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A Syntactic Analysis of *Vanguard* Online Readers' Comments on the Alleged Nigerian National Assembly Fuel Subsidy Bribery Scandal

Abstract

This paper analysed the syntactic features used by online commenters on the alleged national assembly fuel subsidy bribery scandal. The study employed both primary and secondary sources. The primary source included 120 purposively selected *Vanguard* Online readers' comments. Purposive sampling technique was used to select comments that focus on topical issues that bordered on fuel subsidy. The choice of *vanguard* is based on the peculiar nature of the comments posted on the site. The secondary source included books, journal, articles and the internet. The data selected were analysed using Halliday and Mathiessen's (2004) Systemic Functional Grammar. This is because SFG is based on the choices that grammar makes available to speakers and writers. The results of the study showed that the dominant syntactic structures such as paratactic constructions, hypotactic constructions, thematisation and verbalised process option were used to achieve equal and unequal arrangement of utterances, and to draw attention to inequality in the society. The study concluded that the commenters' syntactic choices on the alleged national assembly fuel subsidy committee bribery scandal were shaped by their understanding of the socio-political situation in Nigeria.

1. Introduction

The paper is a syntactic analysis of readers' comments on *Vanguard* online news reports on the alleged bribery scandal involving the fuel subsidy committee of Nigeria's national assembly. The Internet is a global connectivity of computers which gives or allows online readers the opportunity to express themselves. This connectivity is made possible through wireless format called satellite. Dahlberg (2001) cited in Milioni *et al* (2011:2) explains that the Internet helps in

the creation of space where the public can air their opinions and engage themselves in general deliberation. Today, many Nigerians have used this online platform most especially the opportunity offered by the news group to bare their minds on different news reports ranging from the pervasiveness of corruption in the country as the case of fuel subsidy bribery scandal to national security. The fuel subsidy committee was set up by the House of Representative to look into allegations of fuel subsidy corruption against many key players in the country's oil and gas industry. This came shortly after the administration of Goodluck Jonathan removed fuel subsidy which led to a mass protest by different organised labour unions and civil societies in the country.

Syntax

Syntax is one of the major components of grammar. Syntax according to Valin and Lapolla (1997:1) is "an arrangement" or "setting out together". It basically refers to the branch of grammar that deals with the ways in which words with or without appropriate inflections are arranged to show connections of meaning within the sentence. Syntax is central to human language. It is the traditional study of the rules governing the ways in which words are combined to form phrases, clauses and sentences; the arrangement of words in a sentence. It could also be described as the study of the interrelationships between elements of sentence structure and the rules governing the arrangement of sentences in sequence.

The central assumption underpinning syntactic analysis is traditional grammar which states that the phrases and sentences are built up of a series of constituents (ie syntactic units), each of which belongs to a specific grammatical category and serves a specific grammatical function. The syntactic analysis can be said to be done through the application of semantic theory. The

major concern in syntactic theory is to specify what is and what is not possible in a language. Given this assumption, the task of the linguist analysing the syntactic structure of any given type of sentence is to identify each of the constituents in the sentence, and (for each constituent) to say what category it belongs to and what function it serves.

In contrast to the taxonomic approach adopted in traditional grammar, Chomsky (1971) takes a cognitive approach to the study of grammar. For Chomsky, the goal of the linguist is to determine what it is that native speakers know about their native language which enables them to speak and understand the language fluently: hence, the study of language is part of the wider study of cognition (ie what humans know). In a fairly obvious sentence, any native speaker of a language can be said to know the grammar of his or her native language.

Chomsky further says that syntax is the study of the principles and processes by which sentences are constructed in particular languages. Syntactic investigation of a given language has its goal as the construction of a grammar that can be viewed as device of some sort for producing the sentences of the language under analysis. For example, *colourless green ideas sleep furiously*. Chomsky created the above sentence which is grammatically correct but incomprehensible to demonstrate the rules governing syntax.

Syntax mainly has to do with the ways in which words can be combined to form phrases and sentences". It explains the principles that determine the ways in which we can and cannot combine words together to form phrases and sentences.

Carnie (2006:3) is of the view that syntax is an aspect of linguistics which deals with how words and sentences are structured. It studies the level of language that lies between words and

meaning of sentences. It is the level that mediates between sounds that someone produces and what they had in mind to say.

It is clear that the focus of syntax is the sentence. A sentence has a linear structure, that is, the constituents of every sentence are joined together in a particular chain-like order to convey meaning. Constituents which are combined in this way to form larger units are said to be in a syntagmatic relationship. E.g *The man slapped his son*. In the above sentence, there are three units: *The man* (nominal group), *slapped* (verbal group) and *his son* (nominal group).

Sentence and its Types

A sentence is said to be a stretch of language which begins with a capital letter and ends with a full stop, Osisanwo (2004:18). A sentence can be defined as a group of words that contains a subject and predicator which expresses a complete meaning.

Aremo (2004) identifies two classes of a sentence: SIMPLE SENTENCES AND NON SIMPLE SENTENCES. The simple sentences according to him are the base forms from which the non basic ones are formed. He also recognises the fact that the non basic simple sentences undergo some transformation processes before they are formed such as insertion, movement and deletion before they are formed. When these processes are applied, they can lead to the formation of different sentence types such as negative sentences, emphatic sentences, passive sentences and also sentences with polar, WH questions etc.

On the simple sentence, Aremo (2004) refers to it as the base in which the non basic sentences are formed. It can also be likened to a kernel sentence discussed in transformational generative grammar by Noam Chomsky.

Sentence Construction

The commenters used different types of clause to express themselves. This subsection explains the different uses of the clause types used. It equally explains their functions and general contribution to the interpretation of the comments.

Paratactic construction

Paratactic construction, according to Halliday and Mathiessen (2004:384), is the linking of elements of equal status. They further explain that both the initiating and the continuing element are free in the sense that each could stand as functioning whole. In principle, the paratactic relation is logically (i) symmetrical and (ii) transitive. This can be exemplified with the "and" relation.

(i)   "salt and pepper" implies "pepper and salt", so the relationship is symmetrical

(ii)   "salt and pepper", "pepper and mustard together imply "salt and mustard", so the relationship is transitive (Halliday and Mathiessen, 2004:384)

Hypotactic Construction

Hypotaxis is characterised as a relationship between clauses, an interdependency relationship in which neither of the clauses is a constituent part of another. For instance, the subordinate clauses in the sentences "I couldn't come because I was sick and John thought that Alice wouldn't come" are in a hypotactic relation to the main clause; they are dependent on it but not constituent of it (Halliday 1987:73, 1994: 242).

Halliday (1987:74) makes strong claims about the characteristics of hypotaxis which is the arrangement of unequal constituents. It explains the inequalities between clauses that are both grammatically and semantically evident in discourse and claims about embedding as well. He

asserts that "Hypotaxis is more like parataxis than it is like embedding; and both are characteristic of spoken rather than written language" whereas Halliday (1985:84) states that "in mathematical terms, the hypotactic relation is one of interaction whereas embedding is one of recursion".

Relativisation/Embedding

This has to do with embedding construction, and it is otherwise known as nesting. Embedding is a nominalising device, a mechanism of rankshifting in which a clause comes to function as a constituent part of another. It is clause which has undergone a shift in rank from clause level to group level; they function as groups or parts of groups, in the following functions only (Halliday 1987:73, 1994:242)

- head of a nominal group (eg. It is obvious **that Jeff wrecked the car**)

- post modifier in a nominal group (I saw the car **that Jeff wrecked**)

- post modifier in an adverbial group (He came earlier **than we had expected**)

Halliday and Mathiessen (2004:426) define embedding as "a semogenic mechanism whereby a clause or phrase comes to function as a constituent within the structure of a group, which itself is a constituent of a clause, for instance, "who came to dinner" in the example "the man *who came to dinner*". They posit further that there is no direct relationship between an embedded clause and clause within which it is embedded; the relationship of an embedded clause to the "outer" clause is in an indirect clause functioning in the structure of the clause. To them, embedding is thus the rankshift by which a clause or phrase comes to function within the structure of a group. They postulate that the characteristic function of an embedded element is a postmodifier in a

nominal group (as in "the man who came to dinner) where "who came to dinner" is postmodifying the head "man".

They further note that an embedded element may either be an expansion or a projection. By expansion, they mean that the meaning of an embedded clause or phrase, that is functioning as an expansion is essentially to define, delimit or specify. Thus, the characteristic embedded expansion is the defining relative clause (also called "restrictive"). For instance, "that Jack built" in "the house that Jack built" is an example of an embedded expansion. By projection, they mean that the projecting element is the noun that is functioning as the head which in this case is assertion. In a nutshell, they are saying that the characteristic embedded projection is the non defining relative clause. They identified some of the principal nouns of projection as; statement, report, news, rumour, claim, assertion, argument, insistence, proposition, assurance, intimation etc

Theoretical Framework

This study adopted Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics. The most important concern of a systemic functional approach to any language study or analysis is its insistence on studying actual instance of language that have been used or (are being used) by speakers or writers (Bloor and Bloor, 2004:4). Systemic Functional Grammar is also concerned with the choices that the grammar makes available to speakers and writers (Butt *et al,* 1995). This theoretical framework creates unlimited linguistic choices of ways for meaning generation. Such linguistic choices are found to be evident in online readers comments selected mainly for this study where commenters choose different linguistic items to bare their mind.

Data Analysis

The selected data for this study are 120 *Vanguard* online comments in June, 2012. Based on the fact that the syntactic choices used by these online commenters in baring their minds were too broad in scope, the data were grouped as:

A. Pro Farouk Lawan's Comments TEXT A1- 20

B. Anti Farouk Lawan's Comments TEXT B1- 8

C. The involvement of cabals in corruption TEXT C1- 11

D. Perspectives on the Role of Security Agencies TEXT D1- 7

E. Religious Perspectives TEXT E1- 13

F. Disgruntled Comments TEXT F1- 44

G. Suggestions or Solutions to corruption in Nigeria TEXT G1- 19

Total Number of Samples 120

The participants in the selected online readers' comments used utterances in different ways to express their disappointment on the alleged bribery scandal involving a committee of the Nigeria National Assembly. Different syntactic structures used in the data samples are described and analysed in the following sub-sections.

In this subsection, grammatical features that contribute to meaning making and are equally significant for the interpretation of the selected online readers' comments are analysed from the following angles: sentence grammar, mood, transitivity and theme.

Sentence Grammar

Sentence grammar is very important in unveiling the meanings in the selected comments. The analysis in this section is done at the following levels: sentence structure (Paratactic and Hypotactic constructions), Relativisation/Embedding and Structural Parallelism. The commenters used different types of clause to inform the people and to express their disappointment on the fuel subsidy committee bribery scandal.

(A) Paratactic Constructions

Paratactic construction is the arrangement of parallel or similar sentence structures or constituents. In most cases, the equality of the clauses is evident both grammatically and semantically. For instance, Example 1 explains the significant use of paratactic construction in the selected comments.

EXAMPLE 17:

S	P	C
Nigeria	is	immortal
Nigeria	is	invisible
		(Text C7)

EXAMPLE 18:

C	S	P

The more   you   look

The less   you   see

(Text F28)

EXAMPLE 19:

C   S   P

The more   you   see

The less   you   understand

(Text F29)

EXAMPLE 20:

M   H   M   M   H

... The police   The house members

M   H   M   H

The EFCC   The ICPC

M   H   M   H

The SSS   The lawyers

M   H

The Court   (Text C8)

The repeated structures in Example 17 are simple sentences with SPC structural patterns where "Nigeria" is the subject, "is" is the equative verb and "immortal" and "invisible" are both complements. These structural patterns are used by a commenter to show his or her

profound love for Nigeria and the belief that Nigeria cannot be destroyed despite all the corrupt practices in the country. The second structural repetition in Example 18 and 19 point to the backward nature of Nigeria. The last structural repetitions identified in the data Example 20 are all nominal groups with MH nominal structures. "the" and "house" are modifiers while "police", "members", "EFCC", "ICPC", "SSS", "lawyers" and "court" are the headwords. These parallel structures show that all the sectors in the nation's economy are corrupt. The structures further show frustration, helplessness and perplexity by the commenters.

 (B) Hypotactic Construction

Hypotaxis is the arrangement of unequal constituents. The word hypotaxis literally means "beneath" (hypo), "arrangement" (taxis). Hypotaxis forms the basis of subordination. The inequalities between hypotactic clauses are evident both grammatically and semantically and are used in the selected comments to reveal the weakness of government in tackling the problem of corruption and also measures which can be taken in addressing the problem. For instance:

EXAMPLE 21:

S   P   C   A
(1)I / know / dat notin will happen 2 Farouk & Femi / because d goodluck administration didn't pay

                                             A   S   P C   P   C
much attention 2 corruption. (2) When Dino cried out / they beat him & even suspended him in

                                    A   P   S   A
the house. (3) If you want to know more about Faruk Umar/ ask / Dino Melaye. (4) Prosecute him

S   P   C

like Hembe/ den we /ll know/ dat u r fighting corruption.... (Text F20)

        EXAMPLE 22:

                    S   P   C   A

        Farouk Lawan/ should face/ the music/ so that others will learn from

        him (Text G4)

The two sentences in Example 21 and Example 22 contain two unequal clauses with SPCA

structural patterns. The subordinate clauses "because d goodluck administration didn't pay

much attention 2 corruption" (Text F20) and "so that others will learn from him" (Text G4) are

realised as optional adverbials. The former shows the failure of government in tackling the

issue of corruption while the latter presents the measures that need to be taken in solving the

problem of corruption in Nigeria.

Another form of hypotactic construction in the discourse is relativisation or embedding.

Relativisation is a form of embedding of a relative clause. Embedded constructions are

constructions that include one unit as part of another unit of the same general type. A relative

clause normally acts as modifier of a noun phrase and gives information about the head or

preceding part of the nominal group which is also called the antecedent. For instance:

        EXAMPLE 23:
        Nigerians will always be Nigerians; we no longer see reasons
        why the fuel subsidy probe be continued and implemented
        simply because of some cabals **who don't want our collective
        success...** (Text C1)

        EXAMPLE 24:

... It's time for Nigerians to take their destinies in their hands
and chase away those **who are making life difficult for them
in their own country**. (Text C3)

In Example 23 and Example 24 above, the embedded or relative clauses have "relativizer" **who**. The two clauses are restrictive relative clauses. This is because they clarify or specify the antecedents "cabals" and "those" respectively. In a broader sense, the two clauses define the headwords "cabals" and "those" as people who have been profiting from the public treasury to the detriment of Nigerians and who also do not want the fuel subsidy committee's report to be implemented. Also, the use of embedding demonstrates the complexity of thought, confusion and perplexity of the commenters.

Mood

Mood shows what role the speaker in the speech event takes and what role he assigns to the addressee. It is generally concerned with the situation of the subject in the clause structure. Mood is divided into the following: declaratives, interrogatives, imperatives and exclamatory. Declarative and interrogative moods are found to be more significant for meaning generation in the discourse. The following are instances:

EXAMPLE 25:
Why must he use such a huge amount of money 2 set a trap?
(Text A10)

EXAMPLE 26:
Nigerians, **what are we going to do?** (Text F5)

EXAMPLE 27:
Ha ha ha, my country people here we are, did U
hear the amount involved, yet our roads are bad.
No amenities for us. What can we do? Nothing
(Text F44)

EXAMPLE 28:

My agony is that these criminals are always here buying
houses where another developed. The vice president was
here in Cape Town 2or 3 weeks ago (Text F5)

EXAMPLE 29:
My little contribution to this saga of Farouk lawbreaker
and Femi Otedola is that federal government is trying to
shield away from the issue of subsidy probe so that they
will continue to fool themselves... (Text F30)

Example 25 above is a rhetorical question asked as a surprise questioning the wasteful nature of

the bribe giver. The adjective "huge" which modifies the noun "*amount*" in the question

describe the amount wasted and also shows the commenter's surprise and disappointment on the

bribe giver as being wasteful. The two questions in Example 25 and Example 27 illustrate

emotive use of language among these commenters. When this form of language use is employed

in any discourse exchange, it expresses emotions such as anger, shock, frustration etc. The

questions in Example 25 and Example 27 are used by the commenters to express their level of

frustration. More importantly in the questions is the response in Example 27 "nothing". This is a

response to the question asked rhetorically in Example 27 which does not only show the

commenter's frustration but also his or her resignation and loss of hope.

The declarative moods are used as statements. Text F5 and Text F30 are statements about their

dissatisfaction on the ways things are done in the country and the lackadaisical attitude of the

government in solving the problem of corruption compared to the way corruption is being

tackled in other countries.

Transitivity

The transitivity system has to do with expression of processes and the participants. The

process is usually represented by a verb or verbal group. The transitivity system also accounts

for choices made in relation to the clause element- Complement. Halliday (1985:53) explains it as that which deals with the "transmission of ideas", "representing processes or experiences", actions, events, processes of consciousness and relations. We discovered that material, mental and verbalised process types feature prominently in the selected data.

(A) Material Process Types

Material process types involve the act of *doing* and *happening*. In a material process type, there are two classes of participants which are the *actor* and the *goal* (Receiver). The following are instances from the data.

> EXAMPLE 30:
> ... Obasanjo **had wanted** his own person to come on board as a
>   speaker of the house (Text A6)
> EXAMPLE 31:
>   ... The government **set up** the committee so that
> it will look as if they are working and interested in fishing out
>   the thieves that stole the subsidy funds (Text A7)
>   EXAMPLE 32:
>   ... They **don't want** Farouk to deliver his assignment
>   fully   (Text A13)
> EXAMPLE 33:
> ... the giver **has played** it safe by informing the security
> operatives before giving out the bribe... (Text B1)
> EXAMPLE 34:
> ... They, the cabals **have sold** Nigeria to the devil...
> (Text C3).
>
> EXAMPLE 35:
> SSS joined Otedola **to set up** a senator that is probing
> him, all of them na thieve n they shd be dealt with (Text
> D3)
> EXAMPLE 36:
> These so called big men or thieves **are playing** with us
> (Text F40)
>
> EXAMPLE 37:

... Abdulsalam **probed** all Abacha's Ministers and
family to enrich himself (Text F35)

The actors or the implied actors such as "Obasanjo" in Example 30, "the government" in Example 31, "they" in Example 32, "the giver" in Example 33, "SSS and Otedola" in Example 35, "these so called big men or thieves" in Example 36 and "Abdulsalam" in Example 37 are all members of the ruling elites while "Nigerians" are the goal or the affected ones in Examples 32, 34, 35, and 37. While the implied beneficiaries in Examples 36 31, and 33 are members of the same ruling elites as the actors. The material process options "had wanted" in Example 30, "set up" in Example 31, "don't want" in Example 32, "has played" in Example 33, "have sold" in Example 34, "to set up" in Example 35, "are playing" in Example 36 and "probed" in Example 37 describe the actions of the ruling elites on the recipients on different occasions in ensuring everything works in their favour thereby subjecting the masses to sufferrings.

(B) Mental Process Types

In a mental process clause, we have a participant who is usually a human being and a processer who feels, thinks, wants or perceives something. The following are examples from the data:

EXAMPLE 38:
I **believe** this is orchestrated to divert people's attention from
the issue on ground (oil subsidy probe) (Text A5)
EXAMPLE 39:
... I **think** we should pursue the hyena (Otedola) before coming
back to the hen (Farouk) for the former will cause more havoc
(short changing the masses) than the latter).... (Text A12)
EXAMPLE 40:
I **love** this man Otedola.... (Text B5)

The mental process options "believe" in Example 38 "think" in Example 39 and "love" in Example 40 are used by the commenters to express what they feel, think and perceive about the entire process of the alleged fuel subsidy bribery scandal and the two prominent actors involved in the scandal. The process options were equally used to by the commenters to show

their admiration and perceptions on the actors involved in the alleged scandal and also suggest ways in which corruption can be solved.

(C) Verbalised Process Types

Verbal process options are those used in saying something. It consists of a participant, "the sayer" and the beneficiary. Verbal process options are predominantly foregrounded in the selected data. The verbal options are mainly used by Nigerians, the affected ones to urge the government to address the nation's problem and also to find solutions or suggest ways in which the present situation can be ameliorated. The following are instances from the data:

> EXAMPLE 41:
> .... Goodluck Jonathan **should do** something.... (Text A5)
> EXAMPLE 42:
> Both of them **should be brought** to book (Text A10)
> EXAMPLE 43:
> The giver **should be sentenced** to 50yrs in jail... (Text G8)
> EXAMPLE 44:
> Both the giver and taker **should be jailed**; this is how things work (Text G3)
> EXAMPLE 45:
> Both **should be given** life sentence so others learn (Text G15)

Verbalised process options such as "should do" in Example 41, "should be brought" in Example 42, "should be sentenced" Example 43, "should be jailed" in Example 44 and "should be given" in Example 45 are used by the commenters urging the government to take appropriate action and also suggesting to the government ways in which the problem of corruption can be solved. They equally express opinions, show lack of power, weakness by the commenters and also present them as noise makers.

 Thematisation

Theme is the element which is put in the initial position in the clause structure. In systemic Functional Linguistics, there is a clear difference between unmarked and marked theme. But

for the purpose of this study, our attention is on the marked theme because of its uses, occurrences and its significance for the interpretation of the overall message in the texts. The following are examples of marked theme in the data:

> EXAMPLE 46:
> ... **With these people around**, we are doomed as a country and as a people.... (Text A6)
> EXAMPLE 47:
> **If each regime is always filled up with corrupt and inept politicians since 1983 when Shagari's regime was overthrown for corruption**, then it goes to say that 95% of the Nigerian population is corrupt... (Text F2)
>
> EXAMPLE 48:
> **From the amendment of CBN's Act to the Farouk/Otedola scam to the Arumah Oteh's compulsory leave**, the list is endless (Text F2)
>
> EXAMPLE 49:
> **Right from SUGs in the universities**, its all about embezzlement of union funds.... (Text F7)

In the examples identified above, the adjuncts are fronted to displace the subject as the theme and they are all marked theme. In Example 46 "with these people around", the people being talked about in Example 46 are the cabal who do not want the progress of Nigeria and the people generally. In Example 47, "if each regime is filled up with corrupt and inept politicians since 1983 when Shagari's regime was overthrown for corruption", the commenter draws the attention of people to the fact that these cabal who are the embodiment of corruption have been in existence and are part of the government. In Example 48, the commenter expresses clearly that the CBN's Act, Farouk/Otedola scam and Arumah Oteh's compulsory leave, were propelled by corruption. Also, in Example 49, the commenter included the adults as practitioners and actors in the game of corruption. He or she expressed that corruption can also

be traced to the students' union government in the universities where students in their own little way embezzle union funds that is meant for the welfare of the students. The commenter achieved his or her intention of exposing Nigeria's corruption among the youth by fronting or giving prominence to the adjunct "right from SUG's in the universities" in Example 49.

Analysis of Faulty Sentence Constructions

Error analysis is a technique for identifying, describing and systematically explaining the errors made by a learner using some principles and procedures given by linguistics. In any second language environment, errors, mistakes are likely to occur. In error analysis, errors are classified based on gravity and relative frequencies. A key finding of error analysis has been that many learners' errors are produced by learners making faulty inferences about the rules of the new language. Errors can be classified according to basic type: omissive, addictive, and substitutive. They can as well be classified by how apparent they are: overt errors such as "I angry". This kind of error is obvious and even out of context. Errors may also be classified according to the levels of language: phonological errors, vocabulary or lexical errors, syntactic errors and so on.

There are different instances of faulty sentence constructions in the data used by the commenters. Some of them include:

EXAMPLE 50:
... He just want to seize dat opportunity to scott himself free of accusations...
(Text A13)
EXAMPLE 51:
Otedola should be jail why Farouk should be made to pay fine and dismiss. (Text A17)
 EXAMPLE 52:
Lislature should not allow Otedola to score it free, it is purnishe in the mighty name of Jesus.
(Text A18)

EXAMPLE 53:
... Farouk can be pick any time (Text C2)
 EXAMPLE 54:

... This is very sad a thing to do. (Text C3)

EXAMPLE 55:

... Why did Zenon name was removed after it was initial listed among the company that collected subsidy? (Text D6)

EXAMPLE 56:

This criminals can never live us. (Text F5)

EXAMPLE 57:

You guys are talking as if you are not living Nigeria, did know how many people that has being jailed in Nigeria n letter on a closed door they grant them (Text F6)

The identified utterances are faulty constructions used by the commenters. Example 50 can be corrected as "He just wants to seize that opportunity to go scot free of the accusations". The wrong expression used by the commenter shows his or her level of exposure to the language. Example 51, "Otedola should be jail why Farouk should be made to pay fine and dismiss" can be corrected as "Otedola should be jailed while Farouk should be made to pay a fine and be dismissed". The faulty construction reveal the commenter's poor knowledge of tense usage, most especially simple past tense as in the case of "jail" instead "jailed". Example 52, is also another clear faulty sentence construction, "lislature should not allow Otedola to score it free, it is purnishe in the mighty of Jesus". This faulty construction can be corrected as "legislators should not allow Otedola to go scot free, it is punishable in the mighty name of Jesus. The faulty construction in Example 52 shows that the commenter does not have a good knowledge of morphology. A good example in the faulty constructions is words "lislature" instead of "legislators" and "purnishe" instead of "punishable".

Example 53, "Farouk can be pick any time" which can be corrected as "Farouk can be picked up any time" is also a demonstration of the fact that the commenter does not know how to use the simple past form of the verb as evident in "pick" instead of "picked let alone the phrasal verb "picked up". Example 54 is also faulty. "This is very sad a thing to do" which can be corrected as "This is a very sad thing to do". This example clearly shows the commenter's wrong use of article "a".

Equally important among the faulty sentence constructions is Example 55, "... why did Zenon name was removed after it was initial listed among the company that collected subsidy? Can be corrected as "why was the company's name removed after it was initially listed among the companies that collected the subsidy fund?." In this comment, the commenter failed to use apostrophe to possess the word "Zenon" and also the commenter wrongly inserted the non modal verb "was" before the lexical verb "removed", and the wrong use of adverb "initially" as "initial" and finally the use of "subsidy" instead of "subsidy fund" render the entire utterance useless. In Example 56, the expression "...This criminals can never live us" can be corrected as "these criminals can never leave us". The word "this "is a singular demonstrative pronoun which is used in pointing out nouns or objects. In Example 57, the utterance "you guys are talking as if you are not living Nigeria, did know how many people that has being jailed in Nigeria n letter on a closed door they grant the" can be corrected as "you guys are talking as if you are not living in Nigeria. Don't you know how many people that have been jailed in Nigeria and were later pardoned? In the faulty expression, the commenter demonstrated his or her poor knowledge of concord. The use of "people that has being jailed in Nigeria" is a clear breakdown in communication due to the commenter's inability to apply the rule of concord that states "plural subject takes plural verb".

The faulty sentence constructions identified and analysed here are instances of commenters' wrong use of English expressions to bare their mind on the news report about the alleged bribery scandal involving a committee of the Nigeria national assembly. These wrong expressions which include violation of concord rules, wrong use of articles and simple past form of the verb and also wrong use of demonstrative pronouns and apostrophes clearly show the level of the commenters exposure to the language, their academic background, and to a large extent, the decline in the nation's education standard.

Findings andConclusion

The findings in this study showed that different sentences in the selected comments described as paratactic constructions show repetitive occurrences of identical independent clauses and nominal structures. They were used to show frustration, helplessness, perplexity by the commenters. Also, hypotactic constructions were prominent in the data which show unequal construction of utterances or the embedding of one utterance on another.

The use of material process type in the selected online comments reveal the cabals (Nigerian elites) as the active participants or the actors or implied actors in the comments while the masses (Nigerians) as the goal or the affected ones. The choice of material process options reveals the extent to which transitivity is employed in online readers' comments to show to the world the few Nigerian elites who are amassing wealth to the detriment of the masses. The findings also revealed that commenters in the discourse used mental process option to express what they feel, think and perceive about the entire process of the fuel subsidy saga and also used verbalised process option to express their opinions and which also presents the commenters as weak and noise makers. It was also observed that mood and theme faulty sentence constructions featured significantly in the selected online readers' comments.

This study has been able to discover the significant features prominent in the discourse on the alleged bribery scandal involving a committee of the Nigeria National Assembly in June, 2012. These features were categorised, analysed and were discussed in relation to the Nigerian soci-political context.

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