

**“WE ARE NOT RECRUITING”’: DISCLAIMER STRATEGIES FOR FACE-SAVING IN SELECTED REJOINDERS BY THE NIGERIA POLICE FORCE**

**Temitope Michael AJAYI PhD**

*Department of Linguistics and African Languages  
University of Ibadan, Nigeria*

*michealtemitope@yahoo.com*

**ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6607-9418>**

*Corresponding author*

**Oluwatosin Adebayo ADESOPE**

*Department of Linguistics and African Languages  
University of Ibadan, Nigeria*

*oaadesope@gmail.com*

**ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0000-9763-4429>**

**Temidayo AKINRINLOLA PhD**

*Department of English*

*McPherson University, Seriki-Sotayo, Oyo-Ogun State, Nigeria*

*akinrinlolatemidayo@yahoo.com*

**ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5203-7441>**

**‘Tayo ADEBAYO**

*adetayooluwasegun08@gmail.com*

*Department of Linguistics and African Languages  
University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria*

**ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0003-4624-561X>**

**Abstract**

*This study investigated face acts and disclaimer strategies in selected rejoinders by the Nigeria Police Force (NPF). Drawing on Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory (specifically the concept of Face), and van Dijk's model of Critical Discourse Analysis, this study reports that legitimisation, refutation, deresponsibilisation and dispelling of rumours are the core disclaimer strategies evident in the rejoinders issued by the NPF. The NPF relies on these rejoinders to perform face-saving acts amid criticisms and serious allegations*

*levelled against them by the Nigerian public. These findings underscore the strategic use of language by the Nigeria Police Force to manage public perception, preserve institutional credibility, and navigate the delicate terrain of accountability in the face of societal scrutiny.*

**Keywords:** *Disclaimers, Rejoinders, Nigeria Police Force, Nigerian security agencies*

### **Introduction**

The Nigeria Police Force (NPF) faces a serious image problem among the public they are meant to serve and protect (Dalhatu, 2013). This issue is compounded by frequent allegations of misconduct, power abuse, human rights infringement and inefficiency (Dauda, 2023; Oluku, 2023). In the view of Sogunro (2016), the effectiveness of the Nigeria Police is questioned amid rising insecurity from "Fulani herdsmen" attacks. Udefuna et al. (2014) report that police brutality is one of the major failings of the NPF that has attracted public scorn and condemnation to the Force, and it negatively affects their capacity to maintain law and order in the Nigerian society. Another instance of police misconduct observed in Nigeria is the arbitrary setting up of roadblocks. Although the stated purpose of these checkpoints is to curb crime on major highways, the police are often accused of using them for the collection of bribes and extortion of drivers (Onwunyerimadu, 2022). This prevalence of abuse, brutality and other anomalies within the NPF has resulted in the loss of public support and cooperation for the NPF (Akinyetun, 2021). This aligns with the submission of Umoru (2019), that public perception of the police remains negative, with low and unfavourable public confidence in the NPF. Alemika (2022) puts it succinctly by stating that the estimation of the police in the eyes of the public becomes lowered. Given this context, the Nigeria Police often resort to the release of rejoinders to address accusations, correct false narratives, and manage their institutional image. Conceptually, rejoinders are an official response used to refute claims, clarify issues, defend positions and challenge opposing points of view. They are often done through carefully crafted language and rhetorical strategies. It is worthy of note that rejoinders issued by the NPF are not merely factual responses to allegations; they are carefully employed communicative

acts that reveal how the police navigate public discourse and assert authority.

While numerous studies have examined the Nigeria Police from diverse perspectives, especially regarding Police-Suspect Interactions (Farinde et al., 2015; Ajayi, 2016; Ajayi & Akinrinlola, 2020; Aina, 2021; Akinrinlola, 2021a–d; Sunday & Akinrinlola, 2021; Akinrinlola & Ajayi, 2022; Ajayi et al, 2024; Akinrinlola et al, 2024), others have explored rejoinders by state actors (Akpabio, 2004; Adegaju & Famakinwa, 2018). However, linguistic strategies in official NPF rejoinders remain understudied. This gap in scholarship limits understanding of how the NPF strategically uses language for defensive public relations and image management—highlighting the need for focused investigation. This study investigates how the Nigeria Police Force’s rejoinders deploy disclaimer strategies for institutional face-saving, *via-a-vis* image repair and authority assertion. It draws on Face/Politeness theory and van Dijk’s Critical Discourse Analysis to explore strategic communication, ideology, and meaning-making. Findings promise insights into police accountability, public trust and discourse practices, thereby expanding scholarship on Nigerian police language and informing training policies.

### **Literature Review**

A plethora of scholarly works has commendably engaged the discourse of the Nigeria Police and the rejoinders issued by different state actors in the Nigerian society, separately and from different points of view. Nweze et al (2020) contend that the Nigeria Police's public relations strategy is aimed at defending and protecting the interests of the elite. The study concludes that NPF communication efforts focus on justifying their actions or denying misconduct. This defensive posture largely contributes to the persistent negative image of the police and undermines efforts to build trust with the public. Ajisafe and Ibitoye (2020) combine SPSS and ANOVA analysis to examine the connection between communication and effective policing in Nigeria. The study partly attributes the inefficiency and ineffectiveness of the NPF to poor internal and external communication systems. Okemuyiwa and Akeem (2019) explore the relationship between the Nigeria Police and the citizens by focusing on the effectiveness of police-public relations and communication strategies. Findings highlight the need for officers of the NPF to be

trained in effective communication and respectful interaction with the public. In addition, Farinde et al. (2015) examine discourse control strategies in police-suspect interactions within the purview of Speech Act Theory and Thomas's Meta-pragmatic Acts. The study's analysis identifies four meta-pragmatic acts, which include: illocutionary force indicating devices (IFIDs), discoursal indicators, meta-discoursal comments, and upshots and reformulations. Also, Sunday and Akinrinlola (2021) investigate the pragmatic strategies deployed by the police in dealing with suspects' denials during interrogation. Findings indicate that officers of the NPF usually employ various discursive strategies (lexical choices, speech acts, and paralinguistic cues) to manage these denials. They do this by appealing to suspects' emotional and psychological needs, constructing testimonies against suspects, emphasising suspects' rights, and engaging detention tactics. Anumudu and Abaya (2019) analyse the language of dominance adopted by personnel of the NPF during suspects' interrogation in Kaduna, Nigeria. The work examines how the police use language to establish and sustain authority and dominance. It is revealed that in a bid to create an atmosphere where the police maintain control during conversation with suspects, they employ strategic discourse devices which include: topic control, question and answer sequences, vocabulary choices and pronoun usage.

Furthermore, Adegbite and May (2022) examine how police and suspects strategically use code-switching (CS) as a socio-pragmatic discourse strategy during interrogations, with particular focus on how this linguistic device is employed to achieve institutional and personal goals. The study, situated within the ambit of CDA and Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT), reveals that CS is adopted by interrogating officers to wield coercive power, deliver warnings, morally confront suspects, and reinforce authority. From the standpoint of Gumperz's Interactional Sociolinguistic Theory, Akinrinlola (2021b) engages context-specific discursive strategies employed by investigating police officers (IPOs) to establish rapport with suspects during interrogation in Nigeria. The study mentions that IPOs employ discourse strategies such as topic change to redirect attention, appeal to suspects' empathy and positive reinforcement. The study concludes that rapport building in police-suspect interactions (PSIs) rests heavily on understanding and manipulating contextual factors. Ajayi et al (2024) reveal how

suspects manipulate socio-cultural sentiments in manipulating investigating officers during PSIs; while Akinrinlola et (2024) demonstrate how suspects explore contradictions in PSIs to contest the institutional power of investigating officers.

Adegoju and Famakinwa (2018) discuss the need to address rejoinders to claims by presenting supporting facts and engaging in preliminary arguments to clear objections. The nature of Nigerian newspaper rejoinders is the thesis of Akpabio (2004). Within the remit of Social Responsibility Theory, the research analyses types of rejoinders evident in two Nigerian newspapers (The Guardian and The Punch) over a three-year period (1999-2001). A clear finding of the paper is that the majority of the rejoinders exhibited adversarial characteristics and contained abusive language directed towards journalists and media organisations.

Extant literature has commendably investigated the Nigeria Police on one hand, and the rejoinders deployed by various state actors in Nigerian society, on the other. The point of departure between those studies and the present one is that this study bridges the two areas of study (that have been previously explored separately) by investigating selected rejoinders issued by the NPF. This study agrees with findings from previous studies that the Nigeria Police employ certain discourse devices when interrogating suspects. However, it argues that beyond suspect interrogation, the NPF adopt specific discursive strategies in their press releases and public statements. In other words, existing studies have largely focused on the linguistic devices used in PSIs. The present study, however, shifts attention to the discourse devices (particularly those used to negotiate face) evident in the press releases and statements of the NPF addressed to the Nigerian public. Likewise, this study agrees with Uduma et al. (2020) that the Nigeria Police take advantage of social media for community engagement and image management. While their study does not explicitly address rebuttals issued by the police, the current research contends that the NPF employ certain communicative tactics (identified in this study as disclaimer strategies) in their rejoinders to maintain authority and manage public criticism. It is against this background that this study investigates the use of disclaimer strategies for institutional face-saving in selected rejoinders by the Nigeria Police Force.

### **Theoretical framework**

#### ***The concept of face under politeness theory***

Face act is a notion in pragmatics that depicts one's public self-image that every member wants to claim for themselves (Ajayi, 2014, 2016; Aremu & Babatunde, 2020). The notion has become relevant and is at the forefront of diverse academic fields, including semantics, pragmatics, sociolinguistics, political science, and psychology (Ionel, 2011). Erving Goffman, an anthropologist and sociologist, introduced the concept of "face" in 1967 in his book titled "Interaction Ritual" (Rashid, 2022, p. 43). He linked the concept with the notion of being humiliated, embarrassed, or losing face" (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 61). Goffman (1967) suggests that individuals are not only required to protect their faces but also to safeguard the faces of others. This indicates a mutual reliance on each other's face preservation, as threats to one's face could unintentionally expose others' faces in the same discourse. Hence, "face is a dyadic notion encompassing both the speaker and the addressee" (Bull & Fetzer, 2010, p. 159), and it is a phenomenon achieved via interaction. Tshetu (2023) notes that face is "a linguistic term used in a metaphorical sense to mean the reputation or the standing in the society" (Tshetu, 2023, p. 89). He contends that the comprehension of the notion of face presents it as a concept that is equally vulnerable among interactants. Locher (2008) develops the face as a mask or an image that people present to themselves during a particular interaction. The image is not fixed, but it is negotiated in ongoing interactions. Face can be pursued in diverse conversational and interactional discourses closely relating to reputation, as it showcases how people desire to be perceived and respected. This view is supported by Odebunmi's (2003, p. 78) submission that face is the emotional and social feelings of self which an individual has and expects others to recognise. Ajayi (2014, 2016) contends that a face can either be saved or damaged based on the choice of words deployed by the interactants in a discursive engagement. Therefore, all human communication involves both face-saving and face-damaging elements. In some aspects of linguistic scholarship, face has been connected to the concept of politeness.

Shahrokhi and Bidabadi (2013) note that the term "Polite" is traced to the 15th century. Politeness, in literal or general terms, is linked to being tactful, modest and friendly to people. Brown and

Levinson (1987) hold that politeness is a universal concept. The concept aims to elucidate the speaker's motives for mitigating face threats inherent in certain face-threatening acts. Politeness promotes societal orderliness and cooperation. Haugh et al. (2013) disclose that politeness is not limited to traditional acts of linguistic etiquette such as formal apologies, so-called "polite" language, and address terms, although it incorporates all of these. Instead, it involves and encompasses a range of interpersonal behaviours, from the good to the bad. Politeness is primarily about how people establish and maintain social cohesion through diverse verbal and non-verbal methods to mitigate speeches that can cause social disharmony and conflict (Brown & Levinson, 1987). The current analysis draws on the concept of face under the ambit of Brown and Levinson's (1987) Politeness Theory.

#### **van Dijk's model of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)**

CDA is an approach that primarily studies how social power, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted through language in social and political contexts. Teun van Dijk sees CDA as a means to analyse the role discourse plays in social inequality and dominance, focusing on the relationship between language and power. CDA is also considered by van Dijk to be a multidisciplinary model which is primarily aimed at understanding and challenging social inequalities embedded in texts and speech (Salma, 2018). van Dijk's approach to CDA is a model that analyses discourse through three independent but interrelated dimensions: the text itself, social cognition, and social context. The text dimension is concerned with the analysis of structural aspects of discourse, including strategies, themes and levels such as macro and micro, to understand how meaning is constructed and conveyed. The social cognition dimension examines how individual mental models, beliefs, and ideologies influence the production and interpretation of discourse, emphasising the role of creators' consciousness and power awareness. The social context dimension investigates the broader societal and power relations that shape discourse development, emphasising how discourse functions within social and political structures. The argument of van Dijk is that CDA should extend beyond the relationship between discourse and social structure. He submits that language use and discourse inherently involve the intervening mental models, goals and general social representations

(such as knowledge, attitudes, ideologies, norms and values) of language users. This perspective establishes a tripartite model for studying ideology, triangulating between society/culture/situation, cognition, and discourse/language, forming the basis of van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach (Amoussou & Allagbe, 2018). The integration of the three dimensions (text, social cognition and social context) allows for a detailed analysis of how language reflects, reproduces or challenges ideology and social power in communication. This approach is particularly relevant to this study as it exposes the ideological underpinnings of the disclaimer patterns in the selected rejoinders.

### **Methodology**

This study employed a qualitative research design. Data were collected from the official Facebook and X (formerly Twitter) pages of the Nigeria Police Force (NPF), alongside two online blogs: *Asiwaju Media* and *Reliable Source NG*. These media platforms are reliable fora through which the NPF interacts with the general public. The primary data were sourced from a corpus of forty (40) randomly sampled press releases by the NPF from 2022 onward. The selected rejoinders addressed various critical issues, including the Force's modes of operation, recruitment processes, leadership tenure, disapproval of specific public behaviours and the reiterated disbandment of a particular unit within the Force. The period between 2022 and the time of this study has been a period during which the NPF has made concerted efforts to project a positive institutional image for itself, following the barrage of attacks it received during the 2020 EndSARS protests in the country. Hence, the period has been characterised by press releases and counter-press releases to achieve this institutional goal. To explore the ideological dimensions embedded within the data, the study employed Face/Politeness Theory and van Dijk's model of CDA. The collated data were thoroughly examined and analysed to identify patterns of disclaimers, which were categorised as strategies. No translation was required as all data were originally in the English language.

### **Data presentation and analysis**

This section presents an analysis of the gathered data, referred to as excerpts. The disclaimer patterns evident in these excerpts have been thematically categorised into distinct strategies.

#### ***Legitimisation***

Legitimisation refers to the act or process of making something legal, justifiable and valid. It is not unusual for the NPF to employ certain discourse resources in a bid to argue for the legitimisation of their actions. An example of this is provided in the excerpt below.

#### **Excerpt 1**

*POLICE REFUTE SOWORE'S MISLEADING CLAIMS ON IGP EGBETOKUN'S TENURE.*

**Clarification:** *Appointment is Legal, Duly Confirmed by Police Council.*

*The Nigeria Police Force hereby refutes, in clear and unequivocal terms, the baseless and misleading claims recently attributed to Mr. Omoyele Sowore alleging that the tenure of the Inspector-General of Police, IGP Kayode Adeolu Egbetokun, Ph.D., NPM, is illegal. Such claims are entirely unfounded and seek to undermine the legitimacy of the IGP's appointment as well as public confidence in the Nigeria Police.*

*IGP Egbetokun's appointment is firmly grounded in law, specifically PART III, Section 7 (6) of the Police Act, 2020 (as amended). This provision explicitly states that "The person appointed to the office of the Inspector-General of Police shall hold office for four years." Moreover, his appointment was duly ratified by the Police Council, and he has received the requisite confirmation letter from the Presidency, validating his tenure from October 31, 2023, to October 31, 2027, in line with the provisions of Section 8A of the executive bill passed which amended the Police Act, clearly stating that "Any person appointed to the office of Inspector-General of Police shall remain in office until the end of term stipulated in the letter of appointment in line with the provisions of section 7(6) of this Act. The amendment aims to provide stability and continuity in the leadership of the Nigeria Police Force, enabling the IGP to implement long-term plans and policies without fear of abrupt termination. This change is expected to enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of the police force in maintaining law and order in the country.*

**“We are not recruiting”’: Disclaimer Strategies for Face-saving in Selected Rejoinders by the Nigeria Police Force**

---

*It is crucial for members of the public to be aware that IGP Egbetokun’s status as the 22nd Indigenous Inspector-General of Police is both legally and procedurally sound. The Nigeria Police Force views Mr. Sowore’s unfounded assertions as an attempt to erode public trust and foster confusion regarding the force’s leadership. Dissemination of inaccurate information, particularly about the IGP’s standing, has the potential to compromise the security framework of our nation and impede our collective efforts to ensure peace and order...*

<https://npf.gov.ng/news/details/565>

The above press release is a direct face act which is aimed at defending and upholding the integrity of the police institution and its leadership. Sowore's claim that the IGP's tenure has lapsed directly threatens the positive face of the police by questioning the legitimacy and legal adherence of the police boss and the entire police structure. The press statement performs a "bald on-record" strategy by refuting in clear terms that Sowore's claims are baseless and misleading. This exactness, while potentially face-threatening to Sowore, is deemed necessary to emphatically reassert the police's image and authority. By describing Sowore's claims as "entirely unfounded" and "an attempt to erode public trust and foster confusion", the police portray him as a deliberately deceptive person. The NPF also engage in "positive politeness" towards the interests of the public by seeking common ground and stressing shared goals. This is evident in the statement: "it is crucial for members of the public to be aware that IGP Egbetokun’s status as the 22nd Indigenous Inspector-General of Police is both legally and procedurally sound," and imploring citizens to "focus on objective discussions that advance our shared mission of safeguarding lives and property." This is an attempt to align the actions of the police with the public's best interests, thereby enhancing their (the police's) own positive face. Another discursive strategy evident in the press release is credentialing disclaimer. The entire press release functions as a robust credentialing move. It provides precise legal backing ("PART III, Section 7 (6) of the Police Act, 2020 (as amended)"), details of confirmation ("duly ratified by the Police Council," "requisite confirmation letter from the Presidency"), and specific dates ("October 31, 2023, to October 31, 2027"). All these legal and procedural justifications function as a powerful disclaimer which preempts any further challenge to the legitimacy of

the current IGP's tenure. By presenting these facts, the police argue that they have the legal and administrative proof that the tenure of the NPF's boss is not illegal. This strengthens their claim to authority and competence and also protects their positive face. From the standpoint of van Dijk's CDA, the press release reveals how language is used to construct and sustain power relations. At the level of text, the macro-structure is unambiguous: refutation, justification, and warning. The lexical choices describe Sowore's allegations as negative ("baseless," "misleading," "unfounded," "disinformation") and the position of the NPF as positive ("firmly grounded in law," "duly ratified," "legally and procedurally sound"). This binary opposition intends to legitimise the police and delegitimise Sowore. The emphasis on provisions of the Police Act and official procedures exemplifies the institutional power of the police and the state, presenting their actions as lawful. The reiteration of the legality and proper procedure of the IGP's appointment in the press statement attempts to instill a shared understanding (between the police and the public) that there is no controversy, only unfounded claims. The warning against "perpetuating such unfounded narratives" and jeopardising "national security" is a clear attempt to control the cognitive processing of information by the public, framing dissent as a threat to societal stability. This is a clear demonstration of the authority of the police to influence public opinion and discourage further questioning. The rejoinder also serves as a performative act of power maintenance. It goes beyond correcting misleading information and extends to asserting dominance in the public discourse. The police, as a law enforcement agency in the county, are using their institutional voice to silence a dissenting voice of Omoyele Sowore, whose review of the IGP Egbetokun's tenure represents a challenge to their authority.

### ***Refutation***

According to Walton et al (2012), a refutation is a series of dialogue moves in which one party uses an argument to attack and defeat an opposing argument made by the other party earlier. Refuting a claim involves the provision of evidence in order to prove it untrue. In the excerpt below, the Nigeria Police Force employs refutation to address a wrong narrative.

**Excerpt 2**

*RE: CLARIFICATION ON VIRAL VIDEO OF POLICE  
HELICOPTER OPERATION IN KOGI STATE*

*The Nigeria Police Force wishes to address a video currently circulating online, depicting a police helicopter landing and taking off in an area with armed individuals. Contrary to the misleading and false narrative suggesting that the aircraft was used to deliver food items to bandits, the Force categorically states that the video captures a legitimate security operation. The operation in question was carried out on Saturday, 10th May, by joint security forces, including local vigilante groups, and hunters at the Obajana axis of Kogi State. The operation was part of sustained efforts to combat banditry, kidnapping, and other forms of criminality within the region. The police helicopter was deployed as part of the mission to provide aerial support and surveillance to ground forces involved in the tactical operation. The Force hereby urges members of the public to disregard the unfounded and mischievous claims surrounding the viral video. Citizens are encouraged to rely solely on official police communication channels for accurate and verified information regarding security activities. The Nigeria Police Force remains committed to safeguarding the lives and property of all Nigerians and will continue to collaborate with relevant stakeholders to enhance public safety and national security.*

*(<https://www.npf.gov.ng/news/details/673>)*

In the above press statement, the NPF employs a sophisticated strategy of face management and manipulation of discourse to counter the citizens' interpretation of a video circulating on the internet. The language deployed in the press release indicates that the NPF is primarily concerned with protecting its own positive face, which can be seen as their desire to be seen as competent, efficient, and reliable in the maintenance of law and order. The "misleading and false narrative" of the helicopter delivering food to bandits poses a significant threat to this positive face, as it directly undermines their authority and public perception. The press statement serves as a face-saving act, which aims to repair the damage caused by the public interpretation of the video. By stating that "the video captures a legitimate security operation" and providing a thorough account of the events, the police are attempting to re-establish their credibility and competence. The phrase "sustained efforts to combat banditry,

kidnapping, and other forms of criminality" further reinforces this positive image and also highlights their unwavering commitment to law enforcement in the nation. Applying van Dijk's model, several discursive strategies can be said to be at play. The phrase "Clarification on Viral Video" immediately sets a framing which primes the public for an explanation rather than an admission of wrongdoing. The use of declarative constructs like "categorically states" and "hereby urges members of the public to disregard" serves as an attempt to control the narrative. Likewise, the explicit identification of the "misleading and false narrative" acts as a denial disclaimer. The police are not merely clarifying; they are actively denying the veracity of the public's interpretation of the video. This denial is further reinforced by a detailed explanation of the "legitimate security operation," which provides a detailed account of the events. Furthermore, the inclusion of details such as the date ("Saturday, 10th May"), location ("Obajana axis of Kogi State"), and participants ("joint security forces including local vigilante groups, and hunters") strengthens their counter-narrative, thereby attempting to neutralise the "unfounded and mischievous claims." Also, the Force invokes an appeal to institutional legitimacy by urging citizens to "rely solely on official police communication channels." This is an attempt to delegitimise alternative sources of information and solidify their role as the authoritative voice on security matters. Summarily, the press statement serves as a strategic response to a perceived reputational damage (which is caused by the public's interpretation of the viral video), carefully deployed to protect the face of the Force and reassert their control over the public discourse surrounding their operations in the country.

### **Excerpt 3**

#### *POLICE DEBUNKS MUHUYI MAGAJI'S ARREST CLAIMS*

*Public Complaints Chairman Was Invited, Not Arrested – FPRO*

*The Nigeria Police Force has taken note of recent claims made by Mr. Muhuyi Magaji Rimin Gado, the Chairman of the Public Complaints and Anti-Corruption Commission, regarding his alleged arrest by police authorities. We wish to clarify that Mr. Magaji was not arrested; instead, he was invited by the Force pertaining to a petition received against him.*

*The Inspector-General of Police Monitoring Unit received a petition against Mr. Muhuyi. In accordance with standard investigative*

**“We are not recruiting”: Disclaimer Strategies for Face-saving in Selected Rejoinders by the Nigeria Police Force**

---

*protocols, he was invited to engage with police officials as part of due process in addressing the matter. Given his role as a public servant and a respected individual within society, it is expected of Mr. Muhuyi to cooperate with the police to ensure a proper investigation is carried out, rather than seeking to create media attention.*

*Any assertions indicating that Mr. Magaji was arrested are unfounded and misleading. We urge the media and general public to avoid disseminating misinformation that may cause unnecessary alarm or confusion. The Force remains committed to upholding the rule of law and following due process in all investigations.*

*([www.npf.gov.ng/news/details/558](http://www.npf.gov.ng/news/details/558))*

The rejoinder in Excerpt 3 above is deployed by the NPF to directly respond to a perceived threat to its own institutional image. Mr. Magaji's claim of arrest, if true, would imply power abuse or a deviation from due process on the part of the Force, thus damaging the NPF's image as a law enforcement agency. The NPF's statement, "We wish to clarify that Mr. Magaji was not arrested; instead, he was invited," directly refutes this negative portrayal and aims to restore its positive face by presenting a counter-narrative, which is the narrative of invitation. The subsequent emphasis on "standard investigative protocols" and "due process" further works to strengthen their positive face, presenting them as an institution that adheres to established procedures. Refutation as a disclaimer strategy is evident in the press rejoinder. The Force explicitly declares that, "Any assertions indicating that Mr. Magaji was arrested are unfounded and misleading." This is a direct denial of the original claim made by Mr. Magaji. Their counter-narrative, that he was "invited by the Force about a petition received against him," serves as the basis for this refutation. They argue that an "invitation" is quite different from an "arrest," given that it's a less coercive action. This clarification functions to discredit Mr. Magaji's claim that he was arrested. By stating that it is "expected of Mr. Muhuyi to cooperate with the police... rather than seeking to create media attention," the NPF subtly implies that Mr. Magaji is intentionally misleading the public for personal gain, further attempting to undermine his credibility and, by extension, the perceived validity of his original claim. Situating the excerpt within the confines of van Dijk's CDA, the underlying ideology in the press release is one of maintaining institutional (NPF)

control over citizens' (Mr. Magaji argument and reinforcing the NPF's authority as the legitimate arbiter of truth when such matters arise. The power dynamics and ideological underpinnings of the rejoinder can also be teased out. Specifically, the press release portrays the NPF as upholding the rule of law, following due process and being committed to proper investigation in the discharge of their duties. Mr Magaji, on the other hand, is explicitly accused of making "unfounded and misleading" claims and "seeking to create media attention." The NPF's emphasis on adherence to "standard investigative protocols" and "due process" in their operations intends to project an image of professionalism and transparency, which is crucial for a law enforcement agency to maintain public trust.

#### ***Dispelling of rumour***

A rumour is an unverified report that typically circulates within a particular location. To dispel a rumour means to make it disappear and no longer be believed. The NPF usually resorts to providing clarity through detailed explanations and a holistic address of the issue that triggered the spread of the rumour. Such action is intended to remove the rumour from circulation and further prevent it from being believed.

#### **Excerpt 4**

##### ***DISCLAIMER: SARS REMAINS DISSOLVED - FPRO***

*The Nigeria Police Force wishes to debunk circulating rumors and misinformation speculating the return of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) with a reformed set of rules. The Special Anti-Robbery Squad, which was disbanded on the 11th of October 2020, remains dissolved.*

*The Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) is not back in operation. The recent information regarding SARS reformation and rules of engagement should be treated with caution. Nigerians are encouraged to verify the source of any information before accepting it as true.*

*To ensure receiving accurate and reliable updates, citizens are advised to follow the official handles of the Nigeria Police Force on social media viz @PoliceNG on X, @ngpolice on Facebook, and @nigeriapoliceforce on Instagram. Your safety and awareness are paramount; stay informed and vigilant.*

*(<https://npf.gov.ng/news/details/580>)*

In Excerpt 4 above, the NPF engages in a deliberate face management act in a bid to mitigate potential threats to institutional face and restore public trust in their operations. Due to past abuse by members of SARS, rumours of their return have heightened anxiety among the public and have led to a potential loss of faith in the NPF. This disclaimer functions to douse tension among the citizens by reassuring them that the dissolved Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) remains disbanded and that there is no plan to bring them back into operation in the foreseeable future. This is an attempt to preserve the public's sense of safety and trust in the Force's official communication channels. In the same vein, this move serves to protect the NPF's own positive face as a credible, responsible, and trustworthy institution. The reference to “misinformation” and “rumours” functions as a disclaimer strategy, a strategic move aimed at dispelling unfounded claims that potentially harm the public image of the force and undermine the legitimacy of its prior decision to dissolve SARS following national protests in October 2020. The press release, therefore, stands in contrast to the circulating narrative, which portrays the NPF as untrustworthy. In other words, the disclaimer strategy, which is aimed at rumour dispelling, is executed in an official and assertive tone and serves a double face-saving purpose. The first is to reassure the public, and the second is to preserve the police's institutional credibility in the face of potentially face-threatening accusations that SARS has been reinstated. The expression “should be treated with caution” not only distances the NPF from the rumour but also subtly implies public susceptibility to misinformation. From the lens of van Dijk's model of CDA, the press release can be interpreted as a discourse move that reinforces power asymmetry by positioning the NPF as the sole legitimate authority over information regarding security agencies. The release presupposes the existence of “misinformation” while offering itself as the only source that discloses accurate information as far as the police institution is concerned. Through the imperative recommendation that Nigerians “verify the source of any information” and “follow the official handles,” the discourse enacts a gatekeeping function, subtly instructing citizens to rely solely on official information channels of the NPF. This is a reflection of van Dijk's emphasis on the way discourse shapes ideologies and reinforces institutional dominance.

### ***Deresponsibilisation***

Caffi (2007) defines deresponsibilisation as the act of avoiding responsibility, which is activated in a text through conflict-avoiding or politeness-induced vagueness. In institutional communication, deresponsibilisation can be described as the linguistic act of distancing the institution from responsibility for a particular action or event.

### **Excerpt 5**

#### ***POLICE CLARIFIES ON THIRD-PARTY INSURANCE, WARNS AGAINST MISINFORMATION***

*The Nigeria Police Force wishes to emphasise that it does not issue third-party insurance, as it has been misconstrued by some individuals. The responsibility for obtaining this mandatory insurance lies with vehicle owners through their respective insurance companies.*

*Dissemination of accurate information is vital to prevent misleading the public, while misconceptions can eventually lead to non-compliance and potential legal repercussions for motorists.*

*The Force therefore cautions social media influencers and activists against spreading misinformation regarding insurance policies as the police is solely for the enforcement, not the issuance of the insurance cover.*

<https://asiwajumedia.com/police-clarifies-on-third-party-insurance-warns-against-misinformation/>

Excerpt 5 above is a press statement issued by the NPF to provide a clarification on the issuance of third-party insurance in Nigeria. The opening statement of the press release, "The Nigeria Police Force wishes to emphasise that it does not issue third-party insurance as it has been misconstrued by some individuals," sets the stage for the address of a perceived threat to the competence and reputation of the Force. The NPF seek to clarify a misunderstanding that could lead to public mistrust or accusations of going beyond the scope of their operations. By stating what the Force does not do, the press release is actively redressing a negative portrayal and reaffirming the legitimate role of the police institution, thereby maintaining its positive face as a responsible law enforcement agency. Also, the warning against "misinformation" and caution to "social media influencers and activists" can be seen as an attempt to take charge of the narrative and prevent further damage to its face.

From the angle of van Dijk's CDA, the deresponsibilisation deployed in the press release is made evident. The core of this strategy lies in the clear and emphatic attribution of responsibility for third-party insurance issuance away from the NPF and onto the "respective insurance companies of car owners." The statement, "the police is solely for the enforcement, not the issuance of the insurance cover," serves as a direct disavowal of involvement in the issuance process. This move is crucial in managing public perception and deflecting potential blame or criticism. By explicitly delineating its role as "enforcement" rather than "issuance," the NPF constructs a discourse that exonerates their institution from any misconception about its mode of operations. This strategic distancing not only clarifies its mandate but also reinforces the authority of the NPF as a legitimate enforcer of law, rather than a bureaucratic issuer of documents such as third-party insurance. The language employed, such as "misconstrued," "misleading," and "misinformation," further highlights the NPF's framing of the situation as an external problem of public understanding, rather than an internal failing or ambiguity in its own operations. This discursive move effectively shifts the burden of the document issuance from the NPF onto insurance companies.

**Excerpt 6**

*WE'RE NOT RECRUITING – NPF DISCLAIMS ADVERT BY POLICE SERVICE COMMISSION*

*The Nigeria Police Force wishes to inform well-meaning members of the public that it has not commenced the 2022 Police Constables recruitment into the Nigeria Police Force contrary to a publication on Page 21 of Daily Sun Newspaper of Thursday, August 11, 2022, by the Police Service Commission (PSC).*

*“The Police similarly states unequivocally that the advert has no connection with the Nigeria Police Force, nor is it in tandem with the Police recruitment process and should be disregarded in all its entirety. The website to which the publication refers intending candidates – <http://www.recruitment.psc.gov.ng> – is not associated with the Nigeria Police Force.*

*“The Nigeria Police Force hereby calls on all stakeholders and intending applicants to discountenance the information in both the*

*newspaper and on the portal, as the website is not the official portal for Police Constables recruitment.*

*“The Nigeria Police Force thereby assures well-meaning Nigerians that the commencement of the 2022 recruitment exercise will be announced via the official police e-recruitment website – <https://policerecruitment.gov.ng>, the Nigeria Police Force official website – <https://www.npf.gov.ng>, and advertisements on national dailies and official police social media accounts as and when due.”*  
<https://guardian.ng/news/confusion-as-police-psc-engages-in-another-clash-over-recruitment/>

In the above press rejoinder, the NPF engages in a clear act of deresponsibilisation, which can be examined through the lens of van Dijk's CDA. The core face act here is the NPF's attempt to protect its positive face, which can be described as its desire to be viewed as competent and in control of its recruitment processes. The publication by the Police Service Commission (PSC) of an unauthorised recruitment advert directly threatens this positive face, as it could lead the public to perceive the NPF as disorganised or even complicit in a potential scam. The NPF's disclaimer serves as a potent strategy to diffuse this face threat. By declaring that "it has not commenced the 2022 Police Constables recruitment into the Nigeria Police Force contrary to a publication by the Police Service Commission (PSC)," the NPF immediately distances itself from the problematic advertisement. This statement is a direct challenge to the PSC's authority in this specific instance, implicitly asserting the NPF's sole legitimate control over its recruitment. Moreover, the explicit rejection of the PSC's website ("The website to which the publication refers, intending candidates – <http://www.recruitment.psc.gov.ng> – is not associated with the Nigeria Police Force") reinforces this boundary. This act of disassociation is a typical deresponsibilisation strategy. The NPF portrays the PSC as the sole body responsible for the "unauthorised" advertisement, thereby absolving itself of any blame, confusion, or potential fallout (such as fraud or misdirection of applicants) that might arise from the misleading publication. The NPF's final reassurance, detailing its official recruitment channels, further reinforces its positive face by demonstrating its commitment to transparent and legitimate processes, implicitly contrasting this with the PSC's perceived misstep. Through this carefully worded press release, the NPF attempts to restore its image as a reliable and

authoritative institution, effectively shifting responsibility and blame onto another entity (the Police Service Commission).

### **Conclusion**

This study was designed to investigate disclaimer strategies for face-saving in selected rejoinders of the Nigeria Police Force. Drawing on Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory (specifically the concept of Face), van Dijk's model of Critical Discourse Analysis, this study reveals that legitimisation, refutation, deresponsibilisation and dispelling of rumours are the core disclaimer strategies evident in the rejoinders issued by the NPF. It is argued that the NPF relies on these rejoinders (typically issued as press statements through official communication channels of the Force) to perform face-saving acts amid criticisms and serious allegations levelled against them by the Nigerian public. It would be interesting to see how future studies would investigate disclaimer strategies for face-saving in press statements of other security agencies in Nigeria, such as the Department of State Services (DSS) and the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC).

### **Notes on Contributors**

#### **Autobiography**

**Ajayi, Temitope Michael, PhD teaches in the Department of Linguistics and African Languages, University of Ibadan, Nigeria**

**Adesope, Oluwatosin Adebayo is a first-class honours graduate of the Department of Linguistics and African Languages, University of Ibadan, Nigeria. He is set to commence his postgraduate studies soon.**

**Akinrinlola, Temidayo, PhD teaches in the Department of English, McPherson University, Seriki-Sotayo, Oyo-Ogun State, Nigeria**

**‘Tayo Adebayo, PhD has just completed his doctoral degree programme in the Department of Linguistics and African Languages, University of Ibadan. He teaches in the Department of Linguistics and Nigerian Languages, Osun State University, Osun State, Nigeria**

## References

- Adegbite, M., & May, A. (2022). Code-switching as a marked socio-pragmatic discourse strategy in Nigerian police interrogation. *Language and Law / Linguagem e Direito*, 9(2), 32–57. [https://doi.org/10.21747/21833745/lanlaw/9\\_2a4](https://doi.org/10.21747/21833745/lanlaw/9_2a4)
- Adegoju, A., & Famakinwa, Y. (2018). The rhetoric of de/mystifying ‘presidential mistakes’ in Nigeria’s democratic culture. *Africology: The Journal of Pan African Studies*, 11(2).
- Aina, A. A. (2021). Pragmatic acts in crime-motivated police interactions in Ilorin, Nigeria. *Issues in Language and Literary Studies*, 7(1). Department of English, Ajayi Crowther University, Oyo.
- Ajayi, T. M. (2014). Face acts in soccer rivalry: Mourinho vs five other coaches in Europe. *Research in African Languages and Linguistics*, 13, 1–14.
- Ajayi, T. M. (2016). (Im)politeness and power abuse in police-suspect interaction in Ibadan, Nigeria [Doctoral dissertation, University of Ibadan].
- Ajayi, T. M., Akinrinlola, T., & Adebayo, O. A. (2024). “It Looks Like a Spell...”: Acceptance of Crime Commission as Power Strategy in Confessional Statements in Police–Suspect Interactions in Ibadan, Southwestern Nigeria. *Journal of Forensic Psychology Research and Practice*, 1–20. <https://doi.org/10.1080/24732850.2024.2400286>
- Ajisafe, I. O., & Ibitoye, P. O. (2020). Communication and effective policing in Nigeria. *International Journal of Media, Journalism and Mass Communications*, 6(2), 14–20. <https://doi.org/10.20431/2454-9479.0602002>
- Akinrinlola, T., & Ajayi, T. M. (2022). Discourse tactics in police-suspect interactions in Ibadan, Nigeria. *Language Matters*, 53, 110–126. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10228195.2022.2093951>
- Akinrinlola, T. (2021a). A discursive import of suspects’ affirmative responses in police suspect interaction in Ibadan, Nigeria. *Linguistik Online*, 106(1). <https://doi.org/10.13092/lo.106.7504>
- Akinrinlola, T. (2021b). Rapport building strategies in police-suspect interaction in Ibadan, Nigeria. *Covenant Journal of Language Studies*, 9(1).
-

<https://journals.covenantuniversity.edu.ng/index.php/cjls/article/view/2583>

- Akinrinlola, T. (2021c). A discursive construction of resistance in police-suspect interactions in Ibadan, Nigeria. *Southern African Linguistics and Applied Language Studies*, 39(4), 363–374. <https://doi.org/10.2989/16073614.2021.1968305>
- Akinrinlola, T. (2021d). Concealment in police-suspect interaction in Ibadan, Nigeria. *Ghana Journal of Linguistics*, 10(2), 103–124. <https://doi.org/10.4314/gjl.v10i2.5>
- Akinrinlola, T., Michael Ajayi, T., & Ojo, P. J. (2024). Pragmatics of Contradictions in Police-Suspect Interactions in Ibadan, Nigeria. *Journal of Forensic Psychology Research and Practice*, 25(3), 605–625. <https://doi.org/10.1080/24732850.2024.2348485>
- Akinyetun, T. S. (2021). Reign of terror: A review of police brutality on Nigerian youths by the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS). *African Security Review*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10246029.2021.1947863>
- Akpabio, E. (2004). Direction of Nigerian newspaper rejoinders. *Nordic Journal of African Studies*, 13(2), 188–199.
- Alemika, E. O. (2022). *Criminal victimisation, policing, and governance in Nigeria*. Lagos: CLEEN Foundation.
- Amoussou, F., & Allagbe, A. A. (2018). Principles, theories and approaches to critical discourse analysis. *International Journal on Studies in English Language and Literature*, 6(1), 11–18.
- Anumudu, K. U., & Abaya, A. S. (2019). A critical discourse analysis of the language of dominance in selected police interrogation of suspects in Kaduna metropolis. *Journal of Languages, Linguistics and Literary Studies*, 9(2), 1–14.
- Aremu, M. A., & Babatunde, S. T. (2020). Face acts and impoliteness strategies in Olusegun Obasanjo’s 'Before it is too late'. *International Journal of English Language and Linguistics Research*, 8(1), 54–71.
- Brown, P., & Levinson, S. C. (1987). *Politeness: Some universals in language usage*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bull, P., & Fetzer, A. (2010). Face, facework and political discourse. *Revue Internationale De Psychologie Sociale*, 23(2–3), 155–185.

Caffi, C. (2007). *Mitigation*. Oxford: Elsevier.

**Data Sources**

<https://reliablesourceng.com/were-not-recruiting-npf-disclaims-advert-by-police-service-commission/>  
<https://asiwajumedia.com/police-clarifies-on-third-party-insurance-warns-against-misinformation/>  
<https://www.facebook.com/ngpolice/posts/disclaimer-sars-remains-dissolved-fprothe-nigeria-police-force-wishes-to-debunk-/1042796837878740/>  
<https://www.facebook.com/ngpolice/posts/press-releasere-clarification-on-viral-video-of-police-helicopter-operation-in-k/1118486390309784/>  
<https://x.com/PoliceNG/status/1885021991654109537?t=LnpPCLHLE95fp76zoI6uxQ&s=35>  
<https://x.com/PoliceNG/status/1883908392751641037?t=sCIISSTEFLE1fdq0YWtXMg&s=35>