Style and Adverbials in Selected Supreme Court Judgments in Nigeria

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Abstract

Previous linguistic enquiries have investigated legal discourses by reflecting on forensic evidences vis-a-vis the technicality of court cases, leaving a gap in the way adjudicators use adverbials of modality in court rulings. This research considers a stylistic analysis of adverbials of modality for reinforcing verdicts in selected Nigerian Supreme Court Judgments. Two Supreme Court rulings delivered by each of eight different presiding Judges in 2017 election Tribunals were purposively selected because of their accessibility and centrality to the nation's democratic and judicial processes. Reading through the sixteen judgments, expressions containing adverbials of modality were noted and extracted as data. The qualitative method of analysis was used to interrogate the discourse through Simpson's theoretical framework of modality. It was found that judges commonly use adverbials of modality to express personal attitude, convey certainty or uncertainty, doubt or conviction about facts presented before the court. It was also discovered that such adverbials were deployed to evaluate witness, exhibits, counsel's submission and other evidential components during court proceedings, in addition to utilizing them to encode personal assessment of the available facts and evidences. The research suggested that future studies may scrutinize other linguistic dimensions of the discourse of Supreme Court judgments, such as mood and passivity, to investigate personal sentiments in judges' rulings.

Keywords: Adverbials, judgments, modality, style, Supreme Court