



Social media networks and the discourse of resistance: A sociolinguistic CDA of Biafra online discourses

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Abstract

This study focuses on how Social Media Networks (SMN) have been used in recent times to champion social protests and resistance against oppression and political power abuse. Hence, 'discourse of resistance' takes a cue from the current waves of resistance and political revolutions in North Africa and the Arab world, which have been largely attributed to the vibrant SMN. In Nigeria, SMN have been used to mobilize support and active participation in popular efforts to achieve socio-political reforms. The corpus comprises mainly blogs and discussion forums hosted by the Biafra Online Campaign Groups (BOCG). The BOCG consist of persons and groups of the Igbo ethnic group of Nigeria, living in and outside of the country, that advocate a separate nation for the Igbos and accuse the government of Nigeria of marginalizing them. The study applies a sociolinguistic-based Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to investigate how sociolinguistic issues such as virtual community, identity, language variations and social interaction are used to project self-determination and the struggle for political independence. It further examines how ideology is reflected in this context via the discourses produced by BOCG in relation to the Nigerian state.

Keywords

Biafra, campaign groups, discourse, identity, ideology, Nigeria, resistance, social media networks

Introduction

Resistance is bound to happen, where power exists (Eamonn, 2004). And when individuals or a group of people begin to feel oppressed or perceive that their individual/collective

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human rights are violated by other individuals, a constituted authority or government, they begin to muster strength to effect a change by 'their own means or with the help of others to attain a certain state of happiness' or freedom (p. 35). Therefore, resistance occurs when people feel that change is desperately needed either gradually, or immediately or spontaneously. In recent times, people have begun to take their future in their own hands in their attempts to resist the dominant powers that oppress them.

Previous investigations into the relationship between resistance and discourse show that resistances do occur through social/political, organizational or educational discourses. According to Wilson and Stapleton (2007: 393), for example, this happens 'through thematic frameworks and interactional/pragmatic strategies' (e.g. 'pragmatic blocking'), where speakers jointly produce a 'discourse of resistance', for example resisting a new police service in Northern Ireland. Putnam et al. (2005) also demonstrate that discourse analytical approaches can reveal how acts of resistance target multiple organizational audiences, often developed through diverse texts directed at internal and external stakeholders. Through this method, the 'intended and unintended consequences of resistance' are revealed, highlighting how members in an organization engage with, adapt to and transform organizational practices (p. 5).

Recent developments in the Arab world have clearly demonstrated the power of media discourses to champion social resistance and political protests. Some observers have attributed the success of the North African revolution to the use of new media and social networking sites. Both the Tunisian and Egyptian protests were constantly in the spotlight of most political blogs, *Facebook* and *Twitter*; they were also covered in online discussion forums and in many virtual mailing lists. The North African revolutionary experience, with its huge implications for the rise of new paradigms for political change and government in the Arab Muslim world, demonstrates the potential for similar uprisings, not only in the Muslim world but also in other parts of Africa.

In his article 'New media and the information revolution in the Arab world', Ghareeb (2000) agreed that there was already an 'information revolution' in the Muslim world, initially limited to the elite, which was transforming political discourse in the region. Beginning with the spread of pan-Arab newspapers published simultaneously in several cities, and continuing with the growth of satellite television networks (e.g. Al-Jazeera based in Qatar), new technologies had created a new type of political debate that transcended national boundaries. Ghareeb admitted that the Internet, while just beginning, had impacted significantly on the Arab world with even greater future potential. Contrary to the present widespread popularity of the Internet, Ghareeb (2000) had feared that the influence of social media might be limited primarily to the elite due to high access costs and its largely English-language content. However, the role of keeping the public informed and holding governments accountable is gradually shifting to individuals, notably the youth, armed with social media networks that are increasingly re-shaping news agendas and political landscapes.

The Egyptian revolution has been described as a 'Twitter revolution', where Twitter became the alternative press and was primarily used as a means of reporting daily events for the benefit of the average Egyptian and the outside world. It was also a key site 'for emancipating bursts of self-expression' (Idle and Nunns, 2011: 139). Smith and Brecher (2010) argue that social movements need the kind of communication networks which

social media provide, and that social media networks (SMN) do indeed contribute to the process of forming social movements as well as effective social action. Tao (2011) agrees with Smith and Brecher, and affirms that social media indeed 'fuelled' the North African revolution by inspiring and mobilizing protesters. Sensing the power of Facebook and Twitter, the Egyptian government had cut off Internet and mobile services in most of the country. However, inspired by the Tunisian revolution, thousands of protesters joined a Facebook anti-government campaign with more than 30,600 people in the Facebook group.¹ Protesters gathered in the city centre around Tahrir Square into the night and there were appeals on Facebook for food and blankets for those remaining there. In addition to Facebook and Twitter, Google indexed millions of new blog posts and thousands of news results citing Egypt during the period.

In Libya, protesters mostly inspired by the success of the uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt took to the streets in February 2011 in an attempt to end Muammar Gaddafi's 42-year rule. As violent clashes erupted between anti-government protesters and security agents in Benghazi, social networks again played their roles. Facebook, Twitter and Al Jazeera were intermittently blocked and by 18 February, Internet access was completely blocked. However, social media was 'unstoppable' (Raddatz, 2011). When connectivity was later restored, protesters took full advantage to post reports and events on Twitter. According to Raddatz (2011), social media also ignited protests in Iran, Bahrain and Yemen. The biggest mass pro-election protests in Iran in 2009, which resulted in members of parliament asking for the execution of the opposition leader, and the fierce uprisings in Yemen that called for the ousting of the authoritarian president, were attributed to the 'social media revolution'.

Social media use in Nigeria

Socio-political and economic interests, as well as events in Nigeria, have helped fuel the formation of virtual communities and online discussion forums. During the era of military dictatorship in Nigeria, there was a complete ban on political activities; social groups and political associations were outlawed, especially during the Abacha government (Babatope, 2000). Politicians, journalists and social activists/critics were arrested and jailed without trial (Chiluwa, 2011a, 2012). However, after 29 May 1999, when Nigeria returned to civil rule after over 20 years of military dictatorship, Nigerians, notably the youth, for the first time began to make their voices heard; social media networks became the more active means of participating in political debates (Chiluwa, 2012); blogging activities began and several hosting sites also began to form. *NaijaPals* (also known as *Nigerians and friends*), for example, is a popular online community and a hosting website with social networking and blogging activities that allows users to exchange information. This virtual community is still very much alive today and participants keep personal journals in which they post entries; others can reply to the entries by posting comments. Members not only post comments, they also engage in forms of social analyses and criticisms of Nigeria's socio-political system, thus participants lend their voices to asking for political reforms (Chiluwa, 2011c, 2012). Similarly, the 'Nigerian Village Square', also known as 'a market place of ideas', was established in 2003, and became a 'virtual sphere' whose 'participants are members of the civil society

brought together with a common understanding to maintain a platform for discursive evaluations of socio-political and economic developments' in Nigeria (Ifukor, 2011: 113).

Interestingly, not only are social rights groups, youths and political activists involved in social media practice, Nigerian politicians are also becoming active participants. Political parties and campaign groups are on Facebook, Twitter and discussion forums, encouraged by the success of social media networks in other places, such as the Barack Obama 2008 presidential campaign (Chiluwa, 2011c; Ifukor, 2010). Political campaign groups utilized social media networks to canvass for votes for their candidates during the period of the 2011 general election in Nigeria. And as more people acquire Internet literacy, they take the advantage of the flexibility of social network options available in blogs and online communities to participate in social debates and political governance (Chiluwa, 2011c).

Biafran online resistance

The 'Republic of Biafra' was a secessionist nation of the Igbo of south-east Nigeria that existed between 30 May 1967 and 15 January 1970. It became defunct after a civil war in which over three million Igbos died (see Aneke, 2007; Dike, 2006). The defeat of the Igbo and the re-integration of the south-eastern region in 'one Nigeria' have been criticized by many political analysts. Hence, Nigeria has been described as a 'forced unity' and a big 'colonial commercial business structure', which only profited the colonialists (Ebiem, 2011). Nigeria has also been described as a mere 'colonial contraption and complications' – a creation of the colonialists for their 'self interest' (Ojukwu, 2009). Arguably, Nigeria is still 'far from being one' socially and economically (Ojukwu, 2009). Socially and politically, there are clear differences between the tribal groups; for instance, they speak different languages (about 400) and have highly divergent customs and ways of life. They are also at different levels of cultural development (Ojukwu, 2009; Osuntokun, 1979). According to Nkolika (2007), Nigeria is held together by 'nothing except the coercive apparatus of the state' (p. 1) because it is clear that the average Nigerian commits his loyalty more to ethnic sentiment and in-group movements. Ethnic nationalities support the 'one Nigeria' political arrangement merely on the basis of what they feel they stand to gain from the accumulation syndrome arising from oil wealth, and not through any psychological bond or legal identification. Hence, whenever any group's access to the accumulation process is restricted or denied, such groups accuse the government of being 'marginalized' and threaten to secede (Nkolika, 2007). Duruji (2009) argues that the resurgence of the post-war Igbo generation is a reaction to a continual marginalization and alienation of the Igbo from the Nigerian polity. Since the civil war, the Nigerian government has adopted socio-political and economic policies that consistently and effectively tended to reduce the capacity of the Igbo to confront the state (Duruji, 2009). And because Nigeria is a 'rentier state' (Jegga, 2003), where the government is the main recipient of external rent and the rest of society is engaged routinely in distribution and utilization rather than production, the rentier consumption mentality is created and people simply seek rights to the national 'cake'. Consequently, there is a break in work–reward causation (Jegga, 2003) and well-paid political positions are 'allocated' rather than merited. Thus, individuals are rewarded

and often over-paid for nothing more than loyalty to political parties. Nkolika (2007) notes that this has led to allocation of resources in a way that merely satisfies ethnic expectations, and also subverted equity and justice. 'For instance, projects are initiated for the wrong reasons and located in places where they are least beneficial . . . The immensity of state power and the material benefits accruing from it lead to the over-evaluation of state power. Every means is considered legitimate to acquire state power for the principal reason that those who win (state power) win everything and those who lose, lose everything' (Nkolika, 2007: 4). The struggle for separate existence by some ethnic movements or the demand for the creation of more states in Nigeria today is as a result of the feeling of denial of rights to state resources (Chiluwa, 2011b).

Today, the Biafran struggle is pursued by a pro-Biafra radicalist movement known as the 'Movement for the Sovereign State of Biafra' (MASSOB), whose activities are mostly noticeable on the Internet and discussed on social networking sites. This movement still advocates a separate country for the Igbo people and accuses the Nigerian state of marginalizing them. MASSOB identifies itself as a peaceful group and advertises a 25-stage plan to achieve its goal peacefully (Murray, 2007; Shirbon, 2006). The activities of MASSOB not only query the citizenship question in Nigeria, but have consistently opposed the rationale in the corporate existence of the Nigerian state and have indeed created an identity dilemma for the Igbo nation (Nkolika, 2007). The MASSOB leader, Raph Uwazuruike, was arrested and detained by the Nigerian government in 2005, along with some members of his group, on charges of treason. They were granted temporary bail in May 2008. Biafra campaigners in Diaspora, especially in the USA and the UK, insist on the actualization of the 'Sovereign State of Biafra' or 'the United States of Biafra'. The main body of the campaign group claims to maintain subsidiary media affiliates such as *Radio Biafra* – an online radio network, newspapers and magazines, and is also said to have a well-organized and influential leadership, which claims to be recognized by the most powerful and important countries in the world, with its headquarters in the USA.

Biafra Net (the Biafra network), established by the Biafra Online Campaign Groups (BOCG) is a hosting site comprising links to subsidiary websites such as *Voice of Biafra*, *Biafra World*, *Biafra Online*, *Biafra Forum*, *MASSOB*, *Biafra Consortium*, *Biafra Nigeria World (BNW)* and the *Biafra Liberation Movement (BLM)*. Their main message is to demand the actualization of the defunct state of Biafra through non-violent means and particularly using social media to make their voices heard. Access to any of these websites is strictly by membership. All 'Biafrans' (notably the Igbos) are advised to register as members and participate in the Biafra forums where members engage in important discussions and debates on the actualization of the Biafran state. MASSOB and the Biafra campaign groups (e.g. BNW) therefore form a virtual community, where members not only form social bonding and relationships (Taiwo, 2010), but also awaken the consciousness of their common roots and socio-cultural heritage. To the 'Biafrans', the question of identity, that is 'who we are', in the Nigerian state becomes paramount in the quest for self-determination and group definition. Therefore, rather than provide topic groups as in most discussion forums, the primary topic of discussion in the BOCG forums is the actualization of the Biafran dream.

Previous research on the Biafra campaign groups

Studies in the political and social sciences have identified the causes and management of ethnic conflicts in Nigeria, particularly MASSOB and the Biafran online struggle (e.g. Badmus, 2006; Ikelegbe, 2005; Nkolika, 2007; Ojukwu, 2009; Salawu, 2010; Ukiwo, 2009). Nkolika (2007), among other scholars, attributes the Igbo protests to the culmination of feelings of alienation and marginalization, which is construed as a deliberate policy of the Nigerian government to exclude the Igbo from political power (see also Duruji, 2009; Ojukwu, 2009). According to Ukiwo (2009), state violence against ethnic minorities was the main cause of the secessionist attempt by Biafra and this has continued to promote ethnic nationalism in contemporary Nigeria. The methods of the Biafra protests, according to Nkolika (2007), have been provincial and non-violent, characterized mainly by mild petition to the Nigerian government and demanding negotiation for separate existence. Significantly, the MASSOB leadership has consistently denounced political violence and has demonstrated its commitment to peaceful means in realizing their objectives. This method of non-violence has been attributed to the guiding ideology of the MASSOB founder, who studied at an Indian university and was influenced by the Gandhi philosophy of non-violence (Omeje, 2005; Ukiwo, 2009). Hence, the Biafra campaigners condemn the activities of the militia arm of the group and mainly pursue a systematic sensitization of Nigerians and the international community in regard to the Biafran dream through online social networks. So far, very little research has focused on these online activities, despite the fact that the Internet has become a dynamic instrument for social mobilization and resistance. Unless a thorough study of these online activities is made from a discourse-analytical perspective, rumours and speculation will continue to grow and tension will increase around the potential of this group and the security implications this might have. A comprehensive sociolinguistic-oriented CDA of online-based written texts produced and disseminated by the BOCG will likely offer some valid linguistic report of Biafra online resistance, which previous studies in the social sciences have failed to do. The current research therefore aims to: (i) investigate the discourse structure of the Biafra online forums; (ii) examine the implications and potential of the resistance and consider whose interest the resistance is serving; and (iii) explore lessons and precautions for security in Nigeria.

Sociolinguistic-based CDA

CDA is a type of discourse analysis that ‘aims to contribute to addressing the social “wrongs” of the day (in a broad sense – injustice, inequality, lack of freedom, etc.) by analysing their sources and causes, resistance to them and possibilities of overcoming them’ (Fairclough, 2009: 163). The critical discourse analyst examines how certain sets of vocabulary and grammatical structures in texts (e.g. social media texts) reveal value judgements and ideological perspectives. Ideology in this context (i.e. social media language) includes the ways in which individuals or groups/identities represent themselves or are represented by others. The cognitive structure of ideologies reveals that group attitudes often lead to positive self-representation and negative other-representation (Van Dijk, 2005). This, however, is not limited to the representation and legitimization of class domination. Dominated groups also require a form of ideology as a basis for the

resistance (Van Dijk, 2005: 25). For example, how do the Biafra campaigners construct themselves and what positive representations about their goals are projected? What do these kinds of representations suggest about their expectations of public opinion and the response of the Nigerian government? The main social function of ideologies therefore is 'the coordination of the social practices of group members for effective realization of the goals of a social group and the protection of their interest' (Van Dijk, 2005: 24). This study critically examines the discourse structure of the BOCG forums and how these reveal ideologies and value judgements, which may lead to a better understanding of the Biafra question, their campaign group activities, and the implications and possible consequences of the resistance.

In order to rightly locate the place of Nigerian online discourse in its social context and use CDA to address some fundamental questions of virtual community, identity, inequality and ideology, a sociolinguistically informed approach, such as that recommended by Blommaert (2005), is in part adopted in the analyses. Blommaert advocates a sociolinguistic approach to CDA in order to properly account for globalized contexts of language use as the world becomes increasingly more globalized. Hence, key concepts such as community, literacy, identity, ideology and 'voice' would receive more vigorous analyses within the framework of sociolinguistically and anthropologically informed discourse analysis. While acknowledging the big roles and practices of the main proponents of CDA (i.e. Fairclough, Van Dijk and Wodak), Blommaert (2005) argues strongly in favour of 'forgotten contexts', which goes beyond the here and now of discourse to the social, political, historical and cultural conditions that informed the production of the text. In other words, a globalized approach to CDA will not only pay attention to the real time of the discourse situation, but also to the historical layers of context, both visible and invisible to the participants in that moment (Thorborrow, 2007).

The term 'computer-mediated discourse' (CMD) (Herring, 2001) has in itself important implications for the theory and methodology in computer-mediated communication (CMC) research from a sociolinguistic viewpoint (Androutsopoulos, 2006: 421). The notion of online/virtual community, for instance, is very helpful in theorizing the social context of computer-mediated language practices and the need to apply sociolinguistic methods in CMD (Androutsopoulos, 2006). The virtual community reveals other sociolinguistic parameters such as language variation, social interaction and identity that are fundamental to CMD research. As we shall see in this study, the notion of online/virtual community has been given several definitions – for example, as a group of people who interact in a virtual environment which, however, must interact regularly around a shared norm and have a sense of common history and an awareness of difference from other people (Androutsopoulos, 2006: 422). In this study, I examine how the BOCG constitute a virtual community or virtual communities and how the group(s) negotiate their identity and provide sociability, support and identity to their members (Herring, 2004: 346), as they engage in social interactions in the online forums.

The corpus

The corpus for this study comprises mainly text-based downloads from MASSOB websites and other websites connected to the BOCG. Data are obtained mainly from MASSOB, and the BOCG discussion forums such as BNW and the Biafra Actualization

Forum (BAF). On the whole, a total of 250 posts were sampled, out of which 87 were analysed in this research. They are numbered P1 to P87, 'P' standing for 'Post'. The 87 posts covered the key topics of all 250 posts dealing with the main concerns of the Biafran liberation struggle. Many of the 250 posts overlap in content; in fact some are almost a repetition of previous posts. The posts that are too closely related are combined and considered as one in the data. Posts that are occasional diversionary gossips and jokes are excluded. Thus, the 87 analysed posts are those considered as clearly revealing the sociolinguistic character of digital discourse, reflecting virtual community, social interaction, language structure and ideology. However, given the limited space of this article, I will pay more attention to language and discourse structures in the analysis.

BOCG as a virtual community

The traditional view of a 'community' is that of a people within geographical boundaries with some racial bond and common historical and socio-cultural identity. People in a community often speak the same language and sometimes exhibit cultural traits. A virtual community (Rheingold, 1993), or communities, however, is dispersed geographically, though some online communities are linked geographically and are known as community websites.² Virtual communities resemble real-life communities in the sense that they are both made up of people and provide support, information and friendship for members (Wellman, 1999). Internet-based virtual/online communities have been used by social or professional groups to pursue certain goals and interests, which tends to lay to rest the concern of early researchers about the reality of media-based communities, that is whether communities could actually exist through the media.³ As it stands today, online communities are as real as, and function almost as if they were, the offline community. Hence, a virtual or online community may be described as the gathering of people in an online 'space', where they come to communicate, interact, connect and have the tendency to know each other better over time.⁴ According to Rheingold (1993), virtual communities form when people carry on public discussions long enough and with 'sufficient human feeling', to form webs of personal relationships. This appears to corroborate with the view that virtual communities may not integrate much of our real life, but will certainly affect our emotions and sometimes our thinking and opinions.⁵ Given the serious social and cultural roles of virtual communities in recent times, Androutopoulos (2006) recommends that a virtual community should interact regularly, around a shared interest or purpose, with the development of clearly defined social roles, hierarchies and shared norms; these would anchor on a sense of common history and awareness of difference from other groups. Relating this understanding to the roles of the BOCG, it is clear that these groups identify with the common history of their members, most of whom are Igbos. And they share the history of the civil war as main actors and are viewed as 'rebels' who now see themselves as suffering from generational punishment in the form of economic denials and social exclusion. Their common interest is the sensitization and mobilization of Igbo youths towards the ultimate goal of the realization of the defunct Biafra nation.

Biafra World, *Biafra Forum* and *BNW* hosted by the BOCG operate as Internet Message Boards (IMBs) or discussion forums where members regularly update personal

journals, publish and share fresh ideas, and respond to posts by other members. Some of the posts are media reports culled from offline newspapers or magazines. As is the case with the Arab world, these trends are increasingly seen in regions of the world where violent conflict is ongoing or imminent. Like the more conventional media, the online discourse that is created through blogs and other digital media can serve as a powerful information source within conflict zones, while helping to frame our own understanding of these conflicts (Whitaker and Varghese, 2009). The posts below (P3–P6) from the BNW exemplify the type of communication that takes place in BOCG’s virtual community websites. In addition to the more complex issues of the online struggle, these examples sound very much like chat-room interactions among friends and equals.

P3. (Okwy). It amuses me when i read that ‘okwyonwuka’ lies, if this is the way to lie, i assume the title of a champion. Truth is the greatest vindicator and i am on the side of truth so i am not deterred with false accusation. After a brief absence in this forum, my first post was started with the ‘thank God i am able to post in this forum again’ phrase.

P4. (Joy). I made my correspondence with the right person and have no more apologies on that. If my private discussion is now for public consumption, i am sorry, i can’t help it.

P5. (Greg). Your advice is noted. However, this is not a one way responsibility, i think MeBiafra understands me too, may be a joke taken too far, so let appeasement start from the first offender. It’s never my intention to drag your name to this issue; i think i am capable of defending myself on what i know i am right. Though, i appreciate your intervention.

P6. (Al). I still stand on my intention of starting this thread; my take is that the acrimony toward Dim Ojukwu here is unjustifiable. He likened the second coming of Christ to the realisation of the Biafran dream, stating that at a time people least expect, the much sought Biafra would be a reality. (Rev. Fr. Cornelius Ezeiloaku, posted 9 March 2005, 10.06 p.m.)

The above posts show that the forums are interactive where responses to a post appear as ‘comments’. The above examples also show that the topic under discussion is ongoing and participants respond to previous comments. Members not only agree on certain issues, they also disagree and, in fact, quarrel and exchange bitter words; some even trade insults. In such cases, other concerned members of the discussion groups would naturally mediate and restore understanding. P3 above shows that someone had felt he was misunderstood but maintains his position, which he views as the ‘truth’. In the forums, concerned members take a neutral position to solicit peace and forgiveness from the aggrieved parties. P15 and P16 below are good examples.

P15. Guys,

Please go to neutral corners and let this thing die a natural death. Remember, to forgive is divine. (The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars, but in ourselves. . .)

P16. If we are not careful, we’ll all get distracted away from the main aim of this forum. Let bygones be bygones please. There are greater battles to be fought.

These conversational exchanges, though not strictly on the Biafran online struggle, demonstrate the interactional nature of the BOCG forums as a virtual community that promotes information sharing, collaboration and exchange of ideas and feelings.

Language structure

Previous studies of the linguistic structure of CMD have argued that computer-mediated language is less standard, less complex and less coherent than standard written language (Herring, 2001). According to Crystal (2006: 244), the language style of the web is difficult to describe because it 'falls uneasily between standard and non-standard English'. Some of the samples indeed illustrate writings that are largely orthodox in terms of spelling, punctuation and grammar but 'depart from the norm in various ways' (p. 244).

As regard grammar, stretches of text defy conventional analysis in terms of sentences. The discourse expresses a sequence of units of thought, but these do not correspond to the kinds of sentence division we have been taught to associate with 'elegant' writing. At lower levels of grammar, too, there are features which would be considered unacceptable in traditional printed publications. (Crystal, 2006: 244–245)

However, Crystal (2011) concludes that Internet language combines features of speech exchanges and written communication. For instance, many words and constructions are characteristic of contracted forms; lengthy coordinated sentences are normal, and are often of considerable complexity. We also have 'nonsense vocabulary', obscenity and slang. Writing displays different characteristics, such as multiple instances of subordination, elaborately balanced syntactic patterns and items of vocabulary that are never spoken (e.g. names of chemical compounds) (2011: 18). Unconventional orthography also results when textual representation of auditory information such as prosody, laughter and other non-language sounds become necessary (Herring, 2001). In some cases, emoticons (e.g. a smiley face) are used to express emotions. Herring argues that only a relatively small percentage of non-standard linguistic features in CMD are intentional, rather the majority are deliberate choices made by users in order to economize space, mimic spoken language features or express themselves creatively (p. 617). While the real-time synchronous medium (e.g. Internet Relay Chat (IRC)) tends to be more unpredictable, due to the fact that it more frequently illustrates features of oral language, text-based asynchronous CMD (e.g. emails, blogs or discussion forums) enables users to take their time to construct and edit their messages. As Herring (2001) also observes, variation in structural complexity in emails, blogs or discussion forums must be understood as reflecting social situational factors, which determine what level of formality (and with it standardization) and structural complexity are appropriate to the context. Unlike email, however, language forms in blogs and discussion forums are less complex and combine features of both written and spoken language. Chilwa (2011c), for example, shows that Nigerian participants in an online political discussion forum reflect various levels of English language proficiency, and that language variations are much more based on linguistic choices of the participants rather than on English proficiency.

In the BOCG forums, most of the posts clearly reflect features of Standard American or British English. Language structures are complex, mostly with standard syntactic patterns. This is not surprising because the majority of the Biafra online campaigners live in Europe and North America. However, there are no features of Americanisms in their use of English. Words are carefully chosen and features that betray spoken language are highly minimized. In most of the posts (e.g. P3, P4, P5 and P6), formal language forms are used in interactions that were supposed to be informal, even in arguments. Expressions such as ‘truth is the greatest vindicator and I am on the side of truth, so I am not deterred with false accusation’ in P3, and a response like ‘I made my correspondence with the right person and have no apologies for that . . .’ in P4 sound rather formal and bookish. The formality of language use in the BOCG forums is attributable not only to the fact that written communication tends to be more formal than spoken, but also to the overriding theme and context of online activism. Political discourse, which the online forums are engaged in, is generally formal, even when written to be spoken. Some of the posts tend to be formal also because they are a reflection of online journalism; a number of the posts are actually published newspaper reports from the local press. Another important reason for the formality of language use in the forums is that the variety of English in the posts is partly a manifestation of Nigerian English (NigE). Standard Nigerian English tends to be formal and bookish (cf. Chilwa, 2010a). Despite the American influence, many of the participants still write in Nigerian English. Chilwa (2010b, 2011c) also notes that language use in Nigerian online forums demonstrates intra-group CMD, showing the use of discursive strategies that reflect ethnic and national identity. These include culture-specific words, names and verbal genres that are particularly Nigerian. Others are codeswitching, coinages and Nigerianisms.

Codeswitching and coinages in the posts

Nigeria is a multilingual speech community with about 400 languages (Adegbija, 1997), spoken across its multi-ethnic communities. Thus, an average Nigerian is a bilingual, speaking English (or a version of English) and at least a native language. On the Internet, therefore, language use by Nigerians reveals features of multilingualism or some forms of codeswitching, showing the ethnic/linguistic orientation of the user. This further shows that language choice online depends largely on the socio-cultural context of the user. Since most of the Biafra campaigners are educated bilinguals/multilinguals, they use English and codeswitch infrequently in Igbo. English is the language of choice, especially as one of the main objectives of the campaigns is to educate the international community with the message and situation of the Biafran Igbos. In the BOCG websites and forums, English is used with an occasional switch to Igbo, mainly in the opening and closing of messages. It is also used in ethnic labels, slogans and generic names. Occasionally, it is used to describe God, or to express proverbs/local idioms. An ethnic label like ‘Ndigbo’ (or NdIgbos) is used as a sign of solidarity or ethnic identification.

There are three types of opening illustrated in the following samples. First is the group solidarity address, for example ‘Umu Biafra’ (P34) (Biafrans or children of Biafra). This is similar to ‘Umu Igbo’ (P66) (Igbos or children of the Igbo). Second is the greeting, for example ‘Igbo mma mma nu’ (P64). This does not have a direct English equivalent but

stands for 'Igbo I greet you'. The third form of opening is divided into a formal address, for example 'Mazi Ray' (Mr Ray) (P67), and an informal address, for example Nwanna Dave (P65) (my brother Dave). Most of the posts begin informally with the addressee's first name, especially where a post is a comment to a previous message by a member of the forum. Codeswitching in these examples reinforces cultural meaning and the aesthetics of the local language. The greeting form in P64 captures local thought which lacks a direct English counterpart, thereby restoring the sense of tradition of the Igbo.

P34. Umu Biafra,

The fact of the food poisoning for the Biafran masses should serve as a wake up call for Biafrans to attend the 2006 Bianfran Conference in Toronto, Canada. Orula mgbe anyi ji awa anya! Onye ujo abiala nga anyi na-awa anya!! Forward Ever!!! Backward Never!!!! (Fada Jon, posted 10 July 2006, 06.13 p.m.)

P64. Igbo mma mma nu,

It is one thing to point fingers and another to put out MONEY where our mouth is and do the dirty work. . .

P65. Nwanna Dave,

With out attempt to derail the ongoing issue, may i disagree with the above statement.

P66. Umu Igbo,

The people like Oha ka and his organization who make financial gain from the unfortunate situation Nd'Igbo find themselves are like carpetbaggers and can be said to be worse than the oppressors.

P67. Mazi Ray.

(posted 17 April 2007, 02.23 p.m.)

About 85% of the posts end with the slogan 'Hail Biafra', sometimes with an accompanying emoticon (smiley face) as in P68, or showing disgust/surprise as in P69. A few others end with 'In Aburi we stand' or 'Biafra for' life. P73 below ends with a slogan 'Igbo gadi' (long live Igbo). But, significantly, a few others end with proverbs or local idioms that necessitate codeswitching, especially where the pragmatics of the local expression become crucial. For example, 'tufiakwa' in P59 cannot possibly be rendered in English and is better said in Igbo. This kind of expression is used to express extreme disgust, equivalent to 'God forbid!'

P59. Those who blindly follow any individual no matter who they are or place individuals above any nation will end up with eggs on their faces – TUFIAKWA!!!!

P68. Hail Biafra. ☺☺

P69. WASHINGTON – A Northwest Airline passenger bound to Detroit boarded KLM airline from Nigeria to Amsterdam, who said he was acting on al-Qaeda's instructions, tried to blow up the plane Friday as it was landing in Detroit, law enforcement and national security officials said. Passengers subdued the man and may have prevented him from detonating the explosives,

the officials said. ‘We believe this was an attempted act of terrorism’, a White House official said. Federal officials imposed stricter screening measures after the incident. His name is **UMAR FAROUK ABDULMUTALLAB FROM NORTHERN NIGERIA**. King said the flight began via KLM in Nigeria and went through Amsterdam en route to Detroit. There were 278 passengers aboard the Airbus 330. Yep that name sound very familiar, he is from Islamic Republic of Northern Nigeria that is, the future habitat and sleeper cell for Moslem terrorists. ☹️ Hail Biafra.

P70 below ends with a proverb: ‘ofu onye ana asi unu abia go’ (one person does not say ‘welcome all’). This proverb implies that one person does not take a decision for everyone. A similar closing/sign-off is in P71, which contains ‘udo ga adi’. Though a local adage that simply means ‘there will be peace’, it is not usually said in English, even when the speaker is speaking English as the primary code. This means that ‘udo ga adi’ is traditionally heavier than ‘there will be peace’. In the context of Biafran discourse, this expression envisions hope for the Biafra actualization. P28 ends with a prayer: ‘Chukwu gozie Igbo’ (God bless Igbo), ‘Chukwu gozie New Biafra’ (God bless the new Biafra). God is described as ‘Ama ama amasi amasi’ (the Omniscient). In this context, prayer in the local language is probably perceived as more potent than prayer in English. Also, the attribute of God as ‘omniscient’ is perhaps not as weighty as the Igbo equivalent which literally means ‘the knower, whose knowledge never ends’.

P28. But as usual our God ‘AMA AMA AMASI AMASI’ has and will continue to confound them! Chukwu gozie Igbo. Chukwu gozie New Biafra. . .

P70. Feel me? Ofu onye ana asi unu abia go. (Ednut Igbo-American, posted 23 April 2007, 07.40 p.m.)

P71. Udo ga adi. (posted 29 April 2007, 12.06 a.m.)

P72. Nwa Asaba.

P73. Igbo Gadi.

‘Nwa Asaba’ (son of Asaba) in P72 is used as a sign-off, just as it may as well serve as an opening if someone is responding to this particular post (e.g. P65). Again, ‘Nwa Asaba’ is not usually rendered in English during Igbo traditional discourse. So, certain expressions are better said in the local code, otherwise some levels of meaning or culture will be lost in an attempt to render them in English.

Other forms of codeswitching are still within sentence boundaries but are part of the content of the message. In P42, for example, ‘ozo emena my people’ (line 4) expresses a wish, i.e. ‘may it never happen again’, referring to the horrors of the civil war. ‘Ozo emena’ is often used as a personal name among the Igbos, often in families that experienced deaths or tragedies shortly before the birth of a child. This local term better expresses the Igbo psychology, especially their traditional sense of tragedy and loss. The writer of P42 counsels against the repeat of the Biafran war in their quest for self-determination. He further supports his argument with an adage – ‘umunna bu ike’ (line 5),

meaning ‘brotherhood is power’ or ‘united we stand’. He believes that division among the various campaign groups inevitably endangers the Biafran course. There has been evidence of friction and fragmentation among the various campaign groups.

P42. I’m glad Biafra Nigeria world message board has come into existence. I am a Biafran through and through; it is time something is done to free people like Ralph who have the bottle to say things everyone wants to say. But no matter what, let’s not go back to those horrible thirty months of hell. Ozo emena my people, but we could overcome through a peaceful way like Ralph, but we also should remember that umunna bu ike united we stand and divided we fall like we did the last time around. (Frank O, posted 2 August 2007, 4.12 p.m.)

A similar instance of codeswitching, illustrating culture-specific meaning, has been examined in P34 above, where the writer switches to the local code to render a war song, which says: *Orula mgbe anyi ji awa anya! Onye ujo abiala nga anyi na-awa anya* (It is time to act like warriors; the fearful should not approach when we act like warriors). The song functions as a call to defend the Igbo nation against its enemies. This post was among several others that responded to the report of an alleged fish poisoning that was said to be targeted at the Igbo population in south-eastern Nigeria. Apart from code-switching, coinage is another instance of language use in the BOCG forums. This also includes peculiar Nigerian usages. There are a very few instances of this in the corpus and they are worth mentioning here. In P54 below, for example, there is a codeswitch: ‘if you must speak for oha. . .’ (line 2). (‘Oha’ in Igbo means ‘the majority’ or ‘everyone’.) In line 4, there is a coinage adapted from ‘oha’, that is ‘ohacracy’ derived from ‘democracy’. The Biafran brand of democracy, which the writer defines as ‘majority’ rule, is better captured in the Igbo-based coinage ‘ohacracy’, which is indeed the true democracy. It is rule by everyone.

P54. I care that only three people based in Chicago are pretending to speak for the Igbo nation. Another definition of democracy is Majority Rule. If you must speak for Oha, it is only reasonable to expect that you enjoy the backing of the majority of oha especially when you are expostulating on Ohacracy. If you scroll up you will read where Oha-ka addressed the Igbo nation as a nation of cowards. . .

Discourse structure

Discourses that enact inequality, for instance, often reflect ideological opinions and attitudes that are born out of mental models. Mental models can be personal or collective, that is those shared with members of a group. Both types of cognition influence interaction or discourse of individual members, while shared social representation governs the actions of such a group (Van Dijk, 2001). In the analysis of discourse structures in this section, some dimensions of discourse such as propositions, presuppositions and implications are examined in order to see how these reveal the ideology of the perceived dominated group. I have attempted to examine how certain items of vocabulary, grammatical and semantic structures, story structures and the overall topics of the posts convey ideological biases in favour of the Biafra campaign groups. In this context, the

BOCG are the 'Us' and 'We' with positive in-group representations, while Nigeria and the Nigerian government are 'Them' with the negative other-representation. We must not forget that dominated groups (e.g. BOCG) project their own ideology in order to properly articulate their goal and establish the basis for their resistance (Van Dijk, 2005). In this way, they act through their members to sustain their position.

Propositions

Propositions are arguments often embodying opinions or value judgements that are put forward to strengthen or protect one's position. They contain grammatical items that modify them (arguments) to make them sound more forceful, severe or mitigated. For instance, 'Nigerian cowards' or 'brave Biafrans' are value judgements that portray Nigeria and Biafra as either acceptable or condemnable to the reader, depending on whose side the reader belongs. Ideological representations are more visible when certain propositions stress positive actions of the 'we' in-group and negative actions of the 'they' out-group. This illustrates Van Dijk's 'ideological square': (i) emphasize our good properties/actions; (ii) emphasize their bad properties/actions; (iii) mitigate our bad properties/actions; (iv) mitigate their good properties/actions (Van Dijk, 1998: 33).

This strategy of ideological self-interest appears in the discourse of the campaign groups in relation to Nigeria. This is first articulated in Ojukwu's description of Nigeria in the *Ahiara Declaration*,⁶ and was clearly expressed in the choice of lexical items that explicitly and implicitly reveal positive and negative evaluations. For instance, Ojukwu consistently refers to Nigeria as the 'enemy'. This, of course, is expected in a war situation, where one warring side is automatically the enemy of the other. In this situation also, the 'war' is fought both militarily and verbally. Nigeria was said to have 'diabolical intentions' and was sponsored by 'wicked mentors', such as Britain. On the other hand, 'our guerrillas' (i.e. Biafran soldiers) did 'magnificent works of harassing the enemy'. The activities of the Nigerian military were also generally (expected to be) represented negatively by Ojukwu. For example, the 'proud Biafrans' contained the 'cowardly air raids on civilians' by the Nigerian Air Force and, for a period of two years, the 'defenceless and weak' Biafrans withstood an 'enemy unequalled in viciousness', who embarked on 'a crime of genocide against our people'. Nigeria and her foreign collaborators were 'our enemies' whose 'false and ill-motivated propaganda' beclouded the real issues of the war. However, the Biafran position was 'our struggle', which was a 'total and vehement rejection of all those evils which blighted Nigeria, evils which were bound to lead to the disintegration of that ill-fated federation'. Throughout the *Ahiara Declaration*, ideological propositions portrayed Nigeria as evil and as the aggressors, while the Biafrans were progressives, mainly fighting as the only option for survival.

Following the same propositional pattern, the campaign group members maintained the positive in-group representation and the negative out-group representation in the posts. In some of the posts, Nigeria is frequently referred to as 'a failed state', 'the British contraption' or 'Islamic Republic of Nigeria', etc. (such as in P74). Notice that the Biafrans are referred to as 'proud Igbo Biafrans' in P74; this is very similar to the mode of address for the same people in the *Ahiara Declaration*.

P74. Proud Igbo-Biafrans:

I feel proud to be an Igbo-Biafran. And I am very proud of our fathers, uncles, mothers and all who contributed to the Biafran effort. But for the British, Russia and the Arab world who gave massive military and diplomatic support to the British contraption called Nigeria, Biafra would have survived and the Ahiara Declaration would have been used to build a modern model African State . . . One thing I noticed in the Ahiara Declaration is that the failed state called Nigeria has borrowed ideas in that document under various guises. However, it has not worked for them because they have no regards for meritocracy. . . (Icheoku, advocate, posted 1 June 2009, 7.06 p.m.)

P75. Nigerians call it Igbo made, some will say cheap labor or imitation of arts but to the Igbos, it fulfills the need of a common man and eliminates the middle man. The Igbos sees it as their greatest element of strength, the great substantial interest on which Nigeria over looked. Igbo made is an account of intelligent, manly, progress, independent, thinking and acting for the best interest of Nigeria, earning it's own wages, accumulating those wages into capital, education and claiming the right of effective franchise and helping to unbleached the fabric of the State called Nigeria as an asshole nation with no vision, despite their ingenuity, Nigeria remains dumb and dumber. A university in Eastern Nigeria offers Chinese language to understand more about made in China because the Chinese are coming and they are coming for the common man in spite of the West. Here comes the Chinese. (Waypoint1 Biafra, posted 12 January 2006, 10.56 p.m.)

In P74 and P75 above, the economic and creative activities of the Igbo are emphasized, while the bad actions attributed to the 'Islamic Republic of Nigeria' (e.g. an attempted terrorist attack on a US airliner) are emphasized (e.g. P69). Nigeria is described in P75 as 'an asshole nation with no vision' and it remains 'dumb and dumber', while the Igbos are 'intelligent, manly, independent, thinking and acting. . .' In order to maximize out-group bad actions and minimize in-group negative aspects, some of the members of the BOCG post media reports that chronicle brazen victimization and murder of Igbos by the Nigerian police. One such report (e.g. P76) written by one Caroline Duffield of the BBC claimed that some Igbo youths were killed by the police. The killings were described as 'mindless slaughters' and 'murderous, criminal and genocidal'. In the same report, 'Biafran youth' were referred to as 'helpless people'. Nigeria was also accused of illegal killings of MASSOB members in P35 and P36 above. P35 was a 'press release' by MASSOB, while P36 was a post originally published by the 'world-wide coalition of Biafra org. . .' The two posts chronicled these killings. P35, for instance, alleged that armed soldiers were 'dispatched' to the home town of the MASSOB leader, where MASSOB members were holding their meeting. The soldiers were said to have shot 'indiscriminately', resulting in the deaths of 34 people after the 'heavy, war-like firings'. P36 also accused the Obasanjo government of 'unprovoked brutality' against MASSOB members. While the group re-emphasized their commitment to non-violence, they, however, threatened to 'defend' themselves against further police harassment and killings. The posts ended with 'to be forewarned is to be forearmed'. In the two posts, Nigerians (the 'Other') were the killers, while MASSOB and the BOCG were the non-violent and the killed. However, that the soldiers were 'dispatched' presupposes that an established authority or government must have sent them and that the military attacks on civilians was a deliberate action of the state. Whether these reports were confirmed or not again

presupposes that certain attacks must have been carried out against MASSOB members. A report by the Human Rights Watch in 2009 (in P37), for example, confirms that the Nigerian government indeed had a record of human rights violations, with the state security forces responsible for extra-judicial killings and torture. On the other hand, the threat issued by MASSOB to defend itself against police harassment appears contradictory to its principle of non-violence. The statement ‘these brutalities should not be seen as weakness: to be forewarned is to be forearmed’ actually implies that the group is capable of violent retaliation, which goes to confirm that MASSOB indeed operates an armed militia. The group has repeatedly refuted accusations of violence and kidnapping committed by its members. The warning certainly suggests that MASSOB members cannot possibly confront armed soldiers or policemen without being armed themselves.

In another report attributed to CNN, 84 Nigerian children were said to have died after ingesting a poisonous teething medicine. While the purported CNN report did not differentiate the children that died, a version of the same report posted in a BOCG forum claimed that ‘84 Biafra-Nigerian children’ died; ‘Biafra’ was topicalized in the heading of the post (i.e. P77).

P76. A Nigerian hospital has told the BBC it is overwhelmed by the number of corpses being brought to them by police. The Nigeria Police mindlessly slaughters Biafran youth, at will; there is no accountability; there is no stopping this murderous, criminal and genocidal Agency of the Nigerian Government, and the people are helpless. The Chief Medical Director at the University of Nigeria Teaching Hospital in Enugu says his staff are being forced to carry out mass burials. The BBC has established that at least seven people were last seen alive in police custody, accused of kidnapping . . . Nigeria’s police have faced strong criticism from human rights groups for carrying out extrajudicial and arbitrary killings. Amnesty international is presenting the results of a three-year investigation on Wednesday, in which they will describe the level of police killings as shocking. The BBC has visited the morgue and taken photographs. The images are disturbing. They show piles of young men, lying on top of one another and strewn about on tables and floors. In places the corpses are stacked four or five deep. Records show 75 corpses were delivered to the morgue by police between June and 26 November this year. The Chief Medical Director of the hospital, Dr Anthony Mbah, says his staff were forced to carry out a mass burial of between 70 and 80 bodies some weeks ago. He says that another mass burial is planned to take place soon. (Caroline Duffield, BBC News, Lagos, Tuesday, 8 December 2009)

P77. 84 Biafra-Nigeria children die of medicine from antifreeze

LAGOS, Nigeria (CNN) – At least 84 Nigerian children have died after ingesting teething medicine that contained a solvent typically found in antifreeze, the country’s health minister said Friday. Some 111 babies and children have been sickened since November by the tainted batch of My Pikin, which was found to contain diethylene glycol, which is used in some antifreeze and brake fluid...

By topicalizing ‘Biafra’ in the heading and portraying them as victims of deliberate neglect by Nigeria’s ‘Food and Drug Administration’, the bad actions of Nigeria are maximized, while their good actions are minimized or completely covered up. In the entire corpus, the actions and activities of the Nigerian presidents and government are

frequently criticized in the forums. P78 below is an example of where the late Nigerian president came under such attacks; he was accused of attending a meeting in Saudi Arabia instead of a United Nations (UN) meeting. This implies that he considered a trivial meeting of Islamic nations, such as the opening of a college, more important than a UN meeting. Thus, the actions of an enemy nation (Nigeria) are reflected on in the action of its presidents.

P78. The President of Islamic Republic of Northern Nigeria for the second time did not attend the UN meeting; instead, he flew to Saudi Arabia as a guest at the opening of a University of Science and Technology. Guess what? He was not received by the King of Arabia, rather by a Governor. And I ask; why would a President of a country choose to ignore his influence in the center of the world to attend a meeting in a dusty Island? Even thou Gaddafi and the satanic terror of Iran attended. Nigeria, what a country? Hail Biafra. (Supreme advocate)

P79. What a Country. The President of Islamic Republic of Northern Nigeria issued a statement in Hausa and English not to the people of Nigeria but to British Press that he is alive and well, recovering and will soon be home. He did not set a date to be home, and he did not address the Nigerian people about issues that affect them, instead he issued a statement to foreign country. Yep, Born to rule, Nigerians are beginning to see the worst of it. What a country? Hail Biafra. (Waypoint1)

The late Yar'Adua was also accused of disrespecting Nigerians when he kept silent over the state of his health while he remained in Saudi Arabia for medical care. Later, rather than address Nigerians when his long absence had already generated much controversy, he addressed the British press (P79). The writer of P79 interpreted this action as a slight on Nigerians. The actions and activities of public officers, especially Igbos in the Nigerian government, were also constructed negatively. In P80, for instance, a former Minister of Information was criticized for attempting to defend Nigeria against foreign misrepresentation. While the Minister had argued that Nigeria was not a terrorist state, the writer of P80 maintained that Nigeria was indeed a terrorist nation, citing the killing of his relative by a northerner as an example. The Minister's defence of Nigeria was described as 'shameless'. Thus, the activities and policies of the Nigerian government were consistently negatively highlighted and often misinterpreted. This tends to buttress Van Dijk's ideological square, for example 'emphasize their bad properties/actions'. The actions of Nigerian politicians, such as corruption, financial scandals and political fraud, were freely emphasized and thematized in the posts.

P80. There is something wrong to watch Dora Akumyili shamelessly declare to the world that Nigeria is alien to terrorism, the truth is that a member of her community or even her kindred most have been killed by Northern Nigerian Islamic terrorists. Yes, my cousin was hacked down at the prime of his teenage age by one mallam, nothing happened. Whenever the northern oligarchy finds themselves boxed to the corner, it's never hard to find Igbo fools who would volunteer their own life defend their masters to an extend they may not defend their own mothers. Akumyili should shut up and allow the terror architects to defend themselves.

Positive in-group representation and negative other-representation in the posts became more intense after a northern Nigerian youth attempted to blow up a US aircraft in Detroit

in December 2010 (P69). The BOCG became more vocal in their dissociation from the terrorist act and, indeed, from Nigeria. The northerners were consistently constructed as ‘the Muslims’ and the ‘terrorists’, who were not different from Yemeni or Egyptian terrorists. In P81 below, they are called ‘the jihadists’, who are ‘cold-blooded murderers of innocent men, women and children’. They are also referred to as ‘pompous idiots’. The southerners are the Christians and good people. They are also ‘the pro Judio’ and the ‘free people’ (P13). The writer of the posts, however, failed to acknowledge that many southerners still live in northern Nigeria. Singling out the northern Muslims as terrorists also failed to recognize that Islam is practised in the south and that some southern Christians still convert to Islam. As a matter of fact, this kind of ideological profiling of all northern Nigerian Muslims as terrorists lacks direct connection with the Biafran liberation, rather individuals’ advocacy, especially Diaspora Nigerian southerners who better understand the meaning of ‘profiling’ and the kind of harassment Nigerians go through at airports and immigration points. The campaigners may actually be protecting their own interests abroad, rather than the Biafran cause. It is even doubtful that Igbos in Diaspora are ready to return to Nigeria to advocate for the Biafran liberation, which would be more practical than merely using foul language against northerners on the Internet.

P81. It would seem that the Jihadists of the North have given a bad name (as if it wasn’t bad enough already) to all who live in what is called Nigeria. Something must be done to show the world that Igbo people are not Muslim jihadists, and are not cold-blooded murderers of innocent men, women and children like these people from the north. The sad part is that the world is ignorant of these differences. O what irony! that the Brits hand-delivered the oil wealth to the very people that would terrorize their population in time to come . . . and that the Americans would have to suffer and clean up the bloody mess these pompous idiots caused the whole world.

The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars, but in ourselves. . . (Greg, Supreme advocate)

Similar to the argument put forward by the writer of P80 above, many of the posts that reacted to the attempted terrorist attack on the US aircraft maintained that Nigeria is a terrorist nation. This kind of proposition, coming from Nigerians at a time when the country was being profiled by the USA as terrorist, is not only insightful of the kind of discursive strategies that are employed in the posts, but shows an extreme form of negative other-representation. By denouncing Nigeria as a terrorist nation, they are pragmatically advocating a stiff sanction against the country for a crime committed by one man. In this context, Umar Farouk Mutalabi (the terrorist) becomes the symbol and ideology of the entire north of Nigeria. This is simply not true. In P82, the writer once again argues that the solution to the northern and southern amalgamation is to divide the country. He argues that the continual existence of Nigeria as one nation only serves the interest of European sponsors, for example Britain and its ‘unlimited access to oil in the Christian south’.

P82. Nigeria is a terror sponsor state and should be branded as such, calling Nigeria a place of interest at this moment despite the fact the Nigerian oligarchy has not and will never condemn terrorism is absurd, an action the western authorities will defiantly regret on the long run. These people live and thrive in terror, killing Christians for them is like watching a baseball match in

America. The Obama administration has the duty to inform the American public of the truth about Nigeria. He must encourage Gordon Brown to loosen the conspiracy of the British government and the Nigeria northern oligarchy to hold on to power by means of terrorism and in turn, allow Britain unlimited access to oil in the Christian South. It's now down to oil money or American lives. DIVIDE NIGERIA AND MICRO MANAGE THE TERRORIST NORTH. (Ikenga Iguedo)

The discourse of the BOCG in the posts clearly illustrates propositions that reveal positive evaluations of 'Us' (the BOCG) and negative representation of 'Them' (Nigeria and the Nigerian government). The bad actions of Nigeria are emphasized and interpreted as it suits the interpreters, while the bad actions of the BOCG are minimized. In fact, bad properties of the Biafra campaigners are not mentioned at all in the posts. The Christian south is consistently constructed as 'peaceful' and good, while the Moslem north is constructed as violent and terrorist. Cases of violence and social crises, such as the Niger Delta insurgency, kidnapping and ethnic violence that have been recurrent in the 'peaceful Christian south', are not emphasized at all.

Presuppositions and implications

As already highlighted in some of the few examples above, presuppositions and implications encode propositions that are not explicitly expressed. Some presupposed propositions may be untrue or may simply be promoting the positive in-group evaluation. An opinion may also be implied or inferred from a statement, which might be understood as saying something true or false or even dangerous. Statements such as 'calling Nigeria a place of interest at this moment despite the fact the Nigerian oligarchy has not and will never condemn terrorism is absurd' (P82) and 'Nigeria is not a country in any sense, those in most part of Hausa land are not different from the hardcore terrorist you find in Yemen or Egypt' (P83) leave a dangerous presupposition that Nigeria is indeed associated with terrorism, which the world was not aware of before the attempt on the American airline on Christmas day in 2010. That the 'Nigerian oligarchy has not and will never condemn terrorism' (P82) also implies (falsely) that the Nigerian government supports acts of terrorism, Nigeria herself being a victim of terrorist attacks in recent times. For instance, the UN building in Abuja was bombed by terrorists in August 2011, killing over 20 people, some of whom were Nigerians. In the north, there have been frequent reports of bombings that not only targeted the police but also journalists and civilians, resulting in the deaths of both northerners and southerners. These attacks were said to be carried out by the Boko Haram Islamic sect who also claimed responsibility for the pro-election crises that claimed many lives, including those of Youth Service Corp members serving in some northern states. These attacks were not targeted solely at southerners. After the terrorist attempt on a US airplane, the Nigerian government strongly condemned the act. This action of government was condemned by the BOCG (e.g. in P80). The then Minister of Information, Professor Dora Akuyili (an Igbo), was criticized for being the mouthpiece of Nigeria. This, of course, confirms that the Nigerian government indeed condemns terrorism. The proposition that 'the North of Nigeria will soon supersede the rest of the world as terrorist producers' is not only

another dangerous argument, but also expresses an individual's opinion/value judgement that implies that Nigeria has been a producer of terrorists in the past. This is not true. The question is: what does this kind of proposition intend to achieve? First, this is part of the ideological emphasis given to the bad properties of the out-group Other (Nigeria) that is expected to produce a negative opinion of and attitude to Nigeria by the international community. Second, it is part of the strong arguments of the BOCG which forms the basis of their resistance, that is the North is bad, the North is terrorist; the South is good, the South is Christian, therefore they cannot co-exist as one country. The historical experience of the Biafran war, which up until the present time is still being viewed as ongoing because of the perceived marginalized status of the Igbos in Nigeria, remains fresh in the minds of the BOCG. Therefore, the verbal war going on in the BOCG forums forms part of this resistance of a people seeking justice.

P83. Washington got to listen to Biafrans at this moment, Nigeria is not a country in any sense, those in most part of hausaland are not different from the hardcore terrorist you find in Yemen or Egypt. The North of Nigeria will soon supersede the rest of the world as terrorist producers. (Iguedo, posted 27 December 2009, 11.25 p.m.)

The implications and presuppositions of opinions and value judgements in the data express socio-economic and political propositions, most of which are obvious assumptions that promote positive representation of Us and negative representation of Them. Nigeria is often constructed as the initiator of actions that aim at destroying the Igbos. Some of these propositions also clearly imply that Biafra Igbos are not Nigerian or that Igbos are united to fight a common enemy. In reality, this is not the case. As a matter of fact, the Igbos are not in the least united. For instance, the *Ohaneze Ndigbo* (a non-radical Igbo socio-cultural organization) and other Igbo elites (including the founding leader of the Biafra state, Emeka Odumegwu Ojukwu) have consistently dissociated themselves from MASSOB and the BOCG in their efforts to realize the Biafran dream. While these other Igbo groups seek 'reintegration' of the Igbo in the Nigerian state and greater participation of the Igbo in the Nigerian government, the BOCG seek outright cessation (Ojukwu, 2009). Even among the BOCG, the various small groups do not agree. For example, a Biafran campaign group known as 'Ekwe Nche' is denounced and criticized by other members of the BOCG.

The posts also imply that the defunct Biafran state will one day become a reality. P84, for example, is a proposition in the Igbo language that says: 'Ndi Igbo anyi ga enwere onwanyi oge na adighianya' (Our people, the Igbos, shall be free in a short while). This implies that Igbos are not free at present – a proposition which the Nigerian government would vehemently refute. This argument is supported by the statement in P85 that describes Nigeria as a dungeon: 'I can feel how he (Ojukwu) felt when he wanted his people out of a dungeon called Nigeria. . .' The word 'dungeon' has very strong connotations. And if Nigeria is indeed a dungeon, it is certainly not just the Igbos who should seek freedom. Interestingly, there have been Igbos who have served in top government positions in previous governments in Nigeria and Igbos who have served as federal ministers and state governors. Yet there have not been significant changes in the living standards of the Igbos, even in the Igbo states where Igbos are governed by their own

brothers and sisters. Particularly now that Nigeria is governed by a southern president, the north is watching to see what happens to the general living standards of Nigerians.

For over 30 years, Nigeria was ruled by northern presidents, both military and civilian. Interestingly, the writer of P80 argues that the present Nigerian government is still being governed by the 'Northern Oligarchy', which implies that Jonathan's government is simply a stooge in the hands of the north. Similarly, P87 concludes that 'the old government must repent and become new one, and stop threatening our representatives to work as their boys when they are meant to work for the people they represent'. The expression 'working as their boys' presupposes that southern representatives are actually working under certain masters (perhaps northern masters). P85 and P86, therefore, envisage internal struggles by other ethnic groups for independence from the 'dungeon called Nigeria'. Nigeria is currently divided into six geo-political zones. These zones are probably what the writers of the posts refer to as 'six nations fighting to live separate now'. Again, this presupposes that Nigeria is currently undergoing internal crises that might break up the nation as a matter of course. But, surprisingly, up to the time of this research, there are no obvious cessation struggles going on in the country apart from with the Biafrans. In the last line, however, the writer of P85 points out that his proposition was a mere dream.

P84. Ndi Igbo anyi ga enwere onweanyi oge na adighianya. (Osyprime, 12 June 2011, 2.30 p.m.)

P85. Ojukwu is our number 1 Igbo man living . . . after him we start counting. I can feel how he felt when he wanted his people out of a dungeon called Nigeria . . . but I see the 6 nations fighting to live separate now . . . it is those dreams that come to pass not like a drunkard dreams. (*profetifeanyi*, posted 22 August 2010, 12.09 p.m.)

P86. I agree ur comment six nations fighting 2 disintegrate 4rm dis dungeon called Nigeria. long live Ojukwu, long live true biafrans, long live Biafra. (*valnadis*, posted 11 July 2011, 12.28 p.m.)

P87. With respect to Jonathan's government when it is built with respect. I supported it and will only continue when it is taking us to expected future. My bitterness is against the harassment of the Igbos in their land. This time with correction and compensation of the former mistakes called extermination of defenceless Igbos, any country cannot be deceived to believe that the federal system they practice is what the Nigeria practice, when the time comes . . . The old government must repent and become new one, and stop threatening our representative to work as their boys when they are meant to work for the people they represent. (*cubefeed*, posted 28 April 2010, 5.10 p.m.)

Another strategy of emphasizing the bad properties of the 'Other' applied by the BOCG is to critique, in very strong terms, some perceived unhealthy government policies. They also take advantage of the obvious general insecurity in the land, corruption in government, poor infrastructure, election fraud and general poverty of the citizens to condemn the government. In P8, for example, the writer argues that Biafrans sharing the same country with 'these Muslim Hooligans' would result in sharing with the 'shame of Nigeria'. This 'shame' (implying that Nigeria is currently in shame for whatever reason,

or is promoting shameful activities) includes the destruction of public education, in order that ‘money bags’ (a metaphor for corrupt government officials) may continue to send their ‘spoilt brats’ overseas to be educated. This again implies that corrupt politicians deliberately ignore education development in the country because they can afford the option of sending their children abroad. This argument has been an ongoing one in Nigerian social and political discourse. The writer goes on to say: ‘for those Ndigbo and people of other nations stranded in Nigeria, make distinction of yourself’. ‘Ndigbo’ (Igbos), according to the writer, are ‘stranded in Nigeria’. The serious implication of this proposition is that Igbos are not Nigerians, because only a traveller can be stranded. A stranded traveller, of course, is never at rest until he gets to his destination. So the writer categorizes the Igbos with the ‘people of other nations’, who are also stranded in the country. By implication, the Igbo may never rest until they get home; Nigeria to them is never a home.

The writer of P9 possibly felt the same way when he asked: ‘are you guy prepared to live in the Islamic Republic of Nigeria. Personally I am not. Laugh this off if you like . . . (it) is coming unless you join with the Biafran train right now!’ ‘Personally I am not’ implies that this writer has several options to free himself of his Nigerian identity. For instance, if he is already in the USA, he can acquire American citizenship and remain abroad; or continue to radically support the Biafran struggle until Biafra becomes a reality as hoped. So he urges his readers to support the cause immediately. This call sounds similar to the kind of urgent call to join the Tunisian or Egyptian protests, as in the examples below:

- (i) Everyone come to Tahrir now we need you we are no less than 10,000 and no more police #JAN25 16:42:32 Jan 25. (Ghonim Wael Ghonim)
- (ii) جيجي جيجي don't let the police intimidate us with their presence, they always have been there and always will, it's time to move #Jan25. (Gsquare86 Gigi Ibrahim) (Cited from *Tweets from Tahrir*, by Idle and Nunns, 2011, Kindle, 355–359)

The denunciation of Nigeria continued in P21 where the writer wrote: ‘Nigeria is not a great nation; it is not one of them; it has never been; it has no way to navigate out of this because it is already sunk. . .’ This type of proposition is not only pessimistic about Nigeria’s future, but presupposes that previous assumptions about Nigeria being a great nation were false. While the writer did not explain the indices for qualification as a ‘great nation’, one can infer from his previous statements that he referred to socio-economic development. P25 identified other pitfalls such as political instability and election fraud. According to the writer, ‘election rigging’ has been the vogue in Nigeria since it gained independence. He blamed the civil war on ‘massive rigging’ of the regional and federal elections of 1964–1965. Over 40 years later, another war against the Biafrans seemed to continue unabated. ‘War’ was used as a metaphor for what the writer described as ‘stealthy intrigues and sabotages’ – ‘a secret war against the rights, dignity and aspirations of the Igbos’. One way the Nigerian government achieved this was to install a ‘puppet’ government in Anambra state (an Igbo state) and to perpetually disenfranchise certain people. Again, whether these accusations are right or wrong presupposes that the

government of Nigeria has been guilty of political fraud and that certain sections of society are aggrieved for injustice and human rights violations committed against them, particularly the Igbo population.

As pointed out earlier in the analysis, the Nigerian government has been accused not only by the BOCG but also by other social critics of corruption and mismanagement of public funds, and it is said that despite huge earnings from oil, the average Nigerian lives on less than \$2 a day (Chiluwa, 2011a). The writer of P37 argues that in spite of the 'record oil revenues in 2008, government corruption and mismanagement robbed Nigerians of their rights to health and education'. This statement again implies that although Nigeria ranks among the poorest nations, the country actually derives sufficient income from oil to develop the nation. However, the standard of living for its citizens remains among the lowest in the world. This type of social criticism coming from an opposition group is understandable, yet evidence of corruption and financial fraud in Nigeria remains common knowledge. These critiques are an indirect call to the government to be held accountable and to initiate sound policies to alleviate the suffering of its people.

Conclusion

The Biafran resistance comprises text-based online resistance, without immediate and corresponding offline protests. These are efforts of self-determination towards achieving a separate independent state for the Igbos of south-eastern Nigeria. The BOCG have mainly utilized discussion forums and customized websites for their online activism. Their resistance has been characterized by campaigns, and social criticism. They have also gone to 'verbal war' against the Nigerian government, presumably populated by the northern political elite. While MASSOB – an offline campaign group (with its militia arm) – has organized 'successful' protest marches in the past, the group has not been primarily mobilized by social media; rather, it has been motivated and organized by its leader (Uwazuruike), who probably could have been aided by social media networks.

While it is difficult to predict the same degree of success of the protests in North Africa for that of Nigeria, it is not altogether untrue that the Biafran online resistance is not impactful. The results may be slower but they are certainly progressive. With the increasing rate of social media use in Nigeria, it is possible that more Igbo youths are becoming sensitized to the Biafra question. Those who have been ignorant of the Biafran revolution of 1967, due to the deliberate policy of the Nigerian government to mitigate this aspect of Nigerian history, are getting sufficient information about the perceived genocide committed against the Igbos by the Nigerian government.

One of the main security implications of the Biafran online campaigns is that their potential should not be underestimated. The deliberate and consistent negative representations of Nigeria's roles in the civil war, and the fronting of the instances of victimization and murder of Igbos in contemporary Nigeria, are a very strong discursive strategy in favour of the BOCG. Igbos are repeatedly portrayed as prisoners and slaves in their own country; this is heightened by the postings of media reports about

police harassment of the Igbos and MASSOB members. These are likely to provoke greater ethnic nationalism and incite mass action in support of the Biafran cause. It is even possible that many Igbo youths are signing up to online Biafran forums on a daily basis, and that they are directly or indirectly being mobilized for a physical offline protest in future. It is also likely that the Biafrans in Diaspora maintain strong educated offline groups locally in addition to MASSOB, who are currently being sensitized and trained through the Internet. They may also have other plans to realize their objectives. If one of their goals – to sensitize the international community in regard to the Biafran challenge – is achieved, the BOCG would have influenced opinion in their favour and gained the support of the international community.

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Notes

1. See Tao (2011). According to Maya Tao, all routes to Egyptian networks were withdrawn from the Internet's global routing table; consequently, no websites were accessible within Egypt during Mubarak's regime. Despite the rising death toll during the crisis, demonstrators bypassed the government ban on Facebook and Twitter and networked among each other, contributing approximately 8% of all tweets. Editors from mashable.com gathered social media usage statistics using the real-time analytical tool, *Trendr*.
2. Wikipedia, 2011.
3. Wikipedia, 2011.
4. See Sue Boetcher (<http://www.fullcirc.com/community/communitywhatwhy.htm>).
5. See Sue Boetcher (<http://www.fullcirc.com/community/communitywhatwhy.htm>).
6. The Ahiara Declaration was the principle of the Biafran revolution which forms Ojukwu's national broadcast on the occasion of the second anniversary of the new Biafran state on 1 June 1969.

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