
Original Research Article

LANGUAGE, POWER AND THE LEGITIMATION OF DOMESTIC ABUSE: A DISCOURSE-ANALYTIC STUDY OF PERPETRATORS' PLACATION IN LAGOS AND OGUN STATES

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Abstract: This study investigates how language produces, sustains, and legitimises domestic violence in Nigeria, with specific focus on Lagos and Ogun States. Framed within Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Austin and Searle's Speech Act Theory, and drawing on Dobash and Dobash's Feminist/Patriarchal Theory and Goode's Resource Theory as contextual frameworks, the study analyses the discourse of three domestic violence survivors gathered through in-depth phenomenological interviews. The central argument is that domestic violence in Nigeria is not perpetuated solely through physical force but through a layered discursive apparatus: the vocabulary of survivors, the illocutionary force of institutional speech acts, the grammatical erasure of perpetrators from accountability, and the ideological language of family and community systems that placate abusers. Particular analytical attention is paid to the 'language of domestic violence' — the lexical choices, metaphors, grammatical constructions, and speech act functions through which abuse is enacted, narrated, and normalised — and to the discursive exemption of the male perpetrator from accountability at every level of social and institutional discourse. Findings reveal that corrupt institutional declarations, coercive family directives, and the grammar of passivisation collectively constitute a discursive architecture that protects perpetrators and silences survivors. Recommendations focus on language-sensitive institutional reform, the enforcement of the Violence Against Persons Prohibition (VAPP) Act, and survivor economic and discursive empowerment.

Keywords: Critical Discourse Analysis, Language, Power, Legitimation of Domestic Abuse, Violence Against Persons Prohibition (VAPP) Act

1. INTRODUCTION

Language doesn't simply represent the world, it creates it. This concept in discourse analysis is more important than anywhere else, especially in the field of domestic violence, as found in Fairclough (1989) and van Dijk (1993). The production, sustainability and institutional legitimization of domestic violence in Nigeria takes center stage in discourses, in the words that families use to silence survivors; the speech acts through which corrupt police officers drop legal cases; the metaphors through which survivors struggle to articulate the unarticulated; the grammatical structures that delete perpetrators from accountability, and build victims responsible rather than accountable for their abuse.

Located right in the middle of the discipline discourse analysis, this study examines the language of domestic violence in Lagos and Ogun states of the southwest corridor, Nigeria. It utilises Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), Austin and Searle's Speech Act Theory as major analytical frameworks and focuses on in-depth interviews with three survivors and offers a contextual, sociological framework of analysis using the work of Dobash and Dobash, Feminist/Patriarchal Theory, and Goode's Resource Theory. Language is the object of the study here rather than just a reporting medium of social phenomena, and the study is, therefore, directed towards becoming part of the discourse analytic study of violence, power and institutional language.

For the 'culture of perpetrator placation' is, at its very core, a discursive phenomenon: a social and institutional strategy of protection for the perpetrator of domestic violence. It is enacted in the form of advice given as commands, in the form of lawsuits taken away, in the form of a metaphor that naturalises men's authority, in the form of a silence that renders the unspeakable unspeakable. To analyse this culture effectively requires the concepts and approaches of CDA: insofar it critically engages with the nature of language and its relationship with power, and insofar it is sensitised to the functional force of words in an institutional and interpersonal context.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Although the Violence Against Persons Prohibition (VAPP) Act 2015 has been enacted, domestic violence is escalating in Nigeria. This is not just the case of institutionalized forms of corruption and resource deprivation—it's also about language—discourses of tradition, submission and family honour that naturalise male violence; institutional speech acts which erase survivors' legal personae; and systematic discursive construction of the male perpetrator that obscures his accountability. The study investigates how language constructs, reproduces and sometimes challenges the legitimatisation of domestic abuse in Lagos and Ogun States in witness accounts, institutional encounters and family and community discourse.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

The study pursues the following objectives:

- i. To analyse the language of domestic violence in survivor testimonies through the frameworks of Critical Discourse Analysis and Speech Act Theory.

- ii. To examine how lexical choices, metaphors, and grammatical structures in survivor discourse encode power, trauma, and resistance.
- iii. To identify the illocutionary force of key institutional and family utterances, and to demonstrate how these speech acts constitute forms of violence and perpetrator protection.
- iv. To analyse the discursive mechanisms through which the male perpetrator is systematically exempted from accountability in survivor, family, and institutional discourse.
- v. To recommend language-sensitive reforms to institutional practice and policy in the management of domestic violence in Nigeria.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Language, Power, and Domestic Violence

The connection between language and domestic violence has been given much scholarly research in the field of discourse analysis, feminist linguistics and critical sociolinguistics. Coates (2003) and Weatherall (2002) have proved that gender-based violence is not only physically realized but also discursively produced: It depends on a language environment, where male aggression is ordinary, female subordination natural, and resistance languagewise foreclosed. As noted by Eze-Anaba (2006) in a Nigerian context, “Domestic violence is consistently characterised as a ‘private matter’ in public and institutional discourse; for this reason it cannot be addressed by the state, and the voice of victims of domestic violence is rendered politically unavailable.”

As Wodak (1995) says, language does not simply represent pre-existing social realities but rather acts to shape them; violence is no exception. When a police officer says a survivor ‘there is no case’ what they actually have done is to mean what they say and to create a real-life legal situation in which the perpetrator is free and the survivor is without remedy. Thus the social management, and institutional continuation of domestic violence, is integral to the theory of ‘what language does’ in the world: Austin's original insight in language act theory.

2.2 Critical Discourse Analysis and Gender

The use of Critical Discourse Analysis in the field of feminist application has been building up a solid history (Lazar, 2005; Mills, 1997). Through its core understanding that discourse mirrors and plays a role in the reproduction of relations of power (as developed in Fairclough, 1989), CDA has been helpful in the analysis of GBV cases across institutional and media frameworks. Lazar (2005) defines ‘feminist critical discourse analysis’ as study of the process by which patriarchal ideologies are reproduced and naturalised in everyday discourse. In its application to domestic violence, this approach uncovers that the language of families, courts and police does not just support or reflect the power of patriarchy, but helps to enact its work.

Within this context, Omorogieva (2013) and Onyekwere (2019) have identified discursive structures, namely religious, customary and familial, that, in Nigeria, routinely

normalize domestic violence. Religious discourse asserts male authority as God's will; customary discourse asserts that violence is discipline in a proper hierarchy; familial discourse asserts that what or how to intervene is – or is not – socially shameful. These are discursive approaches, in the sense given by Fairclough (1989), which gaze upon historically contingent power relations as natural and inevitable or God-given.

2.3 Speech Acts and Institutional Violence

There is a long history of using SALT in institutional settings with respect to pragmatics and sociolinguistics, usually in relation to the legal environment (Levinson, 1983; Thomas, 1995). Research investigating police-survivor dynamics in domestic violence has consistently revealed the mechanisms by which institutional speech acts become embedded in the law; how questions are constantly framed to presume guilt or compliance; how statements like 'no case' not only have a literal meaning but also function as institutional closures; and how a decision to refuse to document an order is a form of power strategy itself (Ehrlich, 2001).

In the case of being failed by social institutions in domestic violence matters, nobody is still giving attention to the dimensions of speech in the scholarship. This study fills this gap by using the speech act analysis of the specific institutional utterances recorded in survivor testimonies, outlining the way that declarations, directives and commissives function in corrupt institutional environments that extend protection to the perpetrator and the simultaneous lack of legal protection to the survivor.

In this context of prevalence of domestic violence, this study examines the prevalence of domestic violence among women in Lagos and Ogun States.

Context needs to be linked to any discourse analysis. The Southwest urban corridor of Nigeria is made up of Lagos and Ogun States, and it is the region acknowledged as the most economically vibrant in Nigeria, but one with high intimate partner violence (IPV) estimates. About 31% of women had been physically violent against since age 15 nationally, while rates for Lagos and Ogun are slightly higher (NPC & ICF, 2019). Reporting is very low: Less than 10% of the surviving victims of IPPV seek any kind of formal assistance; reasons include shame, economic dependency, social pressure and a justified negative trust of law enforcement authorities (Owoaje & Uchendu, 2009; Antai, 2011).

This sociological contextualization is analytical as far as discourse analysis is concerned: phenomenon of low reporting is discursive. A discursive context implies the availability of godly submission and familial honour, in which a survivor is not allowed to speak. Silence is not the lack of talk but its greatest product.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis

This study is based on Critical Discourse Analysis (CAD) developed by Norman Fairclough (1989, 1995). As Fairclough explains, CDA is related to the language/power

issue, which we take up, specifically, the role of discourse in creation/reproduction of relations of domination, inequality and social control. Fairclough believes that discourse is not simply a reflection of power relations but rather a social activity that also helps shape and construct them.

The analytical architecture of this study is provided by Fairclough's three-dimensional model.

(i) The Textual Dimension explores the language (vocabulary, grammar, syntax, cohesion, and metaphor) in the text itself. Form analysis examines lexical choices (the words survivors use to talk about their experiences), agency and passivisation (who does what, who has what done to them) and figuration or the method used of making the traumatic experience speakable.

(ii) The Discursive Practice Dimension analyses the production, dissemination and use of texts in institutional settings. This analysis takes into account the institutions involved in the way the survivor's testimony is heard, recorded, dismissed, and/or silence: the discursive practices of those working in the police gender unit, the DPP office, and the family as to what the survivor can say and what the sayings entail.

(iii) Textual and discursive practice is located within the socio-cultural and institutional framework of the Social Practice Dimension. This relates to an analysis at the level of the religious, customary and economical discouragement of women against resisting inequalities and the gender-based normalisation of violence in Lagos and Ogun States citizens' social relations.

I focus in this study not only on the conceptual framework of CDA as outlined above, but also on an aspect central to the field: the 'naturalisation of ideology' described by Fairclough (1989), in which historically constructed power relationships appear to be natural, inevitable and morally normative. The family pronouncement "You should stay" is an ideologically naturalized saying: it defines the subjection of the "abused wife" as what she ought to be doing, and opposition as what she should not be doing; what is "immoral [immorally disruptive]". Discourse analysis makes this naturalisation visible and, in doing so, makes it available for critique.

3.2 Austin and Searle's Speech Act Theory

The second major analytical framework is developed within Speech Act Theory, which was pioneered by J. L. Austin (1962) in 'How to Do Things with Words' and was extended systematically by John Searle (1969, 1979). The critical shift in thinking for Austin was that language itself does not just report states of things, it does things. He distinguished between:

Use the literal (dictionary) meaning of the words that are expressed; what gets said;

Illocutionary acts: the communicative function of the utterance; what is done by saying it (asserting, commanding, threatening, promising, declaring); and **Perlocutionary acts:** the effect on hearer (persuasion/ intimidation/ compliance/ silence).

Searle (1969) extended Austin's model and proposed five categories of illocutionary acts:

Representatives: claims about a state of affairs (he beat me);

Directives: attempts to get the hearer to act ('you should stay'; 'release their brother');

Commissives: commitments by the speaker to a future action, including threats and promises;

Expressives: expressions of psychological states (laments, complaints, accusations); and

Declarations: utterances that, within an authorised institutional context, change reality by being uttered ('there is no case again'; 'I now pronounce you').

Speech Act Theory is particularly useful in the analysis of: the coercive nature of the family's directives which are disguised in the form of counselling; the institutional nature of the police officer's statement whose speech act potential can effectively be used to put out fires while firefighting for political ends; the commissive character of perpetrators' and families' threats; and the expressives, by which survivors proclaim their experiences, which the culture lacks a sanctioned vocabulary to describe. However when language is seen as something we 'do', rather than just say, then the speech acts recorded in the survivor testimonies are not simply 'language' but 'act' – they are languages of power, or, in many cases, further acts of violence.

3.3 Feminist/Patriarchal Theory of Dobash / Dobash

The study is based on the feminist/patriarchal theory of Dobash and Dobash (1979). Because their line of reasoning is that domestic violence is not an individual level phenomenon, but rather located within the structural power of men over women, where this power is embedded in law, custom and belief, and economic structure, it helps them to understand the social context of the discursive practices they have analysed in this study. The language used to excuse perpetrators and silence survivors does not arise spontaneously: it responds to a linguistic vacuum, created by a social order that sees women's independence as a danger and men's power as normal.

3.4 Goode's Resource Theory

Goode (1971) proposes that people are not in a position to assert themselves through economic, social or status means and may resort to force instead to maintain their dominance inside the family. The theory puts within a framework the language of financial oppression found in the receipts of the survivors' testimonies: the language of economic deprivation works as a tool of abuse and a tool that sustains the situation in which harassment is not challenged.

Table 1: Theoretical Framework Summary

Framework	Primary Role in This Study	Key Concepts Applied
Fairclough’s CDA: (1989, 1995)	Primary analytical framework for textual and discursive analysis	Naturalisation of ideology; textual, discursive, and social practice dimensions; agency and passivisation; hegemonic discourse
Austin (1962) & Searle (1969, 1979): Speech Act Theory	Primary analytical framework for utterance-level analysis	Locutionary / illocutionary / perlocutionary acts; directives, declarations, commissives, expressives; institutional speech acts
Dobash & Dobash (1979): Feminist / Patriarchal Theory	Contextual sociological framework	Structural patriarchy; coercive control; institutional complicity in male dominance
Goode (1971): Resource Theory	Contextual economic framework	Resource deficit; economic coercion; financial dependence as control mechanism

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1 Research Design

The study adopts a qualitative phenomenological design (Moustakas, 1994), well-suited to discourse-analytic research that foregrounds the subjective dimensions of language and experience. A phenomenological approach allows the researcher to attend closely to how survivors construct and narrate their experiences in language — not as transparent windows onto events but as discursive acts that are themselves analytically significant. The language of survivor testimony is thus treated as data in the discourse-analytic sense: it is both the medium of communication and the object of study.

4.2 Data Collection

Data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews with three survivors of domestic violence in Lagos and Ogun States, selected through purposive sampling. Interviews were audio-recorded with informed consent, transcribed verbatim, and examined for both thematic content and linguistic features. Participants are anonymised as Victim 1, Victim 2, and Victim 3 throughout this paper.

Table 2: Participant Profile

Participant	State	Forms of Abuse Experienced	Key Institutional Contacts
Victim 1	Lagos	Physical, verbal/emotional, financial control	Project Alert, Ministry of Justice, Women Affairs
Victim 2	Ogun / Lagos	Physical, emotional, financial, levirate coercion	Human Rights Commission, community elders
Victim 3	Lagos	Physical, sexual (child), emotional, postpartum neglect	Gender Unit, SVA, Mirabel Centre, DPP Office

4.3 Data Analysis

Transcripts were subjected to a dual analytical procedure. First, thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke (2006) identified the principal themes of the survivor accounts. Second, and centrally, a discourse analysis informed by Fairclough's three-dimensional CDA model and Searle's speech act taxonomy was applied to the full transcripts, examining: lexical choices and metaphor; grammatical agency and passivisation; the illocutionary force of key utterances by survivors, family members, and institutional actors; discursive absences (what is not said, and what cannot be said); and the representational strategies through which the male perpetrator is discursively positioned relative to accountability.

5. DATA PRESENTATION: SURVIVOR TESTIMONIES

The data are presented in full contextual form, as the discourse analysis in Section 6 draws closely on the specific linguistic features of each testimony. Survivors' own words constitute the primary analytical object of the study.

5.1 Victim 1: Physical Violence, Financial Control, and Institutional Engagement

Victim 1 is a teacher and counsellor in Lagos State who experienced physical violence, verbal abuse, and systematic financial control. She eventually separated from her husband and subsequently engaged multiple institutions in seeking redress.

'I went through violence where I was beaten and abusive words were being thrown at me. You know, it dampens my spirit and I felt downgraded. So if I didn't really fight to put my head above the water, I would have drowned. I had physical damages. So that's how I left the marriage.' - **Victim 1**

'He wants to control you with his finance. He wants to control you because the day you raise up your voice and shout at him, he will stop. So what would you do? You then beg. You kneel down. Yes. You'll beg him because you know I don't have money. So you'll beg him. [...] Is that not another form of enslavement? That's emotional abuse.' - **Victim 1**

'You will be so humiliated that you will not even want to say no. The things that you can't accept. If you see maybe him talking to a girl, hugging and kissing, you will even not want to confront him because he has brought you so low that you will not even value yourself again.' - **Victim 1**

'When you notice the signal that this man is always beating you, when you say a word he will take offence, the anger is always much — as a woman, you monitor him. [...] You don't stay in a marriage because you want to marry. And the man will kill you.' - **Victim 1**

'Every woman should try to empower herself. [...] If a man knows, if he leaves you today, you are okay, he will think twice before leaving you. He will think twice. He say, so what do I get if I leave her? She will still be

flexing. She will even have more boyfriend and she'll be okay. So why do I want to leave her? He will think twice.' - **Victim 1**

5.2 Victim 2: Levirate Marriage, Extended Family Violence, and Community Pressure

Victim 2 was widowed and subjected to levirate pressure from her late husband's family. She experienced physical violence from both the prospective levirate husband and his female relatives, as well as severe economic deprivation affecting her children's schooling.

'He beat me. He beat me very well. Even the sisters, they would come, they would fight me, they would beat me. Upon that, I'm not feeling okay, I'm not okay.' - **Victim 2**

'They said no, I should stay, you understand. That there is no problem that they will take care of me. Even my husband's younger brother has to stand up and say that he will marry me. That's not good. And my people said — I said no.' - **Victim 2**

'I am, as I'm here, I am not happy, because they are out of school, because I cannot afford to pull them. [...] The business has collapsed. The children will eat. I want to buy parts. I want to eat.' - **Victim 2**

5.3 Victim 3: Physical Violence, Child Sexual Abuse, and Police Corruption

Victim 3's testimony is among the most comprehensive in the dataset. She experienced escalating physical violence, discovered that her infant daughter had been sexually abused by her partner, endured postpartum depression exacerbated by neglect, suffered severe financial deprivation, and subsequently encountered institutional betrayal when the IPO assigned to her case accepted a bribe and verbally dissolved her legal case in her presence.

'He was running after me. I was running. So everything on him, he was throwing it at me. [...] That this man one day, he might kill me or might destroy my life.' - **Victim 3**

'Anytime I wore her pampers or pants, if I go to bed and sleep, when I wake up, maybe in the middle of the night, I would see the pants — he has already removed it. [...] My child, when she was two years old, my daddy touched my bum.' - **Victim 3**

'I was depressed. Yes, I was depressed. Because there were a lot of activities in the house. I will have to leave my baby, cater for their own children, go to school to pick them up, go to market to buy things. So there was no help for me.' - **Victim 3**

'How much was I collecting when I was pregnant? 15,000. How do I cope with this?' - **Victim 3**

'She found out that I could not offer any money to her, she was not telling me that... I heard his voice. He was telling the IPO that he has sent it, yes. So she should check her phone. She said, that's okay. She was happy. You know, when you receive big money, you'll be excited. [...] She now checked and smiled.' - **Victim 3**

'In front of me, she said, hey, your wife is here. That she don't tell him, say the case don't close. In front of me, she told him. [...] Madam, that I don't see waiting happen now for CCRI, that there is no case again. That I should not be surprised to see my husband in the house the next day.' - **Victim 3**

'He stopped me from packing my things. That I should, you know, release their brother before I pack my things. Or I should leave my children. We are actually dragging my children. Both of us, we are dragging. And it was raining that day. So I had to just lock up my own room. And run away inside the rain. You know, with my children.' - **Victim 3**

6. DISCOURSE ANALYSIS: THE LANGUAGE OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND PERPETRATORS' PLACATION

This is the analytical core of the study. The analysis of survivor testaments in Section 5 then takes place along the four intertwined dimensions: (i) the lexicon of abuse and the metaphors thereof; (ii) the grammatical, agency, and passivisation of such speech acts; (iii) the functions of salient speech acts; and (iv) how the male perpetrator exempts themselves from responsibility, thereby taking exception.

6.1 The Vocabulary and Metaphors of Abuse: Naming the Unnameable

From a text-level perspective, Fairclough's model, lexical choice is one area that is most analytically productive in the survivor testimony texts. Survivors' language that names and narrates their experiences is not simply a vessel for pre-given significance, but a discursive creation that evokes ideological positions, attunes to the dominant cultural scripts, and serves communicative purposes.

Victim 1's testimony is based on a longstanding aquatic metaphor: if I didn't really fight to keep my head above the water, I would have sunk. The metaphor has several analytical effects. Drowning becomes a kind of environmental condition, not an act of a person, but rather a natural and overwhelming one. This naturalisation of violence through metaphor reflects the broader ideological discourse of patriarchy in which Fairclough's (1989) analysis is interested: the rendering as 'natural' of what is in fact an exercise of power. Fighting and head above the water are at the same time the code words of agency and survival: this vital verb 'fight' and the spatial image 'head above the water' signify that the survivor is not just a passive object of violent force but is also an agent laboring to be the one who was above it.

Financial control is 'enslavement' in Victim 1's version of the naming; this is one of the most lexically powerful moments in the data set. Slavery is more than an economy of exploitation: it is the systematic legal, social, and dehumanization of humankind, the

transformation of a human being into property. The choice of this lexical item suggests that Victim 1 makes a discourse analytical claim; that through her word choice she defines economic means of abuse as the most extreme form of human degradation, thereby asserting the criminality of what has been done to her and rejecting the discursive normalisation of economic control as 'marital friction.' It is discursive resistance in Fairclough's (1992) terms: it brings together counter-discourse to challenge and denaturalise the hegemonic representation of financial control as a normal masculine authority.

At the moment of extreme physical discomfort, the victim's language includes a particular amount of repetition: 'He beat me. He gave me a good beating.' This syntactic repetition cannot be considered redundancy; it is emphasis — a linguistic performance of insistence against the discourse to be expected. The form of the sentence is straightforward and uses the direct form of grammar (active verb, subject, object). The victim is patient, the perpetrator is agent. This is the grammar of clear accountability. That it needs to be repeated is analytically important; the repetition of the affirmation indicates an awareness of the cultural claim of denial or minimisation; namely a discursive rebuttal to the unspoken counter-claim is made beforehand.

In describing the physical attack, the syntax of Victim 3 is fragmented and present progressive, mimicking the phenomenology of traumatic recall, "He was running after me." I was running. So everything on him, he was throwing it at me.' Sensory immediacy of trauma is written into the short sentences, the parallelism of "he was running/ I was running," and the imprecise but compounding "everything on him." Memories of trauma are held in the body and recalled in segments of sensory-rich experience, not story (Herman, 1992). The language in Victim 3's testimony is not the product of faulty pronunciation but rather the true language of trauma.

6.2 The structure of the Passive, Agency and Grammar

The second dimension of text that use CDA is examining deals with grammatical structure, specifically with the distribution of agency. In the context of the clausal grammar, the grammatical subject is the 'agent' that is the entity executing the action (Halliday, 1985). The distribution of the subject's and object's places shows that the great majority of the testimonies have a consistent structure: perpetrators are in the grammatical subject position in clauses reporting violence ('he beat me,' 'he was running after me,' 'he has already removed it'), while survivors are in the object position as recipients of violence.

This arrangement for grammatical agency in the distribution is not descriptive; it is ideologically significant. Fairclough (1989) and van Dijk (1993) point out that grammatical agency indicates social agency: when given grammatical agency, one is socially helpless. Testimonies therefore reflect in the form of their very language the power imbalance of the abusive relationship.

But most importantly, perhaps, survivor agency is also grammatically as well as analytically noted. As the active voice grammatically constructs sentences into the

transference of action away from the self, the statement ‘that's how I left the marriage’ shifts the grammatical subject to the victim of the marriage, namely ‘I’ as a doing subject. She doesn't say “I was coaxed out” and doesn't say “I could have no other way.” The curse of the act of construction in language as a decision; recovery of agency in language while narrating its denial. Likewise, in Victim 3, ‘I had to just lock my own room. And run away inside the rain’ programs a tactic sequence of actions that work: lock, run, to carry out survival in an emergency state. In these moments the grammar of language works as discursive constitution: the survivors are not the objects of their story; they are the subjects.

Passivisation and the grammatical suppression of the agent in passives is a well-documented DCA (CDA) technique, (Fairclough, 1989). Passivisation is used very much in the institutional language associated with the testimonies. The DPP's ‘there is no case’ is the grammatically impersonal form, there is no decision-maker named, no reasons, no accountable subject. This legal outcome is rendered as a natural and unalterable setting, rather than a choice made by a human agent for whom accountability could be sought. The deletion of agents is not merely a grammatical coincidence, it is discursively produced through the strategy that renders the institutions accountable.

6.3 Speech Act Analysis: Language That Performs Violence and Protection

This section applies Fairclough's model of the discursive practice dimension to the illocutionary force of the main utterances in the testimonies, using Searle's state-of-the-art speech act taxonomy to work out how language is not only a companion to violence but also a part of it, and how particular forms of speech act serve as what Searle calls a tool for perpetrator protection.

6.3.1: The IPO's Declaration: Institutional Speech that Ends Legal Standing

The most analytically significant speech act from the set is the IPO's telling of Victim 3: ‘there is no case again. That I wouldn't expect my hubby to be back in the house the next day. For Searle, this is a Declaration: “an utterance whose utterance changes the state of the world, within an authorised institutional context.” Declarations are only effective if they involve a speaker with institutional authority (Austin's notion of ‘felicity conditions’, of speech acts): a judge can declare a man guilty; a registrar can declare a marriage contractation; an authorised police officer can declare the case closed.

The IPO's declaration is not only a legal act, it becomes a legal act through the act of speaking. Its perlocutionary effect — what it brings about in the hearer — is the production of helplessness in the survivor and impunity in the perpetrator. It is severely asserted in the presence of the survivor: ‘Hey, your wife's here, she says, in front of me. The performance of the Declaration in front of the survivor constitutes, itself, an intimidation speech; a show to the survivor that institutional power decided to speak for the perpetrator, instead of for him.

The withholding of a written letter of declaration, just as significant as a speech act, is the strategic non-performance of a documenting act, a refusal to produce a text that would provide the survivor with a basis for appeal. This is ‘negative speech act’ (Thomas,

1995): an intentional silent act of power. Discourse exists not just as content, but also as what is omitted.

6.3.2 Family Directives: Commands in the Language of Care

Advisory statements made by family members to domestic violence survivors about staying, 'I should stay', 'they will take care of me' are Directives in Searle's taxonomy, referring to attempts by the speaker to get the hearer to perform a specified action. In this context the directive 'stay' takes on the weightiness of the ideological system of the patriarchal family structure.

Most importantly, they are given in the soft style of a message of advice (the simplest being the expression of 'you should stay') or a promise of care ('they will take care of me'). This transformation of surface features is analytically meaningful: it is the naturalisation of power that Fairclough (1989) recognises as process characteristic of ideological discourse. Power is called care, direction is called 'advice', the wielding of patriarchal compliance is made to look like 'love'. This discursive strategy has more capacity to shut down opposition than a direct command does – the implication of 'you should stay' is stronger than the language of stay; to not stay is not to disobey a command, it is to refuse care, to reject family, to choose isolation.

6.3.3 Conditional Threats: Commissives and the Architecture of Blackmail

Victim 3's account of being told to 'release their brother before I pack my things. Within the communicative role of threatening words is illustrated the commissive function included in the word Forgive Or, I should leave my children'. According to Searle, commissives make the speaker responsible for an action to come. A conditional threat is a commissive linking a speaker's agreement to the occurrence of a negative consequence, if the hearer fails to comply. The grammatical 'or' serves as the fulcrum of the threat: it frames a choice between compliance (release the perpetrator) and catastrophe (loss of the children).

In this commissive, the illocutionary force is coercion (through the creation of an impossible choice). Stark (2007) describes it as "coercive control" of the survivor's behaviour by means of language as well as physical force, marginalizing available behaviour choices so that there is no real freedom of choice. In this case, this coercion is not manifest through physical force but rather only in a speech act: a threat by means of the commissive structure of the act.

Many reports on the Internet state that you should never use a rhetorical question in your resume. Numerous online articles advise against using rhetorical questions in resumes.

When I was pregnant, how much did I make? (out of Victim 3's mouth) 15,000. How do I cope with this?' is an example of rhetorical questions in function. Rhetorically speaking, the question for which no answer is truly required is akin to an assertion - but a highly illocutionary assertion. In the here, the question raises the outraged "how could it have been possible for him/his/her to have had just a little more money / more money etc can be assumed by the reader, the hearer, and the researcher. The self-supplied answer to

the question, becomes part of the testimony, and she becomes both a witness and a prosecutor and a self-advocate. The next question 'How do I cope with this?' is a perlocutionary call for the hearer to recognize an impossible situation.

6.3.4 Rhetorical Questions as Expressives: Performing Outrage

The third victim's response was 'How much was I getting when I was pregnant? 15,000. How do I cope with this?' illustrates the expressive function of rhetorical questions. Rhetorically: A question for which no real answer is expected is a statement but an illocutionary statement. In this sense, the question acts as a kind of outrage, urging the listener (and any broader audience, such as the researcher) to recognise that the question is missing the amount. The self-supplied answer ('15,000') becomes evidence in the survivor's narrative; she is the witness, the prosecutor, and advocate for herself. The follow-up question 'How do I cope with this?' solicits recognition, from the hearer, of an impossible situation.

6.4 The Discursive Exemption of the Male Perpetrator

Finally, from the analytical point of view, the powerful and systematic discursive exclusion of the male perpetrator of domestic violence from any form of accountability, responsibility and named culpability can be said to be one of the most significant ideological effects of this discourse in Nigeria, as examined in the discourse analysis of this study.

In the discursive analysis of survivors' testimony, naming and characterisation of perpetrators is limited by culture-psychological context in which the survivor gives testimony. In all three survivors, the focus of pronouns is on their abusers; in Victim 3's testimony, 'he' occurs as the grammatical subject of violent actions, and is never described, assessed, or held accountable in the discourse of the testimony itself. He is present in the testimonies as a force, not as an individual or person; grammatically he appears as an agent, but psychologically and morally, as an absent object, to which one could not speak, witness, judge or be held accountable. As the internal cultural script of the patriarchal order, this kind of pattern suggests that the perpetrator is "understood" (she is poor, she is traditional, she is mentally unstable), and the survivor is "under-doing" (she stayed, she did not manage the marriage, she provoked him).

The concept of 'ideological discourse management' offered by Van Dijk (1993) is relevant here: dominant ideology is constructed by how those things that are needed to get explained are managed and what things are not. In these testimonies, there is no explanation of male violence, only context, that is, it is presented as something within which the survivor must move. By contrast, female survival and exit necessitate copious narration and justification. The participants' investments in the discourse are visible in the distribution of what is being accounted for in the talk.

The male exemption is even more routinely institutionalized at this level. The IPO's statement 'there is no case', the most legally significant in the list, literally effaces the perpetrator from the institutional record. The case dissolution does not exculpate the child

abuser, only removes him/herself from legal discourse. This case isn't going to close because of an established absence of wrongdoing. This case will close because that's a decision that the financial power has made. Yet the closure is encoded into the neutral, impersonal language of the legal verdict 'there is no case', and this institutional triumph of the perpetrator is also grammatically absent at the very moment of his greatest institutional triumph.

The male perpetrator is exempted at the family or community discourse level with discourses of tradition, provision, and religious obligation. As recorded in Victim 2's testimony, levirate customs re-make the original perpetrator's act of violence in a discourse of property—the widow is an asset to be shared inside the family. Coercive is broken down into custom; natural is made into tradition. This is the social practice part of Fairclough's model as it most clearly focuses on a macro-ideological shift that systematically removes the perpetrator from the centre of responsibility and imposes the survivor into the centre of responsibility.

The discursive exclusion of the male perpetrator, however, is discursively linked with the simultaneous discursive construction of the female survivor as responsible. This inversion is captured best by Victim 1: 'he has lowered you to the extreme point that you will value yourself no more.' Violence is internalized and made into the survivor's own self-discourse. It is the deepest action of power in the sense of Fairclough: the most convincing act of power is an act that is also her own, but not enforced, but produced by a language that is her own.

Table 3: Summary of Discourse-Analytic Findings

Discursive Dimension	Key Findings	Theoretical Framework Applied
Vocabulary & Metaphor	Drowning metaphor (naturalises violence); "enslavement" (asserts full personhood); repetition in V2 (performs insistence against disbelief); fragmented syntax in V3 (traumatic discourse)	CDA - Textual Dimension; Fairclough (1989)
Grammar & Agency	Perpetrators as grammatical subjects of violence; survivors as objects; survivor agency in active-voice exit constructions; institutional passivisation erases decision-makers	CDA - Textual Dimension; van Dijk (1993)
Speech Acts: IPO Declaration	"There is no case" = Institutional Declaration that creates legal reality; strategic withholding of written order = negative speech act	Speech Act Theory - Declarations; Austin (1962); Searle (1969)

Speech Acts: Family Directives	"You should stay" = Directive cloaked in counsel; command disguised as care; ideological naturalisation of compliance	Speech Act Theory - Directives; Fairclough (1989) naturalisation
Speech Acts: Threats	"Release their brother or leave your children" = Commissive (conditional threat); verbal architecture of coercive control	Speech Act Theory - Commissives; Stark (2007)
Discursive Male Exemption	Perpetrators named by pronoun only; contextualised not judged; grammatically absent at institutional closure; family discourse naturalises control	CDA - Social Practice Dimension; van Dijk (1993) ideological management

7. DISCUSSION

7.1 Language as the Medium of Patriarchal Power

The questions raised in Section 6 find support and extension in the discourse analysis detailed here: if patriarchy is the structural basis of domestic violence, as theorized by Dobash and Dobash (1979), then the evidence of the gendered nature of violence, found in the substantive analysis of the above texts, ought to be seen as being consolidated in this context. The CDA complements this structure-based account with an illustration of the everyday mechanisms whereby patriarchal power is reproduced through language: the lexicogrammar and performances of speech acts described in the survivor evidence. Patriarchy is not just an institutionalization; it is a discursive regime: system of language practices building some discursive forms of power as natural, some positions as granted, some voices as unspeakable. Survivors' discourse is created in this context, but it also challenges it.

7.2 Institutional Speech Acts as Second-Order Violence

In this regard, this Speech Act analysis of institutional language in this study concludes that the failure of institutions to intervene in cases of domestic violence is not only an administrative failure but also a discursive failure. The message of the IPO - there's no case against you - is a second-order violence: an institutional statement of crushing the survivor's legal voice and reclaiming the perpetrator's liberty. That is a statement made in the presence of the survivor, who knew that it would create in her helplessness and fear: the perlocutionary effect is not unintentional but its purpose.

The absence of written documentation is another serious negative speech act. Institutional power is also inviolable by means of something that is not recorded: the deliberate case that has not been recorded, the oral closure without writing, the oral leave-taking, the advice given 'off the record.' The strategic discursive absences need to be equally treated as issues of discourse analysis as do the acts of speech that are present.

7.3 The Discursive Construction of Survivor Responsibility

The study's key analytical contribution is how the discourse of the male perpetrator's exemption is achieved by a simultaneous discourse of the female survivor's responsibility: responsibility for staying, for provoking, for not managing the marriage. This inversion is not a natural characteristic of language; it is an ideological framing which can be made visible through CDA. The survivor's internalization of the perpetrators' violence in the guise of the victim's self-discourse is a discursive process described by Victim 1 when she remarks that she has been, 'brought so low that you will not value yourself again'. Silencing her in one language is silencing her in another. This, as Fairclough (1989) would put it, is the strongest form of ideological discourse, one that does not need to be enforced from outside because its participants are internalizing it.

7.4 Discursive Resistance and Survivor Agency

Survivors' testimonies inherit the potential for discursive fightback as well as being data for an analysis of discursive power. To speak - to name the abuse as 'enslavement' - is to argue against the rule of discursive that will make the survivor go silent, and let the perpetrator remain safe. Victim 1's advocacy discourse is an entire discursive inversion; from the one who is being directed as a victim, she becomes the one analyzing others' behavior as the subject years in the waiting line. This is a counter-discourse in Fairclough's (1992) sense – discourse that challenges and contests the dominant representation of the silent and compliant abused wife.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

8.1 Language-Sensitive Training for Institutional Actors

This research modeling the speech act demonstrates that the language of institutions in legal procedures is not an innovative "neutral" tool but an active tool of power. Discourse-sensitive practice is essential to train law enforcement officers, DPP staff and judicial officers who work with domestic violence cases, where discourse refers to the illocution of institutional declarations in domestic violence, the power effects of lack of written institutional documentation, and the discursive construction of survivor and perpetrator through institutional language of domestic violence. Independent NGO supervision of gender units in the police would generate a counter-discourse mechanism – an institutional voice to challenge the statements of corrupt IPOs.

8.2 Legislative Enforcement of the VAPP Act

Violence Against Persons Prohibition (VAPP) Act 2015 is the legislative counter-discourse to the culture of perpetrator placation. The enforcement of it by all states of Nigeria is discursive as much as legal, demanding the use of language of rights and accountability to replace the tradition, submission and family honour language in the institutional management of cases involving domestic violence.

8.3 Economic Empowerment as Discursive Empowerment

Victim 1 demonstrates the ways in which money can be discussed and even silenced in collusion with the economic power, where the person kneels down and begs the lady, 'you kneel down, you beg, because you know I don't have money'. At the same time, there are economic empowerment programmes targeting women at risk of and living with domestic violence, which are also investments in their discursive agency – their ability to speak, to deny directives, to enter institutional spaces where their voices can be heard.

8.4 Community-Level Discourse Sensitisation

Community discourses and family statements, which are basically responses that appease and reinforce perpetrators and pressure survivors, are not unalterable cultural realities but practices upon which debate and change are possible. Community sensitisation programmes involving religious leaders, community elders, and family heads should explicitly include discursive dimensions of domestic violence: how discourses of tradition, headship, and family honour de-escalate domestic violence, quell survivor voices, and protect abusers, and how these can be challenged and superseded by alternative discourses of mutual dignity, legal accountability, and survivor rights.

8.5 Child Protection as a Discursive Imperative

One of the most egregious outcomes of the study is the institutionalization of child sexual abuse through bribery and declaration in Victim 3's testimony. A child safety evaluation should always be part of every domestic violence investigation and should be referred to specialist forensic services as soon as indicators of child abuse are identified. The invisible, secret, suppressed, institutionalised absence of child sexual abuse is a discourse error that cannot be remedied retroactively.

9. CONCLUSION

The study has highlighted not only that this form of violence is a social problem that can be measured and managed but, more so, that this is a discursive problem, which requires analysis. Language is not just a mirror of the violence inflicted on the survivors in Lagos State and Ogun States; it is the cause and the support of the violence and it is an institutional legitimisation of the violence. Together, Critical Discourse Analysis and Speech Act Theory have demonstrated the ways in which language of trauma and language of resistance are encoded in the survivors, the ways in which language of institutionalization suppresses repeatable forms of perceived culpability, the ways in which family language acts against perpetrators while allowing women to maintain subjectivity, the ways in which the declarative structure of institutional language constructs and dismantles legal reality for the perpetrator, and the ways in which all social and institutional language structures exemptably erase the man perpetrator and reinforce the role of the woman survivor.

The ethos behind this research – the 'culture of perpetrator placation' – is discursive culture, manifested both in the acts of corruption and of physical force with which boys and men are protected from girls and women, but also in the language habits of families,

communities and institutions that inscribe male voice as normal and natural, and silence female voice. Changing that culture is, necessarily, changing that language. The narrators of this study—those survivors whose voices appear within its data—are already engaging in that kind of work: they are naming abuse as enslavement, insisting on being listened to, advocating for other women, and they are engaging in that kind of counter-discourse that the patriarchal language of domestic violence tries to silence. To vet that counter-discourse until it eventually replaces, or can replace, the language of placation is a task for policy, scholarship, and community practice.

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