

# Exploring Stance and Engagement Markers in the Discourse on Fuel Subsidy Removal in Nigeria in the *Punch* and *Daily Trust* Newspapers

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## Abstract:

Eliminating fuel subsidies in Nigeria in 2023 has precipitated a significant transformation with far-reaching economic, social, and environmental consequences. While existing research has attempted to explore the discourse on fuel subsidy elimination from a nonlinguistic viewpoint using various theoretical insights, this study takes a different approach by examining the discourse from a linguistic perspective. Employing Hyland's (2005) stance and engagement model, the study examines the stance and engagement markers used in the discourse on fuel subsidy to interact with readers, describe how the subject has been evaluated, and determine the points of convergence and divergence in stance and engagement markers. The study's data consists of excerpts from *Punch* and *Daily Trust* newspapers. Sixteen excerpts, eight from each newspaper, were purposively sampled and analysed using a rigorous combination of qualitative and quantitative methods. The findings show that both corpora employ hedges, boosters, attitude markers, self-mention, reader pronouns, shared knowledge, directives, and questions to interact with readers. These stance and engagement markers serve as linguistic means through which the authors of both corpora decrease the force of their propositions, express confidence in their arguments, indicate their attitude towards the issue evaluated, project themselves, and invite readers into the discourse. The subject of fuel subsidy in both corpora is presented badly using evaluative indicators with negative connotations. While both corpora employ a host of stance and engagement markers in structuring the discourse on fuel subsidy removal, it is noteworthy to mention that variation in frequency and percentage distribution of these linguistic elements exists.

**Keywords:** Attitude, Engagement Markers, Fuel Subsidy, Media discourse, Stance

## 1. Introduction

Fuel subsidies are government-imposed reductions in the market price of fossil fuels that allow customers to pay less than the going rate (Ovaga & Okechukwu, 2022). When subsidies are in place, customers will pay less per liter of petroleum products than the market price. Because of its enormous scale and impact on the welfare of residents and a country's financial stability, fuel subsidies are a topic of discussion on a global scale (Ozili & Obiora, 2023). Under President Bola Tinubu, in particular, eliminating gasoline subsidies in Nigeria in 2023 has brought about a significant change with broad ramifications in the social, economic, and environmental domains (Evans et al., 2023). While existing studies (e.g., Evans et al., 2023; Ikenga & Oluka, 2023; Ozili & Obiora, 2023; Abdulyakeen & Mumuni, 2024; Sambo & Sule, 2024) have attempted to examine the discourse on fuel subsidy removal from a nonlinguistic perspective using a variety of theoretical insights, there is a scarcity of linguistic

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studies on this discourse. This research examines the discourse on fuel subsidy removal in Nigeria from a linguistic perspective, employing Hyland's (2005) stance and engagement model.

### 1.1. Aim and Objectives

The study examines the stance and engagement markers used in selected newspapers to structure the discourse on fuel subsidy removal in Nigeria. The specific objectives are to:

1. describe the stance and engagement markers used in the selected newspapers by the writers in interacting with readers;
2. elucidate how the subject of fuel subsidy has been evaluated in the selected newspapers, and
3. determine the points of convergence and divergence in the use of stance and engagement markers in the selected newspapers.

### 1.2. Research Questions

The study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. What stance and engagement markers are used in the selected newspapers by the writers to interact with readers?
2. How has the subject of fuel subsidy been evaluated in the selected newspapers?
3. What are the points of convergence and divergence in the use of stance and engagement markers in the selected newspapers?

## 2. Literature Review

This study's literature review has two sections. The first examines the body of research on stance and engagement markers, and the second captures studies on fuel subsidy removal in Nigeria. First, Ayad et al. (2014) examined the use of engagement markers in 1500 English-language Facebook status updates posted by 200 Egyptian male and female students and academic staff members. The study was conducted from a corpus-based viewpoint. This was done to find out how factors like age and gender influence how people express their involvement in the Facebook conversations that are being examined. Hyland's (2005a & b) model of interaction served as the study's theoretical and analytical framework. The data comprised 1500 English-language Facebook status update entries from 200 Egyptian male and female students and 200 English-language academic staff members. The findings showed that, regarding the kind and frequency of the engagement characteristics being examined, there were negligible differences across age and gender. Every participant group was able to keep the reader interested in their online exchanges. With the male groups using all engagement measures (51%) more frequently than their male counterparts (49%), the combined total indicated modest age and gender impacts. Also, the data revealed weak gender effects regarding how frequently male and female academic staff and students recognised and engaged their readers in their articles.

Sayah & Hashemi (2014) concentrated on attitude and engagement elements in structuring the connection between text, readers, and social context to highlight the critical nuances of rhetorical functions in most academic works. The study's premise was that, although the topic had gained significant attention in recent years, not all aspects of posture and participation had been examined in other academic domains. To fill the research deficit, 90 discourse pieces from ISI and non-ISI publications on education, sociology, and linguistics were chosen and examined using the Hyland (2005) model. The results showed that they differed significantly in developing traits like hedges, self-mention, and appeals to common knowledge. The overuse of hedges or boosters in some publications

made it necessary to identify each researcher's organised preconceptions, interpersonal techniques, and preferred communicative style when authoring discourse analysis articles.

Moini & Malihe (2015) concentrated on using meta-discourse markers in the discourse of journal author rules due to a lack of research over the years, despite growing interest in studying interactional meta-discourse markers in many settings. From a corpus-based perspective, the study compared the distribution of stance and engagement features in journal author guidelines to see if there was a significant difference between macro/micro interactional meta-discourse markers in journal author guidelines. A corpus of 280 author instructions from eight academic sub-disciplines in the humanities and social sciences, created by seven top international academic publishers, was gathered and examined. The findings demonstrated that journal author guidelines used reader-oriented engagement features more frequently. Also, there was a statistically significant variation in the frequency of stance and engagement traits. Additionally, there were statistically significant variations between macro and micro interactional meta-discourse. The widespread usage of macro interactional meta-discourse markers revealed a high level of interactionality in journal author guidelines.

Osisanwo (2017) investigated the discourse techniques used by readers who expressed differing opinions about the administration of former President Goodluck Jonathan's efforts to combat terrorism by Boko Haram through their comments on the e-Punch newspaper reports. Seventy-one comments, totaling 22,512 words, were taken from six specifically chosen news items on the 2014 e-Punch Newspaper website. Participants' comments were analysed using discourse analysis, guided by stance and engagement theory on interaction. The results showed that while some internet readers offered answers, others accused and denounced the administration in their comments about the war on Boko Haram terrorists. Partisanship, nationality, and religion all inspired some of their positions. However, to persuade other participants or summon the administration to order, they used a variety of engagement strategies, such as sharing information, asking questions, making personal remarks, and giving instructions. To prevent preventable crises, the study advised e-Punch and other media sources to take the initiative to monitor what users publish online actively.

Given that discourse on academic spoken texts is still much less represented in the literature concerning examinations across disciplines, Yang (2020) explored academic speeches using Hyland's (2005) "stance and engagement" interaction model in academic discourse to determine how disciplinary conventions impact a text's arrangement and the lexico-grammatical choices used in it. The results showed that in spoken discourse, there was less variation among fields using hedges, boosters, self-mention, and pronouns to refer to speakers and audiences. Additionally, minor variations in the frequency and ranking of these devices' use were still detected. The study concluded that these minute differences are caused by the diverse methods that the various disciplines formulate their arguments and build their knowledge through conversation.

Al-Rickaby (2020) examined how position and engagement markers were used in opinion pieces in Arabic and English newspapers. This study was predicated on the idea that any written material implies some communication between authors and their intended audience. The primary goals of this research are to both qualitatively and quantitatively compare the employment of stance and engagement markers in opinion pieces written in Arabic and English. In light of this, twenty opinion pieces—ten in English and ten in Arabic—are examined using Hyland's analytical paradigm. The findings show that position and engagement markers are used in persuasive writing by authors of both English and Arab opinion pieces. According to the quantitative study, the total tokens of these markers in the Arabic datum were (210) and in the English datum, they were (210) respectively. This suggested that both sets of corpora

used these resources equally. Nevertheless, the subcategories of attitude and engagement indicators were used differently in frequency.

Yuvayapan & Yakut (2021) looked at engagement markers in master's and doctoral dissertations on English language-related topics authored by Turkish speakers of English and L1 English speakers over the 2010–2019 timeframe. The results showed that compared to Turkish academic writers of English, L1 English academic writers used more engagement indicators in their master's and doctoral theses. Additionally, it was noted that both academic writers used the same techniques in their master's and doctoral theses. Because using engagement markers in L1 English academic writing may help L2 English speakers choose suitable engagement markers, the study has significant ramifications for academic writers who produce work in English.

The study conducted by Bagherkazemi et al. (2021) aimed to compare the frequency of interactional meta-discourse markers in a corpus of discussion sections from 40 recent applied linguistics research articles (20 qualitative discussions totaling 23052 words and 20 quantitative discussions totaling 22984 words). The following markers were used to achieve this: (a) stance markers, such as hedges, boosters, attitude markers, and self-mentions; and (b) engagement markers, such as reader pronouns, appeals to shared knowledge, personal asides, inquiries, and directives. Hyland (2005) presented this model of these markers. Two coders spotted and tagged instances, and the inter-coder agreement was determined to be 0.78. Chi-square indices revealed that the discussion sections of qualitative research articles contained significantly more stance markers (except for boosters, which were more common in quantitative research article discussions) and engagement markers (except for asides and shared knowledge appeals, where no difference was found).

Jombadi's (2022) research focused on subjective evaluations of players and processes surrounding the coronavirus pandemic in Nigeria through political discourse. The goal was to investigate President Muhammadu Buhari's subjective presence in texts as he takes positions on the pandemic and the Nigerians with whom he talks. Three remarks from the president's official Facebook page were purposefully selected and examined using Martin and White's (2015) Appraisal Theory. Seven evaluation resources were identified as defining characteristics of the speeches: affect the expression of gratitude, affect the expression of solidarity, affect the expression of concern over the pandemic's effects, judgment evaluation of the efforts to curb COVID-19, appreciation evaluation of the facilities available to curb COVID-19, appreciation evaluation of processes designed to mitigate the effects of COVID-19, and appreciation evaluation of the collaborative response to COVID-19. The data's preponderance of judgment value suggested that the president evaluated the actions of those involved in managing, reducing, or lessening the pandemic's consequences more so than the procedures themselves. The study concluded that the main objective of political speeches was to affirm the importance of political actors and convey a favourable opinion of power brokers, particularly during a crisis.

Aluya (2023) investigated stance acts in COVID-19 pandemic reporting by a few selected newspapers in Nigeria and South Korea to determine the objectivity of print media in conveying the pandemic issue in Nigeria and South Korea. Purposeful sampling yielded twenty-eight samples, seven each from Nigeria's *Daily Trust* and *This Day* and South Korea's *Korea Times* and *Korea Herald*. The goal was to identify each newspaper's different types of stance actions, their pragmatic roles, the lexicogrammatical resources used to communicate stance, and the objectivity of each news article in depicting the pandemic. The study used linguistic posture as a theoretical method. The study revealed epistemic, deontological, and emotional attitude acts in the news story. They were used to assess the

COVID-19 epidemic, give evidence to support the claims presented, and reveal dispositions regarding the issue. Also, imperative, commissive, expressive, and directive speech conveyed information, indicated commitment, expressed emotions, and issued orders. Modals, hedges, and stance clauses signified by verbs, adjectives, and nouns served to introduce epistemic, deontic, and affective stance acts, respectively. Finally, despite minor indications of subjective language in some news reports, each story used objective language while reporting the COVID-19 epidemic.

In their study on removing fuel subsidies in Nigeria, Ozili & Obiora (2023) examined the consequences of the 2023 fuel subsidy elimination in Nigeria. The study used discourse analysis and explained the macroeconomic and microeconomic effects of eliminating gasoline subsidies. According to the study's findings, the removal of fuel subsidies would free up funds for other areas of the economy, encourage domestic refineries to produce more petroleum products, lessen Nigeria's reliance on imported fuel, create jobs, channel funds for the construction of vital public infrastructure, lower the budget deficit, and produce a budget surplus soon.

Ikenga & Luka (2023) investigated the advantages and difficulties of the return of fuel subsidies for the country's economy. The results of a descriptive analysis and qualitative data collection method showed that multiple attempts by previous administrations to reverse the fuel subsidy policy had a significant negative impact on the populace due to rising transportation, food, and petroleum product prices. Among other things, the report suggested that the central government give particular consideration to how the policy affects the general public by offering palliatives to lessen their suffering.

Evans et al.'s (2023) study examined the direct and indirect effects on Nigeria's economy and society and the intricate web of repercussions that resulted from the dramatic reduction of gasoline subsidies. Drawing on past experiences with attempts to remove subsidies in Nigeria, the study emphasized the significance of controlling stakeholder reactions and public sentiment and the value of making well-informed decisions to minimize short-term adverse effects, maximize long-term benefits, and protect the most vulnerable members of society. The study concluded that policymakers must use a comprehensive approach that balances social welfare, environmental sustainability, economic efficiency, and inclusive growth.

Abdulyakeen & Mumuni (2024) investigated the effects of eliminating fuel subsidies on the Nigerian economy using Gombe State as a case study. The study used questionnaires and a survey approach to analyse data while including ideas from conventional economic theory. The findings showed that eliminating the fuel subsidy reduced economic welfare and raised inflation by 50%. The analysis concluded that Nigeria's economy would not benefit from removing petrol subsidies.

It is clear from the literature review above that stance and engagement markers have been studied in a variety of discourse genres, including media discourse (e.g., Osisanwo, 2017; Al-Rickaby, 2020; & Aluya, 2023); political discourse (e.g., Adagbonyin et al., 2016; Jombadi, 2022), and academic discourse (e.g., Ayad et al., 2014; Sayah & Hashemi, 2014; Moini & Malihe, 2015; Yang, 2020 etc.). The present study differs and converges with these studies in many ways. The current study is pertinent to the academic discourse research (e.g., Ayad et al., 2014; Sayah & Hashemi, 2014; Moini & Malihe, 2015; Yang, 2020, Ogunsij & Aluya, 2022 etc.) because they all examined stance and engagement markers. While the examined studies explored stance and engagement using academic discourses, the current study addresses a similar subject using media discourse. Also, the review studies on media discourses (e.g., Osisanwo, 2017; Al-Rickaby, 2020; Aluya, 2023) are pertinent because they all

examined stance and engagement using the media discourse. The current study differs from earlier ones conducted utilising media discourse in that it focuses on fuel subsidy removal in Nigeria, which is still relatively fresh. The emphasis on position and appraisal is a common thread between Jombadi's (2022) and current studies on political speech. Also, the divergence is that both studies used different theoretical methodologies to examine separate data sets. While the subject of fuel subsidy removal in Nigeria, which is the focus of this paper, has been studied primarily from a nonlinguistic perspective, as evidenced by the above literature review, little attention has been paid to this subject from the linguistic perspective. This is the gap in literature that the current study seeks to address.

### 3. Theoretical Approaches

The interaction model proposed by Hyland (2005) is used in this paper. Several academics from a range of fields, each concentrating on "positioning" or "adopting a point of view," have emphasised the importance of stance-taking in personal style and interpersonal tactics through the employment of devices like stance and engagement markers (Hyland, 20005, p. 175). According to Hyland (2005), each device has distinct subfactors. Stance features are ways of expressing one's authority, viewpoint, commitments, covert engagement, and tentativeness in the texts. It refers to how writers intrude to stamp their authority onto their arguments or step back and disguise their involvement (Hyland, 2005). Hyland divides stance and engagement markers into four subcategories: self-mentioned, attitude markers, hedges, and boosters. Hedging refers to the use of words or phrases that produce uncertainty. It "allows academics to take a rhetorical stance, downplay their statements, and anticipate audience responses by the degree of certainty" (Hyland, 1994, p. 478). Hyland notes that epistemic modality is an important rhetorical tool for acquiring adherence to knowledge claims and presenting them as an opinion rather than a fact. There are two types of hedges: shields and approximators. Shield addresses the issue pragmatically by expressing fuzziness in the interaction between the speaker and the propositional content. Approximators are expressions that alter a proposition's original meaning or give it a different meaning. Boosters are lexical items that allow the writer to demonstrate high confidence in a claim. They are "a tool which strengthens the claim by showing the writer's certainty, conviction, and commitment, helping the writers affect interpersonal solidarity." (Hyland, 2005). Therefore, boosters can assist authors in presenting their work with confidence while fostering interpersonal solidarity, countering the self-effacement and caution that hedges advocate against involvement and assertion. Authors employ attitude markers to persuade readers to agree with other researchers and occasionally to emphasise the significance of their work. In place of epistemic attitude, the writer's effectiveness might be indicated by various comparatives, progressive particles, specific attitude verbs, adjectives, or adverbs (e.g., agree, prefer, remarkable, important). The writers' identity, style, and "interpersonal information" are shown by self-mention (Hyland, 2001), a crucial element that helps the audience feel connected and familiar with the authors. Engagement features include the 'alignment dimension where writers acknowledge and connect to others, recognising the presence of their readers, pulling them along with their argument, focusing their attention, acknowledging their uncertainties, including them as discourse participants, and guiding them to interpretations' (Hyland, 2001, p. 176). The reader's pronouns, instructions, inquiries, personal asides, and references to common knowledge are his primary tools for achieving these interactional macro-functions (Hyland, 2005).

### 4. Methodology

The data for this study consists of four corpora (2 each from *Punch* and *Daily Trust* newspapers). These corpora are news columns published between 2023 and 2024. The news columns extracted from the *Punch* are titled "Facts about the Fuel Subsidy Puzzle" and "Fuel Subsidy Removal: Way Forward". The first news column was published on 3rd September 2024, and the second on 11th June 2023. The

first news columns consist of 491 words, and the second has 667 words, totalling 1158. The titles of the news columns in *Daily Trust* are "Nigerians Living Fake Good Life before Fuel Subsidy Removal", published on 1st December 2024, and "The Effect of Subsidy Removal at a Time Like This", published on 23rd July 2023. The first news column comprises 667 words, and the second 536 words, totalling 1201 words for the *Daily Trust* newspapers. The study adopted mixed research methods and divided the analysis into two phases. In the first phase, sixteen excerpts, eight each from both corpora, capturing stance and engagement markers, were purposively sampled and analysed using the qualitative textual design complemented by Hyland's (2005) model of stance and engagement markers. The second phase of the analysis, which deals with the points of convergence and divergence in the use of stance and engagement markers, employed quantitative statistical method in analysing the total words in both corpora to determine the frequency and percentage distribution of these linguistic elements. The information gathered was analysed and presented for discussion in the data analysis and discussion section. While the first phase of the analysis answers the first and second research questions, the second phase answers the third research questions.

## 5. Data Analysis and Discussion of Findings

This section analyses the data for study to describe the stance and engagement markers that have been used to structure the discourse on fuel subsidy removal in Nigeria. The data analysis is divided into two sections. The next subsection presents and discusses the first data analysis.

### 5.1 Data Presentation and Analysis 1

This section analyses sixteen excerpts (8 each from the *Punch* and *Daily Trust*) using the qualitative textual design supported by Hyland's (2005) model of stance and engagement markers. This analysis will help to provide answers to the first research question, which seeks to elucidate the stance and engagement markers used by the writers in both corpora to interact with the audience as well as the second question, which also seeks to describe how the subject of fuel subsidy removal has been evaluated. The following are excerpts culled from both data. The first eight excerpts were extracted from *Punch*, and the second eight from the *Daily Trust*.

**Excerpt 1.** The removal of fuel subsidy has been a contentious issue in Nigeria, with proponents arguing that it will improve the economy, and opponents claiming that it will lead to increased poverty and social unrest.

**Excerpt 2.** In 2021, Buhari signed the petroleum industry Act, which aimed to reform the oil and gas sector and phase out the fuel subsidy. However, he delayed the removal of the subsidy, citing potential social unrest and economic consequences.

**Excerpt 3.** Upon taking office in May 2023, Tinubu announced the removal of the fuel subsidy as part of his broader economic reform agenda.

**Excerpt 4.** The move led to immediate panic buying, long queues at petrol stations, and a sharp increase in fuel prices; affecting transportation costs and the prices of goods and services.

**Excerpt 5.** However, it was disheartening that barely minutes after being sworn in, the president made a pronouncement which caused confusion and put pressure on citizens.

**Excerpt 6.** I admit that the removal of fuel subsidy is a right move. However, I felt it could have been better if it had been allowed phased out gradually, to reduce the negative impact it would have on citizens. If that had been done, I am sure the people would have been more open to embracing the change, regardless of how better it would have been to swallow.

**Excerpt 7.** Going by the above, it was obvious that Tinubu was not the one that removed fuel subsidy. However, what many Nigerians expected was that the President should not have made such an abrupt pronouncement, without first preparing the minds of citizens for the eventuality.

**Excerpt 8.** For Tinubu to succeed as the President, he must demonstrate that he has the interest of the people at heart. The buck stops at his table, so he must make sure that those badly needed funds are used for the right things to alleviate the sufferings of Nigerians.

**Excerpt 9.** As the country deals with the impact that the recent removal of fuel subsidy is having on Nigerians, it is clear that the palliatives put forth by the current government are simply not enough to tackle the pervasive poverty that has plagued most Nigerians in our nation for years.

**Excerpt 10.** Many can no longer afford the basic necessities, such as food, healthcare, and education.

**Excerpt 11.** We cannot simply rely on vague suggestions to mitigate the impact, it is imperative that the government takes swift action to ensure that this courageous move to remove subsidy does not disproportionately affect the citizens especially those on low incomes and those on the verge of survival.

**Excerpt 12.** While the eventual removal of fuel subsidy may be inevitable, it must be carried out in a manner that does not further deteriorate the standard of living for millions of Nigerians.

**Excerpt 13.** Tinubu had on May 29, 2023 on the day of his inauguration into office, announced the removal of the fuel subsidy.

**Excerpt 14.** As you are aware, we took the baton of authority at a time when our economy was nose-diving as a result of heavily debts from fuel and dollar subsidies.

**Excerpt 15.** We are all aware of the fact that the poor and the average Nigerians were the sufferers of what was supposed to give them succor and improved standard of living.

**Extract 16.** We are not Nigerians by accident, and I believe that the Almighty God who made us Nigerians has given us the required wisdom to turn things around for our betterment.

The first excerpt relates the arguments between two opposing groups on removing fuel subsidies in Nigeria. From the text, it can be inferred that one group supports the removal while the other is against it. The argument in this text is reported using stance and engagement markers. The stance markers used are words such as "has been" and "will", introducing hedges and "arguing," and "claiming," denoting boosters. The engagement markers used in the text include "argued" and "claiming," denoting shared knowledge. For instance, the writer employs the primary auxiliary "has been" and modal auxiliary "will" to express caution and soften claims. Whereas "has been" criticised less harshly for the removal of fuel subsidy, the repeated use of "will" expresses a cautious opinion on the subject matter. The writer's choice of the lexical item "has been" confirms the existence of the issue being reported. Also, it indicates that removing fuel subsidies is no longer a fresh subject of discourse. Notably, verbs such as "argued" and "claiming" serve dual functions in the text. Both verbs are linguistic elements

strengthening or emphasising the opinions of the two dissenting groups in the text. These linguistic elements, as earlier mentioned, denote boosters, and each group deploys them to convince the reader to accept their viewpoint on the discourse subject. Apart from functioning to denote boosters, they also serve as engagement markers introducing shared knowledge. Whereas "argued" indicates the stance publicly maintained by the group in support of fuel subsidy removal, "claiming" denotes the viewpoint publicly held by those who are against the removal of fuel subsidies. Through these explicit markers, both groups appeal to readers to recognise and accept their viewpoint concerning the subject of discourse.

Excerpt two refers to the Buhari administration's signing of the Petroleum Industry Act in 2021, which was intended to reform the oil and gas sector and remove subsidies in Nigeria. The excerpt consists of two statements. The words "however", "signed", and "citing" signal hedge expressions. The writer employs "signed" to report the Buhari administration's plan and the decision to revamp the country's oil and gas sector. The verb "signed" denotes certainty and fact, implying that the writer is confident in his propositional content. The second statement begins with "however," which signals a shift in thought and contrasting ideas. Normally, the Buhari administration ought to be blamed for setting the motion to remove fuel subsidies. The writer of this text cautiously introduced the hedge words "however" and "citing" to alert readers that the Buhari administration did not remove fuel subsidies. The choice of these hedge markers makes the criticism levied against the Buhari administration less rigid. Observe that lexical items that convey both epistemic and affective meaning are deployed to indicate the writer's degree of confidence in the truth of the propositional content. Whereas in the first text, lexical items such as "increased poverty" and "social unrest" are evaluative indicators used in presenting the subject of fuel subsidy removal in a bad light, here, lexical words such as "social unrest" and "economic consequences" serve similar purposes.

Excerpt three alludes to the period President Bola Ahmed Tinubu removed fuel subsidies in Nigeria. Noteworthy in this text is the choice of the lexical verb "announced". It is a stance marker introducing the writer's use of booster, which gives force to his propositional content. As used in this text, the verb expresses certainty and confidence. Here, the writer is committed to the veracity of the proposition because facts back them up. The adverb clause of time "May 2023" is evidence to corroborate the writer's assertion. The lexical item "led" in excerpt four signifies the stance marker. It is a booster word deployed to give force to the propositional content expressed in this text, which relates to the pandemonium into which Nigerians were plunged due to the removal of fuel subsidies. Here, the lexical verb "led" indicates a high degree of certainty regarding the reported issue. It is significant to comment on lexical items such as "immediate panic," "long queues at petrol stations," and "affecting transportation and the prices of goods and services." These are evaluative indicators employed in this discourse to evaluate the impact of the fuel subsidy removal on Nigerians. These lexical expressions are laced with negative connotations and represent the adverse impact of fuel subsidy removal.

Excerpt five refers to President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's removal of fuel subsidy immediately after he assumed office. The stance marker in the text is introduced by the word "however", which shows the presence of a hedge language. Two stance markers in excerpt six are hedges (e.g. however, could and would) and self-mention (e.g. I). The stance markers highlight what the government should have done before removing the subsidy. The pronominal "I" introduces the self-mention marker and refers to the writer. The word "negative impact" is an evaluative indicator used to present the issue of fuel subsidy removal in a bad light. The subject of fuel subsidy removal in Nigeria is already a reality. As such, the writer in this text employs hedge expression to balance certainty and caution when presenting his viewpoint. Although President Bola Ahmed Tinubu is exonerated from the removal of the fuel subsidy

in excerpt seven, Nigerians still blame him for not putting necessary measures in place before announcing the removal of the fuel subsidy. Two stance markers used in this text are hedge (e.g. however) and booster (e.g. should). Apart from the adverbial marker "however," functioning as a transitional marker to indicate a contrast in the writer's stream of thoughts, it is cautiously deployed in presenting his opinion on the discourse subject and decreasing the force of his propositional content. The modal verb "should" in the text is used to offer advice or recommendations. The utilisation of stance marker in registering the writer's opinion is equally evident in excerpt eight as captured in the repeated use of the lexical item "must," functioning as a booster to emphasise the points raised by the columnist in connection with what President Bola Ahmed Tinubu must do to succeed as president. The lexical expression "alleviate the sufferings of Nigerians" signals the adverse impact of the fuel subsidy removal on Nigerians, and it is used to present the issue in a bad light.

Like *the Punch newspaper*, *Daily Trust* deploys stance and engagement markers to report the subject of fuel subsidy removal. Excerpts nine to sixteen illustrate instances where the *Daily Trust* deploy stance markers. For example, in excerpt nine, the writer speaks of the adverse impact of the recent fuel subsidy removal on Nigerians and the inadequate measures taken by the government to address the issue. Stance markers in the text are indicated with the lexical verbs "deals" and "obvious". Both lexical verbs function as boosters to make the writer's propositional content assertive. Through these lexical items, the writer expresses confidence in the propositional content of his statement. However, lexical items such as "pervasive poverty" and "plagued" are evaluative markers deployed to assess the impact of fuel subsidy removal on Nigerians. The fuel subsidy removal and its adverse effects on the Nigerian masses are presented negatively. In excerpt ten, reference is made to the precarious situation in which the removal of fuel subsidies has plunged Nigerians. The modal verb "can" signals the use of a hedge language. The modal "can" and the lexical expression "no longer afford" operate collaboratively to indicate fact. Through the hedgeword, the writer balances certainty and caution. Notably, the text uses the expression "no longer afford necessities such as food, healthcare, and education" to evaluate the subject of fuel subsidy removal. From this evaluation, the issue raised in this text is portrayed negatively. Excerpt eleven disparages the suggestions put forth by the government to address the negative impact of the removal of fuel subsidies on Nigerians. It mandates the government to devise practicable measures to help address the issue caused by the removal of fuel subsidies. Stance markers in this text are words such as "cannot" and "suggestions", signalling hedge, and "imperative", introducing a booster. The modal verb "cannot" and the noun "suggestions" function to promote inclusive discourse when examined in the context of other lexical items surrounding them. The writer uses these lexico-grammatical markers to lend credibility to the propositional content of his statement. However, through the adjective "imperative", the writer commits himself to the propositional content of his statement. The following expressions, "vague suggestions," "swift action," "low income," and "verge of survival", are evaluative indicators deployed in appraising the removal of fuel subsidies in this text.

Excerpt twelve uses hedge and booster as stance markers and directive as engagement markers. The modal verb "may" signals hedge while "must" performs dual functions. It first denotes booster and then signals the use of declarative. The modal "may" indicates the possibility of the writer's propositional content. Thus, it serves to present his viewpoint on the removal of fuel subsidies. However, "must" as a modal verb indicates necessity. The columnist uses it in the text to strengthen the point raised in his propositional content. However, the writer employs the modal "must" to offer advice. He believes that as far as the intention to remove fuel subsidies is concerned, the government must ensure that this decision does not affect millions of Nigerians. To this end, he employs this modal verb as a directive marker to draw the government's attention to what it must do as it considers removing fuel subsidies.

Excerpt thirteen reports the period at which the President announced the removal. The text only employs one stance marker as captured in the word "announced," signalling booster. "Announced" is a verb that means to make something known publicly or give official notice of something. As a booster word, the verb shows the writer's propositional statement's veracity and his confidence in the statement.

Both stance and engagement markers are deployed in excerpt fourteen, where reference is made to the period when President Bola Ahmed Tinubu assumed office. Observe the primary auxiliary verb "are", a booster word used to indicate confidence in a claim. In this text, the word in conjunction with the lexical verb "aware" indicates that the writer is very confident in the propositional content of his statement. However, whereas pronominal reference items such as "you", "we", and "our" denote the use of reader-pronouns in the text and function to bring the reader into the discourse subject, the lexical expression "as you are aware" exemplifies the writer's appeal to shared knowledge. Thus, through this engagement marker, readers are asked to note the period in the country when President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's government assumed office. The essence of this marker is to convince the reader to accept the fact that the country's plight was already pathetic when the President came into office. The pathetic situation of the country is captured in the text using lexical expressions such as "nose-diving" and "heavy debts". Similar deployment of stance and engagement markers are noticed in excerpt fifteen, which speaks about the defeated aim of fuel subsidy in Nigeria. The pronominal reference item "we" signals the use of reader pronouns, which brings the readers into the text and acknowledges their presence. The auxiliary verb "are" signifies a booster word used to indicate certitude. It is employed in the text to indicate the writer's confidence in his claim. However, the verb "supposed" is a hedge word used to acknowledge uncertainty. Also, the lexical expression "we are all aware" exemplifies the writer's appeal to shared knowledge. Finally, stance and engagement markers in excerpt sixteen are captured in the words "we", "our", "I", "us", "our", and "believe". The reference items "we", "us", and "our" are reader pronouns deployed in the text to bring the readers into the discourse as well as acknowledge their presence. The auxiliary verb "is" denotes a booster word which serves to show confidence in a claim, while the pronominal reference "I" signifies the use of self-mention in the text. The verb "believe" is a hedge word the writer uses to avoid sounding overconfident. Thus, it serves in the text to ensure that the propositional statement of the writer is not easily dismissed or refuted.

**5.2. Data Presentation and Analysis 2**

This section analyses total amount of words that comprises both data using the quantitative statistical design. This analysis will help answer the third research question which seeks to elucidate the frequency and percentage of distribution of stance and engagement in both data. The below tables illustrate this information

**Table 1: Stance and Engagement Markers Use in the Punch and Daily Trust Corpora**

	<b>Punch Corporal</b>	<b>Daily Trust Corporal</b>
<b>Number of Words</b>	1158	1202
Number of Stance and Engagement Markers	68	75
Total Number of Stance Markers	56	55
Total Number of Engagement Markers	12	20
Percentage of Stance Markers	4.83%	6.24%
Percentage of Engagement Markers	1.03%	1.66%

**Table 2: Stance Markers Use in the Punch and Daily Trust Corpora**

<b>Categories of Stance Markers</b>	<b>Punch Corporal</b>		<b>Daily Trust Corporal</b>	
	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>

Hedges	38	56.71%	31	56.33%
Boosters	19	28.35%	19	34.54%
Attitude Markers	4	5.97%	1	1.81%
Self-Mention	6	8.95%	4	7.27%
Total	67	100%	55	100%

**Table 3: Engagement Markers Use in the *Punch* and *Daily Trust* Corpora**

Categories of Stance Markers	Punch Corporal		Daily Trust Corporal	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Reader Pronouns	2	16.66%	15	75%
Personal Asides	0	0%	0	0%
Shared Knowledge	4	33.33%	2	10%
Directives	5	41.66%	3	15%
Questions	1	8.33%	0	0%
Total	12	100%	20	100%

The first table displays stance and engagement markers in the *Punch* and *Daily Trust* data. The analysis shows that the number of stance markers in both data sets exceeds the number of engagement markers. This finding is consistent with earlier research that looked into the use of these linguistic strategies in academic discourse (Hyland, 2005) and consistently shows similarities in the rhetorical construction of academic and media discourse (Al-Rickably, 2020). The analysis of the two data sets reveals that both newspaper columnists use stance markers nearly equally in their columns. The second table demonstrates that hedge is the most frequently used marker in both data, accounting for over one-third of stance markers in the *Daily Trust* data (56.33%) and roughly half in the *Punch* data (56.71%). The high frequency of this linguistic strategy confirms the tendency of media discourse to distinguish between facts and claims, balance certainty and caution, and lessen the force of claims or propositions. There is no discernible difference in the use of hedge words between the two sets of data, with 38 tokens of hedge appearing in *Punch* and 31 tokens in the *Daily Trust*, separated by just seven tokens. The second most common marker in both data sets is boosters, which are used fairly equally. The *Punch* and *Daily Trust* use 19 booster tokens, making up 28.35% of the *Punch* data and 34.54% of the *Daily Trust*. This could be explained by the fact that, like other discourse types, media discourse uses linguistic elements to emphasise or strengthen the point in media texts to persuade or convince the public. There is a notable difference in the use of attitude markers between the two data sets: 4 tokens of attitude markers are found in the *Punch* corpus, which makes up 5.97%, and one token is found in the *Daily Trust*, which makes up 1.81%. This result shows that this linguistic marker is predominantly used in the *Punch* corpus but rarely used in the *Daily Trust*. This result implies that the columnists of the *Punch* newspapers display a higher incidence of evaluating the subject of discourse and revealing their attitude towards it than the columnists of the *Daily Trust* newspapers. The analysis reveals that the sub-category of self-mention is relatively equally used in both data. They appear 6 times in the *Punch* corpus and 4 times in the *Daily Trust*. Also, in terms of percentages, they count as (8.95%) in *Punch* and (7.27%) in *Daily Trust*. The less frequently used stance markers in both data are engagement markers; the third table indicates that the total number of these markers in the *Punch* and *Daily Trust* corpora is (12) and (20), respectively. The most notable and frequently used engagement markers in the *Daily Trust* and *Punch* corpora are reader pronouns and directives, respectively, with (2) and (15) tokens of reader pronouns in the *Punch* and *Daily Trust* corpora. The high frequency of reader-pronoun usage in the *Daily Trust* corpus indicates that columnists are likelier than those in the *Punch* newspapers to use this linguistic strategy to draw readers into the text. Notably, neither newspaper's columnists frequently drew on common knowledge or used personal asides. The *Punch* data has four instances of the language approach of shared knowledge, whereas the *Daily Trust* contains two instances. The directive has three tokens in the *Daily Trust* data, appearing five times in the *Punch*

data. In both corpora, questions are the engagement markers that are used the least. Their token number is zero in the *Daily Trust* and one in the *Punch* corpus.

## 6. Discussion and Conclusion

The present study examined the stance and engagement markers in the discourse on fuel subsidy removal in the *Punch* and *Daily Trust newspapers* using Hyland's (2005) interaction model. The analysis of the selected extracts from both newspapers reveals the utilisation of stance and engagement markers related to the issue of fuel subsidy removal in Nigeria. To answer the first study question, the stance and engagement markers used in the selected newspapers in structuring the discourse on fuel subsidy removal are hedges, boosters, attitudes, questions, and directives. Regarding the second study's question, it is noteworthy to state that fuel subsidy removal is presented in a bad light using evaluative indicators with negative connotations. The quantitative analysis of the data provides answer to the third research which seeks to determine the points of convergence and divergence in the use of stance and engagement markers in both data. Here, the result of the analysis conducted showed that both corpora employ similar stance and engagement markers although with slight variation in their frequency and percentage distribution. The quantitative examination of stance markers show that they are preferable in both data although they are slightly more frequently used in the *Punch* data. Hedges top the rest of all the other stance markers in term of frequency in both data. The second most employed stance marker used in both data are boosters. This confirms the proclivity of the news writer to persuade the readers with arguments generally backed with data presented in the text. Next to boosters is self-mentions. These are frequently used in the *Punch* data compared to the *Daily Trust*. The final category of stance marker, attitude marker, appear in the *Punch* data 4 times but only 1 time in the *Daily Trust*. Engagement markers, on the other hand, are least prevalent in both data although they are more frequently used in the *Daily Trust* data. They appear 20 times in the *Daily Trust* data and 12 times in the *Punch* data. Among the point of divergence is that reader-pronoun and directives scored the highest percentage of use in both data. While reader-pronoun appears 15 times in the *Daily Trust* data with 75%, it appears in the *Punch* data 2 times with 16.66%. Directives appear 5 times in the *Punch* data with 41.66% and 3 times in *Daily Trust* data with 15%. Two markers that are less desirable in both data are personal asides and questions. Whereas both data did not use personal asides, only the *Punch* newspaper rarely used question. Directives are however, more used in the *Punch* data than in the *Trust Daily* data. The overall analysis demonstrates that knowledge is not created outside of particular communities of practice and that authors do not operate in a social vacuum. These kinds of communities are based on a common set of presumptions and practices for handling and portraying their experiences as a group, including how they interpret and communicate their shared experiences and knowledge. These presumptions do not entirely dictate how language is used on specific occasions; instead, a disciplinary voice can only be attained by engaging with these socially determined and accepted ideas and value stances through participation in such groups. Adherence to standard practices shapes individual creativity (Hyland, 2005).

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