



Discourse or Display? A Critical Analysis of Power and Representation in the Nigerian Senate

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ABSTRACT

Background: Discourse in Nigerian Senate is shaped by historical legacies, elite power dynamics, and gendered hierarchies. Recent high-profile exchanges, such as between Senator Natasha Akpoti-Uduaghan and Senate President Godswill Akpabio, raise concerns about exclusion, procedural control, and symbolic performances that undermine deliberative governance.

Objectives: This study examined how Nigerian Senate discourse constructs, maintains, and contests institutional authority, with attention to power, representation, and gender.

Methods: Using Fairclough's three-dimensional model of CDA, selected Senate plenary sessions broadcast on NASSTV YouTube channel were examined at the textual, discursive practice, and social practice levels.

Results: The analysis demonstrated that parliamentary discourse privileges elite interests, reinforces patriarchal and hierarchical power structures, and marginalises dissent. Procedural norms were strategically deployed to silence opposition, while resistance emerges through rhetorical re-appropriation of institutional language and appeals to procedural rights.

Conclusion: Discourse in the Senate functions less as participatory policymaking and more as a performance of legitimacy that conceals exclusion and inequality, turning the chamber into a stage for political theatre.

Unique Contribution: This study advances understanding of how parliamentary discourse operates as both a mechanism of exclusion and a potential site of counter-hegemonic resistance. It offers actionable insights for legislators, civil society, and gender advocacy groups to identify and address discursive barriers to equitable representation.

Key Recommendation: To strengthen procedural fairness and enforce inclusive norms that safeguards the equal right of all legislators to contribute meaningfully to parliamentary debate, regardless of gender or political affiliation.

Keywords: Nigerian Senate, Political Discourse, Power Struggles, Parliamentary Discourse, Institutional Power



INTRODUCTION

Just like other political institutions and offices in Nigeria, Nigerians reaffirm their commitment to democratic governance by electing representatives to the Senate (often referred to as the upper house/chamber of Nigeria's bicameral legislature) every four years. This institution is expected to advocate for public interest and serve as a place for thoughtful debate and policymaking on matters of national concern, including security, education, and economic reform. However, the discursive practices within the institution frequently reflect and expose the dominance of elite interests, exclusion, and performative politics over participatory representation (Daniel, 2019; Inegbe, 2024). This tension became especially visible in the controversial case of an exchange between Senator Natasha Akpoti-Uduaghan and Senate President Godswill Akpabio, where an attempt to speak was met with dismissive and gendered remarks likening the chamber to a "nightclub."

This incident drew public criticism and raised questions about decorum, marginalisation, and political performance in legislative discourse. However, this study treats the Natasha's episode as symptomatic of deeper structural tensions within the Nigerian Senate, rather than as an isolated incident. Recent parliamentary sessions reveal how factors like gender, regional identity, and party affiliation intersect to shape who speaks, who is heard, and what issues receive attention. Such persistent gatekeeping of discursive participation undermines the institution's democratic potential.

Although there is a substantial body of research on Nigerian political discourse, much of it has focused on electoral campaigns, media discourse, or political speeches outside parliamentary settings, with limited attention to the micro-dynamics of Senate deliberations. Studies examining legislative discourse have rarely integrated a gendered perspective with a critical discourse analytical framework. This leaves a gap in understanding how everyday legislative exchanges enact and contest institutional authority. Therefore, this study addresses that gap by using Fairclough's three-dimensional Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) model to interrogate the intersection of power, representation, and performance in the Nigerian Senate.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- i. What linguistic and rhetorical strategies are employed by Nigerian senators to construct and assert power, or to marginalise others, during plenary sessions?
- ii. How do socio-political structures (e.g., gender, party politics) influence patterns of inclusion, exclusion, and representation in the discourses of the Nigerian Senate?
- iii. To what extent does the communicative performance in the Nigerian Senate function as meaningful political debate or as symbolic theatrical display?



LITERATURE REVIEW

Language, Politics, and Power

Language and politics are interwoven; it is a powerful tool central to the performance and legitimization of political power. Politicians do not merely use language to communicate pre-existing ideas but to actively construct political realities through strategic word choice, implicit messaging, and rhetorical devices (Dahal, 2024; Odoemelum & Nwafor, 2012). Political actors—politicians—use language as a tool to build political alliances, frame issues, persuade constituencies, and discredit opponents (Rahmani & Saeed, 2024). Thus, Swetha (2025) perceives such functions as revealing political discourse to be a form of symbolic power that reinforces existing power relations. As Edelman (1988, as cited in Nafea, 2024) argues, “political language is political reality,” as it is inherently selective and symbolic—used by politicians to craft narratives that mobilise support or justify action. Therefore, the use of language to frame political events influences public opinion, shapes policy agendas, and defines who is considered legitimate or deviant within political discourse (Chahbane, 2023; Khaemba, 2024; Rahmani & Saeed, 2024).

Accordingly, language is not ancillary to politics but constitutive of it (Chahbane, 2023). Speaking about the relationship between language and social structures, Khaemba (2024) stresses how Fairclough’s CDA foregrounds this dialectical relationship, emphasising how political discourse both maintains and changes power relations. In this sense, political language operates within institutional constraints and is shaped by underlying ideologies, histories, socio-cultural conditions, and expectations of audiences (Chahbane, 2023). For instance, speeches or debates are often governed by formal procedures and traditions, yet these very norms can become tactical tools to seize power and maintain domination, asserting control and exclusion (Nafea, 2024). Thus, language naturalises unequal relations of power in political discourse (Swetha, 2025), which CDA seeks to uncover by exposing the often-invisible mechanisms that sustain them. Hence, political discourse is not neutral; it is a fundamental ground where meanings are negotiated, and power is exercised (Dahal, 2024).

Power and Ideology in Parliamentary Settings

When it comes to the discourse of parliaments, it is a structured communicative practice where institutional power is both performed and maintained through language (Inya, 2023). Legislative institutions, like the Senate, rely on procedural norms. These norms include the like of turn-taking, forms of address, and rules of recognition, among others. They regulate who speaks, how they speak, who is heard, and what issues receive attention (Obeng, 2011). Agreeing with this, Inya (2023) posits that these discursive procedures are not neutral; however, they are ideologically loaded and those with higher ranks within institutions use them to reinforce dominant hierarchies and marginalise perspectives that do not align with theirs. For instance, the power granted to presiding officers to allow or deny speaking rights is a discursive tool that can shape a debate outcome (Chinwe & Ejiaso, 2023). Such instances in parliamentary discourse



make it a site where institutional authority is enacted, contested, and re-legitimated, reflecting broader socio-political structures that govern power distribution (Inya, 2023).

Furthermore, ideology in parliamentary settings is embedded, though subtly but consequential, in the language choices and narrative structures used to frame debates (Inya, 2023). In politics, its actors routinely draw on implicit ideological assumptions to create national or ingroup identities, justify actions and policies, or exclude dissenting or alternative viewpoints (Aminu & Chilwa, 2022). In legislative discourse, as Ajiboye (2019) argues, ideological positioning may manifest in lexical contrasts between “order” and “chaos,” “development” and “opposition,” or in appeals to tradition and national unity. Consequently, Chinwe and Ejiaso (2023) argue that these binaries mask the interests being protected or marginalised, rendering ideological dominance natural and commonsensical. Therefore, CDA scholars argue that analysing these patterns is important if we want to understand how institutions reproduce particular worldviews while they silence others (Babatunde & Kolade, 2022). In a multiethnic society like Nigeria, Aminu and Chilwa (2022) further reveals how such ideological operations are shaped by factors like ethnicity, regionalism, and political patronage. This can, thereby, make the Senate a complex site of discursive power struggles (Inya, 2023).

Gendered Language in Politics

Political discourse is not only structured by institutional rules but also shaped by gendered norms and hierarchies that influence how authority, legitimacy, and credibility are assigned (Ilie, 2018). Research shows that women in politics often face discursive marginalisation through practices such as interruption, patronising language, exclusion, infantilisation, or the questioning of their competence and authority (Krook, 2022). Bäck and Debus (2018) take this argument further, stating that these patterns are reinforced by the symbolic framing of women as unqualified, emotional, or out of place in traditionally male-dominated spaces like parliaments. Even when they occupy formal positions of power—procedurally valid, their communicative authority and interventions are framed as disruptive or inappropriate through gendered tropes that question their competence or decorum (Raiber & Spierings, 2022). In this regard, Krook (2022) concludes that such symbolic acts are not merely incidental; they constitute a form of linguistic violence that sustain inequalities in political institutions under the guise of institutional decorum.

Moreover, gendered language in political discourse often reveals deeper ideologies about leadership, legitimacy, and national identity (Nwafor & Ogbodo, 2015). In their article, Vranic and Just (2025) mention that terms like “mother of the nation” or patronising labels used against outspoken female legislators not only feminise political engagement but also domesticate it. Parliamentary settings further amplify these dynamics by embedding gender norms within institutional procedures and speech conventions (Bäck & Debus, 2018). The use of dismissive language and selective recognition are common strategies that maintain gendered power relations. According to Raiber and Spierings (2022), women politicians are often expected to conform to narrow discursive roles—emphasising consensus, care, or decorum—while men are permitted more aggressive or assertive speech styles. Such expectations constrain the space



available for women to function as full political agents and frame deviation from these norms as a threat to institutional order (Ilie, 2018).

Discourse in the Nigerian Political Context

In Nigeria, political discourse is intertwined with the country's historical legacies, ethnic configurations, and elite power dynamics (Inya, 2023). While its Senate is constitutionally modelled on liberal-democratic ideals, it exhibits communicative practices that prioritise dominance, exclusion, and performative allegiance rather than deliberative governance. Studies have shown that the language used in this context is strategic, frequently marked by evasive rhetoric, appeals to ethnic or party loyalty, and symbolic displays of authority (Ette & Akpan-Obong, 2022). A study conducted by Inya (2023) reveals that debates are often less about resolving policy issues and more about reinforcing existing power hierarchies, marginalising dissenting voices, and/or engaging in rhetorical performances aimed at external audiences. Consequently, Ette and Akpan-Obong (2022) state that there is no doubt that these communicative patterns undermine the Senate's deliberative function and turn it into a space where power is staged rather than contested through reasoned argument.

Gender dynamics and hierarchical power relations further shape institutional discourse in Nigeria, including the Nigerian Senate. According to Mordi (2022), female legislators often face challenges in asserting their voices within a predominantly male institution. He further mentions that instances of gendered language and behaviour highlight the systemic barriers to women's full participation in legislative processes. They, sometimes, face derogatory comments and procedural obstacles that underscore the intersection of gender and power in Nigerian parliamentary discourse (Uche & Anyanwu, 2024). These practices reveal how parliamentary discourse in Nigeria is used to enforce boundaries around who may speak, when, and under what conditions (Ojo, 2022). This implies that these patterns hinder the representation of diverse perspectives and perpetuate a political culture that resists inclusivity and equitable participation (Chiluwa, 2021). Furthermore, Chiluwa (2021) and Ojo (2022) conclude that this shows how language becomes a tool for silencing dissent and reinforcing patriarchal and regional hierarchies.

Theoretical Framework: Critical Discourse Analysis

When talking about CDA, Norman Fairclough is widely recognised to be among the outstanding figures and the father of the framework—CDA. He has published books and journals on language, discourse, and society. Blommaert (2005, as cited in Xia, 2021) confirms this by stating, “Fairclough's *Language and Power* (1989) is commonly considered to be the landmark publication for the start of CDA.” In this book, Fairclough (1989) views “language as social practice;” a form of discourse with a strong connection with their production processes and social conditions and presents how to analyse what may be hidden in a text from people. Thus, he proposes the CDA as a theoretical framework to study and uncover a text's hidden agenda or meaning. This sentiment is shared by Xia (2021), who states that CDA is interested more in the connection between language and power. To ensure the effectiveness of CDA, Fairclough (1993)



further proposes that a critical discourse analysis must pass through three stages, namely, (i) textual, (ii) discursive practice, and (iii) social practice.

Fairclough (1993) posits that the first stage, textual analysis, focuses on the language analysis of a text, including analysing its linguistic properties. The second stage, discursive practice analysis, deals with the nature of the process of text, how it is produced and interpreted, putting the roles of the author or speaker, participants, audiences, and the intended purpose of the text in mind. Lastly, social practice analysis “attends to issues of concern in social analysis... of the discursive event and how that shapes the nature of the discursive practice” (Fairclough, 1993). The issues Fairclough is referring to here are the sociohistorical conditions that influence how a text is produced and received. In this stage, we look into and examine how a text influences society and how society influences a text. Therefore, researchers (discourse analysts) must establish a connection between “text” and the outside “world” of the language been used in a discourse, using the three stages of Fairclough’s CDA to disclose the hidden ideological factors, if they want to make sense of it completely (Xia, 2021).

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This is a discourse analytic study that deconstructs language use in the Nigerian Senate to assess whether it genuinely serves as a democratic institution or functions as a theatre of political performance. It adopts a qualitative approach, which, as Aspers and Corte (2019) note, is designed to explore social realities by addressing ‘hows’ and ‘whys’ questions rather than quantifying phenomena. In line with Tenny et al. (2020) and Barroga and Matanguihan (2022), such research requires constructing excellent research questions that guide the collection, transcription, coding, and interpretation of data.

The study applies Fairclough’s CDA model, which views discourse as both socially shaped and socially shaping. CDA is particularly suited here because it enables the examination of how institutional language in parliamentary settings reflects and reproduces power relations, ideology, and representation. By analysing Senate exchanges through CDA’s three-dimensional model, the study connects textual features to discursive practices and the broader socio-political structures that frame them, making it possible to reveal how authority is enacted, challenged, or legitimised in this legislative context.

Data Collection Procedure

For this study, the data collection process for this study involved video recordings of selected parliamentary sessions that are publicly available on YouTube. Given that not all sessions derail policy discussions, the selection focused on recent pressing sessions that, according to my judgement, contributed to the non-engagement with key national issues such as security, economic hardship, and education reform. Particular attention was given to the controversial exchange between Senator Natasha and the Senate President.



Data Analysis Procedure

The data collected were subjected to rigorous qualitative analysis, using the principles of CDA to explore how discursive practices reflect deeper issues of exclusion and control within the Senate and interrogate whose interests are being represented. The data were transcribed verbatim, colour coded in MS Word to find the prominent and recurring codes related to the study research questions and analysed them using Fairclough's CDA model. Information about this model was given within the theoretical framework section of this study.

DATA ANALYSIS

Textual Analysis

4.1.1 Lexical Choices and Ideological Framing

More than ever, it is no longer news that politicians have always been synonymous with their tactical use of lexical choices. Instances of such language choices were identified in the selected data, revealing competing ideological positions. For instance, in line 5, the Senate President states that "We're not in a nightclub." This statement employs an inappropriate and gendered metaphor to infantilise Natasha and delegitimise her contribution. Not only that, but such also an instance aligns her presence with disorder and frivolity to frame her as out of place.

On the other hand, it is observed that Nastasha's lexical choices are formal and reflect a strategy of dignified resistance. For instance, "I will do so in honour" (line 26), "I chose to remain on this seat, come what may" (line 27-28), and the use of "Mr. [Senate] President..." throughout her debates draw on moral and institutional language of duty and representation to counter perceived disrespect. It is worth mentioning that this contrast reflects competing styles of legitimacy that are present in politics: informal control versus constitutional responsibility. Looking closely at the texts, the repeated legislative term, "order 10 on privileges," aligns her with constitutional legitimacy, thereby contrasting to the Senate President's informal, paternalistic register.

4.1.2 Pronouns, Identity and Positioning

It is quite common to see politicians using personal deixis such as pronouns like "we," "you," "us," "our," "they," and "them" in their discourse to construct inclusion and exclusion. Similarly, it is observed that Natasha uses "we" in "we don't want the bill killed..." (lines 1-3). This indicates a collective, issue-oriented stance. This contrasts with the Senate President's repeated use of "you." For instance, he says "you have to be recognised before you speak" (line 4); the use of "you" here isolates Natasha and marks her as an outsider to institutional norms. It is also worth noting that this second-person address enforces procedural hierarchies and marks her as a violator of norms.

As the confrontation escalates, Natasha switches from inclusive to accusatory pronouns: "you have discriminated against me" (line 33). This directly indexes personal and institutional oppression; it personalises the power struggle and transforms institutional critique into direct confrontation. It could be argued that this shift underscores Natasha's identity not only as a



senator but as a woman dealing with gendered exclusion. Considering the strategic use of these pronouns, they become powerful rhetorical tools for both silencing and resistance in the micro-politics of speech.

4.1.3 Repetition, Emphasis and Resistance

Throughout the selected data, the speakers repeated words, phrases, and sentences; this feature is known as repetition. Repetition serves as a strategy of procedural insistence and emotional emphasis. In the data chosen for this study, an instance of repetition is observed in lines 11, 46, 58, and 60, where Natasha repeatedly invokes “Order 10 on privileges” to signal her refusal to be silenced through procedural exclusion. Moreover, her repeated appeals, “please... please” (line 50), carry both politeness and desperation; it signals deference while exposing the asymmetry of power.

In contrast, we see the Senate President trying to interrupt Natasha on many attempts and refusing to acknowledge her order mid-sentence. For instance, when Natasha was saying “...I beg to defer that this matter subjudice and I stand on privilege 10... Order 10 which is on privileges.” The Senate President interrupted her by saying “No no sorry”. These kinds of interruptions and refusals reveal a strategy of discursive removal, where procedural legitimacy is denied performance. This imbalance is further reflected in her claim, “I represent people and I represent women who have been silenced.” (lines 54-55). Here, Natasha’s repetition of the words “I represent...” indicates and reinforces her position as a representative of her people. Also, such a repetition becomes both a stylistic and symbolic act of political resistance. Through persistent restatement, Natasha reclaims space, allows herself to be heard, and refuses quiet compliance.

4.1.4 Silencing, Gatekeeping and Control

Like other rhetorical devices, silencing and gatekeeping are other potent rhetorical devices in the selected data that operate through both verbal and technical mechanisms. It is observed that the Senate President refused to grant speaking rights in lines 8-9 “Distinguished senator Natasha, please you are not recognised to speak from there.” Also, he used a directive speech act “please... please, take her out of the Senate” to remove Natasha physically. All these lines are not just meant to re-establish procedural dominance and reframe the interaction; they illustrate procedural gatekeeping disguised as neutrality.

Furthermore, the Senate President enacted gatekeeping through control of speaking rights and technology. It is observed that Natasha’s microphone is turned off multiple times (lines 20, 53) under the guise of procedural order. In response to this gatekeeping, Natasha explicitly protests: “I don’t care if I am silenced... You have deliberately silenced my voice” (lines 21-24) and “would you stop turning off my microphone” (line 54); this highlights the materiality of discursive control in parliamentary spaces. The quoted phrase in lines 21-24 foreground silencing as both literal and symbolic violence. Therefore, we could frame her protest not only as personal but representative, with her statement “I represent people and I represent women who have been silenced” (lines 54-55) further invoking broader gendered dynamics of exclusion.



Discursive Practice Analysis

As Fairclough (1993) asserts, discursive practice analysis deals with the nature of the process of text - how it is produced and interpreted, putting the roles of the author or speaker, participants, audiences, and the intended purpose of the text in mind. As for the data for this study, the texts are produced within the formal setting of the Nigerian Senate and disseminated live via NASSTV on YouTube. While Natasha (Peoples Democratic Party-PDP, Kogi Central) and the Senate President (All Progressives Congress-APC, Akwa Ibom) are the primary participants, their roles reflect competing discursive aims. Each selected session highlights distinct communicative priorities: Session 1 (lines 1-6) focuses on procedural correction laced with gendered dismissal, Session 2 (lines 7-35) escalates into a confrontation about silencing and access to legislative privileges, while Session 3 (lines 36-83) centres on Natasha's petition and institutional accountability.

Although Senate sessions are formally designed for national governance and accountability to Nigerian citizens, the communicative dynamics here raise critical questions about actual inclusivity. Rather than fostering participatory visibility, the debates are reinforcing elite control and exclusion. For instance, Natasha's complaints like "you have deliberately silenced my voice" (lines 23-24), combined with repeated microphone cut-offs (lines 20, 53), suggest that transparency in form does not guarantee communicative fairness. Given the superiority of the Senate President, it becomes evident that who speaks, who is heard and what matters receive attention are shaped by party politics, institutional position, and gendered hierarchy.

In addition, Natasha's multiple attempts to invoke "Order 10 on privileges" (lines 11, 46, 58) are repeatedly dismissed or ignored, and the switching off of the microphone suggests procedural mechanisms are selectively enforced to marginalise dissent. Looking closely at lines 36-42 where the Senate President was talking about the years a particular senator has spent in the Senate and the position he has held; he tries to shift the intended purpose of Senator Natasha's debate from democratic deliberation to institutional display. This further raises questions about whom the Senate truly serves. Do they forget that they are representatives who are elected by their people, and they have some responsibilities toward them?

Social Practice Analysis

The assumption here is that any discourse, especially political discourse, is influenced by institutional and societal power relations sustained by ideologies. Therefore, the exchanges between Natasha and the Senate President must be read within Nigeria's broader socio-political context, where gender, hierarchy, and party allegiance shape access to power. Looking closely at Natasha's repeated phrase "order 10 on privileges" (lines 11, 46, 58), it is not just procedural but a reflection of her struggle against institutionalised gatekeeping often used to side-line women and opposition voices. Moreover, Natasha's party affiliation (PDP) contrasts with Akpabio's own, APC; this can intensify the interaction as a site of a partisan contest.

Furthermore, the Senate President's retort, "We're not in a nightclub" (line 5), evokes deeply patriarchal scripts that reduce women's political agency to spectacle or seduction. Such language



is not accidental; it reproduces gendered ideologies that question women's legitimacy in formal power spaces. Natasha's statement, "Mr Senate President, ever since the night-club incident, you have deliberately silenced my voice." (lines 22-24), further reinforces this assertion. In addition, Natasha's resistance is informed by shifting societal expectations around gender, representation, and accountability. Her appeal, "I represent women who have been silenced" (lines 54-55), connects her experience to a broader constituency marginalised in public discourse. Natasha's comment on seat changing "do what you may, I will not leave this seat" (line 35), becomes symbolic resistance to elite exclusion and political erasure.

Considering most of her statements, they resonate beyond the chamber; they offer counter-narratives to hegemonic portrayals of legislative authority. However, the Senate President's dominance, microphone control, and procedural dismissals reveal how entrenched hierarchies use institutional mechanisms to regulate dissenting or non-conforming voices, especially those of women. The repeated denial of Natasha's right to speak illustrates how institutional discourse reproduces existing power asymmetries under the guise of decorum and order. Thus, it is evident that these discourses are rooted in the sociocultural and conditions of Nigeria, including patriarchy, political patronage, and performative democracy, which it, in turn, helps to legitimise and sustain. This reveals the reciprocal relationship between the selected texts and society, where societal conditions and expectations shape discourse, which the discourse, in turn, helps to legitimise and sustain.

DISCUSSION

How Power Is Used to Control Who Speaks

The analysis reveals that parliamentary discourse in Nigeria, far from being a neutral process, is a carefully managed performance of institutional power. Rules governing the discourse—who may speak, how, and when—are not applied neutrally but often reinforce hierarchy. This reflects Ette and Akpan-Obong's (2022) finding that presiding officers use procedural authority to assert dominance. This reflects Ette and Akpan-Obong's (2022) finding that presiding officers use procedural authority to assert dominance, aligning with Fairclough's (1993) argument that discourse legitimises authority under the guise of order and decorum. Moreover, it is observed that this control is not exercised uniformly but selectively; while the senators are expected to follow rules, these rules are selectively enforced, often against those seen as disruptive to institutional norms.

As observed in the analysis, the Senate President's repeated denial of Natasha's right to speak and disregard for her procedural claims illustrate how 'proceduralism' can be used to silence rather than facilitate debate. The implication is a narrowing of deliberative space, as dissent is framed as disorderly and controlled through procedural gatekeeping. This mirrors Ilie's (2018) argument that legitimacy in political institutions is maintained more through symbolic order than actual inclusion. What emerges, then, is a political theatre where order is performed but deliberation is curtailed. Therefore, it can be concluded that the Senate functions to protect authority and suppress challenge, rather than fostering meaningful dialogues, a trend also noted in other legislatures (Chinwe & Ejiaso, 2023; Inya, 2023).



Gendered Speech and Symbolic Marginalisation

Gender further shapes who is heard and how speech is evaluated. Consistent with Krook (2022), the study finds that women in politics face both structural and symbolic barriers, including interruption, infantilisation, and heightened scrutiny. Such patterns are visible in the selected Senate exchange, where procedural norms are enforced more harshly against a female senator, and her presence is framed as disruptive. The metaphorical framing of her intervention as out-of-place or disorderly, especially when labelled in gendered terms, reflects how language becomes a tool of gender policing. Also, it is observed that gendered power relations are evident in how Natasha's assertiveness is received. While women are expected to be soft-spoken or non-confrontational in such spaces, Natasha's assertiveness is seen not as a procedural contribution, but as a challenge to institutional order. This aligns with Mordi (2022), who shows that political institutions frame assertive women as inappropriate or confrontational.

While this process is about procedural enforcement, it also seeks to protect the symbolic order of the institution, which remains male-dominated in tone and culture. It can therefore be assumed that the reproduction of a political culture where women's legitimacy depends on conforming to deferential speech norms, reducing their capacity to influence policy. This expectation is a deeply entrenched norm. When that norm is broken, they are marked as inappropriate or confrontational, and institutional power responds with silencing. Therefore, Natasha's experience exemplifies how women's voice is regulated not just by law, but by the cultural meanings attached to who (women) speak, how they speak, when they speak, and what kind of speaker they are permitted to be. Similar patterns in legislatures (Uche & Anyanwu, 2024) suggest that this is not unique to Nigeria but part of a broader regional dynamic where language polices gendered participation.

Resistance and Re-contextualisation of Institutional Language

Despite constraints, the study shows that parliamentary language can be re-appropriated as a tool of resistance. Natasha's insistence on "Order 10 on privileges" is an example of strategic re-contextualisation of official language. Her linguistic choices indicate an attempt to hold the institution accountable using its own procedural logic. This reflects Fairclough's (1995) view of discourse as a site of both ideological reproduction and contestation. The persistence in procedural language forces institutional authority to confront its own inconsistencies, supporting Ette and Akpan-Obong's (2022) concept of "discursive counter-conduct." Therefore, Natasha, by speaking in the language of the institution, contests exclusion not from outside, but within the very discursive rules that are used to silence her.

While others may see Natasha's actions as defying institutional norms, it is important to mention that Natasha is not rejecting institutional discourse but demanding equal access to it. She only challenges the legitimacy of the institutional power that seeks to marginalise her. Rather than rejecting the Senate's authority, Natasha insists on her right to access and utilise it, exposing the contradictions in its operation. These observations imply that resistance within institutional language can reveal contradictions between formal democratic ideals and actual practice. Such



acts may inspire other marginalised legislators to strategically navigate proceduralism rather than abandon the institutional field altogether.

When Politics Becomes a Show

The findings also suggest that Senate proceedings often operate as political theatre, prioritising image over substance. This supports Inya's (2023) observation that legislative visibility via livestreams can mask exclusionary practices, enhancing spectacle without necessarily enhancing participation or accountability. As Fairclough (1993) warns, when discourse becomes performative, it risks obscuring the real mechanisms of exclusion behind performative openness. This analysis supports that concern; while the sessions appear democratic in structure, they reveal a theatrical pattern of dominance and suppression, which further undermines the deliberative ethos of legislative practice.

On the surface, the Senate appears transparent—its proceedings are public, its language procedural. However, we can infer that possible reasons include the need to maintain public legitimacy while avoiding contentious policy debates that could fracture elite unity. This results in a hollowing out of democratic deliberation, where the appearance of debate replaces genuine policy engagement. This supports Raiber and Spierings's (2022) argument that in post-democratic societies, discourse is increasingly shaped to manage appearances, not to include dissent. However, unlike studies of European parliaments, this case adds the intersecting role of gender and regional politics in shaping spectacle. Without reform, such practices risk eroding public trust in democratic institutions and disincentivises meaningful engagement, reinforcing perceptions that governance is distant and performative rather than responsive.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results, the conclusion of this study is that political discourse in the Nigerian Senate functions less as a vehicle for participatory policymaking and more as a performance of legitimacy that masks deeper institutional exclusions and socio-political inequalities. The communicative practices observed prioritise the preservation of elite authority, the reinforcement of gendered and hierarchical power relations, and the marginalisation of dissenting voices. Moreover, procedural rules, while appearing neutral, are strategically deployed to control participation and silence opposition, especially from women and less powerful actors. Consequently, the Senate shifts from a site of deliberation to a stage for political theatre, where spectacle outweighs substantive governance. In such a context, discourse becomes a ritual of power that legitimises exclusion rather than challenging it, placing the institution at risk of further eroding public trust in legislative governance. To address these challenges, the Senate should strengthen procedural fairness to ensure equal access to debate and adopt enforceable norms that protect the speaking rights of all legislators regardless of gender or political affiliation.



Ethical clearance

While this study involves analysing existing publicly available videos rather than directly involving human participants, ethical considerations were given the utmost importance to ensure that the analysis is accurately and objectively conducted without any bias or manipulation, with respect for the rights and dignity of the individuals and political parties involved.

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Conflict of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

Authors' Contributions.

The paper was solely authored by Omotayo, who was responsible for all aspects of the research and writing. The author affirms that they have approved the final version of the manuscript for publication and accept full responsibility for all correspondence, its similarity index, and revisions required by the editorial team.

Availability of data and materials.

The data analysed in this study consist of publicly available video recordings of Nigerian Senate sessions, accessible through the official *NASSTV National Assembly, Nigeria* YouTube channel. Relevant transcriptions are included within the paper, and further clarifications or supplementary notes can be provided upon request.

Cite

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List of Appendices

Appendix A: List of Abbreviations

APC	All Progressives Congress
CDA	Critical Discourse Analysis
PDP	Peoples Democratic Party

Appendix B: Transcription Notation Conventions

Notation	Meaning
*	Indecipherable words/phrases
(*)	Short pause
(***)	Very long pause
...	Speech trails off
SP	Senate President
.	Completion of a line

Appendix A: List of Abbreviations

1. Natasha: Mr President, we don’t want it to be killed. We
2. just want a bit of modification. We don’t want the bill
3. killed but there should be slight modification...



4. SP: You see Senator Natasha, in the chamber, you have to
5. be recognized before you speak. We're not in a nightclub.
6. Natasha: Oh, pardon me.
7. Natasha: Order please (*)
8. SP: Distinguished senator natsha, please you are not
9. recognised to speak from there. That is the order of the
10. senate.
11. Natasha: Sir, order 10 on priviledges... Order 10 on
12. Priviledges
13. SP: Ditinguished Senator natasha
14. Natasha: Any senator may rise at anytime to speak upon a
15. matter of priviledge suddently arising.
16. SP: Can the seagent-at-arms... please... Please, take her out
17. of the senate
18. Natasha: And he or she shall be prepared to move without
19. notice: a motion declaring that the contempt of bridge of
20. priviledge has been committed... (Inadubile; microphone off)
21. Natasha: (***) I don't care if I am silenced, I am not afraid.
22. You have denied me my privilege. Mr Senate President, ever
23. since the night-club incidence, you have deliberately
24. silenced my voice. My bills have not been able to scale
25. through to second reading. I am not afraid of being
26. silenced, but I will do so in honour. As a senator duly
27. elected by my people, I chose to remain on this seat, come
28. what may. The worst you can do is to suspend me from this
29. sitting and that will not stop me from contributing my
30. quota to my constituency, the Senate and Nigeria as a whole.
31. Mr Senate President, I have taken a lot from you. If you



32. don't want me to speak publicly, I will let the whole world
33. know how you have discriminated against me, maligned me,
34. dehumanized me. Your choice of words have embarrassed me,
35. Mr President, do what you may, I will not leave this seat.
36. SP: Distinguished colleagues, let us finish with senator
37. Monguno
38. Senator Uduaghan, please let's finish with Senator
39. Mongonu. The order refer to by Senator Mongonu who also
40. served for 12 years as a member of the house of
41. representative... 16 years and was also a chief whip for 8
42. years and at that time a chairman...
43. Natasha: Thank you very much Senate President. Again, I am
44. Senator Natasha Akpoti Uduaghan, representing the good and
45. virtuous people of Kogi central. I beg to defer that this
46. matter sub judice and I stand on privilege 10... Order 10
47. which is on privileges.
48. SP: No no sorry (***)
49. Natasha: Dear Senate President, please with due respect do
50. you mind I have raised an order 10 privileges please...
51. please[Silence]
52. Natasha: It's my right the Senate President. Order 10 on
53. privileges, please [Microphone off] I believe please,
54. would you stop turning off my microphone. I represent
55. people and I represent women who have been silenced. So
56. permit me to speak without my microphone been silenced,
57. dear sir, President of the Nigerian Senate. Order 10 on
58. privileges.
59. SP: Coincidentally, I am hearing you *



60. Natasha. Any senator may rise at anytime to speak upon a
61. matter of privilege suddenly arising. And he or she shall
62. be prepared to move without notice: a motion declaring that
63. the contempt of bridge of privilege has been committed. I
64. stand and I believe here, sir, that your denial, your
65. refusal to accept and treat my petition before the Senate
66. Committee on Ethics and Privileges is an abuse of my
67. privileges, and I say that this matter is not yet before
68. any court of law. [Cut off]
69. SP: Yeah... *
70. Natasha: It is not before the court. The matter before the
71. court is on the defamation and cyberbullying statements
72. made by your special assistant on new media, Mr Patrick
73. Udom, who addressed my decent outfits as transparent,
74. thereby depicting that I walked seductively and naked to
75. the chambers. That is the nature of the petition, of the
76. case in court. This petition, sir, has never been filed.
77. The petition that alleges, or should I say, accuses you of
78. making sexual harassment moves, abusing your office, and
79. making malicious obstructions to my legislative functions
80. has not been tendered anywhere or before any courts in
81. Nigeria. So, sir, I would appreciate it if you kindly accept
82. my petition and forward it to the Ethics and Privileges
83. Committee so it could be treated.