

LEXICAL MARKERS, STYLES, AND ATTITUDES IN LECTURER-STUDENT CLASSROOM DISCOURSE

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Abstract

Effective linguistic choices and delivery methods are crucial in portraying the styles and attitudes used by lecturers and their students to achieve success in classroom teaching and learning. However, the language and style of classroom interactions have received limited scholarly attention. This paper explores the styles and attitudes conveyed through lexical choices in lecturer-student interactions, aiming to establish the role language plays as a vehicle for both content and style in the teaching and learning process. The study analysed data from 12 purposively recorded lecturer-student classroom interactions at the Department of English and Literary Studies, University of Nigeria. These interactions were transcribed and examined using stylistic and quantitative analysis methods, drawing on aspects of the concepts of lexical semantics, text-linguistic, and sociolinguistic stylistics. The study identified two styles that reflect the participants' attitudes toward classroom activities, namely, the evaluative style (used by lecturers) and the informative style (used by both lecturers and students). The informative style is marked by lexical choices such as register, synonymy, antonym, hyponymy, and colloquialism, which form paradigmatic relations and indicate a positive attitude toward classroom activities. The evaluative style is characterised by collocations and lexical fields that form syntagmatic relations, also reflecting a positive attitude. Collocation was the most prevalent lexical feature (253 instances, 32.6%), while antonym was the least common (15 instances, 1.9%). These lexical choices serve as functional indicators for understanding the participants' styles and attitudes in classroom interactions, making the findings valuable for assessing lecturers' competence, and students' learning progress, and for designing school curricula.

Keywords: style, attitude, lecturer-student interaction, classroom discourse, lexical choices.

Introduction

The classroom serves as the central hub for nearly all educational practices, from curriculum planning to its implementation (Fagbamiye, 1998). While various aspects of the educational system can influence the success or failure of classroom activities, the primary determinant is the interaction between the two key participants: the lecturer

and the student (Hall & Walsh, 2002). Consequently, the linguistic choices and methods employed by these participants to achieve classroom teaching and learning objectives have become significant areas of research interest. This paper focuses particularly on how participants select specific lexemes that correspond to distinct styles of classroom language.

Classroom research has expanded significantly over the past two decades, yet several important issues, particularly regarding classroom interaction, remain inadequately addressed. Existing studies on classroom interactions have typically focused on isolated aspects, such as lecturers' modifications in talk and feedback (e.g., Dagarin, 2004) or learners' group work and question types (e.g., Hakansson & Linberg, 1988). However, there has been insufficient scholarly attention on classroom interaction involving both key participants—the lecturer and the student. The few related studies have predominantly concentrated on language (e.g., Babatunde & Adedimeji [nd.]; Schleppegrell, 2001) and conversational patterns (e.g., Maroni, 2008; Zhang, 2011), often overlooking the valuable insights that could be gained by examining the interplay between style and linguistic choices in the classroom. Indeed, the language and style of lecturer-student interactions have received minimal scholarly attention within the existing literature. This study, therefore, aims to explore the styles employed by classroom participants and identify the specific lexical items that characterise these styles. Studying lecturer-student classroom interaction is particularly relevant at this time, as there is a need for a deeper understanding of the types of performances that occur in the classroom. Such insight is crucial for effectively assessing lecturers' competence, monitoring students' learning progress, and designing an effective curriculum for education in Nigeria. This study has the potential to uncover the less obvious functions that language serves in classroom settings, along with the levels of technicality conveyed through specific lexical devices. Understanding these devices is expected to guide lecturers in making informed linguistic choices and adopting effective instructional methods, thereby enhancing students' access to the content being taught.

The Classroom Discourse

In the context of classroom interaction, lecturers are expected to introduce or present information in conventionally structured ways, while learners respond or react to this information, particularly when prompted. A key aspect of this interaction is the use of lecturers' questions. As Fakaye (2007, p. 127) notes, lecturers' questions can serve various functions, including focusing students' attention, maintaining disciplinary control during instruction, encouraging student participation, and advancing the lesson. Overall, classroom discourse is highly valuable, as it helps create a conducive learning environment and communicates lecturers' expectations for student responses (Nystrand, 1997, p. 28).

Empirically, the quest for improved teaching and learning has motivated researchers to pay attention to what goes on in the classroom, especially the interaction

between lecturers and students. This has generated interest not only from language scholars (e.g. Babatunde & Adedimeji [nd.]; Schleppegrell, 2001; Maroni, 2008; Zhang, 2011; Nabhan, 2017; Afrianto, 2023) but also from those in education (e.g. Fakaye, 2007) and the social sciences (e.g. Nystrand, 1997; Zhang, 2008). Particularly, the linguistic work on classroom discourse bifurcates into studies of the traditional approach, and those of the modern approach. Within the traditional approach, there has been a predominant focus on the structure and patterns of classroom interaction (e.g. Maroni, 2008; Zhang, 2011). These 'traditional' studies largely utilise the conversation analytical perspectives. Studies of the modern approach are related to the present study in that they de-emphasise the 'traditional' attention to the conversational patterns on classroom interaction. Very little scholarly work has however utilised this modern approach (e.g. Schleppegrell, 2001; Babatunde & Adedimeji [nd.]). Through empirical observation, the pursuit of enhanced teaching and learning has prompted researchers to focus on classroom dynamics, particularly the interactions between lecturers and students. This interest has attracted attention from not only language scholars (e.g., Babatunde & Adedimeji [nd.]; Schleppegrell, 2001; Maroni, 2008; Zhang, 2011) but also from individuals in education (e.g., Fakaye, 2007) and the social sciences (e.g., Nystrand, 1997; Zhang, 2008). Research on classroom discourse can be divided into two main approaches: traditional and modern. The traditional approach emphasises the structure and patterns of classroom interactions (e.g., Maroni, 2008; Zhang, 2011) and often employs conversation analysis. In contrast, modern studies are relevant to the current research as they shift away from the conventional focus on conversational patterns in classroom interactions. However, there has been limited scholarly work utilising this modern approach (e.g., Schleppegrell, 2001; Babatunde & Adedimeji [nd.]).

Schleppegrell (2001) provides a purely linguistic analysis of the language used in schooling, specifically examining primary school classroom interactions across various topics. This study is confined to the lexical and grammatical levels of language. In contrast to the current research, Schleppegrell does not employ a stylistic framework or utilise quantitative methods to illustrate linguistic patterns, nor does it concentrate on a specific subject area, such as the English language. Conversely, Babatunde & Adedimeji (nd.) conduct a pragmatic study that focuses on the context of classroom interactions, particularly examining politeness phenomena in university settings. Unlike the present study, these authors, in addition to not using stylistic and quantitative analysis, do not explore the relationship between style and lexical choices. This gap is precisely what the current study aims to address.

Theoretical Perspectives

The analysis of data in this paper is driven by a combination of concepts, which include but not limited to aspects of style and stylistics, and lexical semantics. These are described in succession.

Style and Stylistics

Style, as a distinctive way of performing tasks, permeates nearly all aspects of human behaviour, including dressing, eating, and governance (Niazi & Gautam, 2010). In linguistics, style is defined as the "consistent occurrence in the text of certain items and structures, or types of items and structures, among those offered by the language as a whole" (Malmkjaer, 2002, p. 510). Scholars have provided various definitions of style, often associating it with uniqueness in language use (Price, 2024). Several approaches to studying style have been proposed, which can be broadly categorised into three perspectives, adapted from Osundare's (2003[1982]) classification: the choice perspective, the individualist perspective, and the difference perspective. The choice perspective, which focuses on the author, is the most widely accepted view of style. Most stylistic theorists align with this perspective, which addresses the distinction between stylistic and non-stylistic choices (Enkvist et al., 1971, p. 19). It is based on the idea that a language user selects from the linguistic options available in their repertoire, choosing the most suitable items for their message, medium, situation, and purpose. The individualist perspective, as noted by Malmkar and Carter (2002, quoted in Olaniyan and Oyekola, 2007, p. 30), views style as a form of consistency. It posits that good style reflects a "consistent occurrence in the text of certain items and structures, or types of items and structures among those offered by the language as a whole." In other words, style is perceived as a set of recurring linguistic habits that can predict an author's style. According to Osundare (2003, p. 30), these habitual linguistic features can manifest in phonological, syntactic, and rhetorical forms, which can be measured by their frequencies.

The different perspectives include both deviationist and variationist views of style. Style as a deviation from the norm is based on the idea that language functions as a rule-governed behaviour and an accumulation of norms (Lawal, 2003, p. 28). In this context, a writer's style is assessed based on choices that diverge from established language rules without compromising meaning. According to Lyons (1995, p. 340), variation is a fundamental characteristic of language, reflecting its heterogeneous nature. Thus, style as variation highlights "the status of language as a tool which owes its utility and survival to its variability" (Osundare, 2003, p. 19). Two types of variation have been identified: code-oriented variation and subject-oriented variation, both of which are relevant for analysing language in institutional contexts like the classroom. Code-oriented variation arises from the differences between two ways of expressing the same idea, while subject-oriented variation is influenced by the level of familiarity with the subject matter between the text producer and the audience, reflected in word choice. Subject-oriented variation is particularly important in linguistic stylistics as it aids in classifying registers and their associated linguistic features (Ononye, 2012). This approach is often used to examine systemic variations in linguistic features typical of specific non-literary contexts, such as advertising and classroom interactions.

Stylistics is a field of study focused on uncovering and discussing the effective use of specific language features and styles in texts to create particular effects for a given audience, while closely considering genre, context, and purpose (Ononye, 2008, p. 39). Since the classical period, scholars have engaged in ongoing debates regarding the scope and nature of stylistics, resulting in various schools and movements with conflicting or complementary claims. These discussions have produced numerous useful concepts and approaches to style that continue to be relevant today (Miššiková, 2003). The diversity of claims in stylistics stems from the significant influences of linguistics and literary criticism, leading to terms such as "linguistic stylistics" and "literary stylistics" (Akinbiyi, 2007, p. 221). While literary stylistics relies on intuitive and impressionistic judgments regarding the manipulation of formal features in literary texts, linguistic stylistics provides a more scientific approach, aiming to incorporate specific characteristics of language into the analysis of both literary and non-literary texts.

Scholars like Sandig and Selting (1997) have identified five classes of linguistic stylistics, namely, traditional stylistics, which focuses on the structure of literary language; pragmatic stylistics, which examines certain pragmatic features and their situational use; text-linguistic stylistics, which involves a descriptive and comparative study of stylistic conventions across text types; sociolinguistic stylistics, which studies styles within registers and the cultural factors influencing their use; and interactional stylistics, which explores language choices made by interactants. This paper specifically utilises aspects of text-linguistic and sociolinguistic stylistics to identify and discuss the various uses of language features and methods in the data, with careful attention to the genre, context, and purpose of lecturer-student interactions.

Lexical semantics

One principal approach to understanding the lexicon, which is both internally structured and extra-linguistically represented, is through sense relations. The sense of a word is defined as the total of its conceptual senses about other phenomena in the real world (Cruse, 2000, p. 163). In this study, sense relations are categorised according to the Saussurean distinction between paradigmatic and syntagmatism. Paradigmatic relations occur between items that can occupy the same position in a grammatical structure. They involve various associations of relatedness, where the words in question stand in complementary distribution (Geeraerts, 2010, p. 58). Paradigmatic sense relations typically manifest in terms of synonymy, hyponymy, metonymy, and different kinds of opposition.

Synonymy involves different phonological words with similar meanings, derived from various parameters such as dialects (e.g., "tap" and "faucet"), registers (e.g., "wife" and "spouse"), collocational restrictions (e.g., "boy" and "lad"), and the portrayal of positive or negative attitudes (e.g., "activist" and "militant") (Saeed, 2004, p. 65). Hyponymy, derived from the Greek hypo- meaning "under," refers to the lexical

relation of class inclusion, often described by the phrase "kind/type/sort of." A chain of hyponyms defines a hierarchy of elements; for instance, "hibiscus," "tulip," and "rose" are co-hyponyms of "flower," which serves as their hyperonym (Riemer, 2010, p. 142). Meronymy (from the Greek *meros* meaning "part") describes the relation of part to whole. In this context, the part (e.g., "eye") is called a meronym of the whole (e.g., "face"), while the whole is referred to as the holonym of the part (Riemer, 2010, p. 140). Antonymy encompasses a relationship of incompatibility between two items concerning specific dimensions of contrast. Some words may have multiple antonyms depending on the dimension involved; for example, "girl" can contrast with both "boy" and "woman," depending on whether the dimension is sex or age. Similarly, "sweet" can contrast with both "bitter" and "sour" (Murphy, 2003, p. 173). These sense relations play a crucial role in understanding the nuanced meanings and interconnections within the lexicon.

Syntagmatic sense relations exist between items within the same grammatical structure, allowing for lexical elements in a text to co-occur with other language elements in larger constructs, such as compounds and derivations in morphology, as well as constituents and sentences in syntax (Geeraerts, 2010, p. 57). Unlike paradigmatic relations, which are named (e.g., hyponymy, antonymy), syntagmatic relations do not typically receive specific labels. Instead, they are recognised through the effects of combining meanings, leading to phenomena such as anomaly, which involves semantically odd combinations, e.g., "a light green illness," pleonasm, which includes redundant expressions, e.g., "dental toothache," meaning extension, which includes figurative language such as metaphor (e.g., "move mountains") and metonymy (e.g., "nice wheels"). The conditions for a "normal" combination are referred to as selectional restrictions or selectional preferences. For example, the syntagmatic relation between the verb and noun in the sentence "Fred ran across the field" is considered normal, while "The field crawled across Fred" is odd. In contrast to paradigmatic relations, syntagmatic relations represent "on-line co-occurrence" (Lyons, 1968, p. 431). Cruse (2000, p. 149) describes syntagmatic sense relations as "an expression of coherence constraints," while paradigmatic relations serve as "an expression of such structuring." A key insight from this review for our study is that paradigmatic and syntagmatic relations operate concurrently, with syntagmatic relations defining the space within which paradigmatic relations function. This interplay is crucial for understanding how meaning is constructed in language.

Methodology

The data samples for this study comprise twelve (12) full-length lecturer-student classroom interactions, which were randomly recorded from class lectures at the University of Nigeria, particularly the Department of English and Literary Studies at Nsukka campus. The subjects include four lecturers and students of two levels: the third (300) level and the fourth (400) level. These interactions cover various topics discussed

in the classroom setting. Given that classroom discourse is predominantly lecturer-centered, the specific areas of dialogue between the lecturers and students—rather than the entirety of the lecture—were purposefully transcribed for ease of analysis. The study employs both stylistic and quantitative approaches to analyse the data. The analytical framework is rooted in linguistic stylistics, incorporating insights from Geeraerts' (2010) lexical semantics and aspects of Sandig and Selting's (1997) linguistic stylistics, specifically, the text-linguistic and sociolinguistic stylistics. This dual approach allows for a comprehensive examination of the interactions, focusing on the linguistic features and social contexts that shape the classroom discourse. By analysing these dialogues, the study aims to uncover the stylistic nuances and relational dynamics present in lecturer-student interactions.

Findings and discussion

Two distinct styles have been identified in the classroom discourse: informative and evaluative styles. The evaluative style is primarily associated with the lecturers, while the informative style impacts both students and lecturers, making it the dominant style in the data. These styles are indexed by specific lexical choices made by the interactants, which are analysed concerning their paradigmatic and syntagmatic relations. The informative style is characterised by lexical choices such as register, synonymy, antonymy, hyponymy, and colloquialism, all of which engage in paradigmatic relations. These choices reflect the ways in which words relate to one another within the same lexical category. The evaluative style, on the other hand, is marked by collocations that align with syntagmatic relations. This style highlights how words co-occur in phrases and sentences, contributing to the evaluative nature of the discourse. The distribution of these features is summarised in Table 1 below.

Table 1 indicates that the lexical features engaging in paradigmatic relations (506 occurrences, 65.2%) significantly outnumber those involved in syntagmatic relations (270 occurrences, 34.8%). This finding supports the predominance of the informative style, particularly as the interactants—especially the lecturers—focus on selecting the most appropriate lexemes from available options to convey adequate information about their subject matters. In the General Average column, register (276 occurrences, 35.6%) emerges as the most prevalent lexical item in the data. It is followed by collocation (253 occurrences, 32.6%) and synonymy (173 occurrences, 22.3%). Conversely, antonymy (15 occurrences, 1.9%), hyponymy (16 occurrences, 2.1%), semantic fields (17 occurrences, 3.0%), and colloquialism (26 occurrences, 3.4%) represent the least proportions. The discussion of these styles will proceed in turn, examining the characteristics and implications of each style in the context of classroom interactions. This analysis will provide deeper insights into how these lexical choices shape the discourse and contribute to the overall communicative effectiveness within the classroom setting.

Table 1: Lexical choices, styles, and attitudes in lecturer-student classroom interaction

s/n	Styles/Lexical choices		Lecturer	Student	General Average	Attitudes
1	Informative style Paradigmatic 697 (67.9%)	Hyponymy	12 (2.1%)	04 (1.9%)	16 (2.1%)	Positive
		Antonymy	13 (2.3%)	02 (1.0%)	15 (1.9%)	
		Colloquialism	19 (3.3%)	07 (3.4%)	26 (3.4%)	
		Synonymy or near-synonymy	133 (23.4%)	40 (19.2%)	173 (22.3%)	
		Register	196 (34.5%)	80 (38.5%)	276 (35.6%)	
2	Evaluative style Syntagmatic 330 (32.1%)	Collocation	181 (31.9%)	72 (34.6%)	253 (32.6%)	Positive
		Semantic fields	14 (2.5%)	03 (1.4%)	17 (2.2%)	
			568	208	776	

Evaluative style

The evaluative style refers to the manner in which language users employ value-laden words to express opinions or perspectives. This style is prominently observed in the data, where classroom lecturers utilise various lexemes that reflect their assessments of entities within the discourse. Notably, collocation stands out as the significant syntagmatic lexical feature informing the evaluative style. Three broad categories of collocation have been identified: collocations assessing teaching/learning activities (142 occurrences, 56.1%), collocations assessing participants involved (20 occurrences, 7.9%), and collocations assessing participants' roles (91 occurrences, 36.0%). The dominance of the activity category is unsurprising, given the positive attitude demonstrated by the subject towards achieving the teaching and learning objectives in the classroom. This category can be further divided into two subcategories, namely, processes involved in activities (e.g., "semester examination," etc.), and outcomes of activities (e.g., "change of behaviour," etc.). The role category is the next most prominent, likely due to the critical roles that the subjects play in classroom discourse. This category, too, can be subdivided into, namely, lecturers' roles (e.g., "expose you," etc.) and students' roles (e.g., "get the idea," etc.). Further examination of specific collocation items reveals how they function within the evaluative style, illustrating the nuanced assessments made by both lecturers and students. These examples highlight the ways in which collocation supports the evaluative nature of classroom discourse and reflects the subjects' positive engagement with the subject matter. This exploration of collocation not only underscores its significance in conveying evaluative

judgments but also emphasises the collaborative nature of classroom interactions, where both lecturers and students actively contribute to the evaluative discourse.

Extract 1:

Lecturer ... our work here is to give you the various frameworks [*sic*] through which you view the texts, I mean literary texts. And the least you can do is for you to key into what we are doing and learn something from it. [Lines 16—19]

Extract 2:

Lecturer ... a hard-working student starts right from the first day to get the right materials for the courses he has, and begins to read them and get prepared for various forms of semester seminars, quizzes, term papers, and even final exams, and what you have at the end of the day is a successful semester... Of course, the sensitive teacher will know when the students are hard-working and ready for work... [Lines 58—64]

Extracts 1 and 2, as previously mentioned, are predominantly characterised by lecturer discourse, with several recurrent collocation items highlighted. The collocations such as “semester seminars,” “semester quizzes,” “term papers,” “final exams,” and “successful semester” (in Extract 2) pertain to teaching and learning activities. Notably, all these items serve as means to evaluate the teaching/learning activities, except for “successful semester,” which specifically assesses the outcomes of these activities. Additionally, other collocations like “hardworking student” and “sensitive teacher” (in Extract 2) feature pre-modifying adjectives (“hardworking” and “sensitive”) that evaluate the participants involved in the discourse. Furthermore, collocations such as “give you,” “learn something” (in Extract 1), “read them,” and “getting prepared” (in Extract 2) reflect the roles of lecturers and students within their respective contexts. These expressions illustrate how language choices convey evaluative judgments about both the activities and the participants, enriching the evaluative style of classroom interactions. This analysis highlights the integral role of collocation in shaping the evaluative discourse, emphasising the nuanced relationships between language, assessment, and the dynamics of classroom engagement.

Informative style

The informative style refers to a manner of language use where the primary objective is to enlighten the audience. In the classroom context, both lecturers and students engage in paradigmatic lexical choices—such as register, synonymy, antonymy, hyponymy, and colloquialism—aimed at imparting new knowledge. Among these lexical features, register occupies the most significant portion, reflecting the discourse of the classroom and the language associated with the subjects being discussed. The

data reveals three types of register, namely, subject-oriented register (124 occurrences, 44.9%), activity-oriented register (106 occurrences, 38.4%), and participant-oriented register (46 occurrences, 16.70%). The subject-oriented register is the most prevalent and encompasses vocabulary items derived from various topics covered in class sessions. This category can be further divided into: items revealing subject matters (e.g., “phrase structure rule,” etc.) and meta-language items (e.g., “concept,” etc.). The activity-oriented register includes vocabulary that describes the activities occurring within the discourse. This type focuses on the processes and tasks involved in teaching and learning. The participant-oriented register involves vocabulary that describes the participants engaged in the activities. This category can also be subdivided into: items describing the lecturer (e.g., “evaluation” and “resource person”) and items describing the learner (e.g., “tutorial” and “pupil”). These examples underscore how the informative style is manifested through specific lexical choices that enhance understanding and facilitate the sharing of knowledge in the classroom. By employing this style, interactants effectively communicate complex ideas and engage with the subject matter, thereby enriching the learning experience. Some examples from the data can further be considered:

Extract 3:

- | | |
|-----------|---|
| Lecturer | ... the <u>idea</u> of <u>gender</u> is <u>socially constructed</u> ; it emanates from the societal divides we make in our societies, in our everyday lives.... |
| | ... so when <u>criticising</u> any <u>feminist text</u> , the <u>student</u> should try |
| | ... to take his mind off the trivial issues of our everyday lives and get the idea being portrayed by the author who are [<i>sic</i>] incidentally members of the same society... Now let us <u>revise</u> the functions of the writer to the society we <u>treated</u> in our last class [Lines 116—123] |
| Student 1 | you said that the writer is a <u>prophet</u> ; he predicts and announce [<i>sic</i>] what could happen in the society... |
| Lecturer | ...that's right! |
| Student 2 | the writer is a <u>teacher</u> ; he educates and reminds the members of the society on the ills, values and prospects of the society.... |
| Lecturer | Good! [Lines 139—145] |

In the texts above, several register items such as “gender,” “feminist,” “socially constructed,” “prophet,” and “teacher” provide valuable insights into the subject matter being discussed. The terms “socially constructed,” “prophet,” and “teacher” represent the meta-language utilised to discuss the subject matter. These items help frame the discussion and provide context for the subject being analysed. Words like “criticising,” “revise,” and “treated” fall under the activity-oriented register, offering

insight into the ongoing activities within a literature classroom. Notably, the activity of “criticising” involves both lecturer and students, while “revising” and “treating” are primary activities conducted by the lecturers, focusing on the subject matter. The term “student” serves as the sole participant-oriented register in Extract 3, specifically belonging to the student sub-category of participants. This highlights the role of students in the classroom context. These register items collectively illustrate how language is employed to convey information about the subject matter, the activities taking place, and the roles of participants in the classroom. By utilising specific lexical choices, both lecturers and students engage in meaningful discourse that enhances understanding and fosters an informative learning environment.

Synonymy in the classroom discourse has been categorised into two distinct patterns: clustered synonyms and distant synonyms. Clustered synonyms (94 occurrences, 54.3%) are synonyms that appear together in the form of lexical sets. They enhance clarity and provide nuanced meanings when used in proximity. Distant synonyms (79 occurrences, 45.7%) can be interchanged with each other within the data but do not occur together. They may serve different contexts or convey slightly varied meanings. Synonymy manifests in two primary forms within classroom discourse: as process indicators, which include actions (e.g., “read” / “go through”) and activities (e.g., “test” / “quiz”), and as reference indicators, which encompass both animate (e.g., “learner” / “student”) and inanimate (e.g., “text” / “materials”) entities. The presence of both clustered and distant synonyms in classroom discourse enriches the language used by lecturers and students, facilitating clearer communication and a deeper understanding of the subject matter. By employing these synonyms, interactants can convey complex ideas more effectively while maintaining engagement in the learning process. Synonymy of both patterns is prevalent in the data some examples of which are as follows:

Extract 4:

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|-----------|--|
| Lecturer | In our previous <u>meetings</u> , we’ve actually been talking about stylistics, and specifically in the last <u>class</u> , we discussed the origins of stylistics ... what then is style? What can you <u>think</u> in your own view to be style, and how many concepts of style can you <u>say</u> you know?[a little pause] |
| Student 1 | Style is a particular <u>way</u> or <u>manner</u> of doing something or behaving or writing. |
| Lecturer | Ok... |
| Student 2 | style relates [<i>sic</i>] to the way a <u>group</u> of people or <u>generation</u> of people use language or... |
| Lecturer | Ok, as you can see, one particular thing you know that run [<i>sic</i>] across these definitions by the students here is “ <u>the way</u> ”; that is the same as “ <u>the manner</u> ”, the <u>way</u> or <u>manner</u> something is |

done or the way a language user (be it writer or speaker) uses language. What this means to us is that the way something is done is different from the thing itself.... [Lines 71—85]

In the provided exchange, the analysis of synonymy reveals distinct patterns and functions among the lexical sets. For example, the lexical items “meetings/class” and “think/say” are identified as distant synonyms. While “meetings/class” indicates specific activities within the discourse, helping to contextualise the discussion, “think/say” represents stimulated actions, highlighting the cognitive and verbal processes involved in the interaction. The pairs “way/manner” and “group/generation” are classified as clustered synonyms. Both sets occur together, enhancing the richness of the language used. While “way/manner” refers to an inanimate entity, describing how something is done, “group/generation” pertains to an animate entity, referring to a collective of individuals or a cohort. These categories of synonymous sets serve to provide two kinds of information. They provide information about the domain of language use, clarifying the context and nature of the discussions taking place. They also provide information about the participants involved, indicating the animate and inanimate entities that help to delineate the roles of individuals and concepts within the discourse. By employing both distant and clustered synonyms, the interactants enrich their communication, allowing for a more nuanced understanding of the subject matter and the dynamics of participation. This strategic use of language facilitates clearer expression and deeper engagement in the learning environment.

The analysis of colloquialisms in the data reveals a clear dominance of student usage, with two primary types identified: Popular Nigerian English (PNE) words and group mannerisms (GM). PNE words (20 occurrences, 76.9%) are further divided into: non-standard Nigerian English (NSNE), which represents the majority of PNE usage (89.1%), and Nigerian Pidgin (NPg), which is a smaller subset (10.9%). GM (08 occurrences, 23.1%): embraces specific phrases or expressions used within particular groups, reflecting shared cultural or social contexts. The data indicates that NSNE and GM are more prevalent in student exchanges, showcasing their preference for informal, culturally resonant language. This dominance highlights how students engage with their peers using language that reflects their identity and social context. The prevalence of colloquialism, particularly through NSNE and GM, underscores the importance of informal language in student interactions. This use of colloquial expressions fosters a sense of community among students and reflects their cultural background and social dynamics in the classroom environment. Some examples will be relevant here:

Extract 5:

Lecturer Ok from what we’ve been talking about, you know, what and what would now qualify as African Literature and who as an

- African Writer and African Critic? As in, what qualifies a person to be an African Writer or African Critic? [a little pause]
- Student 1 African Literature is the literature written in Africa by African writers; as in, when Africans write about African situation, but not in all cases sha.
- Lecturer My sister...so you're saying that non-Africans or Africans abroad that write about African experiences are not African writers; I mean, their work do [*sic*] not qualify for African literature? Is that what you mean?
- Student 1 Anyway sha, it also includes Africans abroad...
- Student 2 I think African Literature or African writer or critic does not have anything to do with non-Africans or Whites. [Lines 182—184]

In Extract 5, the lexical item “my sister” (and “my brother”) exemplifies the Non-Standard Nigerian English (NSNE) category within Popular Nigerian English (PNE). Notably, this expression is predominantly used by lecturers, highlighting its significance in the classroom context. The use of “my sister” and “my brother” illustrates a case of semantic extension, where the meanings extend beyond their dictionary definitions. In the Nigerian classroom context, these terms foster a sense of unity and community, embodying the concepts of “one-Nigeria” and “being your brother's keeper.” This reflects a cultural norm where every Nigerian is regarded as family, promoting interpersonal connections among interactants. These expressions also carry a stylistic meaning, serving to reward or encourage students' responses during discussions. By addressing students in this familial manner, lecturers create an inclusive environment that values participation and fosters a supportive atmosphere. Several other NSNE items are present in the data, including “light” (used to mean ‘electricity’) (in Line 196), and “big men” (referring to ‘high-profile government officials’) (in Line 211). Additionally, the data reveals the recurrent use of group mannerisms such as “as in,” “sha,” and “you know,” primarily employed by students. These expressions belong to the GM word stock and illustrate the informal, conversational style prevalent in student interactions. The presence of these lexical items underscores the richness and dynamism of classroom communication in a Nigerian context. The use of NSNE and GM not only reflects cultural identity but also enhances group cohesion among students. This variety of languages fosters a vibrant learning environment, emphasising the importance of community and interpersonal relationships in educational settings.

In classroom discourse analysis, antonymy and hyponymy emerge as relevant components of the informative style, despite their relatively low occurrences (15 and 16 instances, respectively). While they may not significantly contribute to the overall stylistic relevance, their presence is notable, particularly in how lecturers utilise them.

Anonymous items in the data reflect both activities and actions involved in the discourse, aligning with the Process Category of Synonymy. Two primary patterns of antonymy have been identified: contrastive opposites and negated opposites. The former highlights clear distinctions between concepts, such as “not White or Coloured, but hybrid”. This example illustrates a nuanced understanding of a positive attitude in explaining issues in class. The latter emphasises the rejection of certain concepts, such as “socially-constructed, not biological phenomenon”. Here, the focus is on the distinction between socially defined categories versus natural classifications. Hyponymy, although less frequently observed, contributes to the specificity of language used in the classroom. It allows for the categorisation of concepts, enabling clearer communication of ideas. For instance, specific terms may fall under broader categories, enhancing understanding of the subject matter. Both antonymy and hyponymy are found to be predominantly used by lecturers, suggesting that they play a crucial role in structuring discourse and facilitating comprehension. This use underscores the lecturers' authority in guiding discussions and clarifying complex concepts. While antonymy and hyponymy may not dominate the lexical stock of classroom discourse, their presence serves to enrich the informative style employed by lecturers. By using contrastive and negated opposites, educators can clarify distinctions and foster deeper understanding among students. The nuanced application of these lexical features highlights the importance of precise language in educational contexts, contributing to effective communication and learning. Let us examine more instances of the demonstration of these features in the data:

Extract 6:

- | | |
|-----------|--|
| Lecturer | Phonetics is concerned about speech sounds of languages <u>in general</u> , <u>not in particular</u> languages. Phonology relate [sic] to a particular language... A phoneme is <u>not a sound</u> , <u>it is a class</u> of phonetically similar sounds... By the way, what did I say is the technical name for a family of sounds? |
| Student 1 | ... phoneme is the name of a family of sounds... |

In the extract, the lecturer effectively employs lexical opposites to enhance students' understanding of the subject matter. The use of antonymy is illustrated through two distinct examples: “general” and “particular” as negated opposites, and “sound” and “class” as contrastive opposites. The negated opposites here are logical antonyms, where “particular” serves as a direct counter to “general.” The lecturer establishes a negative/positive structure through the use of negation with “not,” effectively linking the two concepts. This approach clarifies the distinction between broad categories and specific instances, aiding students in grasping the nuances of the topic. The contrastive opposites, unlike the negated opposites, do not have a logical antonymous relationship. Instead, the lecturer sets up a contrastive opposition between two seemingly unrelated entities. This two-part structure highlights differences that may

not be immediately apparent, encouraging students to think critically about the connections and distinctions between concepts. Through the strategic use of lexical opposites, the lecturer not only clarifies complex ideas but also engages students in deeper cognitive processing. The juxtaposition of negated and contrastive opposites fosters a richer understanding of the subject, illustrating the power of language in educational discourse. This technique not only aids comprehension but also encourages students to explore the relationships between different concepts, enhancing their overall learning experience.

Conclusion

In the analysis of classroom discourse, two distinct styles are used by the subjects to mark their positive attitudes towards the classroom activities and outcomes: the evaluative style, predominantly used by lecturers, and the informative style, utilised by both lecturers and students. The informative style is characterised by various lexical items that establish paradigmatic relations, including register (35.6%, reflecting the context and appropriateness of language used), synonymy (22.3%, involving lexemes with similar meanings that enhance clarity in classroom contents), antonym (1.9%, relating to words with opposite meanings, although less frequent), hyponymy (with 2.1%, engaging specific terms under broader categories), and colloquialism (3.4%, involving informal expressions that foster a relatable atmosphere, which students more commonly use). The evaluative Style is indexed by lexical features such as collocations and lexical fields which establish syntagmatic relations. The lecturers primarily employ this style, using evaluative language to assess and respond to student contributions. Collocations (32.6%) involve words that frequently occur together, enhancing the expressiveness and fluency of the discourse, while lexical fields (3.0%) relate to lexemes that manifest the specialised vocabulary items used in treating the subject matters. The statistical analysis indicates that register is the most prevalent lexical feature in the data, underscoring its significance in classroom interactions. In contrast, antonymy appears least frequently, highlighting its limited role in the overall discourse. These stylistic features serve as functional indices that underpin the lexical choices made during lecturer-student interactions. The dominance of the informative style, particularly through the register, reflects the importance of contextually appropriate language in facilitating understanding. Meanwhile, the evaluative style, through collocations, emphasises the lecturers' role in guiding discussions and providing feedback. Together, these styles contribute to a dynamic and effective learning environment.

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