

**Revisiting the Syntactic Analysis
of Hausa Verbs from Wallace Chafe's
Semantic-Structure-Form
Perspective**

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*Ahmed Mohammed Bedu*¹
ORCID: 0000-0001-7144-7158

Abstract

For several decades, there has been huge interest in studying the well-formedness of sentences in various languages across the globe. There is a consensus among linguists that semantic structure is the area in which the well-formedness of sentences is determined in all natural languages. Over these years, the issue of semantic structure in syntactic analysis of Hausa verbs has taken a back seat in the Hausa language research despite the centrality of the verb as a category that determines the organization of the other constituents of a sentence. The present paper employs Wallace Chafe's semantic structure theory to analyze Hausa sentences that were generated from the Parsonian seven grades of Hausa verbs to justify their structural consideration within semantic structure theory, which specifies verbs semantically in terms of their semantic units that include states, processes and actions. The findings of paper indicate that the semantic formation rules govern the configuration of the basic semantic elements in the well-formed 'semantic structure' underlying the sentences of the language in which verbs dictate the selection of the accompanying nouns and of the relationship which such nouns have to verbs.

Keywords: *Hausa verbs, semantic structure, states, processes, actions, ambient*

Introduction

For several decades, there has been huge interest in studying the well-formedness of sentences in various languages across the globe (Bedu, 2019). There is a consensus among linguists that semantic structure is the area in which the well-formedness of sentences is determined in all natural languages (Katz and Fodor, 1963; Katz and Postal, 1964). These studies have equally demonstrated the ubiquitousness of semantic structure in the theory of syntax (Lakoff, 1970). The central claims of semantic structure theory focus on the centrality of the verb as the grammatical category that determines the main features in the organization of other constituents in the sentence construction (Chomsky, 1955). Given the central role verbs play in sentences, one straightforward prediction that can be derived from hierarchical incrementality is that either the verb or the conceptual

¹ **Corresponding author:**

Ahmed Mohammed Bedu, Department of Languages and Linguistics, University of Maiduguri, P. M. B. 1069, Borno State, Nigeria. E-mail: ahmedbedu@unimaid.edu.ng

representation underlying it should be essential for initiating sentence production (Chomsky, 1965). In this regard, sentences were also considered invalid if the verb had been replaced by one of a different type (e.g., “smell” in its transitive form instead of “stink,” “read” instead of “speak”).

Despite these claims, the issue of semantic structure in syntactic analysis of Hausa verbs takes a back-seat in the Hausa language studies. Though, it is a known issue that placing semantics outside grammar is harmful to linguistics (Chafe, 1970). Several scholars (e.g. Bagari, 1979; Tuller, 1986; Munkaila, 1990, and Yusuf, 1991) worked extensively on the syntactic configurations of Hausa sentence constructions. In all these scholarly works, Hausaists like all other linguists agree that verbs and their accompanying nouns may be specified semantically in term of semantic unit of various kinds. But the popular linguistic research on Hausa verbs by Parsons (1960, 1962, 1970-72, and 1975) that influences the syntactic analysis of Hausa sentence constructions, for over three decades, is not adequate in explaining the centrality of verbs, being the syntactic component that determines the main features of the organization of the rest of the sentence especially the semantic role associated with the selection of agent (agt) and patient (pat) in the sentence constructions.

In view of this, the present paper intends to only revisit Parsonian classification of Hausa verb and re-integrate it into the Chafe’s (1970:11) theory of semantic structure that assumes “The total human conceptual universe is dichotomized into two major areas, that is, the area of verb, which embraces states and events, and the area of noun which embraces things”.

Literature Review on Parsons' Classification of Hausa Verbs

Parsons' (1960) grade system posits seven morpho-syntactic and semantic classes of Hausa verbs, though the classification leaves out a number of verbs (Newman, 1973; Furniss, 1981). According to Parsons (1960, 1962, 1971-72), there are seven verbal grades in Hausa language. These seven grades were divided into the basic (primary) and derived (secondary) verbs and each grade characterized by a tonal pattern, a verbal ending, and some semantic and syntactic correlates. In Parson (1960) verb classification, the grade system applies most to two and three (or more) syllable verbs. Even though, monosyllabic verbs may operate ‘extended’ forms within the system; a number of common verbs are not accounted for by the system, e.g. *tāshì* ‘wake up’, , *mutù* ‘died’, *fadì* ‘fall’ and *gudù* ‘run’ . An alternative to Parsons’s view of the way in which verbs operate has been presented by Paul Newman (1973) on ‘grades, vowel-tone classes and extensions in the Hausa verbal system’.

The verbal complex based on the Parsonian verb grade system (1972) is made up of:

- an element marking person, gender and number of the subject
- an element marking aspect/tense
- a verb root carrying the underlying meaning of the verb
- a marker of Grade and Form—a tone pattern and final vowel

For instance, the Hausa verbal complex structure as in *Zasu Koma* ‘they will go back’ can be broken into above classified assumption as indicted in example (1) below:

1. Aspect/tense	Person/Number	Verb root	Grade/form
Za (hi- tone)	su (low-tone)	kom-	a (hi-hi tone)

Parson (1972) asserts that the Hausa verb grade systems involve both morphology and syntax; morphology in terms of the shape of the verb: root, suffixes and tone pattern; syntax in that some of these features indicate whether the verb is functioning as a transitive, intransitive or efferential verb.

Within the Parsonian framework, the final form of the verbs in all the grades is defined with respect to four syntactic contexts- - referred to as the 'A', 'B', 'C' and 'D' forms. The 'A' form is the form of a verb with no following object, i.e. the citation form of the verb. The 'B' form is when the verb is immediately followed by a pronoun direct object. The 'C' form is when the verb is immediately followed by noun direct object. Finally, the 'D' form- which is the subject of this study — is the form of the verb when it is immediately followed by noun or pronoun indirect objects (the indirect object constructions). Examples (2a-d) illustrate the grade 1 verb *kaamaa* 'catch' in each of the four syntactic contexts.

- 2a. Ali yaa kaamaa 'A-form'
Ali he-PERF catch
'Ali caught (it)'
- b. Ali ya-a kaamaa shi 'B-form'
Ali he-PERF catch it
'Ali caught it'
- c. Ali ya-a kaamaa dookii 'C- form'
Ali he-PERF catch horse
'Ali caught a horse'
- d. Ali ya-a kaamaa wa Audu dookii 'D- form'
Ali he-PERF catch IOM Audu horse
'Ali caught a horse for Audu'
or
Ali ya-a kaamka masa dookii
Ali he-PERF catch IOM-pro horse
'Ali caught a horse for him'

For the general overview of the Parsonian Hausa verb framework, the seven grades of Hausa verbs, tone patterns, vowels ending and their various forms are given in Table 1 below.

Table 1: The Hausa Verb Grade Systems and Forms (Disyllabic Verbs)

	Basic (Primary)			Derived (Secondary)			
	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7
A-form	HL -aa	LH -aa	LH -a	HL -ee	HH- ar/as	HH -oo	LH -u

(Before \emptyset object)							
B-form (Before pronominal accusative)	HL –aa	LH –ee		HL –ee	HH-ar (dà)	HH –oo	
C-form (Before nominal accusative)	HL –a	LH –i		HL– ee/e	HH-ar (dà)	HH –oo	
D-form (Before dative object)	HL –aa	HL – aa	LH –a	HL –ee	HH-ar (dà)	HH –oo	LH –u

As for the syntactic properties of the verb grades illustrated in Table 1 above, gr1, gr4, gr5, and gr6 contain both transitive and intransitive verbs. Grade 2 is entirely transitive, while gr3 and gr7 are all intransitive. The valence in Parsonian analysis of Hausa verbs which bases on the presence or absence of object in the sentence structure does not seem to be adequate because the issue of subject noun in the sentence construction is totally skipped in the classification despite the fact that subject noun is a syntactic argument controlled by a predicate. The notion ‘valency pattern’ in syntax that counts for all arguments in the sentence constructions including the subject which is known in transformational grammar as Noun Phrase (NP) agent and Parsonian classification failed to define its role in all the verb grade system needs to be revisited.

Semantically, verb, as the head of predicate of the sentence structure, is supposed to be an interested phenomenon due its complex nature in Hausa language, but P. W. Parsons does not elaborate on this point for all the grades especially the relations between verb, subject and object nouns apart from structural semantic properties of verbs. The semantic issue in Parsons analysis of Hausa verb is therefore limited to the categorization of these verbs in which Grades 1, 2, and 3 are considered to be basic from which the secondary grades that include grade 4 and 5 or the tertiary grades (grade 6 and 7) are derived. In addition to this, Parsons (1962:250) fails to provide multifunctional and semantic role of Hausa verbs in the syntactic constructions apart from explaining the exact meaning that the analysis assigns to the individual verbs based on lexical semantic perspective. This can be seen in Table 2 below:

Table 2: Meaning and Transitivity of Hausa Verb Grade

Basic Grade (Primary)		Transitivity value	Meaning label	Example
	Grade 1	Transitive and intransitive	Basic	Dafàa ‘cook’ nadàa ‘turban’
	Grade 2	Transitive	Basic	Aìkaa ‘send’

				Yànkkaa ‘cut off’
	Grade 3	Intransitive	Basic	Shìga ‘enter’ Cìka ‘died’
Derived Grade (Secondary)	Grade 4	Transitive and intransitive	Totality	Sayèè ‘buy up’ Zubèè ‘leak away’
	Grade 5	Transitive	Causative	Durkusal (dà) ‘bring to knee’ Jeefar (dà) ‘throw away’
	Grade 6	Transitive and intransitive	Ventive	daukoo ‘pick up and come’ Daawoo ‘come back’
	Grade 7	Intransitive	Completive	Kàràntu ‘well read’

Table 2 above illustrates that the various semantic properties of the verbs in the parson’s analysis are semantic connotations ascribed to the individual verbs in terms of their morphological nature not syntax which adequately describes and explains the selection of agent (agt) or patient (pat) by the verbs in the sentence as postulated by semantic structure theory. In this regard, Munkaila (1990) asserts that the potentiality for a verb to be followed by a direct object is a mark of its being a transitive verb; many verbs will not allow a direct object and these verbs are termed intransitive. As intransitives they will only operate in one environment ‘not followed by direct object’ and not in the other two—‘followed by pronoun direct object’ and ‘followed by noun direct object’.

As aforementioned, Hausa monosyllabic verbs operate as ‘extended’ forms within the system; but a number of common verbs are not accounted for by the system, e.g. *tāshi* ‘wake up’, *mutù* ‘died’, *fadì* ‘fall’ and *gudù* ‘run’. In this regard, an alternative to Parson’s view of the way in which verbs operate has been reviewed as presented in Paul Newman (1973) on ‘grades, vowel-tone classes and extensions in the Hausa verbal system’.

Even though, Parson attempts to explain the semantic properties of verbs in Hausa sentence constructions, his framework fails to adequately specify the nature of verb that determines what the rest of the sentence will be like, especially what type of noun will accompany it in the Hausa sentence constructions. For instance, when the verb is specified as an action as in ‘the men laughed’. The verb ‘laugh’ dictates that it be accompanied by an animate as agent who is also human. Therefore, a structure such as ‘the chairs laughed’ is ill-formed or otherwise forced to give the noun ‘chairs’ a meaning of some kind as if it were abnormally animate. In this case, a Wallace Chafe’s semantic configuration framework can be best to dichotomize the Hausa Verbal system.

Method of Data Collection and Analysis

The analysis is mainly based on data from the standard Kano dialect from secondary sources of data (previous researches) that include Parsons' (1960) article on the verbal system in Hausa and Munkaila's (1990) PhD thesis on indirect object constructions in Hausa where Hausa sentence corpus are generated and native speaker intuition is used to validate their applicability within Chafe's (1970) semantic configuration framework. The researcher analyzes the generated Hausa data using qualitative method of analysis to justify the descriptive and explanatory adequacy of Chafe's semantic configuration framework in the study of Hausa verbal system.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of semantic structure is operating through what Chafe dubs as semantic configurations in which meanings are assembled. In semantic configurations, the post-semantic processes yield a series of post-semantic representation which can lead to surface structure. For one to reach to phonetic structure, the surface structure can be subjected to several processes that include symbolization which converts the still semantically oriented surface structure into underlying phonological structure. After undergoing a series of phonological processes, the surface structure will then appear in its phonetic form as summarized in the semantic structure framework in the following schema:

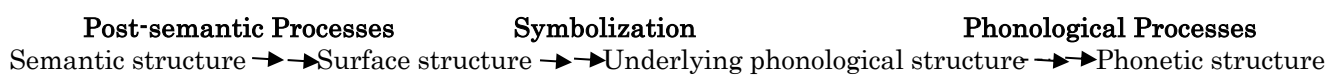


Figure 1: Semantic Structure Schema

Figure 1 above depicts that the whole matter in sentence construction is a semantic structure in which configurations of meanings are to be found. Through post-semantic processes, which are similar to transformation in Transformation Generative Grammar (TGG) of Chomsky, the configurations are transformed into a series of post-semantic representations which eventually lead to a surface structure. In order to reach the phonetic structure, the surface structure has yet to be subjected to be several processes. This includes the symbolization processes which convert the still semantically oriented surface structure into its underlying phonological structure. After undergoing a series of phonological processes, the surface structure will then appear in its phonetic form.²

In semantic structure framework, verb is assumed to be central and the noun is peripheral because verb in every language is always present semantically. Verb determines what rest of the sentence will be like; it particular determines what nouns will accompany it, what the relation of these nouns to it will be, and how these nouns will be semantically specified. Consider the following structure in (2):

2. The man laughed

² The direction of the arrow in the schema of the framework indicates that language is a process that converts meaning into sound, not sound into meaning.

The verb 'laugh' in the above sentence construction as an *action* dictates that it be accompanied by a noun, that the noun be related to it as *agent*, and that the noun be specified as animate, perhaps also as *human*. The correctness of this view is suggested by such facts as the following. If we are confronted with a surface structure such as in (3) below:

3. The chair laughed

When one forced to give a meaning of some kind, what he will do is to interpret **chair** as if it were *abnormally animate* as dictated by the verb. What we do not do is to interpret laugh in an abnormal way as if it were a different kind of activity, performed by inanimate object. This suggests that verb is central to dictate semantic structure of sentence construction in every language.

Another interested claim on the centrality of verb in the sentence structure is the issue of inflectional added to the verb in the semantic structure level as you can see in (4) below:

4. The men laughed

From structure (4) above, the fundamental question is that is the inflectional –ed added to the verb or to the entire sentence? Is the presence of the semantic unit *past* means that the laughing took place in the past that is past applied to laugh or that the men's laugh took place in the past that is past applied to the configuration of laugh with men? I believe that question has no significance that any unit like past which added semantically to a verb is added simultaneously to the entire sentence which built around that verb in same way that anything that happens to the sun affects the entire solar system.

In contrast, we may note that agent 'men' in structure (4) is plural unlike in the structure (2). Such inflectional is relevant only to that noun; it is not a meaning that extends over the sentence as a whole. In this sense, a noun is like planet whose internal modification affects it alone, and not the solar system as whole. Having discussed the centrality of verb in the sentence construction and peripheral nature of noun from semantic structure perspective, let us now take a cursory look at verb classification within the framework of semantic structure.

Classification of Verb from Semantic Structure Paradigm

According to Chafe (1970), the term sentence provides a convenient way in which a verb dictates its accompanying nouns. Sentence as an independent structural entity has a starting point of its generation and the verb is all the starting point we need. Typically, we have a sentence with a verb alone as in command otherwise known as imperative structure as in "come" or "go". Similarly, we can have a sentence with verb accompanied by one or more nouns, or a configuration of this kind to which one or more coordinate or subordinate verbs have been added to form complex structure.

From semantic structure perspective, verb in all types of sentence structures can be categorized into states, processes and actions. Consider the structures in (5-8):

5. a. the wood is dry
b. the rope is tight
c. the dish is broken
d. the elephant is dead
6. a. the wood dried
b. the rope tightened
c. the dish broke
d. the elephant died
7. a. Michael ran
b. the man laughed
c. Harriet sang
d. the tiger pounced
8. a. Michael dried the wood
b. the man tightened the rope
c. Harriet broken the dish
d. the tiger killed the elephant

Source: Aadopted from Chafe (1970: 96)

In structure (5) the nouns (wood, rope, dish, and elephant) are said to be in a state or condition (dry, tight, broken, dead). The remaining sentence in (6), (7) and (8) contained verb which are not specified as states. As rule of semantic structure, nonstates verb can be distinguished from states by the fact that they answer the question ‘what happen? what’s happening and so on. A nonstate is a “happening,” an event as in:

9. What happen?
 - a. The wood dried
 - b. The men laughed
 - c. Harriet broken the dish (but not for example)
 - d. *The wood was dry³

The structures in (9) above suggest that nonstate verbs can be regarded as processes and actions as illustrated in the structures in (6), (7) and (8). But these nonstates are not all of the same kind. In structure (6) for instance, the verbs are *processes*, where the noun is said to have changed it state or condition. It seems valid to dub the noun in (6) as *patient* of the verb. While the verbs in (7) are of a different of sort, they have nothing to do with either a state or a change of state instead they express an activity of *action*, something which someone does.

A rule of thumbs which can help us to distinguish an action from process is that an action sentence will answer what did N do?, where N is some noun:

³ Various other rough tests can be applied to distinguished verbs which are nonstates from states, e.g

- a. The wood is drying
- b. The men are laughing
- c. Harriet is breaking the dish (but not)
- d. *The wood is being dry

10. What did Harriet do?
 a. She sang (but not for example)
 b. *She died

Conversely, it is often the case that a simple process sentence will answer the question ‘What happened to N?’, to which a simple action is not appropriate answer. Consider the structure in (11) below.

11. What happened to Harriet?
 a. She died (but not)
 b. *She sang

However, the structures in (11) appear that the verb in these sentences is simultaneously, both a process and an action. As a process, it involves a change in the condition of a noun, its patient. As an action it expresses what someone, its agent, does. The agent is still someone who does something to something as the patient of the verb. In this sense, the verbs in (11) are both processes and action as they can be identified by answering the following two questions in (12) and (13):

12. What did Harriet do?
 a. She broke the dish
 13. What happened to the dish?
 a. Harriet broke it

In summary, the verb can be specified as state or nonstate. To indicate that a verb may or may not be a state, a rule of the following form can be used:

$$14. \quad V \quad \dashrightarrow \quad > \quad \text{state}$$

The fact that the arrow in (14) has a broken shaft means that its application is optional. This was explained in our explanation of the structure (5-8) above as summarized in Table 3 below.

Table 3: Verb and its Types Form from Semantic Structure Perspective

Structure (in examples)	5	6	7	8
Type of verb	.State	Process	Action	Process Action

These possibilities can therefore be captured in the following rule in (15):

$$15. \quad V \quad \dashrightarrow \quad \left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{Process} \\ \text{Action} \end{array} \right. \\ \quad \quad \quad \text{-State}$$

In the rule in (15), the parentheses indicates an inclusive disjunction that is when there is presence of a nonstate state (-state) verb in the sentence, the verb can either be process or action or both. Though these four types of verb can be realized in the sentence structure when verb is accompanied by patient and/or

agent noun, it might be well to consider the possibility that no noun at all need be present in some sentences, as illustrated below.

- 16. a. it's hot
- b. it's late
- c. it's Tuesday

The meanings of the sentences in (16a-c) seem to involve nothing but a predication, in which there is no 'thing' of which the predication is made and the pronoun 'it' is a surface element only which need not reflect anything at all in the semantic structure. However, the verbs in the above structures apparently specified as a state but these sentences do not answer the question 'what's happening?' as earlier proposed nor can they be made progressive as in *it's being hot. In cases such as these, the state verb with such surface element can be specified as *ambient*.

In addition, we may also consider the sentences in (17) below.

- 17. a. it's raining
- b. it's snowing

Here too the above structures contain surface element 'it' that reflects nothing in the semantic structure. The sentences evidently do not express states for they answer the question 'what's happening?' Furthermore, they seem to express actions rather than processes for they answer the question 'what's it doing?', where the 'it' in the question does not reflect any item in the semantic structure either, though they express actions but without assigned agent.

In this regard, the verb is ambient when it involves event without reference to particular thing within environment. The framework adds another rule to existing ones that were earlier illustrated in this paper.

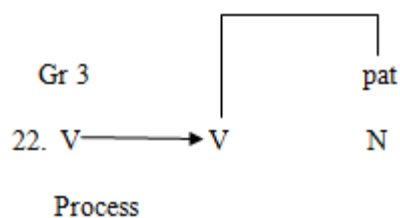
- 18. V ----> > ambient
- process

In the rule (18), a verb which is not specified as a process may be optionally as ambient. Having look at these developments, verbs in sentence construction can be specified and expanded in the following six ways as illustrated in the set of sentences indicated by their example numbers in this paper.

Table 4: Verb and its Types in Expanded Form from Semantic Structure Perspective

Structure (in examples)	5	6	7	8	16	17
Type of verb	State	Process	Action	Process Action	State Ambient	Action Ambient

Having identified the types of verbs from semantic structure framework, the paper is now in a position to discuss the manner in which each of these six kinds of verb



The grade 1, 2, 4, 5 and 6 verbs are semantically both process and action and their resulting configurations allow patient and agent nouns co-occur with verb in the syntactic constructions. Consider the following structures in (23):

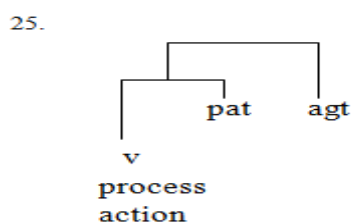
23. a. Auduu yaa rubùuta wàsiikàa ‘Audu wrote a letter’ (Gr 1.)
 b. Kootu taa tùhùmi bàraawò ‘Court has prosecuted a theft’ (Gr. 2)
 c. Bàlaa yaa tum̀bùkee d̀ooyaa ‘Bala has uprooted the yam’ (Gr. 4)
 d. Sheehù yaa durkùsar da su ‘Shehu has caused to bring them to their knees’ (Gr. 5)
 e. Maalàm yana kwaatsoo ruuwaa ‘Malam poured water toward us’ (Gr. 6)

When observed carefully, the verbs in the configuration in (23 a-c) are semantically either actions or processes. However, apart from form B and C of grade 2 verb, all these verbs can be nominalized when preceded by a general or relative continuous of Hausa tense without losing their phonological, morphological and syntactic shape and do still select their noun agents and patients as you illustrated in (24) below:

24. a. Auduu yana rubùuta wàsiikàa (Gr 1.)
 b. Kootu tana tùhùmaa/ *tùhùmi ta /(bàraawò) (Gr. 2)⁵
 c. Bàlaa yana tum̀bùkee d̀ooyaa (Gr. 4)
 d. Sheehù yana durkùsar da su
 e. Maalàm yana kwaatsoo ruuwaa

Despite the nominalization of the verb, the resulting configurations in (24) illustrate that all verbs are still retaining their status of transitivity that cannot without an accompanied patient noun. This further suggests that verb and patient relation in these grades is more internal than the agent. In this regard, the Hausa verbs with characteristics of action and process can schematically be represented in (25) below:

⁵ The instance in which grade 2 verbs cannot be nominalized in forms B and C suggests the partitive nature of the verb.



The schema in (25) above indicates that the action verb that at same time, a process, can take both agent and patient in its syntactic configuration and this development confirms the centrality of verb in determining the presence of accompanying nouns in the sentence structure.

On the state verbs and action verbs that contain ambient in Hausa language, you can find out that such sentence structures are in subjunctive tenses in the language. For instance an yi ruuwaa ‘it has rained’ or ana ruuwa ‘it’s raining.

Conclusion

In the above discussion, we saw how a verb may be specified in terms of semantic units like state, process, action and ambient. It is evident in this paper that the primary role of the verbs in the syntactic configuration in every language is not limited to denoting action but it includes its role in the selection of accompanying noun and of the relations which such noun bear to verbs. These accompanying nouns must always obey the selection manner and characteristic of the verb as the highest element in the hierarchical constituent that is known as predicate in the traditional grammar. It therefore concludes that all theoretical framework must adequately describe and explain the verb in every sentence that determines predicative elements around it.

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Author Biography

Dr Ahmed Mohammed Bedu is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Languages and Linguistics at the University of Maiduguri, Nigeria, with a varied professional background as a journalist, international broadcaster and academic. He holds a BA in Linguistics/Hausa and an MA in General Linguistics from the University of Maiduguri and a PhD in Western Languages and Literature (with a specialisation in English Linguistics and Literature) from Süleyman Demirel University Isparta, Türkiye. His areas of expertise include Media and Political Discourse Studies, Language Policy, Language in Education and Community Engagement. Dr Bedu has authored and edited a number of books, published over thirty articles in reputable, national and international journals, and contributed chapters in books on varied issues in media discourse studies.