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A Sociocognitive Analysis of Traumatic Expressions in Intimate Partner Violence Victims' Narratives in Osun State, Nigeria

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Abstract

Intimate partner violence (IPV) narratives are channels into the concealed world of victims globally, yet less attention has been given to how language use in these narratives reflect the trauma experienced by the victims. While research has highlighted the factors and health implications of IPV, the linguistic choices and patterns employed to convey the experiences are yet to be explored. This study addresses this gap by using a Sociocognitive Discourse Studies (SCDS) approach to explore how language in IPV narratives reflects trauma and shapes societal and cultural views of IPV in Osun State, Nigeria. Six narratives from the victims were analysed to identify recurring linguistic expressions reflecting trauma in the narratives. The results showed that some of the linguistic features serving as markers of trauma are victim's specific lexical choices, including deictic words, adverbial expressions, repetitions, pronouns, reported speeches, metaphor, dates and numbers, hedging, phrases, clauses, simple and complex sentences, causal expressions, verbs, definitive sentence structure, degrading descriptions, repeated active verbs, evaluative expressions, discursive intensifiers, verbs, modal statements, and non-chronological and disjointed narrative structures. These results reveal that the use of the different lexical choices and patterns by victims serve as markers of trauma in IPV contexts and through employing these linguistic markers, victims were able to provide detailed information of the traumatic experiences they went through in their IPV situations.

Keywords: Intimate Partner Violence (IPV), Language and Trauma, Sociocognitive Discourse Studies, Nigerian Society, Cultural Influence, Trauma Narratives

Introduction

Language, as the focal means of communication, is important for social interactions and deep emotional connections between people. It facilitates the expression of inner feelings, personal conflicts, and psychological experiences, which significantly affect how people view and relate to one another. The way people choose their words, their accent, and vocal pitch can reveal important details about their emotional and psychological states, including how people narrate their experiences to reveal the trauma they are experiencing, and all the distressing feelings going on in their subconscious minds that are invisible to

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the physical eyes (Berns, 2017[2]). Intimate partner violence (IPV) is a societal issue that manifests in various forms and contexts, and despite significant strides in understanding its multifaceted nature, the linguistic dimensions of IPV narratives remain underexplored, particularly in Nigeria.

Through the lens of sociocognitive discourse approach, this study delves into the linguistic expressions of trauma present in the narratives of IPV victims in Osun State, Nigeria, providing a fresh perspective that highlights the intersection of language, culture, and trauma. Prior research has predominantly focused on the physical and psychological aspects of IPV, often neglecting the significant role of language in framing victims' experiences and societal responses (Coates & Wade, 2007[3]; Berns, 2017). As Anderson and Umberson (2001)[4] argue, the way IPV is articulated by survivors and perceived by society is deeply intertwined with cultural and gender norms, which are, in turn, influenced by linguistic practices.

The existing literature emphasizes the importance of understanding IPV narratives as a means of facilitating healing and empowerment among survivors (Herman, 2015[5]; Meyer, 2016[6]). However, there remains a substantial gap in academic inquiry regarding how linguistic expressions within these narratives reflect and influence trauma experiences, particularly in Nigeria. This gap calls for a critical exploration of the relationship between language and trauma, which is necessary for developing culturally sensitive interventions for IPV issues.

This study aims to address this gap by examining how language is employed to express trauma in IPV narratives in Osun State, Nigeria, through qualitative methods, to answer the fundamental questions: What is the relationship between linguistic expressions and trauma experiences among IPV victims in Osun State, Nigeria? To what extent does language influence the perception of IPV in this society? How does the cultural context influence the language used in IPV narratives? These inquiries will guide the study on the perceptions of IPV within the geographical region.

[2]N. Berns, Framing the Victim: Domestic Violence, Media, and Social Problems (Routledge, 2017), 45.
[3]L. Coates and A. Wade, "Language and Violence: Analysis of Four Discursive Operations," Journal of Family Violence 22, no. 7 (2007): 511-522, https://doi.org/10.1007/s10896-007-9082-2.
[4]K. L. Anderson and D. Umberson, "Gendering Violence: Masculinity and Power in Men's Accounts of Domestic Violence," Gender & Society 15, no. 3 (2001): 358-380, https://doi.org/10.1177/089124301015003003.
[5]Judith L. Herman, Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence—From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror (New York: Basic Books, 2015), 114.
[6]S. Meyer, "Examining Women's Agency in Managing Intimate Partner Violence and the Related Risk of Homelessness: The Role of Harm Minimisation," Global Public Health 11, no. 1–2 (2016): 198-210, https://doi.org/10.1080/17441692.2015.1047390.

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Literature Review

Many studies have examined intimate partner violence from different analytical perspectives (Adegbite and Ajuwon, 2015[7]; Adegoke and Danbagai, 2024[8]; Umeh, 2022[9]; Oyediran, 2021[10]; Oyediran and Isiugo-Abanihe, 2019[11]; Antai, 2011[12]; Okagbue, et al., 2026[13]). From the health sector, many of the studies are investigations into the health implications of the victims (Mapayi et al. 2013[14]; Benebo et al. 2018[15]; Ikekwuibe and Okoror (2021)[16], while some others are from other academic sectors (Omorogiuwa and Amas, 2020[17]; Effiong, et al, 2022[18]; Dim and Ogunye, 2021[19]; Sunmola, et al. 2020[20]; Aragbuwa, 2021[21])

[7]O. Adegbite and A. J. Ajuwon, "Intimate Partner Violence among Women of Child Bearing Age in Alimosho LGA of Lagos State, Nigeria," African Journal of Biomedical Research 18, no. 2 (2015): 135–146, https://doi.org/10.4314/AJBR.V18I1.

[8]O. O. Adegoke, and Danbagai, N. L. 2024. Intimate partner violence (IPV) and positive life outcomes: Narratives and emerging trends in Ibadan, South-Western Nigeria. African Journal of Psychology & Social Science Issues, 27(2).

[9]I. Umeh, "Community-Based Interventions for IPV Prevention," Journal of Community Health, published electronically ahead of print 2022.

[10]K. A. Oyediran, "Intimate Partner Violence in Nigeria," in Handbook of Internal Migration in Ghana (Cham: Springer, 2021), 85–95, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-74808-1_10.

[11]K. A. Oyediran and U. Isiugo-Abanihe, "Perceptions of Wife Beating Among Married Men in Nigeria," International Journal of Violence and Abuse 21, no. 3 (2019): 250-267.

[12]D. Antai, "Controlling Behavior, Power Relations within Intimate Relationships and Intimate Partner Physical and Sexual Violence against Women in Nigeria," BMC Public Health 11, no. 1 (2011): 511, https://doi.org/10.1186/1471-2458-11-511.

[13]H. I. Okagbue et al., "Profiles of Victims and Perpetrators of Intimate Partner Violence in Nigeria Using the Socio-Ecological Model," International Journal of Sub-Saharan African Research 4, no. 1 (2026): 166-179.

[14]B. Mapayi et al., "Impact of Intimate Partner Violence on Anxiety and Depression Amongst Women in Ile-Ife, Nigeria," Archives of Women's Mental Health 16, no. 1 (2013): 11–18, https://doi.org/10.1007/s00737-012-0307-x.

[15]F. O. Benebo, B. Schumann, and M. Vaezghasemi, "Intimate Partner Violence against Women in Nigeria: A Multilevel Study Investigating the Effect of Women's Status and Community Norms," BMC Women's Health 18, no. 1 (2018): 136, https://doi.org/10.1186/s12905-018-0628-7.

[16]I. C. Ikekwuibe and C. E. M. Okoror, "The Pattern and Socio-Cultural Determinants of Intimate Partner Violence in a Nigerian Rural Community," African Journal of Primary Health Care & Family Medicine 13, no. 1 (2021): 8, https://doi.org/10.4102/PHCFM.V13I1.2435.

[17]T. B. Omorogiuwa and S. Amas, "A Cross-Cultural Analysis of Intimate Partner Violence in Nigeria and Social Work Intervention," Political Science, Sociology and Law 1, no. 45 (2020): 9, https://doi.org/10.20535/2308-5053.2020.1(45).226352.

[18]J. E. Effiong, P. N. Ibeagha, and S. K. Iorfa, "Traumatic Bonding in Victims of Intimate Partner Violence Is Intensified via Empathy," Journal of Social and Personal Relationships 39, no. 12 (2022): 3619–3637.

[19]E. E. Dim and O. Ogunye, "Perpetration and Experience of Intimate Partner Violence Among Residents in Bariga Local Community Development Area, Lagos State, Nigeria," Journal of Interpersonal Violence 36, no. 1–2 (2021): NP1030, https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260517737555.

[20]A. M. Sunmola et al., "Does Relation between Women's Justification of Wife Beating and Intimate Partner Violence Differ in Context of Husband's Controlling Attitudes in Nigeria?" Journal of Family Issues 41, no. 1 (2020): 85–108.

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Regarding the significant associations between intimate partner violence, anxiety, and depression, Mapayi et al.'s (2013)[22] study revealed that anxiety and depression were radically connected with intimate partner violence, and women were ten times more likely to report being depressed and 17 times more likely to report anxiety if they were in violent relationships. Aragbuwa (2021) interrogates the discursive strategies used in Stella Dimoko Korkus' weblog victims' narratives and their ideological functions as resistant discourse against domestic violence. The study utilised a sociocognitive model of CDA similar to the current research, but the victims were not interviewed personally to capture the mood of the moment. Although there have been a handful of studies on IPV, there is still a paucity of studies on how trauma is reflected through the use of language by victims in their narratives in literature.

People often think that IPV refers only to physical forms such as beating, sexual violence, and bruising, but it also includes psychological forms such as verbal aggression, threats, intimidation, coercion, controlling behaviors, social isolation, tactics to reduce self-esteem, and cruel manipulations (Iverson, n.d.).[23] In situations involving intimate partner violence (IPV), a complicated mix of financial, sexual, psychological, and physical abuse results in trauma to the victim. Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), depression, and chronic pain are just a few of the serious, long-term mental and physical health effects that these traumatic events frequently cause (Iverson, n.d.). Although the term "trauma" was first mostly employed in the fields of medicine and psychiatry, it has recently made its way into common speech, where it is frequently used and extended in meaning for any kind of unpleasant or upsetting experience (Busch and McNamara, 2020).[24] Fischer and Riedesser (1998: 84) define trauma

> . . . as a vital experience of discrepancy between threatening situation factors and individual coping possibilities, which is accompanied by feelings of helplessness and defenseless abandonment and thus causes an ongoing disruption of one's understanding of the self and the world. (authors' translation) (in Busch and McNamara, 2020)

The relationship between the experience of trauma and language's function in it is intricate and multifaceted rather than causative and one-way. Language may contribute to or be the cause of traumatic events, and trauma can negatively affect a person's linguistic repertoire, including their propensity to acquire new languages, use, retain, or give up a specific language, or seek solace in silence. Language can also be used as a weapon to inflict pain on others, leading to

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[21]A. Aragbuwa, "Discursive Strategies and Resistance Ideologies in Victims' Narratives in Stella Dimoko Korkus' Domestic Violence Diary 1–4: A Critical Discourse Analysis," Ghana Journal of Linguistics 10, no. 1 (2021): 251-275.
[22]B. Mapayi et al., "Impact of Intimate Partner Violence on Anxiety and Depression Amongst Women in Ile-Ife, Nigeria," Archives of Women's Mental Health 16, no. 1 (2013): 11–18, https://doi.org/10.1007/s00737-012-0307-x.
[23]K. M. Iverson, "Addressing the Stress and Trauma of Experiencing Intimate Partner Violence," U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, National Center for PTSD, accessed July 18, 2026, https://www.ptsd.va.gov/professional/treat/type/intimate_partner_violence.asp.
[24]B. Busch and T. McNamara, "Language and Trauma: An Introduction," Applied Linguistics 41, no. 3 (2020): 323-333.

trauma, including being forced to keep quiet instead of being given the chance to speak. (Busch, and McNamara 2020).[25] Language is a resource for creating meaning (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2014).[26] It is a means of communication and a tool for perspective taking (Tylén et al. 2010).[27] It is also an effective tool that victims use to express how they perceive their experiences, reveal their mental state, and position themselves in society.

The cultural environment significantly influences language used in IPV narratives. For instance, Oluku and Abasiekong (2024)[28] discuss how gender-based cultural values drive violent behaviors toward female partners in times of conflict in Nigeria, emphasizing that the majority of Nigeria's indigenous cultures have patriarchal cultural beliefs that are passed down from one generation to the other, contributing to the unequal treatment of men and women, which makes women more vulnerable to intimate partner violence. Such cultural tones in Nigeria warrant further investigation to better understand how they inform the linguistic expression of trauma in IPV narratives. While existing research provides valuable insights into the intersection of language and IPV, significant gaps remain, particularly regarding the linguistic expressions of trauma among Nigerian IPV victims.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study is grounded in van Dijk's (2016)[29] Sociocognitive Discourse Studies (SCDS) framework. This framework provides a foundation for analysing how language functions as both a vehicle for and a reflection of the complex experiences of IPV victims. By integrating this perspective, this research seeks to uncover the layers of meaning embedded in IPV narratives to reveal how language is used to expose the myriads of experiences victims are exposed to in the context of trauma and how they are comprehended in different cultures.

In a general sense, Sociocognitive Discourse Studies (SCDS) use a multifarious sociocognitive interface to link discourse structures to social structures. This means that the relationship between discourse and society is cognitively facilitated, with cognition being the necessary interface connecting discourse as a language with social situations and social structures (Al-Azzawi and Fathi, 2022).[30] In addition to highlighting the importance of mental representations, a sociocognitive approach demonstrates that many discourse structures can only

[25]Busch and McNamara, "Language and Trauma," 323-333.
[26]M. A. K. Halliday, Halliday's Introduction to Functional Grammar, rev. Christian M. I. M. Matthiessen, 4th ed. (London: Routledge, 2014), 56.
[27]K. Tylén et al., "Language as a Tool for Interacting Minds," Mind & Language 25, no. 1 (2010): 3-29.
[28]O. Oluku and E. M. Abasiekong, "The Influence of Cultural Values on Intimate Partner Violence Against Women in Nigeria: Evidence from the Literature," Social Facts: FUOTUOKE Journal of Sociology and Anthropology 4, no. 1 (2024): 52, https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.14921875.
[29]Teun A. van Dijk, "Sociocognitive Discourse Studies" (unpublished manuscript, last modified July 2022), Microsoft Word file, http://discourses.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Teun-A.-van-Dijk-2018-Sociocognitive-discourse-studies.pdf.
[30]K. M. B. Al-Azzawi and S. Y. Fathi, MultidisciplinaryCDA (2022)..

be (fully) explained in terms of different cognitive conceptions, particularly those pertaining to participants' information, beliefs, or knowledge (Dijk, 2016).[31]

This approach has three segments according to van Dijk: the cognitive, semantic/social, and discoursal segments. The cognitive segment includes cognitive processes such as thinking, perceiving, knowing, believing, understanding, interpreting, planning, hoping, and feeling, which take place in the mind or memory of individuals. It is often referred to as (mental) representations; hence, thoughts, knowledge, beliefs, interpretations, plans, attitudes, or ideologies are different kinds of mental representation, which can be formed, changed, stored, or (de)activated. They are the bedrock of all human actions and interactions, including language use and discourse.

Dijk (2016) opined that there are two types of memories in the cognitive segment: Short-Term Memory (STM, also known as Working Memory (WM) and Long-Term Memory (LTM). Information is usually stored briefly in the Working Memory (WM), where words, phrases, clauses, sentences, and paragraphs are processed, while words, phrases, etc. are characterised and coordinated by mental models in the LTM, which stores knowledge or beliefs that can be recalled and used again by WM for future tasks, such as when we remember something or when we need that 'information' for insight, action, or discourse. He further noted that LTM comprises Semantic Memory or Social Memory (SM), where the social shared knowledge, attitudes, and ideologies are stored, and Episodic Memory (EM), where personal experiences and knowledge are stored. Stored representations of life events experienced as an individual within a specific moment and place are referred to as episodic memory, and mental models in discourse processing can be used to illustrate this (Al-Azzawi, 2022). According to Sunday (2021)[32], "There are two types of mental model in discourse processing: situation models and context models. The former represents the situation a discourse is about…the latter represent the dynamically changing communicative situation or experience of language users. They are subjective, defining appropriateness according to the communicative situation; this is why they are called pragmatic models. Semantic models and pragmatic models show the uniqueness of each text or talk."

"Mental models are subjective representations of events or situations in Episodic or Autobiographical Memory (EM), the personal part of LTM where we store our ongoing and past personal experiences. If we observe, participate in, or read or hear about an event we ongoingly construe a mental model of that event" Dijk, 2016 p.7).[33]Hence, before we can get all the information about such

[31]Teun A. van Dijk, "Sociocognitive Discourse Studies" (unpublished manuscript, last modified July 2022), Microsoft Word file, http://discourses.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Teun-A.-van-Dijk-2018-Sociocognitive-discourse-studies.pdf.
[32]A. B. Sunday, "Critical Sociocognitive Analysis of Hate Speech in the 2015 Nigerian Presidential Election Campaigns," Pragmatics and Society 12, no. 1 (2021): 59-78, https://doi.org/10.1075/ps.16030.sun.
[33]Teun A. van Dijk, "Sociocognitive Discourse Studies" (unpublished manuscript, last modified July 2022), Microsoft Word file, http://discourses.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Teun-A.-van-Dijk-2018-Sociocognitive-discourse-studies.pdf.

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event to create a mental model about it, we must first create a subjective model of it.

In the social component of the Sociocognitive Discourse Studies (SCDS), van Dijk noted that what we do daily are permeated by ideologies, and that the social aspect of ideology may be explained at the micro and macro levels of society. The micro level has to do with the social interaction in social situations and the macro with groups, organisations, and their interactions. In his view, discourse is the final element of the sociocognitive model, and discourse structures play a role in the perpetuation of power abuse in society. It focuses on how particular mental models and general representations of the recipients are influenced by discourse patterns, particularly how beliefs might be influenced (Al-Azzawi, 2022).[34] Some of the ideological discourse structures include: polarization, pronoun usage, metaphors, passive sentence structures and nominalizations, positive self-descriptions and negative-other descriptions, frames, and scenarios.

This theoretical framework provides a comprehensive approach to analyzing the linguistic dimensions of selected IPV narratives in Osun State, Nigeria. They provide room for the investigation of how language not only reflects but also shapes the experiences and perceptions of trauma, offering valuable insights into the connection between language, culture, and power.

Methodology

The methodology employed in this study is a qualitative Sociocognitive Discourse Studies (SCDS) approach, to explore the linguistic dimensions of intimate partner violence (IPV) narratives within their sociocultural context. This methodological choice emphasizes the study of language as a social custom which reveals and summarises power relations in the society. The study focuses on narratives collected from IPV victims in Osun State Nigeria, aiming to dissect how language both conveys trauma and is influenced by cultural factors.

The study population consists of five Nigerian women from Osun State who are victims of intimate partner violence. These narratives provide a rich corpus for examining the linguistic manifestations of trauma. The selection of Osun State, Nigeria as the geographical context is intentional, given the underexplored nature of IPV narratives in this region, especially concerning their language use. Previous study from Osun state had concluded that both men and women are victims of IPV with no focus on use of language (Irinoye, Oyewo & Eboiyehi, 2021).[35]Whereas, the connection of culture and trauma (Antai, 2011),[36] coupled with language use, provides a unique opportunity to contribute to the broader discourse on IPV victims' discoursal use of language.

[34]K. M. B. Al-Azzawi and S. Y. Fathi, MultidisciplinaryCDA (2022).
[35]Irinoye, O., D. J. Oyewo, and F. A. Eboiyehi. 2021. "Intimate Partner Violence among Ever-Married Persons in Egbedore Local Government Area of Osun State, Nigeria." African Journal for the Psychological Study of Social Issues 23 (1).
[36]Antai, D. 2011. "Traumatic Physical Health Consequences of Intimate Partner Violence Against Women: What Is the Role of Community-Level Factors?" BMC Women's Health 11 (December): 56. https://doi.org/10.1186/1472-6874-11-56.

Purposive sampling was used to get participants who have been victims of IPV and are open to sharing their stories. Ethical approval was obtained from the University of Ibadan Social Ethics Committee, with the assigned number: UI/SSHREC/2024/0151. Victims who are in intimate relationships and are experiencing violence are purposively selected and interviewed from Osun State Ministry of Women Affairs, Children and Social Welfare, clients. The location provides access to people in various phases of recovery, guaranteeing a variety of stories. The sample size is five participants of different ages, and educational levels. The interviews were recorded for transcription, and due to the in-depth nature of the interviews, with a focus on gathering detailed data, a small sample size is used to avoid data saturation. Data collection involved in-depth, semi-structured interviews with victims, focusing on their personal narratives of their IPV experiences. The interviews were conducted in English and were designed to allow participants the freedom to express themselves fully, ensuring the authenticity of their linguistic expressions (Coates & Wade, 2007).[37] All interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and anonymized to protect participants' identities.

The analysis was conducted to identify recurring linguistic expressions and patterns related to trauma expressions in the narratives (Van Dijk, 2015)[38] through a Sociocognitive Discourse Studies (SCDS) approach, which examined how these linguistic elements reflect trauma. This analytical approach offers a thorough grasp of how language serves as an expression of trauma, illuminating the complex ways in which it both influences and is influenced by Nigerian culture's conception of IPV. This methodology guaranties that the study catches the complex interaction between language and trauma in IPV narratives, providing insightful information for both scholarly investigation and real-world IPV mediations.

Strategies used in the narratives to reflect trauma

In narrating their IPV experiences, the victims utilised different strategies to make explicit the negative experiences they have had in their relationships that had led to their having traumatic incidents. The focus in this analysis will be on how language is used to reveal the experienced trauma of the victims, and what trauma looks like to them. Some of the linguistic features serving as markers of trauma include victim's non-chronological and disjointed narrative structure, specific lexical choices revealing emotional state, repetitions, pronoun usage, evaluative expressions, different grammatical compositions, hesitations, references, and metaphor.

[37]Coates and Wade, "Language and Violence," 515
[38]Teun A. van Dijk, "Critical Discourse Analysis," in The Handbook of Discourse Analysis, 2nd ed., ed. Deborah Tannen, Heidi E. Hamilton, and Deborah Schiffrin (Malden, NJ: Wiley Blackwell, 2015), 466-485.

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Explicit prognosis of harrowing experiences

As rightly observed by Teun van Dijk (2016)[39], language is not just the narration of things that happened, it also makes explicit the mental models, the beliefs, the emotions, and everything that shows how each person understands their experiences, internalise them and relates them to others. For people who have experienced IPV, the only way they can give vivid pictures of what they have experienced is through their intentional linguistic choices that will reveal their cognitive processing of the incidences and how they are affected negatively by them. One of the strategies used in the IPV narratives is giving detailed distressing experiences they went through while in the relationship. One of such examples is in excerpt 1.

Excerpt 1
Anytime we have a misunderstanding, he will tell me to go to my father's house, that he doesn't want the marriage again. He has even parked my things outside like twice; that I should leave his house. He told my parents that I trapped him into marriage. That, he was never ready for marriage. That I begged him to impregnate me. So, I used it to trap him to marry me. So, he has been maltreating me since then and looking for ways to leave the marriage.

In the victim's narrative, she chose her words carefully through her lexical choices to describe her repeated experiences of rejection and emotional abuse through reported speeches by detailing her husbands' expressions such as: *"go to my father's house", "he doesn't want the marriage again", "leave his house", "I trapped him into marriage", "he was never ready for marriage", "I begged him to impregnate me", "I used it to trap him to marry me".* These lexical choices portray the victim as someone who is unwanted, someone who manipulated her way into his life by coercing him to impregnate her and then turning around to use it against him. Hence, the husband portrays himself as a victim of deception, and an unenthusiastic participant in the marriage. Her usage of the adverbial expression *"Anytime we have a misunderstanding"* shows that such threats occur all the time and have become normalized within the relationship, leading to her traumatisation. Her repetition of these words and her repeated references to his wanting her out of his house and the marriage reveal the consistency of the abuse. She described her husband with the third person pronoun *"he",* as the one that has authority and power to do and undo: *"He will tell me…", "He has parked my things outside…", "He told my parents…"*while portraying herself as the receiver of his actions, revealing a power imbalance, through the personal pronoun *"I".*

Her narratives revealed her mental model representations of her experiences where she sees herself as unwanted, unloved, incapable of holding her marriage together, being blamed unfairly for the start up of the marriage, and being threatened all the time with expulsion and abandonment. In her narrative, the patriarchal ideology revealing a male-dominated culture was evident in the way she reported what her husband said that *"I should leave his house".* Meaning that she had no stake in the house. The house belongs to the husband and he can

[39] Teun A. van Dijk, "Sociocognitive Discourse Studies" (unpublished manuscript, last modified July 2022), Microsoft Word file, http://discourses.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Teun-A.-van-Dijk-2018-Sociocognitive-discourse-studies.pdf.

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decide who occupies it at any point in time. The husband's belief that she metaphorically used her pregnancy to *"trap him"* to marry her led to his maltreating her and *"looking for ways to leave the marriage".*

Culturally, when a man impregnates a woman, the expectation is that the man would marry the woman, and that was what happened in this case, but the man is an unwilling partner who is not willing to go through with carrying the responsibility of his action. His act of maltreating her connotes an ongoing physical, emotional, and psychological abuse and her lexical choice of the participial phrase *"looking for ways"* reveals his mental state at that point in time. Her narrative revealed the traumatic experience she had in her IPV context through her deliberate lexical choices, use of pronouns, repetitions, and adverbial phrases in hermental model representations, revealing the relationship between linguistic expressions and traumatic experiences.
The second strategy used is the revelation of cultural ideology.

Revelation of cultural ideology
Excerpt 2

I gave birth to my first child on November 14th, 2016. I gave birth to my 2nd child, August 4th, 2020. After giving birth to my second child, I noticed some attitude in him….. like he was not really happy that I gave birth to a girl. I confronted him, but he didn't say anything. While I was pregnant with my second child…. sometimes he won't come home and he won't carry me along that he won't be around. I suspected cheating in him through his phone and up till now, he has not changed. I have treated infection 3 times while living with him.

The victim in excerpt two used dates and numbers strategically to enhance her narrative: first child November 14th, 2016 and second child August 4th, 2020. *"I gave birth to my first child on November 14th, 2016. I gave birth to my 2nd child, August 4th, 2020."* The emphasis is on the dates and the number of children. The chronological framing shows the credibility of her children's position in her family and the use of the deictic personal pronoun *"I"* points to her as the bearer of the children. The birth of the second child becomes a turning point in the narrative. *"After giving birth to my second child, I noticed some attitude in him…. like he was not really happy that I gave birth to a girl."*

The cultural belief in Nigeria, a patriarchal society, is that male children are more valuable than female children and men who don't have male children will have no one to inherit their wealth for continuity. The belief is that female children will marry and go to their husband's houses, change their names and that would be the end. Whereas male children will continue carrying the name forward. The husband's suspected disappointment may therefore be assumed not merely as an individual reaction but as part of a socially shared gender ideology. Her lexical choices reveal her interpretations of her husband's attitude and subsequent behaviours: *"I noticed some attitude in him", "he was not really happy", "he won't come home", "I suspected cheating", "I have treated infection 3 times".* Her lexical choices reveal emotional neglect, leading to her having health issues, and an overall marital dissatisfaction.

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Her usage of degrading descriptions and evaluative expressions repeatedly portray the husband as emotionally distant and potentially unfaithful. She employed evidentiality and hedging to support her story: *"I noticed some attitude in him." "like he was not really happy that I gave birth to a girl."* The hedge *"like"* shows interpretation rather than certainty. This suggests that the victim is presenting her observations carefully rather than making absolute accusations, but the narrative then becomes more assertive: *"I suspected cheating in him through his phone."* The movement from suspicion to a firm assertion reveals the development of her cognitive understanding of the situation. According to van Dijk, people construct mental models to make sense of their experiences. Hence, the victim connected everything that happened into a reasonable explanation which are: *"The husband appeared unhappy after the birth of a daughter. He became emotionally distant. He frequently stayed away from home. Evidence from his phone suggested infidelity. She repeatedly suffered infections."* These events are cognitively linked to form a mental model of marital betrayal and neglect.

The infections are significant evidences from her perspective because they changed suspicion into her reality. The husband's implied mental model as reported by the victim pointed to his ideological belief that he preferred male children to females. Although his voice was not heard physically, his actions point to his possible underlying beliefs. The fact that the husband kept mute when confronted is a strategy within SCDS. *"I confronted him, but he didn't say anything."* His silence functions as a discourse strategy to avoid explanation. At the macro-level social setting, her narrative reflects broader social issues in intimate partner relationships which include the preference for sons, marital infidelity, women's exposure to procreative health risks, and emotional neglect as a form of abuse. The specific linguistic features which serve as markers of trauma are her descriptive lexical choices, degrading descriptions, evaluative expressions, and hedging.

The third strategy used is the graphic projection of brutality.

Graphic projection of brutality
Excerpt 3

He stood up and started beating me… in front of the kids, to the extent neighbours came to the window to intervene before he left me. Throughout the night, I couldn't sleep because I was afraid and … he was threatening to kill me.

This is a narrative of pain and agony common in IPV contexts. The victim in this excerpt narrated what she experienced as a progression of violent actions from her abuser and their effects on her through her non-chronological and disjointed narrative structure. She experienced physical assault *"He stood up and started beating me",* emotional disgrace, *"in front of the kids"*, public humiliation, *"neighbours came to the window to intervene"*, psychological breakdown and fear, *"I couldn't sleep because I was afraid",* and threats, *"he was threatening to kill me."*

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The progression of her narration creates a clear mental representation of intensifying abuse, progressing from physical violence to emotional disgrace, public humiliation, psychological breakdown, fear and threats which are all traumatic experiences revealed linguistically through the employment of third person pronoun *"he"*, and full sentence structures," *He stood up and started beating me", he was threatening to kill me", "neighbours came to the window to intervene:* a prepositional phrase *"in front of the kids"*, and a complex sentence *"I couldn't sleep because I was afraid"*.

The victim's mental model sees herself as defenceless and exposed, the abuser as violent and life-threatening, the children as witnesses to violence, and neighbours as external observers and momentary protectors. Her saying that *"I couldn't sleep because I was afraid"* plainly reveals the cognitive and emotional impact of the abuse. The victim's fear is not merely an emotion but a mental representation of ongoing danger. Her inability to sleep reveals trauma-related hyper vigilance, where she remains mentally alert because she perceives continued danger. Her lexical choice of reporting her husband's threat: *"he was threatening to kill me"* revealed that he has instilled fear in her heart to the extent that even after the threat, she could not stop herself from remembering it and having anxiety about it.

Her reporting the fact that her kids and neighbours witnessed the assault has sociocognitive import: *"in front of the kids"* and *"neighbours came to the window to intervene".* It is to emphasise the fact that they could attest to the validity of her claims about the traumatic incidents. Looking at her narrative from van Dijk's Sociocognitive Discourse Studies perspective, it creates a mental model of IPV exemplified by physical violence, threats, fear, and power imbalance. Through her linguistic choices, the victim presents herself as vulnerable and exposed while portraying her abuser as violent and threatening using van Dijk's positive self-representation and negative other representation.

Excerpt 4

In the first year of marriage, I started facing serious problem like miscarriage….3 miscarriages. At this period of my life, my husband was abusive, calling me all sorts of names, beating me up at any little argument. After beating me up, he will take my phones from me and laptop and leave me with no means of communication, and I'll be there crying and still look for a neighbour's phone to call him, …begging him to return back home so that we can settle our differences.

Teau van Dijk in his SCDS, emphasised the fact that discourse is usually understood within a context model, which refers to how individuals understand and present whatever they are experiencing in their social situation. The victim here positions her experience within the first year of her marriage, when she should be enjoying the euphoria of a newlywed, but was a period of *"3 miscarriages"* for her. The experience increased her emotional and physical helplessness, and unfortunately, the support she should get from her husband was not forthcoming and what she got was brutality and humiliation. Her mental representation of her brutal experience reveals that what she

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experienced was not something that just happened once, but repeatedly; especially at a point in her life when she needed help most.

Her narrative progression shows repeated miscarriages, verbal abuse. physical violence, isolation through impounding of her communication devices, emotional distress, and her reconciliation attempts. Her choice of words focusses on the seriousness of the brutality she was going through. The phrase *"Serious problem"* in her statement, *"I started facing serious problem like miscarriage",* reveals that her interpretation of miscarriage is not just an occurrence but a major life crisis. Instead of saying *"three miscarriages"* within a longer sentence, her saying it as a short standalone construction reveals the repeated nature of the loss and their emotional impact. Her mentioning the phrase *"All sorts of names"* in the clause *"calling me all sorts of names"* by her husband reveals massive verbal abuse suggesting frequency of verbal attacks, different degrading descriptions, and long-term psychological harm. Her reference to the phrase *"Any little argument"* shows that the brutality does not depend on the severity of her offence but on trivial circumstances too. The repetition of the active verbs "calling me…", "beating me…", "leave me…" portray the husband as a dominant man exercising power and control on his wife.

Her linguistic choices reveal unequal power relations in her IPV relationship. Her emphasising the fact that *"he will take my phones from me and laptop and leave me with no means of communication",* shows from a sociocognitive perspective the coercive nature of the husband to restrict her access to help, create dependence on him, increase her isolation, and enforce his dominance, leading to psychological trauma for her. This is evidenced by the phrase: *"I'll be there crying"*. The act of *"crying"*reveals the emotional pain she was going through, her helplessness and psychological distress. Despite all her negative experiences, she was still the one trying to bring about reconciliation; *"begging him to return back home so that we can settle our differences."*

Her narration shows how abuse extended over a long period can shape victims' mental models, leading them to prioritize reconciliation and relationship preservation even after being badly treated.

Excerpt 5

The reason why I ran away from the house that day, was because I was actually pregnant heavily then… and my stomach was big… that was when he took that knife, that he wanted to stab me…. that was the reason why I ran.

It is a normal thing for human beings to take cover when they sense danger. Hence, when this victim saw her husband take a knife, she took to her heels. Though she was pregnant, she did not allow that to debar her from escaping. Her narrative uncovers her mental representations of danger, her vulnerability, and her self-preservation resource. She positions her story in a past action which was her decision to run away from her home. She frames it as an instinctive response to an immediate threat.

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Her use of causal expressions ("*The reason why...", "because...", "that was the reason why...*") shows that she sees the need to explain why she did what she did. The context then locates her as providing explanation for her actions. Van Dijk claims that discourse reveals speakers' mental models of events. Hence, her lexical choices of *"knife"* and *"stab"* in *"He took that knife, that he wanted to stab me"* show that it was a life-threatening encounter instead of an ordinary intimate partner misunderstanding. Her cognition perceived that death or severe injury is possible. Unfortunately, she was pregnant and she laid emphasis on her state by her choice of words, *"I was actually pregnant heavily then… and my stomach was big…",* which should be a hinderance to her escape, but she did not allow it to hinder her.

She first mentioned the pregnancy before mentioning the knife, thereby revealing her vulnerability, as to how she cognitively understands the occurrence. The modifier *"actually"* functions as an intensifier, reinforcing the authenticity and gravity of her condition. By laying emphasis on her pregnancy, she invokes culturally shared understandings that pregnant women deserve protection. His attempting to stab her therefore violates not only her but also widely accepted social expectations regarding the care of pregnant women. Her stating that she was *"actually pregnant heavily", "my stomach was big"* was to focus attention on her condition at that point in time, and instead of saying, *"heavily pregnant, actually,"* she rearranged it to *"actually pregnant heavily"* creating a stylistic effect through her using adverb *"Actually", "Pregnant"* (Adjective) which is the core noun modifier/predicative adjective, and *"Heavily"* (Adverb): Traditionally, *"heavily"* should be a pre-modifier to the adjective like, *"she is heavily pregnant".* Positioning it after the adjective *"pregnant heavily"* breaks the standard English syntactic rules to emphasise her own perception of her experience. She also employed verbs, *"ran, took, and stab"* to paint a vivid picture of her reaction to the threat she was experiencing. Her narrative reflects a cause-and-effect situation which started from pregnancy, weapon, attempted stabbing, and her escape. The negative experience was a traumatic event for her, and she employed different lexical choices and patterns to paint a vivid picture of what she went through.

The fourth strategy used is the projection of perpetual fear.

Projection of perpetual fear
Excerpt 6

My son, when he was two years or thereabouts… I got pregnant again. He told me…. he said, this pregnancy, I will not be responsible for it. You have to terminate it. I said, why? Why do you want us to terminate it? Our son is two years already. He said, no, he is not going to be responsible for it. He is not ready to father another child. He told me to my face like this…. that if I keep that pregnancy, that he will frustrate me till I commit suicide.

When a married woman is pregnant in an African setting, the whole family is expected to rejoice because it is a family issue that concerns all the members of the family, and because in van Dijk's SCDS, discourse is interpreted through the participants' understanding of the social situation, the victim situated her

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narrative within her marital relationship which is expected to be a thing of joy in the family. In her narration she established a temporal context and the fact that the pregnancy came from a family"; *"when my son was two years or thereabouts, I got pregnant again."* She then constructed a mental model of psychological abuse and emotional torture through series of events which are: she becomes pregnant, her husband rejects responsibility for the pregnancy, the husband asks her to terminate the pregnancy, she questions his decision, he reiterates his refusal, he escalates his refusal to psychological threats, and he predicts more abuse if she continues to carry the pregnancy.

The sequence shows a progression from disinterest in the pregnancy to threats and intimidation. The lexical pattern of the husband shows his predisposition towards the pregnancy. He employed a definitive sentence structure, *"I will not be responsible for it"*to dissociate himself from the unborn child. He utilised the pronoun *"it"* to reduce the pregnancy to just an object that he is not interested in. Her repetition of, *"He is not going to be responsible for it"* gives credence to his refusal that he was not going to change his mind. His utilisation of the modal statement *"have to"* in his statement *"You have to terminate it."* functions as a command instead of a suggestion, leaving the woman with no choice but to abort the baby. The linguistic choices show that the woman is subordinate in the relationship and has no power to make any personal decisions. Her husband controls all the decision-making atmosphere. All she could do was just to ask, why? *"Why do you want us to terminate it?"* The response she got was a response that destroyed her psychological stand and resulted in trauma for her, *"if I keep that pregnancy, that he will frustrate me till I commit suicide."*

The statement constitutes psychological violence, and the phrase, *"till I commit suicide"* reveals a serious consequence being planned for her in the future, if she disobeys. From a sociocognitive perspective, such linguistic choices are meant to affect the victim's mental model to create fear, helplessness, and pressure to comply. The phrase she started her narration with, *"I remember..."* shows that the incident is very traumatic for her and is occupying her autobiographical memory. Her narrative indicates a mental model exemplified by shock at the rejection of the pregnancy, confusion about the husband's reasoning, fear of future abuse, and awareness of the threat's seriousness.

Results

The analysis of the intimate partner violence (IPV) narratives from Osun state victims revealed several key linguistic strategies that reflect the relationship between language and trauma. A total of six narratives were analyzed, focusing on linguistic expressions that convey trauma and cultural influences on these expressions. The strategies used to capture the narratives include: Explicit prognosis of harrowing experiences, revelation of cultural ideology, graphic projection of brutality, and reflection of perpetual fear. The findings are structured around three primary areas: linguistic indicators of trauma, cultural language elements, and the impact of language on societal perception of IPV.

Most of the victims employed direct accounts using personal and third person pronouns to articulate their emotional and physical pain, such as, *"I started*

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facing serious problems like miscarriages." and *"He told my parents that I trapped him into marriage.That, he was never ready for marriage. That I begged him to impregnate me. So, I used it to trap him to marry me."* These expressions underscore the profound impact of IPV on their sense of self, their rights, their freedom, and personal decision-making power. Also, there were notable use of distinct lexical patterns including, deictic words, adverbial expressions, repetitions, reported speeches, metaphor, dates and numbers, hedging, phrases, clauses, simple and complex sentences, causal expressions, verbs, definitive sentence structure, degrading descriptions, repeated active verbs, evaluative expressions, discursive intensifiers, verbs, possessive pronouns, modal statements, non-chronological and disjointed narrative structure, allowing survivors to narrate their traumatic and emotional distress they had experienced, unambiguously.

Cultural influences were evident in the language used to describe IPV experiences. Some narratives included patriarchal expressions unique to Nigerian culture, which framed the violence as a culturally sanctioned norm, such as: *"After giving birth to my second child, I noticed some attitude in him….. like he was not really happy that I gave birth to a girl."*

The societal understanding of IPV has a lot to do with how language is used to portray the experiences around it, and the narrative structures employed by victims in this study reveal their understanding of the menace and their representation through the use of language to influence the public's comprehension of IPV was profound. They described the violence they had experienced using direct reporting, a tactic that made their experiences realistic and profound. The information they provided highlights the multifarious role that language plays in IPV narratives, to reveal trauma and pain. These findings provide a foundation for the subsequent discussion on the implications of language in the context of IPV narratives in Nigeria.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study emphasizes the relationship between language and trauma in the narratives of intimate partner violence (IPV) victims in Osun State, Nigeria, and through a qualitative Sociocognitive Discourse Studies (SCDS) analysis, we have expounded the ways in which linguistic expressions reveal traumatic experiences of victims. This study offers a distinctive viewpoint that combines linguistic analysis with cultural and psychological perceptions, emphasising the crucial role that language plays in creating and perceiving the concept of IPV.Our findings reveal that the language used in IPV narratives is deeply embedded within the cultural context of Nigerian society.

Notwithstanding the advantages of our analysis, a number of drawbacks should be taken into account. The study's emphasis on Osun State, Nigerian narratives restricts the applicability of its conclusions to other cultural contexts. Furthermore, even if qualitative approaches offer depth, they might not adequately convey the frequency and diversity of verbal expressions among various IPV situations. Also, certain narratives may have been controlled by the victims' linguistic choices, to reflect what the society expects or the presence of

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stigma, as underscored by Coates and Wade (2007)[40] in their analysis of discursive operations.

Future research should aim to expand the scope of this study by incorporating comparative analyses across different cultural settings to enhance the understanding of linguistic influences on IPV narratives globally. Furthermore, examining the role of digital media in shaping these narratives could provide valuable insights, given the increasing digitization of personal stories and social interactions.

In conclusion, this study adds to the scholarly conversation on IPV by providing a high-level understanding of how language serves as a compelling channel through which traumatic experiences are relayed and viewed. By connecting linguistic, cultural, and psychological dimensions, this study provides important insights for research and useful interventions targeted at aiding IPV victims. The results highlight the significance of culturally sensitive approaches for dealing with IPV, supporting laws and initiatives that acknowledge language's ability to influence perceptions and promote restoration.

[40]Coates and Wade, "Language and Violence," (2007). 515

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