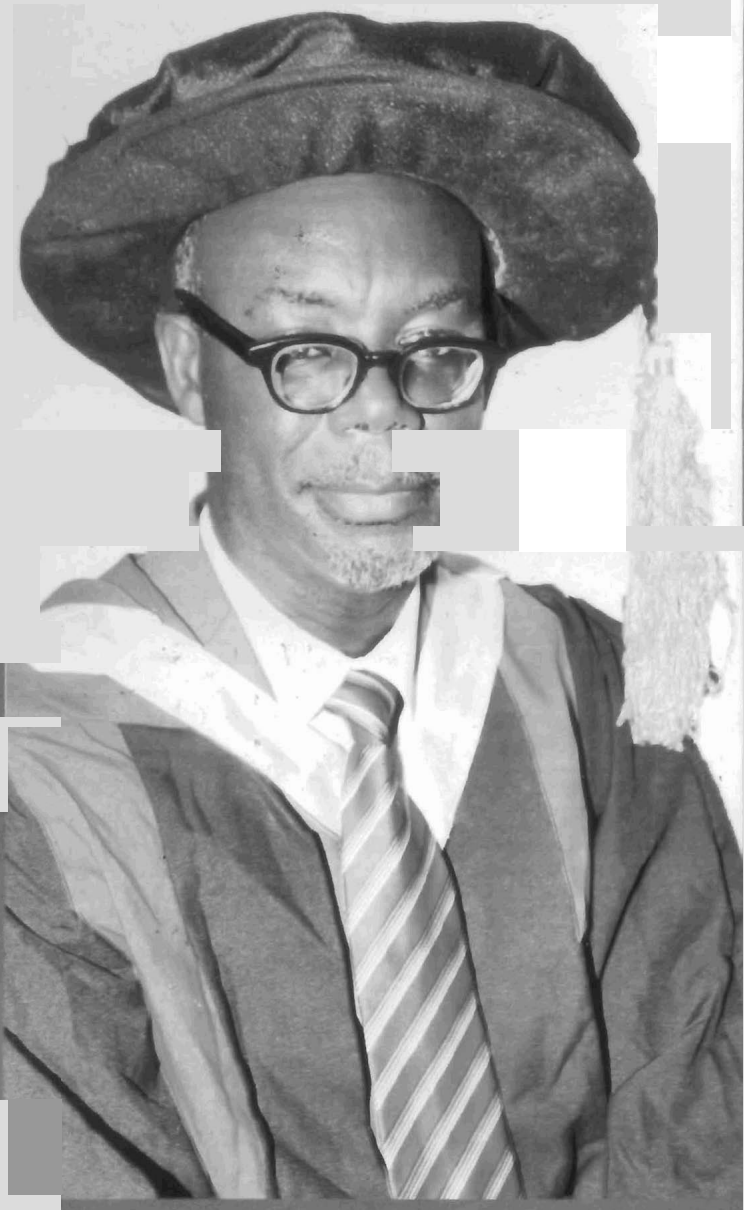# BEYOND THE TEXT: CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS AND THE QUEST FOR MEANING IN CYBERSPACE INTERACTION

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An Inaugural Lecture Delivered at Oduduwa Hall
Obafemi Awolowo University
Ile-Ife, Nigeria.
On Tuesday 22nd May, 2018

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Inaugural Lecture Series 319

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> Technology is basically neutral. It's like a hammer ... the hammer doesn't care whether you use it to build a house or a torturer uses it to crush somebody's skull... same with modern technology [like] the Internet. The Internet is extremely valuable if you know what you're looking for. ***Noam Chomsky***

> The Internet has given us ... new styles of communication: long messages like blogging, and then short messages like texting and tweeting. I see it all as part of an expanding array of linguistic possibilities. ***David Crystal***

Preamble

Mr. Vice Chancellor, Sir, distinguished academic and administrative staff, students, ladies and gentlemen. The quotations above attributed to two prominent linguists of our time, underscore the realities of the digital environment we live in today and how our focus and attitude towards the digital world can go a long way in determining the benefits we could derive from it. As an applied linguist, my attention has been drawn to the 'array of linguistic possibilities' in the interactive text-based and relatively new ways of communicating in cyberspace. My goal is to see how participants construct and negotiate discursive meaning.

It is my pleasure to stand before you today to share with you my research endeavours which started a little over two decades ago in the Department of English of this University. I give all glory to God, the Source of wisdom, knowledge and understanding, for this opportunity to present the 319th

Inaugural Lecture in this university and what I would refer to as "my stewardship report" to the academic community and the general public. To be precise, I stand before you today to present the body of research I have largely engaged in since I commenced my career in this University. This occasion also affords me the opportunity to demonstrate my contribution to knowledge as an applied linguist with major interest in discourse analysis. This lecture specifically focuses on my research in new media and cyberspace interaction. I feel highly privileged and honoured to present the 11th inaugural lecture in the discipline of English Studies in this university. My predecessors are: four professors of English Language - Adebisi Afolayan, Y.K. Yusuf, Wale Adegbite, Chukwuemeka Onukaogu; and six professors of Literature-in-English, Oyin Ogunba, Richard Taylor, Benedict Ibitokun, Modupe Kolawole, Segun Adekoya and Gbemisola Adeoti.

Before taking you through my expedition to cyberspace in search of discursive meaning, permit me to give you a glimpse into how I became involved in researching discursive behaviour generally. My research in discourse analysis was sparked off in the early 1990s under the tutelage and supervision of my highly revered mentor, Professor Femi Akindele, (of blessed memory) the first professor of Discourse Analysis in Nigeria. I cut my teeth on how to analyse written discourse as a graduate student under his supervision. My doctoral thesis was later supervised by Dr. Bolaji Aremo, a great mentor and an accomplished grammarian. Coming from a background where Transformational Generative Grammar (TGG) was the tradition, my exposure to the Hallidayan Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) tradition in Ife gave me a balanced view of the two most influential schools linguistics of our time. At the University of Benin, where I obtained my first degree, I was privileged to be taught and supervised by the Late Professor Jeffery Gruber, a foremost TGG scholar, well known for his Theta Theory. While TGG views language as an abstract set of generalised rules detached from any particular

context of use, SFG is based on the contextual use of language as a socio-semiotic system. My Ile-Ife postgraduate immersion in the SFG tradition has given me the opportunity to explore the complex relationship between discourse and grammar. Precisely, in my earliest publications, I was able to demonstrate how textual cohesion and collocation are explicable in written discourse. My research efforts have helped me not only to explicate the English structural patterns within the sentence, but also across sentence boundaries as well as beyond the sentence.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

I got interested in the critical approach to analysing discourse as a result of my interest in media, political and religious texts. These three kinds of texts play significant roles in the enactment and framing of beliefs, prejudices and ideologies in the social contexts of their production. On the surface, the difference between Discourse Analysis (DA) and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) lies in the critical element of CDA, which DA does not have. Beyond this fact, the goal of CDA is to explore and unfold the typical opaque relationships between discursive practices, texts and events (Fairclough, 1995).

CDA took its roots in the approach of a group of critical linguists and literary theorists at the University of East Anglia. Their approach was based on M.A.K Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) whose branch of grammar stresses the importance of social context (the context of culture and context of situation) in the production and development of language. In addition to analysing naturally-occurring language, CDA shows how texts (written, spoken and visual) manifest as forms of socially constitutive practices (Fairclough and Wodak, 1997: 276). In other words, discourse is seen as a form of social practice, which implies a "dialectical relationship between a specific discursive event and its situation(s), institution(s) and social structures" (*ibid*). To this end, CDA aims to reveal structures of power and unmask

ideologies through the study of texts. Norman Fairclough, a foremost British sociolinguist, gave one of the most explicit definitions of CDA as follows:

> Critical discourse analysis ... aims to systematically explore often opaque relationships of causality and determination between (a) discursive practices, events and texts, and (b) wider social and cultural structures, relations and processes; to investigate how such practices, events and texts arise out of and are ideologically shaped by relations of power and struggles over power; and to explore how the opacity of these relationships between discourse and society is itself a factor securing power and hegemony. (pp. 132 - 133)

Since CDA is interdisciplinary and multi-methodological in nature, scholars from a variety of backgrounds, such as linguists, political scientists, historians, legal experts, philosophers and psychologists have adopted it for interrogating social problems relating to their work. van Dijk (2009), who prefers the term Critical Discourse Studies (CDS) for this reason has described it as "a new cross-discipline that comprises the analysis of the text and talk in virtually all disciplines of the humanities and social sciences." Critical Discourse Analysts agrees with Halliday (1978) that language is a socio-semiotic system in which choices are made by speakers. In addition, since language represents individuals' knowledge of the world and its social practices, CDA believes that each instance of language use embodies ideas involved in the ordering of experience. CDA is concerned with studying and analysing words used in discourses to reveal the source of power, abuse, dominance, inequality and bias and how these sources are initiated, maintained, reproduced and transformed

within specific social, economic, political and historical contexts (van Dijk, 1988). According to Fiske (1994) "our words are never neutral, they convey how we see ourselves, our identity, knowledge, values and they carry the power that reflects the interests of those who speak". Discourses can be used to assert power and knowledge, and to resist and critique. Since written and spoken words are invested with such enormous power, CDA is necessary for describing, interpreting, analysing, and critiquing the social life reflected in texts (Luke, 1997).

I have engaged the CDA approach in analysing political, media, religious and cyberspace discourses and have been able to demonstrate how the discursive practices reveal the ideological positioning of text producers on issues of focus. Legitimisation and coercion are two key strategies employed to enact power in political discourse. Legitimisation uses such techniques as charismatic leadership projection, boasting about performance, self praise, self justification, and self identification as a source of authority, reason, vision and sanity (Chilton, 2004). Coercion manifests in the use of pressure, threat and intimidation in discourse. In one of my publications (Taiwo, 2008a), I was able to demonstrate how Olusegun Obasanjo in 2007 discursively legitimised his party's position on the choice of Umaru Yar'Adua as its presidential candidate and coerced the opposition through his choice of words that encode threat and intimidation.

In other publications on media discourse, I have demonstrated how headlines and news reports employ lexical, graphological and structural devices, such as thematisation, foregrounding, passivisation, pronominalisation and conceptual metaphorical mappings of target domains to fulfill persuasive and rhetorical goals (Taiwo, 2004, 2007a, 2011a, Igwebuike & Taiwo, 2015).

Cyberspace Interaction
Mr Vice Chancellor Sir, what I chose to call "Cyberspace Interaction" in this lecture may be given different appellations,

depending on the perception and orientation of different scholars. Some of its synonyms are: "digital communication", "internet communication", "online communication", "cyber language", "virtual communication", "computer mediated communication", and "computer mediated discourse". While some linguists may try to draw lines of distinctions among these terms, essentially, they refer to the same issue.

"Cyberspace", also referred to as the virtual world, is the conceptual electronic space unbounded by distance or other physical limitations (*Webster's New World Telcom Dictionary Online*). The term, coined by William Gibson in 1982 is a blend of the first morpheme in *cybernetics* (the scientific study of how information is communicated in machines and electronic devices) and *space* (a generic term to denote a platform or environment where people can interact). Technophobia.com defines cyberspace as:

> the virtual computer world, and more specifically, is an electronic medium used to form a global computer network to facilitate online communication. It is a large computer network made up of many worldwide computer networks that employ TCP/IP protocol to aid in communication and data exchange activities. Cyberspace allows users to share information, interact, swap ideas, play games, engage in discussions or social forums, conduct business and create intuitive media, among many other activities.
> https://www.techopedia.com/definition/2493/ cyberspace

To underscore the centrality of cyberspace to our life in modern times, Bakis and Roche (1998) offered a crucial and

useful perspective of cyberspace which describes it as the "nervous system" of emerging societies. Just as people with common interests, locations, lifestyles or backgrounds form communities, people congregate in cyberspace to interact on a range of topics through electronic mails, *WhatsApp*, *Facebook*, *Twitter*, *Instagram*, discussion boards, chat groups, and text messaging. Such interactions may be synchronous, meaning they occur when all parties involved are online at the same time and are synchronised with a signal that is encrypted into the data flow. Examples of synchronous interactions are: telephone conversations, chat room interactions and video conferencing. They could also be asynchronous, that is, they occur with time constraints - meaning all involved parties do not need to be present or available at the same exact time. Examples of asynchronous interactions are: email, discussion boards and text messaging through cell phones.

Though an intangible virtual-reality domain, cyberspace has to be accessed through devices such as mobile phones and computers. Without these access devices, there will be no distinction between cyberspace and communication in the real world. Whatever tool people use defines the nature of the experience in cyberspace. For instance, the limitations of mobile devices and computers affect the linguistic forms, the style and the behaviour of the user. As an ethnographic researcher of online interactional behaviour, I deal with interactants in the virtual world who negotiate meaning with specific linguistic behaviour constrained by the devices that mediate their communication. My research on cyberspace interaction have focused specifically on some asynchronous discussion forums, such as *Nairaland, Nigerian Village Square, Naijabookofjokes, Naijahotjobs, Facebook, Sahara Reporters* and text messaging.

The reality of the digital age is that almost everything people do is technologically mediated: relationships, education, career, health, financial management, information

dissemination, governance, and so forth. Much typical daily behaviour patterns are essentially being reinvented as cyberbehaviour, thus giving us expressions, such as: cyberdating, cyberbullying, cyberstalking, cyberbegging, cyberrape, cybersex, cyberthreat, cybersecurity, cyberattack, cybershopping, cyberspolicing, cyberspeak, cyberscam, cyberactivism and cyberjournalism. Now, why is a linguist like me interested in cyberspace? We can hardly define cyberspace without considering the linguistic behaviour of participants, which is regulated by hardware, software tools and interfaces. Therefore, the more we understand the relationship between language and cyberspace, the more we are able to deal with issues that arise from the emerging culture.

In the section that follows, I discuss the linguistic peculiarities that characterise cyberspace interaction.

Linguistic Forms - Cyberspeak/Netspeak

Mr Vice Chancellor Sir, one of the major concerns of linguists and stake holders in education about cyberspace interaction is the unconventional use of English, which many people consider an assault on formal written English and the tendency to foster a decline in literacy. The digital age brought along with it electronic devices and gadgets, which keep evolving, starting with IBM mainframe computers to the various handheld devices we now have today. In addition, it also emerged with a new range of linguistic cultures, which have to be adapted to the new technology, because users are linguistically constrained by the properties of the Internet and mobile technology software and hardware linking them. For English, the global language and the major language of computing, there has emerged a distinct variety which enables users to cope with the linguistic constraints of this new technology. In its distinctiveness, one of the foremost linguists of our time, David Crystal named this form of communication "Netspeak" and specifically, the kind of English "Netlish" or "Weblish" (Crystal, 2001: 17). Netspeak, also referred to as

"Cyberspeak", includes all orthographic, graphic and grammatical forms in online communication. It selectively and adaptively involves properties of different semiotic systems - writing, speech and pictorial representations. For Crystal, Netspeak is a "genuine third medium" (p.48), coming after speech and writing.

Cyberspace interaction is characterised by all kinds of abbreviated forms used just to beat the constraints imposed by the medium itself. Lexical clipping, symbols and acronyms are used merely for practical reasons to shorten the time and energy needed to communicate (Safranj, 2018). Two major features of Netspeak are respelling and creativity. Respelling is a term used to refer to any form of non-standard, innovative or alternative spellings, typically employed in digital writing. It is a digital recycling of pre-existing popular practices, which are all around us. Crystal (2008) notes that new spellings, abbreviations, rebus and other innovative linguistic forms have a history as old as the written language. He cited instances of language use in telegrams, telex and other earlier communication.

Linguistic creativity, on the other hand, is that aspect of language which enables a language user to use language in a novel way. It is primarily the activity of making new meaning as well as recreating and re-interpreting meaning(s). Noam Chomsky in his book *Aspect of Theory of Syntax* also notes that:

> An essential property of language is that it provides the means for expressing indefinitely many thoughts and for reacting appropriately in an indefinite range of new situations (Chomsky, 1965, p. 6).

He, therefore, believes that humans have the ability to produce infinitely many original utterances or sentences that are based

on a limited number of lexemes and grammatical constructions. Carter (2004) further corroborates the view of creativity as a property of human language when he asserts that linguistic creativity is the property of all language users, which they use "for expressing their social and cultural selves" (p. 124).

As societies develop, norms and patterns of behaviour are altered and this greatly affects the language being used to express social realities. Therefore, as new situations emerge on a daily basis, there is a constant need to linguistically express these new realities. The kind of communication we are concerned with here encourages creativity because despite that it exists in written form, it is conceptually oral - a hybrid, which makes the linguistic experience entirely different from the traditional one. Another constraint of this medium is the limitation of space and time, which makes composing in English more elastic and less rule-governed, giving room for linguistic economy portrayed in the use of ellipsis, abbreviation and colloquialism.

Beyond the Internet, mobile telecommunication is another aspect of cyberspace that I got engaged in at the earlier stage of my research. Initially, mobile phones were typically associated with voice messages, much later, the use of short messages or text messages became popularised especially among the young people. As a linguist, the novel ways of using language on the mobile phone attracted my attention and my earliest research efforts on digital writing were directed at describing the linguistic and discursive peculiarities of text messaging (see Taiwo, 2008c; 2008d; 2009b; 2010b; 2010c). Text messaging is also characterised by abbreviation, respelling and creativity as noted earlier. Users manipulate the written language to fit the technological limitations of space.

My research on text messaging did not just focus on the innovative linguistic forms, which seem to be the major

attraction to scholars. I also explored the discursive issues such as its interpersonal functions (Taiwo, 2008d), its satirical use (Taiwo, 2013a); its implications for literacy (Taiwo, 2010b); and its tendency to foster social change (Taiwo, 2010c). In 2012, I conducted a research sponsored by Alexander von Humboldt Foundation, which culminated in the publication of a book titled *Language and Mobile Telecommunication in Nigeria: SMS as a Digital Age Lingual-cultural Expression* (Taiwo, 2012a). This book, to my knowledge, is the most comprehensive empirical documentation of the linguistic and discursive features of text messaging in Nigeria to date. Table 1 below presents some of the common linguistic forms used in cyberspace communication.

Table 1: Typology of Cyberspeak

Typologies	Examples
Homophonic single grapheme abbreviation	*b - be, c - see, d - the, u - you, y - why*
Number homophones	*4 - for, 1 - one, 2 - two, too, 8 - hate*
Letter-number homophones	*d8 - date, 9it - night, 2day - today, b4n - bye for now*
Consonant Clusters/Vowel elision	*attn - attention* *mbrsd - embarrassed* *tnks - thanks* *cn - can*
Acronyms	*lol - laughing out loud* *ttyl - talk to you later* *idk - I don't know* *brb - be right back* *btw - by the way* *fyi - for your information*
Non-conventional spelling	*luv - love, gud - good, kul - cool, wen - when, fone, phone, ait - alright, jus/juz - just, n - and*
Americanised forms	*wanna - want to, cos/coz - because, bout - about*

It should be noted that many of the online abbreviations and acronyms are now formally part of the English language and thus, could be found in most contemporary English dictionaries. For instance, *The Oxford English Dictionary* already has OMG (oh my God, oh my goodness), IMHO (in my humble opinion) and many other new abbreviated phrases in it.

This new way of communicating in cyberspace, which later came to be known as Computer-mediated Communication (CMC) became a subject of enquiry not only to Information and computer scientists, but also scholars from humanistic disciplines, such as psychology, sociology and linguistics. For discourse analysts like me, the term Computer Mediated Discourse (CMD) coined by Susan Herring in 2001 captures "the communication produced when human beings interact with one another by transmitting messages via networked or mobile computers". According to Herring and Androutsopoulos (2015), Computer mediated discourse is a specialisation within the broader interdisciplinary study of computer-mediated communication (CMC), distinguished by its focus on language and language use in computer networked environments, and by its use of methods of discourse analysis to address that focus" (Herring, 2001: 127).

A long established interactional feature of natural conversations, such as turn taking, is present in asynchronous interactional threads. My study of discourse features in discussion boards shows that in spite of the limitations of the messaging system on sequential turn taking and referencing, interactional and topical coherence are often established, as participants are able to logically connect their ideas in a complex virtual conversational context through Quoting, Addressivity and Topic focus (Taiwo, 2010f).

Language Mixing and Identity in Digital Communication

Contact linguists over the years have made a very strong claim that languages do not exist in isolation. A reduction in the space between two languages often results in language contact, which may yield several outcomes, such as borrowing, shift, interference and code switching (Taiwo, 2010d: 180). What I choose to call language mixing in this lecture, which is also popularly referred to as code-switching (CS) and sometimes code-mixing has become a prominent feature of digital writing. It refers to the alternation of two or more linguistic varieties in an instance of communication. Although some scholars have carried out explicit research on code-switching and code-mixing, and tried to differentiate them (Poplack, 1980; Wardhaugh, 1992; Myers-Scotton, 1993; Leroy & Muysken, 1995; Auer, 1998), contemporary research works use them interchangeably.

The emergence of language mixing in cyberspace interaction has challenged the assumption that spoken face-to-face interaction is the essential site for this practice. Discussion threads of web forums can be seen as the equivalent of a conversational episode and, therefore, as the level at which to determine the base language of discussion, against which the directionality of switches is examined (Auer 2000). Scholars have identified two possible instances of bilingual language mixing online: the dyadic or multi-party verbal exchanges which take place in cyberspace synchronous and asynchronous interactions and the bilingual discourse in edited genres aimed at a reading audience, such as weblogs and fan fiction (Androutsopoulus, 2013). The latter can be likened to the traditional written code switching, which is a practice known since medieval poetry and ranges from fictional representations of conversational dialogue in novels or stage play to diary writing and newspaper discourse (Androutsopoulus, 2007). My research have focused on the

dyadic or multi-party verbal exchanges because of closeness in terms of approximation to spoken conversation.

Below are some examples of language mixing in cyberspace.

> *...abeg no let those idiots give you high blood pressure. I swear this was my exact reaction just could not put it to words, see u never curse dem well... ki lo de gan sef... infact multiply all ur epe by 1 million* (what exactly is happening, in fact, multiply your curses by 1 million) Re: Naval Ratings beat, strip lady naked. *Nigerian Village Square*, Nov 4, 2008

> *I am so grateful 4 ur luv. Alanu o ni won yin l'oruko Jesu.* (You will always find help in Jesus name) A text message

Despite that English is the predominant language of digital communication in Nigeria, oftentimes, participants flavour their communication with switches to some of the indigenous languages. These switches are deliberate and conscious choices that are geared towards reflecting their desire for identity, addressee specification, reiteration, indicating emotions and quotations (Taiwo, 2010d). Code-switching appears to be a way participants in digital communication establish their identities as an integral part of the cyberspace community they belong.

Despite the overt prestige accorded standard English in public domain, many of the participants in cyberspace interaction from time to time give preference to the popular Nigerian English (PNE) typically characterised by indexical markers such as indigenous language expressions and coinages, loan words, indigenised English words and idiomatic expressions and Nigerian Pidgin English (NPE). Obadare (2009) describes NPE as the 'language of the street' and 'the oppressed'. NPE

also serves as an identity marker for Nigerian students and young people in particular (Pandey & Pandey, 1993: 402). The occasional use of these low but popular varieties is Nigerians' own way of expressing solidarity online (Taiwo, 2010e: 77).

Since cyberspace is seen as a network of communities of people, participants exhibit different kinds of identity, which are most times different from their real life identity. While real life identity is shaped by factors such as class, race, level of education and occupation, online identities are subject to being re-defined by participants. This re-definition involves deception, which could manifest as multiple identities, gender switch, masking, identity theft, the use of pseudonym, and so forth. The cyberspace therefore parades all manner of persons with different and sometimes unreliable identities.

Cyberspace offers a virtual utopia of self-disclosure, self-discovery and self-actualisation. As participants discover the great potential in cyberspace for communicating ideas, the tendency is always there for them to either over-disclose or under-disclose information in order to achieve self-actualisation. The truth is that the various platforms offered by social media hinder most people from constructing the self as a stable identity. With the increase in mobility, technology does not only allow for a wider range of relationships, it also erodes the strong bonds between people in community (Gergen, 2000). In addition, certainty is almost non-existent in cyberspace because of information load or access to multiple truths. All these eventually lead to distrust, confusion, self-interest and suspicion. These factors play out as participants negotiate and construct identities in online interactions.

Impoliteness in Cyberspace Interaction
In spite of the numerous advantages of the Internet, such as its unlimited potential in informing, engaging and empowering citizens, it has been established that participants in online discourse are more likely to use comparatively impolite expressions (Graham, 2007; Neurauter-Kissel, 2011). There

are rules for acceptable online behaviour which reminds participants that the Internet is not some new world in which anything goes, but rather a new dimension or extension of our existing society. Such rules are referred to as "netiquette". For instance typing in all capitals is an Internet code for shouting, and it is regarded as rude. It is also expected that online interactants should respect others' privacy and not quote or forward a personal email without the original author's permission. Herring (2003) notes that because online communication is not able to replicate face-to-face cues, there is an increase in chances of miscommunication and conflict. Online communication is often associated with linguistic aggression, which is linked with two major factors - deindividuation and disinhibition. Deindividuation refers to what happens when persons act in groups, thereby forgetting to see themselves as individuals, and in the process engage in anti-normative behaviour. It is the loosening of normal constraints on behaviour when people cannot be identified. This encourages people to use cyberspace as a buffer to conceal their identity as they engage in improper acts. The popular saying of Peter Steiner, "on the internet, nobody knows you are a dog" is used to buttress internet anonymity.

Disinhibition, on the other hand, is the lack of social restrains, which makes people say and do things in cyberspace that they would ordinarily not say or do offline. Suler (2004) further buttressed the understanding of disinhibition in this observation:

> This disinhibition can work in two seemingly opposing directions. Sometimes people share very personal things about themselves. They reveal secret emotions, fears, wishes. They show unusual acts of kindness and generosity, sometimes going out of their way to help others. We may call this

> *benign   disinhibition.*   However,
> disinhibition is not always so **salutary.**
> We   witness   rude   language,   harsh
> criticisms, anger, hatred, even threats.
> Or people visit the dark underworld of
> the Internet - places of pornography,
> crime, and violence - territory they
> would never   explore   in   the   real
> world.   We   may   call   this   *toxic*
> *disinhibition.* (p. 321).

My   research   explored   three   major   impolite   linguistic
behaviour online - flaming, trolling and scamming. Flaming is
the   use   of   hostile   insulting   and   profane   language   by
discussants in online discussion boards. It includes, name-
calling and hurling of insults towards another person, his/her
character, religion, race, intelligence and physical or mental
ability. Due to censorship and fear of arrest and intimidation,
very few Nigerians can speak openly against the government
using the traditional electronic and print media. The Internet,
however, has become "the balancing force to the traditional
media, to which activists and the underprivileged can turn or
must turn in order to have their voices heard" (Uzochukwu &
Ekwugha, 2014: 204). It has become a space especially for
young people, to hone their debating and discussion skills in
regard to national issues, thereby giving them the opportunity
to learn how to function successfully in a community.

Flaming as an online practice is not only directed at
participants, many times, topics that focus on political actors
can also attract defamatory statements and hate speeches
directed   towards   such   political   actors.   The   Federal
Government has in recent times registered its displeasure on
the use of the social media for perpetrating hate speeches and
fake news. The government is making a move to criminalise
two types of behaviour: the propagation of false information
that could threaten the security of the country or that is

capable of inciting the general public against the government through electronic message and the disseminating of any abusive statement via text message, *Twitter, WhatsApp*, or any other form of social media that has the intention of setting the public against any person(s) or any institution of government or such other bodies established by law. Certain contemporary expressions which are targeted at insulting individuals and groups found in cyberspace are presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Common Nigerian Online Derisive Linguistic Forms

Clueless	Used to refer to the former President Goodluck Jonathan
Daura dullard	President Muhammadu Buhari
Afonja	The Yoruba People
Flatinos/Flat heads	The Igbo people
Okoroawusa	Governor Rochas Okorocha
Aboki	The Hausa people
APC e-rats	Online discussants who defend
APC	and its policies
Zoo	used by Nnamdi Kanu to refer to Nigeria

It is common for topics of discussion to derail as a result of insulting and abusive exchanges usually among the speakers of the three major languages in the country - Hausa (*Aboki*), Igbo (*Flatino*) and Yoruba (*Afonja*). These names are meant to create, maintain, accentuate and stigmatise some real or imagined differences among the groups. This construction of otherness is as a result of the power relations that exist among the groups.

Trolling, though closely related to flaming, is different in the sense that it is the clever dissemination of messages online in order to stir up as many replies as possible. The goal is to bait, deceive and provoke emotional response. Trolling may invite a flaming linguistic behaviour. Trolls (those who engage in trolling) are known to be typically immune to criticism and logical argument, they gain energy when people get angry and insult them. Although trolling is a deliberate disruptive linguistic behaviour targeted at provoking emotional arguments, it can reveal what lurks in the minds of participants in cyberspace interactions. While trolling ordinarily is seen as an uninhibited linguistic behaviour, when studied from a judgement-free linguistic perspective, it can show a high level of complexity, which then presents us with opportunities to understand how cyberspace interactions bring about new discursive behaviour.

A study of trolling on *Nairaland* discussions, which I carried out, reveals different kinds of trolls, such as thread starter trolls, who question some fundamental issues that have been taken for granted with the goal of polarising the community; spoilers, who post obtrusive comments to disrupt discussions; spam trolls, who post unexpected responses, such as cynical comments to seek others' attention; pseudo-naive trolls, who intentionally disseminate any piece of information under the guise of being innocently unaware of what is happening (Taiwo, 2014). Common trolling strategies include: sarcasm, obscenity, vulgarism, and threadjacking.

Trolling may initially appear to be a deliberate disruptive discursive behaviour among young people, who are the prominent participants in online discussion. It has however been discovered that there are adult trolls who disobey house rules by deliberately making posts that would start off arguments and controversies or ones unrelated to the original post on *WhatsApp* and other online discussion groups. Such trolls advance in their posts certain religious, social or political

ideological positions that have the tendency to polarise the group.

Deception, Rumour and Manipulation in Cyberspace Interaction

Rumour and deception, which have been age-long practices in human interactions, have been greatly enhanced in the context of cyberspace interactions. Rumours arise typically as alternative means of communication, especially in contexts where the general public lacks the necessary information on any issue of common concern. Rumours are unverified statements that circulate about topics that people perceive as important. They arise in situations of ambiguity and potential threat and are used by people attempting to make sense or to manage risk (Di Fonzo, 2008: 38). There is no doubt that when rumours spread widely, they could have significant impact, mostly negative, on the society. Defamation, protests, destruction of properties, spread of fear, hate, or euphoria are some of the undesirable responses to rumours (Matthews, 2013). Since rumours are narratives that are passed from one source to another, they are subject to embellishments, and individuals and groups can use them for manipulative purposes. Rumours act as a repository for anxieties, aspirations and fears for the group of people who are socially, politically and geographically outside the hegemonic power structure, typically referred to as the subaltern in postcolonial studies, to shape both individual and communal identities and ideologies.

The possibility of sharing real time information and update about unfolding events has turned the cyberspace into a powerful domain for the emergence and spread of rumours. Online rumours are not just in the form of a text or verbal rumour, they are accompanied by 'manipulated or photoshopped images and videos with the intent to both shock and persuade' For any piece of information to be considered as rumour, it must be important to the people and must be

ambiguous. Therefore, the scope of the rumour will be at its highest when importance and ambiguity are at their highest. (Bernardi *et al*, 2012: 49).

Social psychologists have shown that individuals generally tend to absorb messages that they already approve of or agree with and reject or ignore those that question their ideological position or their social identity (Malesevic, 2013). For instance, the early 2017 rumour in Nigeria about the death of the President, Muhammad Buhari started spreading through the social media, and in spite of evidence of pictures and/or videos released online to counter the rumour by the Presidency, many Nigerians argued that the pictures and videos were either old and probably products of photoshopping. This attitude of people is buttressed by the fact that they would rather visit news outlets that are likely to confirm their existing beliefs than consult the ones that would challenge their views (Sunstein, 2009). Below are some examples of rumours that have gone viral on social media:

> *Just got this from Oba of Lagos palace now. Please you should not eat carrot, apple, water melon, and some other fruits coming from the NORTH. We got a report that BOKO HARAM has sent over 54,000 apples to the south-west for sale been poisoned with chemicals. Somebody just called from North now! Please send to many people as possible! It's serious*

> *Please remove your photo from your profile, there is something roaring about and is working true Whatsapp pix. This month of May, occultist is planning to kill from this. I received this all the way from Benin republic this morning. Pls share this to loved ones. He who has ears should*

hear. Let stubborn people ignore it and it will work on them. A word is enough for a wise!!! Pls send it back to me if you really loves me. U can see I have changed mine immediately. Tenx as you share this""""!

In a recent research on the construction of rumour on social media (Taiwo, Agba & Feyisitan, 2017), our findings reveal that the major discursive means of constructing these rumours include the use of performative constructions, which have the tendency of compelling people to disseminate rumours; the construction of the social world of magic, witchcraft and diabolism, which Nigerians can emotionally and cognitively relate to and which in turn validates their experience; and the use of evidence to support performativity, which ensures the perlocutionary force of the rumours and enhances believability. Addressivity is engaged to enable the sharing of social meanings, thereby making the receiver(s) of the rumour co-owners of the discourse. Also, number game is employed for credibility, objectivity, precision and persuasion.

Digital deception can be seen as any form of deceit transmitted through communication technology, such as telephone, email, instant messaging, chats, news groups, weblogs, listservs and multiplayer online video games (Hancock, 2007). With the popularisation of online communication from the 1990s, the most common of the global-reaching online scams have been associated with the country. Advance fee fraud, also known as "419," is named after a statute of the Nigerian criminal code. Deception is intentionally engaged to induce in the target a particular belief through the manipulation of the truth and falsity of some information and language is a key component of deceptive behaviour. Since the social media enable creation and exchange of user-generated content, people are required to supply certain personal information, such as name, age and telephone number. While most Nigerians would present their true names, activities, and social demographic information on

Facebook for instance, some others under the cloak of protecting their privacy, become deceptive, not necessarily because of refusal to disclose such private information, but because they supply wrong ones. A good example is someone claiming to be 103 years old when he/she is just in the 30s. While some would rather be deceptive about age on the social media, they may be eager to reveal their locations, especially when they feel such information, like being in Europe and America, will enhance their value before others. Ogunlesi, a social media analyst puts this aptly:

> We are natural show-offs - you only need to listen to many church testimonies to realise that they are less about gratitude to God than about 'performing' a new-found status or position. And that part of us has translated very well to social media, so that on Facebook, and *Instagram* especially, we now all own our own testimony pulpits, from which we can trumpet our exploits to the world.

Ogunlesi's observation above further buttresses how interactants in online discourse construct and negotiate their identities through deceptive discursive behaviour.

I drew the following conclusion from a recent study on digital deception: chain messages, urban legends, phishing and scam engage discursive power through the use of different linguistic resources, such as imperatives, conditionals, evidentials, threats, cognition and lexical choice to manipulate and control their victims (Taiwo, 2017).

Online communication can sometimes be manipulative. Manipulation according to van Dijk, (2006:360) is "a communicative and interactional practice, in which a manipulator exercises control over other people, usually against their will or against their best interests". The whole

idea of manipulation could be considered negative because it violates social norms. It is an abuse of power, which implies the use of illegitimate influence to make others believe or do things that are in the interest of the manipulator. It is however important to point out the difference between manipulation and persuasion. While persuasion will imply the freedom to believe and act as one is pleased in response to the persuader, manipulation makes the recipients passive and victims of the manipulator.

Online manipulation may come in form of spamming (the use of electronic messaging systems to send an unsolicited messages); scamming (a fraudulent scheme performed by a dishonest individual, group, or company in an attempt obtain money or something else of value); and spoofing (a fraudulent or malicious practice in which communication is sent from an unknown source disguised as a source known to the receiver). A number of unsolicited messages sent on *WhatsApp, Facebook* email and other digital platforms, as well as voice calls from telecommunications service providers could be manipulative in nature. For instance, messages and voice calls, such as

> *Yello keep on using your phone and watch out for fantastic offers from MTN. Thank you.*

> *Welcome to MTN. Press 1 to select Ojuelegba by Whizkid as your caller tune*

are received frequently by mobile phone subscribers than anticipated and the momentary psychological prompting to pick such unsolicited calls or read such messages amounts to manipulation.

A study I carried out on the discursive manipulation strategies in online scam mails, corroborates the findings of some previous scholars that virtual scammers appeal to their addressees' religious sentiments, trust, and greed to perpetrate

some form of global fraud. Internet scammers employ greeting formulas, confidence building, and self-identification strategies to gain trust in international online contexts (Taiwo, 2012c). In the study, I observed that over the years "the strategies scammers use keep changing to reflect the growing experiential knowledge of the targets of such scams. Unlike their practice in earlier emails, scammers now pretend to yield discursive power to their targets, and they often present themselves as ignorant, non-desperate, vulnerable, and naïve persons" (p. 151*ff*).

Satirical writings are often used for manipulative purposes online. Of recent, on April 26, 2018, the Deeper Life Bible Church (DLBC) opened its world headquarters church at Gbagada, Lagos and a cyberspace satirist wrote what he referred to as a "Breaking News", purporting that the Deeper Life Bible Church commissioned "the biggest and best-equipped hospital ever built in Africa". It was later discovered that this "breaking news" was a hoax. This kind of imaginative writing is one of the ingenious ways of driving traffic to a website or social media page. The poster of the news eventually achieved this because in less than 48 hours, the news had been liked, shared and commented on by more than 5000 people. Other ways people drive traffic to their web pages include using irresistible adverts, posting contents to *LinkedIn* and using visuals, such as videos and memes.

Manipulation is continually resisted in cyberspace. In fact, offline manipulative acts are also resisted in cyberspace, since the space empowers protesters and provides some sort of 'security' and an avenue for adequate multimodal semiotic modes for such resistance such as pictures, movies or other media (Van Leeuwen, 2005). Van Dijk (2008) observes that the control of discourse and discourse production itself are important condition for the exercise of social control through discourse. Prior to the digital age, powerful groups and their members control or have access to a wide and varied range of

discourse roles, genres, occasions, and styles. He refers to these powerful groups as the "symbolic elites" (p. 22). They include journalists, writers, artists, directors, academics, and so forth. With the coming of cyberspace, "little people" are given the ability to have a voice as relevant as those of the symbolic elites. Cyberspace provides avenues for the oppressed to express their frustrations, thereby resisting manipulation. In recent times, our society has been dealing with cases of alleged victims of different kinds of abuse, such as sexual abuse, who leverage on access and opportunities available on cyberspace to resist manipulation by their perceived oppressors.

Stance Taking in Online Discourse

The cyberspace has become a major public space for expressing ideologies. Individuals, as well as groups express attitudes, beliefs and positioning as they interact in cyberspace. Ideological groups - religious, political or social - that have clear and strongly held values of the world around them create social media platforms, such as blogs, discussion groups, *Facebook*, *WhatsApp* pages and websites. The cyberspace provides an outlet for these groups to spread their messages which sometimes may not be socially acceptable on mainstream media outlets.

Online bulletin boards or forums which are asynchronous in nature are known to promote citizen debates, deliberations, agreement and/or disagreement, as well as collective actions (Idehen & Taiwo, 2016; Chiluwa & Odebunmi, 2016). During arguments or debates on these forums, members are typically divided along the lines of their strong feelings and attitudes towards any particular proposition. The linguistic mechanisms used for indicating personal expressions of commitment, attitudes, viewpoints, and judgements towards a proposition in discourse are generally referred to in the literature as "stance". Stance, which is also referred to as "textual voice", is conveyed through lexicogrammatical options (Biber, 2006), which can be expressed epistemically (involving knowledge and cognition)

or affectively (involving mood or degree of emotional intensity). Hyland (2005) identifies stance markers, which are linguistic indices that signal how participants position themselves in relation to other voices in a discourse and convey their judgments, opinions, and commitments. Stance markers include Hedges (linguistic devices used to soften interpersonal imposition); Boosters (certainty markers); Self-mention (conscious choice of first pronouns and possessive adjectives to present propositional, affective and interpersonal information); Attitude markers (linguistic elements that indicate affective stance) (Hyland, 2011).

In researching cyberspace interactions, I have explored interactional engagements of and stance taking by participants on *Nairaland*, *Nigerian Village Square*, and *Naijahotjobs*. The first two are online forums and discussion portals where Nigerians congregate to discuss issues of interest, such as politics, culture, religion, entertainment, jobs and career, business and health. *Naijahotjobs* is a Nigerian graduate jobs and career vacancies forum. The forum is designated for job seekers and people who want to boost their career advancement. It is reputed to be the largest website for jobs and vacancies in Nigeria. Precisely in 2014, the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation (AvH) sponsored a research which I carried out at the University of Münster, Germany on interactional positioning and stance taking in online job portals. In the research, I investigated how unemployed Nigerian graduates negotiate meaning online as they interrogate and discuss issues relating to unemployment in the country. My findings on how textual voices manifest in interactional discourse online have shown that cognitive verbs, especially the verb *think*, feature prominently in job portal discussions and they attribute stance to the speaker and other participants (Taiwo, 2016a). The participants also used questions for different engagement purposes, such as genuinely demanding answers to or seeking to confirm issues

agitating their minds about their unemployment situation and to engage the cognition of other participants (Taiwo, 2015).

Humour in Cyberspace Interaction

The cyberspace is a rich source for the display of humour of different kinds, such as short expressions, funny stories, cartoons, comic strips, picture, memes, and so forth. The Internet has become a space for experimenting and exhibiting playfulness and entertainment, particularly on *Facebook*, *WhatsApp*, chat rooms, blogs and discussion forums. The emergence and popularisation of humour in cyberspace among Nigerians is not unconnected with the post-military era when democratisation began afresh in the country. The cyberspace from the early 2000s has given freedom to people to freely express their minds about the leaders and the state of the nation. Humour is one major way people do this. Humour, generally has become a means of socio-cultural improvisation, a means of coping with the harsh socio-economic realities of the pluralistic public sphere in postcolonial Nigeria. The subject of online jokes may include politics, ethnicity, religion, as well as relationship and gender. Jokes constructed and shared in the public space depend on shared beliefs between the producers and recipients.

Online humour is created not just to make people laugh; underlying some jokes are issues of power relations and ideological stance. Humour can be employed metaphorically by a group as either an offensive weapon - a sword, or a defensive one – a shield. Online humour employs literary devices such as exaggeration, allusion, metaphor, wit, and satire to discursively express socio-cultural issues (Taiwo, Arilewola & Oshodi, 2014).

Ethnic humour is a kind of humour that thrives in cyberspace. It is premised on the perceived traits of a group and/or its members, which may or may not be erroneous. The commonly used techniques in the ethnic humour are overgeneralisation,

exaggeration, gestures, accents, and stereotypes. Jokes about ethnic groups in Nigeria also target how people from these ethnic groups speak naturally, what they talk about and what language represents for them. For instance, jokes about speech mimicking focus on accents of members of these ethnic groups when they speak English. The subliminal perceptions buried in these jokes become realities to the people of the country and the tendency for every Nigerian to laugh at themselves becomes the binding force for the pluralistic groups.

Table 3 below presents some common stereotypes in Nigerian ethnic jokes.

Table 3: Some common stereotypes in Nigerian online ethnic jokes

Ethnic group	Stereotypes expressed
Yoruba	Love partying and lavishing money, too loud when they speak, boastful, but fearful. Very pugnacious and two-faced
Igbo	Materialistic, and greedy - loves money and can do anything to make money. Industrious but calculative and exploitative in business dealings
Hausa	Uneducated people who can barely string words together to form complete English sentences. Fatalistic and prone to violence, religious bigots
Efik/Ibibio	Girls are hypersexual and promiscuous, good cooks and good home keepers; lovers of dog meat (404)
Edo/Delta	Men - smart, witty swindlers and criminal-minded; ladies - prostitutes
Tiv	Men love the bar and pepper-soup life, while the women love sex, and do not see anything wrong with a woman sleeping with her husband's best friend

Applying the insights of critical discourse analysis, one of my works in press (Taiwo, in press) explicates that in everyday ethnic jokes in Nigeria majority and minority groups in the country construct power and ideologies about themselves, and demonstrate how prejudices created through jokes portray the ability of Nigerians to laugh collectively at their stereotyped attitudes, and socio-cultural and linguistic behaviours. I also edited a volume on humour studies with two of my colleagues, Akin Odebunmi and Akin Adetunji titled: *Analyzing Language and Humor in Online Discourse.* This volume which is a compendium of research on humour in digital space, covered the following topics: rhetoric of humour, *Facebook* humour, ethnic and racial humour and visual humour online.

Visuality plays a vital role in the construction of online humour. According to Baran (2012), visualisation is a very efficient tool in getting a message across to participants in cyberspace communication. A major way of enacting humour online is through memes. Internet memes are cultural ideas, symbols or practices that spread and mutate on the Internet. They include music, fashion, ideas, common phrases, official and common types of behaviour, rituals, and religious beliefs and so forth. Memes have become tools for presenting all kinds of ordinary everyday events online in such a way that they induce laughter in those who come in contact with them. Adegoju and Oyebode (2015) observes that Otherness plays out in the construction of memes, as the agents sometimes select people outside their in-group and criticise their behaviour for ideological purposes, especially in Nigerian online campaign discourse. Richard Dawkins describes memes as gene-like infectious units of culture that spread from person to person (Dawkin, 1976). In his observation of how memes rapidly spread from person to person through copying and imitation, Dennet (1993:205) states that memes "replicate at rates that make even fruit flies and yeast cells look glacial in comparison". The use of memes in cyberspace interactions among Nigerians is a growing

culture. For instance, sometime in February this year (2018), an account's clerk in the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB) office in Makurdi, the Benue State capital while answering audit queries concerning some missing money from sales of scratch cards, said her housemaid and a fellow employee had confessed to using a snake to 'spiritually' steal the money she kept in an office vault. This news generated a lot of hilarious memes, such as the ones below:

Although, they may appear like playful acts in online interaction, memes raise very serious socio-political issues, critique social ills and communicate messages which fulfil citizens' social responsibilities. Memetics, the study of cultural information transfer on the Internet, is still largely an unexplored aspect of computer-mediated discourse analysis. The growth in the use of memes to communicate vital social messages will necessitate more scholarly empirical investigation of their discursive meaning.

Web 2.0 and New Approaches to Discursive Meaning on Cyberspace

Communication on cyberspace is getting more complex as we advance in technology in the digital age. The amount of information we need to process has increased tremendously even as there is a reconfiguration of cyberspace technology. Web 2.0, the current state of online technology which is characterised by greater user interactivity and collaboration, more pervasive network connectivity and enhanced communication channels, has made researching linguistic behaviour online more interesting. The kinds of sites that manifest the use of Web 2.0 include microblogs, social network sites, photo and media-sharing sites, online auction sites, collaboratively-authored wikis, social bookmarking sites, and news aggregators. The emergent common practices include the dynamic collaborative discourse that takes place on wikis, along with conversational video exchanges, conversational exchanges via 'image texts' and multimodal conversation. The current practices in cyberspace technology have left the contemporary discourse analyst who is researching cyberspace discursive behaviour with no other option than to explore new ways of interpreting meaning.

Linguists now essentially deal with multimodal texts. A text may be defined as multimodal when it combines two or more semiotic systems. There are five semiotic systems in total:

1. **Linguistic**: comprising aspects such as vocabulary, generic structure and the grammar of oral and written language
2. **Visual**: comprising aspects such as colour, vectors and viewpoint in still and moving images
3. **Audio**: comprising aspects such as volume, pitch and rhythm of music and sound effects
4. **Gestural**: comprising aspects such as movement, speed and stillness in facial expression and body language
5. **Spatial**: comprising aspects such as proximity, direction, position of layout and organisation of objects in space (Herring 2012: online)

There is a general apprehension on the fast developing cyberspace culture. Such fear arose out of concerns of different groups in the society, such as parents, teachers, health practitioners, political actors and religious bodies. To a number of concerned persons, these technological changes are compelling us to withdraw from the physical world, promoting antisocial behaviour, undermining our true relationships and ruining our English. We no longer require homes, offices, or cafes to stay in touch with people; we can do it wherever we happen to be. Health practitioners are worried about the effect of modern age interactions through social media, especially when excessive, on the physical and mental health of people. The propensity of the social media for rumour peddling propaganda and hate speeches is a genuine fear among the political class and the tendency for control due to misinformation is common, especially in developing democracies. For parents and teachers, there is a genuine concern about how to raise the digital natives; the damage cyberspace linguistic practices can do to children's communicative and social skills; how to manage the use of computer, which is a multipurpose tool; safety of children while interacting online, and so forth. Religious bodies are also concerned about the tendency for the growing cyberspace

interactions to encourage unrighteous behaviour among young people.

As a linguist, my opinion is that discussion of the dangers of cyberspace interaction has overshadowed the consideration of its positive applications. The panic about the rise of social media and cyberspace culture is largely overhyped and misplaced. There is no doubt that technology has certainly affected the way we use language. This can be seen as language change in progress, which we can do little or nothing about. For a new linguistic form to succeed, two processes are involved: first, speakers (and writers) must come into contact with the new form, which is evidently happening - these new forms are encountered by English users all over the world. The second process is that they must decide to use it. We may not be able say that all English users are using Netspeak when they communicate in cyberspace, but the youth, who are the majority of cybercitizens are active users of Netspeak. What is generating the present concern is that a significant number of people in the modern society, the youth, are adopting the new linguistic forms and increasingly using them regardless of the context of discourse.

Cyber language is a socio-cultural practice that can enhance the teaching and learning of English. This means it has placed new demands on English language teachers to see ways of harnessing the potential of the practice and the tools - mobile phones and computers - which have become accessories for modern socialisation. In a paper in which I explored the potential of text messaging for language teaching and learning (Taiwo, 2010b), I observed that:

> Text messaging may be an important tool to help students learn how different discursive contexts affect the choice of linguistic style. One of the major roles of teachers in language learning is to create
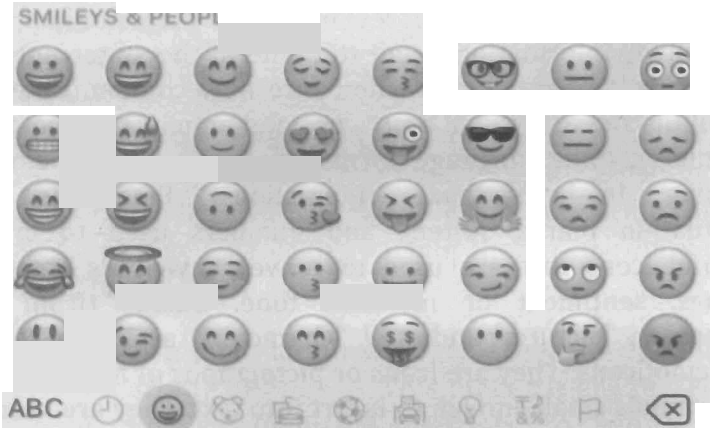
awareness of content, style, purpose and
audience and how these impact on usage,
(p. 281)

I see a situation in which English language teachers already have at their disposal materials for instruction in orthography, morphological processes, sentence patterns, cohesion, literary devices, creative writing, etc, which are evident in their students' text messages. Netspeak is context-specific. It, therefore, illustrates the flexibility of language to communicate in the novel technology-mediated context. The fact that cyberspace creates an opportunity for people to communicate rapidly through a range of media is perhaps one of the best linguistic developments of our time. Discourse particles (lexical items that represent feelings), little pieces of language that convey information about the tone of the statement and even error repairs in interactions are now communicated in virtual discourse through emoticons and emojis, the two new-age hieroglyphic language forms used to convey nuanced meaning in cyberspace interactions. Emoticons are punctuation marks, letters, and numbers used to create pictorial icons that are used to convey a writer's emotion, feelings, sentiment or intended tone. Emojis (from the Japanese *e*, "picture," and *moji*, "character") are more recent than emoticons. They are icons or pictographs of faces, objects and symbols small enough to insert into text. They are used to express an idea or emotion in electronic communication. Emojis appear in various genres, such as facial expressions, common objects, places and types of weather, and animals.

Table 4: Some Examples of Emoticons and their meanings

Emoticon	Meaning
:-(	Sadness, frown
:-D	Laughing, big grin
'-(	Crying
D:<	Horror, disgust
:-O	Surprise, shock
:-P	Tongue sticking
:-/	Sceptical
>:-	Evil, devilish
;-)	Cool, bored, yawning

Fig. 1: Some Examples of Some Facial Expression Emojis

Source: Popular Science: https://www.popsci.com/how-to-use-new-emoji-in-ios-10

The use of emoticons and emojis indicate how cyberspace interaction has been adapted to encode complex human feelings in a streamlined manner that is perfect for our modern, digital world.

In a keynote paper presented in 2013 at a conference on English Language Teaching Today (ELTT), I argued that for English language teachers to get the best out of their practice in the 21st century Nigeria, technology must feature prominently in their teaching, because it is the driving force for sociality among the people they teach (Taiwo, 2013). Just like in many other places in the world, it is the 'language' that contemporary learners speak, and the language teachers need to learn in order to take the English language teaching (ELT) profession forward and make the education that is being delivered more relevant and engaging. Teachers need to understand what the learners are exposed to outside the classroom in order to respond appropriately to the needs of such learners.

The 21st Century digital culture has provided learners with the opportunity to collaborate in their personal life in a way that most teachers were not able to do when they were younger. Many of today's learners are almost permanently connected to their friends and interests via a whole range of networked devises ranging from mobile phones to their computers. This connectivity allows collaboration to take place on a wider scale than has ever been possible. It is also important to note that the digital age promotes learning through discovery. This is called exploratory or experiential learning, which encourages innovative thinking and production of novel ideas. Since digital communication has taught the students to be interactive, collaborative, exploratory, as well as creative, the teachers must value these vital qualities in their students and explore them in their interactions with students.

Researching cyberspace interaction has been an exciting experience for me. Being an emerging space for various kinds of discursive behaviour, I see limitless opportunities for me as an applied linguist and discourse analyst in future research. I am particularly delighted to see scholarship in language study growing in this direction among colleagues and our graduate students.

My Contribution to Knowledge and Professional Accomplishments

Mr Vice Chancellor Sir, at the time it became clear to me that I was going to be a discourse analyst, spoken discourse appeared to be the focus for the few discourse analysts of Nigerian origin (Akindele, 1988; Olateju, 1997; Fakoya, 1999). At that time, I set out to investigate Texture, Structure and Context, the three key domains of Textuality in written discourse, specifically determining how sequences of sentences serve specific rhetorical purposes, such as narrative, descriptive, persuasive, and expository purposes in senior secondary school students' writings. Within the practices of textlinguistics, my earliest research focused on cohesion and coherence, two of the seven constitutive principles of textuality identified by deBeaugrande and Dressler (1981), which signify unity of text (Taiwo, 1999, 2001, 2005a). Cohesion is the way linguistic items are meaningfully inter-connected in sequences, while coherence has to do with the rhetorical aspects of text, which include developing and supporting of argument. In addition, I examined thematic structure and thematic progression, two key aspects of information structure in order to demonstrate how secondary school students write (Taiwo, 1995).

Since I considered textuality in students' writing a very productive research area that could lead to remediation of errors, my quest for researching textuality in written essays of secondary school students for my doctoral research continued as I examined lexical collocation in senior secondary school students' writing (Taiwo, 2003). Collocation refers to the habitual juxtaposition of a particular word with another word or words with a frequency greater than chance (Halliday, 1966). My findings showed that students' writing generally manifested remedial problems which had to do with their inability to use particular collocations correctly. In addition, their developmental problems manifested in the non-use of the collocations needed to convey their ideas in the compositions

they wrote. My suggestions for remediation included drawing more attention to collocations in the teaching of English registers, extensive use of aids to vocabulary learning, and effective use of dictionaries (Taiwo, 2003, 2006, 2007b and 2009a).

Researching cyberspace communication came at a point in my research exploration in 2007. Since then, it has largely defined my research direction. Today, a large percentage of my publications are in this area of research due to the limitless research opportunities available in it for me and the boost it has given to my research profile. In my pursuit of research in cyberspace interaction, I won the prestigious Alexander von Humboldt Foundation Post-doctoral Fellowship, which took me to the University of Freiburg in Germany between July, 2008 and August 2009. I have since then returned to Germany to continue in the pursuit of my research on cyberspace discursive behaviour at the University of Münster.
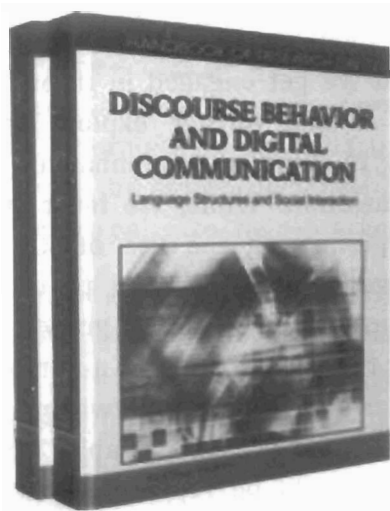
To date, by the grace of God, I have authored, edited and co-edited thirteen books, nine of which are on Computer-mediated Discourse. Also, my investigation of discourse practices took me mainly to the areas of religious, political, medical and market discourse. Specifically I investigated tenor relationships and the use of interrogation in Pentecostal discourse and found that Pentecostal discourse has a highly distinctive style with respect to how social roles and relationships are enacted and how interrogatives are used as markers of discourse control and sustenance by Pentecostal pulpit preachers (Taiwo, 2005b, 2006c, 2007c). In addition, I investigated cultural diversity and multilingualism in Pentecostal discourse (Taiwo, 2008). In my study of political and medical discourses (Taiwo & Salami, 2007, Unuabonah & Taiwo, 2015), I dwelt on the strategies for power enactment and legitimisation. All the papers that arose from these studies reveal the peculiar textual and contextual features of the discourse types.

Mr Vice Chancellor Sir, in 2012, I chaired the local organising committee of a conference organised by my Department, tagged: Ife Language, Literature and Communication Conference (ILLC). The theme of the conference: "Language, Literature and Communication in the Globalised and Digital Age", fell within my research focus. The highly successful conference was held between August 20 and 23, 2013 and it drew participants from institutions all over Nigeria. Selected papers presented at the conference were published in a book titled *Current Linguistic and Literary Issues in Digital Communication in the Global Age*, edited by Professor Segun Adekoya, Drs. Kehinde Ayoola, Yemi Adegoju and my humble self (Adekoya, *et al.,* 2014).

In line with the practice in other parts of the world I have been to, I have introduced Computer-mediated Discourse Analysis (CMDA) as part of EGL 308: Introduction to Discourse Analysis, a course, which I have been teaching for many years. I have also suggested the incorporation of a new course "English Language and Computer-mediated Communication" into our B.A. English language syllabus, which is currently undergoing a review. These will assist the students in understanding the patterns of structure and meaning in the discourses that take place via chat, text messaging, email, mailing lists, web boards, blogs, wikis, virtual worlds, social network sites, and other digital media. In addition, the students will be able to appreciate aspects of socio-cognition related to cyberspace interactions, such as collaboration, disinhibition, engagement, identity, power and impoliteness.

My papers on discursive digital behaviour are mostly part of the pioneering ones, since the online discourse culture as well as the application of discourse analytic methods to online interactions is still relatively new to the Nigerian and other African discourse terrains. My research has brought me in contact with IGI Global, a top publisher of Information Science books, based in New York, USA, which invited me to edit a book

in 2007. The two-volume book: *Handbook of Discourse Behavior and Digital Communication: Language, Structure and Social Interaction* was published in 2010 (Taiwo, 2010h). This book *is* an impressive collection of 56 scholarly papers written by 82 top scholars from different educational institutions in all the continents of the world. It has also become a major reference material for language students in the field of Computer-mediated Communication.

Handbook of Research on Discourse Behavior and Digital Communication: Language Structures and Social Interaction (2 Volumes)

In recognition of my contribution to knowledge in linguistics in general and discourse studies in particular, I have been invited to regularly review papers for some reputable language and communication journals such as *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* (Wiley-Blackwell) and *New Media & Society* (Sage), *Journal of Language Aggression and Conflict* (John Benjamins) and *Digital Studies / Le champ numérique*. I am also currently on the editorial boards of *Linguistik Online* (a long standing online language journal (Germany); *International*

Journal of Language, Society and Culture, (Australia); *Covenant Journal of Language Studies, EKSU Studies in Language and Literature* (ESILL); *Papers in English and Linguistics* (PEL). I have served as editor of my departmental journal, *Ife Studies in English*, and I am currently the Editor of my association's journal, *Journal of English Scholars Association of Nigeria* (JESAN).

Recommendations
Mr Vice Chancellor Sir, beyond the ordinary daily social interactions that we get engaged in through the cyberspace, our university should further explore the potential that technology has to supplement, enhance, or re-design our approach to education. While, we must give credit to this university for pioneering the use of ICT in teaching and research in Nigeria, we will need to catch up with new developments, especially with the growth in our students' population over the years. I am sure a number of us (students and lecturers) are sometimes overwhelmed with our large classes and the limited spaces available. The traditional face-to-face teaching should be replaced with blended learning, which is a combination of e-learning with the traditional classroom methods in order to create a new hybrid methodology. This method will support classroom interactions with digital multimodal assets through the various social media platforms.

I am quite aware that the fear of pedagogy in cyberspace is real among colleagues. However, the reality of our time is that the skills that are valued in education in the highly dynamic world we live in today, as opposed to a few decades ago, require students to be able to collaborate with others and explore their world in order to create, synthesize, interpret, and evaluate

information. The traditional classroom alone can no longer take care of such skills.

We all carry smart phones and laptops about and this gives us potential access to enormous information, which we do not make use of as we ought to. Rather than engaging the cyberspace for non-essential interactions and lamenting the negative sides of the Internet, we can identify and engage the positive and more beneficial ways to interact through it. In addition to providing access to intranet and internet facilities, the Information Technology and Communications Unit (INTECU) can collaborate with the Department of Educational Technology to help the system facilitate how academic staff can use technology to enhance their interactions with students.

Since a good number of young people now practically live their lives on cyberspace, it means that interactions are increasing in the virtual world. Nigerian linguistic researchers, especially sociolinguists, discourse analysts and stylisticians may need to focus more on this relatively novel ways of communicating in cyberspace to draw out peculiar ways non-native speakers of English construct meaning in their interactions. In addition, Nigerian linguists can now turn to the huge reservoir of language data produced by Nigerian users of English for their studies.

Mr Vice Chancellor Sir, the Department of English of this university, to my knowledge, is the largest in any Nigerian university, in terms of students' enrolment, which is not commensurate with the staffing. English is the most desired course in the Faculty of Arts. Most students who could not be admitted to study Law, the natural first course of choice for Arts students, end up in the Department of English. In addition

to the regular students who major in English and those who take English courses as compulsory electives, which runs into about 1,000, lecturers in the Department teach Use of English, which is compulsory for all part one students (usually not less than 5,000). Given the fact that a good number of our graduates end up becoming successful media practitioners is an indication of their keen interest in media and communication. While language is the tool for communicating in cyberspace, the essential practices of communication and the media are equally vital to success in any interaction. I strongly believe that the establishment of a Department of Media and Communication Studies is long overdue in this university. Ours is the only first generation university that does not have such department. The department, when established, will complement the work of Department of English and reduce the pressure for admission into English. It can also collaborate with our department and other language departments to produce media communication experts and drive research in cyberspace communication.

Concluding Remarks

Mr Vice Chancellor Sir, before I conclude this lecture, permit me to acknowledge and appreciate a number of people who have made a great impact on my academic career. I first of all appreciate the Custodian of wisdom, knowledge and understanding, God Almighty, who gave the enabling power to accomplish all I have been able to accomplish. I remain indebted to my academic mentors, Professor Jeffery Gruber (of blessed memory), my B.A. project supervisor; Professor Femi Akindele (of blessed memory), my M.A. supervisor; Dr. Bolaji Aremo, my doctoral supervisor; and Professor Wale Osisanwo, my Postgraduate Diploma in Education (PGDE) project supervisor.

I am eternally grateful to God for blessing me with a loving, caring, prayerful and large-hearted, God-fearing, virtuous woman of courage and honour, and confidant, my wife, Dr. Yetunde Folasade Taiwo, whose birthday incidentally is today. Our wonderful children, Jesutoowo and Jesutomi have been a great source of encouragement to me. I appreciate you for your support and encouragement.

My parents, Mr and Mrs Olakunle Taiwo, both late, were quite supportive. They both believed so much in me that they gave me all I needed to go through my education. I deeply appreciate my wonderful siblings: Temitayo Ope-Oluwa, Akintunde and Gbemisola and their family members for their great support and encouragement. I also appreciate my immediate younger sister, Mobolaji (of blessed memory) and her family for the immense supportive role they played in my life. I also thank my parents-in-law, and my brothers and sisters-in-law for their love and support.

My research on Cyberspace Interaction would not have blossomed this much if not for the generous funding provided by the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation. Beyond the post-doctoral fellowship award I received, the Foundation also donated research equipment, funded my publications and supported my return research visits to Germany. I remain grateful for these lifetime opportunities the AvH gave me. My membership of the Humboldt Family has greatly boosted my research and given me opportunities to network with scholars with similar research interests all over the world.

I am equally grateful to the following people, who helped to shape my research focus, Professor Susan Herring, a foremost professor of Information Science of Indiana University, who gave me useful advice and encouraged her colleagues to contribute to my two-volume handbook; Prof. Dr. h.c. Bernd Kortmann, my academic host at the Department of English, University of Freiburg; and Prof. Dr. h.c. Christian Mair, a very

supportive faculty of the University of Freiburg; Prof. Dr. Ulrike Gut, University of Munster, my second academic host at the Department of English, University of Münster; and Professor David Crystal, a foremost linguist, who gave me the necessary encouragement on my research when I met him in Freiburg in 2008 Summer. Shortly before I met him, his book *Txtng: the Gr8 Db8* was just released and we had some quality time discussing the emerging texting culture in the developed and developing countries, research opportunities and our positions as linguists.

I want to also appreciate all my colleagues and friends from other universities that I have had academic collaborations with, Professor Innocent Chiluwa, my friend, co-author and co-editor of two books (*Computer-mediated Discourse in Africa* and *Pragmatics of Nigerian English in Digital Discourse.* I also deeply appreciate Professor Taiwo Abioye, former Deputy Vice Chancellor of Covenant University, Ota and my colleague in the Department of Languages of the university; Professor Akin Odebunmi of the University of Ibadan a highly dependable friend with whom I have co-edited two books - one on media discourse (2007d) and the other on humour in online discourse (2016b); Professor Tunde Opeibi of the University of Lagos, my co-editor of a book on Digital Civic Engagement (Taiwo & Opeibi, 2016c); my friend and co-editor of a book on understanding discourse strategies (Olateju, Taiwo and Fakoya 2007), Professor Adeleke Fakoya, the Dean, Faculty of Arts, Lagos State University; Dr. Foluke Unuabonah, my former student and co-author now Head, Department of English, Redeemers University; Dr. Akin Adetunji of Emmanuel Alayande College of Education, Oyo (co-editor); and Dr Alexandra Esimaje, Head, Department of English, Benson Idahosa University with whom I have collaborated to organise workshops on academic writing for graduate students. I deeply appreciate Professor David Jowitt, of the University of Jos, a great mentor.

I appreciate my colleagues in the Department with whom I have had academic collaborations: Professors Moji Olateju and Dipo Babalola, Drs Kehinde Ayoola, Akinmade Akande, Niyi Ayeomoni, Mohammed Ademilokun, Eunice Fajobi, Yemi Adegoju, Bukola Alfred, Bunmi Oyebode and Bukola Omigbule. I also appreciate Professor Akin Alao of the Department of History with whom I co-edited a book on African Studies (Alao & Taiwo, 2011) in honour of Professor Toyin Falola. I specially thank all my colleagues in the Department of English, who are too numerous to mention, for the cordial academic and social relationship I have enjoyed with them.

I also appreciate the following graduate students whom I have supervised or who have been part of some of my research projects at one time or the other: Dr. Felicia Oamen, Dr. Bukola Alfred, Dr. Ayo Onanuga, Adegoke Adetunji, Helen Ugah, Jumoke Oyinlade, Seun Eniola, Olamide Eniola, Orevaoghene Agba, and Bukola Feyisitan.

Lastly, members of my spiritual family in the Nigeria Christian Graduate Fellowship (NCGF); The Gideons International in Nigeria; All Souls' Chapel and Living Faith Church have been very wonderful with prayer support, love and good counsel. I appreciate God for giving me such a wonderful family in Christ.

I thank all my friends, family members, students, faculties and staff of our University for gracing this occasion.

Thank you all for coming and listening.

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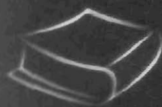
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