstructs the concept of change, reducing it to circular elitism. The transitivity pattern omits agency—power acts upon itself, erasing human responsibility. This aligns with Jeffries' (2010) view that grammatical

suppression of agents serves ideological concealment. The lexical opposition between “seized” and “recycled” foregrounds the contrast between revolution and continuity, positioning Nigeria’s democracy as performative rather than transformative. The expression blends technical and conversational registers. The word “recycled” borrows from environmental discourse, transforming political critique into a modern idiom that appeals to educated readers. Simultaneously, “familiar faces” invokes colloquial familiarity, bridging elite and public registers. According to Bell (2011), such code-mixing reflects audience design — the columnist anticipates both academic and popular readerships. This hybrid tone indexes disillusionment within an informed citizenry, framing corruption as socially systemic rather than isolated.

Excerpt seventeen combines metaphor and presupposition to express moral certainty. The oxymoronic phrase “open secret” exemplifies Jeffries’ (2010) ideational function of contradiction — constructing meaning through paradox. The transitivity assigns passive status to “leadership problem,” implying entrenchment rather than resolution. Through negation (“not a puzzle”), the text dismisses intellectualisation of failure, shifting blame from abstraction to agency. The temporal adjunct “at election time” contextualises deceit as cyclical, revealing the semiotics of

political ritual. The phrase “whispered at election time” draws from oral discourse, invoking intimacy and complicity. The register blend—academic (“puzzle”) and colloquial (“whispered”)—performs social duality. Labov’s (2001) sociolinguistic principle of attention to speech is evident in this stylistic modulation, which mirrors Nigeria’s democratic irony. The columnist’s voice oscillates between critical detachment and communal empathy, reinforcing social knowledge shared through collective cynicism.

The statement in excerpt eighteen is saturated with metaphor and transitivity, assigning purposeless agency to “leaders.” The verb phrase “build bridges where there are no rivers” constructs absurdity, symbolising misplaced priorities. The naming of “ribbons” invokes ceremonial vanity, revealing governance as spectacle rather than service. Through presupposition, the columnist assumes misuse of power as habitual. Jeffries (2010) notes that metaphor in critical stylistics encodes ideological contradiction—here, progress imagery masks regression. The idiomatic framing mimics Nigerian proverbial structure, enhancing relatability. The humorous tone operates as an indirect critique, consistent with Bell’s (2011) audience design model: the columnist codes meaning in wit to avoid overt hostility while engaging the public’s moral imagination. The metaphor of

“bridges” taps into socio-political vernacular, symbolising performative development. The linguistic hybridity—between English formality and local metaphorical reasoning—indexes educated populism and aligns elite voice with popular disillusionment.

In excerpt nineteen, the antithetical syntax (“new dawn” vs. “older darkness”) enacts ideological inversion, illustrating Jeffries’ (2010) claim that lexical contrast foregrounds moral binaries. The transitivity assigns agency to “regime,” while “us” occupies the affected role, delineating power asymmetry. The modality of assertion (“leaves us”) conveys inevitability, underscoring structural pessimism. The presupposition of recurrent betrayal shapes political critique as existential narrative rather than episodic complaint. Lexically, “new dawn” aligns with bureaucratic optimism, whereas “older darkness” resonates with biblical intertextuality familiar to Nigerian audiences. This register interplay amplifies irony and emotional gravity. Labov (2001) highlights that such stylistic shifts express stance-taking — here, the columnist aligns linguistically with disillusioned citizens. The poetic cadence mirrors sermon-like rhythm, fusing journalistic argumentation with cultural orality to maximise resonance.

The metaphorical transitivity in excerpt twenty personifies abstract governance

values—“accountability dies”—to dramatise institutional decay. The naming of “loyalty” as “currency” converts moral virtue into economic exchange, invoking Jeffries’ (2010) model of semantic transformation. The presupposition that loyalty supersedes integrity constructs a moral economy of corruption. The modality of factual certainty reinforces a normative stance, foregrounding critique of patronage systems that erode meritocracy. The economic metaphor resonates with everyday market discourse, translating political morality into tangible vernacular. This register hybridisation bridges the elite lexicon (“accountability”) and colloquial economic imagery (“currency”), exemplifying Bell’s (2011) audience adaptation. The linguistic metaphor encodes social realism; readers recognise the transactional logic of Nigerian politics. The stylistic choice indexes the columnist’s shared sociopolitical consciousness with the governed, reinforcing the credibility of moral protest.

Excerpt 21: “When a nation forgets its past, it elects its mistakes.” (*The Guardian*, 10

September 2024).

Excerpt 22: “In Nigeria, leadership changes hands but not habits.” (*The Guardian*,

26 October 2024).

Excerpt 23: “The louder politicians shout unity, the more divided the people

– become.” (*The Guardian*, 17 November 2024).

Excerpt 24: “Our economy crawls while our leaders cruise abroad.” (*The Guardian*,

19 December 2024)

Excerpt 25: “Nigeria imports fuel, exports excuses.” (*The Guardian*, 4 January

2025)

Through personification, the sentence in excerpt twenty-one transforms the nation into a moral actor capable of memory and amnesia. The presupposition implies a historical cycle of unlearned lessons. The transitivity links forgetting with electoral consequence, tying cognition to politics. The modality of inevitability (“it elects”) conveys deterministic critique. Jeffries (2010) identifies such syntactic determinism as ideological persuasion, where agency is framed as self-inflicted tragedy. This aphoristic expression mirrors proverbial wisdom, invoking collective self-reflection rather than institutional blame. The register simplification through monosyllabic words ensures wide intelligibility, enabling multi-class appeal. Labov

(2001) observes that such linguistic accessibility marks vernacular authority. The columnist’s voice fuses intellectualism with folk pedagogy, constructing shared moral discourse that transcends education level.

The antithesis—“hands” versus “habits”—in excerpt twenty-two is a condensed ideological critique. The transitivity emphasises the noun phrase “leadership,” which performs no transformative action despite a change in possession. Through negation, reform is nullified, producing textual pessimism. Jeffries (2010) explains that such parallel syntax exposes surface change masking continuity. The metaphor of “hands” evokes bodily imagery of touch and control, further humanising corruption. The metaphor employs colloquial rhythm, reflecting spoken Nigerian English cadence. Its register neutrality allows cross-demographic interpretation. Bell’s (2011) framework clarifies that simplicity in lexical construction maximises inclusivity. The journalist crafts authority through linguistic economy, creating a moral refrain easily quoted in civic discourse—showing how stylistic minimalism functions as sociolinguistic power.

Excerpt twenty-three demonstrates contrastive syntax with causal inversion, correlating political rhetoric with social fragmentation. The transitivity assigns “politicians” verbal excess (“shout”) and

citizens' passive division ("become"). Through presupposition, unity slogans are framed as deceptive performances. The intensifier "louder" underscores disingenuous enthusiasm. Jeffries (2010) contends that such structures encode counterfactual irony, revealing ideology through contradiction. The sound imagery of "shout" localises critique within oral culture, where voice equates to authority. The register alternates between formal ("unity," "divided") and conversational ("shout"), enabling resonance across literacy levels. Labov's (2001) concept of style-shifting explains how this duality indexes both intellectual irony and populist frustration. The columnist thus constructs a socially stratified yet unified readership bonded by scepticism.

In excerpt twenty-four, transitivity contrasts motion verbs to dramatise inequality: "economy crawls" versus "leaders cruise." The metaphor of movement symbolises progress disparity. The presupposition that leaders' comfort coexists with public hardship produces moral indictment. The naming of "abroad" functions metonymically, representing escapism and elite privilege. Jeffries (2010) emphasises such lexical alignment as ideological encoding of imbalance.

The collocation of "crawl" and "cruise" blends street idiom and elite imagery, producing a register juxtaposition that mirrors class division. Bell's (2011)

audience model explains how this combination enhances rhetorical sharpness: readers instantly grasp injustice. The linguistic economy mirrors tabloid expressivity while retaining analytical force. Through rhythm and irony, the columnist creates moral solidarity via shared resentment.

The parallel clause structure in excerpt twenty-five employs syntactic compression and transitivity to contrast economic dependence ("imports fuel") with moral deficit ("exports excuses"). The lexical repetition of trade verbs creates ideological irony: governance functions as an exchange of failure. The presupposition that excuses are state commodities extends satire into the moral economy. Jeffries (2010) interprets such linguistic symmetry as a vehicle of ideological crystallisation. The trade lexicon ("imports," "exports") adapts technical register for humorous public commentary. This register blending exemplifies Labov's (2001) view of style as identity performance—here, that of an informed yet sarcastic citizen. The terse structure mirrors headlines, achieving memorability. The columnist's bilingual-like alternation between economic and moral vocabulary signals linguistic agility that appeals to varied readership strata.

Excerpt 26: "Elections are festivals of promises that expire the next morning." (*The*

Guardian, 18 February 2025)

Excerpt 27: “When leaders mistake applause for approval, governance becomes

theatre.” (*The Guardian*, 11 March 2025).

Excerpt 28: “Policies written in English often die in translation to reality.” (*The*

Guardian, 29 March 2025)

Excerpt 29: “We measure progress by headlines, not by lives changed.” (*The*

Guardian, 14 April 2025)

Excerpt 30: “Governance in Nigeria is a beautiful sermon ruined by bad conduct.”

(*The Guardian*, 22 May 2025)

Excerpt twenty-six fuses metaphor and transitivity to construct political temporality. “Festivals of promises” transform elections into rituals of fleeting joy. The naming of “promises” as consumables that “expire” evokes perishability, aligning with Jeffries’ (2010) analysis of evaluative metaphor. The presupposition of recurring deception produces moral cynicism masked in poetic rhythm. The modality remains declarative, suggesting empirical

observation. The metaphor of “festival” resonates with Nigerian sociocultural life, connecting civic ritual to community celebration. Bell’s (2011) audience model explains how this familiar frame enhances engagement. The humorous yet critical imagery employs register adaptation, merging folkloric rhythm with civic commentary. Such stylistic hybridity performs solidarity, translating complex disillusionment into culturally legible expression.

Excerpt twenty-seven employs transitivity that connects perceptual error (“mistake”) with institutional consequence (“governance becomes theatre”). The metaphor of “theatre” frames leadership as spectacle. The presupposition that leaders conflate performance with legitimacy indicts political vanity. Jeffries’ (2010) notion of evaluative metaphor applies here: semantic transformation dramatises moral critique. The word “applause” borrows from entertainment discourse, while “approval” belongs to the bureaucratic register. This register shift illustrates Labov’s (2001) concept of style variation as social commentary. The juxtaposition equates governance to performance art, inviting the reader’s complicity in moral laughter. The stylistic brevity strengthens interpretive universality, reinforcing the columnist’s critical persona as urbane yet culturally attuned.

The metaphoric statement in excerpt twenty-eight critiques bureaucratic disconnection. The transitivity assigns mortality to policies (“die”), dramatising dysfunction. The naming of “English” foregrounds linguistic and cultural alienation, linking governance failure to colonial linguistic hegemony. Jeffries (2010) identifies such lexical framing as ideological exposure of systemic dissonance. The presupposition implies performative documentation without pragmatic delivery. The play on “translation” embodies meta-linguistic irony. It references Nigeria’s multilingual reality, where official communication often excludes vernacular comprehension. Bell (2011) explains that such commentary engages linguistic identity politics. The register oscillates between bureaucratic (“policies,” “translation”) and local realism (“reality”), constructing a critique that is both intellectual and experiential. The columnist’s voice bridges linguistic elitism and vernacular alienation.

The negation and parallel syntax (“by headlines, not by lives changed”) in excerpt twenty-nine frame an epistemological critique of performative governance. The transitivity highlights impersonal measurement rather than human welfare. The lexical contrast between “headlines” and “lives” exposes the commodification of success. As Jeffries (2010) argues, such contrasts

reveal ideological inversion—appearance valued over substance. The phrase “measure progress” belongs to developmental discourse, while “lives changed” indexes humanitarian reality. This register contrast dramatises moral distance. Labov’s (2001) notion of style-shifting clarifies how alternating registers index stance. The columnist’s diction performs moral critique through empathetic accessibility, positioning him as an intermediary between media elites and the disenfranchised.

In excerpt thirty, the metaphor of “sermon” constructs moral aspiration, while “bad conduct” introduces irony through religious imagery. The transitivity assigns evaluative power to the columnist, transforming commentary into ethical judgment. The presupposition that governance aspires to sacred ideals intensifies disillusionment. Jeffries (2010) explains that metaphorical incongruity exposes ideological hypocrisy by collapsing sacred and profane domains. The religious metaphor leverages Nigeria’s faith-based communicative culture, aligning critique with shared spirituality. The register hybridisation—biblical (“sermon”) and colloquial (“bad conduct”)—enhances cultural relevance. Bell’s (2011) audience theory demonstrates that this blending performs solidarity through moral humour. The columnist’s linguistic stance bridges the

sacred and civic, appealing to moral sensibility across social strata.

Excerpt 31: “The government keeps promising light at the end of the tunnel, but

Nigerians are still groping in darkness.” (*Vanguard*, 12 January 2024).

Excerpt 32: “When policies sound good only on paper, the people pay the price in

pain.” (*Vanguard*, 1 February 2024).

Excerpt 33: “Our leaders love to talk about reforms; what they fear is

responsibility.” (*Vanguard*, 14 February).

Excerpt 34: “Inflation doesn’t need a press conference; it announces itself every time

Nigerians visit the market.” (*Vanguard*, 27 March 2024).

Excerpt 35: “Politics in Nigeria is often a contest of survival, not service.”

(*Vanguard*, 9 April 2024).

The *metaphor* of “light at the end of the tunnel” in excerpt thirty-one juxtaposed

with “groping in darkness” constructs a stark binary between hope and disillusionment. Transitivity places the government as an active agent making promises, while citizens are rendered passive sufferers. The presupposition that light exists, but is perpetually deferred, reveals systemic deceit embedded in governance rhetoric. Through negation (“still groping in darkness”), the text exposes unfulfilled leadership claims. Modality is assertive, not speculative, marking the columnist’s evaluative certainty and ideological critique of political deception. The metaphor draws from a common Nigerian idiomatic expression, ensuring resonance across sociolects. The use of “groping” evokes tactile imagery accessible to general audiences, signifying struggle and helplessness. This linguistic variation bridges elite political commentary and the vernacular consciousness of ordinary Nigerians. The columnist uses lexical choice and contrastive register to perform solidarity with the people, constructing shared frustration. Through this variation, language becomes a tool of collective identity and resistance to chronic governmental failure.

In excerpt thirty-two, the transitivity assigns human cost (“the people pay”) to policy failure, converting abstract governance into embodied suffering. The metaphor “sound good on paper” functions as evaluative irony, suggesting

performative bureaucracy. The presupposition that policies should work highlights expectation versus experience. The naming of “the people” universalises victimhood, creating an ideological polarity between the ruling and the ruled. Modality reinforces factual authority, indicating that the columnist’s critique is grounded in observable social reality. Sociolinguistically, the expression “sound good on paper” reflects a bureaucratic idiom domesticated in Nigerian English, signifying impractical governance. The choice of plain, experiential language ensures inclusivity across linguistic classes. Lexical repetition of /p/ sounds (“policies,” “people,” “pay,” “pain”) mimics rhythmic oral delivery, enhancing rhetorical memorability. The columnist’s linguistic style exemplifies audience design (Bell, 2011): elite diction simplified into populist idiom to construct ideological alignment with everyday citizens affected by economic hardship.

Excerpt thirty-three employs antithesis and naming to contrast verbal action with moral inaction. The transitivity of “love to talk” versus “fear” exposes hypocrisy in reform rhetoric. The presupposition that reforms are frequently discussed implies performative governance. Modality (“love,” “fear”) expresses evaluative certainty about leadership psychology. By opposing “reform” and “responsibility,” the columnist

stylistically deconstructs the language of progress to reveal ideological avoidance of accountability. The informal register (“love to talk”) mirrors conversational Nigerian English, fostering reader intimacy. The parallel clause pattern reflects oral discourse rhythm, while lexical economy increases emphasis. The columnist’s linguistic variation aligns with populist speech norms, enacting ideological solidarity through accessible critique. This discursive shift, from formal political lexicon to colloquial phrasing, dramatises resistance against bureaucratic distance, linguistically democratising political critique.

Excerpt thirty-four foregrounds personification and negation. Inflation becomes an autonomous actor—capable of “announcing” itself—while negation (“doesn’t need”) ridicules governmental communication rituals. Transitivity grants inflation agency denied to leadership, reversing expected roles. Presupposition assumes citizens’ shared economic experience, and modality asserts inevitability. The stylistic configuration exposes state failure in confronting lived economic crises, constructing an ideological stance of anti-official realism. Sociolinguistically, the phrase “visit the market” is socially grounded in Nigerian daily life. The columnist uses accessible lexis rooted in experiential reality, aligning with the linguistic register of ordinary Nigerians. The pragmatic structure combines elite

commentary with market vernacular, a classic example of register shift (Labov, 2001). The columnist's variation captures social empathy while asserting authority, positioning themselves as a mediator between elite discourse and grassroots suffering.

Stylistically, the contrastive structure "survival, not service" in excerpt thirty-five embodies antithesis as ideological exposure. Naming "politics" as "contest" constructs governance as competitive rather than communal. The presupposition that politics should serve the people but does not is a moral deviation. The modality "is often" connotes recurrent truth rather than isolated failure. Through Jeffries' lens, this sentence synthesises metaphor and evaluation to reframe politics as predation, not duty. The columnist's lexical economy reflects Nigerian journalistic brevity designed for mass readability. The use of "contest" resonates with the sociocultural obsession with competition, blending sport and survivalist registers. The pragmatic simplification of syntax aligns with audience design (Bell, 2011), enhancing accessibility. This variation constructs ideological solidarity through shared realism—language that captures politics as existential struggle rather than civic duty.

Excerpt 36: "Citizens can't eat promises; they need policies that put food on their tables." (*Vanguard*, 30 May 2024).

Excerpt 37: "Every administration blames the past; none prepares for the future."
(*Vanguard*, 22 June 2024).

Excerpt 38: "Security has become a slogan, not a system."
(*Vanguard*, 11 July 2024).

Excerpt 39: "Subsidy removal was supposed to ease the burden, not multiply the misery." (*Vanguard*, 5 August 2024).

Excerpt 40: "Corruption survives because the system rewards loyalty more than integrity." (*Vanguard*, 17 September 2024).

In excerpt thirty-six, *metaphor and negation* function to expose rhetorical futility. "Can't eat promises" equates political rhetoric with starvation, while *transitivity* gives "policies" agency to "put food." The presupposition that promises exist but fail to deliver frames leadership as performative. The *modality* is pragmatic, asserting economic realism.

The stylistic orchestration constructs ideological tension between empty rhetoric and material need. The idiom “put food on the table” is a pan-Nigerian expression denoting economic sustenance. Its inclusion marks register blending between political analysis and domestic idiom. This linguistic variation indexes the columnist’s alignment with working-class experience. Through lexical choice, the columnist shifts from policy jargon to everyday speech, creating a populist moral economy of discourse—where nourishment becomes the linguistic measure of governance legitimacy.

Parallelism and negation encode cyclic irresponsibility in excerpt thirty-seven. The transitivity assigns agency to “administration” as a habitual blamer. The presupposition is that governance is continuous but unreflective. Negation (“none prepares”) reveals ideological paralysis. The stylistic configuration fuses rhythm and irony, constructing an accusatory tone that equates political continuity with moral regression. This structure mirrors proverbial syntax found in Nigerian oral discourse—balanced clauses with moral inference. The columnist employs this familiar form to encode communal wisdom in journalistic critique. This register shifts from formal journalism to aphoristic cadence, fosters resonance across speech communities. The linguistic pattern embodies Labov’s (2001) variation principle—a socially

motivated stylistic shift that enacts solidarity through moral proverbiality.

In excerpt thirty-eight, the naming contrast between “slogan” and “system” foregrounds semantic degradation. Transitivity situates “security” as a passive entity, stripped of practical essence. The presupposition that slogans exist in place of mechanisms exposes ideological substitution. *Modality* is declarative, reflecting confidence in critique. This stylistic configuration critiques governance superficiality through compact contrast. This simple clause design—short, balanced, and rhythmically taut—mirrors oral Nigerian speech forms used for moral indictment. The lexical variation transforms bureaucratic terminology into an accessible idiom, facilitating shared understanding. By framing security linguistically as a “slogan,” the columnist captures Nigerian sociopolitical frustration using minimal linguistic means, reinforcing ideological cohesion between writer and audience.

Critically, excerpt thirty-nine deploys *irony* and contrastive transitivity. The *naming* of “burden” versus “misery” dramatises consequence. *Presupposition* suggests policy intention (“supposed to ease”) and its ironic reversal. *Modality* implies evaluative certainty in critique. The stylistic device of antithesis exposes the moral contradiction between technocratic justification and lived

reality. Sociolinguistically, “multiply the misery” mirrors oral hyperbole common in Nigerian complaint narratives. The lexical choice blends formal and emotive registers, enabling empathetic engagement. This variation operates as social alignment—anchoring the columnist’s voice in collective experience. Through stylistic condensation, the writer linguistically performs shared pain and protest, reinforcing identity through communal discourse.

In excerpt forty, causal transitivity and naming dominate. “Corruption survives because...” attributes vitality to immorality, personifying corruption as resilient. The presupposition of systemic reward structures implies institutional complicity. Modality denotes certainty, indicating analytic authority. Through evaluative syntax, the columnist constructs a moral indictment against elite patronage networks. The phrase “rewards loyalty more than integrity” draws from workplace and political registers simultaneously. This cross-register blending enhances interpretive richness, linking everyday and institutional corruption. The linguistic variation enacts an ideological critique accessible to both elite and lay audiences. The columnist’s speech design reinforces shared moral norms through evaluative contrast—language as an instrument of moral reconstruction.

Excerpt 41: “Recycling the same politicians and expecting different results is

political insanity.”
(*Vanguard*, 3 October 2024).

Excerpt 42: “When leaders travel abroad for medical check-ups, it is not just

their health that is sick — it is the system.” (*Vanguard*, 28 October 2024).

Excerpt 43: “We can’t develop a nation on borrowed ideas and borrowed

money.” (*Vanguard*, 21 November 2024).

Excerpt 44: “In Nigeria, power changes hands, but not habits.”
(*Vanguard*, 6

January 2025).

Excerpt 45: “The future of this country depends less on who leads and more on

how we are led.”
(*Vanguard*, 18 February 2025).

Excerpt forty-one highlights metaphor and evaluation. “Recycling” applies environmental discourse to politics, encoding staleness and waste. The *transitivity* assigns collective agency to citizens’ expectations, critiquing societal complicity. Modality is categorical—“is

political insanity”—serving as a moral verdict. The stylistic structure enacts ideological disillusionment, dramatising futility within Nigeria’s political reproduction. The term “recycling” bridges scientific and political registers, a stylistic shift enhancing semantic novelty. The juxtaposition reflects Labovian variation where innovation indexes identity performance. The phrase “political insanity” resonates as colloquial hyperbole, aligning elite commentary with everyday speech patterns. The linguistic design constructs solidarity through expressive exaggeration—a sociolinguistic resource of emotional intensification.

The metaphor of illness applies institutionally—transferring pathology from body to polity in excerpt forty-two. Transitivity positions leaders as self-exiling patients, and presupposition frames systemic dysfunction as moral decay. The modality expresses moral certainty through declarative construction. The stylistic synthesis constructs political satire as diagnostic critique, transforming governance into a symptom. The utterance integrates medical and political registers, achieving semantic hybridity. The code-switch from clinical discourse (“check-ups”) to evaluative moralism (“the system is sick”) performs intellectual accessibility. The columnist’s variation bridges technocratic and moral vocabularies, reflecting multidialectal adaptability.

This stylistic manoeuvre sustains ideological resonance across educated and popular audiences, aligning national health with institutional integrity.

In Excerpt forty-three, negation and parallelism reinforce ideological independence. The repetition of “borrowed” dramatises dependency, while transitivity attributes agency to the collective “we,” distributing responsibility. Presupposition implies ongoing imitation, critiquing neo-colonial intellectual subservience. The stylistic rhythm conveys nationalist assertion and epistemic resistance. The repetition mirrors oral pedagogic forms used in Nigerian public speaking, embedding nationalistic affect. The lexical parallel of “ideas” and “money” captures dual dependency—mental and economic—using accessible economic vocabulary. The linguistic variation indexes intellectual self-reliance, positioning the columnist as a moral instructor within collective reformist discourse. Critically, antithesis and presupposition dominate excerpt forty-four. “Changes hands” versus “not habits” encodes symbolic transition without substantive reform. The transitivity renders “power” an active mobile entity, while “habits” remain static. Negation dramatises inertia, implying ideological continuity. The stylistic compactness enhances punch and memorability, fulfilling Jeffries’ concept of linguistic economy in

ideological critique. This aphoristic style reflects Nigerian proverb-like journalistic commentary. The succinctness mirrors oral culture's didactic rhythm, creating communal resonance. The linguistic variation collapses elite political critique into everyday truth statements, enabling cross-class intelligibility. Through stylistic condensation, the columnist performs authority while fostering inclusion—ideological critique through proverbial form. The contrastive transitivity (“who leads” vs. “how we are led”) in excerpt forty-five redefines leadership discourse from identity to ethics. Presupposition assumes perpetual leadership focus while redirecting moral agency. The modality is normative, signalling prescription. The stylistic design reframes governance as a moral relationship, emphasising systemic values over personalities. Sociolinguistically, the structure echoes sermon cadences prevalent in Nigerian rhetorical culture. The rhythm and repetition (“who... how...”) enhance mnemonic and moral appeal. This variation shifts from political commentary to collective exhortation, positioning the columnist as a civic preacher. The linguistic strategy harmonises intellectual authority with communal intimacy, constructing an inclusive ideology of shared responsibility.

Discussion of Findings

The findings reveal that Nigerian newspaper columnists employ language as an instrument of social critique and ideological positioning. Through the deployment of critical stylistic resources such as naming, transitivity, modality, and presupposition, writers in *The Punch*, *The Guardian*, and *Vanguard* construct and deconstruct political power, identity, and legitimacy. Across the newspapers, the political class is linguistically represented as both agents and victims of systemic failure. The *Punch*, for example, frames political actors through metaphorical naming (“corruption wears new clothes”), emphasising repetition and hypocrisy, while *The Guardian* adopts a more intellectualised tone that presupposes moral decay within governance structures. *Vanguard*, in turn, privileges colloquial realism, foregrounding the lived experiences of ordinary Nigerians. These stylistic choices expose how each medium reconstructs political discourse as both performance and reflection of national disillusionment. From a sociolinguistic perspective, the newspapers exhibit clear variation in lexical choices and register shifts reflective of their ideological orientations and target readerships. *The Punch* demonstrates a populist linguistic tendency—accessible metaphors and evaluative lexis—to appeal to the working class and civic-minded youth.

The Guardian maintains a formal register, indexing authority and intellectual engagement consistent with elite discourse. *Vanguard*, however, mediates between the formal and informal, using accessible expressions and idioms to connect with a broader socioeconomic audience. Such stylistic-sociolinguistic variation suggests that the Nigerian press not only informs but also performs identity work, aligning linguistic choices with distinct ideological and demographic communities. A cross-comparison shows that modality and transitivity serve as central strategies for projecting ideological stance. High modality expressions such as “must,” “cannot,” and “will never” in *The Guardian* assert moral authority and ethical finality, constructing the columnist as an arbiter of reason. Conversely, *The Punch* often employs dynamic transitivity structures that depict politicians as active agents of deception or in action (“leaders have perfected the art of making promises”), thereby reinforcing accountability discourses. *Vanguard*, with its pragmatic register, adopts low modality and agentless constructions that emphasise the helplessness of citizens (“Inflation announces itself every time Nigerians visit the market”). Thus, transitivity and modality together delineate varying power relations and ideological positions across Nigeria’s press.

The analysis also reveals that naming and presupposition play vital roles in reproducing evaluative meanings. Through metaphorical renaming (“power is a relay race,” “democracy walks on crutches”), columnists implicitly attribute political dysfunction to structural and habitual causes rather than individual failings. Presuppositions like “when leaders travel abroad for medical check-ups” assume corruption and institutional collapse as shared social knowledge, effectively mobilising collective frustration. This finding underscores how the Nigerian media’s stylistic creativity sustains political commentary as a form of discursive resistance, allowing critique within the constraints of democratic decorum. The sociolinguistic analysis further highlights code-switching and register alternation as mechanisms of solidarity and opposition. While explicit code-switching is minimal in the elite-oriented *Guardian*, both *The Punch* and *Vanguard* exhibit register shifts—especially between formal critique and colloquial irony—that encode identification with the masses. Such shifts create dialogic intimacy, situating the columnist as a voice “from within” rather than “above” the populace. This stylistic hybridity reflects Nigeria’s multilingual, stratified sociolinguistic landscape, where English, though dominant, is constantly adapted to local realities and emotional registers,

allowing newspapers to maintain both authority and empathy. In sum, the findings demonstrate that Critical Stylistics and Sociolinguistic Variation Theory together illuminate how Nigerian newspapers mediate political consciousness through language. The *Punch*'s creative metaphorization, The *Guardian*'s intellectual precision, and *Vanguard*'s populist realism collectively reveal a continuum of linguistic strategies that construct, contest, and negotiate political identities. These stylistic and sociolinguistic practices not only mirror Nigeria's sociopolitical complexities but also reinforce journalism's role as a site of ideological struggle and civic meaning-making. Thus, newspaper discourse becomes both a mirror and a mould of Nigeria's democratic anxieties, aspirations, and struggles for accountability.

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that the intersection of Critical Stylistics and Sociolinguistic Variation Theory provides a powerful analytical lens for examining how Nigerian newspaper columnists construct political meaning and identity. Through the application of Jeffries' (2010) critical stylistic framework and the sociolinguistic perspectives of Labov (2001) and Bell (2011), the analysis revealed that linguistic structures in Nigerian media are never neutral. Instead, they serve as

tools for articulating ideological positions, shaping public perception, and contesting authority. The newspapers examined—*The Punch*, *The Guardian*, and *Vanguard*—each deploy unique stylistic and sociolinguistic strategies that mirror their ideological leanings and readership demographics, reflecting the intricate interplay between language, power, and society. The findings indicate that *The Punch* constructs political discourse through vivid metaphorization, irony, and evaluative lexis that foreground citizen disenchantment. *The Guardian*, on the other hand, projects a tone of intellectual critique, utilising high modality, abstract diction, and presupposition to assert moral authority. *Vanguard* adopts a populist voice characterised by accessible vocabulary, pragmatic register, and narrative immediacy, situating itself as the linguistic mediator between the political elite and the common populace. These differences underscore how newspapers act as ideological actors, encoding distinct perspectives on governance and accountability while appealing to varied sociolinguistic constituencies. At a deeper level, the study reveals that stylistic devices such as naming, transitivity, modality, presupposition, and negation are central to how journalists linguistically construct authority, solidarity, opposition, and ideological alignment. Through critical stylistic operations, political actors are

redefined, institutions are re-evaluated, and citizens are reimagined as agents of social judgment. These linguistic patterns do more than narrate events—they construct social realities, shaping how readers interpret Nigeria's democratic experience. In this sense, stylistics functions not merely as a descriptive tool but as a means of unveiling how textual practices reproduce or resist power structures.

From a sociolinguistic standpoint, the newspapers' variation in lexical choice, register, and code-switching reflects Nigeria's multilingual complexity and layered social stratification. The oscillation between formal and colloquial registers in *The Punch* and *Vanguard* exemplifies the dynamic relationship between discourse and audience design, while *The Guardian's* consistent high-register discourse reinforces its elite intellectual ethos. These patterns reveal that linguistic variation in the media is both indexical and ideological—it signals belonging, authority, and alignment within the broader sociopolitical landscape. Through such variation, journalists negotiate their positions between critique and complicity, between advocacy and neutrality. In conclusion, this study underscores that Nigerian media discourse is not a passive mirror of politics but an active participant in political meaning-making. The use of

stylistic and sociolinguistic devices enables columnists to challenge power, articulate national concerns, and foster civic engagement. Critical Stylistics and Sociolinguistic Variation Theory together illuminate how language functions as both an aesthetic and ideological instrument in shaping Nigeria's democratic narratives. Consequently, future research may extend this analysis to digital news platforms and broadcast discourse to explore how evolving media ecologies continue to reshape the linguistic construction of political identities in contemporary Nigeria.

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