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GREED AND CORRUPTION IN NIGERIA: A MORPHO-SYNTACTIC ANALYSIS THROUGH THE LENS OF *VOLPONE* BY BEN JONSON

Onuegwunwoke, Cynthia Adaeze, Ph.D
Department of English Language and Literature,
Faculty of Arts, Alvan Ikoku Federal University of Education,
Owerri, Imo State, Nigeria
Cynthia.onuegwunwoke@alvanikoku.edu.ng

Amadi, Gloria Ukamaka, Ph.D
Department of English Language and Literature,
Faculty of Arts, Alvan Ikoku Federal University of Education,
Owerri, Imo State, Nigeria
Email: ukezeukwu@gmail.com

Abstract

Greed and corruption have consistently undermined societal growth and development, particularly in Nigeria, where weak institutional frameworks and moral decadence have entrenched these vices in socio-political, religious, and economic systems. Drawing on Ben Jonson's play, titled *Volpone*, a satirical masterpiece that critiques avarice and moral decay in Renaissance Venice, the research examines the morpho-syntactic features employed to reflect deceit, manipulation, and power dynamics. The theoretical framework is anchored on Chomsky's Syntactic Theory, 1965, as a theoretical lens to explore how language is structured to convey the themes of greed and corruption. Chomsky's syntactic framework facilitates an exploration of deep and surface structures in the language of *Volpone*, it focuses on how transformational processes such as embedding, deletion, and substitution reveal the characters' greed-driven motivations and deceptive practices. These syntactic patterns are juxtaposed with linguistic features in Nigerian political, religious, and socio-cultural discourse, uncovering the parallels between Jonson's satirical depiction of moral corruption and the contemporary Nigerian context. The research underscores how morpho-syntactic elements are strategically used as tools for persuasion, manipulation, and ideological reinforcement. It argues that the portrayal of greed and corruption in *Volpone* is not merely a Renaissance concern but a timeless critique of human nature that resonates with Nigeria's present realities. Therefore, the study contributes to the growing interdisciplinary dialogue between linguistics and literary studies by demonstrating the applicability of Chomsky's theory beyond pure linguistics. It offers a nuanced understanding of how language reflects and shapes societal issues, providing a framework for addressing contemporary challenges of greed and corruption. Ultimately, this research illuminates the role of linguistic structures in exposing and interrogating societal ills, affirming the relevance of literary texts like *Volpone* as tools for social critique and moral reflection.

KEYWORDS: Language, greed, corruption, morpho-syntactic analysis, Nigeria

Introduction

The title of this article is melancholic and also pathetic to write about the 'giant of Africa', Nigeria. The reason is that greed and corruption are two pervasive challenges that have continually, plagued Nigeria. These vices deeply rooted in human nature, often manifest through the exploitation of power and resources for personal gain. As observed by Adetayo (2018, p. 45), "Greed and corruption are twin evils that thrive on weak institutional frameworks, eroding trust and hindering national development". Literature has long served as a mirror reflecting these societal flaws, offering insights into their causes and consequences. Ben Jonson's V*olpone* (The Fox), a comedic satire set in Renaissance Venice, provides a fitting framework for examining these themes in the Nigerian context. This classical play by Jonson satirises greed and corruption through the cunning and morally depraved antics of the character, Volpone and his accomplice Mosca, whose schemes to defraud others epitomise the unchecked ambition for wealth and power. Scholars have argued that Jonson's work remains relevant across ages due to its universal critique of human avarice. According to Hill (2009, p. 83), "Jonson's characters symbolise the inherent greed that transcends cultural and temporal boundaries, making his work a timeless critique of societal decay". Similarly, the dynamics of greed and corruption in Nigeria echo the themes presented in *Volpone*, as individuals in positions of authority exploit their power for personal enrichment.

On the other hand, morpho-syntactic analysis is the exploration of word forms and sentence structures, provides an innovative lens for examining how linguistic choices in texts like *Volpone* and contemporary Nigerian narratives depict greed and corruption. This approach uncovers the subtle ways language constructs, reinforces, or challenges these societal issues. As noted by Adeyemi and Onyekwere (2020, p. 102), "Language is not only a medium of expression but also a tool of manipulation that reflects the socio-political realities of its users". By analysing the morpho-syntactic patterns in *Volpone* alongside Nigerian discourse, this study seeks to illuminate the linguistic strategies that reveal the complexities of greed and corruption in both contexts. This is significant as we see the imminent end of all the greedy and corrupt characters in the play. This paper argues that Jonson's *Volpone* offers a critical lens for understanding the pervasive culture of greed and corruption in Nigeria. Through a morpho-syntactic analysis, it explores how language is employed to depict and perpetuate these vices, drawing parallels between Jonson's satire and the Nigerian experience.

Pathetically, greed and corruption remain critical challenges in Nigeria, undermining socio-economic development and public trust. These twin vices, often perpetuated by the manipulation of power and resources, can be effectively explored through literary and linguistic analysis. This study employs Chomsky's Syntactic Theory as a theoretical framework to analyse how morpho-syntactic structures reveal and reinforce themes of greed and corruption. Thus; using Ben Jonson's *Volpone* as a case study, the research examines the interplay between syntax and meaning, focusing on how linguistic patterns convey deceit, manipulation, and moral decay. Chomsky's framework allows for an in-depth investigation into sentence structures, transformations, and the generative rules that underlie the language used by Jonson's characters, particularly, Volpone also as a character in the play and Mosca. These structures are juxtaposed with similar linguistic strategies found in Nigerian discourse on corruption, highlighting parallels between Jonson's satirical depiction of greed and the Nigerian

socio-political context. Incidentally, this study argues that morpho-syntactic choices are not arbitrary but deliberate tools used to construct narratives that critique societal flaws. By analysing the syntactic patterns in *Volpone* and Nigerian political and literary texts, the research reveals how language functions as both a reflection of and a vehicle for challenging greed and corruption. This dual perspective offers insights into the universal nature of avarice and its specific manifestations in Nigeria, emphasising the role of language in shaping socio-political realities.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this study is anchored on Noam Chomsky's syntactic theory of 1965, detailed in his seminal work *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax*. The theory provides a framework for analysing the deep and surface structures of sentences. Applying Chomsky's ideas to Ben Jonson's *Volpone* allows us to explore the syntactic structures and transformations that contribute to the play's dramatic and rhetorical effects. Chomsky's distinction between deep structure (the underlying meaning of a sentence) and surface structure (the way the sentence is expressed) is key to understanding Jonson's dialogue in *Volpone*. The syntactic transformation from the deep structure to the surface structure involves reordering elements for dramatic emphasis. Transformational grammar allows for operations like movement, deletion, and insertion, which Jonson frequently uses to craft his rhetorical dialogue. Chomsky emphasised recursion the ability to embed clauses within clauses as a hallmark of human language. Jonson's use of recursion reflects his characters' rhetorical complexity and intellectual wit.

Ultimately, Chomsky's theory highlights how deep structures can yield multiple surface structures, creating ambiguity. Jonson exploits this for dramatic and comedic purposes. Chomsky's later work on focus (what is emphasised) and topic (what the sentence is about) is evident in Jonson's manipulation of word order and sentence construction. Chomsky's emphasis on how lexical items fit into syntactic structures can be applied to Jonson's wordplay. Characters like Volpone and Mosca select specific lexical items to manipulate others. Using Chomsky's syntactic theory, *Volpone* can be seen as a masterclass in rhetorical complexity, where sentence transformations, recursion, and lexical choices reflect the characters' wit and thematic concerns. Jonson's manipulation of deep and surface structures not only creates dramatic effects but also mirrors the deceit and manipulation central to the play's satire. Ben Jonson's *Volpone* is widely celebrated as one of the finest examples of Jacobean drama, combining intricate rhetorical dialogue, sharp wit, and complex character interactions to satirize greed and moral corruption. Central to Jonson's mastery is his use of language, particularly the structural complexity of his sentences, which serves to reflect the cunning, deceit, and manipulation that drive the play's narrative. To explore the syntactic brilliance of Jonson's work, Noam Chomsky's syntactic theory, as outlined in *Aspects* of *the Theory of Syntax* (1965), provides a fitting framework.

Of course, Chomsky's revolutionary linguistic model introduced key concepts, including the distinction between deep structure and surface structure, transformational grammar, and recursion, which have since become foundational in understanding the generative power of language. Deep structure refers to the abstract, underlying meaning of a sentence, while

surface structure pertains to the specific arrangement of words in speech or writing. Transformational rules describe how deep structures are converted into surface structures through operations like movement, insertion, or deletion. Recursion, the ability to embed clauses within clauses, further demonstrates how language can generate infinite expressions from finite rules.

An Overview of the Play

Ben Jonson's *Volpone* was first performed in 1606. It stands as one of the most celebrated works of the Jacobean period, embodying Jonson's satirical brilliance and sharp critique of human greed and corruption. Subtitled *The Fox*, the play revolves around the schemes of its titular character, Volpone, a wealthy Venetian who feigns illness to exploit the avarice of his would-be heirs. With biting wit and masterful use of language, Jonson crafts a dark comedy that examines moral decay, societal hypocrisy, and the consequences of unchecked ambition. The plot of *Volpone* centers on deception and greed. Volpone as a character pretends to be on the verge of death, luring legacy hunters including Voltore (a lawyer), Corbaccio (an old miser), and Corvino (a jealous merchant) who shower him with extravagant gifts in hopes of being named his sole heir. Assisting Volpone is his servant Mosca, who manipulates the legacy hunters with cunning and flattery. However, the schemes unravel as Volpone's greed and desire for amusement lead to increasingly reckless behaviour, culminating in his downfall. The play concludes with poetic justice as such Volpone is exposed, stripped of his wealth, and sentenced to imprisonment, while the other characters face punishments befitting their vices. This resolution reinforces Jonson's moral stance and the play's satirical critique of greed and corruption.

A Morpho-Syntactic Analysis

In Volpone, Ben Jonson masterfully employs a variety of structure ranging from declarative, interrogative, imperative, exclamatory, periodic, and fragmented to reflect the personalities of characters, develop dramatic tension, and convey themes of greed, deception, and human folly. By varying sentence structures, Jonson enriches the dialogue and underscores the play's satirical tone.

Declarative sentences are used to assert themes such as materialism, greed, and deception. These statements are direct and emphasize the characters' motivations and the satirical tone of the play. For instance, Volpone's opening soliloquy expresses his worship of wealth at the beginning of the play. "Good morning to the day; and next, my gold! Open the shrine, that I may see my saint." (Act 1, Scene 1, p. 2). He equates gold to divinity, showcasing his obsession. This declarative statement sets the tone for the play's critique of greed and idolatry. The use of declarative sentences in Volpone's speeches establishes his character as someone driven solely by material wealth, while also emphasising Jonson's satirical commentary on human vices. Here, we see him affirming that he glories in ill-gotten wealth, "True, my beloved Mosca. Yet I glory in the cunning purchase of my wealth".

Interrogative sentences in the play serve rhetorical purposes, allowing characters to manipulate others or reflect on moral dilemmas. There are excessive instances of rhetorical questions in the play. Example: Mosca's rhetorical question to Corbaccio, "Why droop you so?

Look up, sir, see what you are stored of. Heaven hath no better gift!". (Act 1, Scene 4, p. 16). Mosca uses this question to flatter and manipulate Corbaccio, appealing to his vanity and greed. The interrogative form not only engages the listener but also subtly traps them in the deceitful schemes of Volpone and Mosca. These questions are often manipulative, designed to provoke desired responses. Mosca rhetorically asks Voltore, "When will you have your inventory brought, sir? Or see a copy of the will? ---Anon! I will bring them to you, sir. Away, be gone, put business in your face". (Act 1, Scene 4, p.16).

Commands and imperatives are frequently used to assert control or to dramatise interactions between characters. Example: Volpone instructs Mosca as part of their elaborate deception, "Bring me the two that first arrived here, Mosca; Bid them make haste". (Act 2, Scene 2, p. 43). The command reflects Volpone's reliance on Mosca to execute his schemes, as well as his dominant position in their partnership. Imperative sentences highlight the hierarchical relationships between characters, particularly between masters and servants, while also showcasing Volpone's theatrical manipulation of events. There are many instances of imperative structures like when Volpone was wounded in the process of luring Corvino's wife, he cried, "Fall on me, roof, and bury me in ruin!". (Act 3, Scene 6, p. 69).

Exclamatory sentences emphasise heightened emotions such as greed, triumph, and frustration. They add a dramatic flair, underscoring the satirical tone of the play. Example: Volpone exclaims with adoration for his gold, "O thou son of Sol, but brighter than thy father, let me kiss, with adoration, thee, and every relic of sacred treasure in this blessed room"! (Act 1, Scene 1, p. 4). This exaggerated exclamation highlights Volpone's idolatrous relationship with wealth, satirising human folly. Exclamatory sentences exaggerate the emotional states of characters, making them appear absurd and furthering Jonson's satirical critique.

Jonson employs complex periodic sentences to reflect the wit and intelligence of characters like Volpone and Mosca. We can find instances. For example, Volpone justifies his deceptive lifestyle, "What should I do, but cocker up my genius, and live free to all delights my fortune calls me to"? (Act 1, Scene 1, p. 7). The sentence delays its main point, building suspense and emphasizing Volpone's hedonistic rationalization of his actions. Periodic sentences enhance the intellectual and performative nature of the dialogue, keeping the audience engaged and reinforcing the characters' rhetorical skills. Fragmented sentences occur during moments of tension or emotional breakdown, reflecting the psychological states of characters. There are several instances. For example, during the trial scene, Voltore's fragmented speech reveals his panic. "I—I do deny it! What, do you think me gull'd"? (Act 5, Scene 3, p. 128). The interruptions in his speech signify his mental disarray as he struggles to maintain composure under scrutiny. Fragmented sentences add realism to the dialogue, showing how characters respond to stress or unravel under pressure, particularly in the play's climactic moments.

Veritably, the linguistic richness of *Volpone* is central to its dramatic and comedic effects. Jonson's use of poetic devices, rhetorical flourishes, and varied sentence structures reflects the characters' intellect and emotions. For instance, Volpone's soliloquies ("O, my fine devil!", Act 5, Scene 1, p. 102) are marked by elaborate metaphors and hyperboles, while Mosca's dialogue brims with wit and irony. The play's language not only entertains but also reinforces its

themes, as characters use words to deceive, manipulate, and assert power. The play remains a timeless work, its themes of greed, deception, and justice resonating with modern audiences. The play's critique of materialism and moral corruption continues to be relevant in contemporary discussions of ethics and societal values. Moreover, Jonson's innovative use of language and structure has influenced subsequent writers, securing his place as a key figure in English Literature. It is a multi-faceted work that combines sharp satire, complex characters, and masterful language to deliver a powerful critique of human folly. Its enduring appeal lies in its ability to entertain while provoking reflection on the vices that plague individuals and society.

Incidentally, the play is a linguistic tour de force, showcasing the playwright's mastery of rhetoric, poetic expression, and dramatic dialogue. The language of the play is as intricate and dynamic as its characters, reflecting their wit, deception, and moral corruption. The playwright employs a variety of linguistic techniques to enhance the play's satirical tone, develop its characters, and explore its central themes. His language in *Volpone* often adopts an elevated, almost poetic tone, particularly in the speeches of the titular character. Volpone's soliloquies and monologues are rich with metaphor, alliteration, and hyperbole, reflecting his larger-than-life personality and his reverence for wealth. Volpone's opening soliloquy (Act 1, Scene 1), "Good morning to the day; and next, my gold! Open the shrine, that I may see my saint". Here, the playwright uses religious imagery to equate gold with divinity, highlighting Volpone's idolatry of wealth. The ornate language underscores his hedonism and sets the tone for the play's critique of materialism. In addition, Jonson alternates between prose and verse to distinguish between characters, moods, and themes. For verse, the higher-status characters, like Volpone and Mosca, often speak in iambic pentameter or other rhythmic forms, lending a sense of sophistication and wit to their dialogue. While the use of prose, particularly in the interactions of the legacy hunters (Voltore, Corbaccio, and Corvino), serves to underscore their mundane greed and lack of moral refinement. One could say this deliberate choice enhances the play's social commentary by juxtaposing poetic eloquence with the crassness of the characters' actions. His characters, especially Volpone and Mosca, are adept at using rhetorical devices to manipulate and deceive others. Their language is characterised by flattery, irony, and verbal dexterity. For example, Mosca's speech to Corbaccio (Act 1, Scene 4), "I have a pill for you to purge melancholy". This seemingly innocuous statement hides Mosca's true intentions. The playwright's use of euphemism and double entendre allows Mosca to manipulate Corbaccio into disinheriting his son.

Thus; as a satire, the play makes use of exaggerated language to ridicule human vices. Jonson employs irony, sarcasm, and parody to expose the absurdity of greed and hypocrisy. For example, Corvino's outburst about his wife Celia (Act 2, Scene 5), "I will make thee an anatomy, dissect thee mine own self, and read a lecture. Upon thee to the city". The hyperbolic violence of Corvino's language mocks his jealousy and possessiveness, while also revealing his insecurity and lack of control. There are instances of rich imagery to reinforce the play's themes. Animal symbolism is particularly prominent, with characters named after animals that reflect their personalities. Volpone (the fox), is cunning and predatory. Mosca (fly) that is parasitic and opportunistic. Voltore (vulture), Corbaccio (crow), and Corvino (raven), they all mean

scavengers, representing greed and moral decay. This symbolism extends to their speech, which often includes references to their animal counterparts, further emphasising their traits.

Again, Jonson's use of language is infused with humor, ranging from witty repartee to bawdy jokes. The humor often relies on wordplay, puns, and innuendos, reflecting the intellectual wit of the characters and engaging the audience in the comedy of their schemes. For example, Volpone's feigned self-deprecation (Act 1, Scene 2), "I am unworthy of the air Ibreathe". This ironic statement, delivered while he manipulates his victims, adds a layer of humor to his duplicity. He frequently uses ambiguous language, allowing characters to convey multiple meanings simultaneously. This technique mirrors the duplicity and deception central to the play's plot. For example, Mosca's line to Voltore (Act 3, Scene 8), "Your patron loves you". While this appears to be a straightforward statement, it is laden with irony, as Volpone's "love" is merely a tool for manipulation. His vocabulary in *Volpone* is wide-ranging. It incorporates Latinisms, legal terminology, and colloquial expressions. This diversity reflects the play's setting in Venice, a hub of commerce and culture, and adds depth to the characters' dialogue. For example, the use of legal jargon in Voltore's speeches highlights his profession as a lawyer, while also satirising the corruption of the legal system. Glaringly, the language of Volpone often draws attention to its own theatricality. Characters frequently break the fourth wall or comment on their roles within the narrative, inviting the audience to engage critically with the play's themes. For example: Volpone's aside (Act 5, Scene 12), "This is called mortifying of a fox". This self-referential comment not only highlights Volpone's downfall but also reinforces the animal symbolism that runs throughout the play. The playwright's language often carries a moral undertone, particularly in the play's resolution. The epilogue explicitly addresses the audience, reinforcing the play's didactic purpose. Scrutinise these structures below;

"The seasoning of a play, is the applause.

Now, though the Fox be punished by the laws,

He yet doth hope, there is no suffering due

For any fact, which he hath done 'gainst you."

Here, the playwright tries to remind the audience of the lessons to be drawn from the characters' actions, blending entertainment with ethical reflection.

The Predicaments of the Nigerian State

Nigeria, the "Giant of Africa," stands tall, not for its advancements, but for its grand displays of wealth amidst poverty, its paradoxical mix of abundance and deprivation, and its leaders who govern like kings in a land of peasants. Imagine a land where oil flows like rivers, yet the taps in villages remain dry. Public officials, dressed in resplendent agbadas, move like peacocks at international summits while their citizens queue for basic necessities. In Nigeria, corruption is not a crime but an art form, passed down like family heirlooms. Ministers who "misplace" billions blame the devil for their lapses, yet they live in mansions that gleam with stolen wealth.

The satirical depiction of Nigeria and *Volpone* serves as a mirror, reflecting the absurdities of human greed and corruption. While Jonson's play ends with justice being served, Nigeria's stage remains occupied by actors playing the same roles, generation after generation. In the end, both worlds remind us that greed, unchecked, leads only to tragedy or in the case of satire, to laughter that quickly turns into tears. Every year, Nigeria releases a "national budget," which, much like Game of Thrones, is filled with drama, betrayal, and shocking twists. Billions are allocated for "ghost projects", roads that exist only on paper, hospitals that never see a patient, and schools that remain perpetually under construction. Despite being one of the world's largest oil producers, Nigeria remains a land of scarcity. Oil money disappears faster than a politician at a press conference, siphoned into offshore accounts or luxury estates in Dubai. Over 40% of Nigerians live below the poverty line, yet the country boasts one of the highest numbers of private jets owned by its elite. It's a nation where the rich, fly above the problems they create. While ordinary Nigerians queue for hours at ATMs, the elite casually flaunt stacks of cash at lavish parties, making it rain in a country where it rarely pours prosperity.

Nigerian police have turned checkpoints into toll gates, extorting motorists with the creativity of Shakespearean villains. "Something for the boys" has become the unofficial motto of law enforcement. Corruption in education means you can now "buy" a degree without attending a single lecture. Why study when you can bribe? Meritocracy is for suckers. Nigeria's prosperity preachers are the ultimate capitalists, promising eternal life while collecting tithes to fund their earthly mansions. Their sermons on "giving" somehow always end with them receiving. Nigerians are experts at celebrating ill-gotten wealth. Lavish weddings, over-the-top funerals, and housewarming parties are common, where no one questions the source of the funds. Thus; the bigger the scandal, the louder the applause.

Linguistic Analysis of Greed and Corruption in the Nigerian Context

It is sad that in Nigeria, corruption manifests through various forms, including fraud, bribery, and nepotism, often driven by greed and the pursuit of personal gain. This insatiable appetite for wealth undermines public institutions, erodes trust, and impedes economic progress. The oil-rich Niger Delta exemplifies the detrimental effects of greed-fueled corruption. Despite vast natural resources, the region suffers from environmental degradation and poverty due to corrupt practices by both government officials and multinational corporations. According to Onyema (2021, p. 33), "These and other Niger Delta narresmes have also been essentialized in the Niger Delta discourse. Writers imbued with the burden to bring the experiences of the region to environmental and sociopolitical forecourt and correct years of denigration, interiorization, exploitation and marginalization of her people and the general pollution of their terrestrial and aquatic lives".

On the other hand, Ben Jonson's Volpone is a satirical comedy that delves into the corrupting influence of greed. Set in 17th-century Venice, the play portrays characters whose excessive desire for wealth leads to moral decay and deceit. Volpone, the protagonist, feigns a terminal illness to dupe legacy hunters into bestowing gifts upon him, exposing their avarice and moral corruption. The play serves as a critique of a society where the lust for wealth overrides ethical considerations, leading individuals to engage in deceitful and corrupt practices. Similarly, both Nigeria's contemporary society and Jonson's Volpone illustrate how unchecked greed fosters

corruption, leading to societal decay. In Nigeria, the pursuit of personal gain at the expense of public welfare has resulted in systemic corruption, hindering development and perpetuating poverty. Similarly, in Volpone, characters' relentless quest for wealth leads to their moral downfall, serving as a cautionary tale about the perils of avarice. The parallels between the two highlight a timeless truth: societies that allow greed to overshadow ethical values are prone to corruption and its attendant consequences. Addressing such issues requires a collective commitment to integrity and the reinforcement of ethical standards, both in literature and real life. Incidentally, examining the ruling class in Nigeria alongside the greedy and corrupt characters in Ben Jonson's Volpone reveals striking parallels in their unscrupulous pursuit of power and wealth. Both contexts highlight how unchecked greed leads to moral decay, systemic corruption, and societal disintegration. The ruling elite in Nigeria often exemplify greed and corruption, prioritizing personal enrichment over public welfare. Their actions are characterised by mismanagement of resources, embezzlement of funds, and exploitation of power for personal gain. Sadly, Nigeria's vast natural resources, particularly in the oil sector, have been exploited by corrupt officials. Thus; "The mismanagement of Nigeria's oil wealth remains a glaring testament to the greed of its ruling class" (Akinola, 2023, p. 45). The ruling class often engages in nepotism, awarding contracts and positions to family and friends rather than competent professionals. This practice perpetuates inefficiency and hinders national development. Thus; "The ruling class has institutionalized corruption, leaving the masses in perpetual deprivation" (Okonkwo, 2021, p. 78).

Invariably, in Ben Jonson's Volpone, greed drives the plot, with characters engaging in deceit and betrayal to gain wealth. The play critiques the moral corruption that stems from avarice. Volpone, the titular character, feigns a terminal illness to exploit others' greed, receiving lavish gifts in the hope of inheritance. His deceit epitomises how unchecked ambition leads to moral degradation. "Letting the cherry knock against their lips, and draw it by their mouths, and back again" (Jonson, Volpone, Act 1, Scene 1). Volpone's servant, Mosca, is a sycophant who manipulates others for his gain, symbolising opportunism fueled by greed. His cunning schemes exacerbate the chaos, reflecting the dangers of unchecked ambition. The legacy hunters represent the destructive nature of greed. Each vies for Volpone's fortune, willing to sacrifice morality and integrity. Corbaccio disinherits his son, Corvino offers his wife, and Voltore uses his legal expertise for deceit. "What a rare punishment is avarice to itself"! (Jonson, Volpone, Act 2, Scene 4).

Comparatively, we see that both Nigeria's ruling class and Jonson's characters are driven by unrestrained greed, resulting in corruption and exploitation. In Volpone, characters deceive one another to gain wealth, akin to the ruling elite in Nigeria exploiting public trust for personal enrichment. Just as Volpone and his accomplices disregard ethical boundaries, Nigeria's leaders often neglect moral accountability, prioritising wealth over societal wellbeing. In both cases, greed results in harm to others. In Volpone, it disrupts personal relationships and trust. In Nigeria, it perpetuates poverty, inequality, and underdevelopment.

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Conclusion / Recommendations

This study has explored the contribution between the fields of linguistics and literary criticism by demonstrating how Chomsky's Syntactic Theory can be applied to interdisciplinary analyses, bridging the gap between linguistic structures and societal themes. It underscores the enduring relevance of Jonson's *Volpone* as a framework for understanding and addressing contemporary issues of greed and corruption in Nigeria. It also condemns the parallels between the ruling class in Nigeria and the corrupt characters in V*olpone* underscore the universal dangers of greed and corruption. Both contexts reveal how the relentless pursuit of wealth undermines ethical principles and leads to societal collapse.

Finally, the study recommends that addressing these issues requires robust institutional reforms and a cultural shift toward accountability and integrity. We have seen that both Nigeria and Ben Jonson's *Volpone* present worlds driven by greed, deceit, and a disheartening absence of moral compass. Satire, as a lens, allows us to illuminate the absurdities of human behavior in these contexts, exposing the depths of corruption and the follies of unbridled ambition. Greed and corruption are pervasive issues in Nigeria, significantly hindering the nation's socio-economic development. These themes are also central to Ben Jonson's play Volpone, which satirizes human avarice and moral decay. Therefore, this linguistic comparative analysis has revealed striking parallels between the play's depiction of greed-induced corruption and Nigeria's contemporary challenges.

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