

Discursive Constructions of Sexual Harassment in Policy Discourse: A Critical Analysis of Nigeria's 2019 Anti-Sexual Harassment Bill

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Abstract: *The paper engages in an ideological analysis and a critique of the discourse structures of the Anti-Sexual Harassment Prohibition Bill enacted in 2019 by Nigeria's National Assembly for the purpose of preventing sexual harassment of students in Nigerian academia. This study argues that the Bill's (co)sponsors' ideological belief systems influence and control the discourse structures of the text. Situated within the framework of van Dijk's (1998) socio-cognitive ideological square model, the study explores the discourse structures of the legal text and analyses how ideologies are expressed in the elicited structures. Findings reveal that compelling headlining, topicalisation, goal-foregrounding, agency obscuration, lexicalisation, syntactic structures, implicitness and vagueness are discourse structures observable in the Bill. These structures ideologically represent the relations between "students" and "educators" in terms of Us versus Them in which the students are subtly associated with positive (chaste) properties and their educators with bad (lechery) properties. By representing the students as the vulnerable group, the Bill expresses ingroup-solidarity for the seeming defenceless students. This study concludes that the Bill is a discursive site for the subtle construction of ideologically polarised group opinion which favours students but is biased against educators.*

Keywords: Sexual harassment, tertiary educational institutions, critical discourse analysis, ideologies, and ideological square

INTRODUCTION

Sexual harassment in tertiary education institutions (henceforth, SHTEIs) is any persistent and unsolicited behaviour that offends, intimidates or impinges upon a person's overall productivity and well-being within any higher education system (Pantelmann & Wälty, 2023). It is regarded as

the improper promise of some rewards as compensations for sexual favours or threats of punishment for withholding sexual favours in academic context (Sulfaro & Gill, 2019; Commission for Gender Equality, 2024). It could be verbal (sexual insults, comments or insinuations) or non-verbal (unwelcome touching, staring or cuddling) (Swedish Research Council, 2018; Hardt, Stöckl, Wamoyi & Ranganathan, 2023). SHTEIs has become a perennial problem that studies (e.g., Bondestam & Lundqvist, 2020; Pantelmann & Wälty, 2023; Dey, 2024) on its many nuances and subtle manifestations have gained much traction in diverse regions. Nigeria is apparently not an exception.

Discourses on SHTEIs are gradually becoming popular in Nigeria with the social media uproars on “sex-for-mark” scandals that rocked some Nigerian universities in recent times, particularly the 2019 sex-for-grades documentary by the BBC Africa Eye (Popoola, 2023) and the former OAU lecturer’s case who was jailed for two years (Aare & Orie, 2023). These cases, and subsequent ones, thrust into the spotlight the reality of SHTEIs, thus turning the subject into a major focus of enquiry in Nigerian scholarship. Consequently, empirical studies on SHTEIs in Nigeria have largely explored the causes, manifestations and consequences of the phenomenon (Okafor, Iyekolo & Ajibola, 2023; Thompson, et al., 2024), its prevalence measure (Onoyase, 2019), its legal frameworks and implications (Aina-pelemo & Wellington, 2022; Aare & Orie, 2023). Other studies have examined the factors surrounding its (non)reportage and the lived experiences of its survivors (Mapayi, Oloniniyi, Oginni & Harrison, 2023) as well as the implementation level of the anti-sexual policy in a selected Nigerian university (Fasanmi & Seyama, 2024). Many of these studies are, however, conducted within the purview of legal studies, clinical sciences, social sciences or education policy studies. By implication, SHTEIs is still less explored in linguistic studies, hence, the need for the current study.

Although a few linguistic studies have appraised cyberspace discursivities on sexual harassment in Nigerian TEIs (Ugah, 2024) and examined language indices and gender-based stereotypes in selected university campuses in Nigeria (Oni-Buraimoh & Bartlett, 2025), none of the extant studies has attempted to deconstruct Nigeria’s 2019 Anti-Sexual Harassment Bill. This marks the novelty of this study. With the upsurge in sexual harassment cases in Nigerian academia, the Nigerian Senate passed into law the Anti-Sexual Harassment Bill in 2019 to problematise and address the social phenomenon. Till date, no study has been conducted in language-related fields to deconstruct the discourse structures of this Bill and critique its ideological patterns. Popoola’s (2023) feminist textual analysis of some Nigerian TEIs’ sexual harassment policies is close to this study, but his focus is not on the national Bill and the theory is gender-based. To this end, the present study seeks to bridge this gap by examining the discourse structures of Nigeria’s 2019 Anti-Sexual Harassment Bill, with a view to unmasking the ideological patterns implicit in the structures. It is crucial to critique the provisions of the Bill using the lens of van Dijk’s (2008) socio-cognitive ideological approach embedded within critical discourse analytical framework. This approach will help in gauging the structural value of the Bill and its ideological positionings, which could serve as a useful guide when enacting future laws on SHTEIs.

The Theoretical Base

Critical discourse analysis (henceforth, CDA) is a critical perspective within the broader multidisciplinary field of discourse studies (van Dijk, 2008). CDA focuses on how unequal power relations, dominance and social inequality/injustice are discursively reproduced and or resisted. Hence, it addresses social problems with the aim of achieving equity and justice. Notable scholars like van Dijk (1995, 1998, 2008), Fairclough (2003) and Wodak (2001) have immensely contributed to the evolution of CDA, however this study is specifically premised on van Dijk's (2008) socio-cognitive framework owing to its ideological dimension.

This approach connects discourse structures, societal practices and social cognition in a triad structure in which ideologies organise the social cognitions shared by members of social/institutional/organisational groups and ultimately their discourse structures. Ideologies are thus cognitive and social as they interface between the cognitive processes constituting discourses and social actions, and the interests and attitudes of social groups (van Dijk, 1995, p. 18). For ideologies to sustain socio-cognitive functions, their discourse structures should articulate those functions (van Dijk, 1998). Hence, ideologies basically function to define and organise dominant attitudes and interests of groups or institutions.

Given the linguistic properties of discourse, the socio-cognitive dimensions of CDS need to consider the discourse strategies and structures deployed in texts and talks (van Dijk, 2008). This simply means that the specific ideological meanings passed across in a communicative event depend on the choices made by the speaker/writer from the system of the language being used. The significance of the notion of choice towards meaning interpretation in texts is explicitly espoused by Halliday (2013), thus connecting CDA with systemic functional linguistics (Kazemian & Hashemi, 2014).

Hence, varied discourse structures (e.g., headlining, topicalisation, syntactic structures of sentences and clauses, lexicalisation, implicitness, etc.) are analysed in the expression of ideological meanings, which are typically articulated along the dimension of Us versus Them polarisation – “We are Good and They are Bad, especially when conflicting interests are involved” (van Dijk, 1998, p. 4). This polarising evaluative structure of positive ingroup-description and negative outgroup-description is what van Dijk calls the “ideological square”, delineated into these four sub-structures: a) emphasise our positive behaviours/actions; b) emphasise their negative behaviours/actions; c) deemphasise our positive behaviours/actions; and deemphasise their positive behaviours/actions (van Dijk, 1998, p. 10). Adequate CDS must, therefore, account for discourse structures in text and talk in order to uncover their polarising patterns.

METHODOLOGY

The data for this study, downloaded from the Internet, is Nigeria's 2019 Anti-Sexual Harassment Bill titled – “A BILL FOR AN ACT TO PREVENT, PROHIBIT AND REDRESS SEXUAL

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HARASSMENT OF STUDENTS IN TERTIARY EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS AND FOR MATTERS CONNECTED THEREWITH, 2019.” This Bill was enacted by the Nigerian Legislative arm and sponsored by Senator Ovie Omo-Agege (Delta Central) with other 106 co-sponsors. Although there is the “Model Anti-Sexual Harassment Policies for Educational Institutions in Nigeria” (2023) prepared by the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC), the policies cover primary and secondary educational sectors making them unfit for this study. The Anti-Sexual harassment Bill is solely enacted to address sexual harassment in Nigeria’s higher education system, which is the primary focus of this study. Structurally, the Bill has 16 pages, 16 clauses and 4,742 words. As the title explicitly indicates, the Bill’s provisions seek to shield students in Nigeria’s TEIs from all forms of sexual harassment (Aare & Orie, 2023).

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the analysis on how ideologies are expressed at different discourse levels in the Bill. The analytical procedure covers two sections. The first elicits the various levels of discourse structures in the Bill, while the second analyses the constructions of ideologies in these levels. However, sections one and two are realised simultaneously since ideologies are functions of discourse properties making both discursively intertwined. Extracts exemplifying each elicited discourse structure are purposively selected from the Bill text to authenticate the analysis.

Discourse Structures

The Bill text is discursively organised through the following discourse structures: compelling headlining (in minimal bold text and textual placing); lexical choices; syntactic structure of clauses and sentences; implicitness; and, vagueness. Each of these structures is discussed in turn hereunder.

Compelling Headlining

The foremost striking graphic structure in the Bill is the bold and centralised headline that summarily puts the Bill propositions in the foreground – **A BILL FOR AN ACT TO PREVENT, PROHIBIT AND REDRESS SEXUAL HARASSMENT OF STUDENTS IN TERTIARY EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS AND FOR MATTERS CONNECTED THEREWITH, 2019**. In this headline, topicalisation is structurally used to activate the Bill’s primary thrust. This signals the highest topic and prominent information in the Bill’s macrostructure hierarchy. The “prevention, prohibition and redress of sexual harassment” is emphasised in the title as the macro-proposition of the legal text. Fronting “sexual harassment” in the title foregrounds the phenomenon as a serious object of public concern, an offence to be prevented; while the phrase “Tertiary Educational Institutions” activates the Nigerian academia as the circumstantial category of setting for the offence in the Nigerian society. The significance of “Students” in the Bill is also explicitly foregrounded in the headline to represent them as the “goal”, thus emphasising them as the ingroup (the direct potential victims of the action of sexual harassment in Nigerian academia) whose rights

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are being defended by the Senators. The usage of the word “students” in the Bill is gender neutral, which presupposes gender inclusion. Through goal-foregrounding, the students are broadly represented as the dominated social group whose interest the Bill (through the sponsor and co-sponsors) stands to protect. In consequence, since the role of victimhood has been activated for them, the Bill ideologically reproduces a discourse of resistance against power, inequality and domination (involving gender-based sexual harassment) operating in Nigerian academia.

It is observed that the structure of the headline is agentless – the social actors are obscured and the readership is left to infer their identities depending on their social cognition. The goal and the circumstances of the action are more foregrounded. This resonates with Osisanwo’s (2016, p. 192) view that “text producers use circumstantialisation to background actors and foreground issues and processes”. This “agency obscuration” (Osisanwo, 2016, p. 191) is however ideological inasmuch as opinions in text need not be explicit, but may be inferred (van Dijk, 1998, p. 11). In essence, the agency of the action depicted in the headline may be inferred through the context model. By obscuring the agent in the headline, more ideological structures are brought to the limelight. First, males are typical offenders of sexual harassment in Nigerian society; hence, the inferred actors (agent) of sexual harassment against students are Nigerian male academics, which thus subtly cast aspersions on their integrity. Secondly, girls/women, and not boys/men, are typical victims of sexual harassment in the same society; hence, the gender neutrality of “students” in the headline and in the body of the Bill is an oblique strategy meant to mask the polarised ideological structure of positive representation (student-victims) versus negative representation (male educator-offenders) underlying the headline and the whole Bill. The headline represents the students positively as the dominated, victimised group needing protection from sexual harassment and whose rights the senators are defending. Conversely, male academics are negatively portrayed as potential offenders, the male chauvinists who must be resisted. In essence, the headline is not neutral, but ideologically self-categorises the Bill genre as legalised resistance against male educators’ hegemony. In line with van Dijk’s (1995) view, this headline is the most prominent discourse category of the overall semantic macrostructure of the Bill, that foregrounds the underlying ideological leaning of the text towards the unequal social power dynamics between female students and male educators.

Lexical Choices

Lexical items do not function in isolation neither are they neutrally strewn together. They are rather situated within the broad text, context and usage in which they function to express ideological structure. To van Dijk (1995, 1998), lexicalisation is a core domain of ideologies as concepts expressed through lexical items concretised into propositions which form the core socio-cognitive context model for the expression of ideologies. To this end, lexical items such as “sexual harassment”, “sexual offence”, “sexual intercourse”, “sexual prohibition”, “sex”, “sexuality”, “vagina”, “penis” are explicitly and repetitively deployed in the Bill text. This is not surprising; these words have to be repeated in order to show that everything being discussed revolves around sexual behaviours. However, the choice of sexuality in the collocations “sexual + harassment”,

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“sexual + offence”, “sexual + intercourse” and “sexual + prohibition” bears a negative semantic sense as the sexual behavioural evaluation is considered unsolicited and, therefore, criminal.

The lexical choices “protection” “prevention”, “prohibition” and “redressal” presupposes a negative judgement of any physical intimacy between students and educators. Ideologically, the repetition of “the bill”, a nominal phrase repeated 40 times in the data, represents the social interest of its sponsor and co-sponsors to protect student-victims and punish educator-offenders, and also reflects their positions to criminalise SHTEIs in Nigeria. This corroborates van Dijk’s (1998, p. 4) postulation that ideologies may represent “group self-schemata” that features some categories such as group interests, goals, values and positions. The Bill thus symbolises the intent and social attitude of (co) sponsors of the bill towards sexual harassment against students in Nigerian TEIs and their intent to fight against it. This symbol interfaces between the (co)sponsors and the students by organising ingroup-solidarity for the seeming helpless students. This interface activates a positive ingroup-identity (we are defending the defenceless) for the bill’s (co)sponsors and ingroup-solidarity/favouritism for the students. Ideologically therefore, the bill is activated by its (co)sponsors as a weapon of defence bequeathed to the students.

The words “students” and “educators” are also preponderantly used in the data as revealed in the excerpts below:

- Ex 1. Protection of *students* against sexual harassment by *educators* in tertiary educational institutions;
- Ex 2. Prevention of sexual harassment of *students* by *educators* in tertiary educational institutions; and
- Ex 3. Redressal of complaints of sexual harassment of *students* by *educators* in tertiary educational institutions (p. 4).

The noticeable proximity of the two words ideologically represents the inseparability of the two entities in an academic environment. In point of fact, in one or two instances in the text, both words are compounded – “student-educator” – to upscale this necessary social attachment. In the Bill, working definitions are provided for the terms “student” and “educator”, respectively (see Exs 4 and 5 below):

- Ex 4: to any person enrolled in any educational or training programs of a tertiary educational institution or post-secondary institution. (p. 16)
- Ex 5: every employee of a tertiary educational institution including all academic and non-academic staff, or a faculty or non-faculty member of a tertiary educational institution including a professor, lecturer, graduate assistant, post-doctoral fellow or associate serving as a full-time or part-time instructor or a teaching fellow in similar institutional roles who teaches, educates or trains students or who provides professional educational services... (p. 15)

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The word “student” is necessarily repeated 55 times to realise, on the one hand, discursive specificity designating them as the beneficiaries of the Bill and, on the other hand, discursive generality obliterating gender specificity. The use of the word “protection” gives the students the social identity of a vulnerable group. This vulnerability presupposes they are harmless, which is a clear case of positive group-representation. Although a fleeting sub-section of the bill (Ex 6) acknowledges the malicious tendencies of students, the whole bill mirrors students as a dominated group needing protection.

Ex 6: Where at the completion of an investigation into a Sexual Harassment Complaint, an Independent Sexual Harassment Prohibition Committee finds or determines in its final decision that the complaint is false and malicious, the Committee may, recommend sanctions to the administrative head against the student who made the complaint... (p. 13)

Repeated 32 times in the data, negative evaluations of the entity “educator(s)” are explicitly expressed in the choice of propositional structures such as “sexual harassment by educators”, “educator who is alleged to have committed a sexual harassment offence”, “an educator’s breach of the fiduciary duty owed to a student”, “prosecute the educator”, among others. These structures are intended in the pejorative sense as they imply the (co)sponsors’ shared evaluation of the lewd and lascivious tendencies of educators, which the Bill seeks to proscribe. Since the educators’ possible positive properties are de-emphasised in the course of emphasising their possible raunchy properties, the negative orientation of the emphasis becomes obvious.

Hinged on the ideological square system, the “student-educator” social attachment is organised in a polarised structure in the text, with students and educators being categorised as the dominated and dominant groups, respectively. The polarised categorisation implies positive ingroup-description of students and negative outgroup-description of educators. In other words, students are associated with favourable properties such as innocence, naivety, powerlessness, innocuousness and chasteness while educators are associated with unfavourable properties like profanity, irresponsibility, carnality and corruption. Essentially, the basic ideology that structurally organises the text is the polarised pattern of students’ powerlessness against educators’ hegemony, which the Bill seeks to reverse. Appreciation for the bill’s valuation is thus ideologically upscaled as it symbolises the students’ fundamental defence against sexual harassment, thus activating the corollary ideologies of empowered victims (for students) and disempowered harasser (for educators).

Further in the Bill, the choice of “shall”, an obligation-modality often used in the futurity sense, is quite prevalent, as seen from the following excerpts:

Ex. 7: To uphold the Objective of this Bill, an educator *shall* observe a fiduciary duty of care to every student by not exploiting a student or his/her

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relationship with a student for personal gains, sexual pleasure, or immoral satisfaction ... (clause 3, p. 5).

Ex. 8: An educator *shall* be guilty of committing an offence or a felony of sexual harassment if he/she – (p. 5)

Ex 9: Any person who commits any of the offences or acts specified in Clause 4 (1), (2) and (3) of this Bill is guilty of an offence of felony and *shall*, on conviction, be sentenced to an imprisonment term of up to 14 years but not less than 5 years, without an option of a fine. (p. 6)

All the above examples illustrate the use of “shall + main verb” to indicate obligation, and it is used 56 times in the text. This modal expression or imposition of obligation has been documented in the literature by Palmer (1979) and Huddleston and Pullum (2002). In Ex 7, the modal choice of shall + observe legitimises educators’ fiduciary duty of care towards their students which they are obligated to fulfil; Ex 8 (shall + be guilty) de-legitimises all acts that violate the fiduciary duty by adjudging guilty violators; while Ex 9 (shall... + be sentenced) prescribes and legitimises sanctions for violators, but with a proviso of being convicted (on conviction) and being married to the student (Ex 10):

Ex 10: For the purpose of the offences in clause 4 of this Bill, *it shall be a defence* that the educator and the student are legally married (p. 5).

These modal-obligatory discursive structures are disempowering for the educators. Their usage is thus an ideological strategy aimed at negative portrayal of educators as potential opportunistic sexual offenders who could play on their students’ vulnerability. This aligns with Stephens, Reale, Goodwill & Beauregard’s (2017) study that sexual offenders are “more likely to select victims on characteristics that signal opportunity (e.g., victim vulnerability)”. On the other hand, the use of shall + be delivered (in Ex 11), shall + submit and shall + specify (in Ex 12) legitimises students’ resistance against sexual harassment.

Ex 11: A copy of the written Sexual Harassment Petition complaining of sexual harassment in clauses of this Bill *shall be delivered* by the student or the student’s representation to both the administrative head and... (clause 6).

Ex 12: Where a student complains of sexual harassment, he or she *shall submit* a written Sexual Harassment Complaint to the administrative head of the institution where the complaint arose and *shall specify* the name and department, office or home address of the educator who is alleged to have committed an offence under this Bill (9).

By making students’ resistance against sexual harassment a legitimate move, the Bill confers power on the students as it simultaneously mitigates their victimhood and diminishes their educators’ authority. Equally relevant here is the repeated use of the lexeme “complaint”, a legal document to be filed by a student-victim for a criminal investigation against an alleged educator-harasser. This is an emphasis on the students’ rights associating them not just with victimhood, but with something licit and legitimate.

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However, “shall” does not always have the meaning of obligation in the legal text. In another sense, the use of “shall” together with the main verb that follows gives the general meaning of established policy or standard that is inalterable and incontestable. An instance of the above function is illustrated in Ex 13:

Ex 13: In determining a complaint of sexual harassment, the provisions of this Bill *shall supersede* any existing policies, rules or regulations for internal administrative discipline of its staff and students (clause 15, sub-section 2).

shall + supercede represents a positive value judgment of the provisions of the bill by authorising their superiority over and above other existing laws, and thus legitimising their sacrosanctity as resistive strategy against sexual harassment of students in Nigerian academy.

The conjunction “or” is another preponderant lexical item in the data with 106 occurrences. Its routinised use integrates cohesively various alternatives and possibilities to the provisions of the bill in order to preclude any lacuna or unnecessary loopholes that can be exploited later on by educators, lawyers, students or stakeholders, as the case may be. The following excerpts show some manifestations of the above repetitions in our data:

Ex 14: An educator shall be guilty of committing an offence *or* a felony of sexual harassment if he/she –

... (4) grabs, hugs, kisses, rubs *or* strokes *or* touches the breasts *or* hair *or* lips *or* buttock, *or* any other sensual parts of the body of a student; ... (p. 5).

Ex 15: A written Sexual Harassment Petition complaining of the offence *or* felony of sexual harassment against an educator may be filed *or* made by a student *or* by a student’s representative who may be a relative, a guardian, *or* a lawyer of the student, *or* any person who has interest in the wellbeing of the student to the Nigerian Police Force, *or* the Attorney-General who shall take necessary measures to prosecute the educator in accordance with the provisions of this Bill. (p. 6)

The conjunction “or” is used copiously in Ex 14 to specifically map out diverse alternate forms of sexual harassment an educator could perpetrate against a student. By so doing, discursive specificities are achieved in the excerpt representing “educators” as potential sexual harassers to activating negative educator-description; and “students” as potential victims to achieve a positive solidarist student-description. In Ex 15, “or” ideologically actuates power for students by giving them the legal impetus to officially lodge harassment complaints against any educator-harasser. The power actuation moves the students from victimhood to empowerment and emancipation, a subtle case of student-educator role reversal.

In sum, the choice of words used in the bill text is mostly that of plain English which could be easily understood by all students who assumedly have average knowledge of the English language. In other words, there are no archaic words, Latin words, unfamiliar words, or complex propositions

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that can hinder comprehension. This choice of simplicity in language use is an overall ideological strategy meant to make the students realise that the bill text is primarily for them, and it is their weapon of defence against sexual harassment.

Syntactic Structures

This section covers sentence types according to function structure as well as the parallel structures in the data. In the English language, four sentence types according to function are recognised – declarative, imperative, interrogative and exclamatory. Of these sentence types, the only dominant one in the data is the declarative type, which is amply used to state facts, make and explain assertions as exemplified in the following data samples:

Ex 17: This Bill is enacted to promote and protect ethical standards in tertiary education, the sanctity of the student-educator fiduciary relationship of authority, dependency and trust and respect for human dignity in tertiary educational institutions... (p. 4)

Ex 18: Criminal proceedings shall commence or be deemed to have commenced under this Bill when a charge has been filed in Court and the processes served on an educator who is alleged to have committed a sexual harassment offence under this Bill. (p. 6)

Through these declarative sentences, assertions are deployed to present the objectives of the bill, define what constitutes sexual offences in tertiary institutions, outline criminal proceedings and penalty against alleged offenders, outline rights of complainants, institutional disciplinary measures against an offender and liability for false complaints. Aside from performing the assertive speech act function, these sentences also implicitly validate the reality of sexual harassment of students (by their educators) in Nigerian TEIs. This corroborates Krifka's (2024, p. 52) claim that "with an assertion, a speaker claims that a proposition is true". This implicit validation ideologically organises the (co) sponsors' attitudes to the social actors represented in the Bill – students as potential victims (positive representation) and educators as potential sexual harassers (negative representation). These attitudes control the general semantics and content of the bill.

Parallelism, which is richly deployed in the bill text, is a "rhetorical device in which a formula or structural pattern is repeated." (Mc Arthur, 1996, p. 670). Parallelism shall be illustrated in the data with references to two sections in the Bill. The first section (Clause 4) is on page 5 of the data. The Clause has six (6) sub-clauses which are all expressed in parallel structure. The title of the clause is "Offences". It is expressed as follows:

Ex 19: An educator shall be guilty of committing an offence or a felony of sexual harassment if he/she –

1. *has* sexual intercourse with a student or *demands* for sex from a student or a prospective student; or

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2. *intimidates* or *creates* a hostile or offensive environment for the student by soliciting for sex from the student or making sexual advances towards the student; or
3. *directs* or *induces* another person to commit any act of sexual harassment under this Bill, or cooperates in the commission of sexual harassment by another person without which it would not have been committed; or ...
4. *grabs, hugs, kisses, rubs* or *strokes* or *touches* or *pinches* the breasts or hair or lips or hips or buttocks or any other sensual part of the body of a student; or
5. *displays, gives* or *sends* by hand or courier or electronic or any other means naked or or sexually explicit pictures or videos or sex related objects to a student; or...
6. *whistles* or *winks* at a student or *screams* or *exclaims* or *jokes* or *makes* sexually complimentary or uncomplimentary remarks about a student's physique or stalks a student.... (emphasis ours)

In Ex 19, all the sub-clauses are introduced through the same grammatical structure of third person singular verb. On the surface level, the choice of this parallel structure is to emphasise offensive actions that constitute sexual harassment in academia that the two principal social actors – students and educators – should have knowledge of. However, these parallel structures are significant in ideological construction. From the above structures, objectionable sexual behaviours from an educator to a student are explicitly emphasised in the choice of all the third person singular verbs in italics that introduce each of the sub-clauses. The emphasis implicitly presupposes the educators' misconception of (their) students as sex objects meant to satisfy their sexual orgies. The educators' dominant power and the students' inferiority/vulnerability become obvious in this power imbalance relation. Thus, the educators' propensity to manipulate their power over their students is reflective in the unscrupulous sexual behavioural practices underlined in parallel in Ex 19. The choice of the adjectival lexeme "guilty" in the introductory clause foregrounds the sexual cum legal impropriety of the practices and their culmination as sexual misconducts.

Most importantly, all the above sub-clauses are in the parallel structure of "if-clause" format functioning as subordinate conditional clauses meant to make prominent the actor (the potential educator-offender) and their set of negative properties that constitutes "an offence or a felony of sexual harassment" of students in Nigeria's TEIs. In the words of van Dijk (1995), the semantic prominence of negative properties of outgroups influences clause structures "in such a way that agency and responsibility of outgroup actors is syntactically highlighted" (p. 25). Syntactic prominence is ideologically achieved in the parallel structures to subtly represent the sex-based conflict between female students and male educators, in which the students' academic performances, sexual and mental health are at risk. Ideologically, this not only categorises male educators as potential sexual predators, but also positions them as a threat to Nigerian female

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students. The parallel structures thus represent the relations between the students and such educators in terms of “Us versus Them”, in which the students are subtly associated with positive (chaste) properties while their educators are associated with bad (lechery) properties.

In the aspect of types of sentences according to structure, although all the four types of sentences according to structure (simple, compound, complex and compound-complex) are deployed in the data, simple sentences (consist of one independent clause which conveys only one idea) appear more as reflected below:

Ex 20: The standard of proof in any proceeding for an educator’s breach of the fiduciary duty owed to a student under clause 2 and 3 of this Bill shall be the same standard applicable in all civil proceedings (p. 7).

Ex 21: ... An application for judicial review under the clause may be consolidated with any civil proceedings commenced on behalf of the affected student pursuant to the provisions of this Bill (p. 12).

The simplistic structure of the Bill is, therefore, ideologically unrestrictive as it confers social power on the students, the beneficiaries of the Bill. According to van Dijk (1995), elite groups or institutions may control access to their public discourse by using sentence complexity which limits public comprehensibility; this thus forms the nexus between syntactic structures and ideologies. The simplified language enhances comprehensibility of the Bill, which is instrumental in students gaining unrestricted access to the public discourse. The access is inclusionary in function. This finding is different from that of Trosberg (1997, p. 23) who lists “long and complex sentence” among the features of legal text, with the goal of restricting access to outgroups.

Implicitness

Implicitness is another prominent discourse property that undergirds ideological expressions (van Dijk, 1995). Implicitness in discourse refers to implied, inferable or tacit but intended meanings (Helgesson, 2002). This demonstrates that “people usually understand much more of a text than that it actually expresses” (van Dijk, 1998, p. 6). In the Bill, the frequency of occurrence of the social actors are: student or students (73 times) and educator or educators (41 times). The higher frequency of student(s) implicitly emphasises that Nigerian students in TEIs are centermost in the Bill propositions. More importantly, “student” and “educator” are preponderantly gender neutral in the text, except for just one instance (Ex 22) where gender specificity is achieved to emphasise that a female educator too could harass a male student:

Ex 22: “sexual intercourse” means penetration of a sexual nature of the vagina or anus or mouth of the student by the penis or mouth or finger of the educator or any instrument or toy by the educator and for this purpose, a male student can be sexually harassed by a female educator (p. 16).

Except for this sole instance, all other references to the two social actors remain non-gender specific. In Nigeria, cases of sex-for-grades are typically between female students and male educators; never for once has there been an allegation of sexual harassment against female educators in Nigeria's academia. This context model presupposes that the implied genders of the two social actors are thus "female students" and "male educators". This implicitness performs two polarised ideological moves. It controls the overall empathetic representation of Nigerian female students as a vulnerable group to be protected visible in the Bill. Conversely, it depicts Nigerian educators' negative behavioural propensity, thus portraying them as a group to be curtailed. These moves emphasise male educators' sexual harassment of female students, and de-emphasise female students' sexual harassment of male educators.

Vagueness

This is a semantic relation at the sentence level where an expression has no particular or definite meaning; that is, an expression does not give or have sufficient information as to know exactly what it is referring to. Consider the excerpts below from our data.

Ex 23: Any educator or person in an institution where sexual harassment is alleged or in another institution who *victimizes* a student in respect of a Sexual Harassment Complaint under this Bill shall be liable to the same criminal sanctions, disciplinary punishment or damages as the educator whom the student originally complained against (p. 14).

Ex 24: The administrative head of an institution shall ensure that a student who makes a sexual harassment complaint under this Bill is adequately protected *and not subjected to any form of victimization* by the educator who is complained against or any other educator or person within the institution or in another institution (p. 14).

The expressions in italics are vague in nature; that is, they do not have particular meanings. The expressions are used loosely with no detailed information as to what constitutes victimisation in the circumstances referred to above. However, the local meanings of the expressions further create a polarisation between student-victims and educator-victimisers within Nigerian academia. The lexical choice in the expressions subtly associates the negative attribute of victimisation of students to "educators in Nigerian institutions", whereas the students to be "adequately protected" are subtly associated with innocence and integrity. The vagueness clearly differentiates between victims and victimisers, the chaste and the unchaste. This starkly depicts the significance of unmentioned propositions in the Bill – student-to-educator sexual harassment, and student-to-student sexual harassment.

CONCLUSION

Analysing Nigeria's 2019 Anti-Sexual Harassment Bill using van Dijk's (1995, 1998, 2008) socio-cognitive theoretic framework on critical discourse analysis has provided insights into the levels

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and dimensions of discourse structures through which the Bill is cohesively organised as well as the ideological meanings underlying the discourse structures. Compelling headlining, topicalisation, goal-foregrounding, agency obscuration, lexicalisation, syntactic structures, implicitness and vagueness are dominant (sub)discourse structures observable in the Bill. The use of the ideological square framework reveals how all these structures are ideological patterns delicately interweaved to reflect the (co) sponsors' attitudes not just towards the phenomenon of SHTEIs in Nigeria, but essentially towards the primary social actors typically involved – students and educators.

The most prominent discourse structures are headlining, lexicalisation and implicitness. Headlining is the salient graphic pattern of the Bill, centralised in a compelling mode to achieve topicalisation, goal-foregrounding and agency-obscuration. The topicalisation activates prominent information in the textual macrostructure hierarchy of the Bill; the goal-foregrounding emphasises “Students” as the vulnerable ingroup being defended by the Bill’s (co)sponsors; while the agency-obscuration de-emphasises the educators’ agency in order to downplay their importance. The lexical selections in the textual expression are generally polarised lexemes of the social actors with positive description of students and negative description of educators, which overall depict the Senators taking the defence of the students. The polarised lexicalisation structurally organises the Bill in a pattern of students’ powerlessness against educators’ hegemony, which the (co)sponsors seek to upturn. Appreciation for the bill’s valuation is thus upscaled symbolising it as the students’ weapon of defence against sexual harassment, thus activating the corollary ideologies of empowered victims (for students) and disempowered harasser (for educators).

The preferred implicitness masking the gender of the two social actors referenced in the Bill is also a deliberate ideological strategy premised on the given knowledge that in Nigeria, cases of sex-for-grades are typically between female students and male educators. The implicitness presupposes that the implied genders of the two social actors are “female students” and “male educators”. This implicitness emphasises and validates the reality of male educators’ sexual harassment of female students, while it also de-emphasises and invalidates other forms of SHTEIs in Nigeria such as female students’ sexual harassment of male educators and male students’ sexual harassment of female students. This demonstrates that the Bill is a subtle discursive construction of ideologically polarised group opinions. It is not just ideologically polarised, it is also ideologically skewed in favour of female students and biased against male educators.

Interestingly, this finding resonates with the viewpoint of Thompson et al. (2024) that sexual harassers in TEIs could also be students. Thus, possibilities of student-to-student sexual harassment as well as student-to-educator sexual harassment should be factored into the propositions of the Bill. This aligns with Sang, Kemboi and Omenge’s (2016) view that “most SH is perpetrated by male students against female students” (p. 142). It also supports Iwele’s (2022, p. 616) submission that lecturers too could be victims of sexual harassment in what Munyuki (2016) labels “contrapower harassment” which occurs when someone supposedly with lesser

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power harasses someone who wields greater power. These findings support Aare and Orie's (2023) finding that the Bill is not sufficiently comprehensive to effectively address SHTEIs in Nigeria, and should be revised so that educators do not feel witch-hunted and defenceless (Iwele, 2022).

This study has demonstrated the immense role of critical discourse analysis in understanding the use of language in Nigeria's 2019 Anti-Sexual Harassment Bill. Through the ideological square, the ideological discursive structures of the bill have been deconstructed to mark the bill as a polarised and biased legal text still requiring a complete revision that will encompass all other forms of and social actors involved in sexual harassment in Nigeria's TEIs. The study has enriched existing discourse studies on SHTEIs. The Bill could be further explored through another linguistic lens to expand the literature.

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