

ETHNIC AND RELIGIOUS SENTIMENTS IN THE DISCOURSE OF POLITICAL APOLOGIES IN NIGERIA: A SOCIOSEMANTIC STUDY

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Abstract

In Nigeria's complex socio-political landscape, ethnic and religious affiliations significantly influence public discussions, especially regarding political apologies. These apologies act as vital tools for conflict resolution, rebuilding trust, and affirming authority in a diverse yet divided nation. This research examines how ethnic and religious sentiments are woven into political apologies and their role in either worsening or easing societal divisions, particularly after Nigeria's return to democracy in 1999. Analysing political apologies sheds light on how leaders address identity-based grievances related to perceived injustices and violence that deepen ethnic and religious tensions. The study aims to identify language patterns in apologies that reveal ethnic biases or religious appeasement, assess their effects on public perception and peace efforts, and suggest ways to promote fairer political dialogue. Using a sociosemantic framework, this qualitative discourse analysis reviews excerpts from five reputable online news articles, including Premium Times and Vanguard, from 2018 to 2022. These articles feature Nigerian leaders' expressions of remorse regarding ethnic displacements, historical injustices, and interfaith conflicts. Results show that, although apologies often use strategies like expressing regret and admitting fault to foster inclusivity, they also expose underlying ethnic or religious biases. For example, shared heritage may be invoked to deflect criticism but often overlook deep-seated prejudices. This research enhances discourse analysis by providing a detailed understanding of how political apologies connect to Nigeria's ethno-religious issues, offering helpful recommendations for policymakers to develop narratives that promote national unity and prevent conflicts. Overall, this study highlights the importance of sociosemantic methods in analysing power-related discourse in fragile democracies like Nigeria.

Keywords: Political apologies, ethnic sentiments, religious discourse, sociosemantic analysis

Introduction

Nigeria's political landscape has long been a stage where ethnic and religious identities clash, often sparking conflicts that necessitate public apologies from political actors. Since the end of military rule in 1999 and the return to democratic governance, the country has faced numerous violent outbreaks driven by deep-seated ethnic rivalries, such as those between the Tiv and Jukun, as well as profound religious divides, especially between Christians and Muslims in the northern and central regions (Ibrahim, 2020; Salawu, 2010). These issues are further complicated by historical grievances, notably the annulment of the June 12, 1993, presidential elections, which significantly heightened ethnic mistrust, particularly within the Yoruba community and beyond (Abubakre, 2018; Vaughan, 2016). The discourse surrounding political apologies in these contexts reveals not merely acts of regret but complex layers of

social meaning that both reflect and actively influence societal divisions (Aluya & Uduma, 2024; van Leeuwen, 2008).

Political apologies typically follow actions perceived as discriminatory, such as expulsions targeting specific ethnic groups or statements that offend religious sentiments (Çancı & Odukoya, 2016; Marshall, 2020). These acts of contrition highlight a broader issue of exclusion rooted in identity politics, creating a destructive cycle where the neglect of these core sentiments leads to further unrest, thereby undermining efforts toward national unity (Obodowhuo, 2023; Paul-Ikechukwu & Clara, 2015). This study, therefore, aims to explore how the language of such apologies encodes ethnic and religious biases, seeking to identify pathways toward more sincere and effective reconciliation. By analysing the semantic structures and societal impacts of these discourses through a sociosemantic lens, it becomes evident that apologies can function as instruments for either unity or further division, contingent on their alignment with broader, more inclusive narratives (Halliday, 1978; Aluya & Iangba, 2025).

The significance of this research lies in its critical examination of how political language can perpetuate inequality in a fragile, multi-ethnic democracy like Nigeria. It provides a structured framework to evaluate leaders' accountability and promotes the development of a political dialogue that transcends parochial ethnic and religious boundaries in the pursuit of a more stable and lasting peace (Tuki, 2024; Yagboyaju, 2017).

Empirical Review

Research on ethnic and religious sentiments in Nigerian political discourse, especially regarding apologies, reveals a wide range of studies that recognise how language shapes identity and power, with different focuses on specific contexts or ideas. Early research laid the foundation for understanding how ethnic identities influence political communication. For example, Salawu (2010) examined ethno-religious conflicts, suggesting that leaders utilise group identities to garner support, often requiring post-conflict apologies to rebuild trust. This is supported by Paul-Ikechukwu and Clara (2015), who explored the intersection of religion and politics, finding that apologies following riots sometimes deepen group divisions rather than heal them. Adding depth, Çancı and Odukoya (2016) analysed religious language in speeches, highlighting that apologies for sacrilege or violence may conceal biases favouring dominant faiths. Their work moves beyond ethnic issues to include faith-based considerations. Vaughan (2016) addressed ethnic conflicts within federal systems and criticised political apologies for often overlooking core injustices, aligning with this study's focus on sociosemantic gaps. Conversely, Yagboyaju (2017) studied apologies for resource disputes in the Niger Delta, emphasising the importance of including such issues in broader national conversations. Recent studies, such as Abubakre (2018), have investigated apologies for historical injustices, revealing similarities between past and current ethnic struggles. Emoghene and Okolie (2020) examined religious sentiments in media apologies from a sociosemantic perspective, although they focused on media narratives rather than official statements. Marshall (2020) questioned the sincerity of apologies during ethno-religious crises, such as Jos, advocating for a deeper contextual understanding that aligns with this study's sociosemantic approach, centred on interconnections. Akah and Ajah (2020) explored Yoruba-Igbo political tensions related to expulsions, highlighting ethnic bias in stories of redemption, but did not thoroughly address religious issues – an aspect this research aims to investigate.

Recent studies, such as Eze (2021), have examined post-2015 election apologies, criticising them for concealing ethnic bias, which aligns with this study's detailed approach. Wachukwu (2021) concentrated on Boko Haram apologies, emphasising the role of religious extremism in shaping discourse, particularly anti-terror narratives. Okibe (2022) explored gender issues within ethno-religious conflicts, broadening identity debates through a feminist perspective, encouraging more comprehensive frameworks in this research. Scholars such as Obodowhuo (2023) have studied conflicts in central Nigeria, identifying patterns in apology discourses that perpetuate tensions, like the Tiv-Jukun conflict, which supports this study's sociosemantic focus. Tuki (2024) analysed global political apologies with African case studies, criticising their effectiveness in reconciliation, which aligns with this study's Nigerian context. Ibrahim and Shehu (2024) examined government apologies post-authoritarian regimes, focusing on accountability and uncertainty, stressing the need for a deeper analysis of meaning. Overall, these studies underscore the significance of apology discourse while differing in scope, and this research enhances understanding by systematically analysing ethnic and religious intersections through a sociosemantic lens, addressing gaps in integration and practical application.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework guiding this sociosemantic examination of ethnic and religious sentiments in Nigerian political apologies draws heavily from the sociosemantic perspective articulated by Halliday (1978) and developed in contemporary works such as van Leeuwen (2008). This framework views language as a social construct deeply embedded within cultural and ideological contexts. Within Nigeria's pluralistic landscape, this approach is pivotal in unpacking how apologies encode ethnic and religious sentiments through lexical choices such as expressions of regret, accountability, and unity that mirror societal power dynamics. For instance, apologies might invoke familial metaphors to signal ethnic solidarity, as seen in appeals to shared community ties. At the same time, religious undertones manifest in calls for forgiveness based on Christian or Islamic frameworks, illustrating how language choices construct social realities (Aluya & Jashina, 2025). This sociosemantic lens seeks to elucidate how meanings are not static but are co-produced in social interactions, positioning political apologies as venues for negotiating identity and power within Nigeria's multi-ethnic and multi-religious fabric. Halliday's systemic functional linguistics highlights three meta-functions: the ideational (depicting reality), the interpersonal (constructing social relationships), and the textual (organising coherent discourse). In the context of apologies, these functions facilitate a nuanced understanding of how ethnic biases are ideationally realised through language choices favouring particular groups. In contrast, religious sentiments construct interpersonal relations through shared faith narratives that may marginalise others (Aluya & Iangba, 2025). Van Leeuwen's extensions to social semiotics broaden this framework to encompass non-verbal aspects, although this study maintains a strong focus on linguistic discourse. Notably, political apologies employ recontextualisation, transforming social actions into linguistic expressions, to mitigate ethnic or religious grievances while frequently masking persistent power imbalances.

In the Nigerian context, emerging studies highlight how sociosemantic variations in apologies incorporate English alongside indigenous languages to convey ethnic nuances, aligning with this framework's emphasis on contextual meaning-making. Recent adaptations emphasise distinctions in Nigerian English, where ethnic implications often permeate discourse in attempts to mitigate face-threatening acts amid religious tensions. Van Leeuwen's socio-cognitive perspective opens avenues for

analysing mental models of ethnic dominance or religious supremacy, evident in apologies following ethno-religious violence, where linguistic choices obscure accountability.

Adaptations of sociosemantic analysis into African contexts illustrate the fluidity of meaning in Nigerian political apologies (for instance, the choice of “misunderstanding” over “mistake”) that dilute ethnic accountability; a trend this study aims to navigate through its synthesis of qualitative inquiries.

Methodology

This research design is qualitative and employs discourse analysis to examine ethnic and religious sentiments embedded within Nigerian political apologies using a sociosemantic framework. Data collection involves selecting excerpts from two news articles that highlight significant past instances of apologies during ethno-religious disputes. The selected sources: Premium Times (2020 and 2025) and Vanguard (2018, 2022, and 2025), were purposively chosen because, as widely circulated national dailies, they provide accurate accounts that reflect both temporal variation and insights into Nigeria’s multi-ethnic compositions.

Data analysis and discussion

Data collection involves extracting complete articles from archival websites, focusing on verbatim apology statements and their surrounding contexts to capture subtle layers of meaning. The excerpts were carefully chosen: Excerpt 1 features Buhari's apology to Abiola's family; Excerpt 2 relates to South-South leaders' demand for an apology from the Presidency over a failed meeting; Excerpt 3 addresses religious sacrilege in Plateau; Excerpt 4 concerns the Igbo Coup and the call for apology and justice from Nigeria; Excerpt 5 involves Nnamdi Kanu's regret over an outburst and his apology to Judge Nyako. The analysis employs a sociosemantic perspective, coding for meaning-making strategies (such as expressions of regret) and social implications (such as ethnic considerations), using thematic categorisation to connect language choices to broader sentiments. This approach ensures a comprehensive understanding of how apologies function within Nigeria’s divided society. This section examines five selected excerpts from online news articles, utilising a sociosemantic framework to investigate how ethnic and religious sentiments shape political apologies in Nigeria. The analysis of excerpts from Premium Times and Vanguard reveals patterns in which apologies express sorrow, but paradoxically also reinforce divisions.

Excerpt 1

June 12, Buhari tender’s apology to Abiola's family (Johnbosco Agbakwuru - June 12, 2018: Vanguard)

In this excerpt, President Muhammadu Buhari’s apology to the family of Moshood Abiola stands out as a critically important moment in the wider story of political apologies in Nigeria. It takes place against the historic backdrop of the annulment of the June 12, 1993, presidential election, widely regarded as one of the fairest and most transparent elections in Nigeria’s history. The profound sense of loss felt by many Nigerians, especially within the Yoruba community, provides a vital perspective through which to analyse Buhari's words. Rather than merely functioning as a formal admission of mistakes, this apology aims to heal the long-standing divisions rooted in the historical grievances surrounding that election — an event that has shaped inter-ethnic relations and attitudes across the country.

The language used in Buhari's apology, especially terms like “apology” and “right the wrongs,” conveys a formal acknowledgement of past injustices. This choice of words

is vital for framing an apology, as it indicates not only recognition but also a willingness to undertake corrective actions. The phrase “right the wrongs” functions as a powerful symbol of intent, suggesting a desire for remedial measures that connect with the context of Abiola’s disenfranchisement and the unrest that followed. On a sociosemantic level, these terms carry meanings that extend beyond simple regret; they imply a commitment to remember and possibly enable reparative justice — a crucial part of reconciliation in a society that remains divided. However, it is important to scrutinise the nuances of the subsequent call for “unity and national cohesion” that Buhari advances. While these appeals seem well-intentioned and place the apology within a hopeful vision of a united Nigeria, they may also risk minimising the specific historical grievances that warrant such a public expression of remorse. By framing his apology within a broader appeal for unity, Buhari appears to sidestep the particular and community-specific impacts of the 1993 election’s annulment — an event that significantly affected various ethnic groups, especially the Yoruba, whose identity is closely linked to this event. Relying on abstract notions of unity may unintentionally dilute the emotional significance attached to the names and faces of those specifically harmed by political decisions of the past.

Furthermore, Buhari’s language reflects a certain neutrality that glosses over critical north-south divisions in Nigeria. Although Buhari aims to present a collective reconciliation story, this approach might lead to assumptions of a unified Nigerian identity, overlooking the diverse experiences of suffering and loss articulated by different ethnic groups. His pursuit of unity could be viewed as a politically safe route that seeks to appease all sides, but it also risks alienating communities like the Yoruba, who seek recognition of their unique historical struggles. Therefore, the call for unity is well-intentioned but inherently complex, casting doubt on the sincerity of Buhari’s apology as a whole. The distinction between “performative versus transformative” actions in this context is crucial. Some critics might see Buhari’s apology as more performative than genuine, suggesting it aims to project an image of a leader concerned about past crises without implementing meaningful policy changes that embody real justice and reckoning for those impacted. This view arises from some communities’ perception that systemic injustices remain unexamined and unaddressed, making the apology seem superficial amid ongoing grievances.

Moreover, the timing and circumstances of the apology warrant careful examination. Delivered in 2018, Buhari’s public expression of regret can be seen as a strategic political move ahead of the upcoming general elections. The timing of the apology has led some scholars and commentators to question its sincerity with some wondering whether the gesture was mainly aimed at garnering support among Yoruba voters or if it genuinely reflected a commitment to addressing historical injustices. This creates a paradox where an apology meant to foster healing could be viewed as motivated by political expediency, thus complicating its acceptance among the community it seeks to comfort. The sociosemantic context is also significant when considering reactions from the public and political leaders to Buhari’s apology. The collective memory of the June 12 election remains a potent symbol of lost democracy and ongoing struggles over power and representation in Nigerian politics. Public reactions might indicate a desire for more than just words, demonstrating an urgent need for actions that genuinely transform the socio-political landscape and tackle persistent inequalities.

Recognising that language shapes social reality is essential in this analysis. Buhari’s apology, while expressed in words that suggest collective healing, also serves as a reminder of the divisions within Nigeria’s fabric that such gestures cannot entirely

mend. Acts of leadership like this must navigate the challenging terrain where personal responsibility intersects with collective sentiment, especially in a context marked by historical injustices and ongoing resentment. Buhari's apology to the Abiola family is a significant chapter in Nigerian political discourse. While it conveys regret and calls for unity, it also risks obscuring the rich diversity of individual and community experiences of marginalisation and loss that require acknowledgment and accountability. This analysis highlights the complex nature of political apologies, which can act both as powerful tools for reconciliation and as symbols of the difficulty in genuinely addressing layered socio-political grievances within Nigeria's diverse landscape. The success of such apologies depends not only on their intention but also, more importantly, on how they are translated into actions that reflect the realities faced by all Nigerians, fostering an inclusive and genuinely transformative unity.

Excerpt 2

South-South leaders demand apology from Presidency over botched meeting
(November 17, 2020 - Premium Times)

This excerpt, "South-South leaders demand apology from Presidency over botched meeting," signifies a crucial point of contention within Nigeria's political sphere, especially regarding regional grievances that resonate strongly with expressions of disenfranchisement prevalent in the South-South geopolitical zone. It highlights ongoing tensions between regional leaders and the federal government, emphasising how political apologies, or the absence of them, serve as key indicators of trust and legitimacy in Nigeria's complex democracy. The phrase "demand apology" conveys a sense of urgency and assertion in the political language of South-South leaders. The word "demand" is significant; it implies an assertion of power and agency. These leaders are not simply requesting an apology but are actively claiming their rights as stakeholders in the Nigerian project. This demand underscores a performative element of identity politics, where apologies are not merely expressions of regret but also acts of political strategy used to negotiate power relations. In a context where historical injustices have often led to violent clashes, frequently driven by economic disenfranchisement, particularly in the oil-rich Niger Delta region, the call for an apology becomes a mechanism for affirming regional identity and addressing perceived marginalisation from the central government.

Furthermore, the concept of a "botched meeting" carries implications that reach deep into Nigeria's socio-political fabric. This phrase reflects underlying themes of mistrust and dysfunction within the political systems designed to govern such a diverse nation. It signifies a failure not merely in logistics or scheduling but also in recognising the psychosocial aspects of ethnic and regional interactions within governance. The leaders' demand highlights a vital need for accountability, echoing the grievances of many communities who feel consistently sidelined in national discussions. This call for apology signifies a broader movement towards ensuring that regional aspirations are acknowledged by the central government, turning apologies into potential bridges over historical divides rather than mere symbols of past grievances. Additionally, the sentiment surrounding political apologies calls for a sociosemantic analysis that explores linguistic choices framing the discourse of power between the Presidency and regional actors. Examining the language used around the apology reveals how such expressions are often crafted in performative terms that aim to influence public perception. This exposes the tension between the rhetoric of accountability and the inherently political nature of apologies, which can be perceived

as insincere or motivated by the desire to placate unrest rather than an honest admission of fault.

The broader implications of this excerpt go beyond the South-South context, prompting reflection on Nigeria's fractured national identity. Political apologies in this case can be seen not only as acts of remorse but also as potential tools for addressing historical grievances and encouraging reconciliation among a diverse range of ethnic groups. The call for acknowledgement from the Presidency could initiate wider discussions within Nigeria's political landscape about the country's socio-economic inequalities and ethnic sentiments, paving the way for sincere initiatives to reduce tensions rooted in past injustices. In essence, Excerpt 2 encourages a detailed examination of how language related to political apologies can reveal, reflect, and even reinforce the underlying power dynamics in Nigeria. As regional factions raise their demands, political apologies take on multiple layers of meaning, exposing the complexities of identity politics, historical grievances, and the quest for genuine governance in a nation still grappling with the legacies of colonialism, ethnic conflict, and socio-economic disparities.

Excerpt 3

Pope: Lalong tenders unreserved apology to Catholic Bishops (Luminous Jannamike, Abuja - August 12, 2022: Vanguard)

The segment from Vanguard detailing Governor Simon Lalong's "unreserved apology" to Catholic Bishops encapsulates the nuanced interaction between political rhetoric, religious sentiments, and the ongoing pursuit of societal healing within Nigeria's complex landscape. At its core, Lalong's apology includes key linguistic elements that aim to evoke a sense of accountability and remorse. The term "unreserved" is particularly significant; it suggests a complete, unqualified acceptance of responsibility, marking a departure from the often-half-hearted apologies usually seen in political discourse. However, although this phrasing seeks to communicate sincerity, it also implies how power and authority interact within the religious framework of Nigerian society. The apology highlights the considerable influence that religious institutions, such as the Catholic Church, hold in the socio-political landscape. The need for Lalong to seek reconciliation with religious leaders indicates that political authority is closely linked to religious legitimacy in Nigeria.

Critically, the language used in Lalong's apology raises questions about the nature of "errors" in politics. By framing the incident as an "error," Lalong adopts a narrative approach that aims to minimise the seriousness of the mistake. This use of error-mitigation language is common in political contexts, where leaders try to downplay misjudgments to reduce public backlash. Such framing subtly suggests that the significance of the original remarks may be overshadowed by the apology, possibly masking the deeper socio-political consequences inherent in the relationship between state officials and religious authorities. Arguably, this apology fails to address the profound implications that the blasphemy allegations carry in a constitutionally secular but largely religious society. In the Nigerian context, not dealing with the potential mismatch between governance and religious expectations risks alienating religious supporters and continues the perception that political apologies are insincere or superficial.

Furthermore, the apology holds significant weight within Nigeria's diverse religious communities. While aimed at Catholic Bishops, it unintentionally highlights the discomfort present in Muslim-majority areas regarding perceived favouritism towards Christian religious figures. The acknowledgement of a "blasphemous" mistake

marks a turning point in Nigerian political discourse, where religious identities often become intertwined with ethno-political loyalties. This overlap can intensify existing tensions, especially when leaders are viewed as favouring one religious group over another. As a result, Lalong's public remorse might be seen not just as a gesture of reconciliation with the Catholic community but also as an invitation for increased scrutiny from Muslim constituents who may perceive his actions with suspicion. Additionally, this apology emphasises broader themes of accountability and governance amid ethno-religious disparities. In a nation grappling with inequality and marginalisation, it may prompt questions about who is accountable for political discourse and conduct, particularly when the sentiments of one group seem to take precedence over another's. The perceived elevation of a Catholic apology over grievances expressed by the Muslim community could deepen existing divides, prompting debate on the implications of such preferential treatment in the political environment.

Lalong's apology has the potential to heighten religious tension, highlighting Nigeria's delicate socio-political fabric, where interfaith efforts can unintentionally increase polarisation. Analyses of text and discourse show how mismanaged narratives in political apologies can have complex effects; the act of seeking forgiveness might both promote dialogue and deepen divisions. Cultural factors unique to Nigerian society may also influence how Lalong's apology is received. The interaction of religious and political issues reflects a broader story involving various stakeholders striving for recognition and representation. This is especially relevant given Nigeria's history, where apologies from political leaders are often linked with episodes of violence, upheaval, and marginalisation, shaping the political scene. Therefore, sympathy towards religious grievances must be exercised cautiously; while Lalong may aim to heal divides, the socio-political implications could trigger discord if not handled with care and insight.

Lalong's expression of remorse offers a key point for examining the broader debate about political apologies in a complex ethnoreligious society like Nigeria. It highlights the sophisticated and often risky nature of political communication, where a leader's call for unity, presented as an apology, can be overshadowed by existing narratives of division. Unravelling the complex web of political apologetics shows the need for deeper understanding of the powerful dynamics involved. This includes recognising that political apologies are not just apologies; they can also act as agents of social change, resonating beyond the immediate context into wider societal themes of trust, recognition, and collective memory. Therefore, future political apologies must engage with these deeper meanings to promote genuine reconciliation and address the systemic issues underlying Nigeria's ethno-religious divisions.

Excerpt 4

**Igbo Coup: Group demands apology, justice from Nigeria (February 25, 2025:
Dennis Agbo - Vanguard)**

The excerpt "Igbo Coup: Group demands apology, justice from Nigeria" focuses on a key issue in Nigeria's complex political history, especially concerning the impacts of the Nigerian Civil War and its lasting effects. This plea captures the subtle aspects of collective memory, the politics of apology, and the tense relations between the Igbo ethnic group and the Nigerian state, pointing to the broader effects of historical grievances in today's political discussions. The phrase "demands apology, justice" is especially important in showing the complicated relationship between

acknowledgement and compensation. It highlights a common theme in politics where simple apologies are seen as insufficient responses to serious historical wrongs. The word “justice” indicates a wider range of accountability that goes beyond national expressions of regret, urging concrete actions to repair the injustices faced by the Igbo people during and after the civil war. This demand stems from a strong belief that recognising past injustices with formal apologies must be directly linked to genuine restitution efforts that tackle current social and political inequalities.

In the context of Nigeria's multicultural and multi-religious landscape, this demand also exemplifies the role of collective identity in shaping the narrative nature of political apologies. The language of apology here is not solely about reconciling with historical events but also about affirming the collective identity and agency of the Igbo people. This collective sentiment underscores a multifaceted struggle for recognition and equity within larger anthropological frameworks that often marginalise specific ethnic narratives, emphasising the enduring impacts of colonial legacies and systemic inequalities prevalent within Nigeria.

Moreover, the term “coup” is laden with historical implications, sparking a range of socio-political associations that recall memories of the 1966 coup and its consequences; events that continue to fuel inter-ethnic tension and distrust. The decision to frame the demand within this historical context prompts critical reflections on how narratives are constructed and interpreted within the socio-political landscape. Revisions or appeals to past political upheavals often serve to evoke emotional responses and reinforce in-group solidarity among the Igbo, potentially polarising relationships with other ethnic groups and the state. The use of such a strongly charged term also raises considerations of how political apologies can help address resentments embedded in the national consciousness while also risking deepening existing ethnic divides.

From a sociosemantic perspective, it is crucial to analyse the lexical choices embedded in this demand for apology. Here, the concepts of responsibility and culpability are intertwined with broader social and historical narratives that shape how these political interactions develop. The call for an apology after the coup highlights the ongoing struggle for historical justice within Nigerian society, framing the narrative of collective suffering as central to understanding contemporary political dynamics. It marks a moment of confrontation between state power and ethnic aspirations, with the potential for acknowledgment to act as a step towards healing and reconciliation. In essence, this excerpt serves as a poignant reminder of the emotionally charged political issues surrounding apologies and the related calls for justice. It highlights the complex interplay of identity, history, and power in shaping political debates in Nigeria, demonstrating how these elements converge to influence the effectiveness of political apologies in addressing past grievances and fostering national unity. Ultimately, Excerpt 4 illustrates these dynamics, emphasising the need for a careful approach to political apologies that considers Nigeria's diverse multi-ethnic society, encouraging more meaningful discussions about justice, reparations, and the ongoing struggle for collective healing in a country marked by centuries of complex interrelations.

Excerpt 5

Nnamdi Kanu regrets outburst, apologises to judge Nyako, prosecutor (March 21, 2025: Abiodun Sanusi - Premium Times)

The fifth excerpt, “Nnamdi Kanu regrets outburst, apologises to judge Nyako, prosecutor,” offers insight into the contentious interplay of political dissent, identity,

and authority within Nigeria, especially concerning the Biafran agitation led by Kanu, a prominent figure challenging the Nigerian state's status quo. This excerpt, while seemingly straightforward, is layered with complex implications surrounding themes of accountability, political identity, and the negotiation of power in a religiously and ethnically diverse environment. The phrase "regrets outburst" indicates a significant shift in Kanu's stance from defiance to remorse, highlighting the importance of public apologies in navigating politically sensitive issues. Kanu's public persona, deeply connected with the hopes and frustrations of a substantial segment of the Igbo population, requires a careful balance between maintaining a revolutionary image and recognising the authority structures of the Nigerian judiciary. This contrast reveals intricate power dynamics, where expressions of regret are not merely emotional releases but strategic actions aimed at mending fractured relationships with state institutions and the wider public.

From a sociosemantic perspective, Kanu's apology also raises an issue of agency. The act of apologising can be seen as both an acknowledgment of narrative agency and a possible relinquishing of it. While expressing regret is generally regarded as a way to reconcile differing perspectives, it also prompts questions about Kanu's role as a leader. Is he submitting to the very structures he has strongly opposed, or is this apology a strategic approach through which he aims to negotiate the ongoing tensions between ethnic and national identities? The inclusion of Kanu's sentiments within the political narrative surrounding judicial authority highlights the multiple layers of power dynamics inherent in political apologies, where the act of apologising must navigate a complex landscape of ethnic sentiments, public perceptions, and legal expectations.

Furthermore, the specificity of his apology "to judge Nyako, prosecutor" reflects a complex interaction of personal and institutional factors. The decision to focus on particular individuals rather than a collective group signifies an engagement with personal accountability that sharply contrasts with the broader discourse of collective identity often invoked in ethnic-focused political rhetoric. By directing his apology towards individuals symbolising state authority, Kanu navigates the delicate intersection of charisma, authority, and dissent. The personal nature of the apology humanises political discourse while also raising questions about the sincerity of such expressions when compared to ongoing socio-political strife. Moreover, analysing this excerpt through the lens of socio-semantics shows how linguistic expressions of regret can create narratives that either heal or deepen societal divisions. The language choices surrounding Kanu's apology might unintentionally reinforce ethnic divisions or help bridge them, highlighting how political language can either promote reconciliation or rejection. In this context, the apology goes beyond its primary purpose and becomes a dual-edged tool used by those in power. Its effectiveness depends on how well these expressions resonate with existing grievances among a population dealing with rapid political changes. Excerpt 5 explores the complexities involved in political apologies within Nigeria by comparing individual accountability to the collective goals of ethnic groups. Kanu's remorse highlights broader themes of power, identity, and societal perceptions that influence whether apologies can effectively promote political healing. This shift from an outburst to an apology encourages deeper reflection on the responsibilities of political leaders in mediating between diverse ethnic communities in a society dealing with its divided past. It shows how apologies can act as important channels for expression in the ongoing pursuit of unity, justice, equality, and inclusive governance.

Conclusion

This inquiry illuminates the complex interaction of ethnic and religious sentiments present in the discourse of political apologies in Nigeria. Using a sociosemantic perspective, the analysis shows that while apologies often express remorse and contrition, they can also reinforce divisions along ethnic and religious lines. Key findings highlight that faith-based leaders, such as Lalong's statements, emphasise ongoing religious tensions, creating barriers to true reconciliation. The nuanced approach to political apologies presented here highlights the importance of critically analysing the language used by political figures. It reveals that the success of apologies relies on their ability to recognise the specific grievances of different ethnic and religious groups. Additionally, political apologies should go beyond mere rhetoric and build stronger connections with affected communities by embracing principles of restorative justice. Future research could include cross-national studies that develop sociosemantic frameworks and empirically assess the effectiveness of apologies through public perception. Such studies would benefit from comparing political apologies across various cultural contexts to identify common patterns or significant differences in how they are created and received.

Recommendations for leaders include the need for clarity in language without euphemisms, as these can weaken accountability and cause misunderstandings. It is essential for apologies to be genuine and to recognise the historical context that has shaped current grievances. Policymakers are encouraged to incorporate communication training into governance practices to equip leaders with the skills needed to navigate complex socio-political landscapes while fostering healing. Furthermore, the media plays a vital role in promoting inclusive narratives that go beyond ethnic and religious divisions, thus supporting a culture of accountability and unity in Nigeria. Overall, the findings of this study add to the wider discussion on political apologies and their sociosemantic effects, offering a critical view on how language influences collective memory, identity, and social cohesion in Nigeria's diverse society. By addressing the intertwined nature of ethnic and religious sentiments in political discourse, this analysis highlights the importance of nuanced communication in advancing national unity and reconciliation.

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