# LEXICALISATION IN NEWS STORIES OF SOME NIGERIAN NATIONAL NEWSPAPERS

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## Abstract

There has not been much research on unmasking the ideological bias embedded in the language of the seemingly objective representations of people, events, institutions, and policies in Nigerian newspapers. Thus, this study explores how lexical choices are used to simultaneously convey information and judgment on people, events, and policies in Nigerian newspaper news reports. The study applies critical discourse analysis to analyse selected news stories relating to politics, economy, security, sports, health, and religion, from four Nigerian national daily newspapers (*The Guardian, The Nation, Nigerian Tribune,* and *Daily Trust*). Findings of the study reveal that Nigerian newspaper reporters' choice of lexical patterns produces differential judgmental stances which have some control on the attitudes and actions of readers towards the people, events and policies represented. The findings also depict that Nigerian newspapers often represent people, events, and policies through sensational but very blatantly biased, inflammatory and pejorative lexical items, which undoubtedly reveal the reporters' desperation to propagandise, sensationalise, binarise, or impose certain meanings upon the webs of complexity in news discourse in Nigerian newspapers. Thus, the study recommends that Nigerian journalists, who are products of a nation-state that is confronted with many problems, should strive to be fair, balanced, and restrained in their deployment of representational resources.

**Introduction**

In Nigerian media discourse, the reporter uses a wide variety of representational resources in doing his or her job. Some of the linguistic structures, pragmatic codings, styles of presentation, and visual imagery are his or her own choosing while others are re-enacted or reproduced to appropriately represent the ideas, intentions, power, and emotion of the agents or news makers (who do not hesitate to express their prejudice and discrimination on some issues, societies or groups) in the news discourse. Thus, the reporter's language, style, and visual images at times affect, shape and control the attitude, opinion and thinking of the audience about some people, policies, events and situations. The problem of the re-enactment of power, prejudice and discrimination in Nigerian print media discourse can be said to be capable of promoting social, political and economic discrimination in the country because newspapers have enormous and lasting influence, language being the main tool of this influence (Smirnova, 2009: 80). Newspapers can be read and re-read by audience; they may be shared with friends, family members and workmates; and they may be photocopied and archived in order to have permanent access to them. This is why, according to Liu (2009: 60), the last few decades have witnessed a great deal of research on print media representations from different perspectives.

The newspaper is a text that exemplifies language use in a social context. It is a multimodal or multisemiotic text. It is polythematic and involves a lot of societal problems and issues. It uses linguistic, discourse and visual resources in representing (or misrepresenting) people, events, opinions, and policies. The choice and use of these linguistic resources are not in all cases the journalists' creation but are dictated by the values and norms of their institution (Pan, 2002: 51). In other words, lexicalisation and imaging in media discourse are rooted in some specific cultures and ideologies as discourse itself is ideology (van Dijk, 1991). Media representations through language and images are often found to be discrepant from so-called objective reality (Teo, 2000). Such representations, however, determine public perceptions (or misperception) of some people, sects, events, and policies are capable of distorting audience's attitudes, opinions, and actions towards other people, societies, and events. Media researchers claim that media representations influence people's perceptions of reality. In other words, individuals learn about events, people, and issues from the media and they react based on this knowledge (Sotirovic, 2001).

Although there have been several critical studies on media discourse in the Western countries, there are very few of such in Nigeria. The few ones available focused primarily on interesting devices in Nigerian newspaper reporting, using methodologies and analytical insights of error analysis, text linguistics, genre analysis, stylistics, sociolinguistics, pragmatics, and semiotics. Duncan (2006) employs discourse analysis in his assessment of language and discourse trends and themes which manifest in print media representation of Black South Africans in the fading days of apartheid. His findings reveal that the overriding discourse was that of Blacks as violent, untrustworthy, subhuman, racist, and unreasonable. He also reports the near-complete absence of similar emotive descriptors in news stories depicting Whites as perpetrators of violence. Olorunnisola (2006) is also a study that uses discourse analysis to unravel the language and discourse of racism in some local and international newspapers in South Africa. The study clearly confirms the existence of a typical separation of powers along racial lines typified. He observes that there are a few instances of language of conflict and discrimination in some news stories in a way that readers are left with little doubt that there are divisions along racial lines. Nevertheless, Duncan (2006) and Olorunnisola (2006) address only one social problem - racism.

Yin (2007) combines the analysis of media texts and audience interpretations to explore the extent towhich the media narratives constrain audience interpretations and the extent to which audience members can resistthe preferred meanings presented by the media. His study affirms that media texts serve as mate-narratives foraudience interpretations. Even when audience members are able to resist the ideology conveyed by one type ofmedia, they rely on the dominant meanings of another. Caldas-Coulthard and Moon (2010) use corpus methodology as a research tool to investigate how social actors are classified in the public discourse of the media with lexis as a point of entry. Their findings indicate that uses of pre-modification associated with the two newspapers in Britain and their lexical choices produce differential judgmental stances that have some social effects. They also observe that the media categorize people through very specific point of view and values not always apparent to the uncritical audience. This indicates that media all over the world craftily often take advantage of narrative as a powerful tool to influence the audience or determine their thoughts about people. Ismail (2010) investigates mainstream U.S. newspaper discourses concerning the dividing wall that Israel built as a separation barrier from the West Bank. He

explores news media's role as agents of social control and influence and observes that while the media's role in social control and influence may be significant, the adequacy with which they perform this role is questionable. Closely related to the above, Pounds (2010) uses critical linguistic analysis to investigate authorial stance in English news reporting and the nature of authorial voice itself. He observes that expressive resources and reporting style in Italian news reporting are often loaded with prejudice.

**Methods**

This study is qualitative. It involves critical content analysis of selected news stories from four Nigerian national daily newspapers (*The Guardian, The Nation, Nigerian Tribune, and Daily Trust).* The four newspapers are selected as representatives of national newspapers because their circulation cuts across the six geo-political zones in Nigeria and they are known for moulding enlightened public opinion, pungent editorialising on issues of national interest, and informed feature articles and news on national issues (Phillips, Roberts, and Benjamin, 1999). The newspapers are also part of the most widely read newspapers in Nigeria and they share similar features in terms of circulation, coverage, and fame. News stories selected concern politics, economy, security, sports, health, and religion from 117 purposively selected editions of the newspapers during one-year period, spanning March 2007 to February 2008.

**Theoretical Framework:  Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)**

Critical Discourse Analysis, as it is practised today, has become far wider and deeper than what Fowler, Hodge, Kress, and Trew (1979) suggested and what Fairclough (1989) envisaged. CDA has sensitised researchers and exposed them to the power of linguistic, pragmatic and visual representations and their ability to shape and manipulate audience's understanding, perception, attitudes, and actions (Sotirovic, 2001; Bloor and Bloor, 2007). Also, since the emphasis in the twenty-first century has been on democracy, globalisation, equity, justice, and peace, CDA has also concentrated more on exploring and accounting for the relationships between discourse, or text and social attitudes and actions with the objective of describing and analysing how power/control, prejudice, discrimination, and oppression are enacted, 'reproduced and legitimised' in public texts or discourses (van Dijk, 1996: 84). The aim of this new focus is that with a detailed analysis of text mediated control, dominance,

prejudice, and discrimination, there will be more insight into general social, economic, political, gender, ethnic, religious, and cultural dominance, prejudice and discrimination which have bedevilled many countries of the world. The belief of critical discourse analysts is that things, events, people, groups, and societies could be represented in some other better ways that are pleasurable and acceptable to both reporters and readers (Kress, 1996; Ragusa, 2005).

CDA relies largely on the tenets of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) to show how linguistic forms can be systematically related to social and ideological functions. SFL is well placed to provide theoretical tools for CDA because it is a social semiotic theory where meaning is seen to be context dependent. SFL has also gone a long way to provide a comprehensive approach to language (O'halloran, 2008). The major strength of SFL approach to CDA is Halliday's metafunctional principle which provides an integrating platform for theorizing how representation resources interact to create meaning. The metafunctional principle is the principle that representation resources simultaneously provide the tools for constructing ideational (i.e. experiential meaning and logical relations) and for enacting social relations (i.e. interpersonal meaning). These metafunctions are enabled through the organization of the discourse, which is the textual metafunction of semiosis. The metafunctional principle provides a basis for examining the functionalities of representation resources and for analyzing the ways in which semiotic choices interact in discourses to fulfill particular objectives (e.g. to persuade readers to believe a story or cajole them to act in a way, or to stir the public to violence for some economic gains). The SFL approach to CDA is concerned with critical assessment of the meaning potential of representation resources distributed across strata and the analysis of meaning and functional values of linguistic and pragmatic choices in media discourse.

## Lexical Patterning in Nigerian National Newspapers

Lexical patterning relates to word choice and word creation devices deployed by the news reporter for some purposes. The news reporter's choice of words says and means a lot. In fact, tyranny is much more than threat or physical torture; it looms large in lexical patterning in daily human communication encounters (Hayakawa and Hayakawa 1997). Lexicalization involves ideology (a controversial and elusive issue which can be seen as a "mosaic of cultural assumptions, political beliefs and institutional practices" (Simpson 1993:

176)). Thus, Teo (2000: 14) argues that analysts have to "peep into the underlying ideological meaning behind newspaper reporting" in order to properly understand lexical choices.

Lexis is a level of linguistic coding in text creation at which facts can be represented (or misrepresented) with the greatest degree of freedom. In other words, the news reporter demonstrates his or her freedom of word choice in managing and coding 'facts' gathered. The choices however mirror his or her views on the person, event, issue, or policy being represented. These views, according to Pan (2002) are formulated on the basis of the reporter's social, political, and institutional ideologies.

**Choice of Nominal Expressions**

Expressions that are used to name people, places, policies, things, ideas, events, qualities, and actions may be seen as complex and ideological. They often raise problematic issues about who is being represented and how he or she is being represented. Nominal expressions have power in public texts or discourses. This is the reason why some groups decide what they prefer to be called and the appropriate referential expressions for individuals and groups are those by which they refer to themselves. However, people who desire to be referred to or named in some ways usually encounter some rigorous resistance, especially from those who do not want to relinquish the power to name others in a discriminatory way. Thus, the use of nominal expressions is not unproblematic in Nigerian newspapers.

**Nouns That Exclude or Suppress the 'Other'**

With the advent of Critical Linguistics and Critical Discourse Analysis, there has been vigorous resistance to the use of gender-biased nominal expressions such as 'man', for human beings; 'mankind', for humanity; 'foreman', for representative, and so on. The criticism has not only come from critical discourse analysts but also from critical sociologists and human rights activists. Surprisingly, in spite of the campaigns against discrimination against women, such gender-biased expressions are still common in Nigerian newspapers.

**Sample 1:** *Daily Trust*, **Wednesday July 4, 2007  Page 4**

> **Each policeman to own a house in four years**
> Every policeman in the country will own a house in less than four years, the Police Equipment Foundation (PEF) promised in Lagos yesterday.
>     Briefing newsmen at a world press conference, the National Co-ordinator of PEF, Chief Kenny Martins said the body plans to build 450,000 housing units for the police before 2011.…

**Sample 2:** *Nigerian Tribune*, **Monday June 11, 2007 Front Page**

> **Armed Men Kill Yar'Adua's Man**
> The secretary of Yar'Adua Campaign Organisation in Diaspora, Chief Tunde Olamiju was on Thursday shot dead by armed bandits Mile 2 area of Lagos.…

**Sample 3:** *Daily Trust*, **Wednesday January 9, 2008  Page 7**

> **INEC inaugurates 15-man delimitation committee**
> The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) yesterday inaugurated a fifteen-man committee headed by Dr Muhammed A. Jumare.…

The choice of 'policeman' in the headline of Sample 1 and the use of 'newsmen' in the lead of Sample 1 imply that there are no women in the Nigeria Police Force and in journalism. It is also presupposed that policewomen will not benefit from the housing project and better conditions of service reported in Sample 1 as the nominal expression excludes them from the benefits. Alternatives such as 'police officers' for 'policemen' and 'journalists' for 'newsmen' are more appropriate and have fair representation. The era of male dominance of some professions such as writing, journalism, policing and defence, engineering, transportation, and medicine is gone. Some years back, the assumption of many language users was that everyone is male, able-bodied, rich, educated, young, and married to an opposite sex. However, advancement, civilization, and liberation movements have made it necessary to use language with responsibility, fairness, equity, and justice in order to promote social relationship and world peace. Also, for many centuries back, learners of English have been taught to use masculine pronouns in situations where the gender of the subject is unclear or variable, or when a group to which the subject refers contains members of both sexes. However, an important goal of critical discourse analysis is the avoidance of words and expressions that are overtly or subtly biased against individuals or groups based on gender, ethnicity, social, political, or religious inclination, ability or disability.

The choice of the nominal expression, 'armed men' in Sample 2 suggests a kind of bias against men. In other words, women are underrepresented in the crimes reported. The

nominal expression seems to exonerate women in the crimes of taking arms and killing. Alternatives including 'gunners', 'armed bandits', 'murderers', or 'assassins', 'kidnappers', and 'abductors', should be preferred.

The choice of the nominator modifier, '15-man' in Sample 3 implies that women are not represented in the committee. This is, however, contrary to the fact as the committee has Hajia Bintu Ibrahim as member. Therefore, since the committee is not men affair, a gender neutral expression such as '15-person/member committee' or 'a committee of 15' would be more appropriate.

The preponderance of exclusive and suppressive nominal expressions in Nigerian newspaper news stories as exemplified above still reminds Nigerian women of their controversial second-class citizenship in all sectors. Liberation movements, feminist and post-feminist research findings, and advances in critical discourse analysis and critical sociology have made it obligatory to use language with a sense of fairness, equity, and justice in all public texts and discourses. Newspaper reporters in the western world are conscious of this development and are less biased in their choice of nominal expressions (Fairclough 1992); but in Africa, women have continued to be underrepresented through the reporter's use of language.

**Blatantly Biased Nouns**

The fact that some names or nouns simultaneously communicate facts and judgment gives a special complexity to lexical choice, especially in news discourse. Nouns that have some affective connotations tend to influence the behaviour of the public toward those whom they are applied.

**Sample 4:** *The Guardian*, **Thursday October 18, 2008  Page 5**

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| **Why Sale of Unity Schools was Suspended, by Official**<br>The recent decision of the Federal Government to suspend the sale of 102 unity<br>schools in the country has been traced to the need for transparency in the exercise…. |

Words are powerful tools and much more powerful when users do not explicitly clarify their roles in representing the world to an audience. The newspaper reporter can manipulate the audience into taking on a role or stance that they may not otherwise have taken. For example, the choice of 'sale' in sample 4 and the avoidance of 'privatisation' or 'commercialisation' is a way of making the audience believe that the immediate past administration in Nigeria had planned to sell the Federal Unity Schools and call for some

actions and reactions. The reporter is clever in the choice as he also uses the accolade 'Unity Schools' in lieu of Federal Government Colleges. This is craftily done in sample 4 in an attempt to register in the mind of the readers that the Federal Colleges symbolise unity in Nigeria and any attempt to 'sell' them is calculated at selling the unity of Nigeria. Hence, the reporter actually airs his belief and assumption that privatisation means sale of government parastatal. This he does in a way that the policy will be disliked, feared and castigated by the public.

**Derogatory Naming and Labelling**

Naming and describing people, polices, places, and events are usually made very sensational in Nigerian newspapers. These are often done with words of bad connotations and they go on unchallenged. However, critical examination of such naming and description choices can uncover ideological assumptions. In other words, such biased naming choices are more often than not the reporter's deliberate attempt to cunningly control the reader. Therefore, he or she deliberately chooses a very offensive name to represent people and policies. Also, there are instances of 'over-lexicalization' or the deployment of 'an excess of quasi-synonymous terms for entities or ideas that are a particular preoccupation or problem' in the discourse (Fowler 1991: 85). Patterns of derogatory naming also include pronoun use, specifically the polarising we/us and they/them (van Dijk 1993: 278).

Derogatory names can ruin reputations and end lives; they can rob people of their rights, posts, and freedom; and they can make people to be mad at one another. Offensive naming and description tend to influence behaviour toward those whom they are applied. They can arouse the readers' contempt so that they will dismiss the person or group so disapprovingly named. At times such derogatory naming are injurious to national integration and security. Hence, when such derogatory naming appear on pages of national dailies, unsuspecting readers tend to adopt them as the ideal.

**Sample 5:** *The Guardian*, **Sunday June 3, 2007  Front Page**

**Militants Challenge Yar'Adua**
On a day it released six hostages and announced a freeze on attacks on oil workers and facilities for one month, the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) turned heat on President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua.
    The dominant militia group operating in the region accused the President of toeing the path of former President Olusegun Obasanjo in handling the delicate issues of the Niger Delta….

**Sample 6:** *The Guardian*, **Friday August 10, 2007  Front Page**

> **Govt reinstates 'bribe-for-verdict' judge, may appeal**
> The Federal Government yesterday ordered the reinstatement of Justice Chrysantus Selong following the judgment of the Federal High Court in Abuja nullifying his dismissal by the National Judicial Council (NJC) in 2004 over an allegation of bribery.

News reporters, like all other language users, are 'wordsmiths'. Like the blacksmith, they have 'facts' as their raw material which they mould in a form that best appeals to them. In other words, 'facts' are worded for readers in the way that interests the reporter, who is largely influenced by his or her political, social, economic interest and institutional ideologies. For example, several names are used to represent various agitation groups in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. Labels such as 'militants' (as in Sample 5) and many other derogatory names have continued to appear on pages of many Nigerian newspapers without any reservations. Apart from the fact that such names have the tendency of reducing the people to the problem of militancy and the crimes of armed robbery and hostage taking, they are unfairly used. In the first instance, this biased naming strategy is against the principle of 'people first' (Hayakawa and Hayakawa 1997). The people that are so named ought to be seen and named as people first and some adjectives that describe their activities or agitations can follow instead of adopting the nefarious activities with which they have been associated as their names.

The critical questions that readily come to mind are, who is a militant? Is everyone that carries gun a militant? How appropriate is it to name people with guns as militants? Why are other names such as 'protestants', 'human right activists', 'environmental degradation protestants', and 'revolutionarists' neglected by the reporter and the most controversial and derogatory adopted? There is a suggestive evidence that the media often help to legitimise some social and political misconceptions in the polity by making the reader believe that it is commonsensical to call the Niger Delta agitators militants or gunmen.

There is deliberate over-lexicalization in the headline of Sample 6 not only to attract buyers and readers but also to communicate personal convictions. The reporter in collaboration with the editor unequivocally saturates the headline with personal prejudice and judgment by describing the judge as 'bribe-for-verdict judge'. This is done to castigate the Federal High Court as well as the Federal Government for ordering the reinstatement of the judge. Thus the reporter has deviously suggested that the judge is corrupt in spite of the fact that the Federal High Court, Abuja did not find him wanting. Such unsubstantiated

derogatory naming which is a common journalistic practice in Nigeria is injurious to the personality of the referent and depicts the reporter and editor as biased.

Although every persuasive text or discourse, especially news story, is inevitably presented from an angle or ideological position (Fowler 1991; Dare 2004), overt biases should not feature in news reporting. The media often claim to tell the story as it is but the inconsistencies and the choice labels with the strongest and most disagreeable affective connotations demonstrated in the samples above, show that Nigerian newspaper reporters and or editors do not often tell it as it is. According to the critical realism theory (Lau 2004), nothing has a natural name except what people agree to call it. In other words, it is actually language that shapes reality. Linguistic structures amount to a nonsensical arrangement of letters and words without consensus that assign them meanings. Therefore, ordering reality and coding facts should be done with fairness.

**Biased Naming of People with Diseases**

For many years back, language users name people in various ways. For example, when HIV/AIDS was first noticed in the early 1980s, it was described in many ways and people diagnosed with the virus were named freely. However, with much stigmatisation of the people living with HIV/AIDS and the fight against stigmatisation, coupled with advent of critical discourse analysis, naming of people living with HIV/AIDS as well as other diseases has come under scrutiny. Thus, naming patterns such as 'HIV-infected person', 'HIV-infected individuals' 'HIV-patients' (as used in Sample 7) inter alia, are derogatory and stigmatising. Alternatives such as 'persons with HIV/AIDS', and 'individuals living with HIV/AIDS' are fair. The important thing is that people represented must first be represented as people before the idea of disease is included as qualifier (this is in consonance with the principle of 'people first' Hayakawa and Hayakawa, 1997) if and only if it is of utmost importance. Modifiers describe permanent qualities while qualifiers give temporary traits (Epstein 1978). For example, in the noun phrase 'the *short Hausa* man *who sell onions'*, 'short' and 'Hausa' are modifiers and they described permanent qualities whereas 'who sells onions' is qualifier and states the man's temporary characteristic. Thus the use of HIV/AIDS as a modifier, and not qualifier, presents the victim's situation as permanent.

**Sample 7:** *Daily Trust*, **Monday July 16, 2007 Page 48**

> **FCTA pledges support for HIV/AIDS patients**
> People living with HIV/AIDS will henceforth receive more support from the Federal Capital Territory Administration, Chairman, Transition Committee of FCTA, Engr. Mohammed Sani Alhassan said weekend.
>   Engr. Alhassan made the pledge when he received a delegation of the network of people living with HIV/AIDS led by its national coordinator, Dr Pat Matamilola….

Although newspapers aim at economy as a result of several items competing for the limited space, fair representation must not be sacrificed for this journalistic practice. For example in sample 7, only the headline of the news story has biased naming of people living with HIV/AIDS; the lead and detail have fair representation. Although the newspaper headline has its unique language and style, when it involves naming, a balance has to be maintained between the textual-rhetoric principle of economy (Leech 1983) and critical-discourse principle of fair naming (Hayakawa and Hayakawa, 1997).

**Naming People with Disability or the Less Privileged**

Language or language user orders reality (Waymer, 2009). It is whatever the user represents as disability, for example, that the reader registers as such. The newspaper as an agent of socialization and orientation is supposed to positively re-orientate people about fair naming of people with disabilities and people who are less privileged. Unfortunately, Nigerian newspapers help to reinstate and legitimize the derogatory and illogical patterns of naming people with disability.

Reducing people to disability by naming them as 'disabled', 'destitute people', 'disabled persons' (as in sample 8) is not only derogatory and offensive but also illogical. For example, how logical is it to name people as 'the big headed', 'the big or frog-eyed people', 'the big nosed', or 'the big breasted people'? In spite of the fact that the names above portray some unusual physical features of people, language users have not ordered them to be used for representing the people with such features.

Whereas fair or unbiased expressions are always logical and accurate in representation, biased names are illogical and offensive. Using biased representational resources in naming people based on ability is a kind of bi-polarisation of society into 'we' and 'them'. Nigerian newspaper reporters, over the years, have been seen as reflecting the practices of those who have the power to suppress the 'other' and determine their experience and or fate. Hence, socio-political and economic discrimination or inequality against the less privileged is further reinforced in Nigerian newspapers because of the journalistic value of non-advocacy and use of biased language.

**Sample 8:** *Daily Trust*, **Thursday July 19, 2007   Page 14**

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**1000 disabled, almajirai receive free computer training**
To rid the nation of destitute people, Khemsafe Computer and Communications
has trained over 1000 almajirai and disabled persons from the northern states of
Nigeria in computer application.
    Khemsafe's Director, Mr Dave Obiora yesterday called on the nineteen
northern state governors to throw their weight behind the training and
rehabilitation of disabled and almajirai persons in the North….

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Apart from the general misconception of the word *almajirai* to mean beggars (as in sample 8), the morphological adaptation of the name for use in English texts in place of Quranic school pupils is slanted. *Almajirai* originally means (Quranic) school children; but it is often misused to mean beggars. Etimologically, the word is from *Al-muhajirai* (a helper of the Islamic cause). Unfortunately, young children who beg especially in Northern Nigeria are often misrepresented as *almajirai* and the Nigerian newspapers have helped to reinstate this pejorative naming as if it is commonsensical. The label has assumed wide usage in Nigeria and it is being used in several media almost unchallenged. Therefore, there is 'collocational incongruity' (Stubbs 1996: 172) in the headline of sample 8. The placement together of 'disabled' and 'almajirai' reveals biased association which gives a negative connotation  and indicate ideological 'turbulence' (Toolan 2001: 227).

**Choice of Sensational and Emotive Verbs**

Verbs are not mere action words; the actions they express often mean a lot about the actors attributed to them. In other words, the choice of a verb and the avoidance of others have some implications. Verbs also serve the purpose of ideological entrenchment into the reader's mind. They create and represent a view that is the newspaper's own standpoint.

Journalistic practices make it expedient for reporters to use catchy words mostly for economic reasons. They often use linguistic tactics which entail the use of words and phrases that get the attention of readers by evoking powerful emotional connotation. This often involves using language to exaggerate and propagandise without actually lying. However, some of the sensational nouns, verbs, and adjectives that are used are often cunningly loaded with biases. This practice can actually cost some referents their names, reputations, positions, and rights. Above all, the choice of such sensational and emotive can spur crisis among unsuspecting and uncritical audience.

**Sample 9:** *Nigerian Tribune*, **Monday June 4, 2007  Front Page**

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**North monopolises top security posts**
The South-West may have assumed its backseat position in Nigerian political life as the North has cornered seven key security positions, leaving the South with only three. *Nigerian Tribune* findings showed that of the three top security positions in three southern zones, the South-West has none, while the South-East has two and the South-South one….

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**Sample 10:** *Nigerian Tribune*, **Friday July 13, 2007 Page 9**

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**Anenih tongue lashes OBJ**
- **Says *"no pot big enough to cook me"***

Purportedly faced with sanctions from the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) over alleged acts capable of undermining party's cohesion and integrity, immediate past chairman of its Board of Trustees, Chief Tony Anenih, has declared that no pot is big enough to cook him in Nigeria….

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In sample 9 the choice of the verb 'monopolises' and its attribution to the North (which has been accused of having ruled Nigeria more than any other region) may be said to be injurious to national peace and security. The verb suggests that the North now exercises exclusive control of Nigeria and selfishly cartelises and takes all of the top security posts. The import of the verb is capable of stirring some uproar by other geo-political zones in Nigeria. Its synonym, 'cornered' used in the lead story of sample 9 also has a negative connotation and can generate hatred against the North. It is suggestive that the reporter tries to cunningly control the audience thoughts and actions by covertly calling for some reactions. This is further evidenced in the foregrounding of the proposition 'the South-West may have assumed its backseat position in Nigerian political life…' as the first sentence of the lead. The proposition presupposes that the South-West has always been given the back seat in political affairs in Nigeria and that this imbalance has been repeated. *Nigerian Tribune,* being a South-West based newspaper, the reporter craftily and religiously makes a case for the South-West under the guise of ideological power of being a figure of authority who knows the 'facts' and enjoys some freedom to tell.  Nevertheless, this power or control on the audience, which is a matter of how the reporter has used language, has some signifying effects on the readers. It makes it difficult for readers to make independent judgment on the actual stand point of the issues, as the reporter represents (or misrepresents) both 'facts' and his or her judgment.

Often, Nigerian newspapers deploy verbs that are extravagantly and consciously showy or glamorous. The use of such very sensational and pretentious verbs is a deliberate attempt by newspaper reporter to dress up empty statements and give an air of possibility to

mere fabrications. For example, the use of the verb phrase 'tongue lashes' (sample 10) is to arouse the curiosity of readers or blur their view of the reality so that they are dragged into buying the newspapers and subsequent editions for possible reactions of newsmakers affected. Nevertheless, the result in general is slovenliness or vagueness as the lead and details of the news stories do not complement such weasel or pretentious words.

**Use of Pejorative Modifiers**

Modification is a linguistic phenomenon which involves making a structure pungent, explicit, and specific by deploying other constituents (modifiers) to co-occur with it (Bright 1992). The focus in modification is usually adjectival description of the head noun. The choice of modifiers is determined by two goals. On the one hand, the news reporter tries to achieve economy and clarity which are important principles of textual rhetoric (Leech 1983). Hence, adjectival description in noun phrase helps to reduce the number of sentences by collapsing them into fewer noun phrases and makes the news clear as adjectives paint clearer pictures of head nouns. The reporter therefore reduces space and gives room for accommodating other items competing for appearance in the limited pages of the newspaper. On the other hand, adjectival description or noun phrase modification is often dictated by the reporter's interest and consequently pejorative. The reporter's intention for modification may be to express craftily his or her personal, social, political, or institutional interest. The intention is often concealed by the writer in a way that the reader will not easily detect that he or she is being manipulated to form an, opinion, attitude or act in a way. Therefore, noun phrase modification in newspaper reporting is more often than not ideological, reflecting Nigerian journalistic assumptions and practices; even when it is done to achieve economy and clarity, which are signposts of excellent textual rhetoric, it is also often ingeniously distorted with biases.

**Sample 11:** *Daily Trust*, **Friday July 13, 2007  Page 5**

**Yar'Adua:  NUD's 30-day ultimatum expires today**
The 30-day ultimatum given to President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua to resign by the coalition of opposition parties – Nigerians United for Democracy (NUD) expires today (Friday).
*Daily Trust* had reported that the NUD has asked President Yar'Adua to resign or face massive protest.
    In response, the President brushed off the threat and said he would not resign.
    The All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP) and Action Congress (AC) are members of the NUD.
    A communiqué read out by the chairman of the NUD Mr Tunji Braithwaite had said

"NUD gives the illegitimate Yar'Adua puppet administration all of the next 30 days to resign and yield a conference of all political parties, civil society groups and other stake holders to constitute an interim national government"….

**Sample 12:** *Daily Trust*, **Tuesday August 14, 2007 Page 5**

**FG pays pension to 1,200 ex-Biafran policemen**
Around 1,200 ex-Biafran police officers have been paid their benefits by the Police Pension Office out of the 75 billion naira set aside by the Federal Government under the former President, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo….

The use of adjectival descriptions such as 'illegitimate Yar'Adua puppet administration' (sample 11) '1,200 ex-Biafran policemen' (sample 12) is not only jaundiced but also offensive and illogical. In other words, there is no logic in describing a democratically elected government as 'illegitimate'. Also the choice of 'puppet' as a co-modifier of administration is impolite and provocative. The reporter, in order to look innocent of the biases, skillfully puts the words into the mouth of the NUD chairman to escape the criticism of a critical reader. Thus, he cleverly steps aside in the news reporting and introduces a speaking agent to speak directly not to give credibility to the news but to avoid being sued for slander.

In sample 12 the rationality of the noun phrase modification '1,200 ex-Biafran policemen' is in doubt. Since Biafra was an aborted secession plan, it could not have owned police officers for a long period that they retired there; rather, they police officers could have been officers of the Nigerian Police Force who supported the unsuccessful Biafra republic. The placement of the proper adjective 'ex-Biafran' before the head noun makes the modification more illogical and betrays the reporter's prejudice, as pre-modifiers describe permanent qualities  (Epstein 1978), which is not the case of Biafra, an aborted republic.

**Conclusion**

The work that Nigerian newspaper reporters do is tremendous: they help to educate, awaken, sensitise, and provoke Nigerians on many issues and problems. However, the adequacy with which they do all this is questionable. The choice of the most controversial and pejorative lexical items in news reports is capable of sticking labels on newsmakers and trapping them in stereotypes, to the point that such labels become invidious and a mode of

defamation. It is, therefore, important for both newspaper reporters and readers to know that language, in news reports, is not a mere instrument of communication but it is imbued with power; it is action-oriented; it has the ability to influence or control reader's thoughts and actions. Hence, there is the need for Nigerian journalists to use language dispassionately and responsibly in news reporting.

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