

Organisation and Allocation of Turns at the Oputa Panel Sessions¹

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Abstract:

This study investigates the turn-taking sequence, organisation of turns and the question patterns adopted during the examination of witnesses at the Oputa Panel sessions. The study employs purposive procedure in the selection of five questioning sessions as available on YouTube. The data is transcribed and analysed using the linguistic approach of discourse analysis. In the findings, the counsel and the witness situate their talks firmly in the legal field with adherence to the turn-taking rules, explicit through yes/no responses, providing explanation to information seeking questions and also through the way the lawyers structure their questions to reveal narratives that shed light on the petition. The study notes that all activities and accomplishments at the Panel are carried out through the singular act of questioning. In order to prevent the language of conflict resolution procedures from seeming to alienate certain parties, particularly lay litigants, the study suggested the creation of a system for resolving disputes that is not closely tied to the usage of a particular linguistic form. Future efforts should focus on integrating additional language theories, such as psycholinguistics and critical discourse analysis.

Keywords:

Oputa Panel Sessions; turn-taking; discourse analysis.

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Introduction

Courtroom discourse is a sub-category of professional discourse that exists, and is differentiated from common place conversation and communication in daily human interaction (Santos, 2004). Legal discourse explains the diverse relationships between the use of language and the field of law. The uniqueness of courtroom discourse can be ascribed to many factors that range from the explicit rules of evidence that guide and guard conversations in the courtroom to issues that bother on linguistic theories of Schema (mental representations of events or 'scripts'), Stylistics (modality; expression of the speaker's attitude toward the truth and certainty), Discourse Analysis (face threatening acts and turn-taking) and Pragmatics (Cooperative Principle in conversations) among discourse participants in the courtroom (Coulthard & Johnson, 2007). As identified by Coulthard & Johnson (2007), turn-taking is one important feature of courtroom conversation. Everywhere, both formal and informal discussion, people take turns when speaking. In a classroom setting, the roles that teachers and students play differ, and so do the ways in which they express themselves.

President Obasanjo founded the Nigerian Human Rights Violence Investigations Commission, widely referred to as the Oputa Panel, as soon as he took over as the country's first president of the fourth republic in 1999. The launch of the Commission garnered positive coverage in the media and from the general population. This was caused in part by the distinguished and well-known members of the Panel, such as Father Matthew Kukah, a former secretary-general of the Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria, and the chair, retired justice Chukwudifu Oputa. The Commission was tasked with investigating grave violations of human rights between the 15th of January 1966, when the civilian administration was overthrown, and the 28th of May 1999, when a civilian president was chosen.

After waiting for a period of six months for the publication of the report, the government dissolved the Commission in January 2003, citing the Commission's unconstitutionality as justification. The Supreme Court's decision supported the decision of the government. Consequently, the administration chose not to make the report public, and all of the Panel's recommendations were disregarded. As a result, the report's reach was constrained, despite the fact that several civil society and organisations made it available online (Oderemmi, 2005; Olokojobi, 2004).

Despite the limitations of the Panel among which were constitutional issues, the Commission remains a prominent legal institution with a unique form of legal discourse which attracted this study. The Commission sessions featured all the established procedures, participants and known discourses like turn-taking sequence, question patterns and the organisation of turns, all of which are peculiar to court proceedings. Hence, the Commission's discourse is categorised under forensic discourse. The basic focus of this study is to investigate turn-taking sequence, turn-taking organisation and

the question patterns at the Panel and to determine how these manifest through choices of language.

Discourse Analysis

The foundation of discourse analysis is an understanding of the relationship between language and the context in which it is used. Discourse analysis, according to McCarthy (1991), is the study of language in use, encompassing conversations, written texts of all kinds, spoken language, and highly institutionalized discourse forms. Discourse analysis establishes the relationship between a text - spoken or written - and its social setting. It is curious to know how a listener or reader would comprehend the speaker's (or writer's) intended message on a particular occasion and how the organisation of the generated discourse is influenced by the needs of the particular listener (or reader) in a particular situation (Brown and Yule, 1983; McCarthy, 1991; Sinclair and Coulthard, 1975). Therefore, words, phrases, and sentences included in a written speech should be viewed as proof of an author's endeavour to convey his ideas to a listener or reader. Discourse can be spoken or written, as the foregoing implies. Conversational cues, such as false starts, gestures, pitch, intonation, emphasis, incomplete sentences, topic change, etc., are what define spoken discourse.

The simplest way to understand spoken discourse is to think of it as 'utterances which are most often laced with extra-linguistic realities to achieve communicative effect,' as explained by Widdowson (2004). Therefore, informal writing should be regarded as utterances since it contains sentences that are not fully formed but nevertheless have meaning, including notes to friends, casual letters, and lecture notes. McCarthy (1991) asserts that coherent devices, the absence of false beginnings, hesitations, etc., are characteristics of written discourse. According to him, we do not have to put up with people speaking in printed language all at once. Because the writer usually had time to think through what to say and how to say it, the sentences are usually well-formed than in genuine, spontaneous speech.

A discourse is shaped and constrained by the nature of the discourse in the same manner as social institutions shape and constrain our identities, relationships, knowledge, and beliefs. Discourse analysis focuses on the function and structure of language in use, especially on the ways that language is organised in context and at the level of the sentence. Discourse analysis also examines intricate and abstract linguistic details, such as how authors and speakers use language in formal settings or how sociocultural perspectives affect the creation and comprehension of language.

Discourse analysts are interested in much more than just linguistic forms, even though discourse analysis is not wholly divorced from the study of grammar and phonology. Their worries include how two speakers can understand each other's grammar correctly, how to have a cohesive conversation between two speakers, what their respective roles



are in regard to one another, and what conventions or rules they adhere to when speaking to one another. Humans engage in a variety of spoken interactions, including phone calls, shopping, doctor-patient or job interviews, formal meetings or classroom discussions, and private conversations with friends and loved ones. Different settings, and opening and shutting mechanisms are used in these scenarios. Discourse Analysis is interested in all of these elements and aims to dynamically account for them with a different set of descriptive labels than those employed by traditional grammarians.

In Brown and Yule's (1983) general introduction to Discourse Analysis, they explain the circumstances that account for the successful analysis of discourse. These linguists categorise language according to the function it performs, which is a categorisation that coincides with the earlier linguists like Halliday (1970). Brown and Yule (1983) posit that the transactional function of language is message-oriented. The transactional nature of language becomes the focus of attention when language is used purposely for the transference of factual and propositional information. They maintain that for the effective performance of a transaction to be achieved, there must be clarity – the speaker should make what he says as clear as possible, because failure to do so often results in unpleasant consequences in the real world.

Theoretical Framework

Mostofi (2019) claims that a subset of the Discourse Analysis methodology is conversation analysis. The study of language analysis in both written and spoken form is known as discourse analysis. Since conversations are seen as spoken discourse, conversation analysis can be thought of as a subfield of discourse analysis. Accordingly, conversation analysis is subordinate and discourse analysis is superordinate. Bloomer claims that a few sociologists, including Sacks et al., created language studies as a subfield of ethnomethodology in the middle of the 1960s. They think that the methods people employ to start a discussion make up conversation. Thus, conversation analysis is the process of examining verbal or conversational interaction.

The study of conversational structures in social interactions is known as conversation analysis (Liddicoat, 2007). The focus of conversation analysis is on exchanges between two or more speakers who alternate turns (Fathimiyah, 2016). The goal of conversation analysis is to comprehend how individuals control their communication. Here, one speaker initiates a turn, and the subsequent speaker takes note of what the preceding speaker has said. Thus, conversation analysis is used to learn how to listen to each other throughout a discussion and reply appropriately (Hutchy and Woffitt, 1998). The development of social connection through language use is examined. Conversation analysis examines natural conversations that occur in daily life. Conversely, conversation analysis examines linguistic exchanges in contexts other than daily interactions, such as consultations between doctors and patients, news interviews, fair hearings, and so forth.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, sociologists Harvey Sacks, Emanuel Schegloff, and Gail Jefferson developed conversation analysis. The three issues they addressed were how individuals take turns in a conversation, how to open a conversation, and how to end a conversation.

This study is anchored on Walker's (1986) Turn-taking and Sequencing Theory in addition to Sacks et al. (1974) Organisation of Turn-taking for Conversation Theory as core tools in Discourse Analysis. From these scholars, it can be understood that turn, in interactional activity, is the beginning and the ending of talking. Sacks et al. (1974) have the evidence which supports the proposition that parties, in conversation, take turns quite efficiently. This conversation witnesses brief utterance that overlaps and few gaps between parties' alternating turns. They emphasise the fact where parties in conversation allocate and negotiate turns. The move made by the party that is speaking at turn is referred to as interactional activity. Insertion sequence and adjacency pair are identified as notable interactional activities. Question/answer pair, complaints, accusations, invitations, requests, proposals, offers and informative expressions are features of adjacent pairs. According to Sacks et al. (1974), adjacency pair is unique and known for instances of very tight type of sequence organization. It is the two-part sequences.

According to Mazeland (2006), insertion sequence is the insertion of pertinent words or ideas. It discusses how words or concepts are injected into conversations to make them more interesting. If the recipient is unclear about how the question was delivered, the answer or reaction will be delayed. It is also possible that the receiver, who is the second party, is unfamiliar with or even uninterested in the concepts or ideas communicated by the first party. In this situation, the parties use a variety of techniques to finish their turns, including the current speaker choosing another participant to be the next speaker, with the chosen participant starting another turn, and self-selecting if no other turn starts, and the current speaker continuing if the chosen participant is unable to finish.

Turns from both parties constitute transitional relevance. When taking turns, transition can be seen as each party's position throughout the conversation, negotiation, and point of completion allocation. If the points made by both parties are well-planned and conveyed, the adjacent pair will be structured and organised. In order to finish points in a certain amount of time during courtroom procedures, it is believed that turn-taking organisation is crucial. According to Walker (1986), turn-taking and sequencing appear to be the court's means of self-representation and persuasion for both the counsel and the judge. Through proper turning which refers to the transitional relevance place at speaking in contacts, sequencing of points can be effectively accomplished in turn-taking. Therefore, transitional relevance place is divided into three types by Sacks et al. (1974) – present speaker may choose the next speaker; next speaker may self-select if current speaker does not; and current speaker may, but is not forced to, continue speaking.

Methodology

The study adopts a content analysis research design and also employs qualitative procedures in the analysis of data. The data for the study are five purposively selected questioning sessions of the Commission. They comprise the transcribed recorded hearings which involved the verbatim discourses during the Commission's proceedings as retrieved from YouTube. A total number of 504 exchanges from the five selected cases are subsequently analysed.

Data Analysis

One of the important and obvious features of courtroom conversations is the question/answer approach. Questioning is a major tool employed by the lawyers during the courtroom/panel proceedings to unravel the matters surrounding the cases. In the table below, statistical details of all exchanges studied in the data are presented.

	Extract 1	Extract 2	Extract 3	Extract 4	Extract 5	Total	%
No. of Exchanges	118	80	190	54	92	534	100%
Wh-Q	14	03	16	03	08	44	16%
Statement-Q	17	10	22	07	10	66	25%
Probing-Q	06	04	10	06	06	32	12%
Open-Q	02	02	04	--	04	12	5%
Yes-no Q	14	12	25	06	13	70	26%
Statement followed by Question	06	08	18	05	05	42	16%
Yes-no Response	09	10	12	06	08	45	
Detailed Response	50	30	45	21	36	182	

Figure 1: Summary of Narrative Analysis

In reference to the table 1 above, six different styles of questioning are identified in all the data selected for this study. They are wh-question, yes-no question, statement question, probing question, open question and question proceeded by statement. There are 118 exchanges in Excerpts 1, 80 in Extract 2, 190 in Extract 3, 54 in Extract 4 and 92 in Extract 5. Adjacent pairs dominate discussions at the Panel; the witnesses present the second pair, and the lawyers present the first. These pairs were reoccurring through all

the conversations. Turn-taking is an important aspect of discourse and the study notes that this distinguishes discourse at the Panel from other types of discourse.

Each speaker's share of the conversation and the length of turns in the five extracts reveal something about control and topic switching. When there is a question-answer adjacency pair, the questioner (lawyer) has a "reserved right" to speak again right after the witness has finished speaking. A 'chaining' situation in which the turns of the question and the answer alternate indefinitely happens if this right is used to ask another inquiry (Sacks, 1995, p. 264). The analysis shows that the turns at the Panel are efficient. The lawyers in the excerpts utilise their rights to talk again immediately following the giving of the answers by the witnesses. As can be seen from the preceding samples, the Panel's discourse follows a sequence of questions followed by answers. Courtroom discourse could be distinguished and described by this peculiar feature of turn-taking.

It is observed that Excerpt 3 has the highest number of exchanges which is instructive to this study. The research notes that like other exchanges, the lawyer seeks to unravel the circumstances surrounding the death of Chief MKO Abiola, but the deliberate non-cooperation of Major Aliu results in the long exchanges witnessed. The lawyer has to resort to reconstructing questions as a way of extracting information from the witness. In Excerpt 3, Major Aliu is evasive, giving 'I don't know' responses in many instances of the turns. In view of this, the lawyer rephrases and reintroduces questions which account for the long exchanges.

There are more yes-no questions in all the extracts than any other types of questions as seen in the table except in Excerpt 1 where the statement question has the highest number. It is to be pointed out that questioning at the Panel is mostly yes-no question. Yes-no questions require the witness to either accept the suggested evidence or deny it. Conversations at the Panel are geared towards finding the truth, so the questions are presented to the witnesses for confirmation or otherwise. It means that lawyers at the Panel seek to establish certain facts. Closely related to the yes-no question is the statement-question. The statement-questions are not questions in their grammatical form. The statements are realised as questions through the change in the tone, from falling to rising. The pitch at the end of the statement, rather than falling is raised by the lawyers to indicate a question. Notably, in the absence of the rising tone, the witnesses understand and give answers as required in the adjacent pair of turn taking. The statement-question is characteristically synonymous with the yes-no question. Just like in a yes-no question, the fact is presented to the witnesses by lawyers to accept or deny. Both yes-no questions and statement-questions are employed by the lawyers in the excerpts to construct narratives. The strings of these questions deliver a narrative about the case being interrogated at the Panel.

It is noted that lawyers at the Panel use their institutional role to construct questioning turns (of yes-no and statement questions) that simply require confirmation from the witness. This leads the witnesses in all the extracts through a plot-like narration of their



stories. All of the extracts' sets of questions for the witnesses are mostly yes-or-no questions and statement-questions, which transform every question into an information-seeking exercise to extract additional crucial material for evaluation and evidence. This is evident in the type of questions directed at the witnesses in the five extracts. In total, 267 questions were asked of the lawyers; 44 of those questions were wh-questions, accounting for 16% of the total; 70 questions were yes-or-no questions, accounting for 26%; 66 questions were statement questions, accounting for 25%; 32 questions were probing questions, accounting for 12%; 12 are open questions, accounting for 5%; and 42 questions preceded by statements, accounting for 16%.

The study also notes extract 4, where the witness gives the equal numbers of yes-no responses to the numbers of yes-no questions asked by the lawyer. This is important, as it points to the fact that witnesses usually in the courtroom conversation avoid being 'truthful'. They beg questions and employ various tactics to frustrate the truth. But in extract 4, the witness, Professor Wole Soyinka, is seen as being willing to answer questions truthfully.

The highest percentage occupied by both yes-no and statement questions (26% and 25%) buttresses the fact that conversation at the Panel is fact-finding. Facts and evidence already sought after by the lawyers are presented to the witnesses in the extracts for confirmation or denial. 44 turns were wh-questions (16%) which required the witnesses to give an explanation and detailed description. This is also significant as the lawyers seek to extract specific information from the witnesses to expose/reveal their complicity or role in the case being interrogated. In Extract 1, the wh-questions seek to reveal the role played by Col. Yakasai in the murder of one of the bodyguards to late General Abacha, the former Head of State; in Excerpt 2, the wh-questions seek to unravel those behind the bomb blast at Durban Hotel, Kaduna and the role played by the witness in Excerpt 3, the wh-questions seek to reveal the cause of Chief MKO Abiola's death in the custody of the military rulers and the role played by the witness. In Extract 4, the questions probe into the tenure of Professor Wole Soyinka as the former Head of Federal Road Safety Commission and in Excerpt 5, the questions seek to unravel the role played by Sergeant Rogers in the death of Kudirat Abiola and others.

The wh-questions are also significant to the organisation of conversations at the Panel. The lawyers use a total of forty-four Wh-questions, or sixteen percent of the questions in all the extracts. Lawyers on the Panel use these sets of questions to get clarification on particular issues. These sets of questions help the lawyers to extract specific information from the witnesses in all the excerpts. Significantly, wh-questions manifest as a break in the sequence of yes-no questions in the excerpts.

Excerpt 1

17 Q: *When you got there, did you see General Diya?*

18 A: *No.*

19 Q: You said you followed the victim to Gbawagalada hospital. Did you see General Diya?

20 A: No.

21 Q: Did you see General Bamayi at the Airport?

22 A: No.

23 Q: You said that on that fateful day, you went to Abuja Airport?

24 A: I said that.

25 Q: You said you find the car burning?

26 A: I didn't say so.

27 Q: I put it to you, did you find the car burning?

28 A: I didn't find it burning.

29 Q: What happened to the car?

30 A: I saw a 504 saloon car.

Excerpt 3

126 Q: Now, you did say that you took part of the tea that Abiola was served? Did you take?

127 A: No

128 Q: You did not take part of the tea?

129 A; I did not.

130 Q: Do you know who prepare the tea?

131 A: The steward that worked in Aguda House.

132 Q: But the tea was served by a member of American delegation, to your knowledge.

133 A: Yes my lord, because the steward had already left before he requested for the tea.

134 Q: As a security expert, can you remember any single incident where a foreigner gave 135 food or tea or water to a detainee in Nigeria, ant incident?

136 A: My lord, the situation ...

137 Q: (Interruption) Can you remember one incident?

138 A: No, my lord.

139 Q: Now, did the member of the international doctors interview you?

140 A: No, my lord.

In the excerpts above, the lawyers alternate the questions to achieve the goal of the examination. In the extract from Excerpt 1, the yes-no questions in lines 17 to 27 are punctuated by a wh-question in line 29. However, in the extract from Excerpt 3, there is an alternation of statements-followed by questions, wh-question, yes-no question and statement question.

Generally, in an adjacent pair, the second part is expected to follow the first part immediately. However, there are instances where this does not occur so. The second part in the excerpt from Excerpt 1 as shown below does not follow immediately the



succeeding turn. The occurrence of another turn in between is regarded as an ‘insertion sequence’ between the first and second parts of the adjacent pair.

Excerpt 1

57 *Q: You were a medical student and you joined the army. How long were you at the*

58 *university before you graduated?*

59 *A: Let me educate you on the issue.*

60 *Q: (Cuts in) Don't educate me. Answer my question, how long have you been a medical*

61 *student before you graduated?*

62 *A: I spent one year.*

Line 62 is the second part of the adjacent pair of which line 57 is the first part. Lines 59 – 61 are an insertion sequence of the adjacent pair. The research notes that this occurrence is not common with the conversation at the Panel, but it is a feature of examination worthy of mention. According to the study, the witness's attempt to cut short the lawyer's planned conversation is what caused the incident. The witness is attempting to change the direction of the conversation, but the attorney is resisting.

According to the report, statements followed by questions are another crucial form of question that is used at Panel meetings. These sets of questions allow the lawyers to present ‘detailed’ information to the witnesses followed by questions. These statements could be a sentence or more. The study observes that these sets of questions are important and significant to the examination at the Panel sessions. The lawyers are conscious of vagueness and ambiguity in conversation and the need to avoid that while questioning the witnesses during examination. The lawyers in all the five extracts deploy these sets of questions. Excerpts of such types of questions are shown below.

Excerpt 1

83 *Q: When the incident happened, the Commissioner of Police said at the press conference* 84 *the matter would be properly investigated. Is that not correct?*

85 *A: He said so.*

Excerpt 2

10 *Q: Did you say you analyzed the various respects you received, And I want you to*

11 *confirm, to this honorable commission, specifically, was it that the Management of ICL* 12 *had any connection with bomber of the Hotel? Or are you saying that it is either the*

13 *Management ICL had a connection with number of bombings Or the Late James Bagada acted independently?*

14 *A: That is precisely what we mean.*

Excerpt 3

33 Q: According to the Americans, with whom you visited Chief Abiola, he showed them his 34 swollen ankle. As at 7th July, his ankle was still swollen. When you took over June 8, he 35 also showed you hi swollen ankle. Is that correct?

36 A: He did not show me on June 8.

The organisation of examination at the Panel is quite different from conversation outside the courtroom. This is an important revelation of this study's consideration of the extracts. Turn transfer at the Panel sessions is effected through "current speaker selects next", that is the lawyers have the sole power to select the next speaker. In fact, the conversation at the Panel involves only two participants almost all the times: the lawyers (questioners) and the witnesses (questionees). It is noted that turns taking at the Panel session is not fixed and the length of each examination in the five extracts is not specified in advance; rather the response and the cooperation of the witness determine the number of turns and the length.

There are two important distinct types of examinations at the panel. First, it is revealed that questions and answers are the dominant types of turns that occur in all the extracts, which could be coded as Q-A-Q-A-Q-A sequences. This feature has been addressed. The second turns are pre-allocated, meaning that the examining parties have the right to ask questions while the examined parties have the obligation to answer them. So, this right of the examining parties gives the lawyers the situation to ask questions and as well determine the relevance of an answer from the witness. In the five extracts, the lawyers exercise this right, as seen in the extracts. The lawyers ask questions after each response from the witness and reframe or redirect their questions whenever the lawyers in the extracts are not satisfied with the response. This is so pronounced in Excerpt 3 specifically. Aside from Extract 3, all other extracts feature this peculiar characteristic of courtroom conversation. Examination at the Panel is a two-party speech exchange system: conversation is arranged as a sequence of question and answer turns that are allocated to lawyers and witnesses respectively.

The dominant and only activity of the participants at the Panel is question and answer turn. This relatively only activity is used to accomplish many goals as observed by the study. The question-and-answer turn sequences of the conversation at the Panel are used to accomplish indirect accusation, denials, justifications, challenges and rebuttals. Some of these actions are achieved in the extracts considered for this study. It is revealed that the turn-taking sequences of examination at the Panel operate as a constraint that makes participants to perform their actions indirectly in the making of questions and answers. Besides, it is a constraint that both lawyers and witnesses at the Panel use as resources in managing their actions. Let us consider these extracts:

Excerpt1

42 Q: And it was you who took the custody of the corpse for burial?

43 A: No.



- 113 Q: *And let's get this straight. As a medical doctor, you will agree with me that it is*
- 114 *possible to accelerate the death of someone by some sorts of dangerous injection.*
- 115 A: *Not as far as I know.*
- 116 Q: *Have you not heard of someone's life being cut short as a result of medical process?*
- 117 A: *Not to my knowledge.*
- 118 Q: *Haven't you heard of massive killing, people dying as a result of pain, hardship*
- 119 *through medical process?*
- 120 A: *You are asking about a process called euthanasia.*
- 121 Q: *What does it do when you inject the patient?*
- 122 A: *You see euthanasia is usually a method agreed by the family and doctors before it can* 123 *be administered on the patient.*
- 124 Q: *It kills the patient?*
- 125 A: *It doesn't it kill the patient.*
- 126 Q: *What does it do?*
- 127 A: *It works to end the suffering of the patient as agreed by the family.*
- 128 Q: *Now you agreed it was a drug given to end the suffering , and you know about it?*
- 129 A: *I know about it.*
- 130 Q: *Have you used it before?*
- 131 A: *No.*
- 132 Q: *And I put it to you, on this occasion, in order to destroy evidence of what actually* 133 *happened, it was convenient for Aso Rock to put his life to an end.*
- 134 A: *I told you that ...*
- 135 Q: *(Cuts in) Do you agree or not?*
- 136 A: *I don't agree.*

Excerpt 2

- 19 Q: *Now you had cause to seal up the premises of ICL when you arrested one of its staff.*
- 20 A: *It is not correct my Lord. I didn't seal off the premise of the ICL.*

Excerpt 3

- 33 Q: *According to the Americans, with whom you visited Chief Abiola, he showed them his* 34 *swollen ankle. As at 7th July, his ankle was still swollen. When you took over June 8, he* 35 *also showed you his swollen ankle. Is that correct?*
- 36 A: *He did not show me on June 8.*
- 37 Q: *When did he show you?*
- 38 A: *I can't remember exactly.*
- 39 Q: *Did he tell you he had hypertension?*
- 40 A: *He didn't tell me.*

78 Q: *'What role do you want to play in the politics of Nigeria after your release?'*
That was 79 what they asked him.

80 A: *I can't remember.*

115 Q: *Good, since you were in these meetings, did Chief Abiola give up his mandate to your 116 knowledge on June 12? Did he?*

117 A: *To my knowledge, I don't know.*

Excerpt 4

47 Q: *The director prescribed by the decree shall be appointed by the President. But you*

48 *illegally appointed your friend as the Chairman of the Board.*

49 A: *That is not true. Every appointment which was made went through the Secretary to the 50 Government for approval. And there was absolutely no objection.*

58 Q: *That means you were running an illegal body.*

59 A: *If you want to call it illegal, what I know is that it began its operation even before the 60 inauguration of the Board. I have told you about the basic research that went on long*

61 *before the Board was inaugurated*

As stated above, questioning at the Panel is utilized to accomplish different activities. In the immediately preceding excerpts, lines 42 to 43 of Extract 1 accomplish accusation; lines 113 to 136 accomplish 'justification'. The lawyer, through the questions, tries to justify the suspicion that the victim was poisoned and that the witness is a culprit. Also, in lines 19 to 20 of Extract 2, the witness's response accomplishes 'denial'; questions in lines 33 to 40 of Extract 3 accomplish a 'challenge' and lines 78 to 80 accomplish 'denial'. In lines 47 to 48 of Extract 4, the question accomplishes 'accusation' while the response in lines 49 to 50 accomplishes 'rebuttal'.

The Excerpt 4 is observed to be smooth and efficient. The examination is highly conversational, as the witness provides yes/no responses and detailed explanations to questions where necessary. Though the lawyer seems to be too confrontational, the witness exhibits a high level of civility and calmness. This buttresses Coulthard and Johnson (2007)'s assertion that professional witnesses give more cooperative response and exert 'authority' during examination. However, in Extract 3, Major Aliu is non-cooperative. He avoids answering directly most questions put to him, while his responses are dominantly 'I don't know', 'I was not aware'. The examination becomes obviously of the witness's denial and evasiveness.

The study notes negative judgements in cross-examination. The lawyer in extract 4 displays subjectivity which is reinforced with the use of 'illegally' and 'illegal' in lines 47-48 and line 58, '*...But you illegally appointed your friend as the Chairman of the Board'* 'That means you were running an illegal body'. The deliberate use of these words serves



as a spotlight that throw light on the lawyer's subjectivity, which negates the politeness principle in language use.

Substantially, by general overview of the study's findings, questions at the Panel are highly constrained and constraining courtroom interactions. The nature of the Panel conversation places restrictions on the types of questions and methods that lawyers can ask. However, the witnesses in every extract are limited by two factors: first, the questions are structured to naturally limit the witnesses' answers in order to create a particular type of evidence; and second, the witnesses are naturally limited as a result of the lawyers' framing.

Conclusion

This study concludes that the Oputa Panel, as an instance of legal discourse, is absolutely different from the everyday discourse. The analysis of the conversation at Panel indicated a genre of language as both parties (the examiner and the examined) deployed words, phrases, sentences and linguistic elements in the consciousness of the institutional status of the Panel. The organisation of examination by the examining party is carefully done in such a way that it led to a narration. This narration is the case built by the examining parties and the proof they attempted to establish. In turn-taking rule, all excerpts conformed to turn-allocation rule. It is further revealed that the extract as typical courtroom discourse conforms to the indications of TRPs. The study notes that all activities and accomplishments at the Panel are carried out through the singular act of questioning. The lawyer controls the topic, changes it and asks questions from the witnesses.

Conflict of Interest

The author hereby declares that no competing financial interest exists for this manuscript.

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