

Language and Identity Construction on *Facebook* and *Nairaland* in Nigeria

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**Being a Thesis Submitted to the Department of Languages & Literature, Faculty of Arts,
Lead City University, Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria**

**In Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Award of Doctor of Philosophy
Degree (PhD) in English Language**

2023

Certification

This is to certify that this thesis was carried out by Abosede Bukola ALABI with Matriculation number LCU/PG/001508 in the Department of Language and Literature, Lead City University, Ibadan under my supervision.

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to Almighty God.

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Acknowledgement

I wish to acknowledge some special people who have contributed in one way or the other to my success in my PhD programme at LCU. Firstly, I give thanks to the ALMIGHTY GOD for watering my efforts, for without HIS grace and great mercies, I would not have been able to complete this research work. To HIM alone be all glory, honour and adoration.

My sincere appreciation goes to my supervisor Dr. U Davies for her constant support, her understanding, guidance and encouragement. I am so appreciative for her kindness to me. Thank you too to Professor Maahfouz Adedimeji, Dr. O. Akande, Dr K. Adeshina, Dr W. Busari, Dr. F. Jolaoso, Dr Aluko, Dr. E Senayon, Mr. O. Jegede, Monsieur O. Julius and Dr. M. Gbadegesin, for many inspiring discussions on my thesis topic and for helping me to direct this project to its final conclusions.

My appreciation will be incomplete if I fail to acknowledge the inputs of all the lecturers in the Department of Languages and Literature and Faculty of Arts, Lead City University for imparting knowledge in me.

I would like to thank my brother, Oyeyebi Ayomiposi for his endless supply of motivational support, advice and for the typesetting of this thesis.

Finally, to my husband, my children, my parents, my siblings, I could not have done this without you. I thank you all for your support.

I also thank you so much for your constant love and assistance in everything and for always being source of my strength in my very difficult moments. I am very proud of you and so lucky to call you my family members.

Even though the above-mentioned institutions and persons have assisted in the process of this research work, I alone take responsibility for the errors, if any, found in the work.

Abstract

The representation or performance of identity has become a notorious feature of domestic online interactions. Previous linguistic studies have focused more on the linguistic and stylistic features of online communication, with little attention paid to the meta-representations of identities. Therefore, this study examined identity portrayal in Facebook and Nairaland interactions, with a view to analysing the factors that underly identity representations and the performative (illocutions) acts. Performativity theory by Judith Butler, supported by Herbert Blumer's model of symbolic interactionism and M.A.K Halliday's systemic functional linguistics served as the framework. The qualitative design was employed. Purposive sampling was used to select 100 post and comments, 50 from Facebook, and 50 from Nairaland, due to their vast followership. Data was subjected to pragmatic analysis. Five common factors conditioned identity representations in Facebook and Nairaland, namely, age, national, ethnicity/religion, gender and group aggression. Condescender, progressor, regressor, and leveler were identified as age-based identities. Gender conditioned chauvinist, welfarist, seducer, dependent/independent, and patronizer identities. Ethnicity and religion produced chauvinist, opportunist, and entitlement identities. Group aggression produced the solidarist, activist, revolutionist, compromiser, and encourager/circularist identities. The identity representations were projected by performatives acts, namely, performative verbs, descriptive adjectival with performative actions, nominal performatives, and modal – conditional performatives. Pragmatic markers, namely, reference, inference, metaphor, and metapragmatic acts played key roles in the performance or representation of the identities in Facebook and Nairaland interactions. The performative and pragmatic approach clarifies the intricacies of identity in interactions in digital spaces that is growingly polarised by contemporary political influence and tactics.

Keywords: Symbolic interactionism, Performative acts, Identity construction, Mediated discourse

Word Count: 250

Table of Contents

Content	Page
Title Page	
Certification	i
Dedication	ii
Acknowledgement	iii
Abstract	iv
Table of Contents	v
Chapter One: Introduction	1
1.1 Background to the Study	1
1.2 Statement of the Problem	9
1.3 Justification of the Study	10
1.4 Aim and Objectives of the Study	10
1.5 Research Questions	11
1.6 Significance of the Study	11
1.7 Scope of the Study	11
1.8 Limitation of the Study	11
1.9 Operational Definition of Terms	12
Endnotes	14

Chapter Two: Literature Review	16
2.1 Conceptual Review	16
2.1.1 The Concept of Language	16
2.1.1.1 Function of Language	18
2.1.1.1.2 Language is Expressive	19
2.1.1.1.3 Language is Powerful	20
2.1.1.1.4 Language is Performative	20
2.1.1.1.5 Language is Dynamic	21
2.1.1.1.6 Language is used for Observations	21
2.1.1.1.7 Expressing Thought	22
2.1.1.1.8 Expressing Feelings	22
2.1.1.1.9 Expressing Needs	24
2.1.1.1.10 Language and Power	24
2.1.1.1.11 Language is used to Expresses our Identity	25
2.1.1.1.12 Language Affects our Credibility	25
2.1.1.1.13 Language is a Means of Control	26
2.1.1.1.14 Language and Entertainment	27
2.1.1.1.15 Language is used for Socialization	27
2.1.1.1.16 Language is Rational	28
2.1.2 The Concept of Identity	28

2.1.3	Type of Identity	31
2.1.3.1	Cultural Identity	31
2.1.3.2	Professional Identity	34
2.1.3.3	Ethnic and National Identity	34
2.1.3.4	Religious Identity	35
2.1.3.5	Gender Identity	36
2.1.3.6	Race Identity	39
2.1.3.7	Age Identity	39
2.1.4	Context	40
2.1.5	Identity Sociocultural Construct	40
2.1.6	Social Media Discourse	43
2.1.7	Language and Identity: Gender	45
2.1.8	Language and Identity: Race	48
2.1.9	Language and Identity: Social Status	49
2.1.10	Language and Identity: Age	50
2.1.11	Nigeria Pidgin	52
2.1.12	Code-mixing /Code switching	57
2.1.12.1	Code Switching	57
2.1.12.2	Code-Mixing	58
2.1.13	Facebook and Nairaland	59

2.1.13.1	Facebook	59
2.1.13.2	Nairaland an Online Community	63
2.1.13.2.1	Nairaland and the Public Sphere	65
2.1.14	Online Identity	68
2.1.15	Identity in Real World and Cyberspace	72
2.1.16	Visual Construction of Identity	74
2.1.17	Critical Discourse Analysis	74
2.2	Theoretical Framework	76
2.2.1	Judith Butler's Performativity Theory	77
2.2.2	Hebert Blumer's Symbolic Interactionism Theory	80
2.2.2.1	Nature of Symbolic Interactionism	82
2.2.3	Systemic Functional Linguistics	86
2.3	Review of Empirical Studies	89
2.4	Conceptual Model	99
2.5	Summary of Gap in Literature Reviewed	101
	Endnotes	103
Chapter Three: Methodology		111
3.1	Research Design	111
3.2	Population of the Study	111
3.3	Sample Size and Sampling Techniques	111

3.4	Description of Research Instrument	112
3.5	Validity of Research Instrument	113
3.6	Reliability of the Research Instrument	113
3.7	Method of Data Collection	114
3.8	Method of Data Analysis	114
	Endnotes	116
Chapter Four: Results and Discussion of Findings		117
4.1	Presentation of Data	117
4.2	Presentation of Research Questions	117
4.3	Discussion of Findings	224
	Endnotes	226
Chapter Five: Conclusion		229
5.1	Summary of Findings	229
5.2	Conclusion	237
5.3	Recommendations	239
5.4	Contributions to Knowledge	240
5.5	Suggested Areas for Further Research	241
	Bibliography	242
	Bio-data	257
	The University Compliance Certification	26

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