

Nigerian Online English: An Analysis of Its Nominal Group Structure

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ABSTRACT

Online/Internet English is generally considered by scholars in the field of Information Communications Technology (ICT) discourse research to exhibit usage features which mark it as an emergent sub-variety of the English language (Crystal, 2005, 2011; Posteguillo, 2002). Furthermore, Tagliamonte and Denis (2008) observed that the language used on the internet possesses its own grammar, lexicon, graphology and usage conditions. In fact, there have been proposals advanced for ICT discourse research to treat Internet language as a 'new medium' and to investigate it as a discipline on its own terms (Crystal, 2003). This study is aimed at analysing the Nominal Group (NG) structure of English used by Nigerians on the Internet. The NG data analyzed in this study were obtained from four social media platforms: Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram and Twitter. They were obtained by screenshots of Nigerian netizens' discussion threads in the various media group chats, posts and comments found on the platforms studied. The screenshots were taken after due permission from the authors and Admins. Using insights from the Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG), the isolated NG structures were analysed and found to be mainly syntactic chunks of clauses with expanded structures 'padded' with experiential elements which should normally be elements of clause structure. A further syntactic feature of NG constructions which was observed to occur in the social media English studied is the tendency to be left-dislocated. It could be concluded that the choice by netizens of (structurally loaded) nominal groups resulting in the structural variations observed in the grammar of Internet English is chiefly informed by constraints of the medium (for instance, character limitation), cost of internet data, the speed to beat real-time conversations, the creative nature of language, and the creative discernment of users of the Internet. More research into the grammar of Internet English covering other group and clause types is recommended.

Keywords: Social media, CMC, nominal group, systemic functional grammar, Internet language

1. Introduction

The evolution of Information Communications Technology (ICT) has promoted interactions between humans and the computer (Berkhout and Hertin, 2001), resulting in a phenomenon that has come to be described in ICT discourse as Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC). CMC is ‘a system of human communication via computers, involving people, situated in particular contexts...’ (December, 1996 cited in Udo 2020, p. 16). CMC is as well a technological medium by which social relations among members of the virtual community are initiated, structured and kept running as the breeding ground for social relations to occur. Yu’s (2011, p. 78) view of CMC is that of ‘any communicative transaction’ involving ‘the use of two or more networked computers’. Human participation in CMC necessarily brought in its wake the use of a linguistic codesince humans normally use some language in communicating one with another.

CMC may then be said to encompass three dimensions of the communication process: the networked computers, netizens/language users (LUs), and a language system. The computer is an artificial environment possessing its peculiar features, for instance, what Ko (1996, cited in Udo, p. 25) refers to as ‘electronic’ elements like smileys, emoticons...and so on, and its mode of operation. The second dimension of CMC is constituted of the netizens or language users (LUs), who are usually sentient beings with linguistic abilities and agency capable of making relevant linguistic choices for the purpose of achieving desired communicative goals (Golato and Taleghani-Nikazm, 2006). The third dimension of CMC is language, a linguistic system, with its organising principles by which sounds are organized into morphemes, morphemes into words, words into phrases and phrases into clauses and sentences. These three dimensions of CMC conduce to the emergence of internet language.

Given the sociolinguistic composition of the virtual community, any natural language can be an internet language. According to Baron (2003), the question of internet language relates to linguistic ‘issues that arise in constructing natural language to be carried across the internet’ (p. 3). In light of the foregoing, internet language is any natural language employed by virtual community members for interacting on the internet. It is a code of communication with distinctive usage features acquired by reason of contact with an artificial environment – the computer – but which still possesses shared features with the ‘mother’ code. About ten languages are said to be used on the internet – Chinese, Portuguese, Spanish, Arabic, Japanese, Malay, Russian, French and German – but English is ranked first in terms of being the most frequently used (Internet World Statistics, 2016). The status of English is further enhanced by the fact that internet has an English-speaking origin (Mbarachi 2015, p. 23). The English language is therefore accorded the status of the lingua franca of the internet (Posteguillo, 2002). The focus of the present study is the English language.

As the language of the internet, English has undergone modifications in its structure, usage and meaning since the development of the internet. Researchers in the field of online language research (Baron, 1998; Posteguillo, 2002; Crystal, 2004, 2005; Awonusi, 2004; Chilwa, 2007; Mbarachi, 2015; and

several others) hold a convergent view on the effect which the computer has had on (the English) language, its use and structure. For instance, Peyton (1996), cited in Udoh (2020), observes that CMC reshapes the forms and functions of the language used in communicating through computers. There are also the issues of character limitation, cost and speed. These constitute constraints of the medium on language and have resulted in such features as letter-number combinations, vowel free-words, initialisms, etc. Thus, the entire structure of English used on the internet has ‘shrunk’ – morpheme, word and syntactic structure. It is on the strength of this development that Crystal (2001) describes CMC of which Internet English is part as ‘the third language medium’, since as is apparent, it is a hybrid of the spoken and written mediums. Scholars in internet language use note how the English language used on the internet has acquired what may be described as “fused” features due largely to computer mediation and has therefore tended to become more like speech even though it is written, it combining both spoken and written forms of language use. Consequently, traditional writing conventions are not maintained as evident in the use of various fonts, colours and sizes as well as emojis on the computer screen. In a similar vein, Shortis (2007) states that internet language has a mixed mode; for instance, moods, laughter, anger, excitement..., and so on, are expressed using emoticons, smileys, buzz, etc.

Crystal (2005, 2011) observes that certain features of language characterise the language used on the internet. This results from the trend as reported by Posteguillo (2003 cited in Mbarachi 2015, p. 25) that these features are more prevalent at the levels of morpheme, word and word groups. This development, the source pointed out, arises from the fact that Internet English is most active at these three levels of the grammatical rank scale. Furthermore, Tagliamonte and Denis (2008) are of the view that the English language used on the internet possesses its own grammar, lexicon, graphology and usage conditions. These two positions motivated this investigation of an aspect of the syntax of English used by Nigerians on the internet – the structure of the nominal group in Nigerian Online English (NigOE).

As stated earlier, the virtual community is comprised of netizens from different linguistic backgrounds: it is sociolinguistically diverse. Nigerians make up a part of this community. Most Nigerians are bilinguals in English and their L_1 for two reasons: One, English serves official, educational and general communication roles; and, two, it is now firmly established that there is a Nigerian variety of English, a sub-variety of World English (cf. Jowitt, 1991; Bamgbose 1995, Udofot 1997; and Eka 2000).

As a sub-variety of World English, Nigerian English may be distinguished from other varieties by certain features it has acquired as it came in contact with indigenous Nigerian languages – a phenomenon Bamgbose (1995) and Adebijaja (2004) describe as ‘nativisation’ or ‘domestication’. Bamgbose (1995) posits a tripartite level of nativisation for English in Nigeria: linguistic, pragmatic and creative, but concedes that linguistic nativisation has gained more prominence in language contact discourse in Nigeria. Linguistic nativisation shows up in many ways, for instance, in sound substitution, replacement of stress

by tone, pluralisation of some English mass/non-count nouns and the use of culture-specific vocabulary items like *akara* ('bean balls'), *egusi* ('melon') as well as some L₁-induced syntactic structures such as 'am coming'...and so on.

On the pragmatic level, transfer features related to cultural practices are attested in Nigerian English, such non-English expressions of greetings as 'well done', 'sorry', 'go well', etc. and creatively nativised expressions coined by Nigerian users of English which capture the Nigerian world view, for example, 'take in' (meaning to get pregnant), 'put to bed' (meaning to be delivered of a baby). These are features of usage which characterise English language usage by Nigerians and manifest in many if not all situations of use including the internet, for as Jowitt (2007) has observed, 'it is difficult to specify the usage distinction of the varieties of Nigerian English because Nigerianisms are found in all the sub-varieties of Nigerian English though not in uniform regularity' (p.31).

Scholars have indeed studied the internet language from sociolinguistic and stylistic perspectives. None has investigated the nominal groups as instantiated on the social media to determine how the structure carries communicative burdens of netizens. This may be because the internet language is a relatively very new area of linguistic research. This research therefore analyses the various instances of nominal group structures in social media English of Nigerian netizens using four social media platforms: Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and WhatsApp. Analysis is based on the Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG), a suitable framework for studying the syntactic choices made by Nigerians from the linguistic resources of the English language being the language used by members of the virtual community.

2 Research Methodology

Data for this research were collected from four social media platforms selected for the study. The platforms included Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram and Twitter and covered only the Nigerian netizens. The choice of these social media platforms was informed by the fact that they share peculiarities of language use. The data were obtained through screenshots of discussion threads in the various social media groups, chats, posts and comments found on the platforms studied, with expressed permission from the virtual correspondents whose threads were screenshot. For WhatsApp, screenshots of some groups' messages were taken with prior permission from the respective Admins who, before the screenshots, alerted other members of the groups. Permission was also granted to access and screenshot individual WhatsApp chats for the purposes of the study. Facebook data were obtained using the Facebook Messenger to access and screenshot individual chats of those who consented to having their chats used for the present research. Individual Facebook posts as well as posts on various Facebook groups and pages, especially those which generated a lot of comments, were also screenshot with permission also taken from their various authors/Admins. The same was done on Instagram and Twitter handles. The researchers ensured that the posts and chats whose permission access was not granted by their respective authors and Admins were not invaded nor presented

here, for ethical reasons. Nominal groups were isolated from the screenshots for analysis. They are presented in tables particularly those which appear as syntactic chunks on social media, while others which often do not appear as chunks are presented as either monologic or dialogic texts.

3 Theoretical Consideration

This research is hinged on the theoretical provisions of Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG). This is mainly because since SFG merges grammar with context to reveal functional applicability in any choice of grammatical structures and since internet language displays a contextual use of language, it is only logical to borrow the tools of SFG in analysing internet language. SFG is a two-pronged approach – systemic grammar and functional grammar – and both approaches are interdependent in construing meaning (Ufot, 2009). Whereas the former generally caters for grammatical structures and what informs a speaker's choice of words, the latter tends to position these structures in their contexts, based on what function they fill in the 'here-&-now' of a speech event. 'Here-&-now', a term frequently used in this paper, is Halliday's term for the location (here) and time (now) relative to the speaker's location and time of speaking in a particular speech event (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2014, p. 381). For instance, tense and deictic elements (e.g., the determiner *this*) can only make sense or be interpretable if the speaker's time and location are respectively considered or contextualised. For the purposes of this research, the nominal group structure is examined in some detail.

3.1 The Hallidayan Nominal Group

The nominal group is a unit of the clause within Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG). As an account of language, SFG focuses mainly on meaning and meaning construction in the 'textual processes of social life' or 'the socio-semantics of texts' (Eggins, 2004, p. 2). Elements of the English nominal groups enter into two kinds of structure, multivariate and univariate structures. A multivariate structure is one whose elements stand in different kinds of relationship one to another, each having a specific and distinct function that it performs in a whole structure (Berry, 1975, p. 98; Halliday and Matthiessen, 2014, p. 390). The nominal group in its potentiality of construing meaning consists of the elements *m, h, q*. A univariate structure, as opposed to multivariate, is an iteration of a uniform relationship between the elements of a structure. In this respect, group complexes and, in fact, all unit complexes but not basic units are based on, and built in, univariate structures, thus recursive, as the following structures illustrate *the visitor, the only doctor in the house*.

3.1.1 Multivariate Experiential Structure of a Nominal Group

As Halliday and Matthiessen (2014) observe, the analysis of group constituents in SFG chiefly but not necessarily rests on the ideational metafunction which construes—and is split into—the *experiential structure* of language (i.e., language as representation). In this regard, the nominal group in its

instantiation in objectively testable experiential structure represents a construal of meaning (an entity) and interpersonally functions as the subject of information and verbal exchange. Its logical structure demonstrates a multivariate structure of the Modifier (*m*), Head(*h*) and Qualifier (*q*) (i.e., where the *m* premodifies and the *q* postmodifies the *h*). Apart from the postposition of the *q*, which is realised by varying structures relative to the position of the *h*, the pre-position of the *m* relative to the position of the *h* is logically organised into and construed by four, plus the head, five experiential functions—*Deictic*, *Numerative*, *Epithet*, *Classifiers* and *Thing* (which is the Head).

The Deictic typifies the specificity of the subset of the Head (Thing) as to whether such a subset is specific or non-specific, and, if either, which? Thus Deictics are in a system of DETERMINATION and are primarily distinguished into specific (e.g., *the*, *this*, *my*, etc.) and non-specific (e.g., *a(n)*, *some*, *each*, *every*, etc.). These divides are realised by a class of determiners and are called *Deictic₁*. There are also those Deictics that occur after the just discussed Deictics and which help to fully identify the subset by way of specifying its fame, familiarity, similarity, dissimilarity or its position in the text, for instance *same* in *the same cruel man arrived again*. These ones are realised by adjectives and are called *post-Deictics* or *Deictics₂*.

Also realised by adjectives like the post-Deictics are the Epithets but these ones specify the subset in the form of its quality. If such qualities are interpersonal (subjective), they are *Epithet₁* (e.g., *splendid*, *beautiful*) or if experiential (objective), *Epithet₂* (e.g., *black*, *big*). The difference is that interpersonal or attitudinal epithets rest on the speaker's judgement or perception relative to the here-&-now of the speech event (the speech event is also referred to by Halliday as the *speaker-now matrix*) while the experiential epithets rest on relatively objectified testable realities independent of the speaker. Realised by numerals, the Numerative quantifies or orders the subset of the Thing (e.g., *two*, *many*, *too*, *several*, *first*).

As the name implies, the Classifier seeks to classify a thing under a particular subclass. It is realised by either adjectives or nouns. The Classifier is summarised in 'a kind/ type of', 'a subset of' or 'belonging to' (e.g., *plastic* in the *plastic bag*). Classifiers are so broad as to include such semantic descriptions as scope, material, status, rank, origin, purpose and function, etc. (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2014, pp. 371-396). Lastly, the Thing, on the other hand, usually serves as the Head of the nominal group but sometimes does not as some of the other experiential elements can function as the Head (e.g., *those are mine*, here a Deictic determinative is the Head). The Thing is usually a noun and is the thing described. The meaning of its use here, in contrast with its use elsewhere, is not localised but includes both sentient and non-sentient beings.

The logical organisation and sequential ordering of these experientially functional elements are given in Table 1, showing their examples and the classes of word that most typically realise them.

Table 1: Logical Structure of the Experiential Elements of Nominal Group

Deictic	post-Deictic	Numerative	Epithet ₁	Epithet ₂	Classifier	Thing
Determiners	Adjectives	Numerals	Adjectives		Nouns/adjectives	Nouns
<i>The</i>	<i>miserable</i>	<i>three</i>	<i>best</i>	<i>young</i>	<i>Nigerian</i>	<i>artists</i>
<i>m</i>						<i>h</i>

These experiential functions of nominal group are logically ordered on the basis of their relative characteristic permanence in potentially identifying the head relative to the speaker-here-&-now. In other words, Halliday observes that the more permanent an attribute is, the less likely it is to identify a thing in the speaker-now; and vice versa.

Table 2: The Order of Nominal Group Elements in Identifying the Head

Deictic	post-Deictic	Numerative	Epithet ₁	Epithet ₂	Classifier	Thing
→						
(a) <i>More permanent and hence less increasingly identifying potential</i>						
←						
(b) <i>Less permanent and hence more increasingly identifying potential</i>						

The most permanent attribute as the arrow (a) in Table 2 shows is the Thing (and thus least likely in identifying as it yet requires other identifying potential), and, as arrow (b) shows, the least permanent attribute is the Deictic (and thus most likely in identifying as it barely requires any other identifying potential) relative to the here-&-now. Therefore, the more inherent, and thus general attribute, is placed as closely as possible to the Head while the more temporary, and thus specific, as distant as possible to the Head so that the latter can lead to an easy identification (cf. the example in Table 1). This is why we normally say *the new black shoes*, not *the black new shoes*, because the newness of the shoes being more extrinsic is likely to fade sooner than the blackness of the shoes; thus the more permanent attribute being placed nearer the head than the temporary. Some of the experiential elements can themselves be premodified (e.g., *the very much new black shoes*).

The Qualifier element can be realised by an embedded or downranked clause, group or phrase or by a word. It can also manifest to its nominal group a logico-semantic relationship of expansion, that is, it can elaborate, extend or enhance the Thing (e.g., *the war within the heart* has an enhancement). It can also correspond to a Participant or Circumstance in the transitivity structure of a congruent clause made metaphorical in an incongruent nominal group (e.g., *the creation of states*). All these constituents of the nominal group can also be replaced by appropriate pronouns

3.1.2 Logical Univariate Structure of the Nominal Group

As stated earlier, a univariate structure, unlike the multivariate one, is the iteration of a uniform functional relationship between elements of a structure. It is the logical propensity of the ideational metaquality that configures a series of nominal group into recursive patterns of the same kind of relationship (univariate structure). This relationship could be that of *parataxis* or *hypotaxis*, both being the two terms in the system of TAXIS (interdependence of structure) (see Berry, 1975; Halliday and Matthiessen, 2014).

Hypotaxis on the one hand is an unequal relationship holding between two structures where one is dependent on the other. The relationship is one of subordination and is non-symmetrical and non-transitive (e.g. *I sleep when I read* does not imply *I read when I sleep*). Parataxis on the other hand is an equal relationship holding between two structures where one is independent of the other. Paratactic univariate structure can be either *coordination* or *apposition*. If it is the former, the different but equal structures are organised by an appropriate coordinator, and if the latter the paratactic structures are juxtaposed and are generally co-referential. Paratactic structures are both symmetrical and transitive except for logico-semantic modifications (e.g., *school and church* does imply *church and school*) (Berry, 1975; Egbe, 2014; Halliday and Matthiessen, 2014; Quirk and Greenbaum, 1973). Nominal groups, in principle, form univariate structures logically through the domain of nominal group complexes where they are iterated in a series. On the social media, paratactic and hypotactic univariate structures, especially the former, are used for nicks, group and page names, titles, posts on timelines and handles (Facebook and Twitter respectively), hashtags, and so on. The list of some of these as they occur on the social media are made available in Table 4.

4 Presentation and Discussion of Data

In the presentation of data on the tables, the Hallidayan conventional symbols are used to represent various syntactic elements in analysing the texts: the alpha (α) for a head element and beta (β) as well as other letters of the Greek alphabet are used for modifiers relative in position to the head. A pair of slashes represent a group while a pair of square brackets represent a group embedding. Each emboldened horizontal bar closes each text. Other keys are explained beneath the table as they variously appear in each of the tables.

4.1 Corpus and Analysis of Multivariate Nominal Groups of the Social Media Language

Table 3 is a presentation of some multivariate nominal groups, among a plethora of others, found on the social media studied.

Table 3: Table Showing Multivariate Nominal Groups on the Platforms Studied

1.	Generational swagz	$\beta^{\text{Clas.}}$	α^{Thing}
2.	Late post	β^{Epi_2}	α^{Thing}
3.	No p	β^{Deic}	α^{Thing}
4.	Final year results	$\beta\beta^{\text{Mod}}$	$\beta\alpha^{\text{Clas.}}$ α^{Thing}
5.	Friend request	$\beta^{\text{Clas.}}$	α^{Thing}
6.	Just one-third [of it]	β^{Mod}	α^{Num} $q^{\text{PP(Thing)}}$
7.	That moment [[when one's face steals into someone else's mata]]	β^{Deic}	α^{Thing} q^{Clausal}
8.	D ^c prison world?	γ^{Deic}	$\beta^{\text{Clas.}}$ α^{Thing}
9.	Your example [of seriousness]	β^{Deic}	α^{Thing} q^{PP}
10.	Nxt week	β^{Num}	α^{Thing}
11.	Too many a setback	$\beta\gamma^{\text{Mod}}$	$\gamma\alpha^{\text{Num}}$ β^{Deic} α^{Thing}
12.	No light [4 nw]	β^{Deic}	α^{Thin} q^{PP}
13.	What tym?	β^{Deic}	α^{Thing}
14.	Just a subtle way [of inviting me]	$\beta\gamma^{\text{Mod}}$	$\gamma\alpha^{\text{Deic}}$ β^{Epi_1} α^{Thing} $q^{\text{PP(Clausal)}}$
15.	Breaking news	β^{Epi_2}	α^{Thing}

Key: Mod = Modifier; PP = Prepositional Phrase; Clas. = Classifier; Deic = Deictic; Epi = Epithet; Num = Numerative; Clausal = realised as a clause. Nominal groups appear as minor clauses in chat rooms and apart from being spontaneous chats, they are rarely monologic but dialogic.

Quite a number of the experiential functions observed in Table 3 are designated by mostly experiential entities (Classifiers, Epithets, Things) while others are realised by interpersonal elements of the here-&-now such as deixis

(Deictics) occurring frequently by virtue of its deictic (specifying) functions. The Classifier *generational* in Text 1 can also be analysed as an Epithet (i.e., *swagz* being construed as having a quality of being generational) as some netizens do interpret it. However, this interpretation seems to be unrealistic and seems to lack adequate explanation because first, one of the dividing lines between Classifiers and Epithets is that the former unlike the latter cannot conceivably be intensified. For example, since *very* in standard English is an intensifier of gradable adjectives and adverbs, we cannot possibly have **very generational*. Second, the experiential construal of *generational* is that of periodisation (not quality) hence more permanent to be a Classifier than an Epithet (*swagz* which is a subclass is defined around a generation).

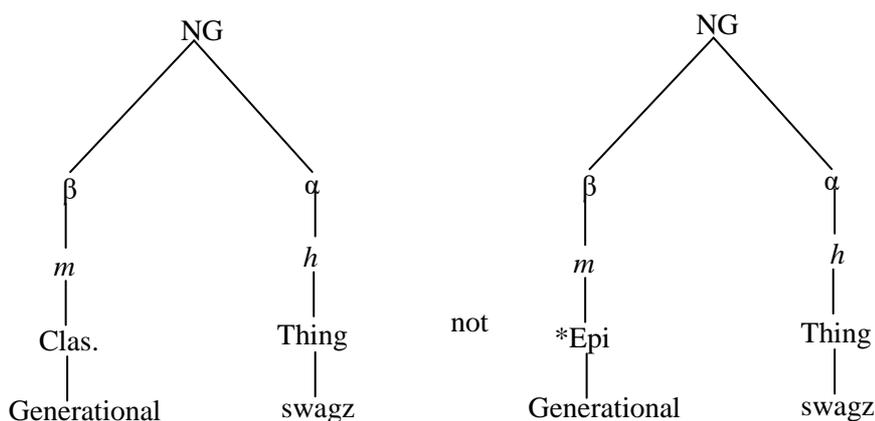


Fig 1: A representation of the experiential function, *generational*

The item *Late* in Text 2 is a circumstantial attendant of enhancement (temporality) to the Thing, *post*. This makes it more experiential (i.e., the temporal experience of *post* in relation to the external world of the text which is independent of the speaker here-&-now), hence Epithet₂. From the table, the Epithets are characterised mainly by interpersonal loading revealing the *interactant* mode and modality of chatspeak. Text 3 is commonly seen on social media as a fragmented version of *there is no problem* where it implicitly occupies the S-element of an *existential clause* (cf. *there*), that is, the grammatical Subject on which the statement is predicated and on which rests the truth of the argument, and where it has a predicated theme and functions as the *existent* (that which is being said to exist) (see Halliday and Matthiessen, 2014, for these concepts). In this case, the Process *is* is comparative to that of a *relational clause* (that which construes change as being). However, the said nominal group *no p* does not serve as a Subject in the interpersonal metaquality. The existential *there*, though having no representational function in the transitivity structure of the clause but merely signals existence, stands in this case as the interpersonal Subject to assess Mood in conversational exchanges.

Deictics, which are certain to occur for specificity purposes, are realised chiefly by the determinatives *that*, *the*, and *you* (cf. Texts 7, 8 and 9 respectively) and differently by other determiners: the specific interrogative *what* (Text 13), the non-specific total unmarked negative *no* (Texts 3 and 12) and the non-specific, partial non-selective singular *a* (Texts 11 and 14). The Numeratives feature the definite ordinatives *one-third* and *next* (Texts 6 and 10 respectively) and the indefinite quantitative *many* (Text 11).

In Text 4, *Final year* is jointly embodied in the function of the Classifier to exteriorise the subclass of the *result* in question. Although Classifiers are neither intensified (**very final year result*) nor do they lend themselves to degrees of comparison (**more final year result*), the classifier *final year* comprises a Head (*year*) and its premodifying element (*final*), both jointly functioning as Classifier. In some cases, to show their joint effort, they are compounded through hyphenation (*final-year result*).

As stated earlier in this section, most of the experiential functions of the nominal group can be premodified. This is exemplified by, though not very common in the table, Texts 6, 11 and 14. While the former and the latter consist of the Modifier *just*, premodifying the Numerative and indefinite article respectively, Text 11 consists of the Modifier *too* premodifying the quantitative Numerative *many*.

According to Halliday and Matthiessen (2014, p. 379), the nominal, realising Epithets and Classifiers, can sometimes be expressed by the class of verb in two forms:

- (i) Present (active) participle, V-ing, e.g., *losing*, as in *a losing battle*;
- (ii) Past (passive, or intransitive) participle, V-en, e.g., *lost* as in *a lost cause*.

These forms usually have the sense of finite tense when functioning as Epithets: the present participle in (i) means *which is (will/will be) . . . ing* and the past participle in (ii) means *which has (had/will have) been . . . ed*. But as Classifier, these forms characteristically designate the sense of a simple present active or passive: the active present in (i) means *which . . . s* while the passive past in (ii) means *which is . . . ed*. Thus in Text 15, *breaking news* with the verbal form presented in (i) above would as an Epithet mean *news which is breaking, probably on the spur of the moment*. (cf. *which is . . . ing*) as it occurs on social media. As a Classifier, it would mean *news which breaks, probably as a question of usuality* (cf. *which . . . s*) the meaning of which identifies it as a permanent attribute to the Thing (*news*), thus a classifier. These two interpretations of *breaking news*—as an Epithet and as a Classifier—appear to be a syntactic feature of social media discourse. But most often, that of the Epithet is realised since most posts on social media are spontaneous and instantaneous, and current events are often prefaced on social media by the tag *Breaking News!!!*

As seen in Table 3, a few nominal groups come with qualifiers which are in turn construed through typically and predominantly minor clauses (rank-shifted

prepositional phrases) and through, very minimally, a rank-shifted clause. Texts 6, 9 and 12 have true rank-shifted prepositional phrases in which the prepositional phrase of Text 12 (. . . 4 *nw*) expands the Head logico-semantically by means of temporal enhancement. Halliday's theorising on the distinction between a group and a phrase restricts the term phrase to a prepositional phrase. This, according to him, is because groups have multivariate structures (i.e., a string of words with a head and modifiers); phrases are like clauses whose structures are not multivariate. Functionally, prepositions behave like verbs in transferring some form of process to their complements. Thus, prepositions are like transitive verbs, and prepositional phrases are in this respect regarded as contracted, shrunken or minor clauses, for prepositions are themselves minor verbs (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2014, pp. 423-426). However, *of*-headed phrases within a nominal group are exceptions, for they are only structural markers of nominal groups, and are not regarded as minor clauses except in the cases of Circumstances of Matter and Cause (see Halliday and Matthiessen, 2014, for detail). Hence, these texts except Text 12 and also Text 14 (whose prepositional phrase structure consists of a rank-shifted non-finite clause *inviting*) all contain *of*-prepositional phrases and as such, non-clausal.

The occurrence of *of*-prepositional phrases as Qualifiers of the nominal group in the texts being analysed construes those special cases where the Head and the Thing are not conflated but each dissociated from the other. As shown earlier, the Head is not always the Thing; there could be variations. For instance, the Head may be realised by a Deictic (*Those are mine*, an Epithet (*The rich*), and so on. Consider the texts below:

Example:

Text 6:	<i>just one-third of it</i>	[Head < Thing]
Text 9:	<i>your example of seriousness</i>	[Head > Thing]
Text 14:	<i>just a subtle way of inviting me</i>	

The nominal groups in Texts 6 and 9 respectively have a Numerative and noun (*one-third* and *example*) as Heads. The Numerative is known as *extended Numeratives* (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2014, p. 394). The elements, which realise Thing, are *it* (Text 6) and *seriousness* (Text 9) embedded within and postponed to the prepositional phrases, thus discontinuous. Here, the Heads are respectively words of measure (quantity) and type (quality). Whereas the measure item of Text 6 (*one-third*) is that of partitive, a portion of the Thing where Head is less than Thing, the quality type of Text 9 is that of Variety where Head is greater than Thing. In this dissociation of Head and Thing, their point of difference here is that while the Thing actually remains the entity serving as Participant in the transitivity structure of the clause, the Head on the other hand (1) limits the entity to a matrix of two variables: first, measure/type and, second, the set relationship of Head to Thing as collective (Head > Thing), partitive (Head < Thing) or quantitative (Head = Thing) and (2) remains the logical Head of grammaticalisation (i.e., to mark person, number and concord) (Halliday and

Matthiessen, 2014). The prepositional phrase of Text 14 rather circumstantially postmodifies the Head by way of Means.

Text 7 has a clausal modifier (*when one's face . . . mata*) expanding the Head logico-semantically by means of elaboration, redefining it in some way. This is further illustrated in Fig. 2: The rank shifted finite clause contains the sequence ASPA, with varying structural types realising each of the elements of the clause structure.

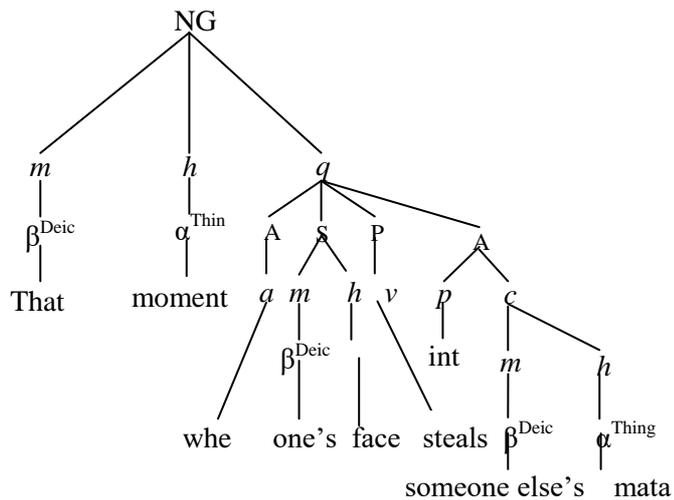


Fig. 2: Tree Structure of the nominal group: *that moment when one's face steals into someone else's mata*

4.2 Univariate Nominal Groups of Social Media Language

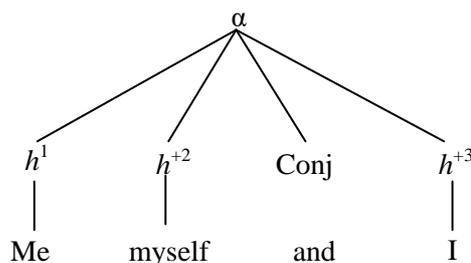
Table 4 lists some data of univariate nominal groups present on the social media platforms studied. In accordance with the Hallidayan conventional symbols, the symbols (') and (+) in the table show apposition and coordination respectively, and the numbers attached to them show the number of paratactic elements apposed or coordinated to the right as marked by the arrow. The symbol (^) indicates modification within a constituent multivariate group in the larger univariate nominal group complex, and the symbols (=, x) designate logico-semantics.

Table 4: Table Showing Univariate Nominal Groups

S/N	Nominal Group Complex	Type of Taxis
1.	@ Bassey and Sarah $1^{Thing} \longrightarrow +2^{Thing}$	Coordinate paratactic univariate structure
2.	My FBFs, well-wishers and families $\beta^{Deic} \wedge 1\alpha^{Thing} \longrightarrow +2^{Thing} \longrightarrow +3^{Thing}$	Coordinate paratactic univariate structure
3.	Me, myself and I $1^{Pro} \longrightarrow +2^{Pro} \longrightarrow +3^{Pro}$	Coordinate paratactic univariate structure
4.	No work, no school $1\beta^{Deic} \wedge 1\alpha^{Thing} \longrightarrow +2\beta^{Deic} \wedge +2\alpha^{Thing}$	Coordinate paratactic univariate structure
5.	Department of English, University of Uyo $\alpha \quad \times \beta$	Hypotactic univariate structure
6.	Class of 0'12 ENG UNIUYO $\alpha \quad = \beta \quad \times \gamma$	Hypotactic univariate structure
7.	King the Poet $1' \quad +2'$	Appositional paratactic univariate structure
8.	Shuga Demson $1' \quad +2'$	Appositional paratactic univariate structure
9.	Goodluck Jonathan 2015 Online Group $\alpha \quad = \beta$	Hypotactic univariate structure
10.	Radio Biafra London $\beta^{Clas.} \quad \alpha\alpha^{Thing} \quad \times \beta$	Hypotactic univariate structure

Key: Pro = Pronoun; Deic = Deictic; Clas. = Classifier. The arrows indicate symmetrical and transitive paratactic univariate structures. The round-dotted strokes indicate paratactic group boundaries.

From Table 3, some of the nominal groups themselves contain modifications and postmodifications (e.g., Texts 2, 4, 5, etc.). Text 2 is basically an (unnecessary) iteration of pronouns (*Me, myself and I*) probably for emphasis. This iteration can also be seen as a dislocated nominal group (discussed in detail below). Its logical tree diagram is presented in Fig. 3.

Fig. 3: Tree Structure of *Me, myself and I*

Each of the elements in Fig 3 is symmetrically and transitively proportional to the other: *Me, myself and I* does imply *myself, me and I*; *I, myself and me*; *Myself, I and me*; *me, I and myself*; *I, me and myself*; hence, a coordinate paratactic univariate structure, coordinate as exemplified by *and*.

Some of the nominal groups also exist in a logico-semantic relationship of expansion one to another, where one elaborates, extends or enhances the other in the tactic relation. For instance, in Text 4, the continuing nominal group *no school* is an extension of (reinforces or is an addition to the information provided by) the initiating nominal group *no work*. The sequence is therefore $1\beta^1\alpha^1 + 2\beta^2\alpha$. The same thing is true of Text 1 ($1^1 + 2$), Text 2 ($\beta^1\alpha^1 + 2^1 + 3$) and Text 3 ($1^1 + 2^1 + 3$), each of which is a coordinate paratactic univariate structure. Sometimes, coordination can have an elliptical coordinator which is rather supplied implicitly and this is called an *asyndetic coordination*, otherwise a *syndetic coordination* (Quirk and Greenbaum, 1973, p. 253). The asyndetic type is exemplified by Text 4 (*no work, no school*) where *and* is elliptically supplied at the group nexus (as in *no work and no school*). The ordering of these independencies comes with a negative polarity as indicated by the Deictic *no*, and the continuing nominal group has the newer information structure while the initiating one is thematic within the nominal group complex.

In Text 5 there is a nested group occasioned by the dependent element (*University of Uyo*). The group nesting fits the entire groups into a hypotactic univariate structure while the dependent element (*University of Uyo*) locates the dominant element (*Department of English*) circumstantially in space by way of enhancing it. Shown in Fig 4, Text 5 has the sequence $\alpha^1 \times \beta$. Each of the *of*-headed prepositional phrases is a possessive binder to the Head, meaning that the Head belongs to the experiential element provided in the prepositional phrase (e.g., *University* belongs to *Uyo*).

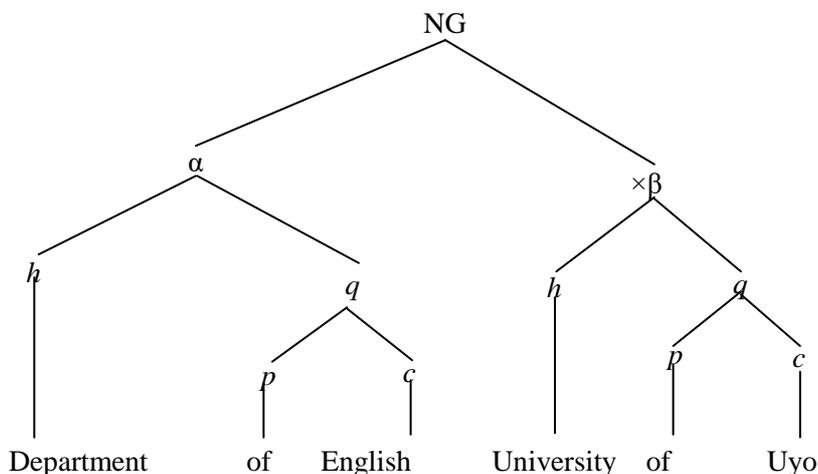


Fig. 4: A hypotactic univariate structure of *Department of English, University of Uyo*

The grammatical decomposition of the group *Class of 0'12*, which is a component of Text 6, reveals that there are the Head (*Class*) and an *of*-headed prepositional phrase (*of 0'12*) merely functioning both as a qualifier and as a structural marker. Because of this, the prepositional phrase is not an equative of a minor clause but merely participates within its nominal group structure as a Variety type (quality) containing the Thing and with the formula Head > Thing. This thus dissociates the conflation of the Head (*class*) and Thing (*0'12*). In sequencing, the whole group (*Class of 0'12*) comprises attendant hypotactic groups *ENG* and *UNIUYO* elaborating respectively by way of reinforcing the dominant element and enhancing by way of locating the dominant element circumstantially in space, hence a hypotactic univariate structure. These dependencies are further illustrated in Fig. 5 with the sequence $\alpha^{\wedge}=\beta^{\wedge}\times\gamma$. In cases of hypotactic ordering such as this, according to Halliday and Matthiessen (2014), there are usually two possible interpretations:

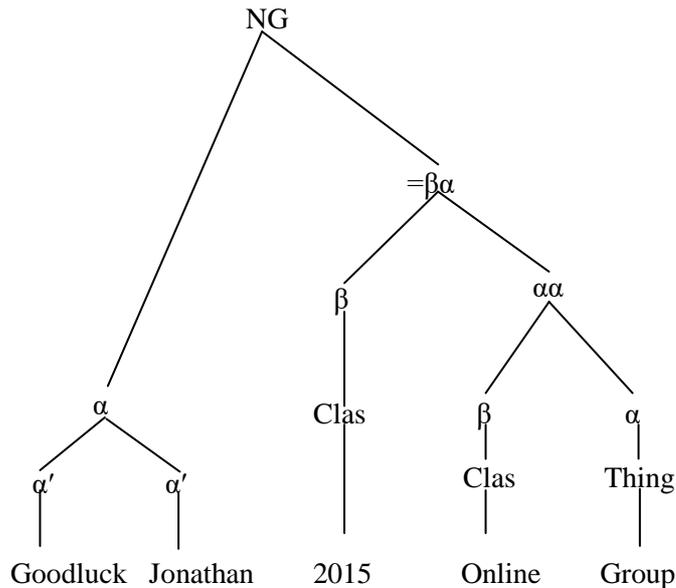
Example:

$$\begin{array}{l} \text{|Class of 0'12} \text{ } \ddot{\text{}} \text{ } \text{ENG} \text{ } \ddot{\text{}} \text{ } \text{UNIUYO|} \\ \text{(i)} \quad \alpha \quad \quad \quad =\beta \quad \quad \times\gamma \\ \text{(ii)} \quad \alpha\alpha \quad \quad \quad \alpha=\beta \quad \quad \times\beta \end{array}$$

In (i) the sequence shows postpositive modifications in turns: *UNIUYO* modifying *ENG* which is in turn modifying *class of 0'12* (i.e., *UNIUYO* is dependent on *ENG* which is yet dependent on *Class of 0'12*). The interpretation is that a class of 0'12 students is of the Department of English, a department which is in turn located in the University of Uyo. On the other hand, in (ii) the sequence shows a group nesting (*ENG* nested to *Class of 0'12*) in which case both *ENG* and *UNIUYO* are direct, separate modifiers of *Class of 0'12*. The interpretation is that a class of 0'12 is located in the University of Uyo and this class is again students of the Department of English, a department which may not necessarily be found in the same school but elsewhere. But it is usually the first interpretation that is the motive of the said group. In Fig. 5 while (i) shows the first interpretation, (ii) shows the second.

Fig. 6: Structural Tree of *KingthePoetand ShugaDemson*

Text 9 presents *Goodluck Jonathan* as superordinate to *2015 Online Group* so that the latter elaborates the former logico-semantically in the form of specifying that it is an online group. *Goodluck Jonathan* as shown in Fig. 7 is itself an iteration of appositional proper nouns while *2015 Online Group* recursively contains Classifiers and a Thing. This means that the Classifier *2015* premodifies an existing synthetic compound *Online Group* whose formal head semantically has yet another premodifying compound member *Online* serving again as a Classifier. This is the beauty of creativity on the Internet.

Fig.7: A Structural tree of *Goodluck Jonathan 2015 Online Group*

Finally, Text 10 subordinates the nominal group *London* to *RadioBiafra* which consists of a Classifier and a Thing serving as the Head, hence hypotactic. As shown in Fig. 3.8, the second nominal group *London* is a hypotactic enhancement to its dominant group locating it in space.

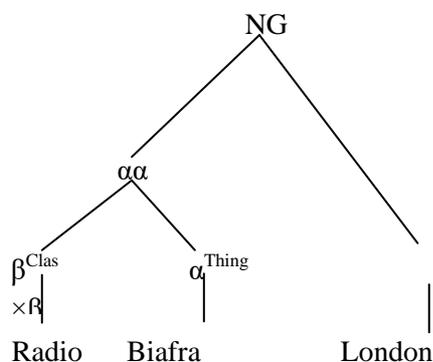


Fig. 8 A Structural tree of *Radio Biafra London*

4.3 Left-Dislocated Nominal Groups

A left-dislocated nominal group usually refers to a nominal group which, by virtue of its left position in the clause, possibly could have functioned as the syntactic head to a verb or as object of a verb within the clause. Instead, it is followed by another nominal group (usually but not limited to a pro-form) which fulfils such a function, leaving it stranded (cf. Botha, 2012). When such a replacement of function possibly by a pro-form occurs, the replaced nominal group is said to be dislocated. For instance, the sentence *Most current Nigerian politicians we have in the different political groups they are certainly not assessed through what they say* leaves dislocated or stranded the nominal group (*Most politicians . . .*) which is naturally the subject of the clause, but the pro-form (here, a pronoun *they*) performs the function instead. This pronoun in this function is usually called a *copy pronoun*.

According to Botha (2012), left-dislocation is occasioned by several pragmatic factors such as the signalling of topic change, contrast and list functions, referent tracking, substrating language influence. As this research might add, it can also occur because of the temporal and textual distance between the syntactic head and its verb, a speaker being possibly lost from the memory of the already introduced subject and thus wanting to restate the subject or introduce a different one to maintain, somehow proximally, the subject-verb relationship in the conversational exchange. Thus left-dislocation, considered very informal, non-standard and even ungrammatical, is more often found in spoken than written language. It perhaps also serves, for netizens, as emphasis. The copy pronoun (or pro-form) enters into anaphoric reference to the left-dislocated nominal group, hence a pro-form.

Notably, chatrooms are synchronous (almost the same with face-to-face conversation and irretrievable for editing) and as Baron (2010) observed, netizens

[in chat rooms] break their utterances into chunks (transmission units). Left-dislocated nominal groups are by these routes somewhat frequent on social media with very few done deliberately. Traces of the syntactic breaks reveal such nominal groups as those presented in 4.3.1 text below. The ones bold face show dislocation and the ones underlined show the copy pronouns (pro-forms).

4.3.1 Text Samples of Dislocated Nominal Groups (Some Monologic, Others Dialogic)

1. A: This is wonderful
A: I didn't do the mmm, not because it's very lucrative, but the capital with which one needs to start.
B: Wonderful . . . MeI will make my money small small . . .
B: So enjoy
2. **Me, Myself** and I . . .
3. **All my facebook friends that have been posting rubbish on my wall, you** are warned . . .
4. Please **whoever**that knows where I can sell it should pls contact me
5. Some % awaiting for **whoever** that will bring D market.
6. **Positiveconfession**, claim it with undiluted faith by typing AMEN.
7. **Fiesta of Flavour 2016**, it's all about food, fun and flavours.
8. Yesterday I took my shoes to the shoe repairer, today I met him wearing **them**, which they would have been returned today. I asked him why and he told me they were on road test.
9. **What u no today**, tomorrow it will be something S . . . [S = else]
10. **Many** that will type AMEN your story will change.

In the above samples, Text 1, which is a dialogic piece and also often occurs in speech, the stranded *me* is introduced by speaker 'B' probably mainly for emphasis or to draw attention to himself as a form of Vocative. The scenario in Text 2 as well as in Text 1 is an example of unnecessary iteration of pronouns of different cases within the same nominal group for emphatic purposes. If such a case appears at the S-element of clause structure, the acusative case (as well as the reflexive) is left dislocated (e.g., *Me, and myself* in Texts 1 and 2), and if at the C-element (the object in traditional terms), the nominative case *I* is left-dislocated.

The unnecessary introduction of the copy pronoun *you* in Text 3 leaves dislocated in the discourse the initial nominal group with an embedded clause *All my facebook friends that . . . wall*. The nominal group alone would have meant no harm as the syntactic head. Texts 4 and 5 have a similar case. When a nominal group exists as interrogative Deictics (a wh-element) such as *where, whichever, whoever, who, what, whatever* and *however*, the interrogative Deictic automatically serves as the nominal Head without any help of a relative clause (cf. further Quirk and Greenbaum, 1973, pp. 319-320). A relative clause may postmodify it as a rank-shifted clause especially in interrogative contexts (e.g. *Who that intends to learn is here?*; see Ufot, 2009) but, as is apparent, it definitely

does not usurp its position as the Head. These Deictics either express universal meaning (indefiniteness) or definite meaning as seen when they are paraphrased: *whoever knows* . . . (= any person that knows . . . , universal); *what really matters* . . . (= the thing that really matters . . . , definite). Thus the universal *whoever* in both Texts would not be dislocated and thus grammatical if the pro-form *that* were not introduced. But this is just one of the linguistic anomalies online.

In Text 6, the nominal group *Positive confession* functions neither as a Vocative nor as an Expletive (see Section 3.2.5) but perhaps as a thematised element though with no adequate explanatory power for its syntactic connection to the rest of the elements in the clause; hence, it is dislocated. From a cohesive orientation, this same nominal group undoubtedly serves as an antecedent to the copy pronoun *it* that is predicated and which leaves it stranded. It would not be left-dislocated if it were recast either as the Object of the verb *claim* interpersonally assessed through explicit subjective modality and with an interpersonal speaker-role pronoun added in an active construction as in Ex. 3.4 (i), or as the Subject of the verb in a passive construction with the same modal assessment and the verbal element in the *by*-phrase being made a gerund as there is no known Actor (Metcalf and Astle, n.d.), as in Ex. 3.4 (ii).

Ex.3.4

- i. *Positive confession you should claim with undiluted faith by typing AMEN.*
- ii. *Positive confession should be claimed with undiluted faith by the typing of AMEN.*

In Text 7 *Fiesta of Flavour 2016* is dislocated by *it* and in Text 8 *them* is dislocated by *they* from its right of being an antecedent Subject to the following relative clause. The nominal relative clause *What u no today* in Text 9 serving as the S-element is dislocated by the copy pronoun *it*. It should have been:

Ex. 3.5 *What u no today will be something S tomorrow.*

Text 10 introduces another nominal group *your story* which shifts in PERSON-reference from third person *many* to second person, thereby dislocating *many*. This is, as pointed out earlier, a case of trying to introduce a new Subject. The dislocation, or, better, the entire clause, will be made a little more appropriate as seen in Ex.3.6 with a causative/volitional verb *have* in a passive construction corresponding to an infinitive clause of the verb (see Quirk and Greenbaum, 1973) and the conjunction changed to a correlative.

Ex.3.6 *As many as will type AMEN will have their stories changed.*

4.4 Vocatives and Expletives

The Vocative and Expletive in SFG are yet other elements which characterise the clause as exchange and lie outside the boundary of the Mood and Residue. The one signals the attention of the addressee in a dialogic text and,

again, more frequently in ‘demanding’ clauses (clauses which seek *information* or *goods-&-services* as response, e.g., interrogatives and imperatives, see Section 3.4.10), therefore enacting the participation of the addressee in the exchange; the other allows the speaker to enact his own attitude or state of mind towards the current discourse (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2014, p. 159).

Vocatives and Expletives are rather mobile within the clause structure: They can occur at the boundary between Theme and Rheme, clause finally or thematically initially to reinforce the ‘you-&-me’ dimension of meaning especially in casual conversation (see further Halliday and Matthiessen, pp. 159-160). While the bold lexical item in (i) demonstrates the Vocative, those in (ii) demonstrate the Expletive.

*Example: (i) **Lens**, you are not Ok, are you?*

*(ii) **Oh God**, this is terrible!*

Vocatives and Expletives are fairly certain to occur in such casual-conversational mode as social media which involves a lot of interpersonal exchanges. Many of such words are realized by nominal groups (e.g., pronouns, common nouns and commonly proper nouns) as Text 3.2 shows (indicated by the bold items). The Vocatives draw attention of the addressee or specify in a group chat whom a particular post is being referred to and often come with an @sign. The Expletives reveal some form of paralinguistic reactions from the users, thus enacting their current attitude or state of mind towards a post or on-going discourse. Both can serve in minor speech functions as minor clauses correspondingly realising calls, greetings, exclamatives, valedictions, well-wishing and alarms (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2014).

4.4.1 Samples of Vocatives and Expletives (Mainly Dialogic)

1. A: Seriously... Uniuyo people have suffered
B: **Oh my God!** May their souls rest in peace.
2. **Beauty**, u don carry your wahala com resurrect dead topic, bah?
3. Glory: How do u knw. Stop saying wat u ain't sure of. It af do o
Beauty: **Prince**, can you remind this group
Glory: Ur opinion. **WRONG!!!!!!**
Jane: **Glory** you ain't responsible for what he understands ...
Clenzy: **Prince**, its ok.
Glory: Don't mind him . . . **Prince** I challenge you. Lets meet in the law court. [Conversation in a group chat, WhatsApp]
4. **My brother** . . . if u were in d hospital hmmm u see pains, tears
5. Could you kindly restate your problem? **@PrincessLady P..., Lady P!**
6. **Good morning, everyone**
7. Richard: Elizabeth just likes reading old newspapers, probably especially
when she's in the toilet
Elizabeth: **Jesus!!!** Sorry I didn't check the date. Lol.

In Text 1 *Oh my God!* is an Expletive (realised by a nominal group with an *mh*-structure preposed by an interjected *Oh*) enacting B's attitude to the creepy information heard from A. The same thing is true of *Jesus!!!* in Text 7.

Beauty in Text 2 and *Prince* and *Glory* in Text 3 are all Vocatives (realised by proper nouns) used to direct attention to the specific bearers of these names in the dialogue. The *mh*-structured *My brother* in Text 4 is a defined common noun functioning as a Vocative, and *@Princess, LadyP...LadyP* as an Expletive (realised by an appositive univariate structure) is a Vocative with the @sign. Text 6 combines the Vocative *everyone* (a pronoun) and the Expletive of greeting *Good morning* realised by a nominal group (Epithet₁+ Thing).

5 Some Observed Peculiarities of the Nominal Groups in Nigerian Social Media

English

Although there is some level of consistency between social media English and the spoken variety of English as used in the Nigerian environment, there are, however, some unique features which nominal nominal groups on the social media studied exhibit. As seen in the data analysed above, some of these observed varietal features are highlighted below.

- i. As opposed to other forms of written English, the nominal groups in all four social media platforms, as Botha (2010) observes about Internet language, occur chiefly as syntactic chunks of clauses, hence occurring as elliptical clauses. Each chunk tends to carry the communicative weight of a normal full clause. The nominal group chunks *D prison world?* and *No light 4 nw* in Table 3, among other analysed examples, are contextually understood as full alpha clauses: *Are they in the prison world?* and *There is no light for now.* This elision into transmission units of nominal groups may well be due to the speed required to beat online real-time conversations just so that a fellow discourse participant would not be kept waiting on the ongoing chats and also for want of mobile Internet data. It is faster, shorter and easier to send nominal groups (aided again by reductions in spellings) than to send full clauses. The choice of a nominal group above all other syntactic group choices is perhaps informed by the fact that the nominal groups are the most substantial elements capable of embodying messages or propositions.
- ii. Netizens tend to encode and compress their communicative intentions into chunks of nominal groups rather than clauses, some nominal groups comprising a number of embeddings/rank-shifted elements. This possibly explains why they choose to load their nominal group modifiers with mostly experiential and interpersonal elements. This is so because, as Halliday pointed out, experiential elements construe mostly experiences, ideas, messages, and world's realities. Thus, in their conversational exchanges to beat time and space and also to

avoid boring long chats, nominal groups are consequently stretched – expanded – to include a number of Epithets, Deictics, Classifiers, etc., which expand the nominal groups logico-semantically in terms of enhancement, extension, or elaboration. In a normal speech or written piece, the ideas loaded in these experiential functions would have been distributed, possibly evenly, to the various elements of the full clause structure.

- iii. It has also been observed that the meanings of some modifying elements in nominal groups on the social media platforms studied have been extended, from one experiential function to the other, to force and forge a new meaning. Particularly, the word *generational* in the data *generational swagz*, for instance, which normally functions as a Classifier (i.e., swags defined around a generation), is now made to function and understood online as an Epithet (i.e., a swag having the inherent quality called generation). ‘Generation’ is now a quality instead of periodisation. It therefore means that as an Epithet, the word *generational* can now take an intensifier such as *very* (i.e., *very generational*) since Epithets, unlike Classifiers, are capable of undergoing premodification. However, all these expressions are ill-formed expressions in standard English but represent the Nigerian environment from which they were formed.
- iv. Pronouns are frequently iterated to form a univariate structure in the nominal group, for instance, *Me, myself and I*. Netizens seem to do this for the purposes of foregrounding and emphasis.
- v. Nominal groups, especially on Facebook and WhatsApp, are generously used to form names of groups and pages. Sometimes, because of misguided formations, these names tend to create meaning ambiguity. For instance, as shown in detail above, the nominal group *Class of 0’12 ENG UNIUYO* used as a group’s name, having a great many postpositive modifications, suggests double meaning. However, one unique thing about this formation is that members of the group share the very interpretation intended.
- vi. Also, a good many noun phrases are left-dislocated. The dislocation possibly occurs because since there is a temporal and textual distance between the syntactic head and its verb, a netizen being possibly lost from the memory of the already introduced subject might want to restate the subject or introduce a different one to maintain, somehow proximally, the subject-verb relationship in the conversational exchange.
- vii. Lastly, nominal groups are frequently employed as Vocatives and Expletives to call attention to particular discourse or discourse participants or to exclaim them. Some of the nominal groups occurring this way are hashtagged, particularly the Vocatives.

5 Conclusion

In this study, the different instantiations of nominal groups in social media language, specifically as used by the Nigerian citizens, have been shown and analysed. The study drew data from four social media platforms – Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and WhatsApp – which currently seem to be arguably the most preferred social media platforms. The analysis drew insights from Halliday's SFG. The paper has observed that although there is some level of consistency between social media language and mostly the spoken variation of English as used in the Nigerian environment, there are, however, some unique instances of deviation especially within the nominal group to cater for communicative burdens that are peculiar to social media language. The nominal groups frequently used are the multivariate and univariate nominal groups as well as those used for vocative and expletive intentions. Therefore, the research concludes that the social media having created the platforms for Nigerians to enact their thoughts using short versions of sentences substantiated by nominal groups, the choice of particularly (structurally loaded) nominal groups resulting in structural variations in the grammar of Internet English derives mainly from social media constraints (character limitation, for example), cost of internet data, the speed to beat real-time conversational events, language creativity and the creative nature of internet language users.

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