



STANCE LINGUISTIC DEVICES IN TELEVISED DISCOURSE ON THE 2024 NATIONAL MINIMUM WAGE NEGOTIATIONS IN NIGERIA

Oni, O., Onucheyo, P.A, Abdulhammeed, G O., Onuh-Psalm, K.O and Atuluku S.

¹Department of English and Literary Studies Federal University Lokoja, Nigeria

²Department of English, Federal College of Education, Okene, Nigeria

³Department of Mass Communication, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Nigeria

⁴Department of Mass Communication, Nassarawa State University, Keffi, Nigeria

(Corresponding Author, Oni, O , Email: olusolaoni47@gmail.com(+2348101126390)

ABSTRACT

This study examines the linguistic devices through which the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) and the Federal Government (FG) constructed their stances during televised interviews on the 2024 minimum wage negotiations. Existing studies on minimum wage negotiations in Nigeria have largely concentrated on economic, political, and industrial relations dimensions, with limited attention to the linguistic resources through which negotiating parties communicate and legitimise their positions. Anchored in Du Bois' (2007) Stance Triangle Theory and Martin and White's (2005) Appraisal Theory, the study adopts a qualitative research design. Data were drawn from selected interviews aired on Arise News and Channels Television between January and November 2024 and analysed using discourse-analytic procedures. The findings reveal that both parties strategically deployed modal auxiliaries, evaluative adjectives and adverbs, referential pronouns, metaphors, hedges, boosters, and repetition to express certainty, construct solidarity, project authority, and influence public opinion. The study concludes that stance linguistic devices function not merely as grammatical resources but as strategic tools for persuasion, legitimation, and ideological positioning in labour-government negotiations.

Keywords: Stance-taking, linguistic devices, minimum wage negotiations, media discourse, Nigeria Labour Congress, Federal Government.

1.0

INTRODUCTION

Minimum wage negotiations in Nigeria have consistently generated debates between organised labour and the government because of their implications for workers' welfare and national development (Adebayo, 2019; International Labour Organization [ILO], 2021). The 2024 minimum wage negotiation between the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) and the Federal Government (FG) was particularly significant due to rising inflation, increasing living costs, and declining purchasing power among workers (National Bureau of Statistics [NBS], 2024;



World Bank, 2024). These realities heightened public interest and positioned the media as an important platform for articulating and contesting viewpoints (Fairclough, 1995).

Television interviews on platforms such as Arise News and Channels Television became strategic spaces where both parties sought to justify their positions and gain public support. Labour leaders highlighted workers' hardship and advocated wage increases, whereas government representatives emphasised fiscal limitations and economic sustainability. Consequently, the media served as a site for negotiating competing social and political realities (van Dijk, 2008). In these interactions, language functioned not merely as a medium of information but also as a resource for expressing attitudes, certainty, evaluations, and solidarity. Such communicative acts are referred to as stance-taking, which enables speakers to position themselves ideologically and socially while aligning with or opposing others (Englebretson, 2007).

Although studies on minimum wage negotiations in Nigeria have largely focused on economic and industrial relations issues (Adebayo, 2019; Otobo, 2005), and discourse studies have examined political interviews and media representations (Fairclough, 1995; van Dijk, 2008), limited attention has been given to the linguistic resources through which negotiating parties construct and communicate their positions. This study addresses this gap by examining the stance linguistic devices employed by the NLC and the FG during televised interviews on the 2024 minimum wage negotiations.

2.0

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Conceptual Review

2.1.1 Concept of Stance Linguistic Devices

Stance is an important concept in discourse analysis, pragmatics, and sociolinguistics because it explains how speakers express attitudes, opinions, emotions, and commitments during communication. Biber and Finegan (1989) define stance as the linguistic expression of personal feelings, judgments, and evaluations towards propositions, emphasising that language users constantly communicate their orientations towards issues and events. Similarly, Du Bois (2007) conceptualises stance as a public act through which speakers evaluate issues, position themselves, and align or disalign with others. He argues that stance-taking is inherently interactional because speakers continually negotiate meanings and social relationships through



language. Englebretson (2007) further views stance-taking as a socially situated practice through which speakers reveal perspectives and establish relationships with others.

Studies generally identify several linguistic resources through which stance is realised. One major device is the use of modal auxiliaries such as *must*, *should*, *may*, and *cannot*. These expressions indicate varying degrees of certainty, obligation, and possibility and often reflect ideological positioning (Biber & Finegan, 1989). Another category comprises evaluative adjectives and adverbs, which communicate judgments and assessments of events and situations. Through lexical choices such as *unacceptable*, *important*, and *difficult*, speakers categorise issues as desirable or undesirable (Martin & White, 2005).

Similarly, referential pronouns such as *we*, *our*, and *they* function as stance devices by establishing solidarity and group identity (Du Bois, 2007). Speakers also employ metaphors and figurative expressions to frame issues in ways that evoke emotions and support particular ideological positions (Charteris-Black, 2005). Hyland (2005) further identifies hedges and boosters as important stance markers. Whereas hedges enable speakers to moderate their claims and avoid categorical assertions, boosters reinforce certainty and conviction.

In institutional interactions such as labour negotiations, these linguistic devices frequently occur simultaneously as speakers express certainty, evaluate proposals, establish solidarity, and negotiate authority.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored in Du Bois' (2007) Stance Triangle Theory and Martin and White's (2005) Appraisal Theory.

Du Bois' Stance Triangle Theory conceptualises stance-taking as a dialogic process involving three interconnected components: **evaluation, positioning, and alignment**. Evaluation refers to the assessment of issues, actions, and propositions. Positioning concerns how speakers locate themselves in relation to issues and project particular identities and perspectives. Alignment refers to the relationships speakers establish with others through agreement, solidarity, opposition, and disassociation. According to Du Bois (2007), these processes occur simultaneously during communication, making stance-taking fundamentally social and interactional.



Martin and White's (2005) Appraisal Theory complements this framework by explaining the linguistic resources through which speakers communicate attitudes and evaluations. The theory comprises three major subsystems: attitude, engagement, and graduation. Attitude concerns emotions and judgments, engagement relates to commitment and alternative viewpoints, while graduation involves the amplification or mitigation of meanings.

2.2.1 Application of the Theories to the Study

The concept of evaluation facilitates the identification of linguistic resources used to assess wage proposals, economic conditions, and government responsibilities. Positioning provides a basis for examining how labour representatives construct themselves as defenders of workers' interests and how government officials project themselves as responsible managers of national economic resources.

Similarly, the notion of alignment enables the analysis of linguistic resources used to establish solidarity with particular groups and oppose competing viewpoints. Appraisal Theory further facilitates the identification of lexical and grammatical resources through which speakers express attitudes, intensify meanings, and negotiate commitment. The theories therefore provide an effective analytical framework for identifying and interpreting the stance linguistic devices employed in the televised interviews.

3.0

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative research design because it seeks to examine how linguistic resources are strategically deployed to construct meanings and negotiate positions in institutional discourse. The data comprise televised interviews involving representatives of the Nigeria Labour Congress and the Federal Government on Arise News and Channels Television between January and November 2024.

A purposive sampling technique was adopted because the selected interviews directly addressed issues relating to the minimum wage negotiations and contained substantial interactional data relevant to the study objective. Ten interviews in total were used comprising five interviews involving labour representatives and five involving government representatives were selected for analysis.



The interviews were transcribed verbatim and subjected to qualitative discourse analysis. Particular attention was given to linguistic features that revealed stance construction, including modal auxiliaries, evaluative adjectives and adverbs, referential pronouns, metaphors, hedges, boosters, and repetition. The identified linguistic devices were analysed within their contexts of use and interpreted using Du Bois' (2007) Stance Triangle Theory and Martin and White's (2005) Appraisal Theory.

4.0 DATA PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

4.1 Analysis and findings

The analysis reveals that both the Nigeria Labour Congress and the Federal Government strategically deployed various linguistic devices to construct and communicate their positions during the 2024 minimum wage negotiations. These devices performed important interpersonal and ideological functions by enabling speakers to project authority, express certainty, establish solidarity, legitimise viewpoints, and influence public opinion.

Modal Auxiliaries as Devices of Certainty, Obligation, and Authority

Modal auxiliaries emerged as one of the most salient linguistic devices in the data.

Excerpt 1

"Workers cannot survive on the current minimum wage."

The modal auxiliary *cannot* encodes impossibility and presents the proposition as an objective reality rather than a subjective opinion. Linguistically, the expression projects a high degree of epistemic commitment because it leaves little room for alternative interpretations. The lexical choice transforms workers' economic conditions from a negotiable issue into an indisputable fact.

Discursively, the expression functions as an instrument of legitimisation. By presenting survival on the existing wage as impossible, the speaker constructs wage review as a moral and economic necessity rather than an optional policy decision. The utterance simultaneously positions the NLC as a defender of workers' welfare and aligns it with ordinary Nigerians experiencing economic hardship.



Ideologically, the expression constructs a binary opposition between suffering workers and an inadequate wage structure. The statement therefore seeks to secure public sympathy and increase pressure on the government to concede to labour's demands.

Excerpt 2

"Government must address the realities confronting Nigerian workers."

The modal auxiliary *must* communicates obligation and necessity. Unlike *should*, which merely recommends action, *must* expresses compulsion and presents government intervention as unavoidable.

The expression simultaneously performs the three dimensions of Du Bois' (2007) stance triangle. It evaluates the existing condition as problematic, positions the NLC as an advocate of workers' interests, and aligns with employees who perceive government action as inadequate. The use of *must* therefore reinforces labour's authority and projects confidence in its demands.

Government representatives similarly employed modal auxiliaries.

Excerpt 3

"The economy cannot sustain the amount being proposed."

The modal auxiliary *cannot* again projects certainty. However, unlike labour's use of the modal to foreground workers' suffering, government representatives deploy it to foreground economic constraints. The proposition presents fiscal limitations as objective realities rather than political choices.

Discursively, the utterance functions as a strategy of rationalisation. By invoking economic impossibility, government representatives legitimise their resistance to labour's demands and portray themselves as responsible managers of national resources.

The findings indicate that both parties employed modality strategically. Whereas labour used modality to emphasise urgency and necessity, government representatives used the same linguistic resource to justify caution and fiscal restraint.



Evaluative Adjectives and Adverbs as Devices of Ideological Framing

Evaluative expressions occurred extensively in the interviews and constituted one of the principal means through which both parties framed the negotiations.

Excerpt 4

"The present wage is completely unacceptable."

The adjective *unacceptable* assigns a negative value to the existing wage structure and presents it as socially deficient. The adverb *completely* intensifies the evaluation by eliminating any possibility of partial acceptance.

Discursively, the expression functions as a strategy of delegitimisation. The speaker does not merely describe the wage structure but condemns it outright. Such categorical evaluation portrays labour's demands as morally justified and socially necessary.

Ideologically, the expression transforms the negotiation from an economic dispute into a question of justice and human dignity.

Labour representatives employed similar expressions:

"The current wage is inhumane."

"The wage structure is ridiculous."

The adjective *inhumane* introduces a moral dimension into the discourse by suggesting that the wage violates fundamental standards of human welfare. Likewise, *ridiculous* presents the wage structure as irrational and indefensible.

Government representatives also relied on evaluative expressions.



Excerpt 5

"The demands are extremely challenging."

The adjective *challenging* and the intensifier *extremely* portray labour's demands as difficult and potentially disruptive.

Unlike labour's evaluative choices, which foreground suffering and injustice, government evaluations foreground complexity and economic risk. Consequently, both parties employ evaluation strategically to frame the same issue from different ideological perspectives.

Referential Pronouns and the Construction of Collective Identity

Referential pronouns constituted another significant stance device.

Excerpt 6

"We cannot continue to watch our workers suffer."

The pronouns *we* and *our* are highly inclusive. Linguistically, they erase distinctions between labour leaders and workers by constructing both groups as members of the same collective.

Discursively, these pronouns foster solidarity and emotional identification. The expression presents labour's demands as collective concerns rather than institutional interests.

Ideologically, the pronouns create an in-group consisting of labour representatives and workers while implicitly constructing government officials as the out-group responsible for workers' difficulties.

Government representatives similarly employed inclusive pronouns.

Excerpt 7

"We understand the concerns of workers, but we must consider the economy."

The repeated use of *we* projects collective responsibility and institutional authority.



The first occurrence establishes empathy and portrays government as responsive to workers' concerns. The second occurrence introduces an obligation to protect national economic interests. The expression therefore simultaneously projects solidarity and legitimises economic caution.

Hedges and the Negotiation of Commitment

Government representatives frequently employed hedges.

Excerpt 8

"Perhaps there may be a need for further consultation."

The hedge *perhaps* and the modal *may* reduce the force of the proposition and present it as tentative.

Discursively, hedging enables speakers to avoid categorical commitments while maintaining negotiation flexibility. The expression also functions as a politeness strategy because it avoids imposing definitive conclusions on listeners.

Ideologically, hedging portrays government representatives as cautious, measured, and consultative rather than authoritarian. Labour representatives employed relatively fewer hedges, reflecting the urgency and assertiveness of their demands.

Boosters and the Projection of Conviction

Labour representatives frequently employed boosters.

Excerpt 9 "Workers are certainly suffering."

The booster *certainly* intensifies the proposition and leaves little room for disagreement.

Discursively, the expression strengthens the speaker's argumentative position by presenting workers' suffering as indisputable.

Similarly, "Clearly, the present wage can no longer sustain workers."



The adverb *clearly* portrays the proposition as self-evident and discourages alternative interpretations. The use of boosters therefore reflects labour's communicative strategy of projecting confidence and mobilising public support.

Metaphors as Instruments of Persuasion and Emotional Appeal

Metaphorical expressions occurred frequently in labour discourse.

Excerpt 10

"Workers are being pushed to the wall."

The metaphor conceptualises workers as victims subjected to unbearable pressure. Rather than merely describing economic difficulties, the expression dramatises hardship and evokes emotional responses.

Similarly,

"The current wage is a death sentence."

This metaphor intensifies the seriousness of workers' conditions by framing wage inadequacy as a matter of survival.

Government representatives also employed metaphorical expressions.

Excerpt 11 "We must avoid overheating the economy."

The metaphor conceptualises the economy as a living organism capable of overheating.

Discursively, the metaphor simplifies complex economic realities and legitimises government caution. Ideologically, it presents economic management as a delicate process requiring prudence and restraint.



Repetition and Discursive Emphasis

Both parties frequently employed repetition.

Labour representatives repeatedly invoked lexical items such as:

hardship

survival

justice

dignity

The recurrence of these expressions reinforces the urgency of wage increases and keeps public attention focused on workers' suffering. Repetition also creates thematic coherence by repeatedly linking the demand for wage increases to questions of justice and human dignity.

Government representatives repeatedly employed expressions such as:

sustainability

revenue

economy

responsibility

The repetition of these lexical items constructs a discourse of fiscal discipline and prudent governance. By repeatedly foregrounding economic sustainability, government representatives portray themselves as responsible custodians of national resources and justify resistance to labour's demands.

4.2 Discussion of Findings

The findings demonstrate that stance linguistic devices are central to the discursive construction of labour-government negotiations. Modal auxiliaries and boosters were primarily employed to project certainty and authority, whereas hedges enabled speakers to moderate commitment and maintain negotiation flexibility. Evaluative expressions and metaphors allowed both parties to frame issues according to their institutional interests, while pronouns and repetition facilitated identity construction and audience alignment.



The analysis supports Du Bois' (2007) proposition that stance-taking simultaneously involves evaluation, positioning, and alignment. It also corroborates Hyland's (2005) argument that stance markers are fundamentally interpersonal and persuasive, as well as Martin and White's (2005) view that evaluative language performs important ideological functions. Overall, the findings indicate that linguistic choices in televised negotiations are strategic acts through which institutional actors construct legitimacy, negotiate power relations, and shape public opinion regarding the minimum wage debate in Nigeria.

5.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

This study examined the stance linguistic devices employed by the Nigeria Labour Congress and the Federal Government during televised interviews on the 2024 minimum wage negotiations. The analysis revealed the extensive use of modal auxiliaries, evaluative adjectives and adverbs, referential pronouns, metaphors, hedges, boosters, and repetition.

The study concludes that these linguistic devices perform functions that extend beyond grammar. They serve as strategic resources for expressing certainty, constructing solidarity, legitimising positions, negotiating authority, and influencing public opinion. The findings therefore underscore the importance of stance analysis in understanding the linguistic dynamics of labour-government negotiations and the broader relationship between discourse, ideology, and power.

5.2 Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed:

First, government and labour representatives should adopt more constructive and inclusive discursive strategies during wage negotiations. The study reveals that stance linguistic devices significantly influence public perception and shape the legitimacy of negotiating positions. Therefore, communicative practices that encourage dialogue, empathy, and mutual understanding should be prioritised over excessively adversarial and confrontational expressions.



Second, negotiating parties should exercise greater sensitivity in the deployment of evaluative and metaphorical expressions. While metaphors and strongly evaluative language function as effective persuasive resources, their excessive use may heighten tensions, reinforce ideological polarisation, and hinder consensus-building. More balanced and carefully moderated linguistic choices are therefore necessary for productive negotiations.

Third, media organisations should strengthen their role as responsible moderators of labour-government discourse. Since television platforms serve as important sites for the construction and contestation of public realities, media practitioners should ensure balanced representation of competing viewpoints and facilitate discussions that promote clarity, informed public engagement, and a more nuanced understanding of negotiation issues.

Fourth, labour and government spokespersons should receive regular training in strategic communication and discourse management. Capacity-building programmes in negotiation discourse, media communication, and persuasive language use would enhance their ability to articulate institutional positions effectively, manage ideological differences constructively, and engage the public in ways that foster trust and confidence.

Fifth, discourse-oriented approaches should be more deliberately integrated into studies of industrial relations and public policy negotiations in Nigeria. The findings demonstrate that labour disputes are not merely economic and political events but also discursive processes through which legitimacy, authority, and power relations are negotiated. Future policy analyses should therefore accord greater attention to the linguistic dimensions of institutional interactions.

Finally, further studies should extend the investigation of stance-taking practices to other communicative contexts and media platforms. Comparative studies involving newspaper editorials, radio programmes, social media interactions, and other forms of institutional discourse would provide broader insights into the relationship between language, ideology, and power in contemporary Nigerian public communication.

These recommendations underscore the importance of strategic language use in promoting effective negotiation processes, enhancing institutional legitimacy, and fostering more constructive labour-government relations in Nigeria



REFERENCES

- Adebayo, A. (2019).** *Labour Relations and Wage Administration in Nigeria*. Lagos: Malthouse Press.
- Biber, D., & Finegan, E. (1989).** Styles of stance in English: Lexical and grammatical marking of evidentiality and affect. *Text*, 9(1), 93–124.
- Charteris-Black, J. (2005).** *Politicians and Rhetoric: The Persuasive Power of Metaphor*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Du Bois, J. (2007).** The stance triangle. In R. Englebretson (Ed.), *Stancetaking in Discourse: Subjectivity, Evaluation, Interaction* (pp. 139–182). Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Englebretson, R. (Ed.). (2007).** *Stancetaking in Discourse: Subjectivity, Evaluation, Interaction*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Fairclough, N. (1995).** *Media Discourse*. London: Edward Arnold.
- Hyland, K. (2005).** *Metadiscourse: Exploring Interaction in Writing*. London: Continuum.
- International Labour Organization (ILO). (2021).** *Global Wage Report 2020–2021: Wages and Minimum Wages in the Time of COVID-19*. Geneva: ILO.
- Martin, J., & White, P. (2005).** *The Language of Evaluation: Appraisal in English*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- National Bureau of Statistics (NBS). (2024).** *Consumer Price Index and Inflation Report*. Abuja: NBS.
- Otobo, D. (2005).** *Industrial Relations: Theory and Controversies*. Lagos: Malthouse Press.
- van Dijk, T. (2008).** *Discourse and Context: A Sociocognitive Approach*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- World Bank. (2024).** *Nigeria Development Update: Turning the Corner*. Washington, DC: World Bank.