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A COMPARATIVE CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF IDEOLOGY IN THE ‘OLD’ AND ‘NEW’ NIGERIAN NATIONAL ANTHEMS

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Abstract: Studies on Nigeria’s national anthem have largely considered the old anthem, ‘Arise, O Compatriots’, to identify its stylistic, pragmatic, and discourse features, with limited attention paid to the newly approved national anthem, ‘Nigeria, we hail thee’. This study, therefore, presents a comparative critical discourse analysis of the Nigerian old and newly approved national anthems, examining them as codified institutional discourse with the aim of identifying divergent and shared ideologies and how they are enacted through linguistic means. The data were obtained from the lyrics of the old and new Nigerian national anthems, sourced from official government records and verified archival documents. Drawing on Fairclough’s approach to critical discourse analysis and Halliday’s systemic functional linguistics, the study investigates the anthems to uncover how state ideology is linguistically encoded in a comparative perspective. The study adopts a qualitative approach to show the interconnectedness of language and political power. The findings reveal that the two anthems’ ideological convergence is evident in their shared emphasis on a common national identity, indexed by kinship-related metaphors and collective pronouns; patriotism and service, with lexical items relating to duty and service; positive national values; and an emphasis on freedom and divine intervention. However, the anthems manifest some ideological divergences. For instance, while ‘Nigeria, we hail thee’ suggests optimism, futurism, and acknowledges unity in diversity, ‘Arise, O Compatriots’ appears motivational, emphasizes immediacy, and does not acknowledge the diversity in Nigeria. The analysis reveals that the language of the anthems performs the social work of reconstructing national consciousness. Ultimately, this study contributes to the understanding of institutional communication by demonstrating how state actors deploy specific linguistic strategies within national symbols to legitimize governance, manage transitions, and embody the evolving ideologies of the nation-state.

Keywords: Critical discourse analysis, systemic functional linguistics, national anthem, institutional discourse, national identity, state ideology, Nigeria.

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1. INTRODUCTION

A national anthem is a solemn patriotic song adopted as an expression of national identity. It is a tool to ingrain the idea of fatherland in the hearts of citizens, a symbolic device through which the nation is incorporated into citizens’ collective identity. The national anthem and pledge can also be seen as a creed to inspire virtues such as loyalty, service, and a sense of belonging to one’s country. It inspires love, unity, and courage in the face of unfavorable circumstances. One unique characteristic of national anthems is that they are carefully constructed in a “semantico-syntactic sense to manifest specific meanings” (Oyeleye, 1985: 138).

Before Independence in 1960, the patriotic song of Nigeria was the British ‘God Save the Queen’. When the Union Jack was lowered and Nigeria became independent on October 1, 1960, Nigeria’s anthem, ‘Nigeria, We Hail Thee’, was adopted. Its lyrics were compiled from the entries of the first five winners in the National Publicity Committee competition. Due to the criticisms against the national anthem and the agitation to change it, a national competition was held to choose another one. A committee was created to select the best anthem from all. The anthem, ‘Arise, O Compatriots’, was drawn from the five best entries, and the music was by the Nigerian Police Band under the directorship of Benedict Odiase in 1978. ‘Arise, O Compatriots’ became the nation’s anthem on the first day of October 1978. The anthem is usually performed to mark major events, such as the President’s address, major sporting events, and in schools, where it is usually accompanied by Nigeria’s National Pledge.

Nigeria’s first anthem, ‘Nigeria, We Hail Thee’, which served as the country’s national song from 1960 until 1978, was reinstated in 2024 when President Bola Tinubu signed the Nigerian National Anthem Bill into law. The anthem was composed by Frances Benda and written by British expatriate Lillian Jean Williams. Although it played a significant role in forming the country’s identity, the anthem was criticized over the years because its composer was not a Nigerian. The recent changes to legislation, led by Senator Opeyemi Bamidele (Ekiti Central), received strong support from lawmakers. Advocates for the bill argued that the first anthem promotes a stronger symbol of unity, peace, and prosperity compared to its successor, ‘Arise, O Compatriots’. ‘Nigeria, We Hail Thee’ was initially adopted in 1960 as the Nigerian National Anthem, but was subsequently replaced by ‘Arise, O Compatriots’ in 1978. However, in 2024, the 1960s’ ‘Nigeria, We Hail Thee’ was reinstated as the new Nigerian anthem. Therefore, in the context of this study, ‘Arise, O Compatriots’ is regarded as the old, while ‘Nigeria, We Hail Thee’ is regarded as the new anthem.

In discourse analysis, some of the most interesting observations are made, not only in the study of language but also in the way language is used. According to Brown and Yule (1983), the analysis of discourse is necessarily the analysis of language in use. As such, it cannot be restricted to the description of linguistic forms independent of the purpose or functions that those forms are

designed to serve in human affairs. Language as a way of social expression is also ideological. Ideology is fundamentally a set of ideas that dictates or guides the decisions and actions of a people in a context. It is the belief, creed, dogma, philosophy, or principle on which a political or economic system is based. In the discourse, language is not simply a neutral medium for generating subject knowledge but a form of social practice that acts to constitute and reflect social realities. According to Lemke (2002), language and ideology are intrinsically connected because language is the carrier of ideology, and no language is ideologically neutral. The relationship between ideology and meaning is rooted in the question of language. The thrust of this work is to undertake a comparative linguistic analysis of the old and new Nigerian national anthems to unearth the ideological implications of the language choices in the anthems. When the message and ideology of a nation's creed are not well understood, the effect is always enormous, leading to a lack of patriotism. The objectives of the study are 1) to identify and describe similar and different linguistic strategies in the two Nigerian anthems, and 2) to explain the ideological implications of the linguistic strategies.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Previous research has explored the linguistic dimensions of anthems through various frameworks, including pragmatics, pragma-stylistics, and stylistics. However, most of this scholarly attention has centred on national anthems from different countries. Studies on these anthems have examined diverse linguistic aspects, with particular interest in thematic and genre-related elements (Dze-Ngwa, 2014; Azam & Negar, 2014; Mustafa, 2015), lexical choices such as content words (Oyeyemi, 2018; Amenorvi & Grumah, 2019), cohesive markers (Mwinwelle, Adukpo, & Mwinwelle, 2019), and clause structures (de Souza, 2008; Wang & Ma, 2018). For example, Azam and Negar (2014) analysed the national anthems of 48 Asian countries and the five permanent members of the UN Security Council to identify linguistic patterns and contrasts. Their findings revealed that the Russian anthem linguistically aligns more closely with those of Asian countries, differing from the other Security Council members' anthems.

Similarly, Oyeyemi (2018) analysed Nigeria's former national anthem, focusing on its linguistic organization to enhance understanding and interpretability. The study showed that techniques such as grouping, prominence, and cohesion help structure the anthem, highlighting key terms like *unity*, *love*, *loyalty*, and *peace*, suggesting that these values are vital for maintaining Nigeria's unity amid its diversity. In a related paper, Odebode (2020) approached the old Nigerian anthem 'Arise, O Compatriots' from a socio-pragmatic angle. His research identified praying and informing as its primary illocutionary acts, with additional functions like asserting, summoning, and admonishing. These acts are used to remind citizens of their national duties and identity. Furthermore, using Austin's classification of speech acts, the study noted a dominance of behabitives, exercitives, and verdictives in the anthem. These prior works provide foundational insights that support the current research. Their focus on national anthems offers a backdrop against which this study seeks to explore further linguistic nuances. This work contributes to the ongoing scholarly conversation by focusing specifically on language use in Nigerian national anthems.

Language serves as a potent vehicle for ideology, often mirroring and perpetuating socio-political and cultural beliefs. The words and metaphors individuals employ can subtly convey assumptions about identity, power, and societal values. Many scholars have studied how language reveals such embedded ideologies. For instance, Ayinuola (2022) conducted a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) of twenty African national anthems, four from each of the continent's five

sub-regions, including Nigeria's old national anthem, to examine how ideological stances are lexicalised. The findings demonstrate that word choices are instrumental in expressing ideological positions within the texts. Similarly, Onyeachulam and Okoye (2024) use CDA to analyze the old Nigerian anthem, identifying the ideological messages embedded in it. Their findings emphasized how the anthem's language encourages national unity, patriotism, and faith in the country, with linguistic features reflecting values like equality and justice.

Adegbenro & Mayadenu (2025) examine Nigeria's reintroduced national anthem, "*Nigeria, We Hail Thee*," through a pragmatic lens, combining Searle's Speech Act Theory and Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). The mixed-method design allowed for both qualitative line-by-line analysis and quantitative categorisation of speech acts. The study identified distinct communicative functions, which are admiring, asserting unity, encouraging duty, asserting values, declaring, promising, committing, and praying. Findings showed that the most frequent illocutionary act was "praying" (25%), while others, like admiring and asserting unity, were less frequent (12.5% each). Using Austin's typology, verbs were categorised as behavitives (50%), exercitives (37.5%), and verdictives (12.5%). This indicated that the anthem strongly emphasises social conduct, unity, service, and values, with a marked reliance on divine guidance.

Emoruwa et al. (2025) carried out a functional analysis of the same anthem. The study employs Halliday's Functional Grammar, specifically the experiential metafunction and transitivity system. The researchers argue that earlier works focused on thematic and stylistic analysis of the abandoned anthem, neglecting deeper linguistic-functional dimensions. Six process types were identified: material, relational, mental, verbal, behavioural, and existential. The findings identify that material processes dominate, emphasising actions expected of Nigerian citizens in nation-building. Other processes were used sparingly to construct relationships and present Nigeria as a valued entity.

Bankole & Ayoola (2025) expand the study of the anthem by analysing intonation using David Brazil's Discourse Intonation Theory. This approach investigates the role of pitch movements in shaping meaning, emotion, and mnemonic retention. The anthem was segmented into tone units, and tone choices (falling, rising, fall-rise, and level) were assigned. The analysis revealed a dominance of the falling tone (↓), signaling assertiveness, closure, and patriotic conviction. The fall-rise tone (↓↑) added nuance and emotional shading, especially in lines on diversity and commitment. These tonal contrasts structured the anthem into rhetorical phases: salutation, unity, and aspiration. The study concludes that intonation is not decorative but a rhetorical resource that fosters solidarity, reinforces national identity, and enhances memorability. Its contribution lies in introducing a prosodic dimension to anthem studies, an area often overlooked compared to grammar and pragmatics.

While existing research has made significant contributions to the study of Nigerian national anthems, the comparative linguistic examination of Nigeria's former and current anthems has yet to receive sufficient attention. This study addresses that gap by critically examining both texts through a CDA lens, focusing on how lexical choices reveal the ideological underpinnings of each anthem.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study adopts an interdisciplinary framework that combines Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) with Fairclough's social semiotic model of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). CDA moves beyond surface-level language description to interrogate how linguistic

choices reflect and reinforce social hierarchies, institutional power, and broader societal structures. From a functional perspective on language, CDA views discourse as a site of meaning-making that often exceeds literal content. One of CDA's key strengths is its contextual sensitivity, which enables nuanced interpretations of how language functions in specific social settings.

Fairclough (1992, 1993, 1995; Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999) proposes a three-dimensional model for CDA: description, interpretation, and explanation. The first stage focuses on analyzing the formal features of a text, such as its vocabulary, grammar, and textual organization. The second phase interprets how these linguistic elements interact with the discourse practices that are produced and shaped by them. The final stage focuses on explaining the relationship between the text and its wider socio-political context, particularly with regard to power relations and ideology. According to Norman Fairclough (2001), this model, rooted in the tradition of Critical Linguistics and developed within Critical Discourse Analysis, offers a comprehensive lens for exploring the interplay between language and society.

Halliday's SFL complements CDA by emphasizing the social and functional aspects of language use. Halliday and Matthiessen (2014) conceptualize language as a semiotic system in which meaning emerges from choices made in context. SFL rests on four key premises: (1) language is inherently functional; (2) its primary role is to convey meaning; (3) language use is shaped by social and cultural contexts; and (4) linguistic analysis can uncover ideological patterns embedded within texts. These theoretical assumptions make SFL particularly suited for investigating the ideological dimensions of discourse.

The interdisciplinary framework combining Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) and Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is particularly apt for the comparative discursive and linguistic analysis of the two Nigerian anthems. SFL provides the tools to examine how meaning is constructed through choices in transitivity, mood, modality, and thematic structure, revealing how each anthem linguistically encodes ideologies of nationhood, unity, identity, and service. CDA, on the other hand, enables a critical exploration of how these linguistic features are embedded in broader socio-political contexts, uncovering how each anthem reflects, reinforces, or contests dominant narratives about Nigeria's national identity at different historical moments. Together, these frameworks allow for a nuanced comparative analysis that not only describes how language functions within each anthem but also explains how each text operates as a site of ideological expression.

The dataset for this study comprises the lyrics of both the former and current Nigerian national anthems. The new anthem contains 91 words, while the old anthem consists of 87 words, making a total corpus size of 178 words. The lyrics were sourced from official government and verified archival records, including the Federal Ministry of Information and reputable national media outlets that published the official texts upon adoption or reinstatement of the anthems. Only the officially sanctioned textual versions were used in the analysis to ensure accuracy and consistency. While recorded performances of the anthems exist, this study focuses exclusively on the transcribed lyrical texts, as the primary interest lies in their verbal and grammatical structures rather than musical or phonological features. The written form of the lyrics provides a stable linguistic dataset suitable for the type of textual and ideological analysis employed.

A qualitative approach is employed to analyze the data in depth. The analysis is grounded in both SFL and CDA frameworks to explore how each anthem articulates ideological positions through lexical and grammatical choices.

4. DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

The Nigerian national anthems, both old and new, reflect the country's values and aspirations through their lyrics. Linguistically, comparing these anthems reveals similarities and differences in language use. The analysis conducted first considers the meeting points of the two anthems before addressing points of divergence.

4.1. Convergence of language use and ideologies in the Old and New Nigerian anthems

There are convergences in the themes of the two anthems in the aspects of national unity, loyalty, and pride. Both emphasize Nigeria as a beloved homeland and seek to create a collective national identity that transcends regional and ethnic divisions. These are shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1. *Ideological convergences in the anthems*

Ideologies	Arise, O compatriots (AOC)	Nigeria, we hail thee (NWHT)
National identity and unity	Nigeria, compatriots, we, our, fatherland, unity	Nigeria, our, own, native land, motherland, brotherhood, Nigerians, all
Patriotism and service	Call, labour, serve, arise	Serve, to hand on
National aspirations	Peace, unity, love, strength, faith, freedom, honesty, true, just	peace, justice, banner without stain, plenty, blessed
God's intervention	God of creation	God, prayer
Freedom	Freedom	Sovereign

4.2. National unity and identity

National unity and identity are interconnected ideologies that play a crucial role in a nation's cohesion and stability. They involve a sense of belonging, shared values, and collective identity among a country's citizens. Every society needs a degree of unity and a core of shared values. In both anthems under consideration, elements that foreground national unity and identity are pronouns, kinship-related terms, adjectives, and nouns. A glimpse at the table above reveals lexical elements that emphasize national unity and identity in the two anthems. Examples of how the elements are used are found below.

Excerpt 1: "*Nigeria we hail thee, **Our own dear native land**, Though tribe and tongue may differ, In **brotherhood**, we stand*". (NWHT)

Excerpt 2: "*Arise, O **compatriots**, **Nigeria's** call obey. To serve **our fatherland***". (AOC).

Excerpt 3: "***Nigerians all**, are proud to serve **Our sovereign Motherland**.*

Our flag shall be a symbol" (NWHT)

Excerpt 4: "***One nation bound in freedom***" (AOC)

In excerpts 1 to 3 above, the name 'Nigeria' constructs the nation's identity, and Nigerians are constructed as compatriots in the second example. Further, the pronouns 'we' and 'our' also foreground the collective identity of Nigerians. These pronouns are inclusive, creating a sense of collective identity among Nigerians. They reinforce the idea that the anthem is speaking for all citizens, fostering a shared national identity. The possessive 'our' in excerpts 1 and 2 suggests ownership and belonging, which are fundamental aspects of national identity. 'Our own dear native land' and 'our fatherland' employ possessive and affectionate language, emphasizing a personal

and emotional connection to the country. It is also important to note that the phrase ‘our own’ is tautologous, and given that NWHT was composed by a Briton, this suggests that it was an intentional move and therefore ideological. This repetition is done to emphasize the ownership or the nation’s collective identity. In the same vein, declarative mood also foregrounds national unity and identity, ‘in brotherhood we stand’. This promotes an ideal of national solidarity and collective identity that transcends individual differences. Another discursive strategy is the placement of important elements at the beginning of sentences. Halliday’s Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) highlights that while sentences typically follow the pattern of a nominal group (subject) followed by a verbal group and then the goal, this order can be deliberately altered depending on the intended communicative function. Positioning the circumstantial element before the subject is not merely a stylistic variation but also reflects an underlying ideological intention. The writer of the anthem, ‘Nigeria, we hail thee’, foregrounds the prepositional phrase, ‘in brotherhood’, in the sentence ‘in brotherhood, we stand’ to emphasize national unity. The concept of ‘brotherhood’ also evokes a sense of familial bond and mutual support among Nigerians. It describes the manner or condition of unity, reflecting affection and solidarity. Considering the historical context of the anthem, adopted in 1960, it reflects the post-independence era, when the newly sovereign Nigeria was working to establish a cohesive national identity. During this period, fostering unity among Nigeria’s diverse population was crucial to nation-building. The emphasis on brotherhood can be seen as a political statement advocating national solidarity and cooperation amid potential ethnic tensions. In excerpt 3, ‘Nigerians all’ is also an inclusive phrase that addresses all citizens of Nigeria, and emphasises unity. ‘Our sovereign Motherland’ uses a possessive element to create a sense of belonging and reverence for the nation. The term ‘Motherland’ anthropomorphizes the country, imbuing it with a nurturing and protective quality. ‘Motherland’ evokes a nurturing, familial image, positioning the country as a figure deserving of loyalty and care. There is also an equivalence of this in AOC, ‘Fatherland’. Furthermore, excerpt 4 reveals that the ideology behind the old Nigerian national anthem is unity. It is based on the desire to enthrone a unified country (one nation). The fact that the secession movement of 1967 through 1970 contributed to the ideology of the old anthem cannot be denied. The anthem aims to reconcile all and make everyone see Nigeria as “one country” that is bound in freedom, peace, and unity. It can be argued that the anthem aims to soothe the upset and mend the cracks in Nigeria’s foundation. Generally, both anthems draw on semantic fields related to unity.

4.3. Patriotism and service

Patriotism and service are common themes in anthems. Words relating to duty and service, such as ‘serve’, ‘call’, and ‘labour’, are prevalent, emphasizing the importance of contributing to the nation’s well-being in both anthems.

Excerpt 5: *“Nigerians all, and proud to serve Our sovereign Motherland” (NWHT)*

Excerpt 6: *“Arise, O compatriots, Nigeria’s call obey
To serve our fatherland” (AOC)*

In the two anthems, there is a call to service and duty. The anthems instil a sense of duty and pride in serving the nation. This is indexed by the verbs ‘to serve’, ‘arise’, and ‘obey’. However, the call to duty is more emphatic in AOC than in NWHT. This is evident in the use of imperative material processes ‘arise’ and ‘obey’ in the AOC, as seen in excerpt 6, as against the declarative ‘proud to serve’ in the NWHT, shown by excerpt 5. The imperative material processes create a

sense of urgency and collective responsibility. The lexical item ‘serve’ is repeatedly used in AOC to emphasize duty and service to the nation. It is a call for patriotism to all, especially to those who had lost interest in Nigeria, particularly during the secession war of 1967 – 1970. The declarative ‘Proud to serve’ in NWHT also conveys a sense of duty and honor, suggesting that serving the country is a noble and commendable act. The language reflects a strong sense of patriotism, with citizens described as ‘proud to serve’ their country. In AOC, the material process of doing is elucidated in the foregrounded verb, ‘arise’. The actor is cataphorically understood as ‘compatriots’ as the original sentence is ‘all compatriots arise’. The material process construes a national call to all Nigerians to serve their country. The material process appears in the verb ‘obey’. The original sentence is ‘all compatriots obey Nigeria’s call’. The material process is functionally used to instill patriotism in the hearts of Nigerians. The actor is unactualized, still understood anaphorically as ‘compatriots’, and the goal is actualized as ‘Nigeria’s call’. The infinitive phrase ‘to serve our fatherland’ is a purpose circumstance. The language of the anthem motivates Nigerians to serve their homeland. The prepositional phrase ‘with love and strength and faith’ clarifies the tools needed to accomplish the action.

The term ‘Motherland’ in excerpt 5 personifies the nation as a nurturing entity deserving of devotion and service, reinforcing a strong patriotic sentiment. The reference to the ‘sovereign Motherland’ emphasizes loyalty to an independent and autonomous nation. The text reflects the post-independence era, emphasizing sovereignty and national pride following colonial rule. It resonates with the themes of nation-building and the creation of a unified national identity. The text serves as a call to civic duty and national service, encouraging citizens to contribute actively to the nation’s development.

4.4. National aspirations

The anthems’ aspirations for truth, justice, peace, and prosperity indicate a forward-looking vision for the nation, setting ideals for governance and societal values. National aspirations are indexed by nominals suggesting positive values.

Excerpt 7: “*Our flag shall be a symbol
That **truth** and **justice** reign,
In **peace** or battle honour’d,
To hand on to our children
A **banner without stain**” (NWHT)*

Excerpt 8: “*With **love** and **strength** and **faith**
The labour of our heroes past
Shall never be in vain
To serve with heart and might
One nation bound in **freedom, peace** and **unity**” (AOC)*

In the excerpts above, the anthems also utilize nominalization, the process of turning processes or attributes into noun forms. The abstract nouns, such as ‘love’, ‘strength’, ‘faith’, ‘freedom’, ‘peace’, and ‘unity’ in AOC, and ‘sovereign’, ‘truth’, and ‘justice’ in NWHT, are timeless and universal, making the values seem incontestable and beyond debate. They foreground the values that the nation aspires to uphold. These nouns represent core values and qualities that citizens are encouraged to embody, reflecting aspirations for a nation built on strong, positive principles. ‘Freedom, peace, and unity’ are abstract nouns that encapsulate the ultimate goals for the nation,

foregrounding aspirations for a free, peaceful, and united Nigeria. This is a powerful discursive move, as it naturalizes certain ideologies, such as nationalism, integrity, and ethical governance, as foundational truths rather than socially constructed ideals. In NWHT, we observe a predominance of relational processes, ‘Our flag shall be a symbol / That truth and justice reign’, which link abstract values to national symbols, assigning them identity and significance. Similarly, in AOC, ‘the labour of our heroes past / shall never be in vain’ employs relational process to connect past efforts with future responsibilities, foregrounding national continuity. The mood in both anthems is largely declarative, signaling authoritative assertions about what Nigeria is or *ought to be*. However, there are also modal elements, ‘shall never be in vain’, and ‘shall be a symbol’, which indicate obligation and commitment. This modality projects certainty and determination, constructing the envisioned values not as optional but as national imperatives. There is an emphasis on the legacy to be passed down to future generations in NWHT. The ‘banner without stain’ metaphorically represents a nation untainted by corruption or injustice, highlighting a vision of integrity and ethical governance. This is particularly relevant in a postcolonial context marked by concerns over governance and accountability. This metaphor, while poetic, also performs an ideological function: it elevates national symbols to moral standards, embedding expectations of ethical behavior into patriotic sentiment.

Both anthems construct a narrative of a morally upright, unified Nigeria that values justice and peace. Discursively, these texts emerge from specific historical moments: NWHT from the optimism of early independence, and AOC from a period of post-war national reconstruction. Thus, their aspirational language also serves to re-legitimize the state, unifying citizens under a common ideological banner.

4.5. God’s intervention

The invocation of God reflects the importance of religion in Nigerian society and portrays a sense of moral and divine support for the nation’s aspirations. The belief in divinity is reflected in the two anthems.

Excerpt 9: “*O God of all creation, Grant this our one request,
Help us to build a nation,
Where no man is oppressed,
And so with peace and plenty
Nigeria may be blessed*” (NWHT)

Excerpt 10: “*Oh God of creation, direct our noble cause
Guide our leader’s right
Help our youth the truth to know
In love and honesty to grow*” (AOC)

The concluding stanzas of both ‘Nigeria, We Hail Thee’ (NWHT) and ‘Arise, O Compatriots’ (AOC) invoke divine intervention as essential to the nation’s progress. The plea for a country ‘where no man is oppressed’ reflects a desire for justice and equality, while the hope for ‘peace and plenty’ signals aspirations for national prosperity. These lines are grounded in the belief that divine involvement is crucial to achieving unity and building an egalitarian Nigeria. This perspective is not unique to Nigeria but is widespread across many African nations, where religious belief is deeply entwined with national identity and governance.

Excerpts 9 and 10 function as prayers, expressing the ideology that national progress is contingent upon God's will, the same God believed to have brought Nigeria into existence. In particular, the second line of excerpt 10 highlights the significant influence that leaders' decisions and actions have on the country's unity and the people's trust in the nation. The prayer becomes especially pertinent in light of the potential for poor leadership to undermine national cohesion and erode public confidence.

The call for divine guidance for leaders and for truth to be instilled in the youth emphasizes the need for principled leadership and ethically grounded, well-informed citizens. While both anthems appeal to God, AOC places greater emphasis on leadership and youth, aligning with modern ideals of responsible governance and civic engagement. The material process verbs '*direct, guide, and help*' position God as an active agent in national affairs, symbolizing reliance on divine support for the nation's development, protection, and overall well-being.

4.6. National freedom

National freedom typically refers to a country's ability to govern itself without external control or influence, functioning as a discursive reaffirmation of the country's postcolonial identity and aspirations for autonomous governance. It encompasses political independence, sovereignty, and the right to self-determination. National freedom is a key concept in the context of decolonization, national liberation movements, and the establishment of sovereign states. It includes the capacity to make independent decisions regarding political, economic, social, and cultural policies. Both anthems emphasise national freedom, and the choice of lexical items indexes this. A glimpse at the excerpts below reveals this.

Excerpt 11: "*Our sovereign Motherland.*

Our flag shall be a symbol

That truth and justice reign" (NWHT)

Excerpt 12: "*One nation bound in **freedom**, peace and unity*" (AOC)

In excerpts 11 and 12, the main terms showing national freedom, 'sovereign' (NWHT) and 'freedom' (AOC), are realized as nominal groups, strategically deployed to reify abstract political ideals. These nouns are not linked to specific agents or processes, a typical effect of nominalization, which allows the concepts of freedom and sovereignty to appear natural, timeless, and universally accepted. For instance, 'Our sovereign Motherland' encodes the nation's independence not just as an achievement tied to historical struggle, but also as a defining, unquestioned attribute. Likewise, 'bound in freedom' metaphorically frames freedom as a unifying force rather than simply a political status. The metaphor 'bound in freedom' is particularly ideologically potent. It suggests a paradox. Being 'bound' typically connotes restriction, yet here it is paired with 'freedom', indicating that citizens are unified through liberation. This ideological metaphor constructs national freedom not as individual autonomy, but as a collective bond, reinforcing the idea that true liberty lies in unity and mutual responsibility. It transforms the abstract concept of independence into a shared national experience. These linguistic choices are functionally used to communicate an optimistic vision of the future. 'Sovereign' reinforces the idea of independence and self-governance, which is central to the ideology of national freedom. The clause, 'That truth and justice reign', connects the flag (and by extension, the nation) to universal ideals of truth and justice. It suggests that the nation is morally righteous and governed by fairness, which aligns with the ideology of national freedom as a just and equitable state.

4.7. Divergence in language use and ideologies in the Old and New Nigerian anthems

The old and the new Nigerian anthems also diverge ideologically, indexed by the use of language. These differences are discussed below.

4.8. Optimism versus motivation

The tone of NWHT is that of celebration and affirmation. The first line of the anthem sets a celebratory tone and emphasises pride in the nation.

Excerpt 13: *“Nigeria we hail thee,
Our own dear native land” (NWHT)*

The tone of NWHT is formal and somewhat reverential, reflecting a sense of colonial influence. This anthem reflects the optimism of the immediate post-colonial period and the challenges of forging a unified national identity from a diverse population. Phrases like ‘sovereign Motherland’ and ‘our own dear native land’ suggest a formal, almost poetic style. The first clause depicts citizens as active agents paying homage to the nation. The material process of ‘hail’ suggests celebratory action, symbolizing reverence, allegiance, and national pride. It affirms an emotional and ceremonial engagement with the idea of Nigeria. The declarative mood functions as an assertion rather than a request or command, conveying confidence, certainty, and optimism. Again, the line thematizes ‘Nigeria’ by placing it at the start, establishing it as the point of departure, and emphasizing its centrality in the discourse. This thematic foregrounding aligns with the celebratory tone, as the nation itself becomes the subject of praise. Generally, the lexical choices ‘hail’, ‘dear’, ‘native’, and ‘own’ carry positive evaluative meaning, promoting a glorified image of Nigeria. At a broader ideological level, the lines participate in the (re)construction of national identity. Postcolonial optimism is encoded through language that uplifts and unifies, reflecting a desire to move forward with pride and hope.

On the other hand, the tone of AOC is more direct and motivational, with a call-to-action format. Imperative mood, like ‘Arise, O compatriots’ and ‘Nigeria’s call obey’, suggests a sense of urgency and collective responsibility. The material processes, ‘arise’ and ‘obey’, particularly foreground the call to action. Moreover, the verb ‘arise’ is thematized to emphasize the importance of this action. Introduced in 1978, during a period of military rule and significant political changes, it reflects a desire for stability, unity, and a forward-looking national vision. The lines immediately call the citizens to action. AOC employs a directive and mobilising strategy, urging citizens to take action and embody values like love, strength, and faith to achieve unity.

4.9. Diversity

Another area of divergence in the two anthems is the emphasis on diversity. NWHT emphasizes diversity in Nigeria, indexed by the thematization of the subordinate clause, ‘Though tribe and tongue may differ’. This acknowledges the diversity within Nigeria, referring to its multitude of ethnic groups and languages. The acknowledgement of differences (Though tribe and tongue may differ), followed by a commitment to unity (In brotherhood, we stand), highlights a theme of inclusivity. Acknowledging ‘tribe and tongue’ signifies recognition of Nigeria’s rich cultural diversity while advocating for unity. This dual acknowledgement is crucial in a country with over 250 ethnic groups. This unity is not despite diversity but through it, recognizing and celebrating the multiplicity of cultures within Nigeria. Nigeria is home to over 250 ethnic groups and more than 500 languages, making diversity a prominent characteristic of its social fabric. The anthem’s reference to ‘tribe and tongue’ directly addresses this reality, promoting a vision of unity that embraces, rather

than erases, cultural differences. National anthems play a significant role in shaping collective consciousness and national identity. By promoting diversity as a theme, the anthem contributes to the ongoing project of nation-building in Nigeria. In recent times, Nigeria has witnessed ethnic conflicts, especially during the 2023 elections. This may have influenced the re-enactment of the first national anthem, given its emphasis on unity in diversity.

4.10. Approach to unity: Fatherland versus Motherland metaphors

Motherland is a conceptual metaphor, representing the nation as a mother. The source domain is mother, which has the semantic features +animate, +human, +productivity, +fertility, +good care, and +diligence, while the nation has semantic features +inanimate, and +abstract. This implies that a nation is a mother. Motherland is the country in which somebody was born. It shows productivity. It is a place of oneness and togetherness. In addition, the nation as a mother depicts a place of fertility. It is often culturally posited that children born to the same mother often share a stronger bond than when they are only connected by the father. The choice of motherhood in NWHT foregrounds the strong bond and unity that should exist among Nigerians. The father metaphor, on the other hand, is the notion that the nation is a father. A nation is a place that provides security to its sons and daughters. The semantic features of the father are +animate, +human, +protection, and +security. The nation as a father shows a place of protection and acceptability. Fatherland equally refers to somebody's ancestral nation and a native land. Generally, in the African context, it is believed that there is a higher level of closeness among children of the same mother than among children of the same father, hence the adoption of the new anthem.

4.11. Futurism versus immediacy

Futurism is a forward-looking approach that emphasizes long-term possibilities, innovation, and anticipation of future developments. It often involves speculation about advancements in society and culture. Immediacy, on the other hand, is a focus on the present, addressing current needs, issues, or opportunities with a sense of urgency. Immediacy values practical, actionable solutions and immediate outcomes. NWHT focuses on a hopeful future, emphasizing the legacy to be handed to future generations and the moral duty of current citizens, while AOC concentrates on immediate action and the realization of specific goals such as peace and justice, reflecting a more urgent and concrete set of aspirations.

5. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The analysis of “*Nigeria We Hail Thee*” (NWHT) and “*Arise, O Compatriots*” (AOC) reveals that both anthems employ similar linguistic strategies to promote unity, patriotism, and moral responsibility, yet they differ in tone, focus, and ideological orientation. These similarities and differences provide insight into how language is strategically used to construct, sustain, and redefine Nigerian national identity across historical periods. The first objective of the study is to identify and describe similar and different linguistic strategies in the two Nigerian anthems. A key similarity in both anthems lies in their use of inclusive pronouns such as *we*, *our*, and *all*, as well as collective national identifiers like *compatriots*, *Nigerians*, and *brotherhood*. These lexical choices serve as unifying devices that linguistically construct the nation as a shared community. Through this collective voice, both anthems erase individual, ethnic, and regional distinctions in favor of a singular national identity. This inclusive linguistic strategy aligns with the ideological aim of fostering a sense of belonging and solidarity among citizens.

Another shared strategy is the use of positive evaluative lexis, words like *unity*, *peace*, *faith*, *freedom*, *honesty*, and *justice*. Such words express the nation's moral ideals and aspirations, thereby positioning Nigeria as a virtuous and promising homeland. This type of moral and evaluative language corroborates Oyeyemi (2018) and Emoruwa, Saka & Awolaoye (2025) on how moral virtues are foregrounded in the Anthems to inspire collective commitment and loyalty. Both anthems also make reference to divine intervention, invoking God as a moral and spiritual foundation for national unity. Phrases such as “*God of creation*” in AOC and “*God*” and “*prayer*” in NWHT reveal that both texts construct the nation as dependent on divine guidance. This strategy positions God as an ideological guarantor of peace and righteousness, thus fusing nationalism with spirituality. The persistence of this theocentric discourse across both anthems demonstrates that religion continues to function as a central ideological anchor in Nigerian national identity formation.

Despite these convergences, notable linguistic differences distinguish the two anthems. *Nigeria We Hail Thee* employs a softer, descriptive tone, relying on sentimental expressions such as “*native land*”, “*motherland*”, and “*banner without stain*”, corroborating Bankole & Ayoola (2025). These evoke emotional attachment, gratitude, and admiration for the homeland. The linguistic style reflects the anthem's historical context of independence, where the focus was on celebrating the birth of a sovereign nation and expressing hope for peaceful coexistence. In contrast, ‘*Arise, O Compatriots*’ adopts a directive and action-oriented tone characterized by imperatives such as “*arise*”, “*serve*”, “*labour*”, and “*call*.” This grammatical shift from description to exhortation signals a transition from mere celebration to active nation-building. The anthem's linguistic structure positions the citizen not as a passive observer but as an agent of national progress. This strategy reflects a postcolonial ideological orientation, emphasizing responsibility, productivity, and civic engagement.

Another linguistic difference lies in how freedom is represented. In NWHT, the notion of freedom is expressed through the term “*sovereign*”, symbolizing national independence and autonomy from colonial rule. In AOC, however, “*freedom*” appears alongside “*peace*”, “*unity*”, and “*love*”, suggesting a broader, internalized understanding of freedom as a moral and civic value that citizens must uphold. Thus, while the new anthem constructs freedom as a collective political achievement, the old anthem redefines it as a continuous ethical and social responsibility.

The second research objective is to explain the ideological implications of the linguistic strategies. The identified linguistic strategies carry deep ideological implications that reflect Nigeria's socio-political evolution. For instance, the shared use of inclusive pronouns and collective identity markers in both anthems underscores the enduring ideological project of national unity. It shows that despite Nigeria's persistent ethnic and regional diversity, both texts function as linguistic tools for promoting a unified national consciousness. Furthermore, the consistent invocation of divine authority in both anthems reveals the fusion of religion and nationalism in Nigerian ideological consciousness. The attribution of national progress and morality to divine will in both anthems legitimize the nation's existence through spiritual authority. This theocentric ideology reflects Nigeria's broader sociocultural context, where religion plays a vital role in legitimizing political and moral values. Divergences in ideologies include the approach to unity, diversity, optimism versus motivation, and futurism versus immediacy. Generally, the findings show how national anthems function not merely as ceremonial texts but as evolving ideological instruments that articulate the nation's self-conception across time.

6. CONCLUSION

This comparative study of language use and ideological shifts in the old and new Nigerian national anthems reveals both convergence and divergence in their representation of Nigeria's values and national identity. While both anthems emphasize the importance of national unity, patriotism, and a shared sense of national aspiration, they also underscore the role of God's intervention and the desire for freedom. These commonalities reflect enduring elements of Nigeria's self-conception across different historical periods, suggesting a consistent focus on promoting a cohesive and aspirational national identity. However, some divergences were identified in other areas, highlighting the distinct socio-political contexts in which the anthems were written. The new anthem, 'Nigeria, We Hail Thee', embodies a post-colonial optimism and a focus on consolidating the newly gained independence. In contrast, the old anthem, 'Arise, O Compatriots', written after the Nigerian Civil War, projects a more urgent call for national reconstruction, civic responsibility, and collective effort in a nation grappling with internal divisions. Overall, the study demonstrates that while certain core values have remained central to Nigeria's national ethos, the evolution of the anthems mirrors the country's changing historical and political realities, with shifts in language reflecting new challenges and aspirations. This evolution highlights the dynamic relationship between national symbols like anthems and the broader ideological landscape they inhabit.

Conflict of Interest

The authors state that there is no conflict of interest.

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Appendix

A. Nigeria, We Hail Thee

I
 Nigeria, we hail thee,
 Our own dear native land,
 Though tribe and tongue may differ,
 In brotherhood we stand
 Nigerians all,
 Are proud to serve our sovereign Motherland.

II
 Our flag shall be a symbol
 That truth and justice reign,
 In peace or battle honoured,
 And this we count as gain,
 To hand on to our children
 A banner without stain.

III

O God of all creation,

Grant this our one request:

Help us to build a nation

Where no man is oppressed,

And so with peace and plenty

Nigeria may be blessed.

(Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Federal Republic of Nigeria)

B. Arise, O Compatriots

Arise, O compatriots, Nigeria's call obey

To serve our fatherland

With love and strength and faith

The labour of our heroes past

Shall never be in vain

To serve with heart and might

One nation bound in freedom, peace and unity.

Oh God of creation, direct our noble cause

Guide our leader's right

Help our youth the truth to know

In love and honesty to grow

And living just and true

Great lofty heights attain

To build a nation where peace and justice shall reign.

(Nigeria High Commission)