

LANGUAGE
CONTEXT

LANGUAGE,
CONTEXT
AND SOCIETY

A FESTSCHRIFT FOR WALE ADEGBITE

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LANGUAGE, CONTEXT AND SOCIETY: A FESTSCHRIFT FOR WALE ADEGBITE



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Chapter Fifteen

A Critical Discourse Analysis of Stance Expressions in Crisis Reportage

Esther Ajiboye

15.1 Introduction

This chapter explores the dynamics of the relationship between social crises and the discourse of mass media reportage, particularly, newspaper reports. The tenet of objectivity traditionally upheld by the mass media probably lends credence to their perceived credibility among the masses they communicate to. Hence, the masses in any society most likely consider news reports as valid accounts of events. For this reason, the mass media have gained reputation as the mouthpiece of the society. Notwithstanding, news may be influenced by the respective ideological perspectives of individual journalists, or even the different media organisations which they represent (Chiluwa, 2011). It is arguably true that language is one of the major tools employed by the mass media in information dissemination to various audiences. Discursive choices made in communication are likely consequential on the perception of message by the audience. Especially, when the news being reported is about crises or unpleasant events, it may be likely that holistic objectivity may not be realised, and implicit stance-taking may be observed in the news discourse produced for mass consumption by the media. This study therefore examines the discursive forms and patterns that the mass media employ when reporting socio-political crises since prevailing social conditions considerably influence properties of discourse, that is, discourse is able to represent, produce and reproduce social reality (Fairclough, 1989; Richardson, 2007). Discourse is generally used to refer to any coherent form of language use. In the context of this study, discourse refers to news reports.

15.2 The Pragmatics of News Reports

Communication is in itself an activity; this means that it is an active process and an action. Thus language use, as a form of communication, is purposeful activity, a social action, a practice (Richardson, 2007). Therefore, when news is written, there is the inherent motive to accomplish things (Gee & Green, 1998). Evidently, communication is two-way as there is an (un)spoken relationship between the speakers and hearers (news-writers and readers in our own context) in any communication process, and there is an expected receiver of any communicative message. In fact, both news-writers and readers are not to be referred to as separate entities; one is usually implicated in the action of the other. Hence, writing does not exist in a vacuum, a writer writes with an

expectation that the message passed across is actively understood and would influence the form of feedback received (Bakhtin, 1986). This likely explains why White (2006) rules out the objectivity claims of the media. He argues that the discourse disseminated by the media is "value laden" and "ideologically determined", with the intent to "influence its audience's assumptions and beliefs about the way the world is and the way it ought to be" (p. 37). These transmissions, he posits, differ in "rhetorical functionality" either on the basis of the intended audience, medium (print, internet, and broadcast) or the message form and content. Interestingly, the mass media decide what they consider to be in the best interest of the public (Coleman & Ross, 2010). Hence, they discursively frame their reports to shape public discourse and influence readers' interpretation and perception; this could be to foreground or background an issue (van Dijk, 2001; Scheufele and Tewksbury, 2007).

Olowe (2003) cited in Taiwo (2007) posits that Nigerian newspapers deliberately subject language use to manipulations. They choose those language patterns that suit the ideological expectation of the audience which is an ideological empire on the one hand and that of the mass media house which is an ideological empire on the other hand. Van Dijk (1993) also argues that the mass media significantly contribute to the ideological construction of group attitudes through their discursive lexical choices and structural patterns. He adds that the mass media may sometimes attempt to re-orient readers to embrace the messages that the mass media propagate and also accept the validity of such messages.

Amongst Nigerian scholars, researchers such as Taiwo (2004, 2007) and Odebunmi (2010) observe that ideology is easily transmitted via the mass media and note that certain lexical choices are employed to arouse specific emotions in the readers as well as construct and recreate power asymmetry in the society. In fact, Taiwo (2007) opines that "headlines are emotion-inducing strategies in the hands of the editor used to initiate, sustain discourse and shape the views of the readers on national issues" (p. 218). In addition, Abioye (2012) submits that transitivity choices in news headlines are ideologically motivated. Clearly, these choices carry ideological notions about the Nigerian people and the news stories that are being disseminated. They are therefore used to influence readers' views to reflect the perspective of the media house, that is, whose interest is being protected and those whose interest is being weakened. The Nigerian press participates in us-them dichotomies and representations through specific discursive choices and lexical variations that help to reinforce or create newly and disseminate value judgments and ideological perspectives among readers (Chiluwa, 2011, 2012).

15.3 Discourse and Control of Perception

Language users are able to produce different modes of meaning in a communication process, as texts always have a meaning potential. Halliday (1973) describes these modes as metafunctions of language use, arguing that language functions in three broad modes (or metafunctions); ideational or experiential, interpersonal and textual. The ideational metafunction relates to the social experiences of a language user. It is a representation of the world through the perspective of a language user. The ideational function of language implies that reality (which is not necessarily linguistic) is constructed through the use of language. According to Halliday and Matthiessen (2004), this is realised through shared knowledge/ experiences of the society, and content words that are used to express meaning and shape reality. The interpersonal metafunction signals language users' roles and relationships in a communicative situation. It also expresses the stance of the speaker or writer as expressed through negative or positive language or through sentence types such as imperatives, declaratives and interrogatives. Lastly, the textual metafunction explores the way sentences are organised into meaningful expressions. It establishes the coherence between the ideational and interpersonal functions of language.

These three functions explain that through a careful enactment of any of these functions, language may be used to mean, signal and influence. For instance, it is argued that discourse has a controlling power, and may be used to sway ideological positions and opinions of others. In fact, social power is expressed by those who are able to effectively control discourse content and structures (elements such as meaning, form or style) in specific contexts of use (see van Dijk, 2001). Control over discourse inadvertently suggests control over perception of discourse. Nee et al (1993) in van Dijk (2001) notes that discourse recipients readily accept discourse content that resonates with their shared belief systems as true, especially when such discourse is produced or distributed by a perceived credible source. This may be an expression of control over perception. In some other communicative situations, recipients may possess limited or no knowledge required to challenge the discourses that they receive. Hence, they are predisposed to accept the forms of knowledge distributed by such discourse especially when they have no alternative source of information (Wodak, 1987 in van Dijk, 2001). This suggests that the context of a communicative situation and not only discourse content is quite relevant in the mental representations that people get when they interpret text and talk. In fact, context refers to the mentally represented structure of those properties of the social situation that are germane to the production or comprehension of discourse (Duranti and Goodwin, 1992; van Dijk, 1998, cited in van Dijk 2001). These properties according to Halliday (1976) include the field of discourse (the on-going activity, situation or subject matter), the tenor (participants and participants' relationships/ roles, shared knowledge and worldviews) and the

mode (the channel of communication). Hymes (1964) classifies all of these properties into two types of context, i.e. the linguistic context (the choice of language within discourse) and the non-linguistic context (the topic, setting, channel, message-form, purpose and the communication event/ situation). All of these properties can be controlled within discourse. For instance, a news report can withhold certain information of participants, participant roles and their social actions in the field of discourse, and editors too determine what news stories are/ are not reported and how these are reported. In addition, certain ideological-linguistic processes such as rewording and re-ordering especially with mobile syntactic elements can control meaning, form and style within discourse (Fairclough, 1995; Ajiboye, 2013). In all, all of these are geared towards control over discourse perception.

15.4 Mass Media Discourse in Crisis Situations

The mass media are naturally attracted to crisis situations; they thrive in crisis reportage (Ekwueme & Obayi, 2012) and are brought to prominence during crises. Cable News Network (CNN) for instance, earned popular audience during their reportage of the Iraq War and Middle East crisis; Aljazeera was also brought to prominence during their coverage of the Arab Spring Revolution. This may be attributed to the common obligations of the mass media, one of which is surveillance (Dominick, 2002). By surveillance, what is meant is that mass media outlets are saddled with the responsibility of news-gathering in order to provide information to a mass audience. They also create news by deciding what is newsworthy and what is not, therefore they have the ability to shape public discourse. Because crises in most cases usually escalate into varying degrees of violence, the mass media may be torn between a choice to abide by the principle of objective reporting, and a choice to acknowledge the emotional realities such crisis situations evoke in them (Allan & Zelizer, 2004). Consequently, this makes subjectivity sometimes inevitable.

Since nearly all meanings are socially constructed, it is important that a linguistic approach should be adopted in understanding the language of newspapers (Fowler, 1991). Some studies have therefore examined language forms and choices in newspapers during crisis situations. For instance, Butt, Lukin and Matthiessen (2004) examine the grammatical choices and patterns in newspaper reports of the Iraqi war and argue that linguistic choices shape ideological perspectives. Also, Mourad (2012) uses Critical Discourse Analysis to explore language and representation in *The New York Times* reports on Jihad. In Nigeria, researchers such as Eti (2009) examine the relationship between balance and objectivity in Niger-Delta Press' reports. Similarly, in a study anchored to the framing theory of the mass media, Ekwueme and Obayi (2012) critically examine news reports of Boko Haram assault on Nigeria, and Ekeanyanwu (2007) concludes that the mass media are not impartial judges in reporting crises and conflicts; rather, they are active players in such crises and

conflicts.

Chiluwa (2012) notes that news stories during the peak of military rule and the transition to democracy in Nigeria played salient discursive functions in the polity, and Abioye (2012) in a study on online news reports on the 2012 fuel subsidy removal in Nigeria observes that the reports feature particular patterns of language use, lexical relations, discourse structures that reflect the socio-cultural, political and ideological views of the news writer(s). From the foregoing, it is evident that language in the news has been of considerable interest to researchers. This study is thus expected to contribute to existing literature on the subject matter, as well as identify specific discursive strategies with which news reports reflect varying standpoints about on-going crises. This is empirically achieved through the provisions of Critical Discourse Analysis and the ideational function of language.

15.5 Framing the Crises: Aluu Killings and the Kaduna Post-electoral Crises in Nigeria

This study specifically focuses on newspaper reports of two selected crises in Nigeria, *Aluu Killings* and the *Kaduna Post-electoral Crises*. The nature of the crises generated a lot of public discourse because both resulted in the loss of human lives. Particularly, these crises seem to have generated the most national public reaction in recent times in comparison with other similar events, that is, post-electoral crises and extra-judicial killings. Furthermore, there is the likelihood that the sensitive nature of these events may influence news-writers' dispositions towards the news stories while reporting.

Aluu Killings

Aluu killings refer to the extra-judicial killings of four male students of the University of Port Harcourt, Nigeria on 5th October, 2012 at Umuokiri, Aluu, Rivers State who were accused of stealing a laptop and a phone. Their death/killing sparked a lot of national outrage as a videotape of the killings, revealing the manner the victims were killed in the face of a jeering mob, was in wide circulation on the Internet. The four victims are generally referred to as the *Aluu 4*.¹

Kaduna Post-Electoral Crisis

The Kaduna post-electoral crisis is one of the major post-electoral crises that have occurred in the Federal Republic of Nigeria. It began on Sunday, 17th April, 2011, shortly after the announcement of the outcome of the nation's presidential polls. Though it was not a conclusive announcement, as more polls were still being collated, the already announced results sparked a major crisis in Kaduna State. This was attributed to the fact that the incumbent, President Goodluck

¹ <http://pmnewsnigeria.com/2012/10/15/anger-over-aluu-killings/>

Jonathan of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) evidently had a wide winning margin when compared to his major opponent, Mohammed Buhari of the Congress for Progressive Change (CPC) whose bulk of supporters were from the North-western states, particularly, Kaduna state. These aggrieved supporters clearly assumed that the poll's outcomes were not representative of their views and thus resorted to violence.²

15.6 Critical Discourse Analysis: The Sociocognitive Model

The socio-cognitive model to Critical Discourse Analysis (henceforth, CDA) posited by van Dijk (1998, 2001, 2006 2009) is one that aptly captures the micro and macro structures of communicative events and the functions that these structures perform in the society. Van Dijk argues that discourse is a social and cognitive practice. He notes that the triangular relationship between social structures and discourse structures is mediated through personal as well as social cognition. Cognition, according to him, is the totality of goals, values, emotions, sociocultural knowledge or assumptions, and other mental structures owned by individuals or shared by a group of people. It is based on cognition that language users build context models (or mental representations) which influence features of discourse production, reproduction, distribution and consumption or interpretation. Discourse is, therefore, a product of social cognition.

The influences that respective context models exert over discourse makes discourse a powerful tool that may be used to sway cognition amongst listeners or readers and may significantly contribute to the ways that an audience interprets messages in a communicative process. When this is the aim of a discourse activity, then there is the likelihood that such discursive text portends some elements of subjectivity. Such elements are indeed strategic, and functional, especially since they summarily reveal the socio-cognitive tendencies of discourse.

Van Dijk (2004) identifies twenty seven ideological strategies that may be employed in subjective discourse. Data for this study reveal evidence of some of these strategies. These include: (i) *implication* (inferring to implicit information); (ii) *lexicalisation* (an ideological strategy that involves deliberate choices of words); (iii) *number game* (using figures and statistics to enhance credibility and display objectivity); (iv) *vagueness* (using vague expressions that do not have well-defined referents); (v) *presupposition* (a submission based on prior knowledge/ shared knowledge); (vi) *evidentiality* (using proofs to support what is being said); (vii) *generalisation* (making generalisations to express biases); (viii) *authority* (citing authorities to validate one's claims). The identified strategies

² <http://blueprintng.com/2012/06/how-post-election-crisis-erupted-in-kaduna-inquiry-report/>

therefore form a rubric for data analysis.

15.7 The Ideational Function of Language

As earlier discussed, the ideational function of language is one of the three metafunctions identified by Halliday (1973). This is in fact a part of his widely-known Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). SFL is based on four main theoretical claims: (i) that language use is functional; (ii) that its function is to make meaning; (iii) that these meanings are influenced by the social and cultural context in which they are exchanged and (iv) that the process of using language is a semiotic one, a process of making meanings by choosing (Eggins, 2004). Evidently, the basic premise of SFL is that language use is purposeful behaviour (Eggins, 2004). The primary goal of SFL therefore, is to understand the linguistic system and how it enables speakers and writers to produce meanings (Bloor & Bloor, 1995).

The ideational function of language implies that language expresses reality, that is, language is used for talking about things. It is informative, narrative and representational (Halliday & Hasan, 1985). The ideational function of language is expressed in the transitivity system of grammar, for instance, in clause and phrase constructions. It highlights the actor (who does what?), action (to whom?) and goal as affected in an expression. Therefore, it identifies the clause as a transmitter ideas and representation of processes or experiences which include action, emotions and relations (Halliday, 1985).

Within the transitivity system, there are a number of processes represented in language use. These are identified as the material process which places emphasis the action; mental process which represents emotions, perceptions and feelings; behavioural process which represents physiological and psychological behaviours such as “breathing; coughing; smiling; dreaming; and staring” (Halliday, 1985:128); verbal process which represents what is said or thought; relational process which describes abstract relations and existential process which represents existence. In addition to processes, the transitivity system represents circumstances, that is, what happen. These are realised in prepositional phrases and adverbials.

For functional purposes, some elements of the clause structure demonstrate mobility within the clause. This offers language users the ability to condition text and talk to perform specific functions. It is therefore plausible that the lexico-grammatical choices of language users help to reflect their ideological stances (Haratyan, 2011).

15.8 Methodology

Data for this study comprise news reports on selected social crises in Nigeria in 2011 and 2012. A total sample size of 50 news reports was purposively obtained from ten widely read Nigerian online newspapers: *Business Day*, *News Direct*, *Osun Defender*, *PM News*, *Premium Times*, *Sahara Reporters*, *The Nation*, *The Sun*, *The Vanguard*

and *This Day*. The sampled news reports are numbered R1- R50 ('R' representing 'reports'). Data is analysed qualitatively within sub-categories that reflect the discursive strategies employed within the texts. Though CDA primarily serves as the theoretical framework for this study, some aspects of ideation in SFL are included within the analysis.

15.9 Lexicalisation and Vagueness

According to van Dijk's provisions for analysing discourse, lexicalisation is a term used to describe the strategic choice of words to emphasise meaning, while vagueness involves hedging. In the context of this study, both strategic choices are closely related to lexicalisation and vagueness, as they carry significant meaning potential. There are examples of these strategies within the reports sampled for this study. For instance, R2 makes a biased claim which may be inferred from the authority of the Inspector-General when it reports that 'the Inspector General's statements "... confirmed... that the police simply abandoned the students...' The lexical choice of "abandoned" connotes negligence and a deliberate act to forsake the *Aluu 4*. The report appears to be taking sides with witnesses' criticism. The report therefore could be said to make a judgmental statement since it is not leaving out the inference to the reader. It seems to create a point of view that the readers are expected to share.

R2 (Excerpts):

The Inspector General's statements only confirmed the criticisms by witnesses that the police simply abandoned the students to their fate when they got to the scene of lynching. A relation of one of the victims actually accused the police of encouraging the mob to kill the boys.

Similarly, the headline in R4 condemns the killing of the *Aluu 4* and calls it an "Unjustifiable Barbaric Act". The choice of the adjective, "barbaric" powerfully connotes "evil", "unrefined" and "primitive". As an attention-getter, the headline constructs and foregrounds sentimental perspectives in the report:

R4 (Headline):

Burning Alive Of Four University Of Port Harcourt Students In Rivers State, Nigeria: An Unjustified Barbaric Act

The report further emphasises that the students were victimised and that they did not have a say. This too appears to take sides with the victims since it explains that they were killed "without an option to try the case", hence the action is to be regarded as a case of 'unacceptable barbaric jungle justice'. The action of the mob is generally constructed negatively in order to attract

sympathy but this consideration fails to acknowledge the fact that the victims might have been culpable.

Again, the headline in R5—“Inspector General of Police Admits Police Ran Away From UNIPORT 4 Lynching”—employs lexical choices that are implicitly satirical—“admits” and “ran away”. “Admits” connotes confession of wrong doing/ failure to carry out assigned responsibility. It places the Inspector General of Police in a vulnerable position. This is compounded with the verb, “ran away”; a lexical choice that implies cowardice and incompetence. It could therefore be said that the headline is set to demean the Nigerian Police, as it highlights in the SFL framework, the behavioural action of the actor:

R5 (Headline):

Inspector General of Police (Behaver) Admits (Process: behavioural)

The sarcastic tone set at the headline is further entrenched within the report—“Mr. Abubakar did not explain how a heavily armed police patrol team was prevented from an active crime scene by people who only had stones”. At the semantic level, two conflicting lexical choices are juxtaposed with each other within the same sentence. It talks of a “heavily armed police patrol team” and “people who had only stones”. The picture painted in the report is that of a Police team that is armed to the teeth. The report thus appears to question the truth and validity of Mr. Abubakar’s statement in a debasing manner. The report further indirectly asserts that stones alone cannot be as harmful as the Police have presented them to be; hence, the ordinariness of the stones is emphasised—“only stones”.

Within the reports examined, certain lexical items are emphatic. While reporting the comment made by the Chairman of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) in relation to the Kaduna post-electoral crisis, R34 makes use of the term, “significantly” in the expression—“the introduction of inter-agency networking among security agencies significantly helped to curb incidents of violence and electoral offences”. Further down within the report, he is quoted as saying “the election was a remarkable improvement over what happened in 2007”. The use of “significantly” and “remarkable” is what van Dijk (2004) refers to as “vagueness”. They do not particularly state to what extent the electoral process had improved since 2007. They however vaguely present a picture of positive change, and subtly highlights the downsides of the 2007 elections. Since the INEC Chairman was not the one who oversaw the 2007 elections, the report seems to show support for the present INEC Chairman, by subtly emphasising the success of the 2011 elections and de-emphasising the downsides, while contrastingly emphasising the flaws of the 2007 elections.

R2 reports that, “Abubakar said the police have in the meantime made a massive deployment of Policemen to the area, including detectives to assist the

State Police Command". In a controversial situation as the *Aluu 4*, the use of "massive deployment" is a strategy of *hedging*. It presents a vague picture of the number of policemen that have been deployed in the area as the definition of what constitutes "massive" is not clear.

These strategies lean towards subjectivity. They appear to seemingly impose the reporters' mental model of the situations being reported on the reading public, by subtly guiding them to see the social situation from the perspective of the report. Therefore, they are capable of creating bias/ sentiments among readers.

15.10 Implication and Presupposition

Implications are propositions derived from socially shared knowledge. They represent the reader or the analyst's assumptions or inferences about the intentions of the speaker/writer (van Dijk, 2000). Presuppositions are signalled by expressions in the text that express or suggest that some proposition is (accepted to be) true, though this might be controversial or not asserted (van Dijk, 2000). It is therefore the implicit link between "shared knowledge" and "knowledge presented as shared/given" (Sbisá, 1999). Both 'implication' and 'presupposition' can introduce ideological orientations into discourse.

For instance, the use of 'confirmed' in R1's lead presupposes that speculations have been made earlier on the circumstances surrounding the murder of *Aluu 4*, however, the report has new information (provided by the Police chief) to offer to readers. Hence, the text is used to perform the textual function of language as he explains that the Police could not rescue the victims because they were "pelted with stones".

R1 (Lead):

The Police has confirmed that the four University of Port Harcourt students killed by a mob at Aluu, Rivers State, were set up by a debtor who masterminded the lynching and eventual death. A police made this known on Monday in Abuja.

During the period that the killing of the *Aluu 4* was in the news, it was likely that Nigerians had begun to make a number of inferences from various news accounts of the situation. R2, therefore, attempts to discredit inferences which might have been drawn from the police explanation on the killings. It does this with the evidence offered that – "a relation of one of the victims actually accused the police of encouraging the mob to kill the boys. While on the one hand, the report is inferring, on the other hand, it gives credence to the speculation that the explanation of the Police was insubstantial. This strategy is used to convince the readers and authenticate the position of the report.

A number of the sampled reports are based on certain presuppositions. An example is seen in R4 which alludes directly to the Nigerian society when it expressly categorises the killing of Aluu4 as “malaise and anomie”. It implies that the Nigerian society is plagued with inappropriate acts of greed and corruption which are a result of poor leadership. Subsequently, the report states that “good leadership beget[s] good followership”, another expression that implies that all forms of injustice and misbehaviour from the Nigerian citizens are products of the failed leadership system in the country.

R4 (Excerpts):

This malaise and anomie appear to be the logical consequence of a corrupt society where children have no good role models. Good government and good leadership beget good followership.

It can also be implied from R34 that until 2011, Nigeria had been experiencing discrepancies in her electoral process. This is based on a shared knowledge that rigging of elections had always been the order of the day. It was usual for ballot boxes to get snatched away and election results not to be transparently computed—“although the 2011 elections was [sic] not perfect, it was [sic] a remarkable departure from the failures of the past” (R34).

Of significance is the strategic positioning of the statement in the concluding paragraph of R2 —“the IG explained that the police patrol team sent to the scene of the lynching could not rescue the students from the mob as members of the team were pelted with stones”. In the same way that a report’s headline creates a first impression on the readers, its conclusion likewise creates a lasting impression on the readers.

These two impression-makers (the headline and the conclusion) in the report are contrasting. It is no coincidence that the headline topically presents the agent as actively carrying out its judicial duty—“Police begin manhunt for mastermind of Aluu 4 killings”, neither is it coincidental that the concluding remark in the report is that the police were rendered impotent because they were pelted with stones. This contrasting strategy employed in the report deliberately highlights the cowardice the police team displayed in the face of crime. The report could be said to summarily express the position that the police are believable, but the police are not capable of discharging their duties.

It is notable that R2 presents a contradicting picture when it initially states that the Police are actively carrying out their duties, and then concludes that “the Inspector General’s statements only confirmed the criticisms by witnesses that the police simply abandoned the students to their fate when they got to the scene of lynching”. It further mockingly explains that the IGP “went on to outline the efforts the police are making to arrest the culprits”. This presents a picture of ‘medicine after death’, that is, after the Police wilfully abandoned the students; the report states that the Police were accused “of encouraging the mob

to kill the boys"; though the report quotes the Police as saying that they were faced with "stiff opposition". The replication of the Police' statement only satirically accentuates the report's conclusion/submission.

The use of implications and presuppositions strategically demonstrates sociocultural meanings and practices within the Nigerian society. They allude to the society by offering implicit information, therefore, proving that discursive practices, the society and contexts in which discourse manifests are inextricably linked. Furthermore, these strategies denounce societal practices and satirise the Nigerian society.

15.11 Authority and Evidentiality

'Authority', as the strategy suggests, is the citing of authorities to persuade people or support one's claims. It is closely related to 'evidentiality' which is a strategy that presents some evidence or proof to accentuate the speaker or writer's knowledge or opinions. These strategies reflect the material process in the ideational function of language, as they tend to offer information on actions expressed in a clause or the activities of the social actors within the clause. For instance, R1 and R7 express the surveillance role of the mass media by informing a mass audience that investigations have begun on the killers of the Aluu 4:

R1 (Headline): Police begin manhunt for mastermind of Aluu 4 killings"

R7 (Headline): Suspect Coxson Lerebori Lucky Arrested As Alleged Ringleader In Lynching Of Four Aluu Students"

The reports, however, in an attempt to convince the readers that the propositions are true, cite authority to validate claims made in the report. Authority here refers to 'the police'. The reports further make constant reference to a number of accounts obtained from relevant authorities, specifically with words such as "the police", "Nigerian police", "the Force", or "Inspector-General of Police", and "Mohammed Abubakar" all through the reports.

In addition to this, it is evident that the R1 attempts to condition the readers not only to accept the report as true, since "the Police has confirmed that the four University of Port Harcourt students killed by a mob at Aluu, Rivers State, were set up by a debtor", but to also believe everything that the report represents; after all, "the IG explained that the police patrol team sent to the scene of the lynching could not rescue the students from the mob as members of the team were pelted with stones". With the ideological strategy of "authority", it is likely that public opinion would be shaped towards accepting the report as valid despite controversial reports that police authorities were complacent in the discharge of their duties. An account such as this may generate some form of empathy from readers towards the police instead, and probably make an

aggrieved audience redirect blames to the government who had probably not adequately equipped the police with resources to handle a mob:

R1 (Excerpts): The Police (Actor) has confirmed (Process: material) that the four University of Port Harcourt students (Recipient) killed (Process: material) by a mob (Actor) at Aluu, Rivers State, were set up (Process: material) by a debtor (Actor)

Another case of citing authority is the headline in R34: “520 persons killed in post-election violence – IGP” and its succeeding lead, “THE Inspector General of Police, Alhaji Hafiz Ringim disclosed, Wednesday, that a total of 520 persons were killed in the violence that followed the outcome of the last presidential election”. In crisis situations in Nigeria, it is not unusual to have contradicting casualty figures from various sources. Therefore, while the headline claims that 520 persons were killed, it is quick to acknowledge its ‘reliable’ source. This strategy is also evident in R36’s headline: “Post-election violence claims 800 in Nigeria – HRW”. This is complemented by “evidentiality” within the contents of the report to place emphasis on the number of lives lost and at the same time help to enhance credibility. For instance, the report combines accounts from Christian and Muslim clergy, as well as police officials, political leaders and witnesses. This is likely geared towards maintaining objectivity so as not to raise any questions from the heterogeneous audience who have varying opinions about social crises. It is likely that if these sources were not consulted, the statistics might be questioned; most especially in a nation like Nigeria where there is diversity of opinions within and across many sectors.

R36 (Excerpts): To arrive at the figure, HRW said it conducted more than 55 interviews with witnesses and victims of the violence, Christian and Muslim clergy, traditional leaders, police officials, civil society leaders, and journalists. Researchers also conducted telephone interviews with witnesses of the violence in Bauchi, Gombe, Kano, and Zamfara states.

In R35, the source of authority is “BBC reports” —

R36 (Excerpts): According to BBC, young supporters of Muhammadu Buhari, who is popular in the north, have been clashing with police...

According to BBC reports, smoke is billowing over the skyline in Kano as angry youths burn tyres across the city

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According to BBC reports, smoke is billowing over the skyline in Kano as angry youths burn tyres across the city

while the Police fired tear gas, appealing for calm on state radio.

STOPPED Though a seemingly reliable source, the report is likely to draw questions from readers who might wonder if foreign coverage of local events is more authentic than the local one. This, for instance, is evident in one of the feedback comments (C1) made by a reader. The use of authority here may presuppose that the Nigerian press is not self-reliant and may proffer bias reporting that corresponds to foreign reportage of the country's events.

C1: Vanguard should be ashamed of reporting according to BBC. In your own country. Then fold up if you can't get the news as it unfolds. You allow someone who is thousands of miles away in London report it and you are proud quoting according to BBC.

Therefore, while the report has employed the strategy of authority to enhance the credibility of the report, what is seemingly implied is the subservience of the Nigerian society to all foreign things. It could be said then, that the report's choice to quote BBC from the beginning to the end, presenting the entire report as hearsay is a way of saying, "if BBC says so, then that is what it is". This is closely related to the verbal process in SFL, linguistically representing the *sayer* in either direct or indirect speech.

From the foregoing, it is evident that the use of strategies such as authority and evidentiality within news reports serve cognitive roles of enhancing credibility, therefore, shaping readers' mental models of the news story being reported.

15.12 Generalisation and Number Game

R7 employs what van Dijk (2004) refers to as "number game" which means the use of figures or statistics to establish credibility. Because the Aluu4 has been in the news, and reports had earlier condemned the Police for their inactivity, a report headline (R7) that reads "Suspect Coxson Lerebori Lucky Arrested As Alleged Ringleader In Lynching Of Four Aluu Students" would not be believed by readers without statistical proofs. The report, therefore, does not fail to include the specific number of suspects arrested by the police. For instance, within the report, the text, "twenty-one people have so far been arrested" is included to make the already stated headline credible.

A similar strategy occurs within R34; in this case, the entire report is pervaded with "number game". The report as a whole is a collection of facts and figures, giving a touch of realness to the report's account of the crisis being reported. It is likely that the report produces figures and statistics in order to rouse readers' emotions and reactions towards the crisis' casualty figure:

R34 (Excerpts)...five hundred and eighteen (518), including six policemen were killed in Kaduna State while two persons were killed in Niger state...

...157 churches, 46 mosques and 1435 houses were burnt. Four hundred and thirty-seven vehicles, 219 motor-cycles were also burnt. Forty five property belonging to the police were also burnt...

...22, 141 persons became internally-displaced in Kaduna State alone while 77 persons were injured and that 157 churches with 46 mosques were burnt in the state...

...Also, 987 shops and 1, 435 houses were burnt as well as 437 vehicles and 219 motorcycles...

R37 makes a successful attempt at arousing the readers' emotions. It begins with the number game in its headline— "Election mayhem: 300 patients with bullet wounds"—, then proceeds to fill the entire report with recounted reports (of trauma, shock and helplessness) from the victims. These victims'/ witnesses' accounts seem to be strategically infused into every segment of the report to shape the reading public's perception of the crises. It tries to portray the victimised state of the victims, giving ample room for pity from the reading public.

In the instances highlighted above, the use of generalisation and number game in the reports in some way help the news writers take a stance towards the news story without explicitly taking sides. Inasmuch as the reports have presented the stories, they have presented these stories from perspectives that help the readers cognitively process the messages produced in a certain way. These strategies could therefore be said to perform the actions of enhancing credibility and also arousing sentiments from readers; hence, shaping public discourse and opinion.

15.13 Topicalisation and Fore-grounding

Topicalisation or foregrounding is the process of bringing to the fore (fronting) an element which a language user wishes to express as salient in the clause structure. This thematising strategy is captured in the textual metafunction of language as *theme*. The headline in R2—"Police: Why we could not save the Port Harcourt 4" foregrounds the agent or actor, "police". It gives prominence to the incapacitation of the police who were faced with "stiff opposition", and makes the readers assume a judgmental stance, as to the validity of the inability of the

police to act; thereby shaping the readers' perceptions to act as critiques of the society.

R4 likewise topicalises the verb phrase, "burning alive" in its headline and in the lead of the report. This, which is the first expression in the report, is strategically used to evoke series of powerful emotions in the readers. It projects imageries of torture, anguish, trauma, pain and heartlessness. The headline foregrounds the act and remains silent on the actor, thereby, creating an agentless clause structure. As proof that the emphasis is on the material process ("burning alive"), the headline further expresses the act as "An Unjustified Barbaric Act". Therefore, the headline already suggests that the report has violated the maxim of objectivity in reportage.

R4 (Headline): Burning Alive Of Four University Of Port Harcourt Students In Rivers State, Nigeria: An Unjustified Barbaric Act

R4 (Lead): The torture and burning alive of four University of Port Harcourt Students at Aluu Community...

Another instance of topicalisation is seen in the headlines in R34 and R37. Deaths, most especially when they occur in large numbers are quick to arrest the emotions of readers. R34 and R37 seize on this knowledge to topicalise the number of persons killed. This agentless topicalisation strategy makes use of number game to attract condemnation from the general public who would react more easily based on the number of people that were killed.

R34: 520 persons killed in post-election violence
– IGP.

R37: Election mayhem: 300 patients with bullet wounds

Using van Dijk's (2004) ideological strategies and Halliday's SFL, the analysis of the texts in this category establishes the relationship between texts, processes and their social condition. Particularly, the analysis investigates the meaning potential of what has been written in the sampled reports and the way they are used to influence the readers' perspectives. This is closely knit with the social condition being reported—two separate instances of unnaturally occurring deaths and the situations surrounding the deaths. Therefore, language use in the reports uses the social contexts being reported as a platform for conditioning the cognitive contexts of the readers.

15.14 Conclusion

This study concludes that news writers are able to overtly and covertly take stances in their news stories. It notes that language use may tilt towards emotionalism in formal mass media reports on socio-political crises. This is done through the use of stance-taking strategies which include topicalisation, lexicalisation, implicatures, presuppositions, generalisations, number game, evidentiality, authority, lexicalisation and vagueness. This study reports that stance-taking strategies are functional in crises discourse in the news, and may be used to assert readers' sentiments or express bias by the news writer as well as convince the audience. Expectedly, the use of such strategies may sometimes give rise to subjective views. For instance, strategies such as authority and evidentiality play cognitive roles of enhancing credibility, therefore, shaping readers' perceptions of the crises. Some other strategies such as generalisation, number game, lexicalisation, vagueness, topicalisation and foregrounding are capable of creating bias and sentiments among readers, thereby, shaping public discourse and opinion. In all, these strategies reveal the stance projected by the news reports and it is possible that as social actors, readers share or contradict the stance of news reports (*see* Ajiboye, 2013).

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