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Discursive Constructions of Power in Selected Nigerian Media Reports of Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) Strikes

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Abstract:

Power, dominance, and control are not exclusive and are always constructed, exercised, and sustained through overt acts/mechanisms of coercion. The subtle yet manipulative subtexts of language in discourse are, at times, more effective vehicles (modes) utilized by more powerful groups to build and ratify institutional dominance over less powerful ones. Based on the foregoing, this study examines discursive constructions of power in ASUU strike discourses between the FGN and ASUU, as reported in major Nigerian newspapers – The Punch, Vanguard, and The Nation – as well as on other credible media platforms. The research sought to unearth, among other things, the various discursive structures deployed in discourses by the parties for the ventilation of dominance and demonstration of resistance, as well as the group ideologies that underlie such language choices. The qualitative research approach and content analysis, based on a purposive sampling of discourse texts in the newspapers and other media sources, were adopted for the study. Twenty-two discourse texts from 2001-2009, 2013, and 2020 ASUU strikes were analyzed based on the analytical tools found within Van Dijk's (2001) Socio-cognitive model of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Van Dijk's Socio-cognitive frame, over and above other models of CDA, contains a checklist of actual discursive cum ideological instruments of dominance and resistance relevant to this study. Our analysis revealed, among other things, that the FGN consistently focused on and deployed ideological strategies which tended toward legitimizing its control over ASUU, winning positive public perception, sympathy, and support for itself and away from the Union (a less powerful group). This was achieved through various forms of discursive propaganda and appeals to patriotism, ventilated through ideological instruments such as number games, vagueness, apparent empathy, and blame transfer, as well as through the FGN's strategically-more-pronounced media visibility. ASUU, on the other hand, instinctively and perpetually struggled, through the use of appropriate discursive mechanisms too, to detach from itself the government-ascribed negative public image. These ideological wrangling, incidentally, delayed and even stalled the resolution of the FGN/ASUU conflicts in each case. The study thus recommends, among other things, focusing on language that is truthful in public discourse instead of advancing a specific group's ideology over the public interest.

Keywords: Power, discursive, socio-cognitive, institutional, critical discourse

1. Introduction

Language, 'a social practice' (Fowler 1975, p. 16) by which power relations are established and sustained, is seen in Hagan Scott (2018, p. 10) as a communication medium for turning a power base into influence. Moreover, Scott holds that lower power groups might achieve power through language, and those in higher power positions might retain and subvert acts of power. The application of language, he maintains, may serve to reify and concretize institutional control relationships. Fowler's and Scott's positions about language and power corroborate Fairclough's (1989) view that power [and dominance] is not only built and sustained through coercive means but also [more so] through other subtle and indirect ways, such as the use of language. In this way, powerful institutions and individuals employ and deploy the toolbox of language as both a means to construct their power and to maintain it. Thus, just as language becomes a necessary tool for exercising power [and control] by overtly recognized entities for holding certain positions of authority, the power and effect of language connection, in turn, is predicated on the power of individuals and institutions themselves. The maintenance of such status and power through language is often facilitated by the privileged access of the higher power group to scarce social resources – authority, wealth, public media, and knowledge, among others – at the expense of the lower power groups (Van Dijk 1996 cited in Agbedo 2015, p. 297). The exploitation by the higher power groups of such privileged access to scarce social resources for the dominant control of the lower power groups informs critical discourse analysis (CDA's) interest in the subject of social power abuse (Agbedo 2015, p. 296). Indeed, its overriding concern with

social power abuse and resistance confers critical discourse analysis, the 'criticalness' (Van Leeuwen, 1996), which distinguishes CDA from other genres of discourse studies.

The sort of unequal power relation, as highlighted above, is the sort that exists between the Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN) and the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), especially as it has to do with the recurrent disharmony in Nigerian university system (NUS). While the FGN, here identified as the higher power group, insists on exercising dominant control over the union of university teachers (the lower power group), ASUU, in its Marxist-Leninist stance and ideological foundation, perpetually struggles to resist such oppressive tendencies of the 'oppressor'. This is geared towards attaining egalitarianism for Nigerian society, especially in Nigerian public university education. Such ideological differences often pitch the FGN against ASUU over the improvement of Nigerian public university education and often lead to conflicts/strikes with the polarized power equation expressed in discursive rather than coercive terms.

From the 1980s military-era struggles of the union to the post-2009 FGN/ASUU Agreement strife, perpetually unmet pacts by the FGN have often defined/underlined the perennial conflict between ASUU and the Federal Government of Nigeria. These pacts [MoUs and MoAs] bother on the union's quest for improvement in welfare and other working conditions for academic staff in Nigerian public universities and revamping dilapidated structures in the nation's public universities. The growing unfaithfulness of the government to these pacts signed with ASUU at different times has led to worsening working conditions for the lecturers and adverse learning environments for the students. Thus, the constant reminders by ASUU – through Strikes – of the need for Government to live up to its responsibilities to the public (Ihunvbere, 2020) often brew conflicting ideologies between the parties. Such a conflicting ideology – 'a complex' dogmatic belief system, by which individuals or groups interpret, rationalize and justify behaviours and actions (Hinich and Munger 1994, p. 10) – is often embedded in discourse through various forms of discursive constructions, 'the linguistic turns and draws on various conceptualizations of 'discourse'...' (Stacy et al., 2017). Thus, according to Hosseini et al. (2013), ideology and ideological differences explain why dominated groups relentlessly struggle to resist organized dominant groups' ideologies/control. One then readily appreciates the constantly polarized, even disparaging, discursive practices between the FGN and ASUU during strikes. On this premise, this paper examines the discursive constructions of power in selected Nigerian media reports of ASUU strikes.

The investigation is carried out to:

- Find out the various discursive structures by which power, dominance, and resistance are demonstrated,
- Ascertain group ideologies that determine groups' language choices in discourse texts...on ASUU strikes, and
- Identify the similarities or dissimilarities in discourse patterns across the different strikes reviewed

Altogether, twenty-one (21) discursively-germane texts, seven (7) each, drawn from three strategic ASUU strikes – 2001-2009, 2013, and 2020 – as reported in *The Punch*, *Vanguard*, *The Nation* newspapers, and other credible Nigerian media platforms are purposively sampled and analyzed using Van Dijk's Socio-cognitive model of critical discourse analysis (CDA). By Nigerian media platforms, we mean those media platforms that publish in Nigeria and feature at their core Nigerian events – local issues of politics, social realities, business, major events, et cetera (Afeez, 2011).

2. Situating the Study

The paucity of scholarly research on the discursive approach to the study of power relations in the FGN/ASUU decade-long conflict has constituted a huge drawback to the uncovering and understanding of the implicit ideological rather than coercive imprints of power that underlie discourses on the subject. This is despite the relevance of the linguistic x-ray of discourses to conflict management and resolution. In contrast, the principal aim of critical discourse analysis is to unveil the hidden, subjective, and even biased ideological assumptions and meanings behind the abuse of power (Alo & Oluremi, 2013). Previous studies on the FGN/ASUU perennial conflict mostly focused on the sociological evaluation of the struggle, with the suggested remedial measures remaining largely ineffective. These included studies by scholars such as Odoziobodo 2015; Anyim et al. 2013; Eke and Ori 2017; Albar 2016; Ebele 2013; Uhumwuango 2018; Odim et al. 2018 and Ahmed 2013. Although Aragbuwa (2014), Asiru et al. (2018), and Akinwotu (2019) made inroads into the discursive dimensions of the conflict between the FGN and ASUU, they specifically focused on an isolated case – the 2013 ASUU strike – adopting varied methodological approaches and theories in their studies. Others have discursively probed related linguistic dimensions of discourse and power and various other aspects of the discursive engagements and/or other forms of conflict, choosing models such as the Hallidayan transitivity, Van-Leeuwen's theory, or other models of the critical discourse enterprise. Bloor and Bloor (2007), Hosseini et al. (2013), Gyamera (2012), Layo (2017), Bayram (2010), Marone (2017), Asiru et al. (2018), Usigbe and Illo (2019), Taiwo, (2007), Ajiboye (2013), Koehn et al., (2017), Monogbe and Monogbe (2019), Akinwotu (2019), Ugwuona (2016) are among these scholars. In view of this dearth of discursively-relevant analyses of strike discourses and the consideration of isolated cases of the conflict, a gap obviously exists in discursive studies that take a holistic approach to the conflict. This constitutes a research problem and knowledge gap, which this study seeks to solve/fill. Thus, using Van Dijk's Socio-cognitive approach to critical discourse analysis (CDA), this work explores discursive constructions of power in ASUU strikes across time, as reported in selected Nigerian media platforms. The primary aim of this paper is to discover various ways by which power and dominance are discursively constructed and negotiated by the higher and lower power groups during ASUU strikes.

Closely related to the present research on language and power in ASUU strikes, Akinwotu's (2019) study of the discursive strategies employed in the ASUU-FGN labour conflict of 2013. The study employed critical discourse analysis (CDA) and Johnson and Lakoff's conceptual metaphor theory (CMT). It was discovered in that study that both the FGN and ASUU employed propaganda in their discourses on the strike, in line with their militaristic discursive strategies, and that each of the two sides propagated disparaging discourses in respect of each group's motivation and ideology. Apart from her 2015 study of Boko Haram discourses in the Nigerian print media (see also Agbedo and Ugwuona 2010 for such

studies on the analysis of discourses in the Nigerian print media) in which a lot of manipulative use of language was discovered, Ugwuona (2016) again examined the discourses in internet content on the 2013 strike through the lens of Van Dijk's psychologically-focused version of critical discourse analysis (CDA) (see Van Dijk 2006). Earlier, Aragbuwa (2014) employed Halliday's systemic functional grammar (SGF) framework (see Halliday, 1978) to analyze the thematic structure of statements by ASUU and FGN officials on the 2013 labour dispute.

Also, Alo & Oluremi's (2013) investigation of the discourse strategies and ideologies used in selected radio lead news of Osun State Broadcasting Corporation (OSBC) is theoretically related, at least in part to our work, in that CDA and SFG were used in their analysis. The study observed that media organizations often deploy various ideological strategies in their media discourses to highlight pro-government activities. Even more closely related to the present study, at least in conceptual consideration, is Arua and Amuta's (2018) examination of the ideological postures of ASUU and the FGN in industrial disputes. Analyzing a number of data (discourse texts by the parties) on ASUU strikes, the study reveals constant polarization in the discourses of the contending groups – dominant and dominated. Incidentally, such ideological polarization of discourses between the FGN and ASUU often arises due to the desire to maintain dominance and control on the one hand and the vehement resistance to such dominance on the other hand. The current study is, however, unique in its taking a purely linguistic and holistic approach to the FGN/ASUU conflict. Analyzing only discursively-relevant discourse contents in three historically-strategic ASUU strikes – 2001-2009, 2013, and 2020 – gives credence to the novelty of this research.

3. Theoretical Basis

In line with the study's concern with discursive issues of power, dominance, and ideology in ASUU strikes, Van Dijk's Socio-cognitive model of CDA will be applied to different sets of data based on theoretical...appropriateness and relevance (Clarke 2005, p.21). Features of the 'Ideological Square' and other discourse structures within the 'Socio-cognitive' frame (see also Arua & Amuta 2018; Alo & Oluremi 2013) will be isolated and applied to the specific discourse texts (data) to be analyzed.

3.1. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

CDA is both a multi-disciplinary approach to the study of discourse and an analytical research model that views language as a form of social practice in which all forms of linguistic usage are believed to encode the ideological disposition of language users (Fairclough, 1985). Originally known as critical language studies (Billing, 2003), scholars like Van Dijk and Wodak prefer to call it critical discourse studies to suggest that it is a combination of theory, application, and analysis. CDA traces its origin to a symposium held in Amsterdam in 1991 when its founding practitioners – Teun Van-Dijk, Norman Fairclough, Theo Van Leeuwen, Gunther Kress, and Ruth Wodak – met to deliberate on and formulate a discourse theoretical approach that will not just be interdisciplinary but will also integrate other linguistic, grammatical theories that are relevant to the analysis of language use (Wodak, 1996).

CDA is political in its objective. It was designed to question [and actually questions] the status quo by detecting, analyzing, and also resisting enactments of power abuse as transmitted in private and public discourse. Herein lies the 'criticalness' of critical discourse analysis (Van Leeuwen, 1996), and it is here that CDA as an analytical discourse tool finds application. Van Dijk (1998) observes that CDA is concerned with the analysis of words used in discourse to reveal the sources of power, dominance, inequality, and bias and how these sources are initiated, maintained, reproduced, and transformed within specific social, economic, political, and historical contexts. In doing this, Wodak and Fairclough see CDA as seeking to expose the manipulative nature of discursive practices in society, which manifest as class conflict, and are concealed in the language behaviours of the members of a society. Since language serves as the ideological anchorage of these oppressive social structures, the critical discourse analyst must therefore seek to establish through the process of analysis the linguistic strategies that serve as evidence of these oppressive tendencies. This is where the interventionist mission of CDA lies, and at this point, the actual analytical tools within CDA find application.

3.1.1. Van Dijk's Model of CDA

An analytical model (a theory), according to Clarke (2005), is chosen based on theoretical appropriateness and relevance. Therefore, in this connection, Van Dijk's socio-cognitive model of CDA, which is adopted for data analysis in this study, is theoretically appropriate and has context and content superiority over others. The features/tools contained in this model would be sufficient for handling the ideological features found in ASUU strikes discourses. The model began with elements of the psychological model of memory taken from cognitive science (Hidalgo, 2005). Like other CDA models, Van Dijk's Socio-cognitive approach is interested in social issues such as dominance, inequality, and resistance. However, over and above the other models, Van Dijk's model is interested in the naturalization of dominance which, according to the proponent, is possible through a socio-cognitive process of mind control. To Van Dijk, such mind control mechanisms are facilitated when members of a discourse domain accept beliefs, knowledge, and opinions appreciatively from those they consider authoritative, creditable sources such as the media (Nester et al., 1991). This 'virtue of submission' (Ibiley 2017, p.209) is also possible when consumers of discourse are obliged to the social actors (Giroox, 1981). Van Dijk (2001) maintains that CDA focuses on social problems, especially on the role of discourse in the production and reproduction of power abuse or domination. He believes that wherever possible, it does so from the perspective that is consistent with the best interest of the dominated (Out-group).

Within Van Dijk's model, social groups [especially those in power-related conflicts] are discursively categorized into ideological compartments of 'Us' and 'Them', 'In-group', and 'Out-group'. Such classification of groups in polarized terms is at the heart of the 'Ideological Square', a subset within the 'Socio-cognitive' model. The ideological square

principle thrives in opposites. While 'Our' (In-group's) positive actions are emphasized, 'Their' (Out-group's) negative deeds are emphasized, *and vice versa* (Van Dijk, 1998, p.33). He also identified implicit or indirect meaning, subtle structures, mental model, context model, and event models as underlying features within this model of CDA. Besides these contextual means of mind control, Van Dijk's approach also includes other mind control structures which are essentially discursive. These structures employ persuasive strategies such as highlighting topics in a newspaper headline, argumentation, and manipulation in a discourse which manifests in implicit communication of beliefs and ideas to recipients without actually asserting them, and by so doing, foreclosing their chances of being challenged.

CDA research, for him, is interested in the study of ideologically-biased discourses and the ways these polarize the representation of 'Us' (In-group) and 'Them' (Out-group) at the level of global and local meaning analyses in discourse. These are encapsulated within the overall strategy of positive 'self'-presentation and negative 'other'-presentation, in which 'our good things' and 'their bad things' are emphasized, and 'our bad things' and 'their good things (actions)' are de-emphasized (see Van Dijk 1993, 1995, 1996). Van Dijk describes global meaning or superstructures as schemes consisting of arguments, stories, or news articles, while local meaning (forms) are those of (the syntax of) sentences or formal relations between clauses or sentences in sequences: pronominal relations, active-passive voices, among others. Other ideological/discursive structures of dominance within the socio-cognitive frame include:

- Implication and presupposition,
- Apparent empathy,
- Number game,
- Lexicalization,
- Vagueness,
- Example and hyperbole,
- Rhetorical figures, and
- Generic sentences typical of propaganda

However, others are passive construction/voice, subjectively-construed sentences, omission or downgrading of specific actions or facts, silence/exclusion, and impoliteness/discourtesy, which fall within the micro-level structures of discourse (see also Arua & Amuta 2018; Alo & Oluremi 2013). Such global and local forms, which are the hallmarks of the Socio-cognitive model, are abundantly present in sample media discourses on the ASUU strikes, which form the focus of this study.

Wooffitt, cited in Ugwuona (2016), notes that empirical work from a CDA perspective largely draws upon what Van Dijk (2001) refers to as a solid linguistic basis in that it often examines topics such as sentence structure, verb tense, syntax, lexical choice, the internal coherence of discourse, among other things. Holmes (2008) observes that CDA seeks to identify ways in which readers or listeners – primary consumers of public discourse – are manipulated through linguistic choices and constructions in relation to specific subjects of discourse. In this connection, Van Dijk, quoted in Ibileye (2017, p.209), believes that to make a transparent ideological dichotomy between 'Them' and 'Us', 'In-group' and 'Out-group' members, a CDA scholar needs to analyze discourse, taking into account:

- The context of discourse - historical, political, or social background of a conflict - and its main participants,
- The groups and power relations involved,
- Positive and negative opinions about 'Us' versus 'Them',
- The need to make explicit the presupposed and the implied, and
- The need to examine all formal structures: lexical choices, and syntactic structure in a way that helps to de-emphasize polarized group opinions

The section that follows will identify, analyze and discuss the actual ideological/discourse features in the strike discourses.

4. Analysis and Discussion of Data

4.1. 2001-2009 ASUU Strike

4.1.1. Batch 1. Text 1

FGN: The more we tried, the more 'the unions remained insatiate'. 'Government has stretched itself to the limit' in acceding to the 'endless demands' of these unions. Even as this meeting is taking place, there is another 'thick cloud of uncertainty' on the horizon as ASUU has given notice of its intention to go on strike.... (Quoted in Arua & Amuta 2018).

In discourses involving unequal power dynamics, each power group is in a constant quest to maintain its position. While the higher power (or dominant) group seeks to consolidate its privileged position of power, influence, and dominance, the dominated (or lesser power bloc) struggles, through its discourse, to neutralize and reject such dominance. Thus, whether for the less noticeable consolidation of power and dominance, or the resistance of same, each group tactically explores discourse mechanisms that 'present themselves or their own group in positive terms, and the 'other', in negative terms' (Ibileye, 2017, p. 209). In Text 1 above, the FGN, in line with 'lexicalization' feature in discourse, carefully selects the lexical item 'insatiate' to express the underlying meaning and belief that the Out-group (ASUU) is hard to please and their demands/appetite are unquenchable. The clause 'the more we tried, the more the unions remained insatiate' used by the FGN in Line 1, Text 1, is not neutral but ideological. Its goal is to persuade the public (main victims of the strike) to believe that whereas Government has done enough to satisfy the 'unending demands' of ASUU, the Union's insatiable demands have been the hindrance to the amicable resolution of the conflicts.

To make its ideological position more obvious, the FGN employs the 'hyperbolic enhancement' of its positive action, 'stretched itself to the limit', and of ASUU's negative action, 'endless demands'. Through this strategy, the Government hopes to win public sympathy for itself (In-group) and away from the Out-group (ASUU). To cap it all, the FGN, through the discourse mechanism of 'storytelling', tactically offers plausible details of impending danger (strike) to overshadow its current negative action of not addressing the issue of strike satisfactorily. FGN's metaphorical reference to a possible ASUU strike as 'thick cloud of uncertainty' in Line 3, Text 1 seeks to hide from the public psyche the fact that it is the unyielding, divergent ideological stances maintained by ASUU and Government that are likely to result in further friction, and another strike. Thus, by emphasizing ASUU's negative action and being silent over its own in the last line, the FGN probably aims at directing the ill-feeling of the public towards the union.

4.1.2. Batch 1, Text 2

ASUU: Soon after the FGN-ASUU agreement on July 3, 2001, ASUU wrote to the Executive Secretary, NUC, asking that an implementation committee be set up 'as soon as possible, almost immediately'. Up till this date, this has not been done. Moreover, since no implementation committee has been set up, the agreement is not implemented as it should be. (*Ibid*)

In line with the positive self-representation and negative other-representation, which is the hallmark of the socio-cognitive processes in power-related discourses, ASUU, in the above text (Text 2), uses discourse 'perspective' or 'point of view' as a strategy to confirm its ideological stance of belief in justice and due process. Writing to the approved authority, the NUC, and asking that 'an implementation committee be set up... almost immediately' vindicates ASUU as a union that believes in the tenets of justice, democracy, and due process. However, despite ASUU's prompting letter to the NUC, the foregrounded statement 'up till this date...' in sentence 2, Text 2 stresses the FGN's well-known reluctance over the implementation of its agreement with ASUU. In discursive terms, Government's action is considered unfair, thereby justifying ASUU's stance on the Out-group's (FGN's) negative action.

4.1.3. Batch 1, Text 3

FGN: I still believe that dialogue along the lines of my suggestion to Dr. Fashina or others that may emanate from your ranks after Exco-membership consultations is a better option than the current action. (*Ibid*)

Prof. Babalola, the then Minister of Education's image-making rhetoric, 'I still believe that dialogue....' in Line 1, Text 3 is typical of political actors. Their goal is to always portray themselves and the Government they are defending in a positive light. As if in a competition to win a medal for positive actions, the Minister carefully chooses and uses the lexical item 'dialogue' repeatedly in the full text. His aim, like those of most government representatives, is to show that the Government, whose interest he is out to protect, believes in dialogue and has often resorted to it as a norm whenever conflict ensues between the FGN and ASUU. Notwithstanding the 'individualization' strategy, 'I Still believe....' as against 'collectivization', 'we or Government believes....,' the Honourable Minister, sells 'dialogue' as Government's major ideological trait. By using the image-laundering phrase in the opening line of Text 3, the Minister hopes to de-emphasize any negative actions attributable to Government and win public allegiance while spotlighting ASUU's negative action – '...the current [strike] action'.

4.1.4. Batch 1, Text 4

ASUU: Do you know, Mr. President, that the refusal by your agent to sign the Agreement in 2008 is a 'unilateral abrogation of the 2021 Agreement? Do you know, Mr. President, that contrary to the principle of collective bargaining, on June 10, 2009... your Government announced that negotiations were 'to be concluded by individual university councils'? Mr. President, is it not clear that this is a unilateral declaration of change of the negotiation framework after the negotiation ended? Mr. President, is it permissible in a game for a player to change the rules after the game is over and ask the other player to accept the changed rules, whether they are legitimate or not? (*Ibid*)

The superstructures text schemata in discourse consist primarily of argument through implicit communication of ideas, beliefs, and rhetorical figures such as hyperbole and rhetorical question, lexical style, and structural emphasis, among others. Prominent in Text 4 is ASUU's repeated use of 'rhetorical question' to press home its accusation of the FGN of 'unilateral abrogation' of the 2001 agreement it had with the union. In literature, which is the domicile of literary devices/rhetorical structures, 'repetition' is known to be used for emphasis. Here, by using the 'Polar or Yes/No' Question structure, 'Do you know...? Is it...?' four (4) times in sentences 1, 2, 3, & 4 of Text 4, ASUU unleashes rhetorical questions as a means to disarm the FGN of its claim to dialogue. Using that discourse strategy also implies how obviously unfaithful Government is to the use of dialogue in conflict resolution. The repeated use of Mr. President, 'Do you know...?' in the rhetorical questions is not to create awareness for the President, but to accentuate Government's negative action (unfaithfulness to agreements), rope-in the FGN on its obvious infractions, deflate its earlier claim on dialogue and possibly put Government on the defensive. While possibly trying to achieve these ideological objectives, ASUU is yet conscious of its respect for the office of the President (as enshrined in the constitution) and of the Pollyanna principles of courtesy and seasoned speech that are the hallmarks of every civilized organization and human relations. Hence, the Union's constant use of the mild tone: 'Do you know, Mr. President...?' Mr. President, is permissible...?.

By alluding to the everyday social ethics/rules of a game, ASUU successfully underlines FGN's arbitrary and hegemonic approach to negotiation, which contradicts its claim of ultimate belief in dialogue. This also reveals the ideological difference between the two parties. Aside rhetorical question and repetition, the discourse mechanism 'uncontroversial presupposition', which is based upon the knowledge that is common to all parties to the communication (Ibibleye, 2017, p. 121) as in the rules of a game alluded to, helps ASUU to achieve its ideological goal in text 4.

4.1.5. Batch 1, Text 5

FGN: We are still actively addressing the issue of shortfall in the recurrent expenses carried over from 2000 to 2001. In 2001 alone, the government released over ₦28.4billion to federal universities for recurrent expenditures. Through the National universities commission, the government released a total sum of ₦5.85 billion for the rehabilitation of facilities and the purchase of equipment. (Quoted in Arua & Amuta 2018)

In Batch 1 Text 5, the FGN tactfully deploys the discourse mechanisms of 'presupposition', 'implication/implicitness', 'apparent empathy', and exaggerated 'number game', spiced with vagueness, to achieve its ideological aim of showing Government's positive action and underlining ASUU's lack of patriotism. Although intended as a mitigation device to portray the In-group (FGN) as good and caring, the participial phrase 'we are still actively addressing...' in sentence 1, Text 5, ironically exposes the FGN's hypocrisy in the negotiation. The same federal government that is wont to direct the National Universities' Commission to begin the 'immediate implementation' of the 'No Work, No Pay' law during ASUU strikes is the same that is in 2009 'still addressing' a 2000 to 2001 issue of shortfall in recurrent expenses. The 'passive voice' used in the progressive action 'still addressing' is ideologically intended to help the FGN evade any responsibility, as no clue is given when the ongoing action will be completed.

Employing the participial 'addressing' in the text is also intended to portray the Government as doing much, or even suffering much, in showing sympathy for the victims of the strike – the students. Beyond the evasiveness observed in Text 5, Government also manipulated [exaggerated] statistics through a discourse mechanism known as 'number game' in its presentation of facts to achieve credibility and objectivity. It foregrounds the expression 'In 2001 alone...' (Position-wise) and states the amounts released for infrastructure and recurrent expenditure, without correspondingly mentioning the number of public universities to share in these sums, ₦28.4bn, and ₦5.85bn, respectively. By so doing, the FGN hopes to persuade the public to believe that Government is playing its own role in ensuring the functionality of the university system in Nigeria. It stands to reason that if the Federal Government is spending 'so much' money to fix infrastructures in public universities, as it, through vagueness and implicitness, claims to do, without a corresponding acknowledgement by ASUU, then the Union must be both ungrateful and unpatriotic. Thus, public opinion would be swayed positively towards the FGN and away from ASUU.

4.1.6. Batch 1, Text 6

- ASUU: It is our duty to call the visitor's attention to 'the above problems', which are possible grounds for open conflict (sic) between ASUU and the FGN. It is not ASUU's wish to generate what could be a needless and expensive crisis.
- FGN: End strike in 'sympathy' with your students.

Text 6(a) reveals an attempt by ASUU to draw the Government's attention (through the visitor/President) to its obvious violation of any deviation from the path of useful dialogue, due process, and legality, which the FGN has often claimed to pursue. Deploying discourse strategies, such as 'perspective', 'presupposition', and 'implication', the Union possibly hopes to convince the Government to retrace its steps in the overall interest of harmonious industrial relations. ASUU's reference to FGN's stoppage of its 'check-off' – 'the above problems' – as 'having no basis in law' implies that Government's action towards the Union is both unlawful and constitutionally invalid. From its presupposed 'perspective' of a believer in peace and ideological dialogue, the Union draws the Government's attention to 'the autonomy of universities', upon which the Government's action is adjudged unlawful and wrong. Having thus identified FGN's unlawful action, ASUU calls the latter's attention to 'the above problems', appealing for a retracing of steps with regard to the Minister's order for the 'discontinuity of ASUU check-off'. This expected proactive approach by the FGN is to avert what the Union terms, '...possible grounds of open conflict (sic) between ASUU and FGN'. From an ideological point of view, ASUU's call to the FGN implies that failure by the Government to apply immediate preventive measures towards solving the problems could result in a strike, even though 'it is not ASUU's wish to generate... needless and expressive crisis'.

As though in a who-cares-more contest against the Union, the FGN in Text 6(b) above 'urges' ASUU to consider the plight of its suffering students and call off its strike. This discursive strategy is known as 'apparent empathy'. In the same breath that the face-saving device in discourse portrays the In-group (FGN) as being good and caring, it feigns sympathy for the victims (students) and redirects the 'victims' negative feelings, even animosity, toward the addressee (ASUU/Out-group). By applying what may be termed 'reverse psychology' by the FGN, the public could be outwitted into believing that Government always acts in its overall best interest while ASUU acts otherwise.

4.1.7. Batch 1, Text 7

FGN: A draft on the matter 'will be considered' by the Federal Executive Council (FEC) 'a little moment from now'.

Text 7 shows a further attempt by the FGN to validate its earlier claim that the Government is playing its role – to the best of its ability and to the extent of available resources – towards improving the quality of public university education in Nigeria. In this segment, the FGN tactfully deploys the ideological tool of 'vagueness' to achieve its end. Hence, Government intentionally avoids being precise about its actual commitment to ending the recurrent crises between it and ASUU. Perhaps to warm itself into the collective subconscious of the public, the Federal Government chooses to be economical with information, leaving open-ended and some unspecific vital details. The reference made to an uncertain future time, 'a little moment from now' when a draft bill 'will be considered', makes the referent indeterminate and the subject (FGN) evasive over a situation that requires urgency of action. This is another delay tactic by the FGN.

4.2. 2013 ASUU Strike Discourses

The strike, which lasted for about six (6) months, arose due to the government's non-implementation of the 2009 ASUU/FGN Agreement, the 2012 *Needs Assessment Report (NAR)*, and sundry issues affecting the union.

4.2.1. Batch 2. Text 8

ASUU: Our members are left with no other choice than to prosecute this strike to its logical conclusion. ASUU members nationwide are saying this strike will not be suspended until and unless the government respects the 2009 Agreement and makes concrete efforts to implement it in the best interest of the country – *THE NATION*, August 23, 2013.

4.2.2. Batch 2. Text 9

- FGN: What ASUU is doing is no longer a trade dispute but subversive action. – *THE PUNCH*, December 1, 2013
- FGN: [...] the strike action seems to have the 'backing of external forces' seeking to bring his [President Goodluck Jonathan's] administration down. – *Osun Defender*, November 30, 2013.

In text 8, the opening line, 'our members are left with no choice...' in ASUU's statement, suggests that the union has exhausted every avenue of meaningful dialogue with the FGN, but to no avail. Moreover, despite its efforts at dialogue and negotiation with the government, the 2009 FGN/ASUU Agreement still lies unimplemented. ASUU members nationwide thus resolve not to suspend the strike until it draws some commitment from the FGN. The discourse by the then ASUU President, Comrade Nasir Fagge, reveals the use of 'collectivization' and 'our' as a discourse strategy to show 'inclusiveness'. It affirms the fact that ASUU's national executive committee (NEC) derives its powers from its 'members nationwide' (Branch Congresses).

President Goodluck Jonathan's claim in Text 9(a) that ASUU is rather engaged in 'subversive action' than trade dispute, perhaps due to the latter's doggedness, implies that ASUU's action would require an equal dose of semi or full-militaristic approach to subdue. The seeming battle-like or violent dimension that the supposedly civil conflict has now assumed was made clearer subsequently. Text 9(b) by Doyin Okupe – a media aide to President Jonathan – is steeped in propaganda, typical of conflicts involving power-play. The most prominent propagandist's tool in the text is 'Blame Transfer'. According to Van Dijk (1995, p.37), 'it is an ideological construct... created by political actors to blame all ills of the society on others'. Thus, Okupe glosses over the government's negligence through the non-implementation of the 2009 agreement it signed with ASUU. Instead, he conveniently blames 'external forces' who, in his foreboding, are 'seeking to bring down President Jonathan's administration'. The government agent's deployment of the propaganda device of 'Blame Transfer' typically aims at swaying public opinion to the government's side while shifting the blame to others, possibly linked to ASUU (the Out-group).

4.2.3. Batch 2. Text 10

FGN: Let them study the enabling laws to see what they have been violating. What they have done in the past four months amounted to economic sabotage [...] If they continue to take the law into their hands by paralyzing university activities, we may try them for economic sabotage. – *Osun Defender*, November 30, 2013.

As it is typical of discourses of this nature, and in conflicts of this proportion, President Jonathan, in text 10, explores a variety of reprehensible rhetoric to cast ASUU in negative terms. Such negative castigation expressed through the strategy of 'negative other-presentation' as in 'what they have done... amounts to economic sabotage' is the hallmark of polarized discourses. According to Van Dijk (2006, p.373), the 'positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation' strategy is revealed through a biased account of facts in favour of the speaker's or writer's interests, while blaming negative situations and events on the opponents.... Thus, by urging ASUU to 'study the enabling laws to see what they have been violating', the FGN (Mr. President) tacitly indicts ASUU of 'economic sabotage' – a negative action – which is unambiguously stated in Line 2 of the text. Therefore, ideologically, the government's labeling of ASUU's action as 'economic sabotage' is targeted at blaming the union (other) for all the negative economic impacts of the strike on the nation while masking its (FGN's) central role in the conflict. That way, it (FGN) hopes to attract favourable public opinion to itself while shifting reproach, even ill-feeling, to the 'unpatriotic' other (ASUU).

4.2.4. Batch 2. Text 11

ASUU: While ASUU has been struggling for conditions in which Nigerian students would benefit from a very much enhanced academic environment in teaching and research facilities, the Minister of Education is thinking of a 'thoughtless mass sack' as a solution to the problem arising from government's non-implementation of an agreement reached with ASUU [...]. That a minister of education would pronounce a threat of mass sacking of academic staff is a tragedy of huge proportion for Nigeria and Africa. – *AIT Online*, December 1, 20213.

Text 11 is ASUU's apt response, nay rejoinder, to the then Minister of Education's (FGN's) threat to sack all the lecturers in public universities and immediately replace them should ASUU continue to prove adamant over the 2013 ASUU strike. In the text, the then ASUU President, Nasir Fagge, depicts the FGN as negligent and scheming, describing the direct 'agent of negative action', the Minister of Education, as 'thoughtless' for considering mass sack of lecturers instead of tackling the cause of the strike. Using the discursive devices of 'dysphemism' (Crystal, 1992, p.112) and 'metaphorisation' (Chiluwa, 2007, p. 237), Dr. Fagge describes the minister's unreasonable threat/statement as 'a tragedy of huge proportions', not only for Nigeria but also for Africa.

Relying on Allan and Burridge's statement (cited in Yusuf 2006, p.28) that 'dysphemism' is used 'as a weapon against those things and people that frustrate and annoy us, and whom we disapprove of...', Fagge's description of the Minister's threat can be further expatiated. It (Dr. Fagge's description) exposes the Minister's (FGN's) moral hollowness

and deflates his/its integrity for overlooking the cause of the strike, namely, 'non-implementation of agreements' and instead resorting to threats and political blackmail against the Union. It also calls to question the FGN's purported belief in dialogue and due process. Moreover, text 11 represents ASUU's effort at ideologically countering the government's (In-group's) perpetual presentation of the Out-group (ASUU) in negative terms, thus continually damaging the latter's public image during strikes.

4.2.5. Batch 2, Text 12

NMWA: We are tired of seeing our children at home. We want our children back in school. We are begging them [ASUU] for the last time. If we come out again, we may have to chase them out of this country and replace them with so many jobless Nigerians – *Information Nigeria*, October 15, 2013.

Text 12 above thrives in the discourse properties of 'indirectness', 'implicitness', and 'presupposition' to drive the government's ideology and advance their negative view of ASUU.

In the ideological constructs of implicitness and indirectness, for instance, ideas that a political actor or its agents conceive may be directly but implicitly expressed or expressed indirectly through a surrogate voice. This is often targeted at hiding the 'agent' of negative action and making inequality, even dominance of the dominated group, to appear less obvious and immediate. A typical example of this is observable in the text above, where the discourse explicitly represents the voice of the national market women association (NMWA) but implicitly and by well-crafted stratagem represents the voice of the government. The expression 'we are begging them [ASUU] for the last time. If we come out again, we may have to chase them out of this country...', supposedly issuing from the NMWA, functions to control the minds of the readers and attract the sympathy of the public to the FGN, since, even the market women are condemning the protracted ASUU strike and demanding its immediate suspension. In sentence 3 Text 12, the supposed market women could threaten to '...replace them [lecturers] with so many jobless Nigerians', implying that the actual source of information is not overtly stated but deducible from the text. All textual indices point to the fact that the government may have been responsible for the NMWA's (surrogate's) action, which is given overt expression in the market women's ideology and movement. The position taken by the NMWA on the subject confirms Woofitt's (2005, p.40) claim that, 'ideologies serve to protect the interest of the powerful groups and ensure that certain events, actions, and relationships [with the less powerful groups] come to be regarded as legitimate and appropriate'.

4.2.6. Batch 2, Text 13

FGN: My administration has done 'all within its powers' to meet the demands of the university lecturers. This includes setting up a technical committee to carry out inventories of the universities while it has also set aside ₦100 billion (sic) for the provision of infrastructure in tertiary institutions, which is one of ASUU's key demands. – *PMC on NTA*, September 30, 2013.

4.2.7. Batch 2, Text 14

FGN: Nelson Mandela was a great leader. He lived his life for the people of South Africa. I check through the history of Nigeria amongst the past and present leaders, and the only one we can call our Mandela here in Nigeria is President Jonathan. No President in Nigeria has sacrificed 13 hours to discourse (sic) with ASUU.... – *AIT Interview with Doyin Okupe*, December 6, 2013.

Texts 13 and 14 are issues from President Jonathan and Doyin Okupe, a political appointee (media aide) of the President, respectively. The texts involve, among other discourse structures, the use of 'positive self and negative other-presentation', figures and statistics (or number game)', 'individualization', and 'functionalization or appraisalment'. The positive image-making rhetoric (Fairclough, 2000) noticed in the President's opening line, 'My administration has done all within its powers...', sets the tone for the positive self-portrayal [positive presentation of President Jonathan's administration] intent of the text. To assign credence and validity to the government's professed efforts (positive action) in trying to meet the demands of the union and thus avert crises, the president resorts to details and statistics (number game) in Sentence 2, Text 13. The ideological import of mentioning the 'technical committee' and stating the amount '(₦100billion (sic) set aside' by his administration for the provision of infrastructure in universities is to emphasize the government's (our) positive actions. This, by implication, also plays up 'their' (ASUU's) negative things, namely, lack of appreciation and patriotism despite the in-group's (FGN's) noble efforts.

In the final text in this sequence (Text 14), Doyin Okupe, in line with Van Dijk's (2001) subjectively-construed context model, takes to the use of 'generic sentences' typical of propaganda, 'individualization' and 'appraisalment', to show the good side of his principal. According to Van Leeuwen (2008, p. 37), 'individualization' in CDA occurs in news discourse when social actors are referred to as individuals taking cognizance of their personalities in society. Appraisalment [an offshoot of 'functionalization'], on the other hand, relates to the 'representation of social actors in terms of... their role in the society' (Coesmans, 2012, p. 190).

However, when 'functionalization' has an evaluative connotation and becomes ideological, it is termed 'appraisalment', according to Leeuwen (2008). Thus, Okupe's extolment of his principal, '.... I check through the history of Nigeria...; the only one we can call our Mandela here in Nigeria is President Jonathan', reflects a generic form of knowledge and opinion as well as the discourse characters of individualization and appraisalment. Expectedly, the fundamental aim of these, as in all polarized discourses involving unequal power dynamics, is to warm the In-group (government) into the public mind while blowing cold any ignitable public allegiance for ASUU (the Out-group).

4.3. 2020 ASUU Strike Discourses

The 2020 ASUU strike lasted for nine months (March 23, 2020 – December 23, 2020) and is adjudged the longest strike yet in the history of the union's struggle.

4.3.1. Batch 3, Text 15

- FGN: The University community, based on their level of knowledge, experience, academic, and research (sic), 'one would have expected them' to be at the forefront of championing any policy that is geared towards accountability and transparency in government expenditure. Instead, ASUU is threatening to go to court for an injunction against IPPIS and Government... ASUU's position to IPPIS is 'an open endorsement to corruption' in the Nigeria University System [...] There is nowhere [in the world] employees dictate to their employers as to how he or she (sic) should be paid as being dictated by ASUU. – *THE NATION*, October 23, 2019
- FGN: What ASUU is saying is laughable. Your employers will dictate how they will pay you. They can decide to pay you with a cheque.... They can decide to do an electronic transfer...But for some strange reasons, this has become an issue with ASUU – *The PUNCH*, June 1, 2020.

4.3.2. Batch 3, Text 16

ASUU: IPPIS and 'He-Who-Pays-the-Piper' Argument:

It amounts to simplifying the IPPIS matter to say, 'He who pays the piper dictates the tune'. Secondly, our elected officials and public servants are 'paying' from our collective resources, which they are holding in trust for Nigerians, and not from their pockets.... If we stretch the argument of 'the piper' and 'the tune' too far, a time will come when every policy 'dictated to our rulers by the IMF and the World Bank' will be passed to the rest of us as orders that must be obeyed. – THE NATION, November 25, 2019

The discourses in Texts 15(a) and (b) reflect FGN agents' (AGoF and the Minister of Labour and Employment's) deployment of a number of mind control tools of discourse to emphasize its group's positive action and emphasize ASUU's negative action. In the texts, 'unfair or controversial presupposition', 'metaphorization', 'silence', and 'naturalization of dominance' are strategically deployed towards achieving the goals of mind control and positive 'self', and negative 'other' presentations. In text 15(a), the Accountant-General's use of the phrase '...one would have expected them (ASUU)...' presupposes common socio-historical knowledge and expectation on the part of the Union (University community). However, such a presupposition is negative, unfair, or controversial, as it is made upon the covert knowledge (expectation) of the speaker (AGoF), namely, to persuade and control the public's mind toward believing that ASUU is supporting corruption by its rejection of the IPPIS. While metaphorization can be deduced from the description of ASUU's rejection as an 'open endorsement of corruption', naturalization of dominance plays out in paragraph 2, Text 15(a) and (b) of the *Press Release*, where ASUU is expected to display docility while the government [presumed employer] 'dictates how they will pay the union members'.

As noted in Nester et al. (1993), dominance by the higher power group is enhanced when members of a discourse domain expectedly display the 'virtue of submission', and recognize their natural obligation to obey, as well as lack of moral or legal right to oppose or challenge the decision or actions of the authority-wielding former. Again, the government's demonstration of its 'unchallengeable' institutional power over ASUU is facilitated by the discursive 'silence' over the issue of 'Collective Bargaining', enshrined in the Nigerian labour law in line with 'ILO Convention'.

However, to successfully reject the unholy 'virtue of submission' that the government expects of it and put the records straight, ASUU, in text 16, reveals important information using the 'blame transfer' discourse strategy. Thus, in a sort of rejoinder entitled 'IPPIS and He-who-pays-the-piper Argument', the union (through its president) rejects the argument as 'oversimplifying the IPPIS matter' and states that the IPPIS policy was imposed on the FGN by the IMF and World Bank. The ideological 'implication' of this is that the IPPIS is an IMF and a World Bank invention and not home-grown by the Nigerian government. Hence, a tacit violation of FGN's 'Local Content Act' is already in force in the country. Ultimately, ASUU's argument in text 16 is that the scheme in issue violates the unique structure of the university system.

4.3.3. Batch 3, Text 17

- FGN: I do believe that while they were signing that [2013] agreement, 'they knew' that it was not possible to implement it. There is just no place ₦1.3trn will come out from. But I can assure you... that very soon we will reach an agreement with them. – Quoted in *The PUNCH*, November 3, 2020
- FGN: The agreement the government reached with ASUU was an 'imperfect obligation', meaning that the agreement was not binding on the government, as it did not have the force of law. – Quoted in *The NATION*, November 19, 2020

4.3.4. Batch 3, Text 18

ASUU: The Federal Government canvassed the same argument of the poor economic situation in the country... in 2013 when they 'willingly' entered into a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with us, 'and they signed'. – *The PUNCH*, November 5, 2020

Texts 17(a) and (b) above by Mallam Adamu Adamu, the current Minister of Education, and Ben Nwabueze (SAN), then Education Secretary (Minister) under President Babangida, follow Van Dijk's 'Event Model'. In the model, facts and interpretation of discourse events are based mainly on the speaker's subjective mental model of those facts. Thus, based on their personal, biased mental modes, both Mallam Adamu and Nwabueze (SAN) find it expedient to blame the federal

government's inability, nay, unwillingness to implement agreements (MoUs and MoAs) it had signed with ASUU on the mischievousness of the Union's principal officers.

Through the discursive tools of 'naturalization of dominance', which stipulates that information/'ideas issued from supposed authorities must not be challenged', and 'blame transfer' (Van Dijk, 1995, p. 37) which is 'created by political actors to blame the ills of the society on others', the duo – Adamu and Nwabueze – find ASUU a scapegoat for blame over government's failure. In the same manner that Senator David Mark had, elsewhere, castigated ASUU for capitalizing on the 'ignorance of those the FGN sent to negotiate' and cajoling them into signing 'a difficult piece of paper to implement', Mallam Adamu, in text 17(a), accuses the Union on some note of certainty that 'they [ASUU] knew' that it is not possible to implement such an agreement, yet signed it. However, Nwabueze (SAN), in text 17(b) above, speaking from the standpoint of an authority in law whose assertion must not be countered, refers to the ASUU-FGN agreement as 'one of imperfect obligation' which, he notes, 'was not binding on the government...'. The ideological goals of the trio's argument are to:

- Spotlight ASUU's negative actions and de-emphasize the FGNs,
- Win public sympathy and allegiance to self (the government) and away from the union ('them')

As in the case of Senator Mark's accusation, ASUU, again in text 18, rejects the government-ascribed negative public image of the union by setting the records straight. ASUU says it is not surprised by the federal government's blame game. The union recalls that the government advanced the same argument of the poor economic situation when, in 2013, it 'willingly' entered into a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the union, 'and they (FGN) signed'. With the foregrounding of the word 'willingly' and clause 'and they signed', ASUU shows that nothing was done under duress or on the grounds of ignorance as claimed by government agents. ASUU's rebuttal also implies that the FGN, not the union, is often guilty of dishonesty and duplicity toward signed agreements.

4.3.5. Batch 3, Text 19

- FGN: Government is actually not holding anyone to ransom. It says, 'this is how I want to pay, and it has to be through the IPPIS'. You can leave the employment. You can opt-out of it and say I no longer want to teach. You can find other professions. What we need now are probably more farmers. – *THE NATION*, October 5, 2020.
- ASUU: The minister of state had displayed his 'naivety' on education matters. If the Minister of State for Education is interested in farming, he should resign from his appointment and stop displaying his 'cluelessness' of the problems in the education sector. We are in a just fight to ensure that those in public offices become responsive and responsible to the masses they swore to serve. – *The PUNCH*, October 7, 2020.

The texts above (Texts 19 a and b) reflect disparaging discourses from the Minister of State for Education (Nwajiuba) and ASUU, respectively, over the controversial payment platform – IPPIS – introduced by the government and forced on the Union. In Text 19(a), the FGN (represented by the Minister), instead of logically convincing ASUU of the merits of the payment platform, resorts to the use of face-threats and demeaning remarks to tacitly show its dominance and control over the lesser power group (ASUU). The expression, 'it [the government] says this is how 'I want' to pay, and 'it has to be' through the IPPIS', in sentence 2, Text 19(a) fits into the 'naturalization of dominance' strategy. As with this discourse strategy, the Minister (FGN) expects the union to show some 'virtue of submission' naturally since the government, which has the authority, has considered IPPIS expedient. The government's expectation that ASUU shows docile obedience to the IPPIS argument works against the spirit of 'Collective Bargaining' – a viable conflict resolution mechanism in labour relations.

Worse still, the Federal Government (Minister), in a bid to make its exercise of power, dominance, and control over ASUU 'unofficial', much less direct and less noticeable, employs a 'micro-level' feature of discourse – face-threat. Structures at this level are less regulated by any known legal or moral codes. As politeness features, using insolent or pure discourtesy in discourse only violates rules of politeness or social ethos, not any established law. Thus, the apparently-subtle yet discourteous expressions, 'You can leave the employment'; '...What we [government] need now is probably more farmers' in sentences 3 and 6, Text 19(a) is ideologically aimed at consolidating the FGN's control and dominance over ASUU.

ASUU's response in Text 19(b) shows the use of 'Dysphemism' – in 'cluelessness' and 'naivety' – as a weapon against the FGN's frustrating, annoying and demeaning statements against ASUU. The union does not end its ideological fight there. It also goes further to deploy some 'image-boosting rhetoric' in the last sentence of the text. The expression 'we are on a just fight...', which combines 'collectivization' 'we' with the 'image-booster' 'just fight...' essentially rescues the union's image, emphasizes its 'good things' and government's 'bad actions' – irresponsiveness and irresponsibility towards the Nigerian public. It also reverses public sympathy and support toward ASUU and away from the FGN.

4.3.6. Batch 3, Text 20

- FGN: ... The development of UTAS by ASUU has been rejected by other unions in the universities – SSANU, NASU, and NAAT. They said they would never be part of UTAS; [that] they should be counted out of UTAS. – *THE NATION*, November 9, 2020 [...] The Congress of University Academics (CONUA) said incessant strikes had done the university system more harm than good. Sumonu (CONUA National Coordinator) said... 'CONUA members are not part of ASUU, adding that the striking union no longer represents the interests and aspirations of his colleagues.' – *THE NATION*, November 20, 2020.
- ASUU: We saw that coming because the minister had mooted that and even issued subtle threats a number of times. We know (sic) it will come to that. We wish him luck. If he thinks divide-and-conquer is the best approach, he is wrong. That cannot help anybody. – *Vanguard*, November 22, 2020

In social and political conflicts [even military battles], the 'divide and rule' or 'divide-and-conquer' approach, coupled with propaganda, are known to be very effective strategies for victory and/or dominant political control. By choosing the enemies of the Out-group as its friends, and their friends/associates as enemies, the In-group (usually the dominant force/group) can penetrate the defense of the opponent and conquer them. In order to successfully break the ranks of the formidable opposition of dominance and control, the 'powerful' social/political actors may employ the services of saboteurs from within or outside the opponent's camp. These mercenaries act as surrogates for the ventilation of the government's or dominant group's opinion or position. This is what happens in text 20 (a), as in text 12 of Batch 2 earlier analyzed. In the former, the FGN apparently spoke through the surrogate voices of the Nigerian Market Women Association (NMWA) to condemn ASUU's role in the 2013 ASUU strike. Again, in Text 20 (a), the FGN (Senator Nigige) deploys the same discourse strategy, namely, 'implicitness' in the communication of its belief and opinion about the 2020 ASUU strike and the home-grown payment platform – UTAS – developed by ASUU. The alleged strong 'condemnation and rejection' of the UTAS by sister unions in the University – SSANU, NAAT, and the NASU – seems to be the government's voice speaking from behind the veil of these unions. A similar tendency is observed in the case of the 'break-away' faction, CONUA, which apparently was created and is being romanced by the government to achieve its ideological goal of stifling ASUU. Ideologically, two important questions arise:

- If the government did not create CONUA to divide and conquer ASUU, why the haste and threat to register an 'unofficial' splinter group amidst conciliation with a recognized union, ASUU?
- Would such an act by the FGN not stall instead of facilitating the negotiation?

Text 20 (b) reveals a union that is not intimidated by government antics. ASUU equally seems not surprised when it says, 'We saw that coming...' in sentence 1, Text 20 (b). By its statement in sentence 3, namely, 'We wish him luck', the union is resolute and determined to forge ahead with the strike until its demands are met. Moreover, ASUU's reference to the FGN's divide-and-conquer approach, which, the union notes, 'cannot help anybody', implies that it would not be cowed into suspending the strike-through government's antics and propaganda but by fulfilling agreements signed between the parties.

4.3.7. Batch 3, Text 21

- FGN: The truth of the matter is that 'a gentleman agreement' was reached at the last meeting [on November 27, 2020] in which ASUU agreed to call off the strike before December 9, 2020, and the Minister agreed that once the strike was called off, he would get a 'presidential pardon' for ASUU to be paid the remainder of their salaries on or before December 9... We have kept our promises to ASUU.... Asking the government to pay the four months before it goes back to work means ASUU is placing itself above the 'laws of the land'....a recipe for chaos in the labour milieu. – *The PUNCH*, December 9, 2020
- ASUU: The government lied that ASUU leadership did not reach any understanding with the government to suspend the strike on December 9, 2020, and 'there is nothing in the government offer' of November 27, 2020, to suggest that conclusion as allegedly claimed by the minister.... Lecturers cannot work on empty stomach... – *The PUNCH*, December 10, 2020

In text 21(a), Senator Ngige (FGN), in line with the 'Story Telling and Examples' strategy of discourse, tactically gives plausible details of the conflict 'a gentleman agreement was reached...', to overshadow the negative features of the discourse events – government's repeated violation of agreements it signed with ASUU.

Like other discourse features within the socio-cognitive frame, this strategy usually comes in the form of 'our good deeds' and 'their bad actions'. Thus, the minister, in an intensified 'blame transfer' and 'image-making' parlance, accuses ASUU of violating the 'gentleman agreement' it had with the government to suspend the strike before December 9, 2020. This implies that ASUU, rather than the government, is the problem – [emphasis on ASUU's bad deed]. In the same vein, the minister, using the 'appraisal' tactic (see Coesemans 2012, p.190; Van Leeuwen, 2008), plays up the government's 'good action', namely, 'mercifulness' by referring to the minister's promise to secure 'presidential pardon' for ASUU members to be paid their remaining four month's salaries once the strike was called off. Despite its own deliberate 'silence' over the extant 'Non-victimization clause' in the labour law and the skewed logic of putting the 'cart' (suspension of strike) before the 'horse' (payment of salaries), the FGN (minister) metaphorically refers to ASUU's insistence on 'salaries before suspension' as 'placing itself above the laws of the land'. The ultimate ideological goal of these emphases of the 'Union's (Out-group's) negative actions' in the text is to ward off public outrage from itself (FGN) and redirect the same towards ASUU.

However, ASUU in Text 21(b) quickly refutes the Federal Government's 'blackmail' against the Union. In a release titled: 'Government lied, No Agreement on Strike Suspension Date', the ASUU President, Professor Ogunyemi, explained that what comes out of an engagement with government agents is regarded by the Union's leadership as an offer, which must be taken back to the Union's branch congresses for ratification or rejection. He maintained that there was 'nothing in the government's offer of November 27, 2020' to warrant the Minister's conclusion that ASUU was going to suspend its strike on or before December 9, 2020. After all, 'Lecturers cannot work on an empty stomach', the Union insists. Placed side-by-side with the FGN (Minister's) initial claim, the ideological implication of ASUU's rebuttal in text 21(b) is that, whereas its ideology as a Union is founded on the truth that of the Federal Government is steeped in lies and propaganda.

4.3.8. Batch 3, Text 22

- FGN: ASUU will end the strike before January 15.... Those who want to use the #EndASUU protest to destroy public and private property or lecturer's homes will be disappointed. [...] We allow social dialogue in line with ILO conventions for all employers and employees to guide this meeting. – *The PUNCH*, December 23, 2020.

- ASUU: We sympathize with the students, who are also our children. No amount of sacrifice would be too much to get the matter resolved as long as the government is consistent with its commitments. – *Ibid*

Texts 22 (a) and (b) echo the last lap of discursive exchange between the FGN and ASUU before the 2020 ASUU strike, which is the last in the series of our discussion in this work, was 'conditionally suspended' on December 23, 2020. Having possibly reached a truce at this point, the language of Texts 22 (a) and (b) by the parties indicates a respite from the hitherto disparaging discourses that dominated their media engagements. The only 'transfer of blame' noticed in Text 22 (a) is on 'those who want to use the #EndASUU protest to destroy public and private property or lecturer's homes', but who, the government in its often-acclaimed good nature, promises to disappoint, in the overall best interest of the public. Despite the deferral in the use of negative discourses by the sides, image-making rhetoric – a look-good discourse mechanism for contending parties in a conflict – still abound in the last set of discourses by both the FGN and ASUU. Thus, the FGN, on the one hand (Text 22a), uses discourse 'perspective', 'collectivization', and 'appraisement' to underline its 'good deed' of allowing 'social dialogue in line with ILO conventions...' to guide its meeting with ASUU.

On the other hand (Text 22b), ASUU explores similar discourse features to emphasize its positive actions of 'sympathizing with students who are also our [their] children'. In addition, the Union, using mild language and without reference to the government's negative actions whatsoever, commits itself to making sacrifices toward ensuring an amicable resolution of the current conflict. To ASUU, 'no amount of sacrifice would be too much' to make towards achieving that goal, provided 'the government is consistent with its commitment' to the Union. That commitment [MoA] led to the truce between the parties and the eventual conditional suspension of the 2020 ASUU strike.

From the various strike discourses analyzed in this paper (Batch 1, Text 1 to Batch 3, Text 22), the polarization of discourse along the 'Us' versus 'Them' dimensions remained a constant variable except in Text 22(a) and (b), where there was a respite on disparaging discourses. This was owing to the truce reached by the parties at that point. While the FGN (higher power group) endlessly portrayed ASUU (the lower power group) in a negative light, the latter relentlessly struggled to rescue its public image from the stranglehold of the government's demeaning propaganda and blackmail. Based on the ideological disparity between the contending sides, the quest to maintain a positive public image and score high on the unofficial public perception scale distracted the factions (especially the government faction) from focusing on proactive actions toward quick and amicable resolution of the conflict each time.

5. Summary and Conclusion

The paper aims to discursively probe the constructions of power between the FGN and ASUU during the union's strikes, which had set out to fulfill three basic objectives. These were to:

- Unearth the discursive mechanisms and structures by means of which power [and dominance] is exercised, ratified, and resisted by the groups,
- Ascertain the similarities and/or differences in the discourse patterns of the FGN and ASUU during strikes, and
- Establish how each group's ideology determines their language choices in the discourse during strikes

The analysis was based on three strategic sets of ASUU strikes 2001-2009, 2013, and 2020 – which spanned across four democratically elected governments/regimes in Nigeria. It was observed that across the respective strikes reviewed, discourses were consistently polarized along the dimensions of 'Us' and 'Them', with the FGN deploying manipulative discourse tools such as 'blame transfer', dysphemism, 'hyperbole', Vagueness', as well as propaganda to advance its ideological goal of dominance. ASUU, on the other hand, deployed similar yet appropriate discourse tools to resist the FGN's dominant control.

It was also noticed that to make its dominance less noticeable and less immediate, the FGN mostly engaged in subtle yet manipulative discursive practices against coercive ones. The subtle discursive manipulation and other forms of appeal to patriotism not only helped the higher power group to sustain its dominance and control over the other. It also helped it to gain greater public sympathy and support while redirecting the animosity of the largely unaware public towards ASUU.

Based on the observed consistency in polarized discourses during strikes, the paper concludes that during labour conflicts, the FGN [and its agents] is often more concerned about the protection of its group ideology and public image than in the quick and amicable resolution of conflicts in the overall public interest. The study also concludes that it is an innate character of the Nigerian governments/regimes and political actors to violate agreements with labour unions and, in turn, deploy manipulative discourse, propaganda, and image-boosting rhetoric to mask its negative public image while magnifying the less powerful group's failings. The paper concludes that group ideologies have an overwhelming influence on a group's language choices in discourse. It was thus recommended, among other things, that focus of the power groups (the FGN and ASUU) be redirected to truthful discourses during conflicts/strikes. This will ensure an amicable resolution of the FGN/ASUU labour conflicts and enhance stability in the Nigerian University system.

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