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SOCIAL MEDIA HATE SPEECH: A SOCIO-PRAGMATICS INVESTIGATION

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Abstract

This study focused on identifying, categorizing, and analyzing hate expressions prevalent on social media in Nigeria. Through the use of an internet-based application, the study purposively gathered twenty (20) utterances and two (2) songs containing hate-related content from the period of 2014 to 2023. These samples were sourced from two digital platforms: X (formerly Twitter) and TikTok. Three primary themes of hate speech were identified: ethnic-motivated hate speech, religious-motivated hate speech, and politically-motivated hate speech. Ethnic-motivated hate speech emerged as the most dominant category, accounting for 42.3% (n = 11) of the collected data, while politically-motivated hate speech was the least represented at 26.9% (n = 6). Applying the Socio-Pragmatics framework alongside the Hate Speech Act theories to interpret the data, the study highlighted distinct linguistic and contextual features that characterize hate speech. Furthermore, findings revealed that hate expressions were strategically utilized by social media users to demean, dehumanize, or silence individuals/groups targeted by such utterances. It concluded that hate expressions are deliberately crafted to inflict significant emotional and psychological harm on their targets, thereby reinforcing a sense of subordination. Additionally, the recurring use of hate expressions was linked to their function as identifiers or labels for distinguishing concrete entities.

Keywords: Social Media, hate Speech, Nigeria, Socio-Pragmatic, Investigation

Introduction

In today's world, the widespread increase of social media hate speech presents a significant challenge that knows no boundaries and permeates numerous aspects of society. Grasping the



seriousness of this issue demands a deeper exploration of its origins and context. Hate speech, as a harmful element within the complex framework of human communication, undermines societal harmony at its core. Characterised by expressions that degrade, discriminate, or provoke violence based on attributes such as race, religion, ethnicity, gender, or other factors; it spreads its influence across diverse cultures and regions globally. Furthermore, the global rise in hate speech is driven by a web of interlinked factors, each playing a distinct role yet interconnected in impact. Social divisions and polarization, highlighted by events such as the 2017 Charlottesville rally, reveal underlying societal fractures (Holmes, 2018). Political turbulence and authoritarian regimes, as observed in the Rohingya crisis in Myanmar, illustrate how leaders can exploit hate speech to fuel persecution and humanitarian disasters. Additionally, economic inequalities, exemplified by the Eurozone crisis in Greece, often lead to the scapegoating of vulnerable groups, like immigrants, intensifying the prevalence of hate speech (Hatano, 2023). As the world grapples with the challenges of the 21st century, the spread of hate speech is intensified by the swift flow of information through both traditional media and the expansive digital landscape. Platforms designed to foster connection have instead become hubs for hostility, escalating the global reach and influence of hate speech. Technological progress, especially in social media, significantly contributes to the amplification of hate speech. The Christchurch and Mosque shootings in New Zealand highlight how digital platforms can be misused to disseminate extremist ideologies and incite violence. Similarly, historical grievances, like German Nazi War of 1945, the 20th Century genocide in Southwest Africa, the Nigerian Civil War in 1967, the Balkans during the 1990s, the Rwandan genocide of 1994 demonstrate how hate speech can tap into collective trauma, igniting widespread conflict and aggression, making hate speech a global concern (Ayeni, 2024). Hate speech remains a pressing global issue, yet it is notoriously challenging to define with precision. There is no universal agreement on what constitutes hate speech, how it is identified, and how it is classified. Although numerous studies (Anderson, & Lepore, 2013; St Clare, 2018; Kennedy, 2003; Langton, 2012; West, 2012; Walker, 2018) have explored the concept of hate speech with little or no attention paid to the Nigerian context or the unique and evolving dimensions of hate speech within Nigeria (Ayeni, 2018). Furthermore, the specific words or expressions that qualify as hate speech varies greatly depending on context, and there has been limited linguistic analysis to systematically categorise hate-related utterances. This highlights a significant gap in the linguistic study of hate speech. Hence, this study seeks to provide not only a deconstruction of hate speech but also a taxonomy and analysis of hate speech discourses on the social media space in Nigeria, from a socio-pragmatic interpretation.

Concept Clarification

Social Media

The late 1990s and early 2000s marked the beginning of a revolutionary era in digital social interaction. One of the first social networking platforms, SixDegrees, launched in 1997, introduced users to online socialising through features like profile creation, friend lists, and connection searches. Following the success of Six Degrees, new platforms emerged, each offering distinct features. In 2002, Friendster revolutionized social networking by enabling users to create profiles, connect with friends, and share updates and images in a virtual space, significantly expanding the concept of online interaction. MySpace which came into the digital arena in 2003, transformed online self-expression with customizable profiles and music integration, becoming the first social media platform to achieve a million monthly active users by 2004. Around the same time, Hi5 gained popularity for its global reach and multilingual



interface (Shaikh, 2024). The 21st century saw a massive transformation in social media and communication, with platforms like Facebook (launched in 2004) and YouTube (in 2005) shaping digital culture. By 2019, Facebook had 2.4 billion users, and YouTube, revolutionizing video sharing, surpassed one billion users, fading away earlier competitors like Hi5, MySpace, and Friendster from prominence. Instagram transformed visual content sharing in 2010 with its focus on curated, aesthetic photos and videos, while Snapchat gained traction among younger users with ephemeral messaging and augmented reality features. TikTok became a global phenomenon since its 2016 launch, amassing over half a billion users by mid-2018, while platforms like LinkedIn, Pinterest, and Twitch further diversified the social media experience with unique opportunities for connection. With this development, the use of social media has helped to amplify hate speech by providing platforms where harmful content can spread rapidly and reach a global audience. The lack of effective moderation of hate speech in a country like Nigeria, and, the anonymity of social media have significantly contributed to the spread of hate speech in the country. These allow individuals to express hateful views without fear of accountability. While anonymity has benefits like protecting whistleblowers and marginalized groups, its misuse in the context of hate speech highlights the need for balanced approaches to moderation and accountability on social media platforms. These factors, put together, have made social media a powerful tool for the dissemination of hate speech, influencing societal attitudes and even inciting violence (Ayeni & Ibileye, 2024).

Hate Speech

Hate speech has emerged as a prominent and contentious topic globally. While it is widely discussed, a clear and universally accepted definition remains elusive. The line between hate speech and freedom of expression is often blurred. The Nigerian constitution guarantees citizens the right to express their opinions freely. However, in a diverse nation like Nigeria, where numerous languages and ethnic groups coexist, an unoffensive statement in one language can sometimes be perceived as offensive in another. This dynamic contributes to the ambiguity surrounding what qualifies as hate speech (Ayeni, 2018). The notion of hate speech has been defined and interpreted in diverse ways, even among scholars, leading to varying perspectives and understandings of its essence. Numerous connotations and interpretations have been attributed to its meaning. Cohen-Almagor (2013) defines hate speech refers to malicious communication targeting individuals or groups based on their actual or perceived characteristics, such as race, religion, gender, or ethnicity. It reflects prejudicial and discriminatory attitudes and seeks to harm, dehumanize, intimidate, or degrade the affected groups, fostering insensitivity and brutality toward them. The United Nations (2016) believes that hate speech encompasses the spread of ideas promoting racial or ethnic superiority or hatred, regardless of the method used. This includes inciting hatred, contempt, or discrimination against individuals or groups based on their race, color, descent, nationality, or ethnic origin, as well as threats or incitement to violence and involvement in organisations or activities that encourage racial discrimination. For Ezeibe (2015), Segun (2015) and Akinola (2017), hate speech is any utterance that attacks, stigmatizes or discriminates an individual or a group while Nzeako (2017) and Ude (2017) maintains that the definition of hate speech varies across countries, shaped by their unique historical contexts. The international human rights organization, Article 19, describes hate speech as any expression of discriminatory hatred directed at individuals based on specific aspects of their identity. Such discriminatory hatred is characterized as an intense and irrational hostility toward a person or group due to their inherent attributes, as recognized by international human rights law. However, in accordance with



Nzeako (2017) and Ude (2017), upholds that hate speech is context-dependent, influenced by the setting, the target group, and the speaker. Its definition involves analysing factors such as the expression's content, tone (written or spoken), intentions (individual or collective), and potential consequences or impact. In light of the above, it is obvious that the definition of hate speech varies widely based on factors such as culture, values, religion, politics, and audience. However, existing definitions have limitations, as they fail to fully encompass all aspects of hate speech. To address this, St Clare (2018) provides an in-depth analysis of the characteristics and features of hate speech, which this study explores further.

Related Studies

Numerous studies have explored hate speech from diverse perspectives. Rasaq et al (2017), Fasakin et al (2017), Okafor and Alabi (2017), and Ezeibe (2015) examined political hate speech from diverse perspectives. While Okafor and Alabi (2017), and Ezeibe (2016) examined how politicians used hate utterances to run down politicians in other rival political parties during the 2015 Nigerian general electioneering campaign, Rasaq et al (2017) and Fasakin et al (2017) examined the role the media played in amplifying the hate utterances used by the said politicians during the same period. Bakircioglu (2008) and Shaw (2012) carried out their investigation on the complexity of having a clear-cut demarcation between free speech and hate speech. As Shaw (2012) claims that national jurisdiction cannot be translated into cyberspace, so government regulation may likely not proffer a solution to the problem hate speech, Bakircioglu (2008) argues that achieving a balance between free speech and hate speech within a democratic framework requires imposing restrictions on specific types of expression, which should be shaped by the political and historical context of the environment in question. The study by Bayer and Bárd (2020) explores the societal and individual impacts of hate speech, highlighting its role in fostering hate crimes, societal division, discrimination, and human rights violations. While it does not connect hate speech to language misuse, the study advocates for comprehensive legislative measures to combat hate speech and related actions. It emphasises the need for stakeholders to implement proactive and effective solutions to address the challenges posed by hate speech. Other studies (Des Forges, 1999; Benesch, 2011; Yanagizawa-Drott, 2012; Scheffler, 2015; Robert, 2017; Nwosu & Nwokolo, 2022; Robert et al., 2023; Udogu, 2024) focused their concern on the effect of hate speech on individuals and corporate organisations. Robert et al. (2023), Nwosu and Nwokolo (2022), Robert (2017), Scheffler (2015), Yanagizawa-Drott (2012), Benesch (2011), and Des Forges (1999) have identified derogatory terms or labels directed at individuals, groups, and organizations as key components of hate speech, which trigger conflicts and deteriorate interpersonal and inter-group relationships. The reviewed studies above have enhanced the understanding of hate speech and have provided a foundation for conducting a socio-pragmatic investigation. Consequently, the current study focuses on identifying and categorising hate speeches in online discourses in Nigeria, and analysing the motivations behind such hate speeches within a socio-pragmatic framework.

Theoretical Frameworks

This study employs a dual theoretical perspective, combining the Hate Speech Act Theory and the Socio-Pragmatics Theory. The Hate Speech Act Theory provides the framework for understanding the characteristics of hate speech, hence its identification, while the Socio-Pragmatics Theory offers a critical lens for analysing the identified hate utterances. By integrating these two theories. This study aims to provide a nuanced understanding of what



hate speech is and how to analyse it socio-pragmatically when it is used on individuals/groups in society.

Hate Speech Act Theory

Building on Austin's Speech Act Theory, St. Clare (2018) introduces the Hate Speech Act Theory (H-SAT) as a specialized subset. St. Clare argued that Austin's framework can seamlessly apply to hate speech. In this context, the locutionary act of hate speech refers to utterances aimed at individuals or groups in a derogatory manner to imply inferiority or inflict pain. St. Clare (2018) highlights that the Hate Speech Act carries an illocutionary force capable of subordinating and silencing its targets through linguistic actions. Furthermore, the perlocutionary acts of hate speech may provoke offense, potentially leading to confrontations or violent actions. The targeted individuals may suffer psychological effects such as low self-esteem, while the utterers may feel a sense of superiority over their targets. According to St. Clare (2018), hate speech can be characterized by three key aspects: Referent and Reminder, Subordination and Silencing, and Context.

Referent and Reminder

Hate speech encompasses multiple referents, targeting both individuals and the groups they belong to. Unlike mere insults or disapproval, which may focus solely on an individual, hate speech inherently extends to the entire group, setting it apart from other forms of expression. Hate speech often draws on past historical injustices to assert a negative view of a target group, typically minorities who have faced previous oppression. By referencing such events, hate speech can revive and endorse past cruelties, further deepening its impact. For affected individuals, these reminders may reopen old wounds, adding to the complex and harmful nature of hate speech.

Subordination and Silencing

St. Clare (2018) identifies two key impacts of hate speech: its ability to subordinate and to silence. Drawing on Langton (2012), subordination occurs when individuals are demeaned or placed in a position of inferiority, often through racist speech that unfairly ranks targets as having lesser worth. Maitra (2012) adds that subordination can cause physical and psychological harm, depriving individuals of significant rights and abilities. While ranking or legitimating may sometimes be appropriate, Langton emphasizes that in the context of hate speech, such acts perpetuate discrimination and unjustly deprive targets of vital powers. Hate speech can derogate, demean, dehumanize, and injure its targets. It unfairly ranks individuals or groups as inferior and may assert this belief even if the speaker does not hold it. Additionally, hate speech legitimizes discriminatory behavior, endorsing oppression and promoting the acceptability of discrimination. Hate speech unjustly deprives its targets of power, particularly within social or political activities, and may be more impactful when uttered by those in authority. It can undermine trust and credibility, limit access to opportunities, and strip individuals or groups of rights and vital powers. Through perlocutionary forces, hate speech promotes inferiority, discrimination, and deprivation, while its illocutionary acts reinforce ranking as inferior and discriminatory. Collectively, these acts contribute to the silencing of targeted groups. Langton (2012) outlines three forms of silencing: when individuals refrain from speaking due to intimidation or the belief that their voice will go unheard; when their



speech fails to create the desired perlocutionary effects; and when their speech neither achieves its intended perlocutionary effects nor performs the intended illocutionary act. Langton (2012) explains further that hate speech leading to violence and death silences the target group entirely, with those killed experiencing the ultimate form of silencing.

Context

Hate speech is not only capable of causing harm but is also highly context-sensitive. Linguistic studies have long emphasized the role of context in understanding language, as highlighted by Malinowski (1923), who argued that utterances gain meaning through their situational context. Mey (2001) further underscores the need to consider the speaker's world, including their linguistic, social, cultural, and ideological background, which encompasses aspects like religion, ethnicity, and political affiliations. Huang (2007) defines context as any relevant feature of the setting in which a linguistic unit is used and categorizes it into three types: geographic context, physical context (the physical setting), and knowledge context (shared background knowledge between the speaker and listener). Similarly, St. Clare (2018), referencing Saul (2006), emphasizes that a speech act involves the act of uttering words, rather than the words themselves. Using *I do* as an example, St. Clare illustrates how its meaning and illocutionary act vary depending on the context, such as a courtroom (assertive) versus a church (commissive). This highlights the significant influence of context on the illocutionary force of speech acts.

Socio-Pragmatics

Leech (1983) introduced the term *socio-pragmatics* to explain how pragmatic meanings are shaped by particular local contexts of language use. As a specialised area within pragmatics, it is distinct from the study of general pragmatic meanings. Socio-pragmatics, according to Leech (1983) elaborates that Socio-pragmatics provides valuable insights into the complex relationships between language, social context, and communication, helping us better understand how language works in real-world interactions. It focuses on how language is used in social interactions to convey meaning, establish relationships, and achieve goals. He examines how pragmatic meanings interact with specific local conditions, focusing on meanings in lexemes rather than considering utterances as a whole. Harlow (1990) defines Socio-pragmatics as the study of communication within its socio-cultural setting. In contrast, Crystal (1985) characterises it as the analysis of language from the users' perspective and the decisions they make. Crystal (1992) also explores the challenges users face in employing language during social interactions and the impact their linguistic choices have on other participants in the communicative process. Thomason (2001) and Harlow (1990) hold that socio-pragmatics is the analysis of significant patterns of interaction, particularly in social situations and systems. They acclaim also claim that patterns of interaction may be realized differently in different social contexts and situations as well as in various social groups within a speech community. Most of these concepts, among others, are found appropriate for application in the present study.

Methodology

Twitter (X), and TikTok tests and songs from 2014 and 2023 constitute the data for this investigation. Tweepy, a Python module used for the extraction of data, was used to extract utterances laced with hate from X and TikTok. With the aid of Tweepy, four hundred and twenty (420) hate-related texts were downloaded from X, while one hundred and fifteen (115)



hate related texts/songs were downloaded from TikTok. Using the simple random sampling technique, sixteen (16) texts from X, four (4) text and two (2) songs from TikTok were sampled; making a total of twenty-two (22) texts sampled for analyses. This information is presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Summary of Population and Sampling Procedure

Social Media Sites	Total Download	Sorting by Year			Simple Random Sampling			Total Sample for Analyses
		Texts	Songs	Total	Texts	Songs	Total	
X (Twitter)	420	82	--	82	16	--	16	16
TikTok	115	22	10	32	04	02	06	06
G/Total	535							22

The study employed both qualitative and quantitative methods of data analysis. Quantitative analysis involved coding the collected data as Texts 1 through 22, with some texts sub-numbered (e.g., Text 1a, 2b, and 2c) to maintain the continuity of specific threads.

Analysis and Discussion

a. Analysis

The findings regarding the thematic categorization of hate speech by type in this study are summarised in Table 2 below. It is worth mentioning that while twenty-two (22) texts were initially sampled as data, the analysis revealed a total of twenty-six (26) frequencies. This discrepancy arose because four of the texts contained two distinct themes, resulting in a total of twenty-six (26) frequencies.

Table 2: Thematic Categorisations of Hate Speech observed in the Study

Theme	Frequency	Percentage %
Ethnic	11	42.3%
Religious	8	30.8%
Political	7	26.9%
Total	26	100%



From the table above, ethnic hate expressions represented the highest frequency, making up 42.3% (n = 11) of occurrences. This was followed by religious hate expressions at 30.8% (n = 8), and political hate expressions at 26.9% (n = 7).

Samples of the Three Major Hate-Theme Categories Found in the Study

Table 3: The table below highlights examples of the three key thematic categories of hate expressions identified in this study.

Thematic Category	Hate Expression
Ethical Hate Expression	The Igbos are collectively unlettered, uncouth, uncultured, unrestrained, crude in all their ways (Text 4).
	Inyaniri did a lot of bad deeds in the time past. They killed Sardauna, multiple threads, the loved by all. The Igbos are useless, inyamiri we don't like you at all. They inherited their warlike and troublesome nature from their forefathers Inyamiri is shameless and useless (Text 11).
	We have one thing in common (all of us who believe in Biafra). One thing we have in common is a pathological hatred for Nigeria (Text 18).
Religious Hate Expression	Do you think even Buhari is a good Muslim? Buhari is not a Muslim as far as we are concerned; he is nothing but an infidel and our enemy (Text 19).
	To fight terrorism, you have to fight Islam. Your prophet and your god are both sick terrorists (Text 21).
	We can never love you because you are all infidels. I so much detest Southern Christians because they are the problem of this country. If I have my way, there won't be any functional churches in this country, especially in the North (Text 13).
Political Hate Expression	All APC supporters are Boko Haram members; they are the real terrorists. Chukwuabiana will expose them all (Text 5).
	Drunken sailor, drunken fisherman, kindergarten President (Text 16).
	“President Muhammadu Buhari, Vice President Osinbajo, APC National Chairman, John Odigie Oyejgun, and other leaders of the party, you all are indeed a bunch of self-serving deceivers and self-seeking hypocrites (Text 14a).



b. Discussion

Ethnic Motivated Hate Speech

Ethnically motivated hate speech accounted for 42.3% (n = 11) of the total occurrences, representing almost half of the hate expressions identified in this study. The predominant use of ethnic hate speech reflects a deliberate effort to incite hatred, contempt, discrimination, threats, or violence against individuals or groups based on their ethnic background. This observation supports Heyd's (2014) assertion, which emphasises that some individuals intentionally disseminate hate utterances to amplify their hate to gain superficial online visibility. Texts 11 and 19 illustrate this further.

Text 11: *Nyaniri did a lot of bad deeds in the time past. They killed Sardauna, multiple threads, the loved by all. The Igbos are useless, inyamiri we don't like you at all. They inherited their warlike and troublesome nature from their forefathers Inyamiri is shameless and useless.*

Text 9: *If you find anybody in your village asking after Radio Biafra kill the baboon Awusa Foolani or Yoruba bastard. Let them keep searching as we keep tweeting for #Biafra*

Text 11 is an allusion to the Nigerian Civil War of 1967 to 1970, commonly known as the Biafran War. This war was fought between the Nigerian government and the secessionist state of Biafra, representing the Igbo people's nationalist aspirations. The Igbo leadership felt unable to continue coexisting with the northern-dominated federal government. Late General Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu, a military officer at the time, declared the Eastern Region's secession, forming the Republic of Biafra. The Republic of Biafra was predominantly inhabited by Igbos, who pursued secession primarily on ethnic grounds, among other reasons (Falode, 2011). This is reflected in the statement: *They inherited their warlike nature and troublesome nature from their forefathers*, with *forefathers* possibly referencing the warlords of the Biafran War. Sir Ahmadu Bello, popularly called Sardaunan Sokoto (Sadauna of Sokoto) and Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa were influential figures in Northern Nigerian politics before independence and key leaders in the First Nigerian Republic. Both met tragic ends during the 1966 coup. Sir Ahmadu Bello was killed in the coup led by Major Patrick Chukwuma Nzeogwu, while Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa was abducted, later found dead, his body abandoned in a bush by the roadside. These events likely inspired the sentiment expressed above. The term *Inyamiri* is a derogatory expression used by the Hausas to demean the Igbos. Its origin traces back to the Nigerian Civil War, where the phrase *Nyemmiri* (meaning "give me water" in the Igbo language) was commonly uttered by captured Igbos due to severe deprivation of food and water. The use of *Inyamiri* is a deliberate act to evoke painful memories of the war, including immense suffering, loss of lives, and poisoned water supplies. For the Igbos, this term symbolizes the trauma and dehumanization they endured during that period.

Text 9 further deepens the rift between ethnic groups, as when the Yorubas or Hausa/Fulanis hear this, they perceive the Igbos as adversaries, prompting them to either avoid the Igbos or preemptively commit violence out of fear of being attacked. Similarly, the term "Awusa/Foolani" carries dual meanings: "Awusa" and "Foolani." This compound term is a



derogatory label used by Igbo speakers to describe the Hausa/Fulanis. The Igbos intentionally use "Awusa/Foolani," with "Awusa" implying "scattered aimlessly and uselessly all over" in Igbo. This stems from the belief that the Hausa/Fulanis' uncontrolled procreation is driven by their faith in Allah's provision for every life He creates. Consequently, the Igbos view the Hausa/Fulanis as senselessly scattered and aimlessly wandering, hence the term "Awusa." This is another example of hate speech (Nairaland Forum, 2017). The term "Foolani" is a deliberate pun on "Fulani," intended to portray the Hausa/Fulanis as fools. By substituting "Fulani" with "Foolani," the speaker seeks to insult and demean them. To the average Igbo individual, the Hausa/Fulanis are perceived as foolish and irrational. Lastly, the term "bastard," used by Nnamdi Kanu to describe the Yorubas, is an offensive term implying stupidity, irritation, and absurdity. This reflects Kanu's disdain for the Yorubas, whom he criticizes for supporting Nigeria's unity under the perceived exploitation and mismanagement of the Hausa/Fulanis. According to Kanu, only a "bastard" would tolerate or accept such a situation.

Religiously Motivated Hate Speech

Religiously motivated hate expressions accounted for 30.8% of occurrences in this study, highlighting a global challenge. This is further illustrated in the texts below.

Text 13: *We hate you even more, and we can never love you because you are all infidels.*

Text 19: *We need to break down infidels, practitioners of democracy and constitutionalism, and those doing western education in which they are practicing paganism*

The term *infidel* refers to an individual who does not adhere to a specific, dominant religion (Crystal, 2023). When someone labels another as an infidel, it signifies hostility based on religious beliefs. This term is prominently used in the hate rhetoric of Boko Haram's current leader, Abubakar Shekau. Boko Haram's activities are well-known both in Nigeria and globally. The group, originally founded by Mohammed Yusuf, came under Shekau's leadership after Yusuf's death. Boko Haram, formally known as Jama'at Alh as-Sunnah lid-Da'wah wa'l-Jihad, is an Islamic sect that strictly follows Islamic teachings. They perceive Christianity and Western education as sinful or forbidden, which is reflected in their name, "Boko Haram," an Arabicized-Hausa phrase meaning "Western education is sinful." The sect views Christians, proponents of Western education, democracy advocates, and even less fanatical followers of Islam as enemies, labeling them infidels unworthy of coexistence and advocating for their elimination (Awojobi, 2014). Due to his fanatical extremism, Abubakar Shekau also believes that Muslims who believe in democracy are deviants of the teachings of the holy Quran, and so, are infidels, hence the utterance in Text 19. Stout (2013) highlights that Boko Haram's primary goal is to establish an Islamic caliphate in Nigeria governed by Sharia law, with the intention of its eventual nationwide implementation. Non-compliance with Sharia law and Islamic teachings is met with severe consequences, including death. Sharia, derived from the Quran and Hadith, represents divine guidance and a way of life leading to Allah. It emphasizes Allah's sovereignty and liberation from servitude to anyone but Him, which motivates Muslims to advocate for its implementation over other laws. Abubakar Shekau asserts that Islam is the only true religion. He views adherence to any other faith or a lack of strict Islamic practice as paganism, labeling such individuals as infidels who must be "broken down. Anonymous (2017) argues that the Quran advocates for the killing of infidels, with historical events supporting this



claim beyond the Quran and Hadith. The spread of Islam from the Arabian Peninsula to regions like Morocco and Indonesia was marked by violence, including the killing of approximately 80 million Hindus during India's conquest and similar actions in North Africa. Such killings persist today, targeting Christian Nigerians and others, carried out by groups like Boko Haram who adhere strictly to Quranic verses and Hadith instructing the killing of unbelievers. The phrase "break down infidels" is interpreted as advocating their elimination, reflecting the speaker's commitment to following Quranic law.

Politically Motivated Hate Speech

Politically-motivated hate expressions constituted 26.9% (n = 7) of occurrences, making them the least frequent among the three types identified in this study. This may be attributed to findings from several studies (Agwu, 2009; Godwen, 2004; Salawu, 2010; Omotosho, 2003), which indicate that politically motivated hate expressions are often driven by ethnicity and, at times, religion. Additionally, many Nigerians show little interest in politics, as the rhetoric of politicians, according to Okafor and Taofeek (2017, p.62), "resembles the beating of war drums against perceived political opponents." The essence of politics and the formation of political parties today lies in the practice of democracy, which is rooted in the principles of freedom of speech and expression. This democratic norm becomes particularly evident during political campaigns, where ideological expressions take center stage. However, such campaigns are frequently marked by hate expressions, as illustrated in the examples of politically motivated hate expressions provided below.

Text 12: *All APC supporters are Boko Haram members; they are the real terrorists. Chukwuabiana will expose them all.*

Text 16: When you described him as *a drunken sailor, a drunken fisherman, a kindergarten President*

The term "Boko Haram" is globally recognized, particularly in Nigeria, as synonymous with terrorism. Given the group's notorious history, no one in Nigeria or beyond would willingly associate with them, as such an association brands one as a terrorist to be avoided. The established speech act schemata between the speaker and hearer reflect a divide between political parties: PDP is associated with Westerners and Easterners, while APC is linked to Northerners. Historically, Easterners and Westerners perceive all individuals from the Middle-Belt region upwards as Hausa, unable to distinguish between Hausa and Hausa/Fulani identities. Considering the context, the statement "All APC supporters are Boko Haram members," attributed to an Easterner (Nnamdi Kanu), suggests that APC is perceived as a political party associated with terrorists, given its association with Northerners. Furthermore, the emergence of Boko Haram from the North reinforces the stereotype that all Northerners are inclined toward terrorism, regardless of their affiliations. The phrases in Text 16, *drunken sailor, drunken fisherman, and kindergarten President* were used to demean former President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan, the PDP presidential candidate. These slanders reference his background in Otuoke, Bayelsa State, where fishing and the consumption of locally brewed gin, "ogogoro," are common. "Drunken sailor" and "drunken fisherman" mock this lifestyle, with the latter being more directly insulting. The term "kindergarten President" was used during Jonathan's 2014 campaign for a second term, implying his inexperience and immaturity in national leadership, suggesting he was unfit for the presidency compared to seasoned



politicians like General Mohammed Buhari (Rtd.), the opposition candidate. The primary aim of politically motivated hate expressions is to discredit the targeted party, thereby attracting more supporters to a specific political group or party. Such hate speeches are typically propagated by opposition party members, who use these utterances to undermine their rivals' self-esteem and erode public confidence in them. Furthermore, research (Ezeibe, 2015; Rasaq, Udende, Ibrahim, and Oba, 2017; Fasakin, Oyero, Oyesome, and Okorie, 2017) suggests that politically motivated hate speech in Nigeria intensifies ethnic and religious divisions, fostering greater intolerance.

1. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that online hate expressions can be identified, categorised, and analysed within a socio-pragmatic framework. The prominence of ethnic-motivated hate expressions highlights the significant role of ethnicity in Nigeria. However, it is suggested that the timing of sample collection may have influenced these findings. For instance, data gathered during election campaigns might yield different results. Additionally, the study concludes that the frequent use of nouns and noun phrases in hate expressions stems from their function as labels for identifying concrete entities.

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Analysed Data

Text 1: To hate is human, to bomb is divine. We hate western inventions including twitter, we only feel the necessity to use it to reach out to our fans. https://twitter.com/BOKO_HARAM

Text 2: Wherever they are, we will kill them ourselves at the same time, the same day, at noon, wherever we find them all over the world. Nnamdi Kanu (X 7th July 2019)

Text 3: “Yes, the herdsmen value even the life of the cow more than their own life. The useless Aboki.” Nnamdi Kanu, 27th January 2018.

Text 4: The Igbos are collectively unlettered, uncouth, uncultured, unrestrained, crude in all their ways. Money and the acquisition of wealth is their sole objective and purpose in life.
Source: Tweeter, (@realFFK)

Text 5: All APC supporters are Boko Haram_members; they are the real terrorists. Chukwuabiana will expose them all.

Text 6a: Buhari and his gang of abductors and ransom seekers have subtly created the Ministry of Kidnapping and Ransom Collection. The APC government is the government of the terrorists, by the terrorists, and for the terrorists (X. April, 2022).

Text 7: “I’m using this opportunity to send this message to the infidels in Nigeria and the rest of the infidels in the world in Hausa vernacular, the tongue that many understand, and if the need arises, I will explain in Fulani and Kanuri, but let us explain to you briefly. (Boko Haram Leader Shekau, Twitter, 2014).

Text 8: We have a group of thieves and armed robbers called leaders. Buhari, Lai Mohammed, Rotimi Amaechi, Rochas Okorocha, etc. (TikTok, 15th April, 2022).

Text 9: "If you find anybody in your village asking after Radio Biafra, kill the baboon Awusa Foolani or Yoruba bastard. Let them keep searching as we keep tweeting for #Biafra." (From Nnamdi Kanu, 2017).

Text 10a: The cruel Igbos have done and are doing more damage to our collective nationhood than any other ethnic group, being responsible for the first violent interference with democracy in Nigeria, resulting in a prolonged counter-productive chain of military dictatorship. The Igbos



similarly orchestrated the first, and so far, the only civil war in Nigeria that consumed millions of lives and sowed the seed of the current mutual suspicion and distrust.

Text 10b: The Igbos are also responsible for Nigeria's cultural and moral degeneracy with their notorious involvement in all kinds of crimes, including international networking for drug and human trafficking, violent robberies and kidnappings, high-profile prostitution, and advanced financial fraud.

Text 11: Can the people ask, “Who is this inyamiri?”

It is the Igbos, after great suffering, who said, “Give me some water.”

Inyaniri did a lot of bad deeds in the past.

They killed Sardauna, multiple threads, the one loved by all.

(A short Hausa song on TikTok. June 2022).

Text 12: “I pledge to Allah, my God. To be faithful, loyal, and honest. To serve Allah with all my strength, to defend His Islam... Allahu Akbar!! Nigeria is dead; her constitution is dead!! Islam and Islam; war by war upon the Kafir who is the unbeliever”.

Text 13: We hate you even more, and we can never love you because you are all infidels. I so much detest Southern Christians because they are the problem of this country. If I have my way, there won't be any functional church in this country, especially in the North (Tweeter, May 17, 2017)

Text 14a: “President Muhammadu Buhari, Vice President Osinbajo, APC National Chairman, John Odigie Oyeun, and other leaders of the party, you all are indeed a bunch of self-serving deceivers and self-seeking hypocrites. **Text 14b:** Worst of all, you are the architects of terror and the fathers of hate!” “When you called us 'wailing wailers,' it was not hate speech. **Source:** Tweeter (@realFFK 2017).

Text 15: “Boko Haram doesn't acknowledge the Nigerian government (or any government whatsoever). We need to break down infidels, practitioners of democracy, constitutionalism, voodoo, and those who are doing western education, in which they are practicing paganism. Shakau, May 2016

Text 16: “When you described him as a 'drunken sailor', a 'drunken fisherman', a 'kindergarten President', and insulted members of his family, it was not described as hate speech. “When you called us 'wailing wailers,' it was not hate speech. When they called us “PDPigs,” it was not described as hate speech.

Text 17: We know what is happening in this world; it is a Jihad war against Christians and Christianity. It is a war against Western education, democracy, and the constitution. Shekau, June 2017.

Text 18: The whole world listens to Radio Biafra, and here we set the agenda for political discussion, especially in the contraption called the Zoological Republic of Nigeria. We have one thing in common (all of us who believe in Biafra). One thing we have in common is a pathological hatred for Nigeria. By **Innocent Orji, 2019.**

Text 19: We need to break down infidels, practitioners of democracy and constitutionalism, and those doing western education, in which they are practicing paganism