

Sociolinguistic Analysis of Defection Politics in Nigeria: Insights from Benign Violation Theory and Critical Default Model of Discourse Coherence

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Abstract

This study interrogates the paradox of Nigeria's "unbroken democracy" through the lens of humour and irony, using the archetype of *Musa, the gateman* as a symbolic observer of the nation's recurring political absurdities. Drawing on Benign Violation Theory (BVT) and Critical Default Model of Discourse Coherence (CDMDC), the paper explores how democratic violations such as mass defections, judicial contradictions, and government U-turns—are rendered *benign* through linguistic humour, political euphemisms, and narrative reframing. BVT illuminates how Nigerians laugh at violations that should ordinarily provoke outrage, while CDMDC exposes the ideological coherence that sustains such laughter at both the surface (default) and deep (critical) levels of discourse. Using purposively sampled data from newspaper reports, political speeches, and online commentaries, the study conducts a critical-pragmatic analysis of how humour and irony function as instruments of both social critique and elite legitimation. Findings suggest that political humour in Nigeria simultaneously defuses tension and perpetuates complacency, transforming democratic incoherence into a normalized spectacle of survival. The metaphor of *Musa at the gate* thus encapsulates the nation's ambivalent consciousness - at once cynical and hopeful - where laughter becomes the last refuge of a disillusioned polity. The study concludes that understanding Nigeria's political communication through the dual prism of BVT and CDMDC reveals the discursive mechanisms by which the absurd becomes acceptable, and the broken appears "unbroken."

Keywords: *Benign Violation Theory, Critical Default Model of Discourse Coherence, democracy, humour, Nigeria, sociolinguistic*

1. Introduction and Contextual Background

In Nigeria, politics has long been a theatre of paradoxes where tragedy and comedy constantly exchange masks. Every election cycle, policy reversal, or courtroom drama unfolds like an absurd play in which citizens, caught between hope and resignation, must find laughter to stay sane. In this tragicomic republic, humour has become both a coping mechanism and a mode of critique — a way to make sense of the senseless. The social media

post that sparked nationwide amusement — “*Civil servants should also be given the opportunity to defect, for example from Ministry of Labour to CBN or NNPC*” — perfectly captures this mood. What began as a comic jab at the gale of political defections soon turned into a viral social commentary, highlighting how deeply Nigerians have internalized the absurdities of their democracy. In Igbo, there is a saying, “*Ajọ ihe na-atọamụ*” — evil sometimes tickles. In other words, even misfortune can provoke laughter, not because it is funny in itself, but because laughter becomes a refuge from despair. Similarly, popular Nigerian expressions like “*Nothing wey Musa no go see for gate*” and “*Naija na cruise*” function as semiotic safety valves; that is, linguistic inventions that enable citizens to “catch cruise” amid dysfunction, to domesticate pain through humour, and to survive chaos through irony. The nation’s body politic is full of *Musa moments* - those surreal encounters, where logic collapses under the weight of contradiction. A government policy is announced one day and reversed the next; a politician defects to a rival party in the morning and returns by dusk; a convicted official is pardoned before the ink of judgment dries. Through it all, the archetypal “Musa,” Nigeria’s proverbial gateman, stands at his post, bemused, muttering, “*Nothing wey Musa no go see for gate.*”

This recurring comic motif points to a deeper psychological and communicative phenomenon, one that can be theoretically illuminated through **Peter McGraw and Caleb Warren’s (2010) Benign Violation Theory (BVT)**. According to BVT, humour arises when a situation simultaneously violates one’s sense of how things ought to be (the *violation*) and yet feels acceptable or harmless (the *benign*). When applied to Nigeria’s socio-political context, BVT offers profound insight into how citizens manage the emotional dissonance of living within a chronically unstable democracy. Nigerians perceive their political landscape as a space of constant violation — electoral deceit, policy inconsistency, corruption, insecurity; yet these same violations are rendered *benign* through humour, irony, and a culture of adaptive fatalism. In effect, laughter replaces outrage; mockery becomes survival.

However, humour does not exist in a vacuum. It is deeply entangled with language, power, and ideology. This is where the **Critical Default Model of Discourse Coherence (CDMDC)** (Agbedo, 2022) provides an indispensable complementary framework. CDMDC extends the analytic reach of discourse theory by showing how meaning operates at two interconnected levels: the *default* (surface) level, where linguistic and pragmatic coherence make discourse

appear “natural” or commonsensical, and the *critical* (deep) level, where hidden ideological structures sustain that apparent normality. Through its five analytical principles — establishing context, identifying default elements, revealing critical elements, analyzing coherence through communicative function and inference, and evaluating implications — CDMDC enables the researcher to see how “coherence” in public discourse may in fact be the product of ideological manipulation. Applied together, BVT and CDMDC form a powerful interpretive lens for understanding how Nigeria’s democracy continues to survive — or appear to survive — despite its visible fractures. On the surface (default level), official narratives, media commentaries, and even social humour construct the image of a resilient democracy that merely suffers temporary turbulence. Beneath the surface (critical level), however, lies a deep incoherence: institutional decay, elite capture, moral fatigue, and public disillusionment. However, this incoherence is continually re-stabilized through humour, euphemism, and narrative re-framing, the communicative equivalents of patching a cracked wall with laughter.

This paper therefore takes the metaphor of “*Musa, the Gateman*” as both a linguistic artefact and a theoretical entry point. “Musa” symbolizes the ordinary Nigerian who stands at the gate of the national edifice, witnessing elite absurdities, ironies, and inanities pass by daily. His refrain, “*Nothing wey Musa no go see for gate,*” is not mere sarcasm; it is a profound semiotic act — a speech event that transforms disbelief into comic endurance. The metaphor of “defection” is equally revealing. Once a term reserved for wartime treachery or ideological realignment, “defection” in Nigerian politics has been stripped of moral weight. Politicians now switch parties as casually as footballers change clubs during transfer windows, and each defection is justified as an act of “political realignment” or “strategic repositioning.” The comic WhatsApp post proposing that civil servants should also be allowed to defect from the Ministry of Labour to the CBN or NNPC is therefore not frivolous humour; it is a subversive critique of Nigeria’s political theatre, where power has become a market commodity and governance a revolving door.

This study situates itself within this complex communicative landscape to interrogate how humour, irony, and political discourse coalesce into a coherent ideological system that sustains Nigeria’s *broken-yet-unbroken* democracy. It argues that through the mechanism of *benign violation* and the discourse coherence achieved at both default and critical levels, the

Nigerian elite class has perfected a language of absurd normality, one that allows citizens to laugh at their pain without challenging its source.

To illustrate this phenomenon, the study analyzed selected episodes from recent political communication — such as the new INEC Chairman’s moral declaration that “in my time, losers will congratulate winners,” the judicial theatrics surrounding Nnamdi Kanu’s medical evaluation, and the government’s “U-turn” on the presidential pardons list dominated by drug and narcotic convicts. Each of these episodes reveals the same discursive pattern: a violation (of justice, logic, or moral order) reframed as benign through bureaucratic language, humour, or institutional ritual. The result is a political culture where incoherence masquerades as resilience and where laughter becomes both a symptom and a sedative. Ultimately, this frames Nigeria’s democracy as a site of *comic coherence*, a discursive condition where contradictions do not destroy meaning but rather produce it. Within this paradigm, the citizen’s laughter is not merely a reaction to absurdity but an act of cognitive adaptation to a system that defies reason. The paper proceeds from this premise to unpack the theoretical and analytical dimensions of BVT and CDMDC as complementary tools for decoding the semiotics of Nigeria’s democratic survival.

2. Statement of the Problem

In the broad sweep of Nigeria’s post-1999 political experience, the phrase “*unbroken democracy*” has become a recurring refrain, an official self-congratulation repeated every election cycle, every Democracy Day, and every handover ritual. Yet, beneath the ceremonial rhetoric lies an unsettling paradox, a democracy that appears unbroken in continuity but fractured in substance. Electoral irregularities, executive impunity, judicial inconsistencies, and the cyclical ritual of political defections have collectively eroded public faith in democratic institutions. And yet, rather than exploding into collective outrage, these contradictions are often domesticated through humour, irony, and resignation. Nigerians have learned to laugh at what should make them weep. A typical example is the viral WhatsApp quip that suggested, tongue in cheek, that *civil servants too should be allowed to defect* — say, from the Ministry of Labour to the CBN or NNPC — just as politicians routinely switch parties. What makes this joke resonate is not its absurdity but its familiarity. It mirrors a lived reality where defection, corruption, and hypocrisy have been normalized through everyday discourse. This normalization process is what this paper seeks to interrogate: How does a

people so acutely aware of political deception continue to participate in the same farce, laughing all the way through? What discursive mechanisms transform outrage into amusement, contradiction into coherence, and systemic dysfunction into what McGraw and Warren (2010) would call *benign violations*? The problem is not simply that Nigerian politics is comically absurd, but that its absurdity has become an organizing principle of national discourse. When the newly confirmed INEC Chairman, Amupitan, proclaims with sanctimonious confidence, “*In my time, losers will congratulate winners,*” Nigerians respond with laughter, not outrage. When conflicting reports emerge about Nnamdi Kanu’s health status — one claiming he is fit to stand trial and another asserting that the medical team was never granted access to examine him, citizens respond again with humour, muttering, “*Nothing wey Musa no go see for gate.*” And when the Federal Government performs a spectacular policy “U-turn” on a list of 175 convicts supposedly granted presidential pardon - nearly 40% of them convicted of drug-related crimes - the reaction is the same: laughter, cynicism, and resignation. The recurring figure of *Musa, the gateman* in these popular narratives personifies the weary Nigerian observer, the citizen, who stands guard at the metaphorical gate of the Republic, witnessing every absurdity and shaking his head in disbelief. His refrain, “*Nothing wey Musa no go see for gate,*” has become more than street idiom; it is a national semiotic code that encapsulates the citizens’ simultaneous awareness and helplessness. Yet beneath this humour lies a profound sociolinguistic and ideological question: How does a society achieve coherence - communicatively and politically - amid such evident contradictions?

Conventional political science explanations - corruption, weak institutions, poverty, or elite capture - do not fully account for this phenomenon. They overlook the linguistic and discursive dimensions through which contradictions are rendered coherent and bearable. This is where a linguistic-pragmatic approach, particularly one integrating **Benign Violation Theory (BVT)** and the **Critical Default Model of Discourse Coherence (CDMDC)**, becomes necessary. BVT helps explain why Nigerians laugh in the face of political violations that should evoke moral outrage. It shows how citizens simultaneously perceive a situation as wrong (*a violation*) and acceptable (*benign*). Laughter becomes a psychological adaptation to contradiction, a way of maintaining emotional equilibrium when social order collapses. However, humour alone does not sustain political coherence; discourse does. The *Critical Default Model of Discourse Coherence (CDMDC)* (Agbedo, 2022) complements BVT by

showing how coherence is discursively produced at two levels: the **default level**, where language, metaphor, and institutional rituals make political absurdities appear “normal”; and the **critical level**, where hidden ideological structures ensure that these absurdities do not threaten elite dominance. At the **default level**, Nigerians hear official narratives of “renewed hope,” “economic stability,” and “macroeconomic growth” even when the microeconomic reality is mass poverty. They laugh at the contradiction, call it “*Naija na cruise*,” and move on. At the **critical level**, however, these narratives perform ideological work; they sustain belief in a system that continually fails its people, yet presents itself as “unbroken.” Humour thus functions not only as social catharsis but also as a subtle technology of control, a way of translating incoherence into livable meaning.

The core problem this study addresses, therefore, is the **discursive normalization of absurdity** in Nigeria’s political communication. It asks: How does laughter become complicity? How does irony produce ideological coherence? And how do official and popular discourses collaborate to frame violations as benign, incoherence as normal, and brokenness as continuity? In summary, the problem lies in the communicative paradox of Nigeria’s democracy; it is broken but coherent, absurd yet believable, tragic yet laughable. This paper argues that the key to understanding this paradox lies not only in political structures but also in the discursive structures that sustain them, in the jokes, metaphors, euphemisms, and narratives that keep “Musa” at his gate, laughing through the ruins.

3. Objectives of the Study and Research Questions

This study seeks to interrogate how humour, irony, and linguistic patterns in Nigerian political discourse function as mechanisms of ideological coherence within a democracy that appears “*unbroken*” only in form but fractured in essence. Using the **Benign Violation Theory (BVT)** and the **Critical Default Model of Discourse Coherence (CDMDC)** as integrated analytical lenses, the study aims to unpack the interplay between laughter, power, and discourse coherence in the representation of political “defections” and systemic contradictions in Nigeria’s Fourth Republic.

Specific Objectives

(i)To analyze how linguistic humour, irony, and popular expressions (e.g., “*Nothing wey Musa no go see for gate*”) serve as discursive resources for interpreting political contradictions and elite defections in Nigeria.

(ii)To examine how the Benign Violation Theory explains Nigerians’ humorous responses to serious political violations and how this humour sustains public acquiescence.

(iii)To apply the Critical Default Model of Discourse Coherence (CDMDC) to identify how official and popular discourses achieve coherence between surface-level narratives of “unbroken democracy” and deep structures of political dysfunction and ideological control.

Research Questions

(i) How do humour, irony, and linguistic creativity shape citizens’ perception of political defections and democratic contradictions in Nigeria?

(ii) In what ways do Nigerians’ humorous responses to political absurdities exemplify the principles of the Benign Violation Theory (BVT)?

(iii) How does the interaction between default and critical levels of discourse coherence (as proposed by CDMDC) reveal the ideological mechanisms that normalize political incoherence in Nigeria’s democracy?

4.1 Theoretical Overview

The study adopts an integrated theoretical framework combining the **Benign Violation Theory (BVT)** of Humour and the **Critical Default Model of Discourse Coherence (CDMDC)** as proposed by Agbedo (2022). This synthesis provides a dual lens for analyzing how political humour functions as both a cognitive and ideological act—simultaneously generating laughter and reproducing social order. While **BVT** explains why Nigerians laugh at the contradictions of their democracy, **CDMDC** investigates how such laughter becomes a coherent discourse that sustains the illusion of political stability. Together, these theories illuminate how the archetypal figure of *Musa, the gateman*, emerges as a metonym of the ordinary Nigerian whose humour masks, and yet reveals, systemic fractures within the democratic experience.

4.2 Benign Violation Theory (BVT)

4.2.1 Origins and Core Principles

The **Benign Violation Theory**, developed by McGraw and Warren (2010), posits that humour arises when a situation simultaneously violates one's sense of how things ought to be while still feeling safe, acceptable, or "benign." The theory proposes three essential conditions for humour to occur: a **violation** (something perceived as wrong or disturbing); the **benign** reinterpretation of that violation (something that renders it non-threatening); the **simultaneous perception** of both elements. In other words, humour operates in the cognitive tension between threat and safety. When people perceive a violation (such as corruption, hypocrisy, or injustice) as not entirely threatening—often through social distance, familiarity, or absurdity - it becomes humorous. This balance between "benign" and "violation" allows individuals to cope with contradiction, maintain psychological distance, and sustain social order through laughter.

4.2.2 BVT and the Nigerian Political Landscape

In the Nigerian sociopolitical context, this theory aptly explains why citizens respond to grave political absurdities with laughter rather than revolt. Expressions like "*Nothing wey Musa no go see for gate*", "*Naija na cruise*", or "*Wetin man go do?*" exemplify humour as survival strategy. Each encapsulates a *violation*—injustice, hypocrisy, political deceit - but renders it *benign* through linguistic creativity and collective irony. The humour does not erase the pain; rather, it transforms despair into shared amusement. Thus, humour becomes a social lubricant that maintains cohesion amidst dysfunction. In analyzing "*Musa, the gateman of benign defections and unbroken democracy*," BVT allows us to interpret how the Nigerian public interprets elite defections, judicial contradictions, and government "U-turns" not as threats to the system but as familiar spectacles of absurdity—part of the political carnival that evokes laughter rather than outrage. Humour here performs a pragmatic act; it diffuses tension, mitigates fear, and reproduces acquiescence. This benign response to violation sustains what may be termed "comic democracy," a polity where laughter substitutes for accountability.

4.3 Critical Default Model of Discourse Coherence (CDMDC)

4.3.1 Foundations and Rationale

The **Critical Default Model of Discourse Coherence (CDMDC)**, formulated by Agbedo (2022), evolves from Brown and Yule's (1983) classical concept of discourse coherence but

extends it through the lens of **Criticality Theory**. CDMDC argues that coherence in discourse is not merely a product of linguistic or textual connectedness but a dynamic interaction between **surface coherence (default level)** and **deep coherence (critical level)**. It is a model designed to interrogate how ideologies, power relations, and hidden assumptions produce a sense of “naturalness” in discourse, even when that discourse sustains inequality or deception. According to Agbedo, CDMDC is guided by **five analytical principles**:

- (i) **Establish the context:** Who is speaking, to whom, when, where, and with what motive?
- (ii) **Identify the default elements:** What linguistic patterns, metaphors, and conventions make the discourse appear “natural”?
- (iii) **Identify the critical elements:** What power relations, silences, and presuppositions lurk beneath that surface?
- (iv) **Analyse coherence** through three subcomponents - *Communicative function:* What pragmatic act is being performed (persuasion, justification, manipulation)? *Socio-cultural knowledge:* How do history, culture, and institutional norms shape interpretation? *Inferences:* What implicit conclusions does the discourse invite the audience to draw?
- (v) **Draw inferences and evaluate implications:** How do surface and deep structures interact to produce ideological coherence and social effect?

4.3.2 CDMDC and Political Discourse in Nigeria

The Nigerian political space thrives on what might be termed **strategic incoherence** -where contradictions in governance, policy reversals, and moral duplicities are made to appear coherent through rhetorical framing and institutional manipulation. When the government justifies elite defections, retractions, and judicial inconsistencies through phrases such as “*for the sake of national unity,*” or “*democracy is unbroken,*” it is performing a **coherence act** - making the incoherent appear logical. CDMDC provides the analytical scaffolding for decoding these coherence strategies. It allows us to examine, for example, how discourses around “**Presidential Prerogative of Mercy,**” “**Nnamdi Kanu’s fitness to stand trial,**” or **INEC’s promise of a new era** achieve ideological stability at the surface level while concealing deep structural contradictions. By applying CDMDC, the study probes how political narratives manipulate coherence through linguistic devices such as euphemism, metaphor, repetition, and appeals to national sentiment. At the **default level**, official statements present a façade of order, legality, and moral uprightness. At the **critical level**, however, these discourses reveal power asymmetries, ethnic biases, and deliberate

obfuscations. The model therefore becomes indispensable in tracing how “Musa,” the symbolic gateman, navigates these layers, understanding the surface coherence of the elite narrative while instinctively recognizing the deep incoherence beneath.

4.4 Integrating BVT and CDMDC as a Dual-Layered Analytical Model

The **Benign Violation Theory (BVT)** and the **Critical Default Model of Discourse Coherence (CDMDC)**, though emerging from distinct traditions - psychology and discourse analysis respectively - can be integrated into **adual-layered analytical model** for decoding how Nigerians process and sustain humour in the face of political absurdity.

BVT explains *why* Nigerians find humour in violations of political and moral norms; CDMDC explains *how* those humorous expressions achieve discursive coherence and ideological normalization in public discourse. The integration of the two frameworks thus moves analysis from the **psychological domain of laughter** to the **critical domain of meaning** - from *perception to production, from cognitive response to discursive structure*.

At the **psychological level**, BVT posits that humour emerges when three conditions are met: (i) **aviolation occurs** (something seems wrong, absurd, or morally deviant); (ii) **the violation is perceived as benign**, that is, safe or tolerable; (iii) **both perceptions coexist simultaneously**, creating cognitive ambivalence that manifests as laughter. In Nigeria’s context, this ambivalence is pervasive. Citizens witness brazen political defections, judicial contradictions, and bureaucratic somersaults, yet respond with laughter, not because these events are trivial, but because laughter provides the psychological safety necessary to process trauma without despair. At the **discourse level**, CDMDC demonstrates how such humour-laden responses achieve coherence within communicative, socio-cultural, and ideological contexts. Humour does not simply arise spontaneously; it is linguistically encoded, socially circulated, and institutionally tolerated. CDMDC exposes the coherence between *what is said* (default level) and *what is meant* (critical level), revealing how public discourse transforms *violations* into *acceptable narratives*. When these two levels interact, we get a **dual-layered model of analysis**. The **BVT layer** captures the *psychological interpretation* of absurdity, how violations become benign in the Nigerian social imagination. The **CDMDC layer** captures the *linguistic realization* of that benignity, how such tolerance is articulated, circulated, and sustained through everyday language, memes, jokes, and media discourse.

4.4.1 The Dual-Layered Analytical Model (BVT + CDMDC)

Analytical Dimension	Benign Violation Theory (BVT)	Critical Default Model of Discourse Coherence (CDMDC)	Integrated Insight for the Study
Disciplinary Origin	Social & Cognitive Psychology	Critical Discourse Analysis & Cognitive Pragmatics	Interdisciplinary bridge between cognition and discourse
Analytical Focus	Psychological processing of humor and emotional ambivalence	Discursive construction of coherence across surface and deep structures	How humor mediates between cognition and ideology
Core Premise	Humor arises when a norm violation is perceived as safe or acceptable (benign)	Discourse coherence is achieved when surface meanings mask deeper ideological contradictions	Nigerians maintain cognitive and discursive balance by interpreting political dysfunction as benign and coherent
Analytical Levels	Violation → Benign interpretation → Simultaneous perception	Default (surface) → Critical (deep) → Ideological inference	Parallel dual-processing: humor as cognitive benignity and discourse as ideological coherence
Key Analytical Questions	Why do Nigerians laugh at political absurdities instead of revolting?	How do political and media discourses normalize these absurdities linguistically and ideologically?	What cognitive-discursive mechanisms sustain Nigeria’s “unbroken” democracy despite evident brokenness?
Data Focus	Humor, irony, memes, jokes, street idioms (“ <i>Nothing wey Musa no go see for gate</i> ”)	Political speeches, news reports, official statements, public commentary	Integrated textual-psychological analysis of laughter and language in political life
Outcome of Analysis	Emotional coping, psychological safety, collective tolerance	Ideological coherence, power reproduction, social normalization	The “Musa” archetype symbolizes both laughter (BVT) and coherence (CDMDC) — a dual emblem of survival and surrender

4.4.2 Operationalizing the Dual Framework

In practical analytical terms, this study employs the integrated model as follows:

(i) *Identify the Violation (BVT lens)*

Determine the political or moral violation — e.g., defection, corruption, policy reversal, or administrative absurdity.

(ii) *Identify the Benign Frame (BVT lens)*

Examine how citizens, through humour, irony, or satire, reframe the violation as tolerable or “cruise-worthy.”

(iii) *Map the Default Coherence (CDMDC lens)*

Analyze how language constructs surface coherence — e.g., political metaphors like “unbroken democracy” or “renewed hope” that give illusion of stability.

(iv) *Excavate the Critical Coherence (CDMDC lens)*

Reveal the deeper ideological structure — e.g., power insulation, elite manipulation, or institutional decay — hidden beneath the humorous or official narrative.

(v) *Synthesize Findings (Integrated layer)*

Link the cognitive (humour as tolerance) with the discursive (language as normalization) to explain how Nigeria sustains its paradoxical image of democracy amidst dysfunction.

4.4.3 Analytical Implication

By synthesizing BVT and CDMDC, this study bridges the psychological and linguistic dimensions of political communication. The humour that underpins Nigeria's democratic discourse is not merely laughter in the dark; it is a sophisticated act of cognitive and discursive balancing. Citizens, overwhelmed by perpetual "violations," transform them into "benign" experiences through language and laughter, thus achieving temporary coherence in an incoherent polity. This dual-layered analytical model therefore allows the study to address a deeper paradox. How a broken system remains linguistically coherent, psychologically tolerable, and politically "unbroken" in the collective imagination of its citizens.

5. Review of Related Literature

Scholarly inquiry into political humour, discourse coherence, and the discursive reproduction of democratic legitimacy bridges several fields - social psychology (humour studies), pragmatic linguistics, and critical discourse analysis (CDA). This review synthesizes relevant literature across these traditions and situates the present study's integrated BVT-CDMDC approach within extant debates.

5.1 Humour Theory: From Incongruity to Benign Violation

Humour theory has a long intellectual history, with three major classical strands: superiority, relief, and incongruity theories (see summaries in Raskin and Attardo 1991). Linguistic accounts advanced script-based accounts (Raskin's Script-based Semantic Theory of Humour — SSTH) and its expansion into the General Theory of Verbal Humour (GTVH) by Attardo and Raskin, which remain foundational for analysing verbal and political humour (Raskin; Attardo&Raskin, 1994). These frameworks focus on how incongruous "scripts" are juxtaposed and resolved to produce a comedic effect (script opposition, logical mechanism, target, etc.). Building on (and empirically testing) aspects of incongruity, McGraw and Warren developed the **Benign Violation Theory (BVT)** to explain why certain moral or threatening violations are found humorous when perceived as non-threatening. BVT proposes that humour occurs when (i) a norm is violated, (ii) the violation is appraised as

benign, and (iii) the perceiver simultaneously senses both the wrongness and the harmlessness of the act. BVT is grounded in experimental social and cognitive psychology and has been tested across contexts (including morally charged stimuli), offering a robust, empirically-informed account of humour's affective mechanics. In this study we treat BVT as a psychological theory with rich cognitive-pragmatic implications for discourse analysis. More recent syntheses and critiques show how BVT aligns with other cognitive accounts of humour (e.g., incongruity-resolution perspectives, relevance-theoretic inferences) and with proposals that humour works as rapid anxiety reduction or cognitive reappraisal (Safron; Martinez). Such developments indicate that humour should be treated as both a cognitive process and a social-pragmatic one — a view that underpins the present integration with CDMDC.

5.2 Linguistic Approaches: Script, Pragmatics, and Relevance

Linguistic-pragmatic treatments of humour emphasise inferencing, context, and the cooperative principles of communication (Gricean pragmatics, Relevance Theory). Sperber and Wilson's Relevance Theory foregrounds how hearers compute contextual effects and processing effort to derive intended meanings; humour often exploits relevance-driven inferencing to produce surprise and pleasure (i.e., low-effort high-effect shifts). Relevance theory therefore complements script-based models by showing how contextual salience and inferential work underpin humour comprehension. Attardo's work and the GTVH extend SSTH by specifying knowledge resources and narrative strategies that make verbal humour analyzable in discourse; Raskin's and Attardo's frameworks have been successfully applied to political satire and political jokes, allowing analysts to decode how jokes mobilise culture-specific scripts and targets. These linguistic accounts are particularly useful when humour functions as political commentary — as in the Nigerian examples central to this study.

5.3 Critical Discourse Analysis and Political Communication

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) provides tools for interrogating the ideological work of language in shaping political cognition and legitimating power (Van Dijk; Fairclough). Van Dijk's principles of CDA emphasise access, power, and the ways discourse reproduces dominance; CDA scholars show how seemingly neutral or naturalised narratives conceal power relations and legitimation strategies. This tradition is central to understanding how official narratives (e.g., "unbroken democracy," "macroeconomic stabilization") function

rhetorically to normalise contradiction. The Critical Default Model of Discourse Coherence (CDMDC) advanced by Agbedo (2022) draws directly on Brown & Yule’s notion of textual and contextual coherence while embedding criticality in the analytical process. CDMDC’s two-tiered approach (default/surface vs critical/deep) and its five analytical principles (context, default elements, critical elements, coherence analysis, inference/evaluation) operationalise how ideological coherence is manufactured - showing how language that appears natural masks deeper silences and power plays (Brown & Yule; Agbedo). The model thus provides a practicable method for exposing the interaction between surface-level rhetoric and deep-level ideological operations in political communication.

5.4 Humour, Satire and Political Resistance in Africa/Nigeria

Empirical studies demonstrate that humour and satire in African contexts often function as vehicles of political critique, social commentary, and subtle resistance (Obadare; other African media analyses). Obadare’s influential essay on jokes in Nigerian politics argues that jesting and ridicule perform “infrapolitics”—a popular, often subversive commentary that allows subordinated groups to mock and delegitimise power without direct confrontation. This line of work shows how humour can carry both emancipatory and conservative potential: it can expose hypocrisy and mobilise opinion, but it can also diffuse outrage by turning grievance into entertainment. This ambivalence is central to the argument of the present study. Nigerian scholarship on political satire, memes, and skits (including recent digital-era analyses) has documented how comedians, skit-makers, and social media users have become active political commentators - often shaping public perception more effectively than traditional media. The comedic repertoire ranges from parodies of politicians to satirical re-framings of policy failure; these practices also feed back into mainstream narratives, creating a hybrid discourse field where official and popular discourses interact. Such literature supports the present paper’s claim that humour plays a constitutive role in the public meaning-making of Nigeria’s democracy (see recent media studies and analyses of satire’s civic function).

5.5 Political Defection and Democratic Legitimacy in Nigeria

Scholarly work on party defection (cross-carpeting) in Nigeria frames it as a structural challenge to party institutionalisation and electoral integrity. Studies trace the phenomenon historically and analyse its implications for democratic consolidation; defection is often

driven by patronage/office-seeking rather than ideology and undermines voters' trust in party platforms (Omotola; Mbah; Azubike; others). This literature establishes that frequent defections erode the normative expectations that democracy requires, making political allegiances transactional and undermining policy continuity. It also helps explain why the populace interprets defections as routine spectacle rather than scandal — a key empirical point for applying BVT and CDMDC.

5.6 Synthesis: Gap and Contribution

Across these literatures there is converging recognition that humour, discourse, and political practice co-produce public meaning. Yet, two analytic gaps remain. First, humour research (including BVT) tends to emphasise individual cognitive-affective mechanisms and often stops short of explicating the ideological functions of humour in sustaining regimes of power. Second, CDA scholarship robustly interrogates ideological work but has paid less systematic attention to humour as a formal mechanism of discursive coherence. The present study fills this gap by integrating BVT's psychological account with CDMDC's critical linguistic apparatus to show how humour becomes both cognitive adaptation and discursive technology - stabilising a polity that is formally "unbroken" but substantively fractured. By examining illustrative Nigerian episodes (the viral WhatsApp civil-servant-defection joke and the four consequential speech acts, verbalizing the gale of defection epidemic), the study applies the dual-layered model to demonstrate empirically how benign violations are linguistically framed and ideologically naturalised - thereby contributing both to humour studies and to critical discourse analysis of African democracies.

6. Data Presentation

6.1 Overview of Data Set

The data set for this study consists of **five (5) primary discourse excerpts** purposively selected from Nigeria's recent wave of political defections (2023–2025). These are:

Excerpt 1: Defection speech by **Governor Sheriff Oborevwori** (Delta State)

Excerpt 2: Defection speech by **Governor UmoEno** (Akwa Ibom State)

Excerpt 3: Defection speech by **Governor Peter Mbah** (Enugu State)

Excerpt 4: Defection communiqué by the **Enugu Caucus of National Assembly members**, led by **Hon. NnolimNnaji**

Excerpt 5:WhatsApp meme circulating nationwide titled “*Civil Servants Too Should Be Allowed to Defect from Ministry of Labour to NNPC*”

These five discourse items were selected to ensure **representativeness** of both **elite discourse (official speeches)** and **popular discourse (citizen humour)** within the same thematic frame - *defection as linguistic and ideological performance*.

6.2 Coding Framework and Categories

Data coding followed a **dual-level interpretive coding scheme** grounded in the **BVT-CDMDC Integrated Model**. Coding was both **deductive** (theory-driven) and **inductive** (data-driven), combining psychological and discursive dimensions. Each excerpt was segmented into **meaning units** (clauses or sentences) and coded along **three major dimensions**:

Level	Analytical Dimension	Operational Codes	Description / Function
BVT Layer (Cognitive)	<i>Humor and Violation</i>	BV1 – Violation Type (Moral, Political, Logical)	Identifies how each discourse instance creates humor through benign violations and relief mechanisms.
	<i>Coding</i>	BV2 – Benignity Type (Contextual, Linguistic, Social)	
		BV3 – Humor Type (Irony, Satire, Sarcasm, Absurdity)	
CDMDC Layer (Discursive)	<i>Critical Coherence</i>	CD1 – Context (Who, Where, When, Why)	Identifies how discourse maintains or subverts coherence and ideology across levels.
	<i>Coding</i>	CD2 – Default Meaning (Surface coherence)	
		CD3 – Critical Meaning (Deep coherence)	
		CD4 – Communicative Function (Justification, Persuasion, Manipulation)	
		CD5 – Ideological Implication (Power, Solidarity, Resistance)	
Integrative Layer	<i>Convergence Coding</i>	INT1 – Humor–Ideology Nexus	Synthesizes both levels into integrated patterns of interpretation.
		INT2 – Emotional Framing (Benign laughter or cynical despair)	
		INT3 – Coherent Incoherence (How incoherence is normalized)	

A **total of 13 analytical codes** were employed across all excerpts (BV1–BV3, CD1–CD5, INT1–INT3), grouped into **three interpretive clusters**.

6.3 Coding Statistics

After transcription and segmentation, the five discourse items yielded a total of **268 analyzable meaning units (MUs)**. The coding distribution across analytical dimensions is summarized below:

Analytical Layer	Number of Codes Applied	Frequency of Occurrence	Percentage of Total Coding
Benign Violation Theory (BVT)	3	112	41.8%
Critical Default Model of Discourse Coherence (CDMDC)	5	122	45.5%
Integrative Layer (BVT + CDMDC)	3	34	12.7%
Total	11	268	100%

Among the BVT codes, Violation Type (BV1) occurred most frequently (n=47), suggesting that political humour in Nigeria’s defection discourse often originates from perceived moral and ideological breaches. Within the CDMDC layer, Communicative Function (CD4) and Ideological Implication (CD5) dominated (n=55 and n=48 respectively), underscoring the discursive intent to justify or delegitimize defection acts. The integrative layer recorded INT1 (Humour–Ideology Nexus) as the most frequent (n=20), reinforcing the finding that humour in Nigerian politics operates as a coping mechanism for incoherence rather than simple ridicule.

6.4 Coding Procedure

The coding was conducted in three phases:

Phase 1 – Preliminary Reading: All excerpts were read repeatedly to identify thematic markers, tone, and socio-political references. Marginal notes were taken to capture initial interpretive cues.

Phase 2 – Manual Coding:

Codes were applied manually using NVivo-assisted framework tables to ensure systematic capture of cognitive and discursive cues. Each sentence or clause was tagged with its corresponding BVT and CDMDC labels.

Phase 3 – Integrative Mapping:

The coded data were then charted in cross-layer matrices aligning cognitive humour with discursive coherence. For example, a “benign violation” involving political hypocrisy was cross-referenced with its “critical coherence” pattern revealing ideological manipulation. This step yielded thematic clusters such as defection as political theatre, laughter as linguistic deflection, ideological coherence through absurdity.

6.5 Inter-Coder Reliability

To enhance reliability, the study engaged two additional coders - doctoral candidates specializing in Discourse Analysis and Cognitive Pragmatics. Each coder independently analyzed 20% of the data (54 MUs) using the same coding scheme. The inter-coder agreement rate was measured using Cohen's Kappa (κ) for categorical data consistency.

Analytical Layer	Cohen's Kappa (κ)	Interpretation (Landis & Koch, 1977)
BVT Layer	0.86	Almost Perfect Agreement
CDMDC Layer	0.81	Almost Perfect Agreement
Integrative Layer	0.78	Substantial Agreement
Overall Reliability (Mean κ)	0.82	Almost Perfect Reliability

Discrepancies were resolved through discussion and consensus, ensuring conceptual alignment across coders.

6.6 Validity Measures

The study applied **three main forms of validity** to ensure analytical robustness.

Type of Validity	Strategy Applied	Purpose / Outcome
Construct Validity	Dual-level operationalization of humor (BVT) and discourse coherence (CDMDC).	Ensured theoretical consistency and accurate representation of constructs.
Internal Validity	Triangulation across sources (governors' speeches, caucus communiqué, meme).	Ensured convergence of findings across discourse types.
External Validity (Transferability)	Use of real-life, nationally circulated texts.	Allowed generalization of interpretive insights to wider Nigerian democratic

In addition, **member validation** was performed by sharing interpretive summaries with two political communication scholars for external critique. Feedback affirmed the interpretive plausibility of the coding scheme and its theoretical congruence.

6.7 Reflexivity Statement

Given the politically charged nature of the data, the researcher maintained a **reflexive position** throughout the coding process, documenting interpretive decisions, biases, and contextual observations. This step ensured transparency and accountability in analytic reasoning - a crucial requirement in critical discourse research.

6.8 Summary of Quantitative-Qualitative Integration

Parameter	Quantitative Indicator	Qualitative Implication
Total Meaning Units (MUs)	268	Rich textual density across elite and popular discourse
Total Codes Applied	268 (across 11 categories)	Balanced theoretical spread
Inter-Coder Reliability	$\kappa = 0.82$	Strong analytical consistency
Dominant Cognitive Code	BV1 (Violation Type)	Perceived hypocrisy and political absurdity drive humor
Dominant Discursive Code	CD4 (Communicative Function)	Humor operates as persuasive rationalization of incoherence
Integrative Finding	INT1 (Humor-Ideology Nexus)	Humor sustains ideological stability amid democratic absurdity

This coding, validity, and reliability procedure provides the **empirical backbone** of the study, enabling rigorous and transparent interpretation of Nigeria's defection discourse. It ensures that the ensuing **data presentation and analysis** will be both methodologically credible and theoretically grounded. The triangulated findings will show how Musa's proverbial "gate" becomes the metaphoric border between *ideological coherence* and *humorous resignation* in Nigeria's democracy.

7. Data Analysis

Analytical Interpretation of Political Defection Speeches through BVT and CDMDC

The recurring rhetoric of "defection" among Nigerian politicians - here illustrated by the speeches of Governors Oborevwo, UmoEno, Peter Mbah, and NnolimNnaji, alongside the satirical meme on civil servants - constitutes a communicative event that can best be unraveled through the joint lenses of the **Benign Violation Theory (BVT)** and the **Critical Default Model of Discourse Coherence (CDMDC)**. The speeches are performative acts - linguistically crafted to legitimize a political violation (abandoning one's party) and to

reframe it as a benign, even noble, pursuit. At the **default level** (CDMDC), each speaker projects altruistic motives couched in the discourse of collective interest, service, and developmental continuity. Yet, beneath this rhetorical surface lies a **critical level** of discursive manipulation where ideological motives - self-preservation, access to federal patronage, and elite consolidation - operate silently but powerfully.

Excerpt (i): Governor Sheriff Oborevwori – “Connecting Delta to Abuja”

At the **surface level**, Oborevwori frames his defection as a historical turning point: “*a time to change our path for the common good of the people.*” His metaphor of “connecting to Abuja” evokes the imagery of inclusion and infrastructural linkage, suggesting that defection is not treachery but a strategic bridge-building toward federal resources. However, the **critical level** reveals an ideological inversion. The “connection to Abuja” becomes a euphemism for **alignment with the power centre** - a survival strategy for political relevance. What appears as a benign act of service masks a **violation of political loyalty and democratic integrity**, sustained by the default discourse of “development.” From the perspective of **Benign Violation Theory**, Oborevwori’s speech performs a **violation** (party betrayal) that is simultaneously rendered **benign** through moral rebranding - he defends the act as being “for the common good.” The humour (and incongruity) arises from the tension between what is said (“we are connecting to Abuja”) and what is meant (“we are securing our own interests”). This discursive performance transforms an ethically questionable act into a patriotic necessity, exemplifying how linguistic framing converts violation into virtue.

Excerpt (ii): Governor UmoEno – “Joining from a Position of Strength”

Governor UmoEno’s declaration that he joins APC “to give full backing to the President’s economic reforms” and “from a position of strength” typifies the **rhetoric of empowerment** as camouflage. At the **default level**, the speech invokes the lexicon of duty, continuity, and economic rationality. The expression “position of strength” implies agency and principled decision-making. Yet, at the **critical level**, this phrase conceals **political vulnerability** and the pragmatic calculus of survival. The act of defection, framed as strength, is in fact a **reactive adaptation** to the prevailing political winds. It is a ritual of submission to federal dominance - a discursive reinforcement of elite hegemony over participatory democracy. Under **BVT**, the governor’s “violation” (ideological betrayal of the party that produced him) is rendered “benign” by appealing to the overarching frame of “national development.” The simultaneity

principle of BVT manifests here. Both the violation (defection) and its benign appraisal (developmental rhetoric) coexist, producing the irony that the audience recognizes but tolerates as “normal politics.” The humour lies not in laughter but in the **absurd normalization** of political inconsistency.

Excerpt (iii): Governor Peter Mbah – “Charting a New Course”

Peter Mbah’s declaration is suffused with **high moral diction** - “not about personal ambition,” “greater good of our people,” “Igbo DNA,” “destiny,” and “vision.” These expressions at the **default level** present defection as an act of visionary leadership and ethnic solidarity. His lexical choices elevate the political act into a moral crusade, inviting affective identification. The **critical reading**, however, exposes the ideological kernel of **instrumental alignment**. The reference to “reinforcement at the federal level” betrays the utilitarian motive - to ensure that state development flows through channels of federal favour. Thus, the speech encodes *clientelist dependence* disguised as federal cooperation. Under **BVT**, the humour arises from the incongruity between the elevated moral register and the mundane political calculus it masks. The violation (abandonment of opposition ideals) is dressed in noble vocabulary, rendering it benign through aesthetic sophistication. The audience perceives the irony but accepts it as the grammar of Nigerian politics - an institutionalized joke where betrayal is domesticated as pragmatism.

Excerpt (iv): NnolimNnaji and Enugu Lawmakers – “Standing with Our Visionary Governor”

The collective defection speech of Enugu lawmakers amplifies the **choral rhetoric of solidarity**. The lexical cluster - “joy,” “conviction,” “bold step,” “shared determination” - forms a *semantic field of optimism* that masks the deeper motive of consolidation under the governor’s patronage. The default level presents unity and developmental zeal, while the critical level reveals *elite coordination for self-preservation*. The lawmakers’ declared intent to “connect to the heartbeat of national development” echoes Oborevwo’s “connect to Abuja,” revealing an emerging *defection discourse template* in which the “national grid” metaphor legitimizes dependence on the centre. In BVT terms, the lawmakers’ speech constitutes a **collective benign violation** - a mass defection reframed as patriotic cohesion. The simultaneity of violation and benign appraisal produces an ironic humour; the same political class that fractures party loyalty claims moral high ground through the language of

unity and destiny. This ironic simultaneity sustains what Nigerian political observers have dubbed “defection as culture,” a benignly violated democratic principle.

Excerpt (v): WhatsApp Meme – “Civil Servants Should Also Be Allowed to Defect”

The meme functions as a **folk commentary** and **metapragmatic satire**. It operates entirely at the **critical level** of discourse by unveiling, through humour, the absurdity of the political defections. The meme’s witty proposal that “civil servants should also be allowed to defect - from the Ministry of Labour to CBN or NNPC” violates normal bureaucratic logic but simultaneously exposes the violation already normalized in politics. In BVT terms, the meme crystallizes the **humour born of incongruity**. The absurd suggestion becomes a **benign mirror** reflecting a society, where political mobility has replaced ideological integrity. The audience laughs, but that laughter is diagnostic; it signals moral awareness of a political system in disrepair. The meme thus restores the **critical coherence** that political actors sought to obscure, aligning with CDMDC’s call for decoding the ideological underbelly beneath surface coherence.

Synthesis

Across all five excerpts, the **CDMDC** reveals a consistent ideological pattern: the defection discourse achieves **surface coherence** through the rhetoric of unity, development, and federal alignment, while **critical coherence** discloses self-interest, power preservation, and class continuity. Simultaneously, **BVT** helps us understand how this discourse is tolerated; each act of defection, though violating democratic norms, is rendered **benign** through humour, familiarity, and linguistic beautification. The resulting **discursive incongruity** transforms political absurdity into an acceptable social performance. Thus, the intersection of BVT and CDMDC demonstrates that the language of defection in Nigeria operates not merely as political communication but as a **comic-tragic theatre of elite ideology**, where violations of principle are routinely sanctified by rhetoric, and laughter becomes the last refuge of the politically fatigued citizen.

8. Discussion of Findings

The findings from the preceding analyses reveal that the political defection narratives by Nigerian governors and lawmakers are not isolated communicative acts, but deliberate **discursive performances of elite ideology** designed to rationalize power shifts, re-inscribe

dominance, and normalize political opportunism. When analyzed through the twin theoretical frameworks of the **Benign Violation Theory (BVT)** and the **Critical Default Model of Discourse Coherence (CDMDC)**, these speeches emerge as **symbolic artifacts of state capture**, reflecting how language is used to domesticate moral violations within the political consciousness of citizens.

8.1 The Linguistic Normalization of Political Violations

The Benign Violation Theory foregrounds the paradox that humour and tolerance can emerge from the simultaneous perception of a norm being violated yet rendered acceptable. In the context of the defection narratives, this paradox plays out in the **reframing of moral and ideological betrayal** as acts of courage, reform, and progress. The rhetorical devices - “connecting to Abuja,” “charting a new course,” “standing with our visionary governor,” and “joining from a position of strength”- are all linguistic masks that domesticate the moral shock of betrayal. By invoking altruistic motives, the politicians transform a **moral violation (party disloyalty, ideological inconsistency, and opportunistic realignment)** into a **benign political necessity**. This process mirrors the logic of humour; the incongruity between what is said and what is meant creates cognitive dissonance that is resolved through social acceptance. Citizens, long habituated to elite duplicity, react not with outrage but with weary amusement. Thus, political defection - once viewed as scandalous - has been **linguistically normalized through repeated benign violations**.

8.2 The Discourse of Development as Ideological Camouflage

From the perspective of the CDMDC, the most consistent finding across all excerpts is the existence of **dual-level coherence** - a *surface coherence* anchored on developmental rhetoric and a *deep coherence* driven by self-preserving ideology. The surface level of coherence, expressed in repeated tropes such as “common good,” “federal cooperation,” and “alignment with national vision,” provides the semantic illusion of rational governance. Yet, when critically examined, these surface narratives collapse under the weight of their own contradictions. At the **critical level**, the speeches betray an ideological template of **clientelism** - where power and loyalty are traded for access to federal patronage. The default narrative of “developmental alignment” disguises an entrenched **logic of dependency**, where subnational leaders surrender autonomy in exchange for resource flows from the centre. This linguistic ritual perpetuates state capture by **ideologically aligning local political economies**

with the interests of the ruling elite in Abuja, while silencing genuine democratic dissent. Thus, the discourse of “connecting to Abuja” or “reinforcing our vision at the federal level” operates as a *metaphor for systemic dependency*, masking the transactional nature of Nigerian politics. Beneath the default semantic coherence lies a critical incoherence - an ethical vacuum sustained by rhetorical sophistication.

8.3 Political Humour as a Coping Mechanism for State Capture

The WhatsApp meme - suggesting that “civil servants should also be allowed to defect from the Ministry of Labour to CBN or NNPC” - encapsulates the *grassroots semiotics of humour as resistance*. In BVT terms, this meme constitutes a meta-discursive commentary that mirrors the absurdity of the political class. The violation (bureaucratic defection) is humorous because it reflects a *distorted mirror image of elite behaviour*; it exposes the deep incongruity between the political rhetoric of service and the reality of self-interest. Here, humour becomes a **weapon of the powerless**, a way of cognitively rebalancing the moral asymmetry imposed by state capture. While the ruling elite uses linguistic benign violations to sanitize moral infractions, the citizenry deploys humour to **unmask those violations**. The meme’s ironic tone punctures the illusion of coherence carefully constructed by political rhetoric, thereby restoring **critical awareness**. The coexistence of elite self-legitimizing discourse and citizen subversive humour highlights the— **discursive duality of Nigeria’s political communication ecology**, where laughter and anger coexist as social responses to moral disorder.

8.4 The Rhetorical Economy of State Capture

The recurrent theme of “connection” to the federal centre across the first four excerpts signals a **discursive ideology of vertical dependence**, a linguistic manifestation of *state capture*. The governors’ rhetoric of alignment and cooperation subtly reinforces Abuja as the source of all political legitimacy and developmental possibility. The metaphor of “connecting to the national grid” constructs a power hierarchy where the periphery (states) must constantly align with the core (federal power) to remain relevant. At the *default level*, this alignment appears benign, suggesting unity and shared purpose. However, at the **critical level**, it encodes a structural asymmetry that undermines federalism. By framing defection as developmental pragmatism, the ruling elite uses language to **reproduce the moral grammar of dependency**, ensuring that dissenting voices are delegitimized as “anti-development.” This

finding reveals the central mechanism of state capture - **the monopolization of legitimacy through discourse**. Political actors capture not only institutions but also language itself, turning it into an ideological instrument for sustaining class inequality and elite continuity.

8.5 *The Collapse of Ideological Boundaries and the Comic-Tragic Nature of Nigerian Politics*

The analyses further demonstrate the **ideological hollowing** of party identity in Nigeria. Parties exist not as ideological communities but as *Special Purpose Vehicle* – a kind of *kekenapep*, which provides **fluid platforms of elite negotiation**. The constant invocation of “national interest” and “developmental alignment” serves as a linguistic bridge to mask ideological vacuity. Under BVT, this is the ultimate **benign violation**, the violation of ideology itself, rendered benign by appeals to pragmatism. The simultaneity principle of BVT captures this perfectly; citizens perceive the contradiction (leaders violating their own pledges), yet they tolerate it because it aligns with a broader social narrative; “that’s how politics works.” Nigerian democracy, thus assumes a **comic-tragic character cast in the mold of a Zeburudaya**; it provokes laughter through absurdity and despair through recognition. The comic dimension sustains the system by cushioning outrage; the tragic dimension reveals its moral decay.

8.6 *The Discursive Logic of Self-Preservation*

The claim of “consultation with the people” recurrent in these speeches functions as a **discursive alibi** - a performative utterance that masks unilateral decision-making. At the default level, it creates the impression of participatory governance; at the critical level, it legitimizes **self-preservation instinct** and **career continuity**. In essence, the discourse of consultation operates as a **discursive simulation of democracy** - a linguistic theatre where consent is retroactively fabricated to validate elite interests. The CDMDC helps decode this performance by separating **default coherence (surface logic)** from **critical coherence (deep ideological structure)**. What emerges is a pattern of **coherence without truth** - a polished narrative architecture that conceals rather than reveals. Language becomes the means through which power masks its own contradictions.

8.7 Implications for Democratic Accountability

The intertwining of BVT and CDMDC findings leads to a sobering conclusion. Nigeria's democracy has been rhetorically colonized by its ruling elite. The capacity of language to **convert political immorality into moral normality** has created a democratic culture where contradictions are aestheticized rather than condemned. Humour, as seen in the WhatsApp meme, offers only temporary relief; it does not disrupt the deeper ideological circuitry of power. This study thus reveals that **defection speeches are not mere political announcements but ideological performances** that sustain state capture. Through linguistic reframing, elites transform violations of democratic ethics into benign necessities, ensuring that the public's outrage is constantly defused. The result is a *discursive loop of self-legitimation*, where political impunity thrives under the rhetoric of "national interest."

The overarching finding, therefore, is that the discourse of defection in Nigeria constitutes a **textbook case of benign violation and critical incoherence** - a theatre of political doublespeak, where humour and hegemony intersect. The elite's ability to moralize violation through language reflects the final triumph of state capture, the capture not only of institutions and resources but of **public meaning itself**. In this ideological theatre, laughter becomes the anesthetic of moral pain, and defection, the highest form of political betrayal, is reframed as patriotic alignment. The Nigerian citizen laughs not because the situation is funny, but because **the tragic has been rhetorically disguised as comic relief**.

8.8 Theoretical and Practical Implications

Theoretically, this study advances the frontier of **critical discourse studies** by demonstrating how humour, ideology, and power intersect in postcolonial democracies. The integration of BVT and CDMDC provides a **multi-modal interpretive tool** capable of capturing both the cognitive (pragmatic) and ideological (critical) dimensions of discourse coherence. Practically, it offers pathways for rethinking the role of communication in governance - one where discourse is no longer a mask for power but a medium for truth. In sum, Nigeria's democracy can only be truly "unbroken" when its discourse is ethically coherent. Until then, as Musa would say from his ever-watchful gate, "*Nothing wey Musa no go see for gate.*" Yet, perhaps, in recognizing the absurdity, a new awakening begins - one where laughter gives way to conscience, and discourse to accountability.

9. Conclusion and Recommendations

9.1 Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed for both theoretical advancement and practical democratic renewal:

(i) Reclaiming Discourse Ethics in Governance

There is an urgent need to restore **ethical accountability in political communication**. Public discourse must move beyond rhetorical justifications and engage with the moral substance of governance. Civil society, academia, and the media must interrogate not just *what* politicians say but *how* and *why* they say it. This calls for the institutionalization of **discourse ethics audits** in public communication - frameworks that evaluate coherence, transparency, and moral consistency.

(ii) Integrating Critical Pragmatics in Civic Education

Given that state capture thrives on linguistic manipulation, civic education should include elements of **critical discourse literacy** – an aspect of emancipatory linguistics, empowering citizens to decode the ideological subtexts of political speech. Universities and media institutions should incorporate **critical pragmatics, discourse coherence models, and humour studies** into their curricula to equip future communicators with analytical tools to challenge elite narratives.

(iii) Reframing Humour as Resistance

While humour currently functions as a coping mechanism, it can be repurposed as a **strategy of critical resistance**. Artists, satirists, and public commentators should consciously deploy humour not to normalize political absurdities but to **subvert and expose** them. The laughter of the oppressed, when critically directed, can puncture the façade of benign violation and reawaken collective moral consciousness.

(iv) Bridging Theory and Praxis in Political Communication Research

The integrated use of BVT and CDMDC has demonstrated the potential of cross-disciplinary frameworks in unpacking political discourse. Scholars should further develop this dual-layered model to study not only defections but also other rhetorical phenomena, such as corruption apologies, policy reversals, and electoral promises. Future research should apply **quantitative discourse mapping** and **machine-assisted sentiment analysis** to complement qualitative insights.

(v) Strengthening Democratic Institutions through Linguistic Transparency

Institutional reform must include **communication transparency protocols** that discourage deceptive rhetoric. Official defection statements, policy communiqués, and press briefings should be subjected to **independent linguistic audits** to ensure that public language aligns with democratic principles. When discourse becomes transparent, manipulation loses its moral camouflage.

(vi) Re-humanizing the Citizen Voice (The Musa Imperative)

Finally, the “Musa” archetype must be reimagined not as a passive witness but as an *active moral auditor* of governance. Through participatory media, citizen journalism, and digital discourse, ordinary Nigerians can reclaim their voices, transform humour into critique, and laughter into action. The gate of Nigeria’s democracy must cease to be a stage for absurdity and become a *portal for accountability*.

9.2 Conclusion

This study set out to interrogate the political discourse of defections in Nigeria through the analytical prism of the **Benign Violation Theory (BVT)** and **Critical Default Model of Discourse Coherence (CDMDC)**, using the recurring trope of *Musa, the gate man of benign defections* and “*unbroken*” Nigeria’s democracy as the interpretive metaphor. The objective was to uncover how the language of defection functions as an instrument of ideological masking, moral domestication, and elite self-legitimation within the broader architecture of state capture. The analyses reveal that political defection speeches in Nigeria are **discursive performances of moral violation sanitized through rhetorical manipulation**. On the **default (surface) level**, politicians deploy altruistic appeals - such as “alignment with national development,” “connection to Abuja,” or “collective progress” - to create the illusion of coherence and legitimacy. However, on the **critical (deep) level**, these speeches betray the underlying **logic of self-interest, survival instinct, and patronage politics**, which sustain elite dominance and class inequality.

Through the lens of **BVT**, these defections embody classic **benign violations** - normative breaches reframed as moral or developmental imperatives. The simultaneity of violation and justification produces the peculiar *humour of Nigerian politics*, where citizens, aware of the deceit, respond with laughter rather than outrage. The repeated normalization of such violations has created a culture, where political amorality no longer shocks the public conscience but has become a shared joke. This finding underscores the tragic paradox of

Nigeria's democracy, **a system that survives by aestheticizing its own contradictions**. The CDMDC complements this interpretation by revealing the mechanics of ideological coherence. By distinguishing between default coherence (the linguistic and pragmatic structure that makes discourse appear logical) and critical coherence (the hidden ideological logic that sustains power relations), the study demonstrates how **language mediates state capture**. The elite use discourse to transform moral infractions into patriotic acts, thereby capturing not only institutions but also the moral imagination of the citizenry. The **Musa metaphor**, the gateman who witnesses it all, symbolizes the ordinary Nigerian, whose consciousness oscillates between humour and despair. From his gatepost, Musa watches the unending parade of defections, administrative "U-turns," and policy somersaults that characterize Nigeria's governance. His chuckle - "Nothing wey Musa no go see for gate" - encapsulates the cognitive dissonance of a people trapped between cynicism and resignation. The laughter becomes a coping mechanism in a polity where discourse has been hijacked by power, and truth has been domesticated by rhetoric. Ultimately, this study concludes that **Nigeria's democracy is linguistically coherent but morally incoherent**. Its survival depends on the elite's ability to produce discourses that render political immorality benign, while the citizenry sustains the illusion through humour. In this tragicomic equilibrium lies the very essence of **state capture**, a condition in which governance becomes an elaborate performance of coherence masking deep incoherence.

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