

## Discourse Strategies of Administrative Communication in Selected Agricultural Research Institutes in Nigeria

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### ABSTRACT

*The study critically examines the discourse strategies of administrative communication in selected agricultural research institutes in Nigeria. Twenty (20) correspondences of two of the Nigerian agricultural research institutes: Nigerian Stored Products Research Institute (NSPRI) and Cocoa Research Institute of Nigeria (CRIN) were randomly selected. Thirteen (13) of the excerpts were purposively sampled for the analysis. The data cover all selected communication outlets from the files of the selected Nigerian agricultural research institutes. Data analysis was anchored to Fairclough's aspect of Critical Discourse Analysis. Findings reveal that thirteen (13) strategies are employed in the discourses of administrative correspondence of the selected agricultural research institutes and the strategies include command, discipline, commendation, evasive, deadline, endorsement, humility, courtesy, hierarchy, introduction, minuting, abbreviation and referencing. The study concludes the strategies were purposively deployed in the administrative correspondence of the sampled agricultural research institutes to achieve certain communicative effects.*

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### 1. Introduction

Effective administrative communication in a research institute is essential to the achievement of its goals. Administrators display communicative competence by deploying certain discourse strategies in achieving effective administrative communication. To demonstrate competence in language use, it is important to be able to deliver and interpret messages according to contexts which require strategies to produce, either spoken or written (Hidayati et al., 2019). To understand the meanings within the stretches of discourse, it is necessary to grasp the meaning from its single sentence as well as from referents in both the previous sentences and following sentences (Hidayati et al., 2019; Adam et al., 2024; Rahman et al., 2023).

Discourse relates to the idea of spoken or written communication. It has been defined as 'language in use'. This suggests that language takes diverse forms which are shaped by their contextual usages (Sari et al., 2019; Dalyan et al., 2022). Contextual usage refers to the topic, participants, function, activity type, time, and place in which language is used. Discourse also includes language as meaning in situational and cultural context. The strategies deployed in the administrative communication of Nigerian agricultural research institutes are situational and they largely determine meanings of the administrative communication.

Agricultural research institutes are government agriculture research-based parastatal under the ministry of agriculture. Their mandate relates to conducting research into genetic improvement, production, processing, utilization, preservation and marketing of agricultural products. In every sector, there is an organisation, there is hierarchy and there is a communication channel. Agricultural research institutes in Nigeria are dominated by scientists who grow in the system to become institute's management committee (IMC) members and they are quite unfamiliar with communicative protocols. Research is therefore needed to reveal how compliant the agricultural research institutes are with the general communicative protocols. This study therefore seeks to explore discourse strategies of administrative communication in selected agricultural research institutes in Nigeria.

### **1.1. Statement of the Problem**

The study employs Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to reveal the discourse strategies embedded in the language use of administrators. In every sector, there is an organization, there is hierarchy and there is a communication channel. Agricultural research institutes in Nigeria are dominated by scientists who grow in the system to become institute's management committee (IMC). Research is therefore needed to reveal how compliant are the agricultural research institutes with the general communicative protocols. This study therefore seeks to explore discourse Strategies in Selected Agricultural research institutes.

### **1.2. Aim and Objectives**

The aim of the study is to examine the discourse strategies of administrative communication in selected agricultural research institutes in Nigeria. The objectives of the study are: 1) To identify and describe the outlets used by administrators to achieve effective communication in the selected agricultural research institutes. 2) To examine the discourse strategies used by administrators in various communication outlets in the selected agricultural research institutes. And 3) to investigate the functions of the discourse strategies of administrative communication in the selected agricultural research institutes.

### **1.3. Significance of the Study**

It should be noted that research of discourse strategies is not a brand-new phenomenon. It emerges as early as 1980s within the general discourse analysis studies. Research has shown that there are lots of existing scholarly works which have examined different aspects of Discourse and its strategies such as politics, religion, education among others. For instance, Felicia (2018) in a study on 'Discursive Strategies in Nigeria's 2015 Facebook Campaign Discourse', investigates the discursive strategies employed in Facebook feedback comments of 2015 general election in Nigeria, to reveal the Nigeria's struggle to access state resources. Two thousand (2000) selected documents from the Facebook walls of Jimi Agbaje of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) and Akinwumi Ambode of All Progressives Congress (APC) from January to April 2015 constitutes the data for this study.

Also, Akintimien & Farotimi (2018) carried out a study on the Conversational Features and Discourse Strategies in Selected Sermons of Pastor E. A. Adebayo. The study investigates three selected sermons of Pastor E. A. Adebayo of the Redeemed Christian Church of God with a view to identifying and analysing the conventional features that characterise the sermons and their role in influencing audience perception.

Furthermore, Jolaoso (2020) in his study on Television based political interviews within the Nigerian context investigates the discourse functions of conversation strategies in the discourse of Channels Television's "Politics Today". It analyses selected episodes of Channels television's politics today spanning the years 2011 to 2015. The author explores two perspectives of conversation, the presenter conversation strategy (PCS), where three strategies: identity-profiling, elicitation and shadowing were identified, and guest conversation strategy where three strategies: identity-profiling, elicitation and shadowing were identified, and Guest Conversation Strategy (GCS) where avoidance, asserting and promising were the strategies identified.

The current study is different from the above studies in that it seeks to focus on another dimension of discourse strategy as it adopts Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to examine the discourse strategies employed in the administrative communication with a view to revealing the linguistic features of administrative language and the communicative implicatures.

### **1.4. Theoretical Framework: Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)**

CDA is an interdisciplinary approach to the study of discourse that views language as a form of social practice (Catalano & Waugh 2020). It concerns how language is implicated in issues such as power and ideology that determines how language is used, what effect it has, how it reflects, serves, and promote the interests, positions, views, and values of those who are in power (Catalano & Waugh 2020). Two scholars have contributed to the development of Critical Discourse Analysis. They are Dijk and Dijk in his book *Discourse and Power* (2008) explores the relationship between language and power in society. Fairclough as well in a revised third edition of his publication on *Language and Power* (2014) critically examined language and social institutional practices and of "wider" political and social structures. He focuses on how language functions in maintaining and handling power relations in modern society, the ways of analysing language which can reveal these processes and how people can become more conscious of them. This research work is being carried out using the CDA because it is applicable in institutional domains where issues of power and structural

inequalities exist. Thus, CDA is being adapted as the theory for the analysis of the various correspondences sampled for this study.

## **2. Methodology**

The study employs documentary research design. Documentary research is like Content analysis. This research method enables the researcher to study official documents like memos, letters, Reports, circulars, etc. The researcher uses content analysis to examine patterns in communication in a replicable and systematic manner. The population for the study is 10 communication outlets, 5 each from the selected agricultural research institutes in Nigeria. Purposive sampling technique is employed to select 10 communication outlets from the selected agricultural research institutes. The data for the study covers all selected communication outlets from the files of Nigerian Stored Products Research Institute (NSPRI) and National Horticultural and Cocoa Research Institute (CRIN). The researcher visited each of the selected agricultural research institutes in person, met with the administrators of those institutes, engaged them to seek permission for the release of the communication outlets used in their institutes. From the ones made available, 10 communication outlets were selected purposively from each of the institutes. Quantitative and qualitative methods are employed to present and analyse the data. The quantitative method will focus on numbers and frequency. It will apply mainly to the discourse strategies employed by administrators to determine their frequency of occurrence and relevance to the study. The qualitative method will deal with describing and inferring intended meaning or perceived meaning of the texts and not just draw statistical inferences as it applied to how the discourse strategies identified elicited and got information and performed communicative function in the interactions being studied. In determining the communicative effect of the discourse strategies identified, van Dijk's Language and Power relations and Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis as adopted to guide the study.

## **3. Result and Discussion**

The prominent communication channels identified in the administrative correspondence of the selected agricultural research institutes are memos, letters, circulars, reports, and minutes prominently used. The researchers analyzed the sampled channels using the Fairclough's model of Critical Discourse Analysis which focuses on investigating how societal power relations are established and reinforced through language use. The purpose of this is to unearth how the identified discourse strategies of administrative communication in Nigerian agricultural research institutes reflect power relations between the subordinates and the superordinate. The method of data analysis aligns with top-down (communication from superordinate to subordinate) and bottom-up (communication from subordinate to superordinate) method. Each strategy examined is written in bold letters for easy identification in the excerpts. Some of the excerpts do not follow the grammatical patterns of paragraphs and other sentence patterns because the researcher is trying to present the excerpts as they appear in the communication channels. Analysis was done in three categories which reflect the strategies used by the superior officers in their correspondences to their subordinates (top-down flow of communication); the strategies used by the subordinates in their correspondences to their superior officers (bottom-up flow of communication) and the strategies commonly used by both the superior officers and the subordinates (symmetrical). Each of these categories of discourse strategies in the correspondence of Agricultural Research Institutes in Nigeria is presented and discussed below, one after the other.

### **3.1. Top-down Flow of Communication**

This form of communication is from the superior officers to the subordinates in Agricultural Research Institutes in Nigeria where the superior officers deploy certain strategies which reflect the power relation between the boss and the subordinate, such that the bosses exert power on the subordinates and sometimes negotiate power through the indices called discourse markers used in their correspondences. Below are the strategies deployed by the superior officers to exert authority on their subordinates and to negotiate power for the purpose of enjoying continuous support of their subordinates.

#### **a. Command Strategy**

A command is an authoritative order given to the subordinate by the superordinate and it is expected to be obeyed. This command strategy identified in the administrative correspondences of the selected agricultural research institutes in Nigeria. Aligning with Fairclough's model of Critical Discourse Analysis which focuses on investigating how societal power relations are established and reinforced through language use, command strategy is deployed to exert authority which is a display of power relations between the addressed and the addressee. The word comply, which is one of the markers of command, means that the recipient or the addressed must yield or kowtow to the instruction, or the

directive contained in the correspondence. The instruction is binding on the concerned officer irrespective of his opinion or whether it is convenient to carry out such directive. The command strategy can only be used in downward communications, that is, only superior officers can employ command strategy in their communications to the subordinate, except the subordinate is writing on behalf of a superior officer who instructed the subordinate to write in such a manner; the subordinate therefore would then use the phrase 'I have been directed'. The command strategy aligns with the tenets of Critical Discourse analysis of language and power relations in a social context.

### **Excerpt 1**

#### **CLARIFICATION ON THE APPLICABILITY OF TENURE SYSTEM TO PARASTATALS, AGENCIES, & STATUTORY CORPORATIONS OF GOVERNMENT**

Please refer to our letter no. ARCN/a/02/S.2/11/225 of 25th August, 2014 which forwarded

Letter no...

The letter further states that the headship of departments/programmes shall rotate among eligible Directors similar to what is obtainable in the Universities for Deans and Heads of Department.

The above is for your immediate compliance, please"

Excerpt 1 is a circular in respect of the application of tenures of Heads of research Departments of research institutes and related organizations. The last statement in the Circular, **The above is for your immediate compliance, please**, is a marker of command to ensure that the managements of the agricultural research institutes complied with the directive and that all the guidelines listed in the circular were strictly implemented with no further delay by the Agricultural Research Institutes. The Agricultural Research Council of Nigeria could write in such a manner because of the superior authority vested in the council as the coordinating body for the agricultural research institutes in Nigeria. No Agricultural Research Institute is permitted to communicate with the Agricultural research council in that manner.

Communicative functions Command strategy is employed to ensure compliance with directives by employees without deviating. The use of command strategy is limited to the superior officers/authorities, no subordinate is expected to employ such language during upward communication. This aligns with van Dijk's critical discourse theory of language, power and social relation, which translates in this context to the fact that all officers do not have access to the same linguistic resources. There are certain words that subordinates do not have access to, which manifest freely in the communication of superior officers. The strategy helps avoid late submissions.

### **b. Discipline Strategy**

Discipline is a means of imposing checks and balances on the attitudes of members of staff to work. There are stages stipulated for the discipline of officers according to the guidelines for research institutes and allied institutions. The direct superior of the erring officer could issue a query to him, he can also draw the attention of the Chief Executive Officer to misconducts of the officer(s) (depending on the gravity of the misconduct and whether the subordinate is not yielding to the superior's disciplinary actions) before necessary discipline is taken. Disciplinary action ranges from the query, warning, advice, stoppage of increment, stoppage of salary and dismissal. An example in excerpt 2 demonstrated compliance with this procedure of dealing with the shortcomings of officers. Subordinates' attention must be drawn to their shortcomings in the place of work as soon as possible in form of a query. He will be allowed the opportunity to exonerate himself by submitting his response to the query, failure of the officer to exonerate himself would lead to the necessary disciplinary measures as deemed fit by the superior officer or the highest authority, depending on the gravity of the shortcomings or offence committed. The penalty for any offence is based on the gravity of the case as listed in the Public Service Rule (PSR).

### **Excerpt 2**

"Absence from Duty without Leave

I write to bring to your attention the **habitual case of absenting from Duty without leave of Mr. A. J. A...**"

Excerpt 2 was a report written by a Head of Department at Nigerian Stored Products Research Institute to draw the attention of the Chief Executive of the institute to the habitual absence from duty without leave by one of the subordinates in his department. The expression **habitual case of absence from duty without leave** was written to establish that the offence was expected to be subjected to disciplinary actions as it has become a recurrent action. The discourse marker indicating this inference is habitual case. The Head of the Department could not discipline the officer without bringing the case to the notice of the Executive Director. The report written by the officer's Head of Department initiated the process of discipline. By the report, the Head of the Department could not the second stage is to query the officer after which the disciplinary measure will follow.

Communicative function: Discipline strategy is employed to control the behaviour and attitudes of some members of staff on duty. It offers some form of checks and balances to members of staff. Because discipline is procedural, it clears all doubts and gives adequate information on the issue being investigated before the decision to punish or exonerate an officer is arrived at. The strategy of discipline is employed by superior officers to call the attention of members of staff (usually subordinates) to the need to observe necessary rules and regulations guiding government organizations and be law-abiding. It prevents the breakdown of law and order and prevents attitudes which are inimical to the image of the research institute. It also promotes and maintains peace, unity, harmony and friendliness within the workplace because members of staff will be careful not to fall into any error that could attract disciplinary actions. It guides the activities of members of staff and instil a sense of responsibility. Workers are a spur to correct their shortcomings and perform their duties conscientiously thereby enabling a high level of productivity. The strategy of discipline protects the institute in the event of downsizing or in any negative employment decision which becomes inevitable. The institute's management is not empowered to dismiss a member of staff or terminate the appointment of any member of staff, rather, it can only recommend the member of staff based on an investigative report and any evidence before it. The queries, warnings and letters of advice would be counted as part of the evidence against the officer. If the institute has not taken any of these steps, it would be difficult to recommend the officer for dismissal or termination of appointment or any stiffer disciplinary measures. The disciplinary stages commenced with the writing of the report of offence by the superior officer or Head of Department, followed by a query requesting the explanation of the officer to give him the benefit of exonerating himself from punishment if not found guilty. The next stage is to be warned and or advised to desist from the offence, the other stage is to face a constituted committee or panel of an investigation who will suggest the subsequent line of actions that commensurate to the seriousness of the offence based on the guidelines in the conditions of service of agricultural research institutes and allied institutions. Findings showed that only subordinate staff are presented as offenders, investigated and disciplined in the agricultural research institutes. None of the cases of disciplinary actions in this study falls on superior officers. Although the superior officers are expected to be more responsible in the discharge of their duties, this does not exonerate them from once-in-a-while errors. The superior officers cannot be subjected to disciplinary measures like the subordinates. This still relates to the tenets of van Dijk's and Fairclough's critical discourse analysis of ideology and power relations in a social context.

### **c. Strategy of Commendation**

The strategy of Commendation is a form of reward system. Commendation is the opposite of discipline. It is usually employed by the superior officers to show approval towards an officer's excellent and exceptional performance in the workplace. Commendation is employed by the agricultural research Institutes to acknowledge and appreciate the positive input, commendable disposition to work and any exceptional contribution made by a member of staff to the development and growth of the institutes. Agricultural research institutes issue commendation letters for outstanding performance to deserving members of staff and place such a letter in the officer's file.

#### **Excerpt 3**

“Mr. S. A.

RO I

Letter of Commendation

The Institute appreciates your **interest, initiative and efforts in repairing some faulty laboratory equipment (Electro thermal unit, Muffle Furnace, Kjedahi digestion block of heaters) in the Biochemistry/Chemistry Laboratory in NSPRI Ilorin.**

You are hereby commended for this initiative and diligence in your duty. Endeavour to keep up this commendable effort”

Excerpt 3 is the letter of commendation issued by the management of Nigerian Stored Products Research Institute to a member of staff of the same institute for outstanding performance. The **commendation letter** was written by the Head of Department of the staff on behalf of the management of the Institute based on the instruction of the Executive Director of the same institute to recognize and appreciate the ingenuity and efforts put into repairing the equipment in the laboratory of the institute by the member of staff. It was the responsibility of the institute to provide and maintain the work equipment. Perhaps the equipment was not repaired on time, and this was impairing the efficiency of the staff. He decided to repair the equipment so that he can be able to carry out his duties. A copy of the letter was forwarded to the Executive Director (cc: Executive Director) for his records. Another copy was placed in the officer's file (cc file of Mr, Sunday Afolayan) for record purposes, while the original copy was given to the officer.

Communicative function: the strategy of commendation functions as a show of recognition, motivation and appreciation towards the outstanding performance of members of staff of the agricultural research institutes. It enhances improved job performance and serves as a positive reference point and example to other members of staff. A commendation strategy is employed to enhance diligence on the part of members of staff towards their duty. It will spur them to do more and it will also serve as precedence to other staff that good and ethical manners are recognized and rewarded adequately. This is an effort to boost the commitment of the subordinate officers to the institute and to enhance their job satisfaction.

#### **d. Evasive Strategy**

An evasive strategy is avoidance of action. It is employed when the Chief Executive wants to avoid direct responsibility for an action or response to a subordinate's request. The second example is also the same, the evaluation of government properties is guided by rules; his approval will be based on the recommendation of the expert in that field in the institute.

##### **Excerpt 4**

"APPLICATION FOR SABBATICAL LEAVE

I wish to bring to your notice my intention to seek for placement in other Institutions/Organisations for one-year sabbatical leave . . .

**PEO II (A)**

**Comment Pls.**

Signed

Ag. Admin. Sec.

20/4/18"

Excerpt 4 is an application from a member of staff of the Cocoa Research Institute requesting permission from the management of the Institute to proceed on sabbatical leave. Sabbatical leave is granted to senior-level officers to carry out research in the field relevant to the mandate of the research institute or for national development. It could be within or outside Nigeria. The approval of the request meant that the officer would be away from work for a whole year. The implication to the institute is that the officer's schedule at the institute will either be put on hold or reassigned to another officer. The implication to the officer is that they can interact with other working communities and draw a salary from both their original institute and their host institute for that period. The Chief Executive understands that sabbatical leave is guided by some policies in the institute, they would not be expected to run afoul of the policies. Also, the Executive Director, knowing the implications for the institute, needed to be sure the institute could afford to release the officer to go on leave for a year. However, because the Executive Director was aware of the opportunity the sabbatical leave would offer the officer, not approving it may not be pleasant news to the officer. Hence, the Executive Director requested the guide of the **PEO II (A)** by asking them to suggest what to be done on the request. The linguistic marker for this evasive strategy deployed by the superior officer is comment pls. The PEO II is a member of staff of the administrative department of the institute, who is quite familiar with the subject, and it is the prerogative of the administrative department to suggest whether the institute has another officer who could be responsible for the duties of the officer requesting for sabbatical leave for the period the officer would be away. The Chief Executive will therefore give his approval or non-approval based on the comment of the PEO II. By doing this, the Executive Director has been

able to evade taking decision single headedly and therefore will not be responsible for the consequences of that decision since the decision was taken on advice of another officer (subordinate).

Communicative function: this strategy exonerates the Chief Executive from direct consequences of the actions taken concerning any request or any decision. It is assumed that the officer who is the expert on the issue discussed was responsible for the decision taken. When the consequences turned negative, it could be interpreted to mean that the officer has not given proper advice, suggestion, or recommendation to the Chief Executive who is considered a trained researcher. Administrative and financial errors are blamed on the officers directly in charge of the Departments.

#### **e. Deadline Strategy**

Deadlines are the time frames and dates assigned or prescribed for the completion and submission of an assignment or for an action to be taken. If the respondent fails to meet deadlines, it is considered overdue and could lead to forming a negative opinion about one. Deadline means the date or time you must do something. In different spheres of life, the deadline could mean different things to different people. However, the underline fact is that some instructions and assignments are sometimes given with specified times and dates as deadlines for compliance. Failure to comply with the specified time and date is tantamount to a refusal of official instruction.

##### **Excerpt 5**

“UPDATE ON PROGRESS FOR ACADEMIC PROGRAMME

I write to acknowledge the receipt of your progress report and to congratulate you on your. . . You are therefore redirected to forward a progress report from your Institution or course adviser. . . The progress report endorsed by your course adviser should reach the Executive Director of the Ag. Executive Director on or before 11th October, 2019.”

Excerpt 5 is a letter from the management of Nigerian Stored Products Research Institute, requesting a member of staff of the same institute who was on study leave to produce a progress report of his academic programme which was endorsed by his course instructor. He had initially submitted a progress report which was not endorsed by his course instructor, but the institute insisted through the letter that a progress report endorsed by the course instructor should be submitted. The officer was given a deadline to submit the report. The expression on or **before 11th October, 2019** is a linguistic marker which means that the progress report should be submitted latest by that date. It is only a superior officer that has the power to give action deadline to the subordinates and that is what has been demonstrated in the excerpt above.

Communicative Function: it helps subordinates to be disciplined and avoid late assessment. It emphasizes the importance, seriousness and urgency attached to some assignments. It is employed to teach subordinates time management. It also enables officers to identify and set the right priorities. In other words, meeting deadline is another means of ensuring efficiency and effectiveness in service delivery in establishments. Failure to keep deadlines could sometimes lead to sanctions and disciplinary actions in the institutes.

#### **f. Strategy of Endorsement**

Endorsement is employed to give consent and support to the superior officer on a matter that concerns a subordinate. Communications from the management to the subordinate and vice versa are usually forwarded through the officer's departmental head. The departmental head's consent is always necessary before the management decision concerning approval or otherwise is taken. The Head of the department endorses whatever correspondences, either downward or upward, by appending his signature and date. Endorsement is different from the minute. Endorsement is written directly in front of the head of department's address on the letter, while minute is written most times underneath the letter or memo except if the page is filled up, it could be continued at the back page. Minute is also written in response to a directive conveyed in writing in the letter, like a written conversation. Endorsement is only written by the Head of Department or any designated officer or officers the letter or memo passed through.

##### **Excerpt 6**

‘The Executive Director NSPRI

Ilorin

Through:

The Director (F&A)

Forwarded for consideration

NSPRI

Signed

16/8/2021

Application for Annual Leave

I wish to apply. . .”

Excerpt 6 is an application written by a member of staff of the Nigerian Stored Products Research Institute, requesting the Executive Director of the same institute to approve two weeks of annual leave for him. The application is forwarded through the officer's Head of Department. The Head of the Department apart from just appending his signature and date decided to also write a short comment as indicated in excerpt 6. That is, forwarded for consideration.

The short comment, **forwarded for consideration** is a linguistic marker to further confirm the interest of the Head of the Department to release the officer to embark on leave. There could be occasions where the Head of the Department may not want to release the officer to proceed on annual leave. For instance, if some members of staff of the department are already on leave, or if there are urgent assignments and deadlines to meet, in which case the release of the officer could jeopardise the departmental assignment, the Head of the Department may decide not to release the officer. The Head of the Department can then write his full comment stating why the officer may not be released, other than writing **forwarded for your consideration**.

Communicative function: endorsement is confirming that the superior officer is aware of the subject being discussed and identifies with it. It is to ensure compliance with necessary administrative protocols expected in the institute. Endorsement is necessary before a correspondence can be accorded recognition, or before any correspondence is acceptable to the management or the institutes, officers whose responsibility it is to endorse the correspondence must endorse it. Before any correspondence could be dispatched to the subordinates, the officer concerned must also endorse it. These procedures facilitate the process of approval of requests.

### 3.2. Bottom-Up Flow of Communication

This form communication flow is from the subordinates to the superior officers in Agricultural Research Institutes in Nigeria. To reflect power relation in the language use of the subordinates in their correspondences to their superior officers, certain discourse strategies are deployed such as humility, courtesy, representation, and duplication strategies. To signify that the writers of these correspondences are inferior to the recipients, specific linguistic/discourse markers are used in the correspondences which define the role-relation between the writer and the recipient.

#### a. Humility Strategy

Humility is the opposite of pride. Normally, the subordinates are not supposed to be proud to their superior officers. Being humble to the superior officers is an indication that they are accepted as superior. To demonstrate this act of humility, subordinates, in their correspondences to their superior officers, make use of certain linguistic markers which communicate that they are humble to their superior officers. The excerpts below illustrate this strategy of humility.

##### Excerpt 7

"REPAYMENT OF SALARY THROUGH INTEGRATED PAYROLL AND PERSONNEL INFORMATION SYSTEM (IPPIS)

I am directed to inform you that staff salary for the month of May 2014 was paid to staff . . ."

Excerpt 7 is a memo put up based on the instruction of the Acting Head (A&S) (Admin & Supply) Cocoa Research Institute of Nigeria to the Ag Head Admin. Division on behalf of the Executive Director of the same institute. The Asst. The executive Officer who communicated this request is a subordinate officer to the Ag. Head, Admin. Division. In other not to be assumed to be rude, disrespectful, or commanding his superiors, the strategy employed was to sound humble by stating that he/she was directed by a higher authority to issue the memo. The linguistic marker employed to communicate humility in the excerpt above is **I have been directed** and this marker is one of the common linguistic markers in administrative language employed when administrative officers want to show humility to their superior officers in their correspondences.

Communicative functions: the strategy of humility demonstrated van Dijk's idea of language and power relation in a social context. It reveals the existing gap between superiors and subordinates. Superiors are always revered,



respected, and treated with some sense of humility as reflected in the choice of language of the subordinate. In other words, the humility strategy exists in upward communications. Humility enhances a peaceful working environment, enables subordinates to secure favour, pardon superior officers as well as guarantees the acceptability of the officers by the subordinate.

### **b. Strategy of Courtesy**

Courtesy is very important in any social environment. It is an act of being polite. Politeness is one of the ethics of the civil service to which agricultural research institutes belong. It is useful in both upward and downward communications. No civil servant is expected to be rude on duty; rather, they are expected to show some level of courtesy to members of staff and guests. The strategy of courtesy is demonstrated in agricultural research institutes as noticeable in the use of some languages in the excerpts below.

#### **Excerpt 8**

**“A. Please be assured of my best regards always**

**B. Please accept the assurances of my best regards.”**

Excerpts 8 A&B are expressions from two separate Circulars from the Nigerian Stored Products Research Institute and Cocoa Research Institute of Nigeria respectively. The expressions if written in either of the two statements are acceptable. They are strategies written to reflect some level of courtesy before closing the circulars. They are employed by the management of the institutes to soften the interpretation of the circulars by the members of staff of the institutes. The content of some circulars could be misconstrued as being harsh, inconsiderate, or better still as a dictator.

Communicative Function: strategy of courtesy is noticeable in upward, downward and horizontal communications. It reveals that a sense of politeness is essential in workplace relationships. The subordinates are always showing respect to their superiors, whereas the show of courtesy by the superior to the subordinate is because the subordinates must continue to find the need to carry out their duty and be submissive to the superior officers.

### **3.3. Strategies Common to Superior Officers and Subordinates in Administrative Correspondence**

In administrative correspondences of Agricultural Research Institutes in Nigeria, both superior officers and subordinates employ certain strategies which are common to the two categories of officers, irrespective of the power relation between them. The strategies common to them include hierarchy, introductory, minuting, abbreviation, collaboration, authentication, identification, referencing, recommendation, topicalization and committee. The excerpts below explain these strategies.

#### **a. Strategy of Hierarchy**

The strategy of hierarchy ranked the officers in agricultural research institutes according to superiority or seniority. The ranking is associated with some authority. It is a pyramid where the most senior officer occupies the apex of the pyramid and with the highest authority. Most communicative transactions in agricultural research institutes are based on hierarchical order. All forms of upward and downward communications are written through the immediate superior of the concerned officer. This brings to focus van Dijk's power relation theory. To show power relations and gaps between the superior officers and the subordinates, certain discourse markers are deployed by the superior officers in their correspondences to their subordinates. The indicators of this strategy are analysed in the excerpts below.

#### **Excerpt 9**

SPRP. 1993/1/70

10th December,

2019

Mr. C. O. Abolaji.

(Program Analyst)

ufs:

The Director,

Information & Documentation Department

NSPRI

QUERY

It was observed based on record that you were released to pursue a two-year programme leading to the award of Master of Science Degree in Information Technology on 16th August, 2018. . .

Information, directives and replies to officers' requests from the management usually would not be written directly to that officer; they would be communicated through the officer's superior. The letter in excerpt 9 was a query written by the Executive Director of Nigeria Stored Products Research Institute to a member of staff of the same institute. The query was written through the Head of the Department of the officer. The use of ufs (Under Flying Seal) is an indication that the letter was sent to the officer under the cover of his Head of Department. While the discourse marker thro, thru, or through is used in upward communications, the discourse marker ufs is usually applied in downward communications. Hence, subordinates cannot write using ufs, while management will not write to subordinates using thru, thro or through. This is evidence of language of power relation which is the tenet of critical discourse theory.

That is, the hierarchy strategy aligns with van Dijk's and Fairclough's critical discourse analysis theory of Language and Power relations. There are languages peculiar to the superior officers, and there are languages peculiar to the subordinate. This is a demonstration of class among the staff of agricultural research institutes. The strategy of Hierarchy also reflects when writing minutes in files. Minutes most times are initiated by the superior, and the line of communication continues downward till it gets to the last officer, who, being a subordinate, is directed to execute the necessary actions.

Communicative Function: The strategy of hierarchy demonstrates the superior-subordinate structure that exists in the agricultural research institutes' organogram. The hierarchy strategy enhances the flow of communication from top to bottom and vice versa. It assigns definite roles and shows the relationship that exists among officers according to the ranking of the members of staff. It reveals 'who reports to who' It ensures compliance with administrative communicative protocols. It is also a manifestation of power relations, in which case, subordinates are always at the receiving end of the hierarchical flow of instruction as they execute most of the necessary actions. The management members communicate horizontally, messages do not pass through any superior showing that they operate in a class different from the subordinate. Hierarchical downward communication flow emphasises the recognition of the superior officers and enhances the desired respect from superiors to subordinates, it makes the top attractive and enviable to curry the desire and admiration of subordinates and enhance subordinates' diligence and advancement.

## **b. Introductory Strategy**

The introductory strategy introduces the main thrust of a letter or memo. It reveals the previous action(s) that has occurred, that necessitated the current action to be taken. In other words, it presents to the reader the background information concerning events that have earlier transpired before taking a current action. Some decisions concerning staff matters, especially discipline is not just taken unless there has been a trigger. Hence, the trigger must be made known to the reader so that the management is not thought of as acting irrationally and wickedly but is believed as acting in response to the preceding events, vis-a-vis the rules guiding such events.

### **Excerpt 10**

PROMOTION

Sequel to your success at the just concluded senior staff promotion exercise, the governing

Board of the Institute has approved your promotion . . .

Excerpt 10 was extracted from the promotion letter issued to a member of staff of the Nigerian Stored Products Research Institute. The phrase, sequel to, used in the letter means as a result of the event that has happened earlier. Hence, the expression Sequel to your success at the just concluded senior staff promotion exercise, introduced briefly to the reader the background event, that is, the promotion exercise the officer participated in and passed has led to the release of the promotion of the officer. In other words, the promotion letter could not have been written and released to the officer if the officer had not recorded success in the promotion examination.

Communicative Function: Introductory strategy employs introductory words or statements to reveal previous actions that have taken place before the current action. The reader is in the know concerning the flow of events. It enables readers to understand that the management or the member of staff did not just take the current action, but some events have happened that led to the current action being taken. This prevents the management from being perceived negatively if the management has taken any unfavourable decision in response to a previous action taken by a staff member, or a previous event that occurred. The reader can have first-hand background information on any issue that came up. It shows the management is Public Service Rule compliant.

### **c. Strategy of Minuting**

The strategy of minuting is different from the minute taken during a meeting. It is an exchange of communications in writing between two or more officers through files. In other words, it is the expression of an individual's opinions, ideas, advice, comments, and or recommendations in either technical, subject, or personal staff files. If an application, letter, memo or any correspondence whatsoever is forwarded, all officers who are concerned with the subject are expected to make comments or give their opinions where necessary. The comments are usually made on the letter or memo, enclosed in the file. Minuting is used to approve or give directive(s) on the next line of action, and to lay an issue to rest. That is, it is used to consider and resolve issues and instruct on the required action to be taken on the subject matter. Each officer who gives directive(s), and instructions, makes comments and or responses must add his signature and date at the end. It is always numbered to enable participants to follow the flow of communication. Minutes are also expected to be kept confidential. Officers outside the participants are not supposed to be exposed to individual submission on the subject matter, except for officers whose duty falls within the movement and the documentation of such files. That is why it is a punishable offence to disclose official information and confidential matters without being authorised to do so. All correspondences are forwarded to the appropriate superior, who is most times the Chief Executive, through the immediate superior of the officer. The Chief Executive directs the correspondence to the appropriate officer(s) for their contributions to the subject being discussed. The minutes could be as long as a whole page or could be short as would be discovered in the excerpts. Minutes continue until the subject matter is completely laid to rest. This strategy is employed in administrative correspondences of Agricultural Research Institutes in Nigeria by both the superior officers and the subordinates.

#### **Excerpt 11**

"RE: DEATH WHILE IN SERVICE TAOFEEK JELILI (MR) OF GROUND MAINTENANCE CRIN

Your directive at min. 2, page 327 on the above subject refers, please. Mr. Johnathan Olarewaju, the chief Security officer (CSO) of the Institute in a letter report the demise of . . .

(1) ED

**Your directive @ min 1 p 327& the submission above refer, pls.**

**The recommendation as par X items 1-3 are supported for your approval, sir.**

Signed

AAS

16/3/21

**(2) Ag Head (Admin)**

**Your recommendations 2-3 is hereby approved.**

Signed

17/3/21

(3) AD(B)

AO II (B)

Communicate min. 2 O/L p.328 to Mr. Olarewaju Jonathan

HOS.

Signed

AgAS18/3/21

(4) Ag. AS

overleaf and the above refers It is observed and suggested that the issue of stoppage of the deceased salary needs to be addressed.

you may wish to give further directives on this, pls. and also to write the Head, PEM to give an update on the deceased.

Signed

AD (Admin) 19/3/2021

(5) AD(B)

The deceased officer's salary should be stopped w. e. f. 20/2/21.

Mrs. Akande will be called to give an update on the issue.

(6) AO II (B)

Pls. deal as directed @ mins. (3) & (5) above

clear min.'s draft with me before final release pls.

Signed

AO (Admin)

19/2/2021"

The report in excerpt 11 is a response of the head of the maintenance section of the Cocoa Research Institute of Nigeria to the report of the demise of one of the maintenance unit staff after battling with an undisclosed ailment while in active service. The writer made suggestions that would enable the institute's management to take the necessary decisions concerning the situation. Items listed 1-6 in excerpt 11 are comments of officers that are to be involved in taking necessary actions. Item 1 was written by the AAS (Acting Administrative Secretary) to the Executive Director as a response to the initial minute of the Executive Director on the first report of the death of the officer. He was communicating his support towards the recommendations in the report and requesting the Executive Directors' approval of the recommendations. Minute 2 conveyed the approval of the Executive Director to the recommendations. Minute 3 is a directive to both the AD(B) and AO II(B) to inform the HOS (Head of Section) about minute 2 written on the other page

of the report. Minute 4 is a reply suggesting the need to address the stoppage of the deceased's salary, and to request an update from the Head of PEM (Personal Emoluments). Minute 5 gave the effective date of the stoppage of the deceased's salary while minute 6 directed AO II (Administrative officer II) (B) to carry out the suggested actions in minutes 3 and 5.

Communicative Function: Minuting strategy serves as evidence of the involvement of all stakeholders in the subject under consideration. None of the concerned officers would deny involvement or claim to be ignorant of the issue. The strategy also enhances discussion without necessarily seeing face-to-face. Each of the concerned officers put his or her comment in writing, and the discussion continues until the issue is settled. It also encourages stakeholders to communicate their opinions without bias, because the contents of the file are not supposed to be made known to any external party outside the participants; except if there is an official directive to do so. The content of minutes, unlike spoken words, cannot be denied. Some subordinates are also able to learn and comply with the hierarchical protocols in the workplace. Any subordinate who fails to comply with the protocol has erred and such an officer could be disciplined. Opinions are exchanged via minutes in files, and the Executive Director can know the pros and cons of any final decision taken.

#### **d.Strategy of Abbreviation**

Another strategy noticeable in the administrative communication of agricultural research institutes is the use of abbreviations. The abbreviation is when words or sentences are abridged, shortened, or reduced. Words or phrases could be abbreviated using symbols, figures and short forms of letters to represent such words or phrases. Some of these abbreviations occur either in the address, within the correspondences or when minuting.

##### **Excerpt 12**

"REQUEST TO PRESENT OUR HEALTHCARE GADGETS TO YOUR ESTABLISHMENT

We The Good Health Company Ltd . . .

i. **DAdmin**

Pls. treat.

signed

16/10/17

ii. **AD (E&R)**

**Pls.K. I. V."**

Excerpt 12 was extracted from the letter of a non-governmental health organisation to the Executive Director of Nigerian Stored Products Research Institute requesting an opportunity to introduce their products to members of staff. The Executive Director directed his minute to D (Admin) (Director Administration) to treat the application, and the Director of Administration addressed his minute to AD (E&R) to K. I. V. The minute, Pls. K. I. V. means Please Keep In View, while AD (E&R) means Assistant Director Establishment and Records. The Director of Administration indirectly instructed the AD (E&R) not to treat the request yet, rather, she should keep it in view. By implication, it means the decision to treat the correspondence has not yet been taken. The abbreviation K. I. V. is a strategy meaning that the subject will not be considered at present and so, the correspondence should be kept for the future perhaps it could be considered later. It is an indication of uncertainty because the management, represented by the Executive Director, did not decide on the approval or otherwise of the request. No serious commitment on the part of the management to revisit the request later because no future date was indicated. The writer may not understand the position of the management on this application. The D(Admin) directed the letter to be kept in view perhaps because he observed that the body language of the Executive Director towards the request was not favourable. Body language is also a form of communication, but it is not considered an official means of communication because it cannot be transferred to a written document.

Communicative function. The abbreviation strategy is employed purposely for time and space and effort management. The time that will be required to write the words will be reduced, the space they will cover will be reduced and the sounds will be produced with minimal effort. Abbreviation also enables the concealment of administrative information. Some administrative actions taken; some administrative protocols involved as well as some administrative personnel involved in decision making can be concealed such that they are not easily identified by outsiders. Also, some insiders, who are not among the participants in the actions taken on the subject matter may not know the meanings of some of the abbreviations. It is important to note that not all abbreviations can be employed by subordinates when

communicating with their superior officer. This is where the tenets of critical discourse analysis, which is the language of power relation, comes to play.

#### **e. Referencing Strategy**

Referencing is the alphanumeric identity usually attached to correspondences. That is, it is the combination of letters and figures that is allocated to correspondences by the selected agricultural research institutes. Generally, referencing is reflecting the relationship that exists between one document and the other. The act of linking a recent correspondence to a previous one. It connects all correspondences to the source of the subject matter through the numbers that are assigned to such correspondences. It is called a reference number. The composition of the number includes file/subject number, volume number and folio number. The reference number is usually written at the top of the correspondence, below the letterhead for correspondences on letterhead, and for the correspondences that are written on plain paper, it is usually written before the address. It could also appear in the body of correspondence, especially when the reference is being referred to or quoted from another correspondence. Reference numbers are usually accompanied by the dates the correspondence is issued. In some agricultural research institutes, reference number is allocated by subjects or persons, it is written at the back of files for easy identification of the subject the file is meant for. In most cases, references are coined from the institute's name and staff number or subject number. It could also be coined with the name of the institute.

#### **Excerpt 13**

'Nigeria Products Research Institute

**CSPR 26. 6/vi/50**

**24/08/2021**

The Executive Director

NSPRI, Ilorin

Dear Ma,

APPLICATION FOR TWO WEEKS ANNUAL LEAVE”

Excerpt 13 is a letter written by a member of staff of the Nigerian Stored Product Research Institute requesting that the Executive of the same institute should grant him two weeks' annual leave. The officer by the approval of the letter would be away from duty for two weeks. Annual leave is usually 30 working days, not two weeks, but it could be taken in two installments; that was why the officer requested two weeks. The reference is the CSPR 26.6/vi/50 written on top of the letter. This shows that the letter would be put in the file that has the same reference as the one on the letter. The reference CSPR 26.6/vi/50 is confidential stored products research/volume no/folio number. The number is applied to confidential matters, not staff matters; this was an error from the writer.

Communicative function: Referencing to facilitate identification and allocation of correspondences to enhance easy storage, accessibility and retrieval of documents whenever each correspondence is needed. It also enhances the classification of correspondences. It is also used for easy identification of the subject that is being discussed. It traces the source and history of correspondence. It makes documentation of correspondences easy; documentation is very vital in every communication process. Easy recovery of such documents is also made possible by referencing. Furthermore, it reveals where correspondence should be filed and kept. It secures correspondences such that the loss of correspondence is easily averted when the correspondences are referenced.

#### **4. Conclusion**

This paper has attempted a Critical Discourse Analysis of communicative expressions in selected Agricultural institutes in Nigeria. Administrative correspondences of Cocoa Research Institute (CRIN) and the Nigerian Stored Product Research Institute (NSPRI) have been investigated using a synthesis of van Dijk's (2008) idea of Language and Power and Fairclough's (2014) Text Oriented Discourse Analysis as theoretical framework, for the discussion of the strategies employed in the correspondences within the two selected agricultural research institutes. From the management to common junior staff members and within the horizontal ranks, there is a sense in which power and authority back the choice of words and the requests and instructions given in the respective letters sampled and analyzed. It is discovered that communication, in these agricultural research institutes, is strictly formal, nonverbal, upward and downward and sometimes horizontal. The study revealed that correspondence types in CRIN and NSPRI

include complaints, petitions, applications, information, requests and reports. Of these types, there are more letters than memos and other internal correspondences downwards from the top management or from the management to the junior staff members. Strategies employed in the discourses of administrative correspondence of the selected agricultural research institutes include command, discipline, commendation, evasive, deadline, endorsement, humility, courtesy, hierarchy, introduction, minuting, abbreviation and referencing. The choice of each of these strategies is determined by the essence of the correspondence as each strategy performs certain communicative functions.

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