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Language and literature**

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# Discursive Strategies and Ideological Construction of IPOB's Agitation for Secession in Online News Comments

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## Abstract

The activities of separatist campaigners which have intensified, especially in the Southern part of Nigeria, have attracted considerable scholarly attention. Most of the studies particularly on the media construction of these secession campaigns have largely focused on coverage, reportage and framing. However, it appears much attention has not been devoted to the discursive strategies and stance of the public on the secessionist agitation. This study, therefore, examines the discursive strategies and ideological approaches of non-social actors to the secession campaign of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) in online news comments. Hundred (100) comments in response to news articles on IPOB agitation and government counter-agitation activities reported between July and September 2021 were purposively selected for analysis. Guided by the ideological strategies of van Dijk, the analysis indicates that the ideological stance of commenters is revealed through strategies such as actor description, polarization, self-glorification, lexicalization among others. The strategies embody ideological prejudices of positive self and negative other presentations which enable the commenters to assert ethnic and regional affiliation, express commitment and justification for self-determination, present grievances and depict wide-ranging attitudes towards the government.

**Keywords:** Ideology, Secession, Agitation, IPOB, News Comments

## 1. Introduction

After 61 years of independence, Nigeria has continually been plagued by secessionist agitations. These separatist campaigners have employed both violent and non-violent strategies to threaten the national unity and territorial integrity of the country. Recently, the frequency, manner and spate of this agitation are increasingly becoming worrisome (Chime-Nganya et al., 2017). If not tackled immediately and expertly, these agitations may result in the disintegration of the country or another civil war (Jacob et al., 2020).

Ajayi and Aladegbola (2013) have described the creation of Nigeria as a "marriage of inconvenience" (p. 44). Various and diverse peoples in terms of religion, language, attitude, tradition, and taste were forcefully welded together for colonial purposes. Aladekomo (2021) contends that the diversity of Nigeria in almost all spheres of life afflicts the country with mistrust and suspicion, unhealthy rivalry, nepotism, tribalism, primordial interests, religious intolerance among others. The consequences have led to perpetual conflict, ethnic cleansing, insecurity, uneven- and under-development, marginalization, political dominance and invariably

secessionist agitations. Threats of secession have become a regular feature of Nigerian politics, which is seen as a veritable tool for the expression of dissatisfaction with the Nigerian state and a platform for demanding adequate political accommodation (Alumona et al., 2019).

As highlighted by Ndukwe et al. (2019), some of the separationist groups that have sprung up over the years in Nigeria include the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), Biafra Zionist Federation (BZF) and Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) in the South-East; the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), Niger Delta People Volunteer Force (NDPFF) and Niger Delta Avengers (NDA) in the South-South; the Yoruba Nation in the South-West; the Middle Belt Federation (MBF) in the Middle Belt; Boko Haram sect in the North-East, notoriously known for the ongoing insurgency perpetrated by seeking, among other things, a separate Islamic Caliphate. It is worrisome that almost every geo-political zone in the country is agitating for secession. This might be traceable to the series of challenges facing Nigeria, ranging from political crises to ethnoreligious killings, military coup d'états, civil war, injustice and inequality resulting from power imbalance (Jacob et al., 2020). All these factors threaten and make national integration seemingly unattainable in Nigeria.

Over the past years, the activities of the current generation of separatist agitators have been further stepped up, especially in the Southern part of the country. In the South-West, there is a clamour for Oduduwa Republic (led by the Yoruba Nation group) and in the South-East, there is renewed agitation for the creation of the Sovereign State of Biafra championed by IPOB. According to these agitating groups, these ethnic nationalities are no longer interested in either constitutional amendment or restructuring. Aladekomo (2021) argues that the secession agitation is not only limited to Southern Nigeria but also some areas of Northern Nigeria. The predominantly Christian indigenous peoples of the southern parts of Northern Nigeria, who are popularly called the Middle Belt, have warned that they would never associate with the Muslim Core North if Nigeria broke up. These are indications that Nigeria's territorial integrity is under threat but, unfortunately, the political elite have not found any practical solution to this challenge (Alumona et al., 2019).

## 2. IPOB and Secessionist Agitations

The Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), “the most popular, most radical and most controversial of all the Biafra Campaign Groups (BCG)” (Chiluwa, 2018), is a group leading the call for the secession of Biafra from Nigeria. It is a secessionist movement based in South-East Nigeria with the aim of restoring the now-defunct Biafra. IPOB was established by Nnamdi Kanu in 2013. Since then, the group has consistently campaigned for an independent country of Biafra, made up of mostly the Igbo ethnic group.

Every group has its reasons for agitating for self-determination (Chukwudi et al., 2019). A number of studies (e.g., Chime-Nganga et al., 2017; Chiluwa, 2018; Chukwudi et al., 2019) have stated that the marginalization of the Igbo people is the major cause of secession agitation of

IPOB. Chime-Nganga et al. (2019) report that Nnamdi Kanu, the leader of the group, laments that the Igbos are not given the opportunity to aspire to become the Inspector General of Police or Chief of Army Staff of the country. He is also worried that life-aiding infrastructure or facilities funded by the federal government are rarely located in the South-East (Ikegbunam & Agudosy, 2020). Moreover, the IPOB leader also stated that there is increasing encroachment of Fulani herders on the farmland of the Eastern Nigerians (Jacob et al., 2020). The feeling of marginalization which emanates from what is construed as a deliberate policy of the Nigerian government to exclude the Igbos from political power continues to fuel the agitation of IPOB for the Biafra nation (Policy Weekly, 2021).

The goal of IPOB is to liberate the Igbo people from the discrimination and marginalization of the Nigerian government. The group aims at pushing for, facilitating and advocating the Igbo people's right to self-determination (Ekpo & Agorye, 2019). IPOB continues to decry the marginalization of the South-Easterners in the social and political structure of the country, as well as economic inequalities and the partial distribution of state wealth. Thus, the group perceives the secession of 'Biafra' from the rest of Nigeria as a permanent solution to the political power exclusion, economic marginalization and the menacing activities of Fulani herders in the East (Policy Weekly, 2021).

Through the use of different strategies such as the media (Radio Biafra and Television), social media and website activities, evangelization, sit-at-home orders, street marches and reaching out to international organisations such as the United Nations (UN) to get international interest, IPOB creates awareness on the plight of their people and make their experiences visible to the world. The major target of the group is to make the younger generation recognize the necessities that drove Igbo people to declare Biafra nation which resulted in the 1967-1970 Nigeria-Biafra War and see the need to support secession (Ikegbunam & Agudosy, 2020).

Despite claiming to be nonviolent, IPOB activities have resulted in the loss of many lives. Policy Weekly (2021) reports that both IPOB militancy and the state repression strategies have led to damaging costs on lives, livelihoods and public utilities. Amnesty International (2016) blamed the Nigerian government which ought to quell the situation for the death of many people. Eze (2019) contends that the Nigerian government seems not to have done enough in taking appropriate measures to douse the situation. Eze (2019) also avers that, instead of bringing the Biafrans to a round table for dialogue, the government resorts to intimidation and violent means through the use of the Nigerian Army. It is estimated that not less than 146 people died in such clashes between secessionist protesters and security operatives in 2016 alone (Ekpo & Agorye, 2018, p. 38). Similarly, between March and June 2021, repressive state strategies led to the death of 115 civilians in the South-East (Policy Weekly, 2021). Nigeria Watch database totals the number of fatalities resulting from the Biafran agitation-related killings between 2006 and 2019 at one thousand one hundred and twelve (1,112) deaths in 72 incidents.

However, despite the arrest and detention of the leader Nnamdi Kanu in July 2021, the activities of IPOB continue to grow intense and violent.

### 3. IPOB and News Comments Discourse

Social actors, whether on terrorism, conflict or secession movement, have always acknowledged the important role played by the mass media. This is because each movement gives much regard to the dissemination and circulation of events and happenings to the public. Osisanwo (2016) maintains that the media not only inform, influence, and educate but also shape the opinion of the audience. The coverage and reportage of the media help to create awareness, make activities or events visible to the world as well as influence the ideological construction of the public. By framing events and conflicts, the media influence the opinions, views and behaviour of the masses (Eze, 2019).

The renewed vigour in IPOB's struggles in 2015 after a short period of relative calm gained publicity mainly through media reportage (Eze, 2019). Though the Nigerian media are faulted for having some lapses in reporting IPOB's agitation in the South-East (Chime-Nganya et al., 2017; Akanni & Ibraheem, 2018), they have extensively reported the activities of IPOB and other groups, and the measures taken by the government against the group, as well as positions of Igbo politicians to Nigerians. Online media, the focus of this study, have made the reportage of Biafra issues quicker and easier. Given that online media makes information circulation faster (Akanni & Ibraheem, 2018), it becomes easier to get news content relating to IPOB and the Biafran cause to the target audience. This allows readers to be updated on the happenings in the South-East region of Nigeria where the secession campaign is more intense.

The unique feature of online media which differentiates it from print media is that online media present easy avenues for feedback. Online news comment sections provide a space for the public to interact with news, express their opinions, and learn about others' views. Henrich and Holmes (2013) assert that commenting in response to online news provides an opportunity for readers to interact with each other or express their agreement or disagreement with the content of the article or other comments. This is a form of participatory journalism that gives the public a medium for expressing their perspectives on current issues. Muhammad (2008) avers that such comments present a case of convergence between traditional media and new media, as well as a novel variety of asynchronous computer-mediated communication (CMC). This shifts the status of news consumers from passive to active readers.

The opportunity to share comments, opinions and ideas on online news articles is one of the ways that the public can participate in national and local issues. Chiluwa (2018) acknowledges that the socio-political and economic interests, as well as events in Nigeria, have helped fuel the formation of virtual communities and online discussion forums. As the consumption of online news is becoming increasingly social and interactive, it is more likely that more and more people will join these forums to debate issues of importance to citizens (Diakopoulos & Naaman, 2011).

Hence, data derived from comments are entirely participant-driven and could reveal the issues that matter to the commenters (Henrich & Holmes, 2013).

Based on this assertion, news comments on the secessionist agitations of IPOB serve as data for this study. Noteworthy is the fact that news commenters interact with news articles on secession agitation based on the common ground of the context and content of the news articles. They often debate and negotiate ideas. Considering the controversial nature of secession discussions, news commenters would likely either support or oppose the movement. However, how they frame or portray this ideological stance has not been given sufficient attention in scholarship. Existing studies have tended to focus more on framing and representation of social actors and reportage of events in the media discourse, but the linguistic tools and discursive strategies deployed by the public (news commenters) in revealing their ideological stance on the agitation have not been explored. This is the gap the present study intends to fill.

Many studies have been undertaken on the media construction of the secession campaign of IPOB, such as those that have considered reportage (Akanni & Ibraheem, 2018), coverage (Chiluwa, 2012; Ikegbunam & Agudosy, 2020; Nwofe, 2019; Onayinka et al., 2020), hate speech (Chiluwa et al., 2020), discourse structure (Chiluwa, 2018; Chukwuere & Onyebukwa, 2018), framing (Chime-Nganga et al., 2017; Eze, 2019; Okeke et al., 2019) among others. Other non-linguistic studies have also been devoted to the socio-economic and political implications of the agitations (Aladekomo, 2021; Abada et al., 2020; Ekpo & Agorye, 2019; Chukwudi et al., 2019). However, it appears that few studies exist on the ideological stance of commenters in news responses on the secession movements. Little attention has been paid to the approaches of non-social actors in news comment discourse which is capable of revealing the ideological inclination of people on IPOB's quest for Biafra nation. Therefore, this study attempts to fill this gap by examining the discourse strategies and ideological approaches of non-social actors to the secession campaign of IPOB in online news comments. In order to achieve this, the study attempts to address the following questions:

- i. What strategies do news commenters deploy to construct their ideologies on the separatist agitation of IPOB?
- ii. What are the implications of these strategies, if any, on national integration?

#### 4. Existing Literature

The activities of IPOB have attracted the interest of scholars in the fields of sociology, journalism and discourse analysis, who have carried out studies on the implications, prospects, representation, reportage and coverage of the activities of the group in the newspaper, social media, website and blogs and other media discourse. A few of the relevant studies are briefly reviewed below.



Realizing the importance of media coverage in conflict management, Chime-Nganya et al. (2017) examine how the North- and South-affiliated media frame the IPOB/Nigeria Army clash in the South-East and its influence on the audience. For the study, they adopted a mixed-method data collection approach. Four national dailies and 385 residents of five states in the South-East were used. The study observed that newspapers feed readers with information on the subject matter, but follow-up details, investigative reporting and interpretations were minimal. As a result, their framing of the IPOB/Nigeria Army clashes tended to be perceived as a conspiracy against the South-East. Similarly, the study of Akanni and Ibraheem (2018) revealed that the reportage of the IPOB/Nigeria Army clashes in selected newspapers lacked objectivity and conflict sensitivity as the papers report the conflict from the lens of the Nigerian government security agencies and officials. This study, in agreement with Chime-Nganya et al. (2017), observes that the reporting does not emanate from sufficient investigation and review of the views of individuals who know the exact reasons for the clash.

Chiluwa (2018) explores discourse stances and ideological positions of IPOB, the Nigerian Government and Igbo political actors in online media discourse. The study compares the discourse produced by the Nigerian government, Igbo politicians and IPOB group, bringing out the implications of the self-determination efforts of the Biafra nation. The study revealed that there are contradictions and counter-ideologies, exaggeration, labelling, linguistic violence and hate speech in the discourse produced by Igbo politicians and IPOB groups, which undermine the achievement of the Biafra nation. The study concludes that the different stakeholders of the Biafra nation are divided against themselves and are therefore incapable of achieving the secession they seek.

In Nwofe (2019), the variations in IPOB protesters' digital media practices and their levels of involvement in the Biafra independence struggle were investigated. The study aimed to understand protesters' digital support roles, motivations, constraints and sources of mobilising information. The researcher contends that the idea of Biafra and the awareness of the activities of IPOB towards the Biafran cause was constituted and made visible to the public sphere through protesters' digital media practices in the services of the IPOB protests and the pervasiveness of Radio Biafra ideological programmes.

Osisanwo and Iyoha (2020) carried out a study on the media representation of the pro-Biafra protest in Nigeria by examining the discourse strategies and ideological inclination of news reports on the 2015 and 2016 Biafra protests. Using four widely read and circulated newspapers, within the framework of Van Leeuwen's representation of social actors and Halliday's Systematic Functional Linguistics (SFL), three representational strategies were discovered. These are protesters as freedom fighters, protesters as economic saboteurs and protesters as law-abiding citizens. The pro-Biafra protesters were represented as violent and unruly, whereas the protesters construe themselves as law-abiding citizens and freedom fighters who must not be treated as terrorists.

This present study deviates from these studies in that it exclusively focuses on the ideological inclination of news commenters on the IPOB secession campaign. It explores the discursive stance and ideological positions of online news commenters and how the discourse produced by them reveals their standpoints on their agitation in Nigeria.

## 5. Theoretical Perspective

This study is underpinned by van Dijk's version of the Socio-Cognitive model of Critical Discourse Analysis. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) primarily focuses on the study of discourse as a social practice with the aim of understanding the power language exercises in society. It attempts to unravel the various ways in which dominant groups construct their ideas and interests in good light through spoken or written language (Lombardi, 2018). The major three approaches that seem to be at the forefront of CDA are Norman Fairclough's (1992, 1995) Social Cultural approach, Teun van Dijk's (1998, 2006) Socio-Cognitive approach, and Ruth Wodak's Discourse-Historical approach (Wodak, 2006; Wodak & Meyer, 2015). This study adopted van Dijk's approach to CDA because it centres on how ideologies are expressed, construed or legitimated by discourse, and serves as a better tool to explore how ideologies are constructed in news comments.

van Dijk defines ideology as a form of social cognition and more specifically as the basic beliefs that underlie the social representations of a social group. In van Dijk's view, ideology not only controls the aims, norms and values of a group but also guides their interpretation of events, and monitors their social practices. van Dijk posits that discourse is a social and cognitive practice. Cognition here represents the totality of goals, values, emotions, sociocultural knowledge or assumptions, and other mental structures owned by individuals or shared by a group of people. It is based on cognition that language users build context models (or mental representations) that influence features of discourse production, reproduction, distribution and consumption or interpretation (Ajiboye, 2013). Therefore, discourse helps to express, reproduce, acquire and confirm ideologies through social practices. It is through the use of language, whether written or spoken that members of a social group share ideologically based opinions (van Dijk, 2000). Thus, every opinion is based on an ideology. Language use in fact depends on, and at the same time influences, how individuals interpret its content, and how they perceive the communicative situation (Lombardi, 2018).

It is important to note that ideology, according to Dijk, is related to a social group. It is a set of beliefs, ideas and opinions collectively shared by a group of people. Hence, there is nothing like individual ideology in his conceptualisation. Ideology consists of shared social beliefs and not of personal opinions. Since personal opinions are not common to a group of people, such cannot be regarded as ideology (van Dijk, 2006). Furthermore, ideology is restricted to groups or social movements because, within the same society or culture, there can be multiple ideologies that cannot be necessarily accepted by everyone. People who share the same ideology form an "ideological group". Hence, we can talk of ideologies among racists, politicians, terrorists,



feminists, secessionist agitators, etc. The ideology of each group can be identified based on the beliefs that are associated with the characteristic properties of the group such as their identity, their position in society, their interests and aims, their relations to other groups, their reproduction and their natural environment.

Based on this, van Dijk (2006) proposes twenty-seven ideological strategies through which the ideology of a group can be revealed. Some of these strategies which are revealed in this study include actor description (portraying “actors” in either positive or negative way), polarization (constructing the in-group positively and the out-group negatively), categorisation (diverting people based on positive and negative attributes), generalization (generalizing for the purpose of prejudice), explanation (giving explanation to provide more information about an opinion), legality (having recourse to the law or regulations to support an argument), evidentiality (presenting some evidence or proof to support claim), exemplification (giving concrete examples to defend a standpoint), victimization (constructing in-group as victims), number game (using numbers and statistics to enhance credibility and objectivity), history as lesson (comparing present situation to earlier events in history), self-glorification (positive self-presentation which involves praising the potential qualities of one own group) and lexicalization (deliberately choosing words that project intended meaning). These ideological strategies guided the analysis of the data.

## 6. Methodology

The data for this study were drawn from selected readers’ comments on news stories on IPOB and other Biafra-related issues which are obtained from the Nigerian online Phoenix News App. The Phoenix online news app was selected for a number of reasons. Firstly, most major online news media in Nigeria (such as *Daily Post*, *The Punch*, *The Guardian*, *The Sun*, *The Vanguard*, *The Nation*, *Premium Times*, *This Day*, *News Direct*, *Sahara Reporters* among other newspapers) upload news content to this app. Secondly, the Phoenix news app gives minute-by-minute updates on articles reporting IPOB and Biafra issues. Furthermore, all readers’ comments on news articles are displayed for public view and above all, news consumers actively interact with the news and other readers on this news platform. These motivated the choice of this app as the source of the data collection.

A total of 30 news articles from four Nigerian national newspapers (namely *The Punch*, *The Guardian*, *The Nation*, and *Vanguard*) posted to the Phoenix News App served as the data for this study. These newspapers were suitable for this study because they are daily newspapers with national coverage. Moreover, they are credible sources of news on all national matters. Specifically, excerpts of comments on news reports on the Biafra agitation and government counter-activities in these newspapers constituted the data for this study. The articles were written between July and September 2021. This three-month period saw a rise in the activities of IPOB as it coincided with when the leader of the group was arrested, detained and tried. Such anti-government activities include the sit-at-home order, the group’s banning of the Nigerian flag

in "Biafra lands", a call for a referendum and a no-election threat in the South-East. A total of 100 comments that are of interest to the study were purposively selected for analysis. The sampled comments are numbered NC1 to NC100 (NC here represents news comments). The analysis is essentially qualitative; thus, it identifies and describes as well as interprets the various cultural and political stances of news commenters on IPOB in relation to the Nigerian government and other ethnic groups, as well as the ideological positioning of commenters.

## 7. Analysis and Findings

This section discusses the ideological stances of news commenters towards secession agitation and the discursive strategies with which these are constructed. Hence, this study adopts the ideological strategies proposed by van Dijk for analysis. The different ideological strategies deployed by comments in taking stances with IPOB's secession agitation are *actor description, polarisation, categorization generalization, explanation, legality, victimization, self-glorification, evidentiality, exemplification and lexicalization*, as discussed below.

### 7.1 Actor Description and Polarisation

According to van Dijk's provisions for analysing discourse, actor description is an ideological strategy that is used to portray actors in either a positive or negative way. Polarization, on the other hand, is a categorisation strategy that constructs the in-group positively and the out-group negatively. In this study, both actor description and polarisation are evident in readers' comments to express attitude, commitment and pass judgment on the actors of the secessionist agitation.

Evident in the readers' comments is the vast use of positive self-presentation and negative other presentations. In the news feedback platforms, polarization strategy presents the innocent, God's people 'Us' and the evil Fulani, terrorist 'They'. Actors of IPOB and those who identify with the secession agitation are made to belong to 'us' in-group, while the federal government and non-supportive Igbo politicians belong to the 'them' out-group.

Commenters use expressions that denote IPOB as 'agitators', 'peaceful', 'freedom fighters', 'innocent' and 'God's people', while those in opposition to the agitation are constructed as 'evil', 'lazybones', 'terrorist', 'miscreants'. NC23 refers to IPOB as 'God's People'. The implication of this is that those who don't support IPOB's agitation are against God. The writers use the collective personal pronoun 'we' in NC24 and the possessive pronoun 'our' in NC33 to give a sense of collectivity, solidarity, commitment and affiliation to the Biafran cause.

**NC23:** Good news. God shall speak for His people IPOB.

**NC13:** IPOB are agitators of \*\*\*\*\*. They refuse to die the coward's death by allowing your terrorist Fulani's herdsmen rape and kill them in their own land. Your conscience is dead you criminals. All hail Biafra

**NC8:** Effort in futility. Wicked people. you leave terrorists to focus on freedom fighters

Its is 1 and only ESN any other armed group is sponsored by DSS and Malami, Period!!!. An avenue to move in and kill innocent Igbos becos we've chosen our leaders.

**NC11:** Biafra is real. The earlier these lazy northern bones gets it into their skulls, the better

**NC 24:** We the Innocent people u are referring to are very much COMFORTABLE with the SIT @ HOME. What is then your problem over that Aboki? You don't want to declare Sit @ Home in the north to stop the banditry, BH, Herdsmen terrorism, ISWAP and all other manner of terrorism. We are \*\*\*\*\* to stop bad governance in South East

**NC33:** It is all a ploy to give our peaceful IPOB a bad name I can't imagine how a group of people who move around with branded T-shirts, flag and horn speakers shouting for \*\*\*\*\* and self-determination are tagged terrorist group while Fulani herders who go about killing and maiming people in their thousands are described as bandits. It's a mystery to any right-thinking person.

While reacting to a story on the federal government offering a federal appointment to Kanu in exchange to end IPOB agitation, the writer of NC46 describes two groups of people, namely the common man who lives in hell on earth and the politicians who enrich themselves to the detriment of the common man. This is then likened to Kanu who is of a different species, a liberator and deliverer who has come to deliver everybody, the devilish politicians inclusive. The commenter aligns with the liberator and deliverer that is within the 'Us' group who has come to deliver everybody from the "Them" devilish politicians. One common feature is the use of five to seven asterisks to represent Biafra. It is either to foreground it or liken it to the ambition for Biafra to illumination, like the stars.

The actor's description of 'Kanu' as a different species is out of personal judgement, unlike other politicians who will abandon their people. Mentioning the full name of the actor is meant to give the impression that the commenter is well acquainted with him. The commenter tends to see him as a messiah who has come to save everybody, irrespective of ethnic affiliation. The comment further reflects the social, political and economic position of the common man and politicians in the country through the metaphorical use of demeaning phrases. The use of 'dungeon', 'prison' and 'existing hell' to describe Nigeria for a common man in which that same country is a place where the politicians can 'fatly enrich themselves' reflects a clear contradiction that underscores the state of affairs of the country. In Nigeria, politics has become a lucrative profession where it is easier to become a millionaire overnight. The total monthly emolument of a politician, say a senator, is enough to pay the salary of three hundred and sixty people if they are placed on a monthly salary scale of a hundred thousand naira each. This way, the common man may struggle to live, while politicians continue to amass wealth. However, few commenters who expressed their disapproval of IPOB activities describe the group and its actors as terrorists, fugitives and touts. This is seen in NC98 who describes Kanu as a fugitive who will soon die.

**NC46:** it is not a crime to seek for \*\*\*\*\*. Nigeria is a dungeon, a prison, a horse of horror, an existing hell on earth for the common man. But to you politicians, it's a place of fatly enriching yourself to the detriment of the poor masses. you politicians think Onyendu Mazi Nnamdi Kanu is like one of you: No way! He is a different specie, a liberator, a \*\*\*\*\* fighter, fighting for the liberation of everybody, including you devilish politicians. He wants to deliver all of you too.

**NC98:** I wonder why you defend a soon to die albino fugitive and his tout supporters. Lets call a spade a spade. IPOB is a terrorist group.

In this same vein, commenters who show affiliation with the in-group are quickly recognized as 'brother', 'true son of Igbo land', and 'correct man'. These words show that the commenter belongs in the in-group since they portray solidarity.

**NC15:** You are a true son of Igbo land. Don't mind them

**NC17:** Honestly, my brother. Half of this government presidential official is pure terrorist

**NC21:** You are ur father's son

**NC62:** Correct man

**NC71:** I agree with you dear

However, the federal government and non-supportive Igbo politicians are labelled as 'terrorists', 'criminals', 'evil', 'animals', 'imposters' 'deadly reptiles', 'political harlots', 'slaves', 'miscreants'. Commenters are very direct and hostile when describing the out-group. There is a resort to verbal abuse, labelling and direct condemnation of the out-group. News writers often employ the strategy of voice management to avoid taking a position. One who says what readers find derogatory or that portrays IPOB in a negative light is verbally attacked. NC87 below constructs the out-group as 'greedy' and 'corrupt' who will 'melt away like a candle'. Distancing is a discursive strategy that is used by the commenters to detach themselves from the non-supportive Igbo politicians. They are referred to as 'those thieves', 'those shameless South-East governors', 'those slaves', 'those politicians' in order to dissociate themselves from them.

**NC1:** Imagine an imposter giving our leader an appointment in the zoo when Biafra is already here. This Fulani is a huge joke.

**NC5:** Evil president, self-determination is now terrorism while killer herdsmen and book [Boko] haram are not.

**NC10:** We are not terrorist, Abuja is the sit of Fulani Terrorist government our concern is that fulanigeria should leave Biafra to form our own country

**NC87:** Never mind, when God shall arise to save His people, all those greedy and corrupt leaders will melt away like candle. In this struggle, both the Yorubas and the Ndigbo are one and should work as one for victory to happen.

**NC69:** I wonder why the hell Zoo federal government rushed and proscribed IPOB as a terrorist group and have a deaf ears on the activities of deadly evil armed Fulani herdsmen

**NC32:** The SIT AT HOME must be observed in full. Nobody should listen to those thieves. they only concerned of themselves and they only concerned of themselves and their stupid political ambition. Our Igbo governors and Ohaneze are bunch of miscreants and idiots.

**NC41:** Don't Worry. One day; the hunter will be hunted. Umati (Umahi) and Uzodinma are selling their people to the Fulani herdsmen murderers and their robot president.

**NC70:** And yet the government and Yoruba media continue to call them terrorist. But it was those shameless South East governors who first called them hoodlums and terrorist so the yorubas are not really guilty if you ask me.

**NC89:** Those slaves from Igbo land are speaking to their masters in the north. Animals in human garment

**NC90:** Stop referring to those politicians as Ndi Igbo, mad politicians and evil government. Ndi ialas

Actor description and polarization reveal the commitment and affiliation of the in-group towards the Biafran cause, while resentment of the out-group is conspicuously displayed. News comments engage with the content of the news to give their responses. When IPOB was declared a terrorist group, readers took it as a sentimental decision of a president who appears to be against the South-East. News commenters felt herdsmen and bandits terrorizing the country should have long been declared as terrorists and not a group in the East who is 'fighting for the liberation of the people'. Hence, there is a shared prejudice against the president and the people from the northern part of the country. This is evident in the positive self-presentation of the IPOB group and the negative other presentation of the federal government. The motive was to deliberately ridicule the federal government and make other readers see the government as the source of the problems in the country.

## 7.2 Categorization and Generalization

As illustrated by Dijk (1998), it is obvious that in times of conflict and struggle, the in-group will be categorised and given positive attributes, while the out-group will be negatively characterised. The categorization of 'Us' in-group and 'Them' out-group makes it easier to generalise the negative characteristics of the out-group. When the negative acts or events of the out-group are generalized, it serves as the basis of labelling and prejudices. van Dijk (1998, cited in Ajiboye, 2013) argues that instead of providing facts, language users make generalisations to formulate prejudice and emphasise negative characteristics. In the course of analysing the data, readers and commenters who show disavowal or criticism of IPOB acts are quickly collaboratively constructed as 'Fulani', 'Criminal', 'imbecile', 'terrorist' (the out-group) by the supporters of IPOB (the in-group). This is seen in NC78 below where, in reaction to the news that Ohanaeze Ndigbo (Pan-Igbo Socio-Cultural Organisation) blames IPOB for crises in the South-East, the writer generalised people who comment against secession as paid criminals, bred by the Nigerian government. The writer introduced the modality of certainty 'must' to intensify the determination of the Biafrans to go whether or not it is approved by the government. The writer

of NC63 generalized the northern people as 'unlettered', 'stupid' and 'poor'. The use of 'his brother' as an apposition of 'his ministers' by the writer of NC18 suggests that the ministers of the president are more of his kinsmen. The commenter wants to prove a point that the president is biased in the appointment of his cabinet members.

**NC53:** Your people are here polishing our shoes. ur there claiming leadership, our country is poor cos is ruled by the poor north

**NC6:** We the Innocent people u are referring to are very much COMFORTABLE with the SIT @ HOME. What is then your problem over that Aboki?

**NC4:** We are not terrorist, Abuja is the sit of Fulani Terrorist government our concern is that fulanigeria should leave Biafra to form our own country

**NC63:** Fulani people are the most stupid race in the world. Do your findings

**NC18:** Oga, No foreign powers, Biafra and his ministers, his brothers have divided Nigeria already.

**NC46:** IPOB are agitators of \*\*\*\*\*. They refuse to die the coward's death by allowing your terrorist fulani's herdsmen rape and kill them in their own land. Your conscience is dead you criminals. All hail Biafra.

**NC9:** Most of these northern people are unlettered; that is why they don't know what qualifies someone or group as a terrorist/terrorists. They should leave their nomadic life and go to school.

**NC78:** All you seeing here commenting against Ipob are agents paid by Nigerian government. Nigerian Government beard criminals. Their celebrate thieves, looters, killers. Biafrans must go weather you like it or not

**NC14:** Babagana, whichever way, you fulanis are the sponsors of insurgency and banditry in Nigeria, whether they bought them Pakistan, Libya, Senegal, Niger or Sudan, it is just the same.

**NC16:** That is why I keep saying it and will not stop saying any Igbo man believing in Buhari is an irredeemable complicated imbecile. Buhari is yet to and not ready to pronounce terror Fulani herders rated globally as terrorist group, rather grooms them in presidential warm welcome package. But IPOB, terrorist and east red zone... Buhari is the real law breaker and chief crisis master-minder

It appears the fight is against the president who has been accused of undue sentiment and favouritism in that the majority of his appointments came from Northern Nigeria, his ethnic origin. Hence, anybody who does not support the secessionist agitation is either from the north, a Fulani, criminal or terrorist. These comments may be attributed to the number of atrocities that have been instigated not only in the north by Boko Haram but also unjust killing, kidnapping and banditry in other parts of the country by some herdsmen who are alleged to be Fulani men, a situation which the federal government has not been able to provide a practical solution to. This propels the commenters to label the out-group as Fulani, terrorist or Boko Haram. As a matter of fact, Fulani is used by the commenters to abusively construct the out-group irrespective of their ethnic backgrounds.



Another instance of generalisation is used to express bias and sentiments when the writer of NC39 below remarks that Nigerians are traitors. The overgeneralization here is a result of the Igbo's sentiments towards the north as the cause of Nigeria's problem and the belief that the Yorubas are betrayers. This is reinforced by the examples from the writers of NC85 and NC86 who attempt to justify their lack of trust in the Yoruba ethnic group.

**NC39:** Nigerians are traitors. Just as the minister of interior is persuading governors to kill inmate. if anyone do it, that governor have kill his/her career just as Adam Edo Ex governor have kill his own. Boko Haram have been pardon and give them work after many home have been delete by them. The blind termite did not talk, now is the time for the animals to advise a trap for governors.

**NC85:** lol.. hahaha my brother... Yoruba is like baba set... they don't love Igbo at all.... they will be saying we are at your back but when the time comes... u will not see them... I no them.. I have a boyfriend and girlfriend from Yoruba. all they say is bad thin against Igbo people.

**NC86:** The problem is not from Igbos, rather is from Yoruba. I've live there and see the kind of hatred they have in igbos is too much, but I still believe God'll help us.

In response to the suggestion of a commenter that the Igbos and Yorubas should work together as a team to agitate for secession, both NC85 and NC86 use examples to prove that the Yorubas do not like the Igbos and cannot be trusted. While this is a hasty assertion, it reveals the mistrust, suspicion, and contempt that is nurtured within the country. The Igbos do not trust the Yorubas and the Yorubas feel the Northerners are criminals. The ruled do not trust the rulers and even within the Igbos, there is cynicism. The writer of NC99 describes '*Joe Igboke*' [Igbokwe], an Igbo person, as an '*Igbo slave to his Yoruba masters eating crumbs from Afonjas*' because, in several news items, he has always described the actions of the IPOB group as inimical to the development of the eastern region of Nigeria. Any attempt by anyone to calm the tension is interpreted as an act of betrayal and the person is seen as a willing tool in the hands of the presidency. Attitude markers such as 'dead cow', 'animal brain', 'brainless entity' are used to describe such out-group. As such, enmity continues to linger. The lexical choices in NC67 ('cancerous' and 'leprous') are significant in establishing how over-generalisation with regard to ethnicity has become a dangerous disease in the country. 'Cancer' is a terminal disease and 'leprosy' is a contagious disease. The use of the two diseases together provokes the imagery of detestation and the generalization attitude of the commenters. However, the commenter himself is guilty of generalization as he considers that all Igbos suffer from 'ingratitude'.

**NC99:** If you watch closely, this Joe Igbokwe must be from Imo state. Those people are not only betrayals in the east. Igbokwe is forever happy to be an Igbo slave to his Yoruba masters eating crumbs from Afonjas. Big shame to Igbokwe he will be dumbfounded the manner Igbos will beat his Yoruba master to their own game and shatter this country called Zoo into pieces

**NC67:** Are you surprised at their myopic and low-thinking level? To them, every muslims from the north is Fulani and because of the cancerous and leperous ignorance, they treat people from that region with animosity, while their people are retained, offered jobs, patronized and warmly received in the north. Igbo is synonymous to ingratitude in Nigeria.

Through categorisation and generalisation, readers can express bias, sentiments and prejudices against the president, northern counterparts and others who do not associate with the Biafran cause. Without any proof or evidence to link the out-group with the Boko Haram group or Fulani Herdsmen, the in-group baselessly categorised and generalised the out-group as terrorists and murderers. This is a deliberate action meant to demonstrate resentment towards President Buhari's administration. These strategies also reflect the negative mindset of the people of the country towards one another and explicitly underscore the stance towards the country and its people.

### 7.3 Explanation and Legality

In order to convince other news readers that IPOB is not a terrorist group or to justify their activities, news commenters make conscious efforts to explain to fellow readers the philosophy, modus operandi of IPOB (the in-group) and reasons behind their actions. This is a strategy van Dijk (2006) describes as Explanation and Legality. These strategies are used by the in-group to make a standpoint on the rightfulness of their acts. This is seen in NC37 who attempts to demonstrate that the insistence of IPOB against elections in the South-East came as a result of the political dominance of Fulanis and the consequent relegation of the Igbos to the background. This has also been highlighted by the group's leader, Nnamdi Kanu, who has consistently complained that the Igbo are marginalized in the economic and political spheres. The writer's use of 'moron' to describe those who want the election to be held could be to demean their level of reasoning in failing to see their argument. NC58 in his explanation summed up the social, economic and political realities of the country to prove that the insistence on no election by IPOB is justifiable. The use of 'clamouring' presupposes that IPOB is placing a demand on the country to address their concern. It does this by presenting some of the vices that are not uncommon in Nigeria based on the shared sociocultural knowledge and the kind of country IPOB hopes to build. The commenter, however, hedges on IPOB's no-election order. The use of 'suppose' indicates that the commenter is not sure whether IPOB's ideas would work.

**NC37:** With the Fulani terrorist dominating our national legislative, executive and judiciary power, morons still preach election as if it will solve our problems. Conducting zonal politics without national appointments and representatives is political boo boo. So, ndigbo want Biafra because all the previous elections have done is no good but harm

**NC44:** Gentlemen, the violent and insecurity we are witnessing today in most parts of this country is a result of act of negligence by the federal authorities for failing to respect the principle of federal character as enshrined by the

constitution as well as lopsided appointment which the eastern politicians fails to condemned rather they kept quiet as if nothing is happening, but now as it stand thing has fallen apart where the center can no longer hold, thereby cumulating to civil disobedient agitation

**NC58:** Is Nigeria a country for the first place, the answer is capital NO..... and what they IPOB is clamouring is a country where justice, equality and fair play will be the order of their activities not a country fill of nepotism, deceit, injustice, looting, selfishness, cheating killing of innocent people, tribalism and all evil practice is their culture and tradition like Nigeria. By right there suppose not to be an election

**NC88:** Point of correction, IPOB was never proscribed. Justice Ademola in his honourable sitting discharge and acquit IPOB on terrorism charge likewise Justice Binta Nyako discharge six charges against the group with terrorism among stressing that though they may not be registered in Nigeria that doesn't make them unlawful as they are recognized in the world as law abiding indigenous people or group so be guided

**NC82:** This a welcome ruling, IPOB is not a terrorist Group and will never be, its out of hatred FG levels IPOB terrorist just bcs BH was called terrorist organization and let me tell you, it wasn't even FGN that labeled BH terrorist, it was from international community. FGN forget to know that world body know better which organisation are terrorist. Had been IPOB is a terrorist group as claim by Nigerian government long ago world would have dealt with them. Do not be misguided

**NC53:** one thing that is clear that is the fear of unknown. The Igbos are tired of this democratic dispensation. They want power to shift but against quote system. It's a demand for inclusiveness in governance not in work force.

However, the explanations given to validate IPOB's acts do not clearly show how the expected change can be brought about by the group. Appraisals of the group were given in the feedback platforms but how these actions and inactions would affect the needed change is not explicated. The emphasis is more on the 'what and why,' not 'how'. It could then be said that commenters may have an understanding of the factors that led to the rise of IPOB and their objectives based on shared social knowledge, but they are unable to effectively explicate how certain acts of the in-group contribute to the achievement of Biafra

**NC57:** We are in 21 century, not in the 80s. Anyone still living in the past should wake up or he will be discussing dead issues. We are blaming the North but is north presently at peace? Katsina, the home state of our leader has been in serious security problems. Talk of the entire north east who are being killed on daily basis. We are victims too. Lets all work together as a nation

Conversely, the commenter in NC57 justified the need to work together as a nation to overcome Nigeria's problems as he argues that the northern states who are blamed by IPOB supporters also experienced the same challenges of insecurity and bad leadership.

## 7.4 Victimisation

Victimisation is a strategy used to construct the in-group as victims (van Dijk, 2006). News commenters use this strategy to construct the Igbo people as the real victims of the government's policies and administrative strategies. NC64 makes a successful attempt at drawing attention to the political marginalization and victimisation of the Igbo people. It begins with the negative markers 'never' and 'destiny destroyer' which refer to the political career of the Igbo people in Nigeria. This is to make readers feel Nigeria is not giving the Igbos enough friendly environment to soar politically, justifying their call for secession. This has been the usual outcry that Igbos are only allowed to occupy a few not-so-important positions at the national level. NC93 claims that in the recent appointment of judges of a federal high court, no Igbo man, out of the 27 judges, was selected.

**NC64:** The election that Igbo man will never win in Nigeria, he will win abroad. Just to prove a point that Nigeria is a destiny destroyer for Biafrans.

**NC93:** Look at the appointment of judges done recently. 27 judges were appointed and no single Igbo man was among them...

The writer of NC89 presented the Igbos as animals that are being treated badly by the government through the instrument of the military. The verbs 'ride', 'chase' and 'kill' are deployed to appeal to the emotion of other commenters that they are victims of the government's harsh policies. Also, the writer of NC81 claims that the Igbos 'feed the nation'. This is from the presupposition that crude oil which the eastern part of the country is blessed with constitutes one of the major sources of revenue generation for Nigeria. It further explains that despite this, 'they feed on remnants'. This presents a picture of where the federal government, dominated by the northerners, takes the lion's share, while they, the owners, have to depend on the government for survival. This is based on a shared knowledge of the revenue allocation formula in Nigeria.

**NC81:** Since when have we seen federal projects, no access road, electricity bill over, house rent, no portable water, no job opportunity, no industry, what have we gained before that our mind will drift away when the country's means of survival is within us, am ashamed when we feed the nation and come back to eat the remnants. Who does that?

**NC84:** The FG hasn't had any plan of development for the southeast from the beginning citing 5% poll as an excuse but with serious secret plans to snatch their ancestral land and it over to a certain tribe more preferred to it (FG) but e no go work by God's grace

**NC89:** The federal government is using federal security agencies to push for the Fulani agenda. As if proscribing IPOB is not enough, military men ride our homes,

chase us and kill us like animals and you are there talking about unity. Nigeria is a failed state

Victimization strategy with the aid of number game reflects reasons the 'in-group' commenters see separation as a solution to the marginalization and discrimination of the government which represents the out-group. Commenters attempt to show how they are being victimized in order to win the sympathy of readers.

**NC57:** .....Talk of the entire north east who are being killed on daily basis. We are victims too. Lets all work together as a nation

To the NC57, the Igbo people are not the only victims of the fallout of the problems of Nigeria. Northern people too are victims of incessant killing and it is only by working together that the victims would be able to overcome the problems peculiar to all of them as Nigerians.

### 7.5 Self-glorification

Positive self-presentation may be implemented in various forms and one of them is self-glorification. Self-glorification, as a form of positive self-presentation, is a strategy that emphasizes the positive attributes of the in-group by making reference to or praising the potential qualities of one's own group. Self-glorification can introduce ideological orientations into discourse (van Dijk, 2000).

In the act of positive self-presentation, the commenters glorify the positive characteristics of the Igbo people (in-group). Positive references to and praise of the group's resources, intelligence, business acumen, and ecology are evident in news comments. The commenters believe the major reason the federal government find it very difficult to allow separation is because of the wealth in their zone in terms of resources, personnel and intelligence. The writer of NC65 regarded Nigerians as 'Unity Beggar[s]' for not being willing to allow Biafra to separate despite labelling Biafran agitators terrorists. Northern elders are described as 'pretenders' in NC22. The writer sees the eastern part as the zone that 'feed[s]' the north and if Nigeria should separate, there will be nobody to feed them. NC28 takes pride in describing the Igbos as 'transformers' 'investors' 'innovators', and as people who have the best technological and medical personnel. To these commenters, Nigerians are aware of this potential, although they are unwilling to acknowledge this, which is why they do not want the separation to succeed.

**NC65:** It is like there is a demon of 'shamelessness' in anyone that says he is a proud Nigerian. U say Biafrans are terrorists, Biafrans say we want to leave Nig, Still, Nigns are crying to live in the same country with terrorists. Does it not tell you that Nigns are 'Unity Beggars' very simple.

**NC22:** Northern elders are pretenders. look at the people that oppose ordinary restructuring for fear of hunger, now parade themselves as now ready to their feeder go, who will now feed them? \*\* PRETENDERS!!!

**NC56:** If you are not benefiting anything from Igbo people, why don't you people allow them to go and you people were afraid for them to go, are they your slaves?

If not for Igbo intelligence, much more of our daily consumables will be imported. We arrange everything at Aba there

**NC28:** My brother, please don't be concerned about South South issue. Ghana is a small nation with great thinkers. We Igbos are capable of transforming desert to living place, making kobo to become millions notes. We have the best doctors, engineers, economist

**NC74:** NIGERIA doesn't merit Igbos. Igbos are supposed to be pampered. People advocating to keep us together not do so out of love but the love of our wealth (oil). If this is not there, they will be the one fighting for separation.

To heighten this sense of self-glorification, commenters can employ exaggeration by depicting the in-group as the 'engine room' of the country. They see it as the reason government cannot tolerate the secession request. This reflects the belief of the Igbos as being self-sufficient and the motivating factor for intensifying the agitation. The reaction is based on the text produced by the news writers.

## 7.6 Evidentiality and Exemplification

Evidentiality is a strategy that presents some evidence or proof to support an opinion. This may be a reference to authority figures or institutions. Exemplification, on the other hand, is giving concrete instances often in the form of a short story or illustration to establish a standpoint (Dijk, 2006). News commenters who belong to the in-group are eager to prove that IPOB is a freedom-fighting organisation as against the terrorist label they were given by the government. NC88 refers to the court verdict that discharges and acquits IPOB of all terrorism charges. The writer, using the court order, presents the group as a law-abiding group as against the conception of the government. Another writer (NC30) alludes to the Bible. The example given from the Bible is to prove that if separation can happen in the Bible, it can also happen in Nigeria with dialogue and negotiation. The writer gave an example from the Bible to create the impression he wants.

**NC88:** Point of correction, IPOB was never proscribed. Justice Ademola in his honourable sitting discharged and acquit IPOB on terrorism charge likewise Justice Binta Nyako discharge six charges against the group with terrorism among stressing that though they may not be registered in Nigeria that doesn't make them unlawful as they are recognized in the world as law-abiding indigenous people or group so be guided

**NC30:** Separation is not a crime, God supported oga Abraham when he separated from his nephew Lot, his elder brother's son. Because conflict between the servants. so something greater than conflict in Nigeria needed to be given serious attention: there is need to sit and discuss how and when the peaceful separation will take place as did Abraham and his brother Lot. This is the will of God for this country. Genesis 13: 1-13



## 7.7 Lexicalisation

Lexicalisation is a deliberate choice of words that projects the intended meaning. News commenters use lexical items deliberately to create a clearer picture of their point, express their resentment and paint a vivid picture of what they feel Nigeria is to other readers in order to shape or share ideas.

Many metaphorical expressions directly compared Nigeria to a 'Zoo', 'hell fire', 'satanic country', and 'Babylon'. These comparisons are to portray Nigeria as a place that is not conducive to living:

**NC2:** You must be an ignorannumu for comparing Netherland with the Zoo where Fulani bandits supported by the government keep killing and kidnapping helpless citizens.

**NC9:** Very soon, Biafra will go whether the Zoo like it or not we are going forward.

**NC26:** We have rejected everything about your useless satanic country long before now. Biafra is moving there.

**NC35:** Biafra for life, all hail BIAFRA. The Almighty God is coming to punish Nizooria. Jah kingdom shall rise and Babylon must fall. they refer to.

**NC58:** He is contesting because finland is like heaven compare to Nigeria which is hell fire. Where is your sense? No election, period!!!!

Also, some in-group commenters tend to refrain from using the word 'Nigeria'. Rather than refer to the country by its name, the metaphorical choice 'zoo' is used. This is even inflected on some occasions to 'zoogeria', nizooria.....'. This is to compare Nigeria with a lawless society where citizens are treated like animals. Such references can also be seen in NC2, NC9, V26, NC35 and NC58. NC2 attempts to paint a pathetic situation where Nigerian citizens are helpless.

The metaphor in NC94 insinuating that the 'youth is dead' is a powerful expression and at the same time a contradiction. The deliberate reference to death implies the youths are lifeless and inactive. The commenter creates a picture that there is rampant suffering among the youths which has rid them of the fear of death because the bigger death has killed them. This could be the reason NC58 compared Nigeria to 'hell fire'. The comparison of Nigeria with the raging fire of hell suggests that Nigeria is not a conducive place to live. The use of exclamation at the end of the sentence might denote shouting, fatigue and tiredness of the inhabitants to tolerate the heat.

**NC94:** let them keep on holding him and be opening the eyes of the youth people are suffering u people should believe it or not, if care is not taken, what will happen to this country our military boys will run because d youth is 'dead' already and reason y they fear military is because of death. Army cannot save us anymore.

Also, there is a repetition and praise of Biafra. Extracts below show the words that commenters used to praise Biafra after they have passed their comment. This is to reiterate their commitment to self-determination and express their hope in Biafra.

**NC72:** BIAFRA, THE LAND OF THE RISING SUN

**NC34:** Biafra, forever we stand

**NC73:** all hail Biafra

**NC47:** Long live ndigbo, long live Biafra

**NC28:** Biafra must come

**NC19:** Biafra is light of Africa

In analysing the data, 'Biafra must come' takes the highest frequency. The use of the modality 'must' expresses a certain perception of certainty and determination for the cause.

The usual slogan 'united we stand, divide we fall,' is inversely arranged by NC77 in order to create a special effect.

**NC77:** 'in Nigeria, divided we stand, united we fail/fall'

This is to create a picture of Nigeria's current situation. The rearrangement is to portray that Nigeria is presently in a state of division and every attempt to bring peace has failed.

NC76 deliberately uses the word 'commanded' to signify the power of the IPOB group to tell people what to do. Despite participation in elections being a civic duty, the commenters obviously see the IPOB order as more powerful and legal than the government. He represents it as an 'order from above' to create the impression that such an order supersedes civil obligations and cannot be contested either by citizens or the government.

**NC76:** we are not saying that Nigerian election should not hold but Biafra will sit-at-home as commanded. Order from above

The reference to death is not only used for humans but non-human attributes. NC66 personifies 'unity' and declares it dead in Nigeria years ago. Capitalization of the word 'UNITY' indicates its importance and the enormity of the vacuum its absence has created in the country. This is obvious in the frequent killings that have bedevilled Nigeria.

**NC66:** UNITY died many decades ago. Biafra is the answer

There is the use of code-switching from English to Igbo and Igbo to English. This is often used by Igbos to show their identity as 'Ndigbo' and affirm their solidarity. Also, one common feature is the use of seven asterisk marks to represent Biafra. Some commenters do not write the word Biafra as seen in samples like 'IPOB are agitators of \*\*\*\*\*', '.... shouting for \*\*\*\*\* and self-determination', and 'it is not a crime to seek for \*\*\*\*\*'. The discourse strategy suggests a presupposition that the interactants are already familiar with what is being talked about. The use of asterisks to represent 'Biafra' presupposes that the word has different meanings depending on the context, or depending on the interpretation given by the reader.

## 8. Conclusion

This study has examined the strategies that news commenters use in unfolding their ideological positioning in the secession agitation that is championed by the Indigenous People of Biafra

(IPOB) in the South-Eastern part of Nigeria. Analysis revealed that the ideological strategies through which news commenters can overtly take stances include actor description, polarization, categorisation, generalization, explanation, legality, evidentiality, exemplification, victimization, self-glorification and lexicalization. News commenters engage with the content of the news to give their responses. The reaction is based on the text produced by the news writers. Each news item triggers the comments given by the readers. There are clear instances of positive self-representation and negative 'other' representation. The in-group 'Us' is categorized as 'innocent', 'God's People', 'agitators', and 'liberators', while the out-group 'they' are 'terrorists', 'criminals' and 'imposters'. In the feedback platforms, members of the in-group use negative terms to describe the members of the out-group as well as emphasize 'our' good qualities and emphasize 'their' bad deeds. Through these stance-taking strategies, commenters assert ethnic and regional affiliation, express commitment and justification for self-determination, present grievances and depict their perception of the policies of the government.

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