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On: 10 June 2015, At: 04:04

Publisher: Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



Journal of Multicultural Discourses

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rmmd20>

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Published online: 05 Jun 2015.



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To cite this article: Innocent Chiluwa (2015): Radicalist discourse: a study of the stances of Nigeria's Boko Haram and Somalia's Al Shabaab on Twitter, Journal of Multicultural Discourses, DOI: [10.1080/17447143.2015.1041964](https://doi.org/10.1080/17447143.2015.1041964)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17447143.2015.1041964>

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Radicalist discourse: a study of the stances of Nigeria's *Boko Haram* and Somalia's *Al Shabaab* on Twitter

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(Received 21 March 2015; accepted 10 April 2015)

This study examines the features of stance in tweets downloaded from the English Twitter accounts of *Boko Haram* and *Al Shabaab*, referred to as 'radicalist discourse'. Stance, referred to as 'positioning' or point of views of tweeters, is defined in terms of features such as hedges, boosters, attitude markers, self-mention and threats. These express commitment, attitude and judgement of writers on the issues being discussed. Applying mostly qualitative analysis, the study shows that self-mention and attitude markers are the most prevalent features of stance in radicalist discourse. Thus, stance is used to express triumph, satisfaction, anger and hate by the radical groups under study. The various expressions of attitude and self-mention in the data portray positive construction of in-group and negative evaluation of others (i.e. governments and institutions) referred to as *infidels* and *apostates*.

Keywords: radicalist discourse; stance; Boko Haram; Al Shabaab; tweets; Twitter

1. Introduction

Stance refers to the ways writers present themselves and convey their judgements, opinions and commitments in their writings. Thus, authors express 'a textual voice or community recognized personality ...' as well as 'stamp their personal authority onto their arguments or step back and disguise their involvement' (Hyland 2005, 175). The study of stance-taking in discourse takes a cue from the understanding that a speaker's or writer's internal thoughts, opinions and attitudes about a topic being conveyed can be expressed implicitly or explicitly through certain words or grammatical forms the writer chooses (Biber 2006). Hence, Biber and Finegan (1989, 124) define stance as 'the lexical and grammatical expression of attitudes, feelings, judgements, or commitment concerning the propositional content of a message'.

Stance in computer-mediated discourse (CMD), which is of particular interest to the current study, not only manifests in terms of vocabulary (i.e. lexical stance) and grammar (i.e. grammatical stance) but also paralinguistically (see Biber et al. 1999). Paralinguistic devices such as pitch, degree of loudness, duration of sound in verbal or synchronous online communications are often depicted in CMD through signs and some typographical conventions (Park 2007). *Affect* (or emotion), for example, is often depicted by *emoticons* showing either sadness or joy (see Gales 2010, 58–59). The current study however focuses on lexical and grammatical stances since online discourse produced by radical groups does not reflect non-linguistic devices probably because the writers' stances are

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expressed more through the written word than paralinguistic signs. Unfortunately there was none at all in the data for this study.

Some studies on religious violence, particularly the Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria, have examined its historical and political implications (See Loimeier 2012; Okemi 2013; Burchard 2014). However, stance-taking in discourse, especially of radical and terrorist groups in Africa in the context of computer-mediated communication (CMC) and their broader political implications, is almost non-existent. Hence, certain questions about online behaviours of radicalist (or terrorist) groups in Nigeria, Mali, Somalia or Sudan have not really been answered. For example, how have these groups utilized the Internet or social media to spread their ideologies in an attempt to solicit for supports of or radicalize other Internet users? What stance do they take and how do they position themselves in CMD that they produce given the overwhelming influence of information technology in modern (political) communication?

This study shows that online discourses associated with rebel groups and radical movements not only reflect total commitment to some particular positions and viewpoints in texts, but also express emotional commitment to those viewpoints (Chilwa, in press). This study further attempts to provide answers to the following questions: (1) How do radicalist groups in Nigeria and Mali express their viewpoints and emotional commitment through stance markers (e.g. boosters and hedges)? (2) How do they express ideology through attitude markers, self-mention and threats? The three aspects of stance identified by Hyland (2005) namely evidentiality, affect and presence expressed as *hedges*, *boosters*, *attitude markers* and *self-mention* (and I add *threats*) are applied in the analysis.

2. Social media in political communication

Social media have provided a medium for individuals and groups to make their voices heard. Although they started off as a digital platform for networking among friends, social media have since turned into a dynamic resource for sociopolitical and civil engagements. Popular responses through digital social networks have been the radical rejection of erstwhile oppressive regimes and the demand for sociopolitical change. Radical and rebel groups also utilize the opportunities and affordances provided by digital communication resources to advance their positions and activities. Studies on the use of social media for civil and political purposes have established that *Twitter* in particular is the fastest and most critical campaign tool for reaching and mobilizing people; for gathering data and responding to public reactions (Vergeer and Hermans 2013; Parker 2012). Individuals and social groups who are concerned about social developments and events in their various countries have also mobilized protests using social media (web 2.0, i.e. social networking sites, blogs, wikis, etc.). In the Tunisian Revolution for example, social media acted as an important resource for popular mobilization against the government by allowing digital media practitioners to break the national media restriction to make information available for the mainstream media. Social media also provided the basis for intergroup collaboration that facilitated mass participation; thus overcame the collective action problem through reporting the magnitude of events that raised the perception of success for the protesters (Breuer et al. 2012, 1). Direct reporting of events with supporting photographs added 'emotional mobilization' through 'depicting the worst atrocities associated with the government's response' to the protests (2).

Most of the individual and group communications/protests that take place on digital media platforms consist of 'positioning' of individual or group arguments, or point of view of speakers and writers. As highlighted above, this point of view generally

expresses the writer's attitude, commitment and opinion towards the proposition or the subject matter in question. This positioning or point of view is referred to as *stance* (Hyland 2005).

Political and cultural discourses often highlight group relations, conflicts and resistances and involve debates that are often publicized by the mass media and the Internet. And generally, stances reflect the kind of social and cultural positions, assumptions and identities people take in relations to other members of the society. Ideologies expressed through stance-taking generally recognize the main ideological and cultural assumptions of certain groups as well as other groups, and when people feel that their identities, cultures and social rights are infringed upon, they resist and conflict results. This nature of ideologies characterizes political groups, social movements or rebel/terrorist groups (van Dijk 2005). Hence, having proper understanding of people's cultural and social uniqueness as expressed in the kind of discourses they produce, as well as proper respect for such cultural and ideological positions and stances, will achieve social harmony. Like Shi-xu (in press) rightly observes, being conscious of people's cultural differences and adopting critically minded approaches to communication towards them will foster cultural coexistence, harmony and prosperity. In the study of the stances of the rebel/terrorist groups on Twitter, which highlights their positions (in terms of why they do what they do; what cultural assumptions they espouse and what they wish to be known for), this study recognizes that human discourses are culturally differentiated and competitive in terms of groups' worldviews, identities, interests, values or representations (see Shi-xu 2009); therefore, having the right understanding of and proper attitude towards the rebels groups in question, in terms of their uniqueness; and they in turn, having respect to the society's expectations of them, will likely foster peace and social harmony.

3. Boko Haram

Boko Haram was founded in 2002 by a Muslim cleric, known as *Mohammed Yusuf* in Maiduguri, Northeastern Nigeria. *Boko Haram*, (in Hausa) stands for 'western education is sacrilegious', and the group claims to reject everything Western, including education and social lifestyle, and has carried out attacks on schools, beer halls and pubs. The radical Islamic group insists on a strict adoption of *Sharia* in all parts of Nigeria particularly the north eastern part of Nigeria, and have attacked some northern governors accused of compromising Islamic standards. 'Sharia' refers to the moral code and religious law of a prophetic religion (e.g. Islam); Sharia law is a major source of legislation in various Muslim countries (see Bearman et al. 2014). In June 2009 for instance, Boko Haram, embarked on an armed uprising, which according to them was aimed at fighting corruption and to Islamize the entire northern states. The uprising was confronted by the Nigerian military, resulting in the death of over 700 sect members. For the group, this has meant a greater reason to pursue its objectives (see Chilwa and Adegoke 2013).

Boko Haram, which has since formally confirmed its link with al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb and the Somalia-based *Al Shabaab*, operates also in Mali and probably Somalia (Blair 2012; Olagunju 2012), and members call themselves the 'Nigerian Taliban'. The group is also said to have split into three factions operating in Cameroon, Chad and Niger with some possible links to some terrorist groups in North Africa (Onuah and Eboh 2011). Several bombings at beer pubs, banks and police stations for which Boko Haram claimed responsibility have resulted in several deaths. On 26 August 2011 for instance, the radicals bombed the United Nations Headquarters at Abuja killing over

20 people and wounded 116 others. A bomb attack on St. Theresa's Catholic Church in Madalla (a town in Niger state) on the 25 December 2011 resulted in the death of over 35 worshippers. Since, its formation, the group is said to be responsible for the death of over 3000 people (Christians and Muslims alike) in northern Nigeria. Due to frequent series of violent attacks that destroyed government buildings and killing of officials and civilians in the northern states, the Nigeria Government in May 2013 declared a state of emergency in Adamawa, Borno and Yobe states and ordered more military troops to be deployed in the affected states (see *BBC News*, May 15, 2013). This state of emergency, however, does not seem to have deterred the militants. On 8 July 2013, Boko Haram attacked a boarding school at Mamudo in Yobe state, killing over 30 students and a teacher when their dormitory was doused in fuel and set on fire. Some who tried to escape were shot dead (*Amnesty International*, July 8, 2013). In a similar attack (29 September 2013), the sect in spite of the state of emergency, again killed over 40 students at a College of Agriculture at Gubja in Yobe state. On the 25 February 2014, the group attacked a Federal Government Secondary School at Buni Yadi in Yobe state and murdered 59 students while they slept in their dormitories (*Premium Times*, February 26, 2014). On 14 April 2014, *Boko Haram* again bombed a bus station at *Nyanya* in the Nigerian federal capital (Abuja) killing 75 people and injuring over 200. The following day, the Islamist militants kidnapped 276 girls at a government school in Chibok (Borno state) and burnt down the school; 43 of the girls escaped, and as at the time of this research, over 200 girls were still missing. Several attacks and sacking of whole villages in the northeast have continued up till the early parts of 2015. Some villages have even been taken over by them.

4. Al Shabaab

Al Shabaab which in Arabic means 'the youth,' was founded in 2006 as a radical arm of the Union of Islamic Courts in Mogadishu and is estimated to control over 7000 fighters (see Calamur 2013). Their leader *Aden Hashi Ayro* was killed in a US air strike in May 2008 and was replaced by *Ahmed Abdi Godane* (or *Abu Zubayr*) as their top commander (Ungerleider 2013). *Al Shabaab* operates from the Southern and Central Somalia with a mission to create a fundamentalist Islamic state in Somalia. It enforces a harsh interpretation of the Sharia and like the Boko Haram, prohibits Western lifestyle and entertainment. Hence, it condemns Western education, music, movies, haircut, etc., and had kidnapped and conscripted schoolchildren to fight in battles. They attack non-Muslims, including Christians and are a major threat to humanitarian and other international workers. For instance, the group was said to be responsible for the assassination of Somali peace activists, international aid workers, journalists and numerous civil society personnel, and was blamed for blocking the delivery of aid from some Western relief agencies during the 2011 famine that killed thousands of Somalis (see Masters 2013).

Members of *Al Shabaab* are said to be drawn from different clans and regional sub-clans and their militant groups. They also exert influences and recruit radicalized youths from elsewhere in the African sub-regions. Some radicalized American youths from the Somali-American Diaspora are also said to have been recruited. According to Gentleman (2011), educated Westerners work for *Al Shabaab* and several Somali-Americans have killed themselves as suicide bombers. Some non-Somali Westerners (including a man from Alabama) is also said to serve as battlefield commanders.

As an affiliate of *Al-Qaeda*, *Al Shabaab* has resisted and fought against the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) of Somalia and its allies, including the African Union Mission in Somalia peacekeepers, and non-governmental aid organizations. The group is said to be more interested in their nationalistic battle against the TFG and hopes to regain control of Southern and Central regions of Somalia, which it had attacked and took over in 2006 but was overthrown by the Somali Government with the help of Ethiopian forces. The in-fighting and military pressure from the Somali Government and its allies has continued to liberate key towns from Al Shabaab. However, the group had continued to threaten neighbouring African countries and Western interests in Africa. Al Shabaab had claimed responsibility for several bombing attacks including suicide bombings in Mogadishu and in central and northern Somalia. The attacks had targeted Somali Government officials and their allies. They have also carried out some five coordinated suicide car bombings in October 2008 that simultaneously hit targets in two cities in northern Somalia killing about 26 people and injuring 29 others. Al Shabaab also claimed responsibility for the twin suicide bombings in Kampala (Uganda) on 11 July 2010 that killed over 70 people who gathered to watch the world cup. The USA designated this group as foreign terrorist organization and their leader as a global terrorist in 2008 (see <http://www.cfr.org/somalia/al-shabaab/p18650>).

5. Tweets in radicalist discourse

I shall define ‘radicalist discourse’ broadly as language use by radical movements and rebel groups, either written or spoken. This genre of discourse shares similar features with protest discourse such as language use in a direct rejection of perceived victimization, denial of rights, marginalization or human rights violations by national or regional governments. Literature on discourse by radical/terrorist groups is not common. Gales (2010) describes the ideology of ‘threatening communication’, which does not specify particular threats by rebel groups: anyone can issue a threat, and threats are only one feature of radicalist discourse.

Radicalist discourse is associated with sociopolitical activism as well as calls for actions in form of riots and protests. Such calls generally involve the expression of radical ideas and opinions through strong language that oppose/resist existing sociopolitical structures. Radical/terrorist groups like the Boko Haram of Nigeria and the Somalia’s Al Shabaab, for example, have used *Twitter* to enunciate not only their ideological orientations but also to attack national governments, as well as enhance their own reputation and prestige. Unlike the discourse of resistance (Chiluwa 2012b) in organized rebellions like those being witnessed in the Arab spring or occupy movements, language use by radical groups combines highly organized resistance with threats and verbal war. Ungerleider (2013), calls this verbal war ‘hate speech’. Al Shabaab’s *Twitter* accounts have been closed down at different times for using the Twitter platform to spread ‘linguistic violence’ (Gay 1999).

Discourse of radicalism is highly ideological and generally characterized by the assertion of group identity; radical demands for social justice; rejection of religious tolerance and demand for the restoration of individual or group rights/privileges that are assumed to have been denied by governments or institutions. The structure of ideological discourse by rebel groups includes the enunciation of ‘we’ in-group in the establishment of religious or cultural identity and the definition of membership; they also identify and define their friends and enemies; establish their goals and group ideology as the basis for their activities (see van Dijk 2005). In most cases radicalized members of this group

denounce the ‘other’ often referred to as ‘infidels’ or ‘apostates’. Boko Haram and Al Shabaab have one thing in common, i.e., the fact that both groups espouse Islamic religious ideology and claim to defend Islam from corruption by Western enemies. They also advocate strict adherence to Sharia laws and apply violence to enforce Jihadism; thus, reject Western and ‘un-Islamic’ influences. But they have also been criticized by other Muslims for their extreme violent approach in the pursuit of Jihad. In some cases, liberal Muslims have been attacked and killed by Boko Haram in northern Nigeria, and some liberal Muslim clerics have also been persecuted by Al Shabaab.

Twitter has also been used not only to champion revolutionary approaches through activism but also to recruit as well as radicalize protesters and militants (see Gonzalez-Bailon et al. 2012). Gonzalez-Bailon (2011) had earlier explained that when activists make calls to action from different online sources (including *Twitter*), their effects were amplified, resulting in ‘recruitment bursts’, which is responsible for the recruitment of many users who were responding to the collective behaviour of others (1). Because the messages of tweets are usually brief, users can send several tweets and respond to others within a very short time. ‘Tweeters’ report and respond to ongoing events and contribute to discussions. Except in some rare cases (i.e. cases of spreading of verbal attacks by rebel groups), ‘tweeting’ is usually unrestricted. And with the added advantage of ‘retweeting’ (an equivalent of email forwarding where users post messages originally posted to others) (see Boyd et al. 2010), *Twitter* enables users to coordinate events and disseminate news and information on some specific trendy topics.

As noted above, the use of *Twitter* by Islamist militant groups (e.g. Al Shabaab and Boko Haram) has often been characterized by linguistic violence or ‘twitter terrorism’ (Gentleman 2011) against institutions and governments accused of undermining their rights to exist. Boko Haram, for example, has used *Twitter* to project their ideological stance and accuse northern Nigerian governors of compromising Islamic teachings. They have also applied their tweets to assert their identity and goals as well as mobilize supporters (see Chilwa and Adegoke 2013). According to Gentleman (2011), terrorist organizations utilize the Internet to recruit individuals, fundraise and distribute propaganda more efficiently than they had done in time past. Some radicalize young people (e.g. Americans) and other recruits from elsewhere have gone ahead to become social media ‘stars’ and use the English language *Twitter* feeds to serve as a link between their organizations and the outside world. Thus, their forms of activism have involved the use of *Twitter* to manage their public diplomacy and taunt regional enemies (Gentleman 2011). The sample below is an example of tweets by *Al Shabaab* to the Kenyan army:

Your inexperienced boys flee from confrontation & flinck in the face of death. (@HSMPress)

The real identity and locations of the tweeters are uncertain. For Boko Haram, it is possible that the tweeters are radicalized Muslim youths in northern Nigeria with evidence that some of the tweets end with Hausa slogans (users of this type of slogans are likely Muslims; see an example below). The tweets may also have been written by some southern youths who support Boko Haram’s mission and tactics.

@_BokoHaram @_Boko_Haram

As drops of water we are firing Arewa and infidel Nigeria.

Yaro dan is cene.

Since the tweets are written in English, the audience is not necessarily Muslims or Hausa speaking northerners/Fulanis but all Africans, and may also have aimed at reaching outsiders, especially radicalized Muslims from other countries in Europe and the USA. The tweets have the potential to radicalize Muslims from other parts of the Africa where they are less likely to speak Hausa (See Chiluiwa and Ajiboye 2014).

6. Linguistic features of tweets

In terms of style and structure, CMD combines features of spoken and written language (e.g. English). Honeycutt and Herring (2009), for instance, identify the conversational patterns of language use in Twitter that is characteristic of person to person exchanges. And tweets have also been described as an ‘electronic word of mouth’, due to their often informal manifestations (Jansen et al. 2009). In many instances, Internet language (including Twitter) departs from grammatical norms that are associated with Standard (English) writing. According to Crystal (2011), lexical and grammatical forms of online communication are characteristic of short forms, sentence fragments and lengthy coordinated sentences. It is also not uncommon to find multiple instances of subordination, and elaborately balanced syntactic patterns and items of vocabulary that are never spoken. Interestingly, there is also evidence of ‘nonsense vocabulary’, obscenity and slang in online writing (including Twitter; 18). Crystal further observes that grammatical complexity also exists in tweets, which is reflective to higher levels of discourse organization (47). This means that online communication combines evidence of standard and non-standard writings.

Since *Twitter* is constrained by space, tweeters are forced to restrict their writings to the available space (not more than 140 characters); this often results in sentence fragments or minor sentences. But in most cases, points of view of writers (like radical groups) are usually not in any way endangered, except in cases of complete incoherence arising from typing errors. This is consistent with the original purpose and use of social media as a tool for networking among young people, who are easily amenable to linguistic creativity and play. However, tweets that are posted on the Twitter accounts of radical/rebel groups lack the playful nature of digital communication; thus, do not contain any form of linguistic creativity; short forms are generally rare or completely absent. Thus, Twitter language of Boko Haram and Al Shabaab falls within the generic category described by Hu et al. (2013) as ‘surprisingly formal’ with evidence of the use of grammatical intensifiers and personal pronouns and could well be described as ‘conservative and less informal than SMS and online chat’ (1).

But Twitter constrains its users to some contextual features such as linguistic/typographic markers like the *hashtag* (#) or @ sign (e.g. @boko haram). The latter brings other tweeters into a conversation, republishing other tweets and flagging topics that may be adopted by multiple users (Zappavigna 2011). Prefixing an item with a *hashtag* (i.e. #) indicates that some posts have been grouped under a semantic topic such as #government or #bokophilosophy. This is to enable others to follow conversations that centre on a particular topic.

Zappavigna (2011) observes that tweets perform both ideational and interpersonal functions following the systemic functional theory. Within the context of interpersonal meaning is ‘evaluation’, where ‘language is used to build power and solidarity by adopting stances and referring to other texts’ (794). To analyse evaluative meaning draws on a theory of appraisal (Martin and White 2005), which views linguistic patterning in a text as a meaning potential for emotional language. This emotional language is expressed

in *attitude* (making evaluations), *engagement* (bringing other voices into the text and *graduation* (scaling up or down evaluation; Zappavigna 2011). The analysis of stance in the present study relies mainly on the evaluative character of stance to reflect attitude and judgement.

7. Stance in discourse

Several scholars and authors adopt different terminologies for stance and focus on different aspects of positioning in various genres of discourse. For instance, Biber's and Finnegan's (1989) study was based on recorded written and spoken texts, while Ochs (1990) focused on the analysis of conversational interactions. Hyland (2005) was concerned with academic discourse of published research articles. These are among several other approaches to stance studies applied to different genres of language use.

As pointed out in the Introduction, the present study adopts Hyland's (2005) approach to the study of stance. Here, stance is defined as 'positioning' or 'adopting a point of view in relation to both the issues discussed in the text and to others who hold points of view on those issues'. 'In claiming the right to be heard and their work taken seriously ... stance takers express a textual "voice" or community recognized personality ...' (175). And this can be seen as an attitudinal dimension and includes features which refer to the ways writers present themselves and convey their judgements, opinions and commitments.

According to Hyland, stance consists of evidentiality, affect and presence, which are expressed in a text as *hedges*, *boosters*, *attitude markers* and *self-mention*. *Evidentiality* is the author's position or his expressed commitment to his topic and the credibility of his/her claims, as well as his possible impact on the reader; *affect* reflects the writer's communication of attitude and feeling in his proposition and *presence* is how the writer chooses to project himself/herself (Hyland 2005, 178). 'Hedges' in discourse is a point where the writer withholds commitment to a proposition, leaving the information he/she presents as an opinion rather than a fact. This implies that a statement is based on plausible reasoning rather than certain knowledge (Hyland 2005). Hedges manifests in grammar as *adverbs* (e.g. probably, possibly, perhaps, may be, etc.), *modals* (may, might), *prepositional phrases* (kind of, sort of), etc.

Unlike hedges, boosters such as *certainly*, *clearly*, *obviously*, *surely*, *without/no doubt*, etc. are used to express the writer's certainty of a proposition (or findings) and also to mark the level of commitment and involvement with the topic and solidarity with his/her audience. Boosters also function to stress shared information, group membership and engagement with readers (Hyland 1999, 2005).

Attitude markers express the writer's affect (i.e. emotions and feelings) towards a topic or proposition. Attitude markers may express surprise, importance, frustration, agreement, etc. rather than commitment (Hyland 2005). 'Self-mention' is the use of personal pronoun 'I' or 'we' (and 'us'), and the possessive adjective 'our' to indicate proposition, affect and interpersonal information (Hyland 2001, 2005). This is not common in scientific writings (Hyland 2005) but the presence or absence of a definite reference indicates the type of authorial identity the writer wishes to adopt in his/her work. Thus, Hyland (2005) version of stance is viewed as the most appropriate in the analysis of stance in radicalist online discourse as it provides the right framework for examining points of view, and emotional commitment of the writers.

8. Methodology

Data for this study comprise mainly tweets downloaded from the Boko Haram English Language Twitter profile and that of *Al Shabaab* between 2012 and 2014. As at the time of this research, there were only 148 tweets (of 3090 words) and retweets (with 565 followers and 8 following) on the Boko Haram account (i.e. @Boko Haram) posted between 2011 and 2012. Surprisingly, the Boko Haram Twitter account appears dormant since 2012. The reasons for this inactivity in the account are not immediately known. Possible reasons could be that those who operated the account suddenly withdrew their supports for the group; second, Boko Haram deliberately abandoned their English language account for whatever reason. When the sect first came on Twitter, they operated two separate accounts namely: @Boko Haram (republic of Arewa) and @Boko Haram (Chadian border). The latter account was shut down not long afterwards, probably for using it to spread linguistic violence. The former account (i.e. @Boko Haram, republic of Arewa) was left, where I obtained the data for this study. Al Shabaab's English language account was closed down by Twitter shortly after the attack on Nairobi Westgate Shopping Mall for breaking Twitter's terms of service, (i.e. Twitter prohibits the use of Twitter for making threats of violence; see *AP 24 September 2013*). Al Shabaab had live-tweeted the Mall attack and posted tweets that defended the mass killings and threatened more bloodshed (see Ortiz 2013). An example below is a live tweet by Al Shabaab during the Westgate attack:

SHAB7. MSM Press Office @HSM_PR

The Mujahideen entered #Westgate Mall today at around noon and are still inside the mall, fighting the #Kenyan Kuffar inside their own turf

Al Shabaab Twitter feed (i.e. @HSMPress) carries a self-identify description (i.e. 'Harakat Al Shabaab Al Mujahideen is an Islamic movement that governs South & Central Somalia and part of the global struggle towards the revival of Islamic Khilaafa'). The Boko Haram account on the other hand carries a slogan: 'I hate School', which appears as a logo. It also carries an explanation such as 'to hate is human, to bomb is divine'. 'We hate western inventions including Twitter: however, we feel the necessity to use it to reach out to our fans'. The first tweet by Al Shabaab is in the name of God with the following words: 'In the name of God, the most gracious, the most merciful'.

The data rely on tweets that were posted by Al Shabaab (already about 20 tweets that attracted 3016 followers) before the Twitter account was shut down. A few other tweets posted from 2011 are included totally 34 tweets (of 800 words). Altogether this study examines 182 tweets, which I think is enough for a study of groups that do less talk and more (violent) actions. Although this number is very small, being what was available at the time of research, they give sufficient insight to the discursive character of radicalist discourse in the social media. The analysis is mainly qualitative involving textual/discourse analysis of the tweet samples showing the functions of the stance markers being studied. A small amount of quantitative analysis is also adopted in order to account for the frequencies of the stance markers in the data.

9. Analysis and discussion

Analysis examines the expression of stance following the Hyland's model discussed above, where stance is viewed in terms of evidentiality, affect and presence manifesting as hedges, boosters, attitude markers and self-mention. First, evidentiality or point of

view is discussed independently in order to fully examine the position of the radicalist groups under study.

9.1. Evidentiality in radicalist discourse

In projecting their positions in texts, writers (including tweeters) are usually aware that their readers also have points of view on the issues they discuss. Hence their goal is to persuade and possibly convince their readers to adopt their own point of view. Every written discourse therefore anticipates a response from the reader as the discourse itself belongs to a community whose members already hold certain forms of argument or position on the issues being discussed (Hyland 2005). ‘Evidentiality’ in the context of this study stands for tweet authors’ positions, which explain the reasons why the radical groups under study have carried out series of attacks in Nigeria and Somalia, and how they have engaged the readers in their argument, while negotiating solidarity.

Radicalist discourse is characterized by features that suggest group reaction to perceived injustice. Some radical groups lay claim to their right to resistance against institutional victimization, persecution by national/regional governments, ethnic/religious marginalization or racial discrimination (see Chilwa 2011). The overall position of the Islamic tweeters in the radicalist discourse of tweets has been the creation of the Islamic state of Northern Nigeria strictly governed by the *Sharia* law (for the Boko Haram), and the control of Southern and Central regions of Somalia as a Sovereign Islamic state by the Al Shabaab. Tweets in this context are mainly used as propaganda against government actions, or to mobilize support and followership. Boko Haram claims responsibility to protect Islam through violence from compromise and total collapse in northern Nigeria, where some Muslim governors (according to them) have compromised Muslim standards and adopted Western lifestyle. The entire northern Nigeria is viewed as polluted by Western influence and the violation of *Sharia* laws. Hence, the sect members seek not only to secure a separate government in the north but also claim to liberate the people and defend sociocultural and moral ideals (Chilwa and Ajiboye 2014). This type of argument in a predominant Muslim north and in a fairly populated Muslim south is most likely to attract support, even among the liberal Muslims who have criticized the sect’s violent method of achieving Jihad in northern Nigeria. However, Boko Haram is not alone in their agitation for a separate state in Nigeria: the Biafra campaign groups have consistently made similar demands for an independent state of the Igbos (see Chilwa 2012b). Thus, Boko Haram is not only making a sentimental appeal but also appeals to the shared knowledge between them and the reader, as a form of engaging the reader’s positioning in constructing similar line of reasoning since they share same sociopolitical and cultural context.

It is therefore clear that the Radicalist groups under study seek both political and religious independence from their national and regional governments. They have also made this position clear in their tweets. Below is an example from *Al Shabaab* Twitter account:

SHAB2. MSM Press Office @HSM_PR

The attack at Westgate Mall is just a very tiny fraction of what Muslims in Somalia experience at the hands of Kenyan invaders.

SHAB5.HSMMPRESS @HSMMPRESS1

The Mujahideen strive to liberate Muslim lands & lift the oppression from Muslims who are forced to live under the heel of Kafir Invasion.

The point of view expressed in the above tweets is simply that the writers view their activities as a revenge mission for some perceived injustice meted to Somali Muslims by the Kenyan authorities. Attacks on the Westgate mall were viewed as an action to 'liberate' Muslims from the assumed oppression. Thus, Al Shabaab take the position of liberators. But as serious as the above allegations may sound, there are no obvious documented proofs that Muslims have been oppressed by the Somali governments (as far as I know). It is, however, possible that the Somali Government's battle with Al Shabaab may have resulted in the death of civilians. In which case, any group in Somalia that represents Islamic interests has the right to seek legal action against the government if there is indeed evidence of oppression against Muslims in Somalia, rather than direct attacks on civilians at a shopping mall.

Nigeria's Boko Haram have also made similar mission statements in the past. However, in the examples from the data below, the Islamic fundamentalists appear to be committed to 'liberating' not only the northern states but also the entire country from the corrupt leadership of the 'infidel government of Nigeria'. This argument is expressed in the examples below. (It is important to mention here that the tweets being analysed are those written by *Boko Haram* and not their supporters. Those written by their supporters appear in the data as retweets.)

BOK2. BOKO HARAM @BOKO_HARAMM

We love Nigerians, it's only the nigerian polis, nigerian army, drunkards, prostitutes, politicians, usurers, teachers, touts we can't stand.

BOK3. BOKO HARAM @BOKO_HARAMM

2 fools: Obasanjo and Babangida (plus one infidel dunce in aso rock) taking 150 million people for fools. Join Arewa Boko republic.

BOK4. BOKO HARAM @BOKO_HARAMM

We have left Nigeria. We are in Boko Republic of Arewa. The infidel nig. govt and kafiri army should leave us.

In expressing stance as positioning and point of view, Boko Haram in the above tweets also claim to be liberators of Nigerians, again assuming the position of 'lovers of Nigeria'. By implication, their activities are not to be viewed as antisocial, rather as 'freedom fighting'. In *BOK4* above, they take the position of non-Nigerians, who are fighting for the creation of the so-called 'Republic of Arewa'.

Apart from building on some shared background knowledge, thus constructing solidarity with the reader, tweeters attempt to convince their readers by making calls to them to adopt a particular viewpoint. In *BOK3* above, the tweet calls on the reader to 'join Arewa Boko republic'. This form of engagement involves rhetorically pulling the reader to 'critical points, predicting possible objections, and guiding them to particular interpretations' of the issues at hand (Hyland 2005, 182). For example, Nigerians are called upon to see Boko Haram as friends rather than enemies.

The Boko Haram tweeters have actually taken the advantage of the common knowledge of the history of Nigeria's underdevelopment usually attributed to government corruption, ineptitude and incompetence. Already, several voices in the Nigerian society are demanding for a social revolution, similar to those currently being witnessed in North Africa (Chiluwa 2012a). Hence, the Boko Haram tweeters adopt this persuasive engagement of the reader in assigning to the Nigerian reading public a role (who are already tired of corruption in Nigeria) in creating the argument and assuming their solidarity.

Having established the conventional position and textual voice of Boko Haram and Al Shabaab on Twitter in their struggle to establish dominant Islamic enclaves in their separate Africa sub-regions, I now examine how they express their commitment, attitude, emotion or feelings through hedges, boosters, attitude markers, self-mention and threats in the discourse of sociopolitical and religious freedom.

9.2. Hedges

According to Hyland (1998), hedges (e.g. probably, possibly, etc.) enable the writer to involve the reader as participant in the argument, conveying modesty or respect for the view of others. So hedging does not make specific claims in terms of reality or factuality. Interestingly, radicalist discourse makes claims most of the time. In the entire data of the Al Shabaab tweets, only four instances of grammatical hedging are evident, where hedges are used to express mere disbelief in a perpetual closure of the Al Shabaab Twitter account and to give an unconfirmed number of deaths the group claimed responsibility for. Here are the examples:

SHAB14. HSM PRESS @HSM PRESS!

Freedom of speech is but a meaningless rhetoric. So long @HSM Press! *You might* be gone, but your legacy lives on.

SHAB15. HSM PRESS @HSM PRESS!

And it is *arguable* that the closure of the account is a clear indication of the effectiveness of the message emanating from the 'other side'.

SHAB16. HSM PRESS @HSM PRESS!

The Mujahideen have last night carried out a large offensive against the #Ethiopian invaders in Bidoa, killing *at least* 24 of the invaders.

Hedges in the above samples are certainly not intended to express deference or modesty to the opinion of readers. This is not surprising considering the general nature of radicalist discourse. In many cases, radicalist discourse has been characterized by claim-making (sometimes unconfirmed claims), assertive statements and accusations, all of which do not require the use of hedges. This explains why there are so few occurrences of hedges in the data. In *SHAB14* above, 'you might be gone' is rather used in defence of the existence of their Twitter account (i.e. @HSM Press) that was closed down for violating Twitter's operational guidelines. Al Shabaab views this closure as an infringement on their freedom speech. Here, hedging is used as rhetorical strategy to 'mourn' the demise of @HSM Press and to indirectly maintain that it has not really died. This is confirmed by the fact that the account was reopened after a short while before the Westgate attack. The closure following the Westgate attack was about the fifth time in two year and the second time in 2013 (see *Associated Press*, 23 September 2013). Even after the English language account was suspended, the Arabic language accounts continued to operate and were used to denounce the suspension as media censorship and infringement on their rights to freedom of speech (see <http://www.news24.com/Technology/News/Insurgents-Twitter-account-suspended-20130125>). This message is both explicitly and implicitly conveyed in the samples above.

In the Boko Haram data, again only four instances of hedging were used (e.g. 'we are *not sure* this is ...'), which of course is less frequent in comparison with that of Al Shabaab. This is expected because, as highlighted above, tweets and statements by rebel groups seem to hardly consider the point of view of reader. In the samples below, the verb

phrase ‘thinking of’ is used to indicate *undecidedness* rather than opinion. The use of hedges like ‘we think’ indicates that a statement is not based on empirical findings, rather on the author’s evaluative judgement. But in the Boko Haram’s case, they had simply not made up their mind to carry out the activities expressed in the tweets.

BOK10. BOKO HARAM @BOKO_HARAMM

We are *thinking of* banning jeans, Tshirt and Tmlewin shirts ... jelabia is more suitable to the Maiduguri sun and for banks #1STEPAHEAD.

BOK11. BOKO HARAM @BOKO_HARAMM

Boko Haramm *thinking of* replacing cigarettes with sheesha ... healthier and with more vitamins #PROGRESS.

In their effort to Islamize the north and carry out their intended sociocultural revolution, Boko Haram intends to ban Western lifestyle. Western lifestyle includes fashion and the use of clothing items associated with the West such as jeans and T-shirts and replace them with local wears (e.g. ‘jelabia’ – a locally made *long gown*). They also intend to ban smoking and replace it with a local stuff (e.g. ‘sheesha’; see Chiluiwa and Adegoke 2013). Since this way of ‘thinking’ will eventually amount to a mandatory infringement on peoples’ rights to socialization and choice of a lifestyle, it becomes more like threats. It is therefore right to conclude that hedges defined in terms of holding backing commitment to a proposition (as they appear in academic discourse) do not really exist in radicalist discourse.

9.3. Boosters

Boosters, such as *certainly, clearly, obviously, surely, etc.*, enable writers to present their work with assurance while achieving interpersonal solidarity (Hyland 2005). In the Al Shabaab tweets below, the writers attempt to sound convincing by introducing some forms of boosters such as ‘a clear’, to argue against the illegality of the closure of their Twitter account, which they (Al Shabaab) attribute to Twitter’s fear of the effectiveness of their (Al Shabaab’s) message often viewed by the public as coming from the ‘other side’ (i.e. terrorists). They also use ‘everything practically possible’ to appeal to the understanding of the reader in their explanation that women and children were not targeted in the Westgate attack.

SHAB15. HSMMPRESS @HSMMPRESS1

...the closure of the account is a *clear* indication of the effectiveness of the message emanating from the ‘other side.

SHAB4. MSM Press Office @HSM_PR

Mujahideen have no desire to kill women & children and have done *everything practically possible* to evacuate them before attacking.

While it is possible that the authors of the above tweets may have anticipated the readers’ solidarity with the ‘clarity’ of the propositions, it is also doubtful that readers (i.e. non-supporters of Al Shabaab) agree that the Al Shabaab’s Twitter account was ethically effective. Al Shabaab’s argument in *SHAB4* is also hardly convincing since reports confirmed that both women and children were injured in the Westgate attack, some even lost their lives. So they could not have ‘done everything practically possible’ to evacuate

them before the attack (See www.theguardian.com/world/2013/gunmen-kenyan-shopping-centre-nairobi).

In the same vein, the Boko Haram attempt to appeal to the readers' solidarity when they argue for the rightness of their actions. They are aware that some sections of southern (Nigerian) youths are indeed in support of their bombing attacks in Nigeria and have asked that the Boko Haram should rather bomb Abuja (the seat of power) and dismiss the current government (see Chiluiwa and Adegoke 2013). Nigerians that anticipate a revolution like those of Tunisia and Libya have also tweeted their views and shared them in online forums (e.g. Balya, jokolo. @HeyItsBalya @BOKO_HARAMM *I love you guys!! God bless you.* Retweeted by BOKO HARAM). In *BOK20* below the writer applies some boosters 'sure', and 'surely', first to argue the legitimacy of the activities of Boko Haram, and it appears he takes the support of the reader for granted, when he say 'I'm sure you know ...'; the Nigerian Government is referred to as 'the infidel in 'Aso Rock' (Aso Rock is Nigeria's seat of power equivalent to the US' White House). The writer of tweet in *BOK21* also uses 'surely' to express his conviction of the certainty of the success of the Boko Haram insurgency.

BOK20. BOKO HARAM @BOKO_HARAMM

I'm sure you know we were right all along. We suspected this. The infidel in Aso rock has no clue. #joinboko.

BOK21. BOKO HARAM @BOKO_HARAMM

We are happy to announce the closure of 3 universities: UNIMAID, UI, UNIBEN. Slowly but *surely* we shall overcome #UPBOKO.

In *BOK21*, Boko Haram announce the closure of some Nigerian universities (i.e. University of Maiduguri, University of Ibadan and University of Benin); but this appears much like a propaganda since it was never confirmed that these Universities were at anytime shut down by Boko Haram. I am aware that Nigerian universities were shut down for about four months in 2013 due to disputes between the Academic Staff Union of Universities and the Nigerian federal government due to disputes associated with university funding. There were no cases of university closure in 2011 or 2012 arising from Boko Haram's attacks. The emphatic 'surely' in the above tweet, which also indicates a firm commitment and assurance of the writer in the closure of Nigerian universities, does not of course, represent the view of most Nigerians who strongly believe in the importance of Western education.

In radicalist discourse, writers simply make assertive statements and claims, and in most cases are confident of the certainty of these claims. This is the reason why boosters occur more often in the data than hedges (see Table 1). Some of the assertions and claims appear as accusations levelled against some institutions and governments. The examples below represent some common boosters in radicalist discourse:

BOK22. BOKO HARAM @BOKO_HARAMM

The truth is it's the army killing innocent people ... #askodipeople #askgoodluck. The army is a mad dog. We are for you.

BOK23. BOKO HARAM @BOKO_HARAMM

Fact: federal govt of Nigeria has killed more people thru incompetence this year than Boko Haram, armed robbers, kidnapaz and MEND.#GASKIYA

Some of the claimed 'truth' and 'fact' in the above tweets are followed by verbs 'killing' and 'killed' that indicate actions of the accused agents. In other words, the Nigerian Government and security agents are accused of killing innocent citizens and this is

referred to as ‘truth’. Again, the readers’ position is hardly taken into account. In this case the reader is viewed as a student who should unquestionably accept the (supposed) factual information provided by his tutor. The Boko Haram here attempts to influence the view of the Nigerian public and possibly win their sympathy. Some forms of emotional appeal using stance markers to the reading public are strategic in the process of radicalization of young people, who might be reading the tweets.

9.4. Attitude markers

Attitude markers express the writer’s affect or emotions. They are usually expressed by *nouns* (e.g. infidel, terrorist, coward, fool, etc.), *adjectives* (e.g. good, happy, foolish, ludicrous, etc.), *verbs* (e.g. love, win, plead, massacre, etc.) and *adverbs* (e.g. unfortunately, absolutely, practically, etc.; see Biber et al. 1999; Gales 2010). In the radicalist discourse under study, attitude markers generally express triumph, satisfaction, pride, hate and anger, involving the use of labels and name-calling for governments and institutions. These attitude markers represent several negative evaluations of the ‘other’, which occurs frequently in the two sets of data for the study. The Government of Nigeria and security agents are constantly referred to as ‘infidels’ or ‘terrorists’ by the Boko Haram, while the Somali Government and security agents are called ‘apostates’. Adjectives, such as *ludicrous*, *bad*, *lazy*, *flagrant*, *ragtag*, etc., exhibiting anger and hate are also used to describe the governments and their actions. Below are a few examples:

SHAB20. MSM Press Office @HSM_PR

It is *absolutely ludicrous* how the Kenyans seem to disregard their military’s *flagrant massacre* of Muslims in Somalia and cry about #Westgate.

SHAB21. HSM PRESS @HSM PRESS1

HSM forces *overran apostate* checkpoints in the city during initial phase of the *multi-pronged assault*, killing dozens of *inebriated apostates*.

BOK30. BOKO HARAM @BOKO_HARAMM

Even Boko Haram would not sit by and allow a *gang rape*. The *infidel government* of Nigeria has done enuf #absu #evil5.

BOK31. BOKO HARAM @BOKO_HARAMM

We didn't kill Aikhomu. *Bad* healthcare *unleashed* by *Terrorist infidel Government* did.

The above samples exemplify some forms of lexical and grammatical stance markers in the data. These consist of accusations and other forms of linguistic violence against the governments of Nigeria and Somalia. The writers probably believe that strong or offensive language actually does some harm such as discrediting the accused before the public or inciting a mass action against them. The expression of hate in the expression

Table 1. Stance features in the activist discourse data.

Stance	Boko Haram = 3060		Al Shabaab = 800	
	words	Total (%)	words	Total (%)
Self-mention	131	4.28	04	0.50
Attitude markers	59	1.93	13	1.63
Boosters	06	0.20	04	0.50
Hedges	04	0.13	04	0.50
Threats	03	0.10	02	0.25

'absolutely ludicrous' and the claim 'flagrant massacre' in SHAB20 are subtle stance markers that appeal to emotions of the reader. For instance, a report that Muslims are flagrantly massacred in Somalia by the Kenyan military has the tendency to incite some forms of mob action or protest against the government and possibly radicalize those who are already sympathetic of Al Shabaab's activities. In BOK31, *Boko Haram* blames the death of Augustus Aikhomu (a former Vice President of Nigeria, during Babangida's Government) on the federal government's health care policy. (Aikhomu died in Lagos on 17 August 2011 after a long illness.) The meaning and tone of the verb 'unleashed' in the tweet is sequel to the character of the 'terrorist' that is used to describe the Nigerian Government. Again, this type of claim by Boko Haram is a subtle way of appealing to public sympathy and to win support. A direct reference to the poor health care policy of the government, which is a sensitive issue, is the writer's persuasive attempt to persuade the reader as well as win public approval and support.

9.5. Self mention

Self-mention is the use of personal pronoun 'I' or 'we' (and 'us'), and the possessive adjective 'our' to indicate proposition, affect and interpersonal information (Hyland 2001, 2005). The presence or absence of a definite reference indicates the type of authorial identity the writer wishes to adopt in his/her work. In radicalist discourse, the identification of 'we' in-group and the ideological positive self-evaluation that follows is almost highly mandatory. In the two data for this study, the discourse of the tweets reflects the positive representation of 'we' in-group, which aligns with van Dijk's ideological square, namely: (1) emphasize our good properties/actions; (2) emphasize their bad properties/actions; (3) mitigate our bad properties/actions; (4) mitigate their good properties/actions (van Dijk 1998, 33). In the Nigerian context, Boko Haram represent 'We' and 'Us', while the Nigerian Government and security agents represent 'They' and 'Them'. In the Somali context, the TFG of Somalia are 'They' and 'Them', while Al Shabaab represent 'We' and 'Us'. Both radical groups claim to fight for the people (e.g. Muslims) against their national governments. In the data, instances of 'We', 'Us' and 'Our' with their attributing positive qualities are frequent. A few examples from the data below illustrate the positive actions of the 'us' and the negative actions of 'them'.

BOK40. BOKO HARAM @BOKO_HARAMM

Jonathan, Abati, Omokri *are a threat to Nigeria not Boko Haramm. We fight for your liberation even though you are not grateful #LONGTERM.*

BOK41. BOKO HARAM @BOKO_HARAMM

Nigeria is a joke. Polis, army & govt are jokers. *They* kill more innocent pple evryday than Boko has done in a year.

BOK42. BOKO HARAM @BOKO_HARAMM another's

We have left Nigeria. *We* are in Boko Republic of Arewa. The infidel nig. govt and kafiri army should leave *us*.

BOK43. BOKO HARAM @BOKO_HARAMM

@admutebo. thanks for recognising *our good work*. One man's terrorist is freedom fighter. No retreat no surrender.

SHAB22. MSM Press Office @HSM_PR

Your eccentric battle strategy has got animal rights groups quite concerned, Major.

SHAB23. MSM Press Office @HSM_PR

Your inexperienced boys flee from confrontation & flinck in the face of death.

In *BOK40* above negative actions are attributed to ‘Jonathan’ (i.e. President Goodluck Jonathan), ‘Abati’ (i.e. Reuben Abati, Special Adviser to President Jonathan on Media and Policy) and ‘Omokri’ (i.e. Reno Omokri, Special Assistant to President Jonathan on New Media); they are also described as ‘threats’. On the other hand ‘we’ (Boko Haram) is said to fight for the liberation of the Nigerian people. The Nigerian Government and security forces (i.e. ‘they’) are also accused of killing innocent people (*BOK42*). Positive evaluation of the in-group generally involves the conscious enunciation of positive property or ‘our good work’, sometimes with some claimed proofs (e.g. *BOK45*; *BOK46* below) or with a comparison between ‘us’ and other militant groups (*BOK47*). In *BOK47*, Boko Haram claims to be after ‘ideals’, while MEND (another ethnic militia group) is said to be ‘after money’ (see Chiluiwa and Ajiboye 2014). In other words, ‘they’ are bad but ‘we’ are good. Hence, they (Boko Haram) appeal to Nigerians to join in their fight (e.g. *BOK48*).

In the Al Shabaab tweets above, the tweeter is answering back to the Somali military commander; the latter representing the Somali Government. He represents the ‘They’ whose battle is referred to as ‘your battle’ and soldiers as ‘your boys’. Here, the ‘Other’ naturally attracts negative evaluation of the Al Shabaab tweeter.

BOK45. BOKO HARAM @BOKO_HARAMM

Wives and children now see their husbands in the night in Abuja and Maiduguri. Countless marriages have been saved #COLLATERALEFFECT.

BOK46. BOKO HARAM @BOKO_HARAMM

Rate of alcoholism has reduced in Abuja and Maiduguri because of *our good work* #COLLATERALEFFECT.

BOK47. BOKO HARAM @BOKO_HARAMM

MEND is after money, we are after ideals. Ideas that come at the right time flourishes. MEND VS. BOKO HARAM PT.2 #DEADIDEALS

BOK48. BOKO HARAM @BOKO_HARAMM

I wonder how many years of bombing the infidel in aso rock can survive. *We* plead with Nigerians to join us in *our* fight.

Self-mention in radicalist discourse also usually involves the negotiation of group identity often perceived as endangered by dominant government and institutional forces. Arguably, Al Shabaab’s activities are rooted in both political and cultural struggle that is hoped to redefine a new identity for Muslims in Somalia. Unfortunately, they have consistently applied unethical methods in the pursuit of this objective. In *BOK42* above, the Boko Haram explicitly states that they are no longer Nigerians; thus implying that although still identified in a physical geopolitical space with Nigeria, they are psychological and spiritually out of Nigeria and ask to be left alone. Self-mention in radicalist discourse therefore goes beyond the authorial reference that merely identifies a writer and his personal role in a research work or his academic authority and achievement. Since radicalist (protest) writing is not to be viewed as an academic endeavour, its style, focus and audience also defer. Hence, self-mention in radicalist discourse projects groups identities, actions and goals that revolve round a group who construct themselves in terms of their rights to sociopolitical and cultural privileges.

9.6. Threats

According to Fraser (1998, cited in Gales 2010, 6), threats are intentional acts that use language to send a (special type of) message (*addition mine*). They are just like any other

type of speech act that depends on the illocutionary force or the intent of the message with which they are uttered (Gales 2010). However, threats are different in terms of force, from the act of promise or invitation, for example, because they are usually made to express anger, or instil fear. In radicalist discourse, they are mainly used to express hate, give warning and challenge authority; they are also used to show intent of purpose, and to attract media attention. In the data, the Boko Haram and Al Shabaab issue several threats to the Nigerian and Kenyan armies in order to warn them against impending attacks. For instance *SHAB24* below is a response to the Kenyan Government's failure to heed a threat before the Westgate attack.

SHAB24. MSM Press Office @HSM_PR

The Kenyan government however, turned a deaf ear to our *repeated warnings* and continued to massacre innocent Muslims in Somalia #Westgate.

While the attack was still going on at Westgate shopping mall, the Al Shabaab were still issuing threats, with photos of attackers parading the mall. *SHAB25* below is an example. This type of threat is generally issued in order to instil fear and probably disorganize the Kenyan armed forces. The 'big surprise' in *SHAB25* below probably refers to the high number of casualties and the battle that lasted for two whole days.

SHAB25. MSM Press Office @HSM_PR

The Kenyan govt and FM haven't the faintest idea of what's going on inside #Westgate mail. Rest assured. *Kenyans are in for a big surprise!*

In the Boko Haram data, threats also occur. While some of them appear like mere information, they actually function as threats in disguise as in *BOK50* and *BOK51* below.

BOK50. BOKO HARAM @BOKO_HARAMM

Full list of legitimate targets should be out soon. To be advertised in the national dailies #NOWAYOUT.

BOK51. BOKO HARAM @BOKO_HARAMM

Boom, boom, boom, Boko Haram bomb, do you have *any target*, yessah yessah, 1 are the *infidels in Maidug*, 2 the ones in Abuja #BOKOWORKOUTRHYMES.

BOK52. BOKO HARAM @BOKO_HARAMM

We wonder if the polis in Nigeria is still at his job, take a cue from the met polis and resign. *We'll mess you up again* #INCOMPETENCE.

In the Boko Haram threats in *BOK50–52*, the words 'target' occurs twice (50 and 51), each of them announcing an intended attack. *BOK51* tweet goes further to apply some form of rhetoric (play on words) to express their intention (this also sounds like a mockery of the Nigerian military). The threat in *BOK52*, 'we'll mess you up again', directed to the Nigerian Police, suggests that they had mess the Police before. As a matter of fact, Boko Haram is indeed not only messing up the Nigeria security system, but also the Nigerian Government in the various successes they have recorded in the last three years.

Threats occur as a significant feature of radicalist discourse and from the reports and experiences of terrorized places, threat from terrorists and radicalist movements should not be taken lightly by governments and security agencies. If the Kenyan Government

had taken some oversight actions to protect the Westgate mall, even after Al Shabaab had warned them, the impact might not have been that devastating.

Table 1 shows the occurrence of stance markers in the data; it highlights the prevalence of certain stance markers above the others and to further shade some light on the feature of radicalist discourse. For instance, as already mentioned in the discussion above, certain stance markers (e.g. self-mention and attitude markers) are bound to occur frequently in the discourse of radical movements giving the ideological nature of their arguments, attitudes and points of view. In most cases, their arguments almost lack modesty; in other words, they hardly withhold commitment and leave certain claims as an opinion with the use of hedges and show some respect to the reader’s viewpoint; rather, they present their arguments as facts and show a great deal of emotional commitment to them. Emotional words are used to appeal to the emotions of the reader, which is a strategy to attempt to attract sympathy or even radicalize the reader. Although boosters reflecting certainty of propositions occur far less than self-mention in the data, they are still more than hedges.

WordSmith is used to calculate the frequencies of the stance markers. (WordSmith is computer software often used by corpus linguists for a quantitative method of linguistic analysis. WordSmith is capable of counting and analysing features of language use being studied. For instance, WordSmith can calculate how frequent certain lexical items occur in a text giving an insight to the language forms or choices made by speakers or writers in a text. Frequencies can be given as a raw figure or in percentage.) The Boko Haram data comprise 3060 words and Al Shabaab 800 (as shown on the Table 1), and are converted to a computer-readable format (i.e. plain text) and analysed using WordSmith (2010). Since the data are very small, the frequency of words being sought in the data was simply counted manually from the concordance. (A concordance is a list of all the occurrences of a particular word or search term in a corpus and the context in which they occur.) Figure 1, for example, is a concordance of ‘Infidel’ (attitude marker) from the data.

Stance features in each of the data were obtained and counted manually. The total sum of the occurrences of words reflecting self-mention (e.g. we, us, our, etc.) in the

N	Concordance	Set Tag	Word #	t. #	os. #	a. #	os. #	d. #	os. #	t. #	os. #	File	%
1	SEE THE INNOCENT PEOPLE THE INFIDEL GOVERNMENT IS KILLING		1,470	190	6%	0	1%	0	1%	0	1%	earch corpus.txt	34%
2	out...Aso rock is bombing down infidel politicians build it up with looted		1,567	203	7%	0	3%	0	3%	0	3%	earch corpus.txt	36%
3	TAN IS NT UR FRIEND INFIDEL! BOKO HARAM		1,350	177	0%	0	9%	0	9%	0	9%	earch corpus.txt	31%
4	2 Aug 11 @melifew213 INFIDEL YOU ARE ALREADY OUR		1,193	159	5%	0	5%	0	5%	0	5%	earch corpus.txt	27%
5	2 Aug 11 Imagine this infidel saying MEND has a legitimate		1,238	163	4%	0	6%	0	6%	0	6%	earch corpus.txt	28%
6	ALONG. WE SUSPECTED THIS. THE INFIDEL IN ASO ROCK HAS NO CLUE.		1,703	214	3%	0	6%	0	6%	0	6%	earch corpus.txt	39%
7	@DRDAMAGES. WE ASSUME HE IS INFIDEL AND HIS WORDS DONT		2,698	319	5%	0	7%	0	7%	0	7%	earch corpus.txt	62%
8	of Sharia in Nigeria and ensure that the infidel does not go unpunished. 4) We		4,361	414	0%	0	2%	0	2%	0	2%	earch corpus.txt	93%
9	wonder how many years of bombing the infidel in aso rock can survive. We plead		2,498	289	7%	0	3%	0	3%	0	3%	earch corpus.txt	57%
10	we conciliate &adjudicate wt decadent infidel pestiferous rulers of nig, we then r		1,781	221	8%	0	8%	0	8%	0	8%	earch corpus.txt	40%
11	26 Jul 11 REASON THE INFIDEL RULERS LIKE NIGERIA: IT IS		1,875	225	5%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	earch corpus.txt	43%
12	We are in Boko Republic of Arewa. The infidel nig. govt and kafiri army should		1,156	156	3%	0	4%	0	4%	0	4%	earch corpus.txt	26%
13	?@BOKO_HARAMM If we tell the infidel govt to vote for Palestine and they		473	69	9%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	earch corpus.txt	11%
14	not sit by and allow a gang rape. The infidel government of Nigeria has done		556	81	3%	0	2%	0	2%	0	2%	earch corpus.txt	13%
15	day of bombs...hope this is not an infidel song. BOKO HARAM		378	51	5%	0	8%	0	8%	0	8%	earch corpus.txt	9%
16	A drop of water we are firing Arewa and infidel Nigeria. Yaro dan is ce ne BOKO		284	43	2%	0	6%	0	6%	0	6%	earch corpus.txt	7%
17	bitch, Jesus in one sentence, you are infidel #ASSWIPE BOKO HARAM		312	45	8%	0	7%	0	7%	0	7%	earch corpus.txt	7%
18	?@BOKO_HARAMM 17 Sep 11 INFIDEL OBJ DISTURBING THE PEACE		782	109	5%	0	7%	0	7%	0	7%	earch corpus.txt	18%
19	Bad healthcare unleashed by Terrorist infidel Government did. BOKO HARAM		1,089	146	8%	0	3%	0	3%	0	3%	earch corpus.txt	25%
20	we have been causing havoc and bad. infidel federal government still clueless		1,108	149	5%	0	3%	0	3%	0	3%	earch corpus.txt	25%
21	Obasanjo and Babangida (plus one infidel dunce in aso rock) taking 150		1,005	136	5%	0	1%	0	1%	0	1%	earch corpus.txt	23%
22	?@BOKO_HARAMM Wonder how that infidel sleeps at night. Oh we know.		902	124	3%	0	9%	0	9%	0	9%	earch corpus.txt	21%
23	?@BOKO_HARAMM Heard the infidel goyim at Aso rock got himself		920	128	7%	0	9%	0	9%	0	9%	earch corpus.txt	21%

Figure 1. Concordance of ‘Infidel’ from the Boko Haram data.

Boko Haram data is 131 as shown above (only 04 instances are shown in the Al Shabaab data due to the size of data). The same goes for *attitude markers*. From Table 1, it is quite clear that words reflecting ideological positive self-evaluation and words reflecting attitude markers (or emotional commitment) are the most prevalent in radicalist discourse. This shows that discourses of radical groups or terrorist are highly ideological as this study shows. Hence, the study of stance in discourse is one fruitful method of studying the nature of language features as well as their functions in a wider social context.

10. Conclusion

The present study highlights the various subtle ways stance functions in online discourse of radical groups, showing how authors reflect their positions, commitments and attitudes in the social media. This attempt is therefore likely to open up reactions and possible further research endeavours in discourses produced by activist/terrorist groups. The study also shows that the roles and functions of Twitter in providing a platform for individuals and groups to express themselves, their viewpoints and attitudes on issues affecting them is very important. This research also shows that attitude markers and self-mention the most prevalent features of stance in activist discourse and in most cases are used to express ideological propositions.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Notes on contributor

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