DISCOURSE STRATEGIES IN DOMESTIC VIOLENCE VICTIMS' NARRATIVES IN IBADAN METROPOLIS

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Abstract

While scholarly and public attention to domestic violence in Nigeria has grown considerably in recent years, limited research has examined the linguistic mechanisms through which victims construct, negotiate, and legitimise their experiences. This study, therefore, investigates the discursive strategies deployed in written narratives of domestic violence by victims in Ibadan metropolis. Drawing on van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach to Critical Discourse Analysis, sixty-four (64) purposively selected narratives from an online textual survey were analysed. The study identifies seven recurrent strategies: hedging and mitigation, passivization, pronoun shifting, metaphorical framing, polarization, negative labelling, and evidentiality. The findings reveal that these strategies are not merely stylistic features but function as discursive resources through which victims manage stigma, attribute responsibility, construct credibility, and negotiate identity within prevailing socio-cultural norms.

Keywords: *discourse strategies, domestic violence, Ibadan metropolis, victims' narratives, victimhood*

1. Introduction

Language plays a central role in how social realities such as domestic violence are constructed, perceived, and sustained. In many societies, including Nigeria, linguistic choices surrounding domestic violence are deeply tied to gender norms and power relations. Victims' narratives are frequently framed in ways that minimise their suffering or rationalise the perpetrators' behaviour, while community discourses may normalise violence as a form of discipline or a private family matter (Adebayo, 2014; Aragbuwa, 2022; Hydén, 2014). Hence, language is not merely a vehicle for describing domestic violence but a site where its meanings, causes, and consequences are negotiated and reproduced within social interaction.

In Nigeria, domestic violence has been reported to affect approximately 30% of women aged 15–49 who have experienced physical violence (National Bureau of Statistics, 2019) and up to 68% (National Bureau of Statistics, 2019) who have experienced emotional, economic, or sexual abuse. In urban Nigerian contexts, including the Ibadan metropolis, the lived realities of victims are often shaped by local notions of gender roles, familial obligation, socioeconomic dependence, and cultural expectations of silence or endurance. The deeply ingrained ideology of male dominance and female submissiveness in many parts of Nigerian society further sustains the conditions in which abusive behaviours continue (Adebayo, 2014; Lazar, 2007).

As scholars such as Hydén (2014) and Aragbuwa (2022) have observed, victims' narratives represent a rich and underexplored site for linguistic analysis. These narratives not only reflect the speaker's interpretation of events, but also encode the ideological, cognitive, and discursive strategies through which victims make sense of their situation, position themselves, their abusers, and society. Crucially, they reveal how power, resistance, identity, and ideology are negotiated through language, making them a productive object of discourse-analytic inquiry.

Recent discourse-analytic work has begun to address the linguistic dimension of domestic violence representation. Hydén (2014) explored how women in Sweden narrate experiences of abuse through complex linguistic strategies. Wood (2001) demonstrated that victims' narratives reflect and reproduce patriarchal ideologies. Aragbuwa (2022) identified resistance and polarisation strategies in Nigerian online narratives of domestic violence. Akinseye (2024) examined how newspapers construct social actors in domestic violence discourses in Sub-Saharan Africa. However, these contributions focus primarily on mediated representations or non-Nigerian contexts, rather than on the first-person accounts of domestic violence victims in the Nigerian setting.

There is thus a need to focus on the discursive dimension of domestic violence victims' narratives themselves: how victims construct their identity, how they present the 'self' and the 'other', and how they deploy linguistic and rhetorical strategies to represent their experiences. Addressing this gap, the present study aims to investigate the discourse strategies employed by domestic violence victims in Ibadan metropolis. Specifically, it seeks to: (i) identify the recurrent discourse strategies in victims' written narratives; (ii) examine the cognitive and ideological functions these strategies perform; and (iii) illuminate how language simultaneously constrains and enables victims' construction of identity, credibility, and meaning within prevailing socio-cultural norms.

2. Literature Review

Research into the linguistic features of domestic violence victims' narratives has uncovered recurrent discursive patterns that reflect how victims negotiate trauma, identity, and social expectations. Hydén (2014) explored the narratives of domestic violence in Sweden, focusing on how women linguistically construct their experiences. Her findings demonstrated that victims often tell their stories in ways that blend self-blame and resistance, using linguistic devices such as hedging, hesitation, and self-correction to manage

shame and fear. Wood (2001) analysed women's stories of abuse in the United States through narrative analysis, finding that victims frequently oscillate between justifying the abuser and asserting autonomy, reflecting internalised patriarchal beliefs. The study demonstrated that the power of domestic violence extends beyond physical harm into the discursive domain, where language reflects and reproduces inequality.

Aragbuwa (2022) conducted a discourse analytical study of victims' narratives collected from an online weblog in Nigeria. The research identified various discursive strategies and resistance ideologies in victims' storytelling. Victims frequently employed polarisation and mitigation to balance self-protection with truth-telling. The study demonstrated that language functions as both a tool of resistance and repression. Lazar (2007) examined feminist critical discourse analysis across various cultural contexts, demonstrating how language in domestic settings encodes gendered power relations and sustains ideological structures that normalise subordination. Her work foregrounds the role of discourse in reproducing patriarchal norms, offering a critical lens through which victims' linguistic choices can be understood as ideologically positioned responses to systemic oppression.

Pavlenko (2008) investigated how language and emotion intersect in narratives of trauma and displacement, arguing that emotional expression in personal narratives is never culturally neutral. Speakers deploy culturally available discursive frameworks to render their experiences intelligible to others, often negotiating between dominant social scripts and individual experiential realities. This insight is particularly relevant to the present study, as domestic violence narratives involve both emotional expression and ideological negotiation. Berns (2001) analysed how domestic violence narratives in popular magazines construct gendered identities, showing that language choices reflect and reinforce broader cultural scripts about victimhood and agency. Similarly, Towns and Adams (2000) demonstrated that both victims and perpetrators deploy discursive strategies to rationalise abuse,

including minimisation, normalisation, and victim-blaming, patterns that have direct relevance to the present analysis.

Ehrlich (2001) examined the language of sexual violence trials, showing how institutional discourse can re-victimise survivors by foregrounding consent scripts that obscure coercion. Her work highlights the ideological weight of lexical and syntactic choices in contexts of intimate violence. Matoesian (2001) explored the interactional dynamics of courtroom narratives of rape, revealing how cross-examination strategies destabilise victims' accounts through reformulation and reported speech manipulation.

These studies establish that the linguistic analysis of domestic violence narratives is a productive and multi-dimensional scholarly endeavour, with direct implications for understanding how victims construct credibility, assign responsibility, and negotiate identity through language.Although existing studies have examined media representations, online weblog narratives, and broader narrative constructions of abuse, there remains a clear gap in linguistic analyses grounded in real-life, first-person narratives of domestic violence produced directly by victims within a Nigerian urban context. Much of the current scholarship either focuses on mediated discourse, secondary narrative reconstructions, or thematic accounts of abuse. There is comparatively limited research that systematically interrogates the discourse features through which victims themselves construct, negotiate, and interpret their lived experiences. The present study addresses this gap by providing a rigorous discourse-analytic investigation of victims' own narratives, foregrounding language as both a site of constraint and a resource for meaning-making in the representation of domestic violence.

3. Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in Teun A. van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach to Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), a framework that conceptualises power as operating primarily through the control of cognition rather than through overt physical force. According to van Dijk (2006, 2018), discourse functions not merely as language use

but as a form of social practice through which ideologies, beliefs, and power relations are produced, circulated, and reproduced. Powerful social actors and institutions deploy discourse strategically to shape how social realities are interpreted, thereby sustaining dominance and inequality.

Central to van Dijk's model is the concept of social cognition, which refers to the shared mental representations such as knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, and ideologies, through which members of a social group make sense of the world. Social cognition serves as a mediating interface between discourse and society, explaining how broader social structures influence individual interpretation and how repeated discursive practices reinforce collective ideologies over time. Through this lens, discourse both reflects existing social realities and actively contributes to their reproduction.

van Dijk further proposes that CDA operates across two interrelated analytical levels. At the micro level, analysis focuses on linguistic and discursive features such as lexical choices, modal expressions, syntactic structures, and interactional patterns. At the macro level, attention shifts to wider social phenomena, including power relations, dominance, inequality, and ideological positioning. These levels are inseparable, as routine language use often encodes and legitimises broader social meanings and power structures.

A key analytical tool within this framework is the ideological square, which explains how discourse tends to emphasize positive representations of the in-group and negative representations of the out-group, while simultaneously mitigating negative aspects of the in-group and positive aspects of the out-group. This mechanism enables the subtle construction and reinforcement of ideological boundaries within discourse. This is particularly evident in domestic violence narratives where victims linguistically position themselves as morally credible while constructing perpetrators as responsible agents of harm.

The socio-cognitive approach is directly applicable to the analysis of discourse strategies in personal narratives of domestic

violence. Each of the seven strategies identified in this study corresponds to a specific cognitive and ideological function within van Dijk's framework. Hedging and mitigation reflect cognitive self-protective mechanisms that allow victims to manage face and reduce stigma while still disclosing harm. Passivisation enacts ideological erasure of perpetrator agency, enabling disclosure without direct accusation. Pronoun shifting reveals the negotiation of relational and social identities, as victims move between individual and collective frames of reference. Metaphorical framing externalises abstract suffering through culturally accessible imagery drawn from domains of physical injury, warfare, and economic exchange. Polarization constructs ideological boundaries between self and other, victim and perpetrator, consistent with van Dijk's ideological square. Negative labelling assigns evaluative judgments to actors and situations, functioning as a tool for moral positioning and responsibility attribution. Finally, evidentiality establishes the epistemic authority of narrative claims, transforming personal testimony into verifiable discourse. Together, these strategies constitute the discursive repertoire through which victims of domestic violence in Ibadan metropolis navigate the competing demands of disclosure, identity management, and social legitimacy.

4. Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative research design in order to provide an in-depth and interpretive analysis of how domestic violence victims construct and communicate their experiences through language. A qualitative approach is particularly appropriate for this study because it allows for close examination of meaning-making processes, ideological positioning, and discursive strategies embedded in personal narratives. The data comprised sixty-four (64) written narratives purposively selected from domestic violence victims residing in the Ibadan metropolis. The use of purposive sampling ensured that only narratives directly relevant to the research objectives were included, specifically those that provided detailed accounts of lived experiences of domestic violence.

Data were collected through an online textual survey hosted on Google Forms, with a recruitment link disseminated through domestic violence support networks, women's rights organisations, and community-based advocacy groups active within Ibadan metropolis. Participation was restricted to individuals who self-identified as current or former victims of domestic violence within the Ibadan metropolis and who explicitly confirmed this status at the point of entry into the survey via a screening question. The method was deliberately chosen to guarantee participant anonymity and emotional safety, given the sensitive and potentially traumatic nature of domestic violence experiences. The online format also enabled participants to narrate their experiences at their own pace and in their own words, thereby enhancing the authenticity and depth of the data.

Ethical considerations were given priority throughout the research process. Participation in the study was entirely voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to data collection. Participants were clearly informed of the purpose of the study and the academic use of their narratives.

5. Data Analysis

The analysis revealed seven distinct discourse strategies employed by domestic violence victims in constructing their narratives. Each strategy serves specific functions in how victims manage disclosure, negotiate identity, and position themselves and their abusers within complex social and ideological frameworks.

Hedging and Mitigation

Hedging and mitigation emerged as prominent strategies through which victims soften the force of their statements or qualify their claims. This strategy involves the use of linguistic devices that reduce certainty, minimise severity, or create semantic vagueness.

Excerpt 1

i. I won't call it violence **by the way** but I'll say it was an emotional blackmail from my partner.

ii. I can say it **wasn't really that deep,** I should say he doesn't know how to communicate his emotions that well, I got tired and left.
iii. I cried so much and blamed myself for dismissing what he said about not liking women as **something he just said** out of anger.

The utterance in excerpt 1(i) provides a paradigmatic example of hedging in domestic violence discourse. The sentence begins with explicit negation categorical refusal to apply the term 'violence' to the experience being narrated. However, the refusal is immediately softened by the discourse marker 'by the way', which functions as a hedge. The usage of the expression suggests that the negation itself is incidental rather than central, as if the speaker is making an aside or offering a minor clarification rather than a fundamental redefinition. This creates a middle ground between fully accepting the label "violence" and fully rejecting it. The sentence then pivots with the conjunction 'but', introducing what the speaker calls 'emotional blackmail'. Interestingly, emotional blackmail is itself a recognised form of violence. Here, the victim reveals an internalised ideology that reserves 'violence' exclusively for physical acts, reflecting broader societal tendencies to minimise or render invisible non-physical forms of abuse. The hedging strategy thus simultaneously allows the speaker to acknowledge harm while protecting her social face and avoiding the stigmatised identity of 'domestic violence victim'.

The narrative in excerpt 1 (ii) demonstrates the accumulation of hedging devices within a single utterance, creating a dense texture of mitigation and uncertainty. The sentence opens with the modal expression 'I can say', which introduces tentative assertion. This epistemic hedge signals that what follows is one possible characterisation among others, not a definitive statement. The assertion 'wasn't really that deep' contains multiple layers of mitigation: the negative formulation creates distance, while the intensifier 'really' paradoxically functions as a softener, suggesting that the speaker is moderating an even stronger potential claim.

Finally, the narrative in excerpt 1(iii) demonstrates how hedging and mitigation can operate through self-blame rather than direct modification of the perpetrator's actions. The phrase 'something he just said' is a complex mitigation structure. The indefinite pronoun 'something' creates semantic vagueness, avoiding specification of what was said and treating the utterance as generic or unimportant. The minimising adverb 'just' further encodes the ideology that verbal abuse is not a 'real' abuse, linguistically enacting the cultural minimisation of psychological violence.

Passivisation

Passivisation is a grammatical strategy involving the transformation of active voice constructions into passive voice constructions, where the patient becomes the grammatical subject and the agent is either relegated to a prepositional phrase or deleted entirely.

Excerpt 2

i. **I was beaten.**
ii. **I was coerced** into getting intimate even though I wasn't ready for it at that time. **I gave in** because **he kept begging me**.

Excerpt 2(i) is remarkable for its extreme brevity. It is a passive construction with complete agent deletion. The auxiliary 'was' and past participle 'beaten' create the passive voice, with the grammatical subject 'I' functioning as the semantic patient. The most significant feature is the absence of any explicit agent: the sentence does not specify who performed the beating. This agent deletion serves multiple functions. Psychologically, it may reflect the victim's difficulty putting traumatic experience into words. Socially, in many Nigerian cultural contexts, there are strong norms against exposing family members publicly, and the passive construction allows the victim to document abuse without directly accusing her partner.

Excerpt 2(ii) demonstrates a strategic movement from passive to active voice within a single utterance, revealing the complex negotiation between acknowledging victimisation and

claiming relational agency. The excerpt begins with a passive construction where the agent who performed the coercion is not initially specified, creating temporary ambiguity. However, the subordinate clause 'because he kept begging me' then introduces the agent through an active voice construction, explicitly naming the perpetrator through the pronoun 'he'. This passive-to-active movement enacts incremental attribution of responsibility, allowing the victim to gradually assign agency to the perpetrator while still foregrounding her own experience.

Pronoun Shifting

Pronoun shifting refers to systematic patterns of variation in pronoun use that construct different subject positions, create distance or intimacy, attribute agency or passivity, and negotiate identity. Akinseye (2015) argues, pronouns function interpersonally by creating a link between the speaker and the audience, and this interpersonal function has various effects on how the audience interprets meaning, alignment, and responsibility within discourse. In domestic violence narratives, pronoun choices are strategic discursive moves.

Excerpt 3

i. Miscommunication between **me and my husband**, Lack of trust, Financial crisis, Make **both of us** to pick on each other and out of frustration and anger, it led to fight between us.

ii. **I** use to have a kind loving lady who really love **me** which I do love **her** also, but at some point **we** started experience violence as a result of trying make her realise... though I know have offended her... deep down in me I know that a woman for me and I really so love her dearly.

iii. **I** was being coerced to have sex with **that particular person**, I said no a lot of times but **this person** didn't respond. **He** started to touch me....

Excerpt 3(i)–(iii) demonstrates the strategic use of plural and reciprocal constructions to frame domestic violence as mutual conflict. In excerpt 3(i), the pronouns 'me and my husband' are

conjoined via coordination, constructing the two parties as equivalent social actors. The phrase 'both of us', combining the quantifier 'both' with the collective pronoun 'us', merges the speaker and her husband into a single entity, suggesting that neither party is excluded from responsibility. This pronoun pattern reflects a mental model in which challenges such as domestic violence are discursively shared rather than individually owned.

Excerpt 3(ii) demonstrates complex and strategic pronoun shifting that reveals conflicting mental models. The dominance of the first-person singular (I/me) foregrounds the speaker's agency, while the woman is largely positioned through third-person forms (her), creating relational distance. When violence is introduced, the pronoun shifts briefly to the collective 'we', diffusing individual responsibility in a face-saving move consistent with van Dijk's notion of positive self-presentation. However, this collectivisation is short-lived: the narrative quickly returns to 'I' as agent and 'her' as object, reinstating male authority through causative constructions such as '…make her realise'.

Finally, Excerpt 3(iii) illustrates a clear pronoun progression from distancing to direct attribution. The narrative begins with the distancing demonstrative 'that' and shifts to the proximal 'this', before the decisive adoption of the gendered pronoun 'he' marks a shift from dissociation to identification, assigning clear responsibility to the perpetrator. Notably, self-reference remains consistently 'I' throughout, reinforcing stable victim identity alongside the gradual naming of the abuser.

Metaphorical Framing

Metaphorical framing emerged as a powerful strategy through which victims conceptualise and communicate abstract or emotionally complex experiences through concrete imagery. Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) work on conceptual metaphor demonstrates that metaphors are fundamental cognitive structures through which human beings understand experience.

Excerpt 4

i. She said, 'Am I married at all.' It **pricked my mind**, and I delayed response. I walked away with **lasting bruises** that got healed up later in the relationship.
ii. if I complained **is a serious war** and beating, so therefore I have to move on before he kpai me for house all in the name of beating.
iii. Sex is use **as a bargain chip**."

The metaphors in excerpt 4(i)–(iii) instantiate systematic conceptual mappings in which abstract experiences of abuse are structured through more concrete source domains. In excerpt 4(i), the male victim conceptualises emotional harm through the metaphor of physical injury. The expression 'pricked my mind' maps psychological hurt onto the sudden, sharp intrusion of a pointed object, transferring entailments of immediacy, sharpness, and pain from physical to emotional injury. The second metaphor, 'lasting bruises', extends this injury schema: since bruises are visible marks of internal trauma, the victim applies this imagery to represent enduring emotional damage. The modifier, 'lasting' foregrounds temporal persistence, while 'healed up later' sustains the injury frame by conceptualising reconciliation as physical recovery.

In excerpt 4(ii), domestic violence is conceptualised through the WAR metaphor, activating a combat frame characterised by hostility, escalation, and survival. The conditional clause 'if I complained' presents dissent as the trigger for battle, while the possibility of fatality extends the entailments of combat to include mortal danger. Finally, Excerpt 4(iii) employs an economic metaphor in which intimacy is construed as a commodity. The 'bargain chip' frame constructs sexual access as a controlled resource whose value lies in its exchange potential, transferring entailments of leverage, conditionality, and strategic withholding from economic exchange to relational interaction. The passive construction 'is used' further backgrounds agency, presenting intimacy as a negotiable asset embedded in power relations rather than an expression of shared affection.

Polarisation

Polarisation is a discourse strategy that constructs sharp contrasts between groups. van Dijk's (2008) concept of the 'ideological square' describes how speakers emphasise positive information about the in-group while de-emphasizing negative information, and simultaneously emphasize negative information about the out-group. In domestic violence narratives, polarisation creates moral clarity, validates victimhood, and resists victim-blaming by linguistically constructing clear boundaries between victim and perpetrator.

Excerpt 5:

i. Miscommunication **between me and my husband**, Lack of trust, financial crisis, Make both of us to pick on each other and out of frustration and anger, it led to fight between us.
ii. He was basically a narcissist who turned all issues **both his wrong doings and mine** to my problem. His order only stands and I had to beg through the whole relationship.
iii. I have experienced verbal abuse from my partner. He said something **about people from his place not valuing women** and that I am a bad luck."

In 5 (i) above, the very dichotomy 'me and my husband' establishes a self-vs.other axis, which is the minimal linguistic marker of polarisation. Here, the victim (me) and the husband (my husband) are positioned as separate social actors, creating a contrast between the self and the other even within a relational in-group. The preposition 'between' emphasises relational distance and marks the boundary across which miscommunication, lack of trust, and financial stress operate. This subtle polarisation presents the husband as a distinct *Other* responsible for part of the relational tension, while simultaneously positioning the speaker as a morally and cognitively aware participant observing the conflict. In other words, these two individuals are constructed as contrasting actors within it. The narrative maintains moral and cognitive distance between self and other while still acknowledging relational entanglement.

Excerpt 5(ii) demonstrates conventional ideological square polarisation with stark moral boundaries between victim and perpetrator. The victim emphasises the partner's bad properties through multiple strategies. The victim's recognition and articulation of this strategy demonstrates meta-linguistic awareness she identifies that he employed polarisation against her. The phrase '*His order only stands'* constructs absolute power asymmetry. The possessive pronoun marks ownership of authority. This represents maximal polarisation, that is, all power to *Him* vs no power to *Her*. The victim's self-description emphasises her powerless position.

Finally, excerpt 5(iii) introduces a more complex form of polarization not just victim vs. perpetrator but cultural/regional polarisation. The perpetrator's reported statement about *His* people suggestcultural identity as the basis for patriarchal ideology and abuse justification. The phrase "people from his place" constructs collective identity through ethnic marker. This moves polarisation from individual (him vs. her) to group level (his people/culture vs. universal values or her people/culture).

Negative Labelling

Negative labelling involves attaching evaluative terms to social actors, actions, or situations. According to van Dijk (1998), labelling is a fundamental ideological practice: the terms we use to categorize people and events carry implicit value judgments that position actors within broader moral and social frameworks.

Excerpt 6

i. He was basically **a narcissist** who turned all issues both his wrong doings and mine to my problem.
ii. He just the type that **is very womanizer**, anything in skirt always follow, and it's causing a lot of problems in the house.
iii. He said something about people from his place not valuing women and that **I am a bad luck.**
iv. I won't call it violence by the way but I'll say it was **an emotional blackmail from my partner.**"

In Excerpt 6(i), the label 'narcissist' is deployed to present the partner in clinical and pathological terms. The intensifier 'basically' marks narcissism as core to his identity, and the relative clause that follows supplies behavioural evidence. In Excerpt 6(ii), the label 'womanizer' carries connotations of deceit, exploitation, and violation of normative ethical standards. The behavioural evidence that follows reinforces the systematic nature of his transgression and portrays women as objects of predation.

The label in Excerpt 6(iii) is particularly noteworthy, as the victim applies a negative label to herself, operating through a superstitious or supernatural discourse. This reflects the internalisation of cultural ideologies that delegitimize the victim, justify the perpetrator's behaviour, and naturalise subordination within a culturally authorised framework. Excerpt 6(iv) shows negative labelling extended to the nature of the relationship itself: the term 'emotional blackmail' functions simultaneously as a label for the abuse and as a hedge that avoids the more stigmatised category of 'domestic violence'. Across these excerpts, negative labelling functions as a multi-dimensional discursive strategy through which victims assign moral judgments and ground evaluative claims in observable behaviour or culturally recognised frameworks.

Evidentiality

Evidentiality is a discourse strategy through which speakers indicate the source, reliability, and authority of information. As van Dijk (2008) observes, in discourse contexts involving contested claims of harm, the deployment of evidential resources, particularly direct quotation and reported speech functions to transform personal testimony into substantiated evidence.

Excerpt 7:

i. You have to submit yourself to me. **He often said**
ii. **He said to me** that he didn't rape me, I didn't even make mention of that but he knew what he was trying was rape... **he**

said that we're both mature and didn't I know what was going to happen since I came to his house.

iii. Then he hit my head while saying 'I don't know why you never listen... I was crying telling him my mom was sick, **he replied with** "what do you now want me to do?

In excerpt 7(i), the narrative employs direct quotation to demonstrate the systematic and habitual nature of domestic violence discourse. The quoted utterance is presented with strong epistemic authority and exact recall. This strategy is powerful because it presents the perpetrator's language in an unmediated form, thereby allowing his words to function as self-incriminating evidence. The reporting clause "He often said" presents a pattern of discourse, which signals that patriarchal domination by the perpetrator was habitual rather than situational.In excerpt 7(ii), there is a combination of indirect reporting and explicit inferential reasoning. The clause '*He said to me that he didn't rape me*' foregrounds propositional content rather than exact wording. This indirect report is immediately followed by the victim's evaluative observation. This constitutes a clear evidential inference. Subsequent reported speech provides further evidential support for this interpretation. These utterances reveal justificatory and victim-blaming discourse grounded in rape myths and shared-responsibility framing.

Finally in excerpt 7(iii), evidentiality is achieved through the tight integration of direct quotation. The clause '*Then he hit my head while saying 'I don't know why you never listen*' temporally aligns verbal justification with physical violence. This revealed that the assault was accompanied by discourse that rationalised the violence. The second quotation, '*what do you now want me to do?*' is produced as a direct response to the victim's expression of emotional distress. When considered alongside the earlier quotation in the same excerpt, the repeated use of dismissive and justificatory speech across different moments of interaction demonstrates a patterned form of abusive discourse rather than an isolated utterance. Therefore, this strategy transforms personal testimony into substantiated evidence.

6. Discussion

This study examined seven key discursive strategies employed in victims' narratives of domestic violence in Ibadan metropolis. These strategies are not neutral linguistic choices but operate within broader social and cultural frameworks that influence how victims disclose experiences, manage stigma, and attribute responsibility. Collectively, they reveal the complex cognitive and ideological work performed through language in narrating violence.

Hedging and mitigation function as cognitive self-protective mechanisms that allow victims to acknowledge harm, while minimising the social and personal risks associated with the stigmatised identity of 'domestic violence victim'. The deployment of epistemic hedges, minimising adverbs, and indefinite pronouns simultaneously facilitates disclosure and constrains its interpretive force. This strategy reproduces cultural tendencies to normalise subtle forms of coercion as miscommunication, relational friction, or emotional instability, reflecting the pervasive societal minimisation of non-physical forms of abuse.

Passivisation shifts the discursive focus from the agent to the experience of the victim, enabling documentation of abuse while backgrounding or deleting perpetrator agency. As illustrated in the excerpt, agent deletion serves both psychological and sociocultural functions: it accommodates the difficulty of articulating traumatic experience and negotiates the cultural prohibition against publicly exposing family members. The alternation between passive and active constructions permits incremental and strategic attribution of responsibility, revealing how victims navigate the competing demands of truth-telling and social belonging.

Pronoun shifting operates as a sophisticated identity management strategy, enabling victims to construct themselves alternately as agents or patients, to diffuse or assign accountability, and to regulate relational intimacy and distance. In the analysis, plural and collective pronouns frame domestic violence as mutual conflict, thereby diffusing individual responsibility. Conversely, the gradual shift from distancing demonstratives to gendered pronouns

marks a movement from dissociation to direct naming of the abuser, reinforcing victim identity while assigning clear perpetrator responsibility.

Metaphorical framing renders abstract and emotionally complex experiences communicable by mapping them onto familiar source domains of physical injury, warfare, and economic exchange. As the analysis demonstrates, these conceptual metaphors are not merely stylistic devices but fundamental cognitive structures, as Lakoff and Johnson (1980) argue. In the context of domestic violence narratives, metaphors serve the dual function of translating private suffering into publicly intelligible terms and exposing the relational power asymmetries that underlie abuse.

Polarisation constructs moral and social contrasts between actors, delineating clear boundaries between victims and perpetrators in line with van Dijk's (2008) ideological square. This strategy validates victimhood, emphasizes perpetrator responsibility, and resists victim-blaming. In the analysis, polarization operates not only at the individual level but also across broader social and cultural categories, with ethnic identity invoked as the basis for patriarchal justification.

Negative labelling attaches evaluative categories to social actors, actions, and situations, communicating moral or social judgment through clinical, colloquial, and cultural discursive frameworks. As the analysis shows, labelling ground perpetrator condemnation in observable behavioural evidence, while self-directed labels reveal the internalisation of patriarchal ideologies. The rhetorical sophistication of victims' labelling practices demonstrates their active role as moral agents in the construction of their narratives.

Finally, evidentiality establishes the credibility and authority of narrative claims through the deployment of direct quotation and indirect reported speech. The analysis revealed that victims present perpetrators' actions as verifiable evidence of abuse, temporally aligning verbal justification with physical violence to demonstrate that abuse is accompanied by self-legitimising discourse. This

strategy transforms personal testimony into substantiated evidence, allowing narratives to move beyond mere allegation and situating them within a framework of observable, reportable discourse.

7. Conclusion

This study set out to investigate the discursive strategies deployed by domestic violence victims in Ibadan metropolis to construct, narrate, and negotiate their experiences. Drawing on van Dijk's (2006, 2008, 2018) socio-cognitive approach to Critical Discourse Analysis, the analysis of sixty-four written narratives from an online survey identified seven recurrent discourse strategies: hedging and mitigation, passivisation, pronoun shifting, metaphorical framing, polarisation, negative labelling, and evidentiality.

Hedging and mitigation allow victims to acknowledge harm while protecting their social face and avoiding stigma, reflecting deeply ingrained cultural pressures that minimise non-physical forms of abuse. Passivisation as a strategy enables victims to document violence without directly confronting or naming the abuser, demonstrating the sociocultural constraints on disclosure in Nigerian contexts. Pronoun shifting reveals the complex negotiation between collective relational identity and individual victimhood, as victims alternate between diffusing and attributing responsibility through strategic pronoun selection. Metaphorical framing is evident in the narratives as it renders abstract psychological harm communicable by mapping it onto familiar embodied and social schemas, bridging private experience and public discourse. Polarisation constructs moral clarity by sharply delineating victim from perpetrator through van Dijk's ideological square, operating both at the interpersonal and cultural-ideological levels.

Lastly, negative labelling deploys evaluative categories drawn from psychiatric, colloquial, and cultural discourses to delegitimise abusers and, in some cases, reflects internalised self-blame as a consequence of patriarchal ideology. Seventh, evidentiality transforms personal testimony into substantiated,

credible evidence of abuse through the deployment of direct quotation and reported speech.

Collectively, these findings demonstrate that domestic violence narratives are not merely accounts of experience but acts of critical interpretation, moral positioning, and cognitive sense-making, shaped by prevailing sociocultural norms in Nigerian society. Language simultaneously constrains victims' disclosures and serves as a resource for resisting stigma, constructing credibility, and asserting agency. This study contributes to discourse-analytic scholarship by foregrounding the voices of victims and illuminating the linguistic mechanisms through which personal trauma is narrated, negotiated, and rendered socially intelligible.

Future research should extend this inquiry to spoken narratives and cross-cultural comparative contexts, in order to assess these strategies across different linguistic and sociocultural settings.

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