

# Legitimisation of Language in 2022 ASUU vs FGN Impasse

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## Abstract

Every functional society consists of active shareholders (the leaders and the lead) whose activities are complimentary and must be constantly synergistic. In the event that the required cohesion is to be disturbed, the spectrum inviting such typically owes the other segments of society some form of explanation for such an action. Consequently, this study sets to investigate the linguistic resources deployed for legitimisation in ASUU's press release of March, 2020. To achieve this, Paul Cap's (2005, 2006) Spatial, Temporal and Axiological (STA) model of legitimisation was deployed to analyse for proximation in the corpus. It was found that the linguistic resources used in the speech represented predominant instances of Spatial, Temporal and Axiological dimensions; ASUU deployed linguistic features for positive proximation to justify their claims for an extended (indefinite) strike action and negative proximation when expressing their existential realities, with the Nigerian federal government, in the education sector. The study concludes that judging from the gory realities in the education sector (which ASUU is seen to strongly advocate against), ASUU's insistence on the federal and state governments to adequately fund the sector is deserving of the needed attention. To this end, it is hoped that the education sector will receive a big boost, if ASUU's educational gatekeeper role is taken seriously by the concerned relevant stakeholders (government or school proprietors).

**Keywords:** Linguistic resources, legitimisation, ASUU, proximation, strike action.

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## INTRODUCTION

Quality education is the right of every citizen, irrespective of their socio-cultural status, political affiliation, religion or creed. With quality education, there are higher chances of providing the masses with better life and renewed vigour for productive existence, leading to national development.

It is against this that the UNICEF submits that: *Education for all a must*. While there is high possibility of meeting these standards in an ideal environment, in Nigeria the situation continues to. It is no longer news that (qualitative) education is the tool with which society uses to (re)structure itself, wade through challenges and bequeath a future to up and coming generations. Consequently, world over, the import of education is well priced and celebrated, as evidenced in the attention that is given to it by way of the nature and quantum of research grants/funding it attracts, welfare packages of lecturers and governmental budgetary allocations to the sector. With these incentivizations, it becomes a lee experience for all stakeholders in the educational enterprise (teachers and learners) in such

climes where education is well prized, to reap the gains thereof in terms of productivity.

In Nigeria, unfortunately, the situation is grim. It has been so since independence, as evidence show (see ..... at least 3 sources). Successive governments have continued to downplay the implications and interrelatedness between a virile economy and a vibrant academic structure. This debacle has progressively snowballed into the contemporary infrastructural deficit being experienced in other areas of our national life like road construction, adequately equipped hospitals (in terms of human resources, functional administrative structures and up-to-date equipment), social investments, and so on.

It is a stand up attack against this senselessness that has pitched the Academic Staff Union of Nigerian Universities (ASUU) in a seemingly endless tussle with the government to attract the needed funding and attention. Since its establishment in 1978, ASUU has been engaged with the government on an almost yearly basis. Owing to the incessantness of these engagements, the masses for whom ASUU fights seem not to be in

tune with them. Rather, the unschooled masses perceive ASUU a clog in government's development strides while the schooled masses (especially those in school at the points of these strikes) see ASUU as enemies to their accelerated academic voyage.

Therefore, in order to foreground and reinforce its posture for qualitative education and an ensured future for the masses, ASUU owes the masses a reminder of the need to continually engage the government. It is to study the legitimisation strategies ASUU deployed in her March, 2020 release which heralded the declaration of an indefinite strike action, that this study set out to achieve. It is hoped that this study achieves a tripod goal: it will enable the masses know its place in ASUU's struggle; it will espouse the legitimisation strategies of ASUU and stoke the government into responsibility, perhaps this may stir out the much anticipated attention to education for national development.

### **Conceptual clarification**

#### **Language in Political Discourse**

Language

Ideology in political discourse

#### **ASUU as an Educational Gate Keeper**

Origin of ASUU

What it represents

Why does it legitimise her actions

### **Review of Empirical Studies**

Owing to the perennial nature of the ASUU-FG face off, there have been diverse scholarly interests in this phenomenon, expectedly from many perspectives. Some of these views are reviewed. In 1991, Isaac Nnamdi Obasi in his PhD thesis titled: *ASUU-Government Conflict in Nigeria: An Investigation into the Roots, Character and Management of ASUU Strikes* investigated the ASUU-FG conflicts from a Political Science view. The study set out to identify the roots and character of ASUU strikes and to analyse why the settlement of the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) and the federal government of Nigeria was intractable; with a periodization of 10 years (from 1978 to 1988). To achieve this goal, data was collected through questionnaire, interview and analysis of historical records. Three hundred academics were sampled from 10 federal and state universities; similarly, selected ASUU and government officials were interviewed. It was found that in asymmetric and structure-oriented conflict, the liquidation of one party to the conflict is a major resolution mechanism. The study also confirmed that strikes in the Third World were a form of protest directed against the government, and were likely to possess an over-political dimension.

Crescentia Nwaeze Ugwuona, in 2016, embarked on a similar endeavour at interrogating the

ASUU-FG impasse in a work titled *2013 ASUU Strike Discourses in Nigeria: A Critical Discourse Analysis*. The study was sought to identify and analyse ideological deployment of language in the 2013 ASUU strike discourses in Nigeria. Van Dijk's (2001) model of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) was used to analyse data which was collected from the web pages of the Internet. The study identified certain mental models (ideologies) in the discourses and recommended that language of truth in discourses, appropriate language use in print media by political commentators and newspaper columnists, and peaceful dialogue between the government and ASUU is pivotal in averting future ASUU strikes in Nigeria.

Another study was carried out by Ifeanyi E. Arua & Sunday Amuta in 2018 in a work they titled *The Ideological Postures of the Academic Staff Union of Universities and the Federal Government of Nigeria in Industrial Dispute*. Their investigation was from a Critical Discourse angle, with specific interest in identifying the different ideological postures adopted in correspondences between the Academic Staff Union of Universities and the government of Nigeria between 2001 and 2009. Van Dijk's notion of ideological squares was applied to find that the data (from both ASUU and the FG) were ideologically polarised.

From another perspective, Samuel Alaba Akinwotu, in 2019, in *The Role of Discursive Constructions in Nigeria's ASUU-FGN Labour Conflict of 2013* studied the discursive features of a labour conflict in 2013 between the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) and the Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN); using the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Conceptual Metaphor (CM) frameworks. Data was derived from purposively sampled statements by ASUU and FGN officials and their supporters, as published by Nigerian print and online news sources during the dispute as well as outlets' editorial statements and readers' online comments. The study found that the labour dispute was discursively and metaphorically constructed in a militaristically toned style which presented the altercation between the parties as a war. In which case, both parties were seen to be propagandist in their militaristic discursive constructions. Similarly, it was found that certain readers reproduced strands of these constructions in their online comments on media coverage of the strike action.

In J. Olusegun Ajayi's view, students bear the brunt following conflicts between ASUU and the Federal Government. It was to investigate this phenomenon that he carried out a study in *ASUU Strikes and Performance of Students in Ekiti State University, Ado-Ekiti*. The study examined the correlation between students' academic performance in the face of constant strike actions by the academic staff Union. It took samples from the Ekiti State University,

Ado Ekiti by means of multistage sampling technique which selected six hundred and four (604) respondents drawn from faculties and departments of the University. These respondents were quizzed using questionnaires and interviews. The study found that the strike actions interjected the academic calendar of Universities with attendant negative implications on the students' academic pursuit and performances.

The above studies reveal that interest in the ASUU-FGN industrial relations has been a long drag and has been investigated from several perspectives. While one was from a Political Science view, another was seen to be interested in the impacts the strike actions had on students. The remaining (three) were from a linguistic dimension; interestingly, all three analysed data on the ASUU-FG impasse using insights from van Dijk's Critical Discourse Analysis views on ideology and metaphorical constructions. Again, these studies ranged from 1991 to 2019. Unfortunately, none of these studies captured the experience as at 2020 as well as using Paul Cap's STA model of proximation. It is to fill this gap in knowledge that the present study set out.

### Theoretical framework

This study adopted Paul Cap's Proximation Theory of legitimisation which builds on the structure created by Paul Chilton's Discourse Space Theory. Anna Ewa Wiczorek noted that "Chilton's theory, however, was not intended to be a device applicable in pragmalinguistic analysis of a legitimisation-oriented political discourse, but rather in grammatical analysis" (34). This weakness birthed cap's Spatial Temporal Axiological (STA) model which has affordances for analysing legitimisation in politically stanced discourse from three viewpoints: Spatial (), Temporal (), and Axiological (). To Cap, each of these levels of analysis have positive and negative wings; the positive proximation pattern is used to positively justify the speaker's discursive posture while the negative proximation negatively portrays the opponent who is presented by the speaker as a threat to the addressee, and the speaker. This theory was adopted because of its relevance to the aim of the study which is to investigate the legitimisation strategies applied in the corpus.

### METHODOLOGY

A quantitative and qualitative discursive strategy was applied to the analysis of a 14-paged text of the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) released on the 23<sup>rd</sup> March, 2020 at the Festus Iyayi national secretariat complex, Abuja. The text contained a message to ASUU members and the masses, by extension, about an impending indefinite national strike action. To investigate the legitimisation pattern deployed in the text, the study adopted Paul Cap's (2005, 2006) STA model of proximation.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

It is instructive to note the following findings about the corpus, as these will help to accentuate the legitimisation strategies in it:

- a. Number of paragraphs: 28
- b. Number of sentences: 151
- c. Number of pages: 14
- d. Number of sentences before legitimised action: 131 (in 26 paragraphs)
- e. Number of sentences containing legitimised action: 2 (in 1 paragraph)
- f. Number of sentences after legitimised action: 13 (in 1 paragraph)

The data above implies that ASUU, as shown in the corpus, does not embark on strike actions whimsically (as is claimed in some quarters of the Nigerian society). Therefore, to counter opposing claims against ASUU's actions against the government, the above identified linguistic strategies are deployed to legitimise the indefinite strike action declared to combat successive governments' ineptitude in funding education, as well as other sectors of critical national interest. Consequently, in a text size of 14 pages (28 paragraphs, 151 sentences), ASUU uses 11 pages (26 paragraphs, 131 sentences) to legitimise an action which it declares in merely 2 sentences (in 1 paragraph). After making the declaration on p.12, ASUU continues to legitimise its actions in 13 sentences (1 paragraph).

This communicative strategy is significant to the end that ASUU is seen to play host to several societal elements which are projected as the disadvantaged and downtrodden (society's voiceless lot), for which ASUU fights. Unfortunately, if the actual beneficiaries of the fight are not adequately exposed to the historicity of the fight and the attendant gains thereof (when the war is eventually won), ASUU does not stand a chance at winning; hence the deployment of the legitimisation lexicogrammatical structures identified above, and the pragmatic legitimisation strategies for proximation espoused subsequently.

An examination of the corpus revealed a preponderance of legitimisation strategies which shall be presented along the affordances of the framework adopted as: Spatial, Temporal and Axiological domains of proximation. To enhance the scope of discourse, we shall embark on a quantitative as well as qualitative analyses of the Spatial and Temporal domains while the Axiological domain shall be attended to qualitatively (for want of space).

### SPATIAL DIMENSION OF LEGITIMISATION

This domain is based on the premise that events which occur around a deictic centre can be subsumed as positive (with beneficial and promising ends) or negative (having consequential actions and threatening results). Each of these naturally triggering a

correspondent action, or as Anna Ewa Wiczorek (33) puts it; “the positive, rather than negative outcome of a given event, is within the addressee’s grasp, which

compels them to (re) act “(33). It is against this background that the following data was sourced from the corpus:

**Table 1: Showing Spatial Dimension of Legitimation**

Negative Spatial proximation			Positive Spatial proximation		
Physically Close (FQ/ %)	Consequential and Threatening (FQ/ %)	Demanding Instant (Re)action (FQ/ %)	Physically Close (FQ/ %)	Beneficial and Promising (FQ/ %)	Demanding Instant (Re)action (FQ/ %)
41 (64.1)	30 (73.2)	11 (26.8)	23 (35.9)	8 (34.8)	15 (65.2)
<b>Grand total</b>			<b>64 (100)</b>		

The study, as indicated in the table above, found that there were 41(64.1%) instances of negative spatial proximation; out of this number, 30(73.2%) were consequential and threatening while 11(26.8%) were such that required instant (re)action. On the other spectrum, it can be seen that 23(35.9%) occurrences of positive spatial proximation were observed. While 8(34.8%) were beneficial and promising, 15(65.2%) demanded instant (re)action. Negative spatial proximation featured more in the text, particularly those events that were consequential and threatening. This was balanced with instances of positive spatial proximation in which the actions requiring a retaliatory instant action were also more in number than those which were beneficial and promising.

In a text as the one being studied, the distribution of legitimation features as shown in the table is not inappropriate because as an Association that houses intellectuals, ASUU would want to be seen as a body that would not take actions erratically. Rather, the Association, from the content of the text being studied, prefers to be seen as a body which embarks on its projects (engagements with the Government) based on reasoned facts; such that her actions are evaluated to deduce if there is no need for them either as a result of the consequences thereof or the benefits arising from such actions. Therefore, in order to legitimise her actions, it is expedient that ASUU lays convincing facts which have the capacity to ensure that the goal of legitimation is met. This is what is shown in the data presented in the above table. To buttress these claims, a textual instantiation from the corpus ensues, for each of negative and positive spatial proximation:

#### **Negative Spatial Proximation Excerpt 1**

*Specifically, the crisis arising from the neglect of the education sector developed with the general crisis of the abandonment of the public sector and the*

*valorization of private ownership via liquidation of public facilities such as the banks, the power sector, aviation, telecommunication, roads, etc. Consequently, excuses were produced for the sale of public facilities in the first place, especially because they claimed public enterprises are not efficient. The paradox of this situation is that these privatized facilities are surviving today only because tax-payers’ money is being used to bail them out from complete collapse. But for the intervention of ASUU, the extent of this looting of public properties was to include the sale of Unity Schools and even public Universities. (P 2-3, paragraph 2)*

#### **Positive Spatial Proximation Excerpt 2**

*To prevent and control the spread of COVID-19, Nigeria needs clarity and forcefulness in the measures to be taken. If the emerging success stories of China and other countries are anything to go by, then Nigeria needs a command structure led by experts and professionals. Such structure should include:*

*Teams of researchers, scholars and medical scientists, not groups dominated by bureaucrats and politicians.*

*Inputs from the Committee of Chief Medical Directors at both the state and federal government levels. They would provide information about the state of readiness of the Isolation Centre in each hospital, state the current response capacity and projected capacity to cope with the disease in terms of bed space. These measures, along with early detection and isolation, will significantly reduce the spread of the disease (P6, paragraphs 1,2).*

#### **TEMPORAL DIMENSION OF LEGITIMISATION IN THE CORPUS**

**Table 2: Showing Temporal Dimension of Legitimation**

Negative (FQ/ %)	Neutral (FQ/ %)	Positive (FQ/%)
21 (53.8)	17 (43.6)	1 (2.6)
<b>Grand total - 39 (100)</b>		

**Negative/neutral Temporal Proximation****Excerpt 3**

*It is now public knowledge that ASUU has consistently rejected because of its technical and procedural deficiencies. With the payment of some categories of university staff through the IPPIS platform last month, our fears about distortion in the take-home pay, non-release of third-party deductions (including union dues and cooperative deductions), arbitrary award of sums on the payment, inability to link the personnel information with the payroll system have been confirmed. If Government had encouraged our Union when the idea of IPPIS in universities was first mooted in 2013/2014, a credible alternative would have since been provided (P9, paragraph 3).*

**Positive Temporal Proximation****Excerpt 4**

*Although 30 cases were reported as at 22<sup>nd</sup> March, 2020, the figure has the potential of increasing exponentially in the coming days. (P6, paragraph 1)*

**AXIOLOGICAL DIMENSION OF LEGITIMISATION IN THE CORPUS**

This strand of the theory accounts for ideological tussle(s) in political discourse. Usually in politically-toned texts, as the one being examined, the addresser (who usually represents an in-group) deploys linguistic resources which badly showcase the out-group (in this case, the government) to the addressee whose task is to interpret the message contained in the communicative event and take a stance. Because the addresser (in this case, ASUU) would aspire a positive stance from its audience against the government, thereby legitimising an impending action (an indefinite strike action, in the corpus being investigated). An inquiry into the corpus found that strategies were deployed in the axiological domain for legitimisation, thus:

**Excerpt 5**

*The Federal Government usually ignored ASUU's calls for full implementation of agreements and memoranda signed with the Union. Indeed, it is no news that successive governments in Nigeria have been treating matters of education, particularly university education, with levity. Operators of government relate to universities scornfully and dismiss university scholars as irritants. They send their children abroad and consign children of the poor to an education system bereft of all ingredients of quality. The Nigerian ruling class professes to be committed to using education as a tool for achieving national development. Yet, on a daily basis, they kill the same education through contractocracy and the spread of the intervention resources available at the Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFund), thereby making the Fund too thin for any meaning impact (P2, paragraph 1).*

**Excerpt 6**

*The Grammy Award winner, Mariah Carey, says: "We belong together". When the government talks of self-isolation in Nigeria, where do we place the taxi driver, the market woman or the village farmer who lives on daily income? Government in other climes are proactive to under-write house rents, assure unbroken food supply chains, subsidize incomes and introduce other measures that assure the people of a return to normal life in the post-corona era. But where are the poor, the unemployed and the under-employed in the Nigerian government's approach to preventing the spread of COVID-19? How prepared are we to respond to an imminent lock-down which stares us clearly in the face of today? (P7, paragraph 1)*

**Excerpt 7**

*Compatriots of the Press, no one will develop Nigeria except by ourselves. We in ASUU are not surprised about the scepticism among some members of the public nor are we surprised about the outright misrepresentation of ASUU's motives in government circles and even in some segments of the academia. Our apprehension of the dynamics of social consciousness has enabled us to know that in the face of the deceit of popular struggles, the apostacy among some of the people trusted the Nigerian public and the impunity of anti-people responses among our national leaders has produced a culture of surrender among the people that has propelled ASUU's refusal to give up. (P13, paragraph 1)*

The above excerpts are from three strategic positions of the text (at the beginning-Excerpt 5, middle- Excerpt 6 and the end-Excerpt 7, as indicated by their page numbers). In the excerpts (as shown in the bold portions), ASUU progressively projects herself as a pro-people Association which is interested in the people's welfare and future as evidenced in the use of expressions as .....; the government is depicted as the villain (as being .....). ASUU's posture makes the ..... ideology clear.

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