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## Comparative Analysis Of Stylistic Deviation Of Social Roles Register In Terrorism Discourse: A Case Study Of Joe Biden's And Sanusi Lamido Sanusi's CNN Interviews

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### Abstract

*This study addresses a gap in sociolinguistic research by investigating how cross-cultural contextual factors influence stylistic deviations of register in political discourse. By comparing the CNN interviews of Joe Biden and Sanusi Lamido Sanusi on terrorism, the research examines how their respective roles as a global politician and a traditional authority dictate their communication. Findings indicate that both leaders strategically diverge from conversational norms for distinct objectives: Biden utilizes a pragmatic, informal register to navigate complex geopolitical narratives, while Sanusi employs a formal, principled register to project moral authority and advocate for social reform. Ultimately, the study demonstrates that these deviations are purposeful tools used to achieve specific communicative goals, offering a vital comparative perspective on the cross-cultural language of international security.*

**Keywords:** stylistic deviation, register of social roles, cross-cultural analysis, terrorism, sociolinguistics, communicative strategies.

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### 1. Introduction

The interplay between language, culture, and situational context serves as the cornerstone of linguistic inquiry, evolving from the early ethnolinguistic theories of Sapir (1921) and Whorf (1956) to the sociolinguistic frameworks of Labov (1966) and Bourdieu (1991), which highlight how social variables and power dynamics shape discourse. This study situates itself within the field of stylistics,

specifically focusing on stylistic deviation and the register of social roles to examine how language diverges from established norms to achieve specific communicative goals. I adopt an intralinguistic comparative approach. The research analyzes the CNN interviews of U.S. President Joe Biden and Sanusi Lamido Sanusi, the former Emir of Kano, regarding the global threat of terrorism. This comparison juxtaposes Biden's rational-legal



authority—rooted in the institutionalized bureaucracy of a global superpower—with Sanusi’s traditional and moral authority within Africa’s largest economy. Drawing from Biber and Conrad’s (2019) register framework, Grice’s (1975) cooperative principles, and Sacks et al.’s (1974) turn-taking theory, this study provides a multidimensional lens to examine how Biden and Sanusi strategically deviate from communicative norms to assert their respective sociopolitical authorities.

Previous studies have explored various aspects of linguistic analysis in political discourse, such as journalistic techniques in Nigeria (Vincent et al., 2019); China’s response to terrorism (Murphy, 2017) and security threats from Afghan terrorist groups (Thomas, 2024). On the other dimension, (Egamnazarova, 2024 and Ali & Tahar, 2023) examined the linguistic deviations in communication and artistic expressions. However, there is a notable gap in understanding the contextual factors which influence linguistic deviations in political discourse, especially in cross-cultural settings. This study addresses this void by analyzing the CNN interviews of Joe Biden and Sanusi Lamido Sanusi. Its significance lies in uncovering the sociostylistic mechanisms behind international security narratives, offering crucial insights for media practitioners and linguists into how context shapes global power dynamics.

The primary aim of this research is to conduct a comparative stylistic analysis of register deviation in the political discourse of Joe Biden and Sanusi Lamido Sanusi during their respective CNN interviews on terrorism. This goal is realized through three specific objectives: first, to examine how their divergent sociopolitical backgrounds—representing rational-legal and traditional-moral leadership archetypes—dictate their adherence to or deviation from Grice’s (1975) cooperative principles; second, to identify the specific linguistic features of register, with a particular emphasis on the lexical choices employed by each leader; and third, to evaluate the pragmatic effectiveness of these registers in relation to their communicative purposes and global media audiences.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Stylistics**

Stylistics is the systematic study of language style, examining how specific linguistic choices and patterns shape meaning, identity, and communicative impact. By analyzing distinctive features across various psychological, social, and cultural contexts, it bridges formal structural analysis with broader interpretive frameworks to reveal the complex relationships between language and society.

### **2.2 Register of Social Roles**

In sociolinguistics, the register of social roles serves as a discursive mechanism that encodes



power, norms, and identity (Ferguson, 1983; Biber & Conrad, 2009). In this research, register facilitates "register shifting" to signal specific authorities: Joe Biden utilizes a pragmatic register to reinforce his rational-legal standing as a global politician, whereas Sanusi Lamido Sanusi employs a principled register to assert traditional-moral authority and religious identity. Beyond conveying information, these registers actively construct the relationship between the leaders and their audience, reflecting the distinct institutional protocols of a Western superpower and a traditional Nigerian caliphate.

### 2.3 Terrorism

Terrorism refers to acts that intentionally cause harm or threaten to cause harm to civilians or non-combatants, with the goal of intimidating a population, influencing government policy, or coercing international organizations. This research seeks to contribute meaningfully to our understanding of how terrorism is constructed and communicated through language, ultimately shedding light on the significance of linguistic choices in shaping public opinion and informing counter-terrorism policies.

### 2.4 Empirical

Ince's (2024) mixed-methods study of Azerbaijani university students (n=446) found that socio-political and cultural contexts influence language choice on Twitter more than the experience of studying abroad. Analyzing over 240,000

tweets through the lens of Communication Accommodation Theory, the research revealed that students' linguistic convergence or divergence is driven primarily by a collectivist communicative climate.

Iftene (2021) analyzed Joe Biden's 2021 inaugural address to determine how linguistic deviations and figures of speech promote political ideology. By applying Leech's (1969) Model of Linguistic Deviations, the qualitative study identified four deviation types (semantic, grammatical, phonological, and register) and five figures of speech, including alliteration and anaphora.

Ali and Tahar (2023) examined linguistic deviations in Eugene O'Neill's *The Iceman Cometh*, identifying language defamiliarization as a key marker of American social stratification. While their analysis effectively correlates speech patterns with socioeconomic status, it focuses exclusively on literary representations of class. This study extends their findings by investigating the sociopolitical and situational factors driving register deviation in real-world, high-stakes political discourse. By shifting the focus from fictional characters to global leaders, this research fills a critical gap in understanding how language is manipulated to navigate complex geopolitical crises.

While research addresses context-driven language (Ince, 2024) and conversational maxims (Ali and Tahar, 2023), a gap exists in how sociopolitical backgrounds drive linguistic deviation in leadership



discourse. Applying Biber and Conrad's (2019) register analysis and Grice's (1975) principles to CNN interviews of Joe Biden and Sanusi Lamido Sanusi, this study reveals how distinct backgrounds trigger deviations, offering new insights into leadership communication.

## 2.5 Theoretical Framework

This study utilizes three theoretical frameworks: Biber and Conrad's (2019) Register Analysis model, Grice's (1975) Conversational Principles, and Sacks et al.'s (1974) Turn-Taking theory. These models complement each other, facilitating a comprehensive analysis. Biber and Conrad's (2019) components of analysis - situational context (sociopolitical), linguistic features (register) and functional aspects of linguistic features using Grice's (1975) Conversational Principles to assess conformity to or deviation from conventional communication norms, as outlined by Grice's (1975) principles. Sacks et al.'s (1974) Turn-Taking theory provides a demarcation of boundaries, focusing the discourse solely on terrorism. This theory is instrumental in identifying when the conversation shifts off-topic.

## 3. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative contextual examination to explore stylistic deviations. The sources of data are secondary, consisting of authentic CNN interview transcripts of Joe Biden and Sanusi Lamido Sanusi sourced from YouTube to ensure a

naturalistic analysis of high-stakes political discourse. For data collection, the researcher utilized a video downloading technique followed by meticulous manual transcription to preserve the integrity of the leaders' distinct accents and nuances, thereby avoiding the potential inaccuracies of automated systems. Finally, the method of data analysis is textual qualitative approach, synthesizing Biber and Conrad's (2019) register model, Grice's (1975) conversational principles, and Sacks et al.'s (1974) turn-taking theory.

## 4. Data Presentation and Analysis

### *Biden and Sanusi's Conformity to and Deviation From Maxim of Relation*

Both leaders demonstrate a foundational adherence to the Maxim of Relation in straightforward conversational exchanges. For instance, President Biden consistently provides directly relevant responses to concise, clarifying questions, as seen in his confirmation of "Artillery shells" (Excerpt 2) and his direct answer regarding the "red line" (Excerpt 4). Similarly, Sanusi Lamido Sanusi adheres to the maxim in his initial polite greeting (Excerpt 1) and in his direct evaluation of the Boko Haram-ISIS alignment (Excerpt 2), where he directly addresses the "badness" of the situation. This shared pattern of adherence in basic question-answer sequences indicates a common stylistic baseline of conversational cooperation, ensuring that fundamental information exchange occurs.



However, the most significant insights emerge from their patterns of stylistic deviation from the Maxim of Relation, which reveal distinct communicative approaches. President Biden frequently employs deviations that broaden the thematic scope or shift focus away from immediate, potentially uncomfortable, inquiries. In Excerpt 1 (Biden), for example, when questioned about the specific use of U.S. bombs in Rafah, Biden stylistically deviates by shifting to a general acknowledgment of civilian killings, then to U.S. defensive support for Israel, and finally to a broader ethical stance on artillery shells. This pattern of deviation, also evident in Excerpt 5 (Biden), where he pivots from protests to the Holocaust, past U.S. interventions, and future Gaza plans, functions to control the narrative. His stylistic choices allow him to contextualize specific issues within broader U.S. policy, historical narratives, or ethical considerations, thereby managing direct accountability and steering the conversation towards more favorable or complex diplomatic terrain. This results in a communication style that is often indirect, comprehensive, and strategically expansive, reflecting a leader navigating intricate geopolitical realities.

In contrast, Sanusi Lamido Sanusi's deviations from the Maxim of Relation, while also broadening the discourse, tend to shift the focus towards underlying systemic issues and calls for collective responsibility. In Excerpt 4 (Sanusi), when asked

about his personal safety and campaign success, Sanusi stylistically deviates by expanding his response to address the collective responsibility of Muslim leaders, societal rejection of Boko Haram, and, crucially, the socio-economic factors contributing to radicalization. This pattern of deviation functions to elevate the discourse from personal concerns to a broader analysis of root causes and moral imperatives. His stylistic choices allow him to frame the insurgency within a larger socio-political and ethical framework, advocating for comprehensive societal engagement rather than solely military solutions. This results in a communication style that is passionate, morally driven, and focused on systemic critique and collective action, projecting a leader who is a moral authority and a social critic willing to address uncomfortable truths about governance and society.

In summary, while both leaders maintain basic relevance, their strategic deviations from the Maxim of Relation highlight distinct styles. Biden broadens the scope to manage diplomatic complexities and control narratives via historical context, whereas Sanusi expands the discourse to address systemic societal issues and advocate for moral action. These contrasting patterns reflect their unique roles and communicative goals within high-stakes interview contexts.

*Biden's and Sanusi's Conformity to and Deviation From Maxim of Quality*

Both leaders demonstrate a foundational adherence to the



Maxim of Quality when presenting information that is broadly accepted or verifiable. President Biden, for instance, stylistically conforms by acknowledging general civilian casualties in Gaza and by stating the factual status of Israel's movement into Rafah (Excerpt 7), as well as confirming the holding up of weapon shipments (Excerpt 10). Similarly, Sanusi Lamido Sanusi largely adheres to the maxim by providing a specific numerical datum, "about 15,000 people dead," and by characterizing Boko Haram as "lunatic fringes of Islam," which is presented with apparent conviction (Excerpt 6). This shared pattern of adherence in presenting what is understood as factual or strongly believed information contributes to a stylistic baseline of credibility for both speakers.

However, their patterns of stylistic deviation from the Maxim of Quality reveal distinct approaches to managing information and evidence. President Biden's deviations often involve the introduction of strategic ambiguity, subtle contradictions, or the withholding of specific verifiable details. For example, his phrase, "other ways in which they could have to publish the news" (Excerpt 7) introduces vagueness regarding the precise mechanisms of death, mitigating specific causal links. His statement "But it is wrong—we are going to supply the weapons that artillery shells used... have been used..." (Excerpt 7) presents an inherent contradiction regarding policy when read in conjunction with his later confirmation "Yeah!

Artillery shells" (Excerpt 8), creating ambiguity. Furthermore, his assertion "No... No, they haven't gone into population sites, but they didn't stay on the border" (Excerpt 9) introduces a nuance that complicates a definitive denial, revealing a strategic ambiguity in communicating the exact extent of Israeli actions. Most notably, his explicit statement "I won't name them to get them in trouble" (Excerpt 11) stylistically withholds crucial verifiable specifics about Arab states' involvement. These stylistic choices function to manage sensitive diplomatic information, maintain control over the narrative, or avoid direct, uncomfortable confirmations, resulting in a communication style that is carefully worded, nuanced, and often prioritizes strategic discretion over absolute transparency.

In contrast, Sanusi Lamido Sanusi's primary stylistic deviation from the Maxim of Quality involves the explicit qualification of information based on hearsay. This is evident in his statement, "we've heard there's also mercenaries from South Africa" (Excerpt 7). The use of "we've heard" explicitly signals that this information is derived from unverified sources, stylistically indicating a lower commitment to the full veracity of that specific claim. This deviation is less about obfuscation and more about including information while transparently stating its evidential limitations. His stylistic presentation is direct in its claims but, in this



instance, transparent about the evidential basis of certain details. This reflects a communication style that is assertive in its broader claims but acknowledges the source of less certain information, perhaps reflecting a leader who is willing to share information as it is received, even if not fully confirmed.

In summary, while both leaders maintain general truthfulness, their stylistic deviations from the Maxim of Quality diverge. Biden employs strategic ambiguity and withholds specifics to navigate diplomatic landscapes through controlled discourse. Conversely, Sanusi utilizes stylistic transparency regarding his evidential basis, presenting information with qualifications that reflect his role as a public figure reliant on varied intelligence sources.

#### *Biden's and Sanusi's Conformity to and Deviation from Maxim of Quantity*

Both leaders demonstrate a foundational adherence to the Maxim of Quantity in straightforward conversational exchanges. President Biden consistently provides precisely the amount of information required for direct confirmations, as seen in his concise response regarding "Artillery shells" (Excerpt 14) and his brief clarification on the purpose of governance (Excerpt 18). Similarly, Sanusi Lamido Sanusi adheres to the maxim in his minimal, polite acknowledgment at the interview's opening (Excerpt 9). This shared pattern of adherence in basic, non-contentious turns indicates a

common stylistic baseline of conversational efficiency, ensuring that fundamental information exchange occurs without superfluous detail.

However, the most significant insights emerge from their patterns of stylistic deviation from the Maxim of Quantity, which predominantly involve providing more information than strictly required. President Biden frequently employs over-informativeness to manage diplomatic complexities and project a comprehensive policy stance. In Excerpt 13 (Biden), for example, when questioned about the specific use of U.S. bombs, Biden stylistically deviates by elaborating on general civilian killings, conditional future policy, and U.S. security commitments. This pattern of strategic verbosity is also evident in Excerpt 15 (Biden), where he expands on diplomatic efforts beyond a simple "yes" or "no" on a "red line," and most notably in Excerpt 17 (Biden), where his extensive response to a question about student protests encompasses free speech rights, historical analogies, and future Gaza plans. This stylistic choice functions to articulate policy nuances, project commitment, and control the breadth of the discourse, thereby broadening the scope of the answer beyond the immediate inquiry. His communication style, therefore, becomes comprehensive, often indirect, and strategically verbose, reflecting a leader navigating intricate geopolitical realities.



In contrast, Sanusi Lamido Sanusi's deviations from the Maxim of Quantity, while also characterized by providing more information, tend to expand the discourse towards underlying systemic issues and calls for collective responsibility. In Excerpt 10 (Sanusi), when asked about the severity of Boko Haram's alignment with ISIS, Sanusi extends his response to include observations about "progress being made" and the group's "weakness," providing a more nuanced overview than minimally solicited. In Excerpt 11 (Sanusi), he expands beyond identifying forces to include a historical critique of "passivity." Most significantly, in Excerpt 12 (Sanusi), when asked about his personal safety and campaign success, Sanusi stylistically deviates by broadening his discourse to address the collective responsibility of Muslim leaders, societal rejection of Boko Haram, and the socio-economic factors contributing to radicalization. This comprehensive response provides a much broader socio-political analysis than minimally required, stylistically increasing the informational load and broadening the thematic scope of the interaction. His communication style, therefore, becomes passionate, morally driven, and socio-politically expansive, projecting a leader who is a moral authority and a social critic willing to address uncomfortable truths about governance and society.

In summary, both leaders deviate from the Maxim of Quantity through over-informativeness,

though their motivations differ. Biden provides excessive detail to manage complex policy narratives and project a controlled, comprehensive image globally. Conversely, Sanusi uses increased informational load to address systemic societal issues and advocate for collective moral action, reflecting his traditional and religious leadership. These contrasting patterns align with their unique roles and communicative goals.

#### *Biden's and Sanusi's Conformity to and Deviation From Maxim of Manner*

Both leaders demonstrate a foundational adherence to the Maxim of Manner in straightforward conversational exchanges. President Biden, for instance, stylistically conforms by providing remarkably brief, clear, and unambiguous responses to direct clarifying questions, as seen in his confirmation of "Artillery shells" (Excerpt 14) and his concise answer regarding the purpose of governance (Excerpt 18). Similarly, Sanusi Lamido Sanusi consistently adheres to the maxim in his initial direct and unambiguous acknowledgment (Excerpt 9) and throughout his responses in Excerpts 10, 11, and 12, where his arguments are characterized by clear, orderly presentation and direct language, avoiding unnecessary complexity or obscurity. This shared pattern of adherence in basic, non-contentious turns indicates a common stylistic baseline of conversational competence, ensuring that fundamental information is conveyed with clarity.



However, their patterns of stylistic deviation from the Maxim of Manner reveal distinct approaches to managing information and presenting their discourse. President Biden frequently employs deviations that introduce ambiguity, lack of conciseness, disfluencies, and a less formal register. In Excerpt 13 (Biden), his use of "other ways" introduces vagueness, and his phrasing regarding weapon supply is convoluted, lacking conciseness. In Excerpt 15 (Biden), his immediate qualification after a denial ("No... but they didn't stay on the border") creates a subtle lack of clarity and orderliness. Excerpt 16 (Biden) showcases significant deviations through lack of brevity, hesitations, and repetition, conveying a deliberative but less efficient manner. Most notably, his extended and multifaceted response in Excerpt 17 (Biden) exhibits a significant deviation due to its lack of brevity and multi-pronged, less orderly structure, incorporating semantic shifts and digressions. Furthermore, Biden's pervasive use of contractions (e.g., "I'm," "it's," "we're," "That's") and blends (e.g., "gonna," "wanna") across the interview consistently introduces a more conversational and less formal register, stylistically deviating from the strict formality often associated with presidential discourse. His communication style, therefore, is characterized by a nuanced, sometimes circuitous, and relatively informal manner, reflecting a leader who prioritizes diplomatic flexibility and a relatable

persona over absolute linguistic precision and brevity.

In contrast, Sanusi Lamido Sanusi's analysis consistently highlights his strong adherence to the Maxim of Manner, even when his responses are extensive (flouting Quantity). His discourse is characterized by a clear and orderly presentation of ideas, utilizing explicit connectors to logically structure his arguments (Excerpt 10). He maintains direct language, avoiding stylistic obscurity or deliberate ambiguity throughout his turns (Excerpts 11 and 12). Even when addressing complex socio-economic factors or making strong critiques, his language remains generally straightforward and his arguments progress in a discernible, structured fashion. This consistent stylistic choice projects an image of intellectual clarity, moral conviction, and authoritative directness. His communication style is stylistically straightforward, coherent, and readily processable by the listener, reinforcing his role as a clear and articulate voice.

In summary, while both leaders can be clear and concise, their overall adherence to the Maxim of Manner diverges significantly. Biden utilizes strategic ambiguity, verbosity, and conversational informality to navigate diplomatic terrain with nuance and relatability. Conversely, Sanusi maintains consistent clarity, orderliness, and directness to project an image of intellectual and moral conviction. These contrasting stylistic choices reflect their unique roles and



communicative goals within high-stakes interview contexts.

### Discussion of findings

The analysis reveals that the linguistic deviations of Joe Biden and Sanusi Lamido Sanusi are strategic maneuvers shaped by their sociopolitical identities. Utilizing Grice's (1975) principles, the study shows Biden's deviations from Relation, Quality, and Quantity serve a pragmatic, rational-legal function, using "interdiscursivity" and "synthetic personalization" to manage geopolitical narratives and bridge public distance. Conversely, Sanusi employs a principled expansion of Quantity and strict adherence to Manner, reflecting his traditional-moral authority. While Biden uses populist dichotomies like "bad guys" for broad support, Sanusi utilizes a sophisticated sociological register to delegitimize extremism and advocate for reform. Ultimately, Biden balances relatability with diplomatic authority, whereas Sanusi's structural precision establishes epistemic legitimacy, shifting the focus toward collective moral responsibility.

### Conclusion

This study concludes that distinct sociopolitical backgrounds profoundly influence the linguistic choices of Joe Biden and Sanusi Lamido Sanusi, specifically regarding Gricean (1975) deviations and strategic vocabulary. Grounded in Biber and Conrad's (2019) model, the research affirms that register actively reflects societal roles, enabling leaders to meet specific

communicative goals. The study's primary contribution is its cross-cultural revelation of how linguistic deviations facilitate narrative control in the Global North versus systemic critique in the Global South. While Biden projects relatable authority, Sanusi emphasizes moral advocacy. Future research should utilize quantitative corpus analysis, explore diverse sociopolitical systems, and examine audience reception to further illuminate these dynamics.

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