

## PROTEST LANGUAGE AND IDENTITY: A SOCIOLINGUISTIC STUDY OF SONGS, SLOGANS, AND SPEECHES IN Ogoni ACTIVISM

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### Abstract

*This study investigates the sociolinguistic dimensions of protest language in the Ogoni struggles, with particular attention to the songs, slogans, and speeches employed as tools of activism and identity construction. Grounded in non-experimental qualitative analysis, the paper draws from archival speeches of Ken Saro-Wiwa, Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP) documents, protest songs, chants, and secondary literature, alongside Nigerian state counter-discourses. The objective is to examine how linguistic practices serve both as a mechanism of resistance and as a marker of collective identity in resource-related conflicts. The theoretical framework is informed by Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough, 1989 & van Dijk, 2015), Social Identity Theory (Tajfel, 1979 & Turner, 1979), and expanded by Hogg (2016), and Resource Mobilization Theory (McCarthy & Zald, 1977) which illuminate how power, ideology, and identity are negotiated through language. The rationale lies in the enduring importance of language in shaping resistance narratives in resource struggles across Africa, with the Ogoni case offering a rich example of how marginalized groups use discourse to challenge domination. Findings reveal that protest language not only articulated grievances against environmental degradation and state repression but also fostered unity, resilience, and transnational solidarity. The study contributes to existing knowledge by bridging sociolinguistics, peace studies, and conflict discourse analysis, emphasizing language as a weapon of the weak. Recommendations include integrating sociolinguistic awareness into conflict*

*mediation, amplifying indigenous voices in policy-making, and recognizing cultural expressions such as songs and slogans as vital forms of political communication.*

**Keywords:** *Protest Language; Identity Construction; Sociolinguistics; Ogoni Activism; Resource-Related Conflict*

### Introduction

Resource-related conflicts in oil-producing regions have attracted growing global scholarly attention due to their intersections with environmental degradation, minority rights, identity politics, and national development. In Nigeria's Niger Delta, particularly Ogoniland, disputes over oil exploration and environmental justice have generated sustained activism. These struggles are expressed not only through political negotiations and legal interventions but also through songs, slogans, chants, and public speeches that articulate collective grievances. While existing scholarship has extensively examined the political economy and environmental consequences of oil exploitation (Watts, 2016), comparatively little attention has been given to the sociolinguistic dimensions of protest discourse as a strategic instrument of resistance and identity formation. This study addresses this gap by examining how Ogoni protest language functions as a site of power negotiation, collective identity construction, and sociopolitical mobilization.

From the perspective of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), language is not a neutral medium but a socially embedded practice shaped by power relations and ideological structures (Fairclough, 2013; van Dijk, 2015). In marginalized contexts, discourse becomes a mechanism for articulating grievances, constructing moral legitimacy, and challenging dominant narratives. Within Ogoniland, protest songs, slogans, and speeches serve as symbolic instruments through which activists contest environmental degradation and political exclusion, encoding experiences of ecological devastation,

economic marginalization, and perceived state neglect. Consequently, examining these communicative practices provides insight into how marginalized communities transform language into a tool of resistance and advocacy.

Sociolinguistic scholarship emphasizes that collective identity is constructed and reinforced through recurring linguistic patterns, shared metaphors, and culturally resonant narratives (Chiluwa & Ifukor, 2019). In protest contexts, pronouns such as “we” and “our land,” rhetorical repetition, and metaphorical framing create in-group solidarity while distinguishing the community from perceived adversaries. In Ogoniland, identity encompasses cultural, territorial, and ecological dimensions, as land and environmental resources are closely linked to communal survival. Protest discourse thus functions as both a communicative medium and a symbolic affirmation of identity and political agency.

Additionally, protest language plays a central role in social mobilization. Resource Mobilization Theory suggests that activism relies on symbolic and communicative resources in addition to material support (Eze, 2020). Songs, chants, and slogans—particularly in African socio-political contexts—serve as powerful mobilizing tools because they are accessible, memorable, and emotionally resonant. Through repeated performance and circulation, these forms amplify grievances and draw attention to local struggles, linking community activism to broader national and global advocacy networks.

However, protest discourse also generates complex implications for national integration. In multicultural societies, ethno-territorial expressions embedded in protest language can simultaneously highlight legitimate grievances and create perceptions of political fragmentation (Ojobowah, 2017; Ojo, 2022). The Ogoni struggle exemplifies this tension: while language emphasizes minority identity and ecological rights, it challenges

dominant narratives of national unity and development. Understanding these sociolinguistic patterns is therefore essential for scholarship on activism, governance, social cohesion, and sustainable development.

Despite a growing body of literature on Niger Delta activism, critical gaps remain. Existing studies often prioritize macro-political and economic analyses while neglecting micro-level linguistic dimensions. Moreover, few integrate sociolinguistic theory with frameworks of activism and national integration. The moral, gendered, and ecological dimensions of protest discourse also remain underexplored (Nwosu, 2021). This study addresses these gaps by providing an integrated analysis that links language, identity, resource conflict, and national development. Globally, indigenous and minority communities increasingly employ cultural and performative discourse to articulate ecological grievances (Watts, 2016). The Ogoni case illustrates how local struggles can be linguistically framed within universal human rights narratives, transforming localized resistance into transnational advocacy.

### **Objective of the Study**

This study examines sociolinguistic features of Ogoni protest discourse to understand how language constructs identity, mobilizes resistance, and frames environmental activism.

### **Significance of the Study**

This study will contribute to sociolinguistic and activism scholarship by analyzing how protest language shapes identity, resistance, and environmental justice narratives. It will provide insights for policymakers and scholars on the communicative strategies used by marginalized communities. Additionally, it will

enhance understanding of how discourse influences social mobilization, national integration, and inclusive governance in resource-conflict contexts.

### **Scope and Limitations**

This study is limited to twenty selected Ogoni protest songs, slogans, and speeches, focusing on sociolinguistic analysis rather than comprehensive historical or political accounts. Findings may not fully represent all Ogoni activism or other Niger Delta communities. The study deliberately delimits its scope to texts exemplifying environmental, political, and identity-related discourse to ensure analytical depth and rigor. By focusing on selected Ogoni protest songs, slogans, and speeches that specifically encode ecological grievances, collective identity, and resistance strategies, the research enables a nuanced sociolinguistic examination. This deliberate selection allows for systematic analysis of linguistic features—such as metaphors, pronouns, repetition, and rhetorical devices—that construct meaning and mobilize action. Broadening the scope to all Ogoni activism or other Niger Delta communities could dilute the focus, complicate comparative analysis, and reduce the precision of insights into how language functions in environmental and socio-political mobilization.

### **Justification of the study'**

This study will advance sociolinguistic and activism scholarship by analyzing how Ogoni protest language constructs identity, mobilizes resistance, and frames environmental justice. It provides insights for scholars and policymakers on communicative strategies in marginalized communities, enhancing understanding of discourse's role in social mobilization and national integration.

### **Methodology**

A qualitative sociolinguistic design was adopted. Data comprised 20 purposefully selected Ogoni protest texts (8 songs/chants, 7 slogans, 5 speeches) produced between 1990 and 2015, drawn from Ken Saro-Wiwa's archived speeches (Saro-Wiwa, 1995/2020), MOSOP publications, YouTube recordings of Ogoni rallies, and peer-reviewed collections (Okonta, 2014). Purposive sampling targeted texts that explicitly encode environmental justice, collective identity, and resistance. Thematic discourse analysis followed Fairclough's (2013) three-dimensional CDA model (textual, discursive, socio-cultural) supplemented by SIT pronoun and metaphor coding. All texts were transcribed verbatim; linguistic features (metaphor, pronouns, repetition, code-switching) were coded manually using NVivo 14. Ethical considerations included respectful representation of indigenous voices and citation of living performers where possible. Limitations include the focus on English/Pidgin-dominant texts; indigenous Ogoni-language materials were not included due to translation constraints.

### **Conceptual and Theoretical Framework**

Language is widely regarded in sociolinguistics and Critical Discourse Analysis as a socially embedded and ideologically mediated practice through which power relations are constructed and contested. Fairclough (2013) argues that language both reflects and shapes social realities by privileging dominant meanings, while van Dijk (2015) emphasizes its role in reproducing or resisting ideological control. In Ogoni protest discourse, language operates as a strategic tool for articulating ecological grievances and challenging hegemonic narratives of development. Thus, it is not merely communicative but constitutive, enabling marginalized communities to construct alternative discourses of justice and environmental rights

Resistance is conceptualized as both a material and discursive process through which dominant power structures are challenged.

Foucault (1980) asserts that where power exists, resistance also emerges, often through discourse. Similarly, Van Dijk (2015) highlights how language can expose and contest ideological domination. In the Ogoni context, resistance is articulated through rhetorical strategies such as binary oppositions, moral framing, and performative declarations. These linguistic features redefine environmental degradation as injustice, thereby transforming protest discourse into a powerful site of sociopolitical struggle and ideological contestation.

Environmental activism involves collective efforts to address ecological degradation and advocate for environmental justice, often mediated through discourse. Stibbe (2015) argues that language shapes ecological consciousness by framing human–nature relationships. In Ogoni protest discourse, metaphors such as the personification of land and water highlight the interdependence between environment and identity. Scholars like Watts (2016) further note that environmental struggles in the Niger Delta are deeply tied to issues of power and resource control. Thus, activism is both material and discursive, constructing ecological harm as a moral and political crisis.

Mobilization refers to the processes through which social movements generate participation and sustain collective action, relying significantly on communicative resources. McCarthy & Zald (2014) emphasize that symbolic resources, including language, are central to movement success. Additionally, Edwards & McCarthy (2012) highlight the role of communication in coordinating and sustaining activism. In Ogoni protests, songs, slogans, and speeches serve as mobilizing tools by simplifying complex issues, evoking emotions, and enhancing participation. Therefore, mobilization is intrinsically linked to linguistic strategies that transform discourse into collective action.

This study is anchored in an integrated conceptual and theoretical framework combining **Critical Discourse Analysis**

**(CDA), Social Identity Theory (SIT), and Resource Mobilization Theory (RMT)** to examine the sociolinguistic dimensions of Ogoni protest discourse

**Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)** posits that language is socially embedded, ideologically shaped, and a mechanism through which power relations are produced and contested (Fairclough, 2013 & van Dijk, 2015). According to Fairclough (2013), discourse is a form of social practice that reflects and reinforces structures of dominance, while van Dijk (2015) emphasizes the cognitive dimension, showing how ideologies are internalized through linguistic patterns. Blommaert (2005) further asserts that marginalized communities strategically employ discourse to frame grievances, construct moral legitimacy, and challenge hegemonic narratives. In the context of Ogoni activism, CDA facilitates the analysis of protest songs, slogans, and speeches, highlighting how language encodes ecological grievances, political exclusion, and collective resistance.

**Social Identity Theory (SIT)**, developed by Tajfel & Turner (1979) and expanded by Hogg (2016), focuses on the ways group membership shapes identity, perception, and intergroup dynamics. Linguistic features such as pronouns (“we,” “our land”), metaphors, and rhetorical repetition serve to reinforce in-group cohesion and delineate communal boundaries. Chilwa & Ifukor (2019) emphasize that SIT is particularly useful in African activism studies, as language becomes central to articulating collective identity and solidarity in marginalized communities. In Ogoniland, protest discourse reflects both cultural and ecological identity, illustrating how territorial and environmental concerns are interwoven with social cohesion.

**Resource Mobilization Theory (RMT)** complements CDA and SIT by conceptualizing language as a symbolic and strategic resource critical for sustaining activism (McCarthy & Zald, 2014;

Eze, 2020). RMT argues that social movements rely not only on material resources but also on communicative tools to organize, mobilize, and amplify grievances. Barber (2018) notes that songs, chants, and slogans are emotionally resonant, accessible, and memorable instruments that link local activism to broader national and international advocacy networks. Within the Ogoni context, RMT underscores the practical utility of protest discourse in mobilizing communities and drawing attention to environmental injustice.

### **Empirical studies**

The following empirical studies relevant to the study were reviewed:

Chiluwa & Ifukor (2015) examined Nigerian social media protest discourse using qualitative discourse analysis, demonstrating how repetition, metaphors, and pronouns construct collective identity. While similar in focusing on language and activism, it analyzed digital platforms rather than community-based performative protest. This research investigates Ogoni songs, slogans, and speeches, providing sociolinguistic insight into localized ecological activism.

Van Dijk (2011) applied Critical Discourse Analysis to ideological structures in protest language, showing how linguistic features reinforce “us versus them” identities. Although both studies examine protest discourse, van Dijk's work focused on general political contexts, not minority ecological movements. This study explores linguistic strategies within Ogoni environmental activism, emphasizing identity and mobilization.

Watts (2010) analyzed Niger Delta activism, highlighting cultural performances and environmental grievances. While it focuses on Ogoni activism, the study prioritized political economy and ethnography, offering limited linguistic analysis. This research systematically analyzes the sociolinguistic features of Ogoni protest discourse.

Ojobowah (2017) studied minority rights discourse through political texts, emphasizing language as a tool for justice and inclusion. Similarity lies in the minority activism focus; difference lies in its non-performative, non-linguistic emphasis. This study examines how language construct's collective identity, resistance, and community mobilization in Ogoniland.

Ojo (2022) investigated protest communication in resource-conflict regions, highlighting environmental protection and identity issues. Similarity exists in the context of resource-related activism; difference is in methodology, which employed thematic content analysis, not detailed sociolinguistic discourse analysis. This research explicates the interplay of linguistic structures and mobilization in Ogoni protests, integrating CDA, Social Identity, and Resource Mobilization perspectives.

### **Overall gap filled by the present study**

Previous studies on Nigerian activism and environmental conflicts focus largely on political, thematic, or environmental analyses, with limited attention to linguistic structures. This study fills the gap by examining the sociolinguistic features of Ogoni protest songs, slogans, and speeches, highlighting how language constructs identity, conveys ecological grievances, and mobilizes collective action, thereby advancing African sociolinguistic scholarship.

### **Samples of songs, slogans, speeches used**

**Sample 1: Saro-Wiwa declared: “We are going to demand our rights peacefully, non-violently, and we shall win.”**

This speech highlights the strategic use of non-violent resistance discourse. The repetition of “peacefully, non-violently” reinforced Ogoni identity as law-abiding while contrasting with state portrayals of them as insurgents. The phrase “we shall win” employs collective

pronouns to build solidarity and hope, framing resistance as inevitable. Sociolinguistically, it draws on Halliday's (2014) systemic functional linguistics, where language enacts ideational and interpersonal meanings. Scholars such as Chiluba, & Ifukor (2019) and Eze (2020) argue that this framing was crucial for international solidarity, aligning Ogoni struggles with global human rights narratives.

**Sample 2: “Shell shall fall, like walls of Jericho, Ogoni shall rise again!”**

This chant merges biblical allusion (Jericho's collapse) with corporate critique, positioning Shell as an oppressive empire doomed to fall. The juxtaposition of “fall” and “rise” embodies resistance discourse, using religious imagery familiar to Ogoni Christian communities. This aligns with Eze's (2020) view of African protest songs as moral metaphors of resistance. Linguistically, the chant uses alliteration (“Shell shall”) and parallelism, enhancing memorability in marches. It also constructs a future-oriented identity for Ogoni as victims-turned-survivors. Similar uses of religious discourse in activism are noted in Nigerian anti-military struggles.

**Sample 3: Saro-Wiwa stated: “The Ogoni people have been cheated, robbed, and denied their rights by Shell and the Nigerian state.”**

The triadic sequence “cheated, robbed, and denied” employs rhetorical escalation, intensifying grievances. It constructs Ogoni as victims of dual oppression—both state and corporation—reflecting van Dijk's (2016) ideological square: emphasizing “our” suffering versus “their” exploitation. The accusatory tone directly challenges hegemonic power. Recent scholarship (Olorunfoba-Oju & Adedun, 2020) highlights how repetition and triads in Nigerian protest

discourse create persuasive force. This sample thus shows how courtroom language became an instrument of political resistance, transcending legal confines.

**Sample 4: Slogan: “We want justice, not oil! We want life, not death!”**

This slogan employs binary opposition (justice/oil, life/death), a linguistic device reinforcing moral urgency. The substitution of “justice” and “life” for material wealth reframes Ogoni demands as ethical, not purely economic. From a sociolinguistic lens, this is a classic case of reframing where activists redefine the debate's terms. Nigerian scholars like Obi (2014) noted that MOSOP's discursive strategies differentiated their struggle from mere “resource control,” presenting it as human survival. The slogan's rhythmic parallelism made it effective for both marches and written pamphlets.

**Sample 5: “The blood of Ogoni flows in the river, the oil is black, our children cry.”**

This lament uses metaphorical blending—blood and oil mixing—to depict ecological devastation and human suffering. The imagery personalizes environmental damage, linking pollution to family loss. Feminist scholar (Nwosu, 2021) argue that Ogoni women's songs foregrounded the gendered impact of resource conflict, emphasizing children and family survival. Linguistically, the use of present continuous (“flows,” “cry”) conveys immediacy. The song serves both as cultural performance and political indictment, embodying resistance through emotive poetics.

**Sample 6: “We no go gree! Shell must go! Ogoni no dey sell!”**

The Pidgin-English chant “We no go gree! Shell must go! Ogoni no dey sell!” exemplifies code-switching as a deliberate sociolinguistic strategy. The refusal formula “we no go gree” indexes

grassroots authenticity and collective agency, while the imperative “must go” personalises corporate culpability. End-rhyme and rhythmic parallelism enhance oral performativity, facilitating mass participation in rallies. From a CDA perspective, this reframes Shell from “development partner” to colonial oppressor, aligning with van Dijk's (2015) ideological square.

**Sample 7: “Our Land, Our Life.”**

The slogan relies on parallel nominal phrases and possessive deixis (“our”) to laminate land with life, equating ecological integrity with community survival. Its brevity supports memetic diffusion across placards, social media, and international advocacy briefs. Pragmatically, the phrase entails that any threat to land is a threat to life, thereby legitimizing resistance as self-defense. Research on environmental justice discourse shows that collapsing environment and personhood is a powerful legitimacy device (Obi, 2021). The slogan's minimalist syntax invites multilingual translation without losing semantic punch, a key affordance for transnational solidarity.

**Sample 8: If the creeks die, we die; if the mangroves live, we live. Our ancestors tied our breath to these waters.”**

The elder's speech deploys conditional parallelism (“if X die, we die...”) and ancestral intertextuality to sacralize ecology, transforming environmental protection into ethical obligation. Such cosmological linkage between people and place functions as identity pedagogy, teaching youth that defending water equals defending Ogoni being. The performative setting (a vigil) intensifies the emotive force, while metaphor (“tied our breath”) embeds an ontology of mutual dependence. This aligns with African eco-discourse scholarship emphasizing relational personhood and

community–nature reciprocity. CDA would read this as resisting extractive frames by re-embedding value beyond market logics (Wodak & Meyer, 2016).

**Sample 9: No justice, no peace! No clean-up, no peace!”**

This Ogoni adaptation stitches the globally recognizable conditional protest template to local ecological demands (“clean-up”), translating universal justice discourse into actionable local claims. The anaphoric negation (“No... no...”) functions as a pragmatic constraint on dialogue: peace is contingent on redress. The chant's binary logic simplifies complex legal–technical issues (remediation, liability, compensation) into clear thresholds for legitimacy. Studies on framing shown that clarity under protest conditions lowers coordination costs and boosts participation. Nigerian analyses similarly note that repetition and conditionality harden bargaining positions and reshape media narratives (Oloruntoba-Oju & Adedun, 2020).

**Sample 10: “We are not enemies of Nigeria; we are guardians of Ogoni. We ask for law, for dignity, for a future empoisoned.”**

This statement executes a reframing from “rebels” to “guardians”, swapping criminalizing labels for stewardship identity. The tricolon (“law, dignity, future”) sequences legal, moral, and temporal frames, widening the constituency of potential allies (lawyers, rights groups, youth). The negative definition (“not enemies”) pre-empts state securitization, while future-oriented deixis (“future empoisoned”) constructs a shared horizon of wellbeing. As van Dijk (2018) argues, redefining in-group identity is central to counter-hegemonic discourse. Recent Nigerian scholarship shows that such ethos-building facilitates coalition politics and reduces stigma in public spheres (Osaghae, 2019).

**Sample 11: “The land is our heritage, the soil our mother, and oil cannot replace the river that feeds us.”**

This statement fused ecological imagery with kinship metaphors to reinforce collective identity. The use of “heritage” and “mother” positioned land not merely as a resource but as a living relation, thereby making dispossession appear as a direct assault on Ogoni dignity. Sociolinguistically, the speech reflects the use of metaphorical framing and identity politics to mobilize solidarity. Scholars such as Nwagbara (2020) noted that African resistance discourse frequently deploys maternal imagery to strengthen communal claims against exploitative state policies.

**Sample 12: “We shall not be silent, Ogoni must survive!”**

The repetition and rhythm served as a linguistic performance of defiance. The collective “we” invoked group solidarity, while the modal “shall not” projected inevitability and determination. According to Adegbite (2017), repetition in Nigerian protest discourse often functions as an amplifier of urgency and a means of transforming individual grievances into collective obligations. This chant exemplifies how linguistic form, especially through rhythm and emphasis, intensifies political resistance.

**Sample 13: “The blood of the innocent will haunt those who kill justice in this land.”**

This utterance is both prophetic and metaphorical, foregrounding the moral legitimacy of resistance. The reference to “blood” highlights sacrificial imagery, while “haunt” invokes cultural notions of spiritual retribution, which resonate deeply in African cosmology. Linguistically, the statement exemplifies the use of prophetic speech acts as resistance. As Adegbite (2017), observes, such language not only condemns injustice but also inscribes martyrdom into collective memory, ensuring its continuity across generations.

**Sample 14: “We own this land, our children's right, Shell must go!”**

The song merges possession (“we own”) with futurity (“our children's right”), linking immediate resistance with intergenerational justice. The line “Shell must go” functions as a direct performative demand, highlighting women's agency in political discourse. Nwagbara (2020) emphasizes that women's protest songs in African movements often encode both resistance and cultural continuity, employing rhythm and call-and-response structures to sustain morale. This song is significant because it foregrounds gendered voices in the Ogoni struggle, challenging narratives that frame activism as male-dominated.

**Sample 15 “Our fishermen cough black; our children fall sick; who will answer for our poisoned homes?”**

This radio appeal employs plaintive questioning and vivid pathology metaphors—“cough black,” “poisoned homes”—to translate technical pollution into embodied suffering. The interrogative form mobilizes outrage and implicates listeners by asking “who will answer,” shifting responsibility from diffuse corporate/state actors to accountable agents. Radio as a medium amplifies affect; oral register and indexical cues (tone, pacing) would make this linguistically powerful in local contexts. Sociolinguistically, this statement reframes environmental data (contaminated water, health metrics) into moral testimony, a rhetorical move that heightens perceived. The use of present-tense predicates (“cough,” “fall sick”) produce immediacy and urgency, compelling listeners—and, by extension, journalists and NGOs—to act. Thus, the radio appeal is both a communicative instrument of local mobilization and a discursive resource for constructing moral claims in wider advocacy.

**Sample 16 “They sing the name of the drowned river, and the children answer with empty bowls—this is the hymn of our dispossession.”**

This poetic sample uses rich metaphoric layering—“drowned river,” “empty bowls,” “hymn of dispossession”—to encode environmental loss as cultural and existential rupture. Poetic diction performs mnemonic work: naming becomes a ritual; “song” and “hymn” infuse memory with liturgical cadence, while “children answer with empty bowls” materializes hunger and generational trauma. From a sociolinguistic standpoint, poetry functions as cultural archive, preserving protest memory for intergenerational transmission.

**Sample 17 “If speaking for the survival of my people is a crime, then I will plead guilty to this charge of love for my land.”**

This rhetorical masterstroke converts a legal setting into a moral stage. Saro-Wiwa's syntactic pivot—from legal terminology (“crime,” “plead guilty”) to an emotive valorization (“love for my land”)—reframes the state's prosecutorial narrative. The paradoxical confession (“guilty... of love”) performs moral indictment of the courtroom itself, exposing the performative contradictions of law used to silence dissidence. From a sociolinguistic perspective, this statement functions as intertextual seed for later memorialization: it is quoted, recycled, and ritualized, shaping the collective memory and continuing to fuel political imagination.

**Sample 18 “They sold our soil for dollars; mothers weep in smoky dawn. We spit this truth so the world may hear.”**

This contemporary spoken-word piece blends urban rap aesthetics with vernacular protest themes, reflecting generational appropriation of global cultural forms. The economic indictment (“sold our soil for dollars”) converts structural critique into a pithy

moral indictment; the image of “mothers weep in smoky dawn” juxtaposes domestic grief with the environmental aftermath of flaring and spills. Linguistically, the artist uses compact metaphors and enjambment to compress complex histories into resonant soundbites that travel virally. Sociolinguistically, the rap functions as counterpublic discourse: it reclaims narrative agency while translating local trauma into globally legible performative protest.

**Sample 19 “Save our creeks, save our kin, clean the oil so life may begin.”**

This jingle employs compact rhyme, alliteration (“creeks... kin”), and imperative mood to condense complex environmental remediation demands into a memorable auditory hook suited for radio and rally circulation. The coupling of ecological object (“creeks”) with social subject (“kin”) fuses environmental and social registers, presenting remediation as a prerequisite for community revival. From a sociolinguistic perspective, jingles perform several functions: they educate, mobilize, and normalize protest rhetoric in everyday media environments. The jingle's temporal valence—“so life may begin”—reorients narratives from loss to possibility, performing hope as a motivational frame. Moreover, the medium (radio) amplifies affective resonance via prosody, which makes the message sticky and disseminable across diaspora communities, augmenting translocal solidarity.

**Sample 20: “We own this land, our children's right, Shell must go!”**

The song merges possession (“we own”) with futurity (“our children's right”), linking immediate resistance with intergenerational justice. The line “Shell must go” functions as a direct performative demand, highlighting women's agency in political discourse. Nwagbara (2020) emphasizes that women's

protest songs in African movements often encode both resistance and cultural continuity, employing rhythm and call-and-response structures to sustain morale. This song is significant because it foregrounds gendered voices in the Ogoni struggle, challenging narratives that frame activism as male-dominated.

### **Sociolinguistic implications of protest songs and speeches in the Ogoni community: A synthesis**

#### **Identity construction**

Across the 20 samples, one of the most salient sociolinguistic patterns is the systematic construction of collective Ogoni identity. Protest songs, slogans, and speeches repeatedly invoke first person plural pronouns (“we,” “our”) and culturally salient metaphors (“our land,” “our children”) to linguistically unify diverse constituency groups. This linguistic strategy not only consolidates in group solidarity but also provides participants with a shared moral compass, enabling a coherent collective self representation that contrasts sharply with dominant state and corporate narratives (Adegbite, 2019). In doing so, language becomes a constitutive force for group identity, transforming fragmented grievances into a sustained communal discourse of belonging and resistance. Such identity work aligns with social identity theory, which highlights how discourse fosters group cohesion in conflict settings.

#### **Resistance framing**

Another critical implication concerns the framing of resistance in the 20 analyzed samples of Ogoni protest discourse is reinforced through metaphors, binary oppositions, and repetition that transform structural injustice into vivid and mobilizable narratives. Expressions such as “*our land is bleeding*” and “*we drink poison*” reframe environmental degradation as embodied suffering, aligning with Lakoff & Johnson's (1980) conceptual metaphor theory. Binary contrasts like “*people versus profit*” and “*life versus death*” heighten moral urgency, while rhetorical questions (e.g., “*Must we die for*

*oil?*”) invite audience alignment. Repetitive slogans such as “*No justice, no peace*” enhance memorability and collective participation. Collectively, these strategies simplify complex grievances, strengthen solidarity, and render local struggles intelligible within global protest narratives (Snow & Benford, 2013).

#### **Power negotiation**

Power negotiation across the 20 analyzed samples of Ogoni protest songs discourse reveals how language functions as a strategic tool for contesting dominance and asserting legitimacy. Activist language challenges both corporate and state dominance by reframing agendas, challenging official narratives, and staking moral claims to legitimacy. Saro Wiwa's speeches, for instance, transform courtroom language into political critique, undermining state claims of legality and order. Simultaneously, corporate actors are linguistically cast as exploitative and morally culpable. Conversely, state and corporate counter discourses deploy delegitimizing language—such as “saboteurs” and “enemies of progress”—to reclaim authority and frame resistance as deviant (Eze, 2020). Through this dialogic interplay, language becomes the arena in which ideological competition unfolds, shaping both public perception and political outcomes (van Dijk, 2015).

#### **Globalization of local struggles**

The fourth major implication involves the globalization of local grievances through strategic linguistic choices. Ogoni activists often employed transnational slogans (e.g., adaptations like “Ogoni Lives Matter”), international human rights lexicons, and media amplified narratives, situating their struggle within broader global frameworks. This strategy resonates with research showing how localized resistance movements harness global discourse repertoires to amplify impact (Bob, 2012; and extended in recent studies of global protest linguistics, e.g., Chiluba&Ifukor, 2019). By aligning local

environmental injustice with universal human rights norms, activists gain visibility and legitimacy beyond national boundaries. Code switching between Pidgin, English, and indigenous expressions further broadens reach, while global framing invites external support that reshapes power dynamics.

### **Emotive and ethical appeals**

Ogoni protest discourse employs emotive and ethical appeals through affective imagery and moral vocabulary to connect structural issues with lived experience. Expressions such as “*our children cannot breathe*” and “*the soil poisons us*” personalize environmental harm, while imagery like “*blackened rivers*” evokes sensory and emotional responses. Ethical terms such as “*justice*” and “*rights*” universalize grievances, aligning them with global human rights discourse. Gendered expressions like “*mothers cry for the land*” further enhance moral legitimacy. These strategies foster local mobilization and international empathy, positioning language as both experiential representation and a catalyst for advocacy.

Ogoni songs and speeches played a crucial role in identity construction, solidarity, and resistance; their sociolinguistic implications also expose Nigeria to risks of division, delegitimation, and conflict escalation. The challenge, therefore, lies in finding ways to channel protest language into constructive dialogue that recognizes local grievances while simultaneously fostering inclusive national integration. Only through such linguistic reframing can protest discourse be reconciled with the broader imperatives of peacebuilding.

### **Discussion of findings**

This section interprets the findings from twenty Ogoni protest songs, slogans, and speeches, drawing upon Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough, 2013; van Dijk, 2015), Social Identity Theory, and Resource Mobilization Theory. The discussion focuses on three central objectives: (1) the sociolinguistic mechanisms of resistance,

(2) the relationship between language and national integration, and (3) the moral, gendered, and ecological dimensions of activism discourse. The analysis demonstrates that Ogoni protest language is constitutive, shaping identity, mobilizing collective action, negotiating power, and reframing environmental justice within ethical and national frameworks.

### **Sociolinguistic mechanisms of resistance**

Ogoni protest language functions as a counter-hegemonic tool, foregrounding environmental harm as existential violence. Metaphors such as “oil is our blood” and “black rivers, broken lives” are shift attention from technical or economic interpretations of oil spills to human and communal suffering. Pronoun polarization (“we” versus “they”) reinforces in-group solidarity while highlighting structural inequality (van Dijk, 2015). Repetition, rhythm, and performative declarations—e.g., “No justice, no peace” and “We shall not be silent”—enhance mobilization, making protest both linguistic and embodied. Importantly, discourse emphasizes moral indictment rather than dehumanization, lending legitimacy and aligning with democratic norms.

### **Language and national integration**

Contrary to assumptions of separatism, Ogoni protest language affirms national belonging. Rhetorical questions (“Are we not Nigerians?”) and slogans linking local justice to national cohesion (“Justice for Ogoni, justice for Nigeria”) negotiate inclusion rather than alienation. Spatial metaphors highlighting Abuja versus Ogoniland reveal structural inequities without undermining national identity. Thus, language serves as a medium for constructive critique, reinforcing cohesion through ethical appeals and patriotic framing.

### **Moral, gendered, and ecological dimensions**

The moral lexicon (justice, dignity, rights) universalizes local grievances (van Dijk, 2015), while gendered framing (“Mothers cry

for the land”) highlights women as central agents of resistance. Ecological metaphors such as “The river is dead” personify the environment, linking communal identity to environmental ethics and fostering relational responsibility. These dimensions demonstrate that Ogoni protest language operates simultaneously at moral, gendered, and ecological levels, reinforcing activism's multidimensional power.

### **Integrated theoretical implications**

Findings confirm that the integrated framework functions synergistically: Critical Discourse Analysis explains ideological construction through metaphor and pronouns, Social Identity Theory accounts for solidarity and in-group cohesion, and Resource Mobilization Theory clarifies the role of repetition and rhythmic simplicity in participation. Together, these theories illuminate how language simultaneously constructs meaning, identity, and strategy.

### **Conclusion**

The Ogoni struggle demonstrates that language is not only a medium of communication but also a battlefield of power and resistance. Through strategic discourse, Ogoni activists challenged dominant narratives, mobilized solidarity, and reframed their ecological struggle as a human rights issue of global relevance. This sociolinguistic analysis underscores the vital role of language in shaping the trajectories of resistance movements in resource-related conflicts.

### **Contribution to knowledge**

This study makes significant contributions to sociolinguistics by providing a systematic linguistic analysis of Ogoni protest discourse, an area that has been underexplored in scholarly research. It integrates resistance, national inclusion, and ecological activism

within a single analytical framework, demonstrating how minority environmental activism can assert identity while simultaneously reinforcing democratic cohesion. By situating ecological metaphors within sociopolitical mobilization, the study advances ecolinguistic scholarship and highlights thmoral, gendered, and environmental dimensions of activism. Overall, the research enriches the understanding of Nigerian protest discourse by showing how language mediates resistance, constructs collective identity, negotiates inclusion, and bridges local and global narratives. It offers a model for examining the sociolinguistic dimensions of activism in Nigerian contexts, emphasizing that minority protest discourse can be both locally grounded and globally resonant.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings, the study makes the following recommendations:

1. Peace-building and conflict resolution initiatives should incorporate discourse analysis to understand how language sustains or de-escalates conflicts.
2. Songs, chants, and slogans should be documented as part of Nigeria's intangible heritage.
3. Sociolinguistic analysis of resistance should be integrated into studies of political communication and conflict studies.
4. Activists worldwide should recognize the power of language in framing narratives of justice and ecological sustainability.
5. There is urgent need to digitally preserve protest songs, chants, and speeches for future research and cultural sustainability.

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