

A Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis of Participants' Representations in Media Reportage of Cases of Sexual Harassment in Nigerian Universities

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Abstract

Studies on sexual harassment in academia have become preponderant due to the prevalence, scandalous and demoralising nature of the phenomenon in the wider society. However, a feminist critical discourse analysis of media reportage of cases of sexual harassment in the Nigerian academic community remains under-researched in linguistic studies. In view of this paucity, the present study seeks to apply linguistic frameworks to explore the representations of participants in some select cases of sexual harassment in Nigerian universities; analyse prevalent gender-based ideologies projected in the representations; and discuss their implications for better gender relations in the Nigerian academy. The data comprise eight (8) purposively selected online news reports on cases of sexual harassment in some Nigerian universities. The analytical framework comprises some aspects of systemic functional grammar (SFG) and feminist critical discourse analysis (FCDA). Findings from the analysis reveal that the transitivity clause types woven around the six process options of material, mental, verbal, relational, behavioural and existential serve to construe the experiential variability of the news reports, although the material and the verbal clause processes dominate. Also, from a critical feminist perspective, the linguistic representations of the participants in the news reports invoke a discursive mix of the ideologies of gender asymmetry in academia, women's assertiveness and empowerment, sexual objectification and female students' counter-hegemonic resistance through non-violent acts. The study thus concludes that systemic functional grammar and feminist critical discourse analysis are viable linguistic frameworks for deconstructing gender-based ideologies projected in the

representations of participants in media reportage of sexual harassment in academia.

Keywords: sexual harassment; media reportage; participants' representations; feminist critical discourse analysis; systemic functional grammar

1. Introduction

Sexual harassment, also known as sexual abuse, is a form of gender-based violence that comprises unwished-for sexual attention and all forms of overt and covert (non)verbal or physical assaults relating to sexual conducts that are detrimental to the physical, sexual and emotional wellbeing of the harassed (WHO, 2012; UNZA Sexual Harassment Policy, 2010). It is usually a series of "top-down" form of discrimination that culminates in an escalating pattern of hostility or aggression towards the target (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2018, pp. 76 & 171). Sexually-harassing acts could be direct (aimed at just one target) or ambient (pervasive in an environment) (ibid.). However, both genders are susceptible to sexual harassment although females have a higher rate of susceptibility while males are more often the aggressors/perpetrators (Oni, Tshitangano & Akinsola, 2019; Aguilar & Baek, 2020). Sexual harassment can, therefore, be broadly defined as

a form of discrimination that includes gender harassment (verbal and nonverbal behaviors that convey hostility to, objectification of, exclusion of, or second-class status about members of one gender), unwanted sexual attention (verbally or physically unwelcome sexual advances, which can include assault), and sexual coercion (when favorable professional or educational treatment is conditioned on sexual activity) (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2018, pp. 13-14).

Scholars have explored sexual harassment operative in diverse contexts like the domestic sphere (Chhabra, 2018),

workplace environments (Fitzgerald & Cortina, 2017), political and media arenas (Dalton, 2019), religious settings (Vanderwoerd & Cheng, 2017), and also among racial and ethnic groups (Cassino & Besen-Cassino, 2019). However, with the increasing news reports of alleged cases of sexual harassment covered by the media in recent times, higher institutions of learning are no exceptions. This indicates that the phenomenon is becoming rampant in higher educational institutions, most especially universities.

In line with Article 26(1) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UNESCO, 1998), universities are saddled with the responsibility to provide a safe, hospitable, healthy and a non-discriminatory learning environment for female students at the undergraduate and graduate levels (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2018). In recent times however, media coverage increasingly features news of male academics allegedly getting involved in cases of “sex for marks” in some Nigerian universities coupled with follow-up news reports on the subsidiary actions taken by the management in response to those allegations. Such news reports have, therefore, brought to the limelight sexual harassment in academia, which is “part of a continuum of different forms of actual and potential forms of gender-based violence residing in higher education systems, ranging from bullying and sexist jargon to sexual abuse and rape” (Bondestam & Lundqvist, 2020, p. 2). Till (1980, p. 7 as cited in Joseph, 2015, p. 127) also sees it as “the use of authority to emphasize the sexuality or sexual identity of a student in a manner which prevents or impairs that student’s full enjoyment of educational benefits, climate or opportunities” (Till, 1980, p. 7). The media coverage of the phenomenon indubitably demonstrates that female students are now breaking the primordial silence culture that assumedly pervades gendered assault by formally reporting perpetrators to the necessary authority, although some scholars (e.g., Aguilar & Baek, 2020) still opine that sexual harassment in academia is still largely underreported.

Discourses on sexual harassment in academia have largely focused on its etiologies/predictors, common characteristics and

prevention (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2018; Bondestam & Lundqvist, 2020); underreporting (Aguilar & Baek, 2020); prevalence across institutions (Krebs et al. 2016); direct impacts on female students, the targets (Rosenthal, Smidt & Freyd, 2016; Martin-Storey & August, 2016); indirect impacts on bystanders (other female students) in the target's campus climate (Dessel, Goodman & Woodford, 2017); and its impacts on research integrity (NAS, 2017; National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2018). Scholars have also examined sexual harassment in academia among women students of colour (Clancy, Lee, Rodgers & Richey, 2017); and among lesbians and transgender people (DuBois, Powers, Everett & Juster, 2017; Irwin, 2002).

In language-based studies however, sexual harassment in academia has largely been understudied. In spite of this paucity, a few scholars such as Aguilar and Baek (2020) as well as Karami, White, Ford, Swan and Spinel (2020) have explored this rising phenomenon using text mining. Aguilar and Baek (2020), for instance, explore direct and third-party sexual harassment narratives in higher educational domains across institutions and disciplines mostly in the US via Sentiment Analysis, Text Mining (TM) packages and Logistic Regression. Their text linguistic study quantifies the degree of “positive, negative and neutral sentiment” present in the respondents’ narratives with a view to predicting the likely factors responsible for the underreporting of sexual harassment in academia and identifying its potential trend cross institutions and disciplines (Aguilar & Baek, 2020, p. 2 & 3). Findings from their study identify “power asymmetries” and “retaliation” as factors responsible for the low reportage of sexual harassment in academia, especially in STEM disciplines; and their study also reveals “variability of underreporting behaviours across disciplines” (Aguilar & Baek, 2020, p. 12 & 13).

Karami, White, Ford, Swan and Spinel (2020, p. 1) likewise use text mining to analyse a corpus of online comments on sexual harassment experiences in academia in text format gathered through a crowdsourced web survey, with a view to aggregating the weight of the topics of the harassment experiences across the three variables of the harasser's gender, the institution

type and the victim's field of study. Their study, just like Aguilar and Baek's, also identifies the power differential between faculty and students and elicits unwanted sexual attention as the most prevalent form of sexual harassment in the academic environments of the respondents. This study further reveals that harassers are mostly male and also establishes significant differences across institution type, but no significant difference could be established across the harasser's gender and the victim's field of study. Although Aguilar and Baek's (2020) and Karami, White, Ford, Swan and Spinel's (2020) works deal basically with sexual harassment in academia, their theoretical bases do not align with the present study.

Worthy of mention is the treatise of Ojo, Ayandele and Egbeleye (2020) that explores the euphemistic use of language in the concealment and perpetuation of academic corruption in Nigerian higher institutions. Although their study is not about sexual harassment in academia, their analysis on the euphemistic codes used by students as referents for acts of "sex for marks" (pp. 75 & 76) in academia uncovers language use in relation to sexual harassment in academia and also extends significantly the literature on the phenomenon.

Leifermann (2018) also explores online news representation of sexual harassment in the two biggest German newspapers, *Süddeutsche Zeitung* and *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* using critical discourse analysis (CDA) while Dalton (2019) deploys feminist critical discourse analysis (FCDA) in the analysis of sexual harassment in the political and media arenas. Although Leifermann's (2018) and Dalton's (2019) studies focus on sexual harassment and they are also discourse-oriented, their discursive contexts however circumvent sexual harassment in academia. This marks their divergence from the present study in spite of the fact that they share some theoretical affinities.

In sum, the above literature review portrays the lingering paucity of language-based studies on sexual harassment in academia and also demonstrates the need for more language-oriented and theory-driven expansive literature on the phenomenon. The present study, therefore, seeks to fill this gap by examining the use of language in the representation of

participants in the news reports and then analysing critically the gender-oriented ideologies implicit in the representations. The study is significant due to the need to understand the semantic roles allocated to participants in the online news reportage of alleged cases and the ideologies implicated in the representation. This is expected to broaden the knowledge on gender representation in cases of sexual harassment in academia, an escalating form of gender discrimination.

2. Theoretical Base

The theoretical framework for the study is premised on some relevant aspects of Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG), specifically the transitivity system, and Lazar's Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA). The conflation of both theoretical frameworks makes possible a critical ideologically-inclined analysis of the use of language in participants' representations in the selected news reports.

Function is basic to the semantic system of language; hence, language analysis can only be effectively achieved within a viable functional theory (Halliday & Ruqaiya, 1985). This is the thrust of SFG, a theory founded on "the fact that the grammar of a language is represented in the form of system networks, not as an inventory of structures" since a "language is a resource for making meaning, and meaning resides in systemic patterns of choice" (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, p. 23). Hence, by using SFG as the analytical framework in this study, the meaningful linguistic representational choices made by the news reporters in their reportage of the alleged cases are contextualised inasmuch as discourses differ on the basis of their discourse environments (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004).

The systemic functional theory is construed within the three metafunctional modes of meaning in grammar, namely: the ideational, interpersonal and textual metafunctions (Matthiessen & Halliday, 1997). The ideational metafunction embodies the "grammatical resources for *construing* our experience of the world around us and inside us" and the interpersonal metafunction concerns "the grammatical resources for *enacting* social roles in general, and speech roles in particular, in dialogic

interaction". The textual metafunction focuses on "the creation of text — with the *presentation* of ideational and interpersonal meanings as information that can be shared by speaker and listener in text unfolding in context" (Matthiessen & Halliday, 1997, pp. 12-13).

Transitivity, the aspect of SFG that this study theoretically adopts, operates at the ideational level. Hence, transitivity is the ideational resource for construing in the clause our experience of happenings in and around us, those (participants) involved in the happenings, and attendant circumstances (Matthiessen & Halliday, 1997; Banks, 2002; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004; Almurashi, 2016; Neale, 2017). At the clause rank therefore, the transitivity system in English is realised via three components: the process [realised by the verbal group], the participant [realised by the nominal group] and the circumstance [realised by the adverbial group and the prepositional phrase] (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004; Almurashi, 2016; Bloor & Bloor, 2013). The relationship between these three components forms the semantic configurations for the linguistic representation of realities/phenomena in our world ((Halliday, 1977, 1985; Bloor & Bloor, 1995; Bank, 2002; Almurashi, 2016; Osisanwo, 2016). As opined by Osisanwo (2016) therefore, discourse producers have a wide array of options of processes, participants and circumstances they could select from to capture their intended meanings; so also news reporters. This explains why the transitivity system presents a viable theoretical basis for construing the linguistic options (of processes, participants and circumstances) in news media text.

Six basic process options exist with their associated participants and attendant circumstances. The options are material, mental, verbal, relational, behavioural and existential process types. The material process construes doings, happenings, events, actions and activities; and it bears two major participants: the Actor (the action doer) and the Goal (the affected). The material clause is structurally represented as Process + Actor + Goal (Matthiessen & Halliday, 1997; Sadighi & Bayali, 2008). The mental process construes "sensing" such as "perception, cognition, intention, and emotion" and the mental clause is configured

structurally as Process (the verbal element) + Senser (the entity doing the sensing) + Phenomenon (what is being sensed) (Matthiessen & Halliday, 1997, p. 18). The verbal process encodes a direct or an indirect report with the linguistic configuration of the Sayer (the reporter), the Receiver (the recipient of the report) and the Verbiage (what is being reported – the message) (Sadighi & Bayali, 2008; Haratyan, 2011; Arawomo, 2016).

Furthermore, the relational process describes relations between participants which could be attributive or identifying (Haratyan, 2011). The attributive relational type assigns some quality (Attribute) to the participants (the Carrier) while the identifying relational type has the Identifier (the Token) and the identified (the Value) (Halliday, 1985, 2004; Sadighi & Bayali, 2008; Haratyan, 2011; Arawomo, 2016). The behavioural and the existential processes are less dominant. The behavioural process encodes psychological and physiological acts like laughing, staring, gazing, dreaming, etc. (Halliday, 1985; Haratyan, 2011); and it consists of one participant known as the Behaver (the entity behaving) who could also be the Actor or the Goal. The existential process on the other hand represents the existence of an entity, a phenomenon, an event or action; and as such, the process bears only one participant tagged the Existent (what is being represented to exist). Also, existential processes commonly employ the copular verb *be* or other verbs like *exist*, *occur* or *arise* as well as *there* functioning as Subject (Sadighi & Bayali, 2008; Haratyan, 2011; Arawomo, 2016).

Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA), on the other hand, is a blend of critical discourse analysis (CDA) and feminist studies as it explores the discursive nuances of power asymmetries and ideology in the perpetuation and sustenance of gender discrimination in diverse institutional contexts (Lazar, 2007). FCDA critiques discursive operations of (un)equal power relations and social (in)justices with the goal of achieving social emancipation. Feminist CDA thus offers a theoretical exploration of “overtly expressed meanings in communication” as well as “less obvious, nuanced, implicit meanings to get at the subtle and complex renderings of ideological assumptions and power

relations in contemporary modern societies” (Lazar, 2007, p. 151).

The theory offers five basic principles for a feminist discourse praxis. The five interrelated principles are outlined below:

1. **feminist analytical activism:** FCDA is analytically resistant to all operations of unequal gender relations by critiquing discourses which sustain the patriarchal social order;
2. **gender as ideological structure:** FCDA critiques the means by which the hegemonic ideological gender structure that maps people into two sexes and privileges men as the superior group while disempowering women as the subordinate group are discursively (re)enacted (Lazar, 2007, p. 146);
3. **complexity of gender and power relations:** FCDA explores the complex ways power and gender relations are discursively (re)enacted and/or (counter)resisted in contemporary societies;
4. **discourse in the (de)construction of gender:** discourse is the focal point of FCDA as it constitutes all forms of social orders ideologically represented; and
5. **critical reflexivity as praxis:** critical reflexivity in institutional practices, which denotes the utilisation of knowledge about proper social practices to shape subsequent ones, and critical self-reflexivity among feminists are integral in feminist CDA for a balanced gender relation (Lazar, 2007, p. 145-153).

In view of the above principles, the goal of this study is to analyse the linguistic representation of the reported cases of sexual harassment by examining the entities (animate and inanimate) involved, the events themselves and their how, where, when and why. This is with a view to exploring how the linguistic choices of the reporters encode certain gender-related ideological stances contextualised within the Nigerian socio-cultural and educational institutions inasmuch as speakers’/writers’ linguistic choices are chiefly ideologically-laden (Haratyan, 2011).

3. Methodology

The data comprise eight (8) purposively selected online news reports of alleged cases of sexual harassment involving male academics from some Nigerian universities between 2010 and 2020, a period of 10 years. The news reports were retrieved from the news archives of five online news websites, namely: *Premium Times*, *Pulse Nigeria*, *Sahara Reporters*, *BBC News* and *TNC 24*. These are online media outlets distinguished for their wide coverage of social issues relating to Nigeria. The selected news reports are of substance, adequate length and situated within the Nigerian context; also, they are formal reports of alleged cases of sexual harassment in academia, which represents an aspect of gender-based violence. For simplicity and easy data reference, the news reports were represented by the tag NR, and numbered NR 1-8, as highlighted in the headlines below which reflect the contents of the news reports:

NR 1. Why I demanded sex from female student – Dismissed UX professor (Premium Times, July 6, 2018)

NR 2. UX student accuses another lecturer of sexual harassment (Pulse Nigeria, January 15, 2020)

NR 3. Sex for Marks: Another Nigerian Lecturer Caught Pants Down (Sahara Reporters, June 15, 2019)

NR 4. Nigeria lecturer suspended after BBC Africa Eye 'sex-for-grades' film (BBC News, October 8, 2019)

NR 5. ... Sex for Marks Scandal: Another Nigerian Lecturer Caught Pants Down (TNC 24, N.D.)

NR 6. Varsity's Most Notorious Sexual Abuser (Sahara Reporters, July 23, 2010)

NR 7. Sex-for-mark: DETAILS of how UX lecturer was caught in sting operation: "He removed his shirt, cuddled her from behind..." (NEWSPEAK, October 9, 2018)

NR 8. SEX SCANDAL! Notorious UX Lecturer Exposed in Video [DETAILS] (The Sheet, August 11, 2016)

The study is a qualitative exploration of the use of language in the media reportage of alleged cases of sexual harassment in select Nigerian universities. Guided by Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar, specifically the Transitivity system, and Lazar's feminist critical discourse analysis, the study explores the linguistic processes used by the selected media outlets to represent participants in their reportage; elicits the gender-based ideologies projected in the representations; and, analyses their implications for better gender relations in the Nigerian university climate.

4. Results and Discussion

The data analysis is in two layers. The first layer is a linguistic deconstruction of the data at the clause rank, the level at which the transitivity system is construed. At this layer thus, the different process types are analysed in order to explore the news reporters' representations of the participants allegedly involved in the reported cases as well as the where, when, why and how (the attendant circumstances) of the cases. In analysing the six process types, the following data analytical procedures are undertaken: a) each news report is first read carefully; b) then the clausal elements in each news report are keenly considered to see how they are structured based on the three components of process [realised by the verbal group], participant [realised by the nominal group] and circumstance [realised by the adverbial group and the prepositional phrase], which all form the transitivity system; c) finally, the observed processes in the clausal elements are delineated into the six process types of material, mental, verbal, relational, behavioural and existential with their attendant participants and circumstances. The second layer of the analysis augments the linguistic analysis by investigating how the participants' representations in the process types portray certain gender-related ideologies contextualised within the contemporary Nigerian socio-cultural and educational institutions. The two layers of the data analysis therefore portray the interrelation between language, gender and ideology.

4.1 Transitivity Analysis

Participants' representations in the six process types of material, mental, verbal, relational, behavioural and existential and their ideological construals form the basis of the data analysis in this section. To maintain anonymity, the use of the pseudonyms MX for male participants and FX for female will replace the individual names of persons involved in the reported cases; also, universities will be represented by the pseudonym, UX.

Material Process Participants' Representation

In the data, the material process is achieved via the active voice (activation) that bears two major participants: the Actor (the doer), who performs an action or does something to another participant known as the Goal (the affected). Participants' representation in the material process clause types in the news reports is exemplified in the excerpts below:

Excerpt 1: Why **[Circ]** I **[Actor]** demanded **[Pr: Material]** sex **[Beneficiary]** from female student **[Goal]** ... (NR 1: Premium Times, July 6, 2018).

Excerpt 2: UX student **[Actor]** accuses **[Pr: Material]** another lecturer **[Goal]** of sexual harassment **[Circ]** (NR 2: Pulse Nigeria, January 15, 2020).

Excerpt 3: FX, a 400-level student of the Department of International Relations, Faculty of Business Administration, UX **[Actor]**, has accused **[Pr: Material]** a lecturer, MX **[Goal]**, of sexual harassment **[Circ]** (NR 2: Pulse Nigeria, January 15, 2020).

Excerpt 4: UX **[Actor]** has suspended **[Pr: Material]** a lecturer **[Goal]** who was caught on film propositioning and sexually harassing an undercover BBC reporter **[Circ]** (NR 4: BBC News, October 8, 2019).

Excerpt 5: FX **[Actor]** released **[Pr: Material]** the over 30-minute video clip **[Goal]** which she **[Actor]** reportedly recorded **[Pr: Material]** in a hotel room **[Circ]** where she **[Actor]** was lodged with **[Pr:**

Material] the lecturer **[Goal]** (NR 8: The Sheet, August 11, 2016).

Excerpt 6: UX **[Actor]**, has dismissed **[Pr: Material]** three senior lecturers of the institution **[Goal]** over allegations of sexual harassment of female students **[Circ]** (NR 7: NEWSPEAK, October 9, 2018).

Excerpt 7: In the video, which was also made available to our correspondent **[Circ]**, the female student **[Actor]** set up **[Pr: Material]** a laptop **[Goal]** directly opposite the bed **[Circ]** and pretended to be watching **[Pr: Material]** the 'Things Fall Apart' film on it **[Circ]** but she **[Actor]** was recording **[Pr: Material]** the sexual activity **[Goal]**. (NR 8: The Sheet, August 11, 2016)

In the data excerpts, the Primary Actors are the female students (the victims) realised by proper nouns revealing their real names (represented by pseudonyms), pronouns (e.g. *I* and *she*); and other nominal groups (e.g. *UX Student*, *the female student*). The Secondary Actors are universities represented by institution-based proper nouns all pseudonymised as *UX*. The Subjects in Exs. 2, 3 and 5 are therefore the Primary Actors (female students) in the act of reporting and accusing their alleged offenders (male academics) while the Subjects in Exs. 4 and 6 are the Secondary Actors (UX's) in the act of administering punitive measures against the alleged offenders.

The alleged offenders (male academics) are largely represented as Goals in the Object, subordinated position, as exemplified in the nominal groups *another lecturer* (Ex. 2), a lecturer, MX (Ex. 3), *a lecturer* (Ex. 4), *the lecturer* (Ex. 5), and *three senior lecturers of the institution* (Ex. 6). Where an offender is in the subject position as observed in Ex. 1, he is represented in a defensive subordinated manner in order to repel the accusation against him. Also, via object elision, a linguistic strategy of leaving implicit the Goal in a clause, the male offender (the obscured Goal) of the tape recording of the sexual activity in Ex. 7 is also implicitly subordinated to *the female student*, the Actor. The specificity of the circumstance in each excerpt details the cause of

the report (the reason for the news reports; e.g. *over allegations of sexual harassment of female students* in Ex. 6) and the location of the harassment (where the sexual harassment/recording takes place; e.g. *in a hotel room* in Ex. 5).

Ideologically, the material process participants' representation in the above excerpts portrays a rupture of the hegemonic gender structure that privileges men and relegates women. The Actorship position accorded the female students in the news reports as the indictors of their alleged offenders upturns mainstream tacit androcentrism that pervades the Nigerian sociocultural context where women must keep mute in the face of male oppression. Although the news narratives still index the inherent dualism of the gender structure that sexually maps people into male and female, the age-old subordinate role accorded women is now being reversed through women's emergent resistance to male oppression. The participants' representation thus depicts a counter-hegemonic posture that indexes: a) the contest between women's conventional subservience to male oppression and their emerging unconventional resistance; b) the denouncement of male hegemony in the Nigerian sociocultural and educational settings; and, c) the portrayal of women's enlightenment and empowerment to assert their self-worth by resisting and reporting sexual harassment. Hence, the representation is not just analytically resistive; it is as well empowering and combative.

Mental Process Participants' Representation

The mental process bears also two major participants: the *Senser* (the doer of the sensing process) and the *Phenomenon* (what is sensed by the *Senser*). Excerpts that exemplify the representation of these participants in the use of mental process in the clause types in the news reports are highlighted below:

Excerpt 8: ... she [**Senser**] had been traumatised [**Pr: Mental**] enough to warrant another round of public disgrace [**Phenomenon**]... (NR 1: Premium Times, July 6, 2018).

Excerpt 9: "I [Senser] felt [Pr: Mental] extremely threatened [Phenomenon],"...

...She [Senser] described feeling so intimidated [Pr: Mental] by the staff member that she delayed submitting work to him [Phenomenon] (NR 4: BBC News, October 8, 2019).

Excerpt 10: ... the student [Senser] who was being disturbed [Pr: Mental] by the faculty dean for sexual relationship [Phenomenon]... (NR 5: TNC 24, THE NEWS CENTER).

Excerpt 11: ... she, together with three other colleagues [Senser], was dying [Pr: Mental] under the weight of the lecturer's unceasing sexual advances [Phenomenon]... (NR 6: Sahara Reporters, July 23, 2010).

Participants' emotions are encoded in the news reports in order to represent their feelings, the psychological consciousness of their experience of sexual harassment as revealed in excerpts 8 to 11. In the clause types, female students (animate entities) are the Senser, while sexual harassment from male academics is the Phenomenon they are subjected to. Passivation (a linguistic strategy in which the Subject is made the recipient of a given action and not the performer) is however largely deployed in the mental clause processes to foreground the Senser as the social actor being traumatized by the act of sexual harassment. Only the first part of Ex. 9 uses the active voice to represent the Senser. Basically, the verbal groups (mental processes) *has been traumatized, extremely threatened, so intimidated, was dying* and *was being disturbed* as well as the cognitive verb *feeling* are all positioned to portray the mental state of the female students and to further foreground the negative psychological impact of sexual harassment on victims. The adverbials *extremely* and *so* further reinforce the intensity of the trauma victims (female students) of sexual harassment are subjected to.

This representation of participants' emotions apparently confirms that the hierarchical ideological gender structure, where men "fancy" women as their objects of sexual pleasure, does not

exempt academics, the supposedly learned population. On the one hand, this mental representation portrays female subjugation and disempowerment in the Nigerian academia and the wider society. It characterises a society with an unequal gender relation where women as a group are expected to be sexually subservient to men's sexual advances. On the other hand, the negative emotions of the female students depicted in the mental process overtly portrays women's growing aversion to male chauvinism, most especially in the Nigerian academia. By representing the mental state of these women-victims, they have been given a voice to speak against male chauvinism and thus break its cycle not just in academia but also in the larger society. Therefore, the representation subtly reveals women's growing assertiveness geared towards advancing improved or positive gender relations that challenge gender stereotypes and empower women to speak against male domination.

Verbal Process Participants' Representation

The verbalisation process is deployed by the news media to represent the dialogic import of their reports. The news reports are thus constructed around the Sayer (the reporter/speaker), the Receiver (the recipient of the report) and their Verbiage (what is said/reported) to dialogize the representation of the participants in order to enhance credibility. A few instances of the verbal process participants' representation are outlined below:

Excerpt 12: ... Another witness, FX ... **[Sayer]** told **[Pr: Verbal]** the panel **[Receiver]** that MX appeared bent on stalling her graduation from the university because of her rejection of his sexual overtures **[Verbiage]**. (NR 6: Sahara Reporters, July 23, 2010)

Excerpt 13: ... MX **[Sayer]** said **[Pr: Verbal]** the demand for five days of sex was a deliberate attempt to play along with the student **[Verbiage]**...
... MX **[Sayer]** said **[Pr: Verbal]** if truly he had wanted to sleep with the student, he would not

- have demanded five times of sex rounds at a go
[Verbiage] ... (NR 1: Premium Times, July 6, 2018)
- Excerpt 14: ...She [Sayer] refused to comment [Pr: Verbal]
on the matter [Verbiage]... (NR 1: Premium Times,
July 6, 2018)
- Excerpt 15: ... Reports [Sayer] said [Pr: Verbal] the victim
had repeatedly turned down his many sexual
advances until he invited her to his office that
Saturday afternoon to rewrite a paper she failed
[Verbiage] ... (NR 7: NEWSPEAK, October 9,
2018)
- Excerpt 16: According to Daily Trust [Sayer], the student
who was being disturbed by the faculty dean for
sexual relationship [Sayer], had reported [Pr:
Verbal] the matter [Verbiage] to the university's
security unit as well as the police [Receiver]...
The security agents [Sayer] were said to have asked
[Pr: Verbal] the lady [Receiver] to play along,
which led to the professor booking a hotel room
in the highbrow ... quarters to sleep with the
student [Verbiage]... (NR 5: TNC 24, THE NEWS
CENTER)
- Excerpt 17: ... While the female student [Sayer] chose not
to speak [Pr: Verbal] on the matter [Verbiage]...
MX [Sayer] said [Pr: Verbal] he had earlier
submitted a written response to a query [Verbiage]
from the management [Receiver]... Denying
harassing FX [Verbiage], the lecturer [Sayer] said
[Pr: Verbal] [the student [Actor] had approached
[Pr: Material] him [Goal] to alter the examination
timetable when the rerun course had clashed with
another course she takes at 400 level [Circ] ... (NR
2: Pulse Nigeria, January 15, 2020)
- Excerpt 18: ... Head, Directorate of Information and
Corporate Affairs of the institution ... [Sayer] ...
said [Pr: Verbal] the university would not condone
any act of sexual harassment in the university

[Verbiage]. (NR 3: Sahara Reporters, June 15, 2019)

The dialogic participants represented via verbalisation in the news reports are the victims of sexual harassment (the female students), the alleged offenders (male academics), witnesses, academic institutional managements, security agents and the text producers. The verbalisation posture of the alleged offenders (the Sayers in Exs. 13 and 17) is dialogically defensive. In Ex. 13, the Sayer self-justifies the allegation of sexual harassment against him while the Sayer in Ex. 17 denies outright the allegation. The female students, the victims of the harassment, are however engaged in a mute protest (as observed in Exs. 13 and 17), which is a dialogic refraining strategy that signals the victims' non-violent resistance meant to index their distrust of the news media. The verbal processes *said*, *told* and *had reported* allow the text producers to attribute the news reports to victims, eye witnesses and other reliable sources for credibility.

While the victims and the alleged offenders are principal Sayers in the verbalisation process, other participants (the female witness in Ex. 12; institutional managements in Exs. 16 and 18; and the security agent in Ex. 16) are third party minor Sayers. The female witness in Ex. 12 narrates her experience of sexual harassment to further establish the culpability of the alleged offender so as to corroborate the victim's accusation and foreground the impact of the assault on victim's academic advancement. The institutional managements' verbalisation posture seeks to distance the universities from the offenders and assert their punitive authority on the alleged offenders. The security agents also reportedly verbalise their role in the apprehension of the alleged offender so as to further establish his culpability and lend credibility to the story. The news media are the non-human implicit Sayers doing the reporting by constructing the stories around the major and minor participants to lend credibility to the news. The Verbiage in the excerpts encodes sexual harassment against female students by male academics (e.g., Exs. 12, 15, 16 and 18), victim blaming (e.g., Ex. 18), alleged offenders' culpability (e.g., Exs. 15 and 16), alleged

offenders' defence/denial (e.g., Exs. 13 and 17), educational management's refusal to condone sexual harassment (e.g., Exs. 16 and 18) and security agents' proactiveness (Ex. 16).

The verbal option thus establishes further **men's oppression against women** and **women's growing resistance to it** through formal reports to institutional authorities with punitive measures. The women's resistance thus diminishes men's assumed superiority over women: women no longer see men as sacred cows in matters of gender-based violence, which by implication reinforces women's heightened empowerment and activism for a balanced gender relation. However, the verbalisation process is deployed as a hedger by the news media to give voice to the major and minor participants in the cases to boost the credibility of the stories.

Relational Process Participants' Representation

This process option represents participants' relations. Both attributive and identifying relational representations feature in the news reports, however attribution dominates the participants' relational representation. Find below instances of the two processes in the data:

Excerpt 19: ... *"That man [Carrier] is [Pr: Relational] savage [Attribute] ... He [Carrier] is [Pr: Relational] drunk and very reckless [Attribute]."*
(NR 2: Pulse Nigeria, January 15, 2020)

Excerpt 20: ... *"We [Carrier] are [Pr: Relational] the students [Attribute] and we [Carrier] have [Pr: Relational] more to lose [Attribute]."* (NR 4: BBC News, October 8, 2019).

Excerpt 21: ... Some even [Senser] believe [Pr: Mental] that he [Carrier] has [Pr: Relational] "a Satanic, uncontrollable desire to savour anything in skirt" [Attribute]...

... MX [Carrier] is [Pr: Relational] "one of the most reckless womanizers among lecturers in the university" [Attribute]. (NR 6: Sahara Reporters, July 23, 2010)

Excerpt 22: ... He [Carrier] was [Pr: Relational] in the act [Attribute] when the university security officials and the NGO representatives moved in and effected his arrest [Circ] (NR 7: NEWSPEAK, October 9, 2018)

Excerpt 23: ... the evidences [Identified/Token] showed [Pr: Relational] that the two were found culpable [Identifier/Value], but that in the circumstance [Circ], there [Subject] was [Pr: Existential] a weaker partner and a stronger partner [Existent]. (NR 1: Premium Times, July 6, 2018)

Excerpt 24: ... female alumni members [Sayer] said [Pr: Verbal] the lecturer [Carrier] cannot be [Pr: Relational] innocent [Attribute] in the allegation peddled against him [Circ] (NR 2: Pulse Nigeria, 2020).

Excerpt 25: ... the university [Sayer] said [Pr: Verbal] it [Carrier] was [Pr: Relational] "highly embarrassed" [Attribute] by the allegations [Circ] [NR 4: BBC News, October 8, 2019).

Attributive relations are mostly deployed via activation in the news reports to characterise the alleged offenders which explains its dominance. Adjectives such as *savage*, *drunk* and *reckless* (in Ex. 19); the nominal groups *a Satanic, uncontrollable desire to savour anything in skirt* and *one of the most reckless womanizers among lecturers in the university* (in Ex. 21); and the prepositional phrase *in the act* (in Ex. 22) represent negatively the attributes of the alleged offenders who are positioned as Carriers in the subject position realised by the nominal group *that man* and the pronoun *he*. In a few instances, attribution is used to characterise the victims of the assault as exemplified in Ex. 20 where *We* represents the Carrier (the students) and foregrounds the unequal power relation between them and the male academics. The university authority is also attributed in the Carrier position represented by the pronoun *it* (in Ex. 25) that portrays the negative impact of the alleged cases on academia as a whole.

The identifying process type also reflects in the news reports although infrequently used. The process type is basically deployed when one entity identifies/shows the feature(s) peculiar to a general class of another entity as observed in Ex. 23. The identifier *evidences* (the Token) is pre-modified by the definite article *the* to specify the two male academics found culpable (the Value) of sexual harassment. Justification for the value (the culpability) of the two male academics is given by the evidence (the Identified/Token) against them. The reporters therefore use the identifying relational clause as a justificational hedging strategy to convince their readership that the culpability of the alleged offenders is established based on evidence.

As observed in the data, the relational process option is mainly deployed in the news reports to represent the alleged offenders negatively and establish their blameworthiness in the commission of the offence of sexual harassment against the female students. The representation thus pitches male academics (the alleged offenders) against female students (the victims) to bring to the limelight the power differential, unequal gender relations and non-consensual sexual relations between the two groups as reinforced in Ex. 20. Notably, all the offenders are male while their victims are female; this reveals that the age-old ideological gender construct that subordinates women to men's sexual objects of pleasure still permeates the world of academics. This sex-role distinction reinforced by power asymmetry between faculty and students has thus heightened sexual harassment in higher educational institutions. This is a situation that needs to be redressed by university authorities as they are saddled with the duty of providing a safe and non-discriminatory learning environment for their students in line with Article 26(1) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UNESCO, 1998). Although this representation reveals women's growing assertiveness, academic authorities should empower (female) students more by encouraging them to be brave enough to file official harassment complaints with constituted authorities. Such a measure will further improve gender and/or power relations in academia.

Behavioural Process Participants' Representation

The behavioural process encodes physiological acts like laughing, staring, gazing, dreaming, etc. (Halliday, 1985; Haratyan, 2011); and it consists of one participant known as the Behaver (the entity behaving) who could also be the Actor or the Goal.

Excerpt 26: "...MX [Behaver] held [Pr: Behavioural] her by the hand [Phenomenon] and began to fondle her [Pr: Behavioural]. While he was carried away [Circ], the lady [Behaver] turned on [Pr: Behavioural] the voice recording application on her phone [Phenomenon] and taped [Pr: Behavioural] all his vulgar words including the threat, [Phenomenon]"... (NR 2: Pulse Nigeria, January 15, 2020)

Excerpt 27: ... Even in the examination hall [Circ], FX [Sayer] said [Pr: Verbal], MX [Behaver] would come and whisper [Pr: Behavioural] to her his demand for sex or money in order to pass the examination [Phenomenon]... (NR 6: Sahara Reporters, July 23, 2010)

Excerpt 28: ...A surveillance gadget [Goal] was allegedly placed [Pr: Behavioural] on the student [Beneficiary] while the NGO [Behaver] stationed [Pr: Behavioural] the laptops connected to the spy camera [Goal] to monitor what would happen between the lecturer and the student [Phenomenon].

MX [Behaver] fell [Pr: Behavioural] for the trap [Phenomenon] as he [Behaver] was said [Pr: Verbal] to have removed his shirt and started cuddling [Pr: Behavioural] the student from behind after giving her papers to rewrite the exam he invited her for [Phenomenon]. (NR 7: NEWSPEAK, October 9, 2018)

Behaviourisation is used by the text producers to capture the physical acts of sexual harassment committed by the alleged

offenders as well as the physical acts of resistance of the victims that culminate in the arrest of their alleged harassers. In Ex. 26, the active voice is deployed to dramatically depict the Behaver in the act of harassing the victim while simultaneously depicting the harassed in a counter-move of taping the act, as demonstrated also in Ex. 28 although via the linguistic strategy of passivation meant to depict the role of the NGO (the Behaver) in the arrest of the alleged culprit. Passivation is also used to relay the alleged offender's act of whispering his sex demand to the victim in the exam hall in Ex. 27.

Women's assertiveness is ideologically foregrounded in these excerpts. The female students' physical act of tape recording the alleged incidents is a counter-hegemonic move that ruptures tacit androcentric posture in academia in a non-violent manner. It also demonstrates women's readiness to transform gender stereotypes and bring about social change for themselves.

Existential Process Participants' Participation

The existential clauses in the news reports with *there* as subject represent the existence of power asymmetry between the major Actors in the news reports – the alleged offenders (the male academics) and the victims (the female students) as observed Exs. 29 and 30:

Excerpt 29: ... There **[Subject]** is **[Pr: Existential]** no balance of power here **[Existent]**," she **[Sayer]** added **[Pr: Verbal]** ... (NR 4: BBC News, June 15, 2019).

Excerpt 30: ... the evidences **[Identified/Token]** showed **[Pr: Relational]** that the two were found culpable **[Identifier/Value]**, but that in the circumstance **[Circ]**, there **[Subject]** was **[Pr: Existential]** a weaker partner and a stronger partner **[Existent]**. (NR 1: Premium Times, July 6, 2018)

In a paradoxical twist however, Ex. 30 reveals that the power asymmetry falls in favour of the victim in that upon the presentation of evidence by the victim and the alleged offender

to the constituted investigative panel, the victim's evidence outweighs the offender's which leads to the representation of the victim as the stronger partner and the alleged offender as the weaker partner. This paradoxical representation is also counter-hegemonic as it ideologically displaces gender asymmetry and makes salient the fact that women's empowerment lies in their assertiveness.

5. Concluding Remarks

Using SFG and FCDA as theoretical paradigms, this study has explored the linguistic processes of participants' representations in media reportage of select cases of sexual harassment in Nigerian universities and how the representations embody certain gender-based ideologies within the Nigerian socio-cultural context. Clause types woven around the six process options serve to construe the experiential variability of the news reports, although the material and verbal clause processes dominate. As demonstrated in the data analysis, participants' representations in the news reports are achieved via the linguistic processes of activation (active voice), passivation (passive voice), actorship, nominalisation, pronominalisation, object elision, specificity, attribution, verbalisation, and hedging, all embedded within the transitivity processes of material, mental, verbal, relational, behavioural and existential.

From a critical feminist perspective, the linguistic representations of the participants in the news reports invoke a discursive mix of the ideologies of **gender asymmetry in academia, women's assertiveness and empowerment, sexual objectification and female students' counter-hegemonic resistance through non-violent acts** or "**authoritative femininity**" (Lazar, 2007, p. 158). Structurally therefore, the subsisting hierarchical gender order is being countered by female students. This counter-hegemonic posture depicts the female students as "agentive subjects, assertive ... and in charge" (adopting the words of Lazar, 2007, p. 158) which thus demonstrates the contest between gender conservatism and modern gender liberalism, a contest that signals **positive changes** in gender relations in contemporary Nigeria. Gender conservatism and modern gender liberalism are

“competing discourses of gender relations, based on traditionalism and modernism” (Lazar, 1993, 2000 as cited in Lazar, 2007, p. 152). Other non-dominant gender ideologies elicited from the linguistic processes are **victim-blaming**, alleged offenders’ defensive ploy **and gender role reversal**, where men are now portrayed as the weaker ones. The language use in the news reports thus invokes the subtle emergence of a gynocentric discourse of female empowerment apparently meant to subjugate non-females thereby challenging the status quo. By implication, females in academia in Nigeria are no longer muted as they are seeing negotiating for a balanced gender relation that seeks for consensual sexual relationships as opposed to coerced ones.

Furthermore, the punitive measures meted out by the affected universities reflect institutional reflexivity that enacts social sanctions meant to redeem institutional image, penalise perpetrators and eliminate the menace in academia. However, efforts should further be made to bridge the power gap between faculty and students through gender parity social practices that can enhance power symmetry and engender conducive learning environments for students, most especially the female ones. In conclusion, this study resonates with the works of Aguilar and Baek (2020) and Karami, White, Ford, Swan and Spinel (2020), among others, on sexual harassment in academia. The literature on the discursive representation of sexual harassment in academia can however be further expanded via other viable linguistic tools.

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