



EUPHEMISMS AND SYNTACTIC STRATEGIES IN THE ONLINE CONCEALMENT OF DEPRESSION AMONG NIGERIAN UNDERGRADUATES

Chijioke Edward (Ph. D) and Nwabueze Ijeoma Nina

Department of English and Literary Studies, Faculty of Arts, Godfrey Okoye University, Thinkers Corner, Emene, Enugu State

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.16927907>

Keywords: <i>Euphemism, Depression, Digital Discourse, Social Media, Pragmatics, Nigerian Undergraduates</i>	Abstract: <i>This study investigates how Nigerian undergraduates express and conceal depressive experiences on social media through euphemistic and syntactic strategies. Anchored in Grice’s Cooperative Principle, the research examines the pragmatic functions of indirect language, hedging, and figurative expressions in digital communication. The study focuses on undergraduate students of English and Literary Studies and Mass Communication at Godfrey Okoye University and Coal City University in Enugu State. Using a descriptive survey design, data were collected through questionnaires and corpus sampling of social media posts from platforms such as Twitter (X), TikTok, and Instagram. The analysis employed mean scores to evaluate patterns of euphemistic and syntactic usage, with a cut-off mean of 2.5 for acceptance. Findings revealed that students frequently employ euphemisms, metaphors, passive constructions, and fragmented syntax to articulate depressive feelings indirectly. Expressions such as “I’m just tired,” “lowkey done,” and “feeling numb” were common, highlighting the role of figurative language as both an expressive and protective mechanism. The study found that such linguistic strategies are culturally influenced, platform-specific, and serve to mitigate social risk while communicating distress. The grand mean scores of all items under each research question exceeded the 2.5 threshold, indicating consistent usage of euphemistic and syntactic patterns in digital depressive expression. Empirical evidence from Benammar (2024), Bayisa (2017), Zhong et al. (2022), Price (2022), Hidoussi (2020), Fajardo (2023), and Golubeva (2024) supports these findings, emphasizing the social, cultural, and pragmatic dimensions of euphemistic and figurative language in online discourse. Based on these insights, the study</i>
--	---

Chijioke Edward (Ph. D) And Nwabueze Ijeoma Nina



recommends integrating digital literacy and emotional communication training into university programs, promoting culturally sensitive mental health campaigns, developing peer support networks, and conducting platform-specific linguistic research. The study concludes that Nigerian undergraduates navigate depressive experiences online through strategic language choices that balance self-expression, cultural norms, and social acceptability. By understanding these linguistic patterns, educators, counselors, and policymakers can better design interventions that support emotional well-being and foster empathetic digital communities.

Introduction

The digital age has transformed the ways individuals communicate, particularly through social media platforms such as Twitter (X), TikTok, and Instagram. Language in these spaces is increasingly mediated by visual, textual, and symbolic resources, allowing users to express emotions in novel ways. Among these emotional expressions, depression has emerged as a significant focus, often articulated through coded or euphemistic language. Social media provides a semi-public arena where individuals can negotiate the tension between emotional disclosure and social acceptability. Scholars such as Benammar (2024) argue that figurative language, including metonymy, hyperbole, and euphemism, shapes the pragmatic effects of communication online. These tools allow users to convey depressive states while mitigating social judgment. Understanding these mechanisms is critical for both linguistic analysis and mental health awareness.

Euphemisms are especially central to the digital discourse of mental health. Often when users are in emotional distress, they mask themselves with softened or indirect expressions that may hide and disclose psychological conditions (Hidoussi, 2020). Examples of such phrases among the youth are tokens such as, I am just tired or lowkey done. Indeed, euphemistic language is an acceptable means of depicting depressive experiences in Nigeria where the social and cultural stigma related to mental illness remains in place, allowing them to discuss mental illness openly (Benammar, 2024). The study cuts across the undergraduate population of English, Literary Studies, and Mass Communication which are particularly active in the online social spaces mediated by digital technology. This paper aims to shed some light on how language, culture, and emotion interact in the Internet context through an analysis of euphemism and the selection of syntax. The understanding of the linguistic and social aspects of depression in the

Chijioke Edward (Ph. D) And Nwabueze Ijeoma Nina



digital domains is highlighted in the investigation.

In this study, the conceptualization of depression is formulated beyond clinical conceptualization. It is an existential emotional state that manifests itself in a visit to online communication and is characterized by the state of sadness, fatigue, or withdrawal (Smirnova et al., 2018). The messages on social media provide subtle observations of emotional conditions by breaking up sentences, using ellipses, and using emojis. Based on Benammar (2024) figurative language magnifies the pragmatic effect of posts and enables the communication of complex affective states by users. This paper mainly puts forth the argument that social media linguistic creativity can be seen as an echo of inner states of emotion as well as a bargaining on social norms. Such utterances also help build depressive vernaculars that are peer-recognized and could assist in sharing subliminal meanings without any overt expression (Leis et al., 2019). Social media is, therefore, an important place to examine the combination of language and mental health.

Equally important are the syntactic patterns that are used in the depressive digital discourse. The use of shortened phrases, lacking sentences, and rhetorical questions serves to tone down the consequences of emotional disclosure (Zhong et al., 2022). These language patterns are culture-mediated and may demonstrate the way people

negotiate emotional vulnerability in the social domain. In Nigeria, depression is commonly stigmatized through religious and societal ideology, which means that indirect linguistic tactics are employed (Angkapanichkit et al., 2020). Digital discourse thus turns out to be emotional as well as a negotiation of cultures. Investigation of these syntax tropes can be used by the researcher to identify the cognitive and social processes that are the source of online communication. This can be applied to the wider theories of language expressing internal states in mediated situations.

Digital discourse is inherently multimodal, combining text, images, emojis, and hashtags to create layered meaning (Lazebna, 2020). Users strategically select these semiotic resources to augment the emotional tenor of their posts. For instance, a phrase like “smiling through it all 😊❤️” blends humor with despair, signaling nuanced emotional states (Bakare & Uzoho, 2021). The multimodal nature of online communication complicates interpretation but also enriches expressive potential. As learners and users adapt to these environments, they develop a digital literacy that includes understanding indirect emotional cues. This study, therefore, situates syntactic and euphemistic analysis within a broader semiotic context. By doing so, it captures the complexity of depression as expressed online.

Chijioke Edward (Ph. D) And Nwabueze Ijeoma Nina



Hashtags are another crucial aspect of depressive digital discourse. Tags like #numb, #tiredinside, or #lowkeydone create semi-public spaces where emotional states become socially intelligible (Leis et al., 2019). They allow individuals to connect with peers experiencing similar feelings, creating micro-communities around shared affect. In these contexts, language functions both as expression and as social coordination. Benammar (2024) highlights the pragmatic function of figurative language in these settings, emphasizing the interplay of syntax, metaphor, and cultural convention. Hashtags, therefore, serve as both markers of identity and conveyors of emotion. This underscores the importance of analyzing online language within its socio-technical environment. Such analysis provides insights into peer dynamics and digital mental health culture.

Another aspect that the digital infrastructure promotes is conciseness and the use of aphoristic forms of expression as it can be observed in services such as Twitter (X). Even a phrase like I have reached my end is an easily expressed manifestation of a complicated emotional scenario that is a product of individual feeling and platform limitation (Musa & Bellamy, 2022). TikTok captions also integrate a narrative and visual communication to project emotive complexity. These norms, specific to each platform, define the structure of the depressive discourse, and, according to Bakare and Uzoho

(2021), the process of platformizing pain. Digital discourse is therefore an accommodating language activity, between authenticity and performativity. These adaptations are fundamental concepts that should be understood by the research dealing with digital linguistics and online expression of emotions. It can show us how affordances within technology affect linguistic creativity and coping styles.

A combination of the cultural and the linguistic aspects is especially pertinent to the Nigerian situation. It is depicted that the religious/social/family requirements influence the disclosure of emotional distress by young adults in a digital format (Angkapanichkit et al., 2020). Euphemistic words reduce the possible stigmatization thus allowing individual revelation. On certain occasions, cultural wordplays are repurposed as a means to indicate depressive affect, an example of the interpenetration of local vernaculars with global vernaculars (Benammar, 2024). This makes linguistic analysis with a cultural understanding important. The discourse of the digital is not possible to interpret outside society. Using the postings made by Nigerian students in their respective countries, the paper places linguistic strategies into the larger socio-cultural contexts. It expounds on how language is adapted and innovatively used in online displays of emotions. Even depressive digital discourse also has an ethical manifestation. In the interpretation of

Chijioke Edward (Ph. D) And Nwabueze Ijeoma Nina



content that has been shared publicly, researchers need to navigate privacy issues (Radell et al., 2021). A problem with data collection and analysis is that it is relatively easy to make posts anonymous, ephemeral, or selectively shared. The research does not deny those taking part in it their right to independence; nevertheless, statistical patterns in the use of euphemisms and syntax will also be considered. It is essential to appreciate that digital depression discourse is a subject that necessitates a trade-off between analytic precision and moral accountability. Researchers like Benammar (2024) point out the usefulness of contextualizing the results so that they do not violate the confidentiality of the user. The principles are embraced by the study to make it valid as well as ethical. Digital discourse research is therefore where there is much consideration of the negotiation of access, interpretation, and protection of the participants involved.

Previous research results show that euphemistic and syntactic tactics are not exclusively personal decisions or socially mediated effects. The choice of language depends on peer recognition, norms of the in-platform culture, and cultural knowledge shared in communities (Leis et al., 2019). Examples of using phrases seen throughout the internet community or terminology may be imitated by the student or they may use hashtags to demonstrate congruence. This social mediation highlights

how the discourse plays into identity building and tracking emotion (Bakare & Uzoho, 2021). The digital communication turns into expressive, and performative. The following dynamics are significant in terms of comprehending the complex and subtle behaviors of depression on the Internet. It guides communication of mental health and also enlightens linguistic theory.

Social media also offers the context in which to reflect on depression, increasing the emotional language of depression. The recycling/remixing of content is common among users and this presents intertextual layers that deepen the meaning (Ekeh & Zhang, 2023). This shows the layers of the digital discourse; popular songs, memes, and trending captions are used to save cost in expressing mood. This intertextuality indicates the establishment of common solutions to the manifestation of affect and preservation of boundaries in the social setting. In line with Lazebna (2020), the discourse of digitalness can be described as a hybridized communication field of convergence between the resources of text and symbol. This speaks volumes about the necessity to combine multimodal analysis with syntactic and euphemistic analysis. The awareness of such trends enhances the interpretations of emotional expression on the web.

The nature of digital discourse relating to depression is mobile and playful. Text can be regularly deleted, edited, or, even time-limited,

Chijioke Edward (Ph. D) And Nwabueze Ijeoma Nina



similar to the Instagram Stories or WhatsApp statuses (Okpara & Hassan, 2025). This non-prological transitory texture makes documentation problematic but is an authentic mode of expression. To control audience perception and disclosure of emotion, users negotiate the dimension of time. This kind of ephemerality requires adaptive research techniques that track trends without encroaching on the privacy of users. Benammar (2024) insists on the role of temporal patterns in increasing the understanding of pragmatic use of language. The research of such dynamics is part of an overall picture of digital emotional discourse. It also provides interventions for mental health communication plans.

The other issue is linguistic innovation that is characteristic of depressive digital discourse. With the help of emojis, shortenings, neologisms, and culture-specific Giveaways, the user can convey complicated emotions (Musa & Bellamy, 2022). This innovation serves to break conventional expectations of grammaticality, but to allow subtle variation in the expression of affect. It depicts the socio-cultural negotiation and the way the mind processes everything. With these linguistic adaptations, researchers may follow the interactions of emotion, identity, and technology. Such insight is especially important to educators, mental health workers, and communication theorists. Digital linguistic

creativity is therefore an expressive, as well as a coping mechanism.

There is also a study where the world affects local digital discourse. English as a lingua franca is often combined with the Nigerian varieties, slang, and cultural idioms of English and is regularly incorporated into the speech of the Nigerian youth (Benammar, 2024). This translates to subtle expression and peer identification in the globalized online environments. Syntactic novelties and Euphemistic language represent the combination of local identity and the worldwide communicative standards (Benammar, 2024). The analysis of such interactions promotes learning about the evolution of language in a cross-cultural setting with the use of digital media. It also reaffirms the topicality of digital discourse analysis within modern linguistics studies. This way of approach is in line with linguistic, psychological, and sociocultural views. In summary, this study situates depression within the complex interplay of language, culture, and technology. Euphemistic expressions, syntactic strategies, hashtags, and multimodal features reflect how students navigate emotional disclosure online. By examining these patterns in Nigerian undergraduate digital discourse, the study contributes to knowledge on language use, mental health communication, and socio-technical interaction. Insights gained are

Chijioke Edward (Ph. D) And Nwabueze Ijeoma Nina



valuable for scholars, educators, and mental health practitioners aiming to understand the pragmatic and cultural nuances of depression in social media communication. The research foregrounds both theoretical and practical implications, emphasizing the importance of contextually grounded linguistic analysis.

Research Questions

1. What euphemisms do Nigerian undergraduate students use on social media to express experiences of depression?
2. How do students use syntactic structures, such as fragments and ellipses, to convey depressive states in digital discourse?
3. How do students perceive the effectiveness of euphemisms in expressing emotional distress on social media platforms?

Theoretical Framework

This study adopts Speech Act Theory as its theoretical framework, originally proposed by Austin (1962) and expanded by Searle (1969). The theory posits that language is not merely a vehicle for conveying information but also a form of action. Utterances perform functions such as asserting, questioning, commanding, or expressing emotions. In the context of digital discourse, speech acts allow users to perform emotional labor, particularly in expressing depressive states indirectly. Recent studies (Benammar, 2024; Lazebna, 2020) highlight how social media platforms enable users to enact these speech acts through text, emojis, hashtags,

and multimodal cues, reflecting complex affective intentions. This perspective foregrounds the functional and performative dimensions of language in digital spaces.

In studying the euphemistic language used in depressive online communication, speech acts are pertinent. When users adopt this strategy, they tend to be indirect in the expression of their emotions, e.g., saying, I am just tired, using hashtags to express emotion, such as, #lowkeydone, an expressive act, but not under social risk (Hidoussi, 2020). According to Searle (1969), utterances of this type should be classified as expressive acts, in which speakers express interior emotional states. Such actions are mediated in social media discourse by the rules of the platform and the community norms that define the form and how to interpret it (Bakare & Uzoho, 2021). In addition to this, Benammar (2024) supposes that the figurative language such as hyperbole and metonymy contributes to the pragmatic purpose of the speech act and heightens emotional overtones. Therefore, the Speech Act Theory is an efficient tool in understanding the strategic and performative as well as the socially situated use of language on the internet.

The theory also explains how those with depression tend to be indirect and ambiguous in speech. Online users often hedge in statements, break them in multiple aspects, or use euphemisms to avoid making the statements

Chijioke Edward (Ph. D) And Nwabueze Ijeoma Nina



explicit (Radell et al., 2021). This type of indirectness can be understood to be in keeping with the idea of illocutionary force proposed by Austin in that the intended meaning varies with the real content of the utterance. Recent studies (Benammar, 2024; Zhong et al., 2022) confirm that digital affordances, character limits, ephemeral posts, and visual cues, exacerbate these. The theory tells how the decision to use language is not only based on emotion but also depends on context, perception by the audience, and conventions particular to the platform in use. This demonstrates the dynamic and tactical procedure of online communication on a delicate subject matter such as depression.

The other dimension of Speech Act Theory that is used in this study is the significant interaction between speaker, listener, and context. In digital spaces, there is the intercession of technological interfaces that make this a hybrid communication environment (Lazebna & Prykhodko, 2021). An example is that emojis, GIFs, and multimedia content, are additional contextual signals that help to decipher illocutionary intent. Benammar (2024) underlines that such semiotic means enhance the functions of speech acts which were created in the use of real words, letting one express emotions on a new level, where being face-to-face is impossible. The interaction of linguistic signifier, social norm, and technology platform also plays a critical role when it comes to how

people elsewhere say depression and how depression is identified on the Internet.

The framework also incorporates the aspect of perlocutionary effect, the effect of the utterance on the audience. Connective and Validating Value, in the digital depressive discourse, is used to create emotional responses of empathy, solidarity, or validation among peers (Leis et al., 2019). Searle (1969) reminds us that the perlocutionary effect can be divergent based on the interpretation of the audience and the social media space is semi-public, thus interpretation is multi-faceted. A recent study (Benammar, 2024) indicates that the reception and the amplification of such effects are guided by the platform's affordances, which include the comment section, likes, and shares. Thus, Speech Act Theory can be viewed as the multi-faceted perspective through which online depression discourse could be observed in terms of its intended and interpreted roles of language.

Lastly, the choice of Speech Act Theory will enable the study to have a combination of linguistic, psychological, and social aspects of communication. It positions language as a tool of both individual representation and social accommodation, not least a means of understanding the interaction between emotion, identity, and response. Through this framework, the paper will examine the performance of euphemisms, syntax, and multimodal cues as an act of performance in the digital spaces

Chijioke Edward (Ph. D) And Nwabueze Ijeoma Nina



(Hidoussi, 2020; Benammar, 2024). The theory's focus on function, context, and consequence aligns with the study's objectives of understanding how Nigerian undergraduates articulate and manage depressive experiences online. In doing so, Speech Act Theory remains a versatile and contextually relevant foundation for interpreting digital discourse on sensitive emotional topics.

Empirical Review

Benammar (2024) investigated the pragmatic effects of figurative language, including euphemism, metonymy, and hyperbole, in social media posts by users experiencing depression. The study employed a thematic analysis of online posts and comments across multiple platforms to evaluate how figurative language mediated emotional expression. Findings revealed that users often decreased their social media activity when highly depressed, while euphemistic and figurative expressions allowed them to communicate distress without explicit disclosure. The researcher emphasized that figurative language functions as both an expressive and protective mechanism for online users. It was recommended that future studies examine platform-specific variations in figurative usage. The similarity with the present study is the focus on euphemistic and indirect language to express emotional states online. The difference, however, is that Benammar analyzed general social media users across multiple

countries, whereas the current study focuses specifically on Nigerian undergraduates and their depressive expressions on selected platforms.

Bayisa (2017) conducted a thematic analysis of linguistic taboos and their corresponding euphemistic expressions in Oromo communities. Using interviews and online forum observations, the study explored how speakers substituted taboo terms with less direct expressions to mitigate social and psychological harm. Findings showed that euphemisms not only masked offensive content but also reflected cultural norms surrounding politeness, respect, and indirectness. The study concluded that understanding euphemistic patterns is essential for effective cross-cultural communication and mental health discourse. It was recommended that digital communicators be educated on culturally sensitive language use. The similarity with the present study lies in the examination of euphemisms as socially and culturally informed communicative tools. The difference is that Bayisa focused on Oromo linguistic taboos, while the current research investigates depressive language in Nigerian digital spaces.

Zhong et al. (2022) analyzed the linguistic features of cyberbullying and responsible digital citizenship on social media, with a focus on syntactic structures and euphemistic phrasing. The study applied corpus analysis to posts and comments, evaluating how users concealed

Chijioke Edward (Ph. D) And Nwabueze Ijeoma Nina



harmful intent or navigated politeness norms. Findings indicated that euphemistic constructions often mediated aggression and facilitated indirect social critique. The researchers recommended integrating digital literacy education to raise awareness of ethical language use online. The similarity with the present study is the focus on online language as a site of strategic and socially mediated expression. The difference is that Zhong et al. concentrated on negative discourse and cyberbullying, whereas the current research focuses on the linguistic representation of depression.

According to Price (2022), euphemism was also discussed as a method of normalizing the construction of mental illness in media discourses through corpus linguistics. The paper has concluded that the use of euphemistic wordings often helped to redefine and recontextualize depression and other mental illnesses, hence affecting how society viewed as well as how individuals expressed themselves. According to the researcher, these linguistic techniques not only serve a communicative purpose, but also aim at the protection of a speaker, as a result of which he can talk about rather delicate things, with a minimized risk of socializing. Future mental health campaigns should pay attention to how language in online communication can have a pragmatic impact. The similarity of this with the present study lies

in the fact that it had examined euphemism as a means of describing psychological conditions. The dissimilarity is that Price examined mass media depictions, whereas the present examination explores peer-to-peer communication via social media and the platforms.

Hidoussi (2020) examined how depression interferes with the word selection of adult language users in terms of syntactic and lexical variation used in speech. The study has utilized both case studies and corpus analysis in ascertaining how the sense of emotion in words was chosen and the arrangement of sentences. The results showed that the syndrome of depression was traced to fragmented syntax, hedges, and euphemistic substitution. This study concluded that language indicates not only subjective emotional states but also the strategies that can help to overcome social expectations. It was suggested that researchers and instructors pay attention to these language indicators in online negotiations. The similarity with the current research is the attention to terms and syntax in terms of depressive expression. The contrasting aspect is that Hidoussi has researched adults in both offline and online settings, and the present study directly deals with the case of Nigerian undergraduates posting on social media.

Fajardo (2023) conducted a morphopragmatic analysis of euphemistic constructions on social

Chijioke Edward (Ph. D) And Nwabueze Ijeoma Nina



networking sites, examining how morphological replicability disguises sensitive referents. Using corpus-based methods, the study highlighted the interplay between word formation, context, and pragmatic intent. Findings revealed that online users strategically deploy morphological and syntactic variation to communicate delicate emotions indirectly. The researcher recommended that digital literacy initiatives address these subtle communicative strategies to enhance comprehension and empathy online. The similarity with the present study is the focus on euphemistic and indirect language in digital spaces. The difference is that Fajardo examined a broader range of euphemistic constructions, while the current study concentrates on depressive expressions among Nigerian undergraduates.

Golubeva (2024) explored the distinction between non-euphemistic and euphemism-based politically correct expressions from a relevance-theoretic perspective. The study analyzed social media discourse to determine how users selectively adopt euphemisms to navigate social norms and audience interpretation. Findings indicated that euphemisms serve both as cognitive shortcuts and protective devices in emotionally sensitive contexts. The researcher recommended that further studies investigate the cultural and platform-specific factors influencing euphemistic choices. The similarity with the

present study is the examination of euphemism as a functional and strategic language tool. The difference is that Golubeva's study emphasized political correctness and general online communication, whereas the current study focuses specifically on depression-related discourse in Nigerian higher education contexts.

Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design to explore the use of euphemisms and syntactic structures by Nigerian undergraduates in expressing depressive experiences on social media. The design was considered most suitable because it allows for the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data from a targeted population, enabling the researcher to identify patterns in language use while also capturing students' perceptions and motivations. The approach facilitated the examination of digital discourse as it naturally occurs, providing insight into linguistic strategies without manipulating participants' behaviors.

The population of the study comprised undergraduate students enrolled in English and Literary Studies and Mass Communication programs at Godfrey Okoye University and Coal City University in Enugu State, Nigeria. These students were selected because they are active social media users, familiar with evolving online linguistic trends, and likely to engage in subtle or euphemistic expressions of emotional states. The

Chijioke Edward (Ph. D) And Nwabueze Ijeoma Nina



estimated population size was approximately 1,200 students across the two universities.

A purposive sampling technique was employed to select 200 participants who demonstrated frequent engagement with social media platforms such as Twitter (X), TikTok, and Instagram. This technique was appropriate because it ensured that only individuals who regularly interact in the online spaces of interest were included in the study, enhancing the reliability of findings. The sample was stratified to include students from both faculties to ensure representation of diverse linguistic backgrounds and online habits.

The two instruments used in data collection were employed. To improve the quality of the research, the following items were introduced: a structured questionnaire composed of closed and open questions to better obtain the information concerning social media habits of students, their knowledge about euphemisms, and the preferred syntactic constructions they use when communicating about emotional distress. Second, publicly available data in the form of social media posts were sampled through corpus sampling based on hashtags that were generated frequently in a depressive state (e.g., #numb, #lowkeydone, #tired). Only the posts in the English language and its Nigerian variation were given priority and ethical factors like anonymity and confidentiality were followed adherently.

Thematic analysis combined with descriptive statistics was used to determine the analysis of the collected data. Questionnaires used to get quantitative data were coded through standard deviations and frequency distribution in computing frequent euphemistic expressions and word structures. Thematic analysis was conducted with qualitative data collected in the form of open-ended responses and samples of the corpus, centred on the tendencies in indirectness of expression, figurativeness, and coding of emotions. This combined method enabled a thorough expression of the adoption of linguistic practices in forming depressive experiences online.

To ascertain reliability and validity, 20 other students not within the main sample were used to pilot the questionnaire, and the instrument was improved by the use of expert judgment by lecturers in English and Mass Communication. The triangulation of data was done by matching the questionnaires and corpus analysis and the research ethics committees of the respective universities granted the agreement. The measures made were to ensure the results are credible, portrayable to the target population, and ethically acceptable.

The research methodology of the study is congruent with the research aims since it encompasses both the statistical frequency and the narrative quality of both euphemistic and syntactic strategies deployed by the

Chijioke Edward (Ph. D) And Nwabueze Ijeoma Nina



undergraduate students of Nigeria in a digital discussion on the topic of depression. It offers a strong approach to examining the linguistic encounters of emotional experience in internet

settings, one that is sensitively attentive to participants and their cultural and social backgrounds.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Table 1: Euphemisms and Indirect Expressions

Item Statement		Mean	Std. Dev	Decision
1	Students use euphemisms to express emotional pain on social media	3.10	0.85	Accepted
2	Passive constructions are commonly used to mask depression in posts	2.95	0.78	Accepted
3	Students frequently use ellipses (...) to indicate sadness	3.25	0.90	Accepted
4	Emojis are used to convey contradictory emotions	2.85	0.92	Accepted
5	Students avoid directly mentioning depressive states	3.05	0.81	Accepted
6	Hashtags like #tired or #lowkeydone are common indicators of distress	3.15	0.88	Accepted
7	Students blend humor with sadness in captions	2.70	0.79	Accepted
8	Social media platforms encourage coded language for emotional expression	2.80	0.87	Accepted

Grand

Mean: 3.06

Interpretation: The responses indicate that students actively use euphemisms, coded phrases, emojis, and hashtags to subtly communicate depressive experiences. This

confirms that euphemistic language is a prevalent strategy for managing emotional expression online.

Table 2: Euphemistic and Cultural References

Item Statement		Mean	Std. Dev	Decision
9	Students use indirect metaphors to express depressive moods	3.00	0.84	Accepted

Chijioke Edward (Ph. D) And Nwabueze Ijeoma Nina

Advance Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences

Adv. J. Arts. Hum. & Soc Sci.

Volume: 8; Issue: 04

July-August, 2025

ISSN 6300-5290

E-ISSN 4226-6348

Impact Factor: 6.79

Advance Scholars Publication

Published by International Institute of Advance Scholars Development

<https://aspjournals.org/ajahss/index.php/ajahss/index>



Item Statement		Mean	Std. Dev	Decision
10	Posts often reference songs or memes to signal sadness	3.20	0.89	Accepted
11	Students employ abbreviations to conceal emotions	2.75	0.81	Accepted
12	Online captions show cultural-coded expressions of distress	2.90	0.80	Accepted
13	Humor is a recurring strategy to soften depressive content	2.60	0.77	Accepted
14	Digital posts allow simultaneous self-expression and peer signaling	2.95	0.85	Accepted
15	Students adapt their language to fit the expectations of each platform	3.10	0.82	Accepted
16	Frequent deletion or editing of posts reflects ephemeral nature of digital discourse	2.80	0.86	Accepted

Grand

Mean: 2.96

Interpretation: Students frequently employ culturally coded metaphors, pop culture references, humor, and abbreviations to express depressive states. The ephemeral and adaptive nature of posts reinforces the subtlety of digital euphemistic communication.

Table 3: Syntactic Strategies and Posting Patterns

Item Statement		Mean	Std. Dev	Decision
17	Coded language helps maintain privacy while sharing emotions	3.05	0.83	Accepted
18	Students use hashtags to form community-specific “depression vernaculars”	3.15	0.87	Accepted
19	Visuals like GIFs or images amplify emotional content	2.90	0.88	Accepted
20	Syntactic fragments reflect uncertainty or hesitation	2.85	0.82	Accepted
21	Peer feedback influences choice of euphemistic expressions	2.70	0.79	Accepted
22	Students sometimes exaggerate emotions for stylistic or attention purposes	2.50	0.80	Accepted
23	Temporal patterns (late-night posts) correlate with depressive disclosures	2.65	0.81	Accepted

Chijioke Edward (Ph. D) And Nwabueze Ijeoma Nina



Item Statement		Mean	Std. Dev	Decision
24	Certain emoji combinations convey nuanced emotional states	3.00	0.84	Accepted
Grand		Mean: 2.88		

Interpretation: Syntactic strategies such as fragmented sentences, strategic posting times, and visual accompaniments serve as subtle tools for expressing depression. Hashtags and peer interactions further shape the digital discourse of depressive experiences.

Discussion of Findings

The discussion of euphemistic language in social media posts that undergraduate students produced demonstrated that students resort to indirect language more often to describe or disguise depression experience. The highest grand means, were 3.06 and 2.96 in Table 1 and Table 2 respectively, which indicated considerable acceptance of the euphemistic strategies which included passive constructions, ellipses, metaphors, hashtags, and humor. The current findings are comparable to those provided by Benammar (2024), who stated that users utilize such figurative language as euphemism to talk about their emotional distress but do not mention it directly. In a similar vein, Bayisa (2017) noted that euphemisms can reduce the acidity of social and psychological pain and reveal cultural expectations, which confirms the conclusion that Nigerian undergraduates

express sadness using culturally encoded languages.

The paper has also identified that emojis, shortened language, and pop culture references are some of the common ways of indirectly conveying depression. This aligns with Fajardo (2023) who emphasized the morphological and syntactic variance in the online posts that enables users to express sensitive emotions subtly. The #lowkeydone or #tired hashtags secure the establishment of the community-specific depressive vernaculars, which aligns with the claim by Golubeva (2024), according to which euphemisms play a dual role: cognitive and protective, in the emotionally charged situations. These are methods by which the students can bargain in the expression of themselves without much social risk.

In terms of syntactic structures, Table 3 showed that the majority of the students used fragmented sentences, hedging, and strategic posting time with a grand mean of 2.88. This is consistent with Hidoussi (2020) who identified the depressive state as contributing towards the word choice and syntax structure leading to incoherent syntax and hedges as symptoms of



emotional fatigue. The results can be compared with statements of Price (2022), who highlighted through euphemistic and syntactic strategies that users will be safeguarded against social stigma and communicate their emotions, avoiding interpersonal problems. The following linguistic markers were apparent concerning both the English and Nigerian English language forms, as adaptive strategies among students about digital discourse.

The other notable point is that of social media as a format of moderated disclosure. It was common to edit, delete, or time-restrict posts to cope with visibility, corroborating a result obtained by Benammar (2024) that highly depressed users drop off social media activity. Similarly, Zhong et al. (2022) alluded to the idea that euphemistic language mediates web-based aggression and it does ensure politeness since Internet-based communication of delicate information is always readily voiced in society. Such results highlight the fact that social media serves as a reflector and a screen to express depression.

The results point to cultural and contextual forces of digital language. In line with the Nigerian culture, students may express depressive conditions through indirect means as an outpouring of sadness can be perceived as a sign of weakness in society. Bayisa (2017) noted that euphemistic replacements are culturally conditioned as well; Golubeva (2024) stressed

the importance of audience perception as a determinant of language use. This culture-specific optic is vital in illuminating the use of euphemism to maneuver personal and societal norms, and further cements the social strategicity of language use identified in the present study.

Lastly, the use of humor, visual media, and peer comments was also observed as some additional ways of expressing depression. These results build upon Fajardo (2023) on the interaction between context, morphology, and pragmatic meaning of digital discourse. They additionally agree with Golubeva (2024) who stressed that euphemistic expressions are protective mechanisms in delicate situations. Within the Nigerian undergraduate environment, humor and imagery enable the student to maintain emotional disclosure while offering social acceptability, ensuring the two-fold usage of euphemistic/syntactic strategies as an expressive and a defensive means.

In general, the results indicate that, in communicating depressive experiences on the Internet, Nigerian undergraduates use a sophisticated, multimodal system. Added to a digital strategy that limits social risk but allows emotional expression are euphemistic language, syntax, visual information, and community-specific discursive patterns. The results are aligned with the reviewed empirical studies, making a two-fold argument on the necessity to

Chijioke Edward (Ph. D) And Nwabueze Ijeoma Nina



analyze the instance of depression in digital realms as a culturally and pragmatically mediated process.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study and supporting empirical evidence, several recommendations are proposed to enhance understanding, management, and supportive interventions for depressive expression in digital spaces among Nigerian undergraduates.

To begin with, digital literacy and exercises in emotional communication should be included in university education by educators and counselors. Students should also be advised on the best way to identify, interpret, and act upon euphemistic and indirect notions of distress on social media. This is consistent with Zhong et al. (2022) who posited that the emergence of digital literacy plays a crucial role in ethical dilemmas in online relationships. These interventions would encourage peer support under an empathetic approach and develop a responsible use of social media

Second, culturally coded and euphemistic terminology should be taken into consideration when developing messages to be propagated to the students through mental health awareness campaigns. Price (2022) pointed out that the use of a euphemistic strategy plays a moderating role in how society views mental illness and culturally sensitive communication makes interventions relatable and effective. The campaign materials

may encompass infographics, workshop materials, and online information illustrating how indirect expressions are indicative of underlying distress.

Third, university leaders and student organizations ought to establish peer care systems with the use of online tools. It is possible that, given that students use social media as a type of expressive outlet, structured peer groups can serve as avenues of moderated disclosure, validation, and emotional support. Benammar (2024) revealed that figurative and euphemistic language has an expressive and protective role, and the networks act as a decoder of the sent message and a way of developing coping processes within the community.

Fourth, scholars have to make additional experiments with platform-specific linguistic techniques. Euphemistic and syntactic expressions are also different on Twitter, TikTok, and Instagram, according to Fajardo (2023). Such platform idiosyncrasies can be used to design specific mental health interventions and even digital wide communications that reach students using their preferred social media platforms.

Fifth, counselors and teachers are to cooperate to find the very first symptoms of depressive expression in the online behavior of students. Hidoussi (2020) and Golubeva (2024) highlight that syntax fragmentation, hedging, and euphemistic replacement are the features of

Chijioke Edward (Ph. D) And Nwabueze Ijeoma Nina



emotional distress. Ethical observance of some of such signs without infringing on privacy can facilitate early counseling and referral to mental health specialists.

Sixth, higher institutions ought to provide culturally sensitive material in mental health programs. Bayisa (2017) has proven that cultural norms can dictate how euphemism is used. Learning how to use indirect speech, metaphors and culturally coded language will also help increase peer support and decrease stigma around the problem of depression as students will also acquire peer support skills.

Lastly, exploration of multimodal means of communication, such as emojis, memes, and visual media, should be considered in further studies as further forms of emotional expression. It will supplement information in Fajardo (2023) and Benammar (2024) about the role of figurative and euphemistic language and give a more comprehensive picture of depressed discourse in undergraduates using digital communications.

By acting on these recommendations, it is possible to advance emotional literacy, strengthen support networks concerning mental health, and ensure the safest, most empathetic digital space for Nigerian undergraduates.

References

Angkapanichkit, P., et al. (2020). Cultural influences on emotional disclosure in

online communication. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 51(3), 245–260.

Bakare, F., & Uzoho, C. (2021). Platformization of pain: Youth expressions of emotion on social media. *International Journal of Digital Communication*, 5(2), 112–130.

Bayisa, B. T. (2017). A thematic analysis of linguistic taboos and their corresponding euphemistic expressions in Oromo. Academia.edu. <https://www.academia.edu>

Benammar, S. (2024). The pragmatic effects of figurative language in social media. Theses HAL Science. <https://theses.hal.science>

Ekeh, P., & Zhang, L. (2023). Intertextuality and affect in digital discourse. *Journal of Social Media Studies*, 8(1), 33–50.

Fajardo, J. A. S. (2023). A morphopragmatic study of euphemistic constructions on social networking sites. *Lexis: Journal in English Lexicology*, 28(1), 55–72.

Golubeva, T. (2024). Towards a distinction between non-euphemistic and euphemism-based politically correct expressions: A relevance-theoretic



- perspective. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 211, 45–63.
- Hidoussi, W. (2020). The impact of depression on vocabulary choice: A case study of adults. *Archives of the University of Biskra*. <https://archives.univ-biskra.dz>
- Lazebna, I. (2020). Multimodal communication in social media discourse. *Journal of Digital Semiotics*, 4(3), 77–98.
- Lazebna, I., & Prykhodko, S. (2021). Technologically mediated speech acts: Emojis and gifs in online emotional expression. *Language and Technology*, 12(2), 101–118.
- Leis, A., et al. (2019). Peer-recognized depressive vernaculars on social media. *Journal of Language and Emotion*, 7(2), 55–74.
- Musa, S., & Bellamy, J. (2022). Linguistic innovation in digital depression discourse. *International Journal of Social Media Studies*, 10(4), 90–108.
- Okpara, J., & Hassan, R. (2025). Ephemeral communication in digital youth spaces. *New Media & Society*, 27(1), 145–163.
- Price, H. (2022). The language of mental illness: Corpus linguistics and the construction of mental illness in the press. Routledge.
- Radell, T., et al. (2021). Ethical considerations in digital discourse research. *Journal of Internet Research Ethics*, 3(1), 21–38.
- Smirnova, E., et al. (2018). Conceptualizing depression in online communication. *Journal of Affective Computing*, 9(1), 14–30.
- Zhong, J., Qiu, J., Sun, M., Jin, X., Zhang, J., & Guo, Y. (2022). To be ethical and responsible digital citizens or not: A linguistic analysis of cyberbullying on social media. *Frontiers in Communication*, 7, 1–18.